

Migration from England to Illinois

Name	Migration Date	From	To
Richard Sammis (1621-1648)	1640	Dorchester, Dorset, England	Windsor, Hartfield, Connecticut
John Sammis (1643-1693)	Abt. 1665	Windsor, Hartfield, Connecticut	Huntington, Suffolk, Long Island, New York
Ebenezer Sammis (1744-1814)	Abt. 1802	Huntington, Suffolk, Long Island, New York	Hamilton Twp., Northumberland, Ontario, Canada
Benjamin Sammis (1779-1861)	1845	Hamilton Twp., Northumberland, Ontario, Canada	Burlington, Kane, Illinois

Richard Samwayes (Sammis) of Netherbury (1615–1648)

Richard Samwayes—later spelled *Sammis* in New England—was born in 1615 in Netherbury, Dorset, England, the youngest of six children. Netherbury, a small rural parish in west Dorset, consisted of scattered farms and cottages clustered around St. Mary’s Church. Life there revolved around mixed agriculture: wheat and barley fields, sheep raised for wool, and small household gardens. Work was seasonal, physical, and relentless, leaving little room for surplus or social mobility.

As is typical for men of his class, little survives in the documentary record beyond parish registers. Richard appears on baptism records in 1615 and then again only through his later migration. The absence of wills, land deeds, or apprenticeship records strongly suggests that he belonged to the large class of ordinary parishioners whose lives rarely generated paperwork.

Growing Tensions and the Pull of New England

Richard likely grew up contributing labor from childhood, perhaps on tenant land too small to divide among multiple sons. His prospects in England were limited. At the same time, he came of age amid intensifying religious tension. His later settlement in Connecticut strongly suggests Puritan sympathies—beliefs that emphasized Scripture, moral discipline, and the purification of the Church of England from unscriptural practices. Such convictions, however, increasingly carried risk.

By Richard’s adolescence, England was moving toward political and religious crisis. The government tightened enforcement of conformity, mandating church attendance and discouraging private religious gatherings. Puritans were often forced into outward compliance while inwardly dissenting. In response, thousands looked westward toward the American colonies.

Between 1630 and 1640, more than 20,000 people left England during the Great Puritan Migration. Some sought land; many sought freedom of conscience. Reports circulated that entire “godly towns” were forming in New England, governed not by bishops but by covenants.

Crossing the Atlantic and Choosing Connecticut

In 1640, Richard left Dorset for New England, ultimately settling in Windsor, Connecticut. His decision likely followed existing West Country Puritan networks that directed emigrants directly to the Connecticut River Valley, where religious discipline was stricter and local autonomy stronger than Massachusetts. Shared surnames appearing in both Dorset and Windsor point to this migration corridor.

The journey itself was arduous. Richard would have traveled overland to a port, waited weeks or months for passage, and then crossed the Atlantic aboard a small, crowded vessel. The voyage typically lasted six to ten weeks, marked by spoiled food, rationed water, illness, and constant danger from storms. For Puritan passengers, the crossing was both a physical and spiritual trial, structured by prayer and Scripture.

Life in Windsor, Connecticut

Arrival in New England did not end the hardship. Ships often landed in Massachusetts, requiring additional travel by coastal boat or rough inland paths to reach Connecticut. When Richard arrived at Windsor, the settlement was young but demanding. Survival required immediate labor, strict Sabbath observance, and participation in communal defense and governance.

Richard likely stayed initially with acquaintances before receiving land of his own. In 1642, he married Hester Horsford, daughter of one of Windsor's founders. The Horsfords, also from Dorset, had settled first in Massachusetts and then in Windsor by 1635, suggesting prior connections.

Richard and Hester had three children: Mary (1642), John (1643), and Johanna (1648). Richard died that same year, leaving Hester widowed with young children. She later remarried, ensuring household stability.

John Sammis: Second-Generation Puritan (1643–1693)

John Sammis was born in Windsor in 1643. Growing up in a blended household after his mother's remarriage, he was shaped by early responsibility, agricultural labor, and strict Puritan discipline. Childhood in Windsor was not carefree but intentionally formative, designed to produce self-governing, godly adults.

By the time John reached adulthood, prime land in Windsor was scarce, and he inherited no property from his father. Like many of his generation, he looked elsewhere. Opportunity expanded after the English seizure of New Amsterdam in 1664, which secured Long Island for English settlement and opened new towns to Connecticut migrants.

Huntington, Long Island actively recruited men willing to replicate Connecticut-style self-governance. John likely traveled down the Connecticut River, crossed Long Island Sound by sloop, and arrived after a journey of roughly 60 to 80 miles—four to seven days under favorable conditions. There, he established himself as a farmer and family man within a familiar Puritan framework.

From Puritans to Loyalists

By the mid-1700s, the Sammis family was deeply entrenched in Huntington, appearing in records as landholders, church leaders, town officers, and militia members. Over generations, the family's outlook shifted. What began as reformist Puritanism matured into institutional conservatism, emphasizing order, property, and continuity.

When the American Revolution reached Long Island, these values shaped allegiance. British forces occupied the island in 1776, imposing oaths of loyalty and regulating daily life. Neutrality was rarely possible.

Religious belief reinforced Loyalism. Congregational teaching emphasized obedience to lawful authorities, drawing on Scripture, such as 1 Peter 2:13-14¹. For many Sammis men, rebellion threatened not liberty, but their way of life. To them, the Revolution meant confiscation of property, vigilante justice, and social leveling. With land, livestock, and generational property at stake, loyalty to the Crown seemed to offer the safest choice.

Ebenezer Sammis (1744–1814): Loyalist on Long Island

Ebenezer Sammis was the youngest of the ten children of John Sammis. When Ebenezer was a young man, he formally swore the British Oath of Allegiance after 1776, a legal requirement for residents of occupied Long Island. Doing so protected property and placed him within the category of Loyalist subjects eligible for protection and, later, resettlement.

Records indicate that Ebenezer served with Thomas Conkling's Company, 1st Battalion—specifically the Loyalist Thomas Conkling of Long Island.² Military service on Long Island was compulsory. Records preserved in Canadian archives—because Ebenezer later applied for Crown land—show that he was repeatedly mustered between 1777 and 1781, consistently noted as “sick.” Such notations were common and indicated recognized enrollment rather than evasion. Crucially, he was never listed as absent, deserted, or disaffected, but it seems as if he never actually fought for the Crown.

Leaving Huntington and Moving to Canada

Ebenezer Samis married Sarah Tuttle in 1777, and between 1778 and 1797 they had seven sons, including Benjamin, born in 1779. In the years following the American Revolution, Loyalists on Long Island faced renewed loyalty oaths, lingering threats of confiscation, and increasing hostility from neighbors. Although Ebenezer's allegiance to the Crown had protected his property during the war, it became a source of risk afterward. For a man with a growing family, remaining in the United States offered diminishing security and few prospects for long-term stability.

¹ 1 Peter 2:13-14. Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. (KJV)

² Ebenezer was not the Patriot officer of Connecticut. His residence in British-held Huntington, his Loyalist records, and his later resettlement in Canada made any Patriot affiliation impossible.

In response to these conditions, Ebenezer applied for a land grant in Upper Canada based on his documented service and loyalty to the Crown. Following the war, Britain had undertaken a deliberate program to resettle Loyalist families in Upper Canada in order to secure its northern territory and stabilize the frontier. Land grants were offered in strategically selected areas, including Cramahe Township near the Bay of Quinte and Lake Ontario, where settlement served both defensive and economic purposes. By placing proven Loyalists in this corridor, Britain aimed to limit American influence while rapidly transforming forested land into productive farmland.

Ebenezer Samis received a 100-acre Crown grant, a standard allotment for ordinary Loyalist heads of household whose allegiance was recognized but who did not hold officer rank. The grant represented opportunity rather than immediate security, as the land was heavily forested and required years of clearing, building, and sustained labor. Britain expected settlers like Ebenezer to establish self-supporting farms that would anchor permanent British communities in the region. Cramahe Township also offered social continuity, as it was settled largely by displaced families from New York and New England who shared common religious traditions, governance practices, and Loyalist experience. For Ebenezer, relocation to Upper Canada was not simply a response to loss but a calculated decision that exchanged loyalty for land.

Life in Upper Canada

Ebenezer's land was near Morganston in Cramahe Township, Upper Canada in an area with other Loyalist land grant recipients. This was not a finished farm but raw frontier: dense forest, no roads, no house. Clearing land, building shelter, and surviving winters demanded constant labor. The presence of seven sons was critical to success.

Although conditions were harsh, the family settled among fellow Loyalists—former New Yorkers and New Englanders who shared language, faith, and experience of displacement. Church life reemerged quickly; Ebenezer appears in records of the First Baptist Church of Wicklow in 1807, but records indicate that his son, Benjamin, arrived earlier—by 1804.

Assessment records from 1809 to 1814 list Ebenezer as a laborer, sometimes without acreage, suggesting modest circumstances and possible residence with adult children. Prosperity was limited, but the family was safe.

Benjamin Samis (1779-1861)

Benjamin lived in Upper Canada, married, and had a family. After his wife died in 1844, he moved to Burlington, Kane County, Illinois, along with two of his children.

[Benjamin Samis's migration journey is told in the Biographical Sketch.]

