

Biographical Sketch

Benjamin Samis (1777–1861)

Benjamin Samis was born on 27 June 1779 in Huntington, Suffolk County, Long Island, New York, where the Samis family had been established since approximately 1665. His childhood coincided with the American Revolution, a period that transformed Long Island from a stable colonial community into a contested and often hostile environment for Loyalist families. These conditions shaped the trajectory of Benjamin's early life and future movements.

Benjamin was still a young man when his father, Ebenezer Samis, qualified for and received a 100-acre Crown land grant in Upper Canada as compensation for his Loyalist service. In the early years of the nineteenth century, the family relocated north to Hamilton Township, Northumberland County, Ontario. Benjamin appears to have migrated as part of his father's household, participating directly in the Loyalist resettlement experience.

Marriage and Establishment in Upper Canada (c.1802–1829)

Sometime before 1805, Benjamin married a woman named Mary, possibly Mary Baker. The location of their marriage is unknown and may have occurred either in New York prior to departure or after settlement in Upper Canada. Their presence in Canada by 1805 is firmly established by the birth of their daughter Sarah, who later reported her birthplace as "North Canada" on a census record.

The births of Benjamin and Mary's children trace the family in different locations within Upper Canada. Their son, Richard Baker, was born in 1807, followed by Patty in 1809. Another son, Benjamin, was born in 1811 in Hamilton Township. Their daughter Sabrina, our ancestor, was born in 1814.

By 1820, the family had moved farther inland, where their son Solomon was born in Mariposa Township. Two more children followed: Anna, born in 1824, and Valentine in 1829 in Cobourg, Northumberland County. These locations reflect a gradual east–west and inland movement typical of early Upper Canadian settlement.

Land, Faith, and Community in Ontario

Benjamin's adult life in Upper Canada is documented through church, census, and assessment records. He was baptized on 9 July 1825 at the First Baptist Church of Wicklow, indicating affiliation with Baptist congregations common among Loyalist and post-Loyalist settlers.

Census records place him in Hamilton Township in 1809 and 1811, consistently listing his occupation as farmer. Assessment rolls reveal a slow but steady accumulation of land: in 1812 he was assessed without acreage listed, while in 1813 he appears with 50 acres. These records suggest incremental establishment rather than rapid acquisition, consistent with frontier conditions and family-based farming strategies.

Late-Life Migration to Illinois

In 1845, at the age of sixty-five, Benjamin made the notable decision to leave Ontario for Burlington, Kane County, Illinois. This move came shortly after the death of his wife in 1844, which removed his strongest personal tie to place. With nine children—five of them sons—land in Upper Canada had become increasingly expensive and difficult to obtain.

Illinois offered large tracts of surveyed farmland at relatively low cost, allowing Benjamin to purchase land outright and to provide opportunities for his younger children. Importantly, he did not migrate alone or into isolation. Burlington was an organized township with an agricultural economy and religious institutions familiar to settlers from Upper Canada.

Benjamin's Loyalist upbringing also shaped this decision. Raised in a family that had experienced displacement after the Revolution and rebuilt through careful migration and land ownership, he understood relocation as a means of progress.

The Journey West

Benjamin's journey from Cramahe Township, Upper Canada, to Burlington, Illinois, would typically have taken four to six weeks, depending on season and conditions. By the mid-1840s, this route was well established and heavily traveled by families moving west with household goods, tools, and livestock.

The journey also underscores how porous the U.S.–Canada border had become by this period. For second-generation Loyalist families like the Samises, returning to the United States was neither unusual nor politically charged—it was simply the next step in westward expansion.

Benjamin appears to have migrated with his widowed daughter, Mary, and his youngest son, Valentine. His son, Peter, and Peter's family followed in 1850.

Establishment and Family Structure in Burlington

Upon arrival in Burlington, Benjamin purchased 160 acres for \$1,000, followed by an additional 40 acres in 1846 for \$50. By 1850, census records show him with real estate valued at \$1,500, a substantial holding for a seventy-year-old farmer.

His household reflected a multigenerational family structure. Living with him were his son, Peter, Peter's wife Almira (née Calkins), his son, Valentine, several grandchildren, and his widowed daughter, Mary. This arrangement suggests that Benjamin's land served as a family anchor, providing security for the family.

Consolidation and Remarriage

By the mid-1850s, the household composition shifted as adult children established themselves nearby. The 1855 census lists only Benjamin and Valentine together, while Peter operated a neighboring farm. This pattern reflects a deliberate family land strategy.

In 1856, Benjamin remarried, taking Adah Sawyer as his wife. The 1860 census shows Benjamin, then eighty-one, with real estate valued at \$3,500. He lived with Adah and Valentine, while Peter

farmed adjacent land and Benjamin's daughter, Sabrina Calkins, lived with her family between the two properties. Together, these farms formed a compact, multigenerational settlement.

Final Years

Benjamin Samis died on 11 April 1861. His will reflects both careful planning and family priorities. He divided his land equally between his son, Valentine, and his daughter, Sabrina, charging them jointly with the care of his wife. He also directed Valentine to provide for his son, Richard, as needed, suggesting ongoing concern for Richard's welfare.

Taken together, the will presents a portrait of an elderly patriarch deliberately arranging land, responsibility, and care within a tightly knit family network—an outcome consistent with a life shaped by experience, frontier settlement, and multigenerational planning.