

A Biography of Rev. Samuel Dusenbury

Disclaimer of sorts:

The following brief biography update is based on family research conducted by myself starting in 2006 and continuing on and off over the last decade. I relied heavily on the work of numerous cousins who have been in search of facts about the same ancestors and I am truly indebted to them for sharing their information. My findings may be significantly in contrast to some other family genealogy works done by other interested family members over the last several decades. However, my version is in no way intended to disparage their works, in fact, I add my compliments and appreciation to the Dusenbury family researchers before me for their efforts.

In most, if not all, family genealogy research not done by professional researchers, some degree of traditional family stories and legends do find their way into the narrative. As amateur genealogists we hope to find heroic, outstanding individuals in our family trees, when in fact most of our ancestors were average people like us. I have tried to minimize these accuracy problems. My singular purpose is to revise our ancestor's biography making it as factual as I can...and perhaps add a few interesting stories along the way.

Our ancestor, Rev. Samuel Dusenbury, was an admirable man in many respects and I am proud to be one of his namesakes. However, I must leave any further conjecture from this narrative to the reader.

Dr. Richard Samuel Dusenbury, Ed. D,
Great, great grandson of Rev. Samuel Dusenbury
Conway, SC July 2017

Birthplace and Ancestors:

Samuel Dusenbury, who is considered by most family researchers to be the first Dusenbury ancestor in our immediate family in South Carolina, was born on 4 August 1792 near the town of Peekskill north of New York City. Samuel was a member of a large Dutch American family whose roots go back to the New Amsterdam colony, now known as New York City.

According to several family researchers our original ancestor was a Dutchman by the name of Hendrick Hendricksen von Doesburg. The old Dutch land records and maps of the New Amsterdam colony document Hendrick's residence and some of his business dealings over the years in the colony. One researcher has established by current and colonial map comparison that Hendrick's house was located on or very near the location of the present day and famous Delmonico's Restaurant.

Some family researchers have stated that the family name spelling was changed to a more Anglicized version as a result of the colony becoming part of the British Empire. Others have established by land records the migration of the family to Hempstead, Long Island, NY, and then up the Hudson River and to other lands around New York City.

Samuel was many generations removed from his Dutch colonist ancestors. His parents were Charles and Sarah (aka Mary?) Conklin Dusenberry[sic]. According to journal records left by Presbyterian minister, Rev. Silas Constant, they were married on 6 August 1791 near Yorktown, Westchester Co., NY. BTW, there are some interesting entries in Rev Constant's journal, which can be found online, regarding a notable problem Charles had with the church and was later resolved.

Charles was a son of William Dusenberry, called by some William of Peekskill. William was a landowner and reportedly a veteran of the American Revolution via service in Col. Henry Ludington's NY Militia. An interesting side story is that of the nighttime ride of Sybil Hudington, Col. Henry's teenaged daughter, who rode on horseback some 40 miles alerting the local militiamen to muster at the Ludington home in preparation to defend Danbury, Conn. from attack by the British. So, is it possible that this famous teenager alerted our ancestor as part of her ride? Much has been written about the Hudingtons which can be found online.

According to some family researchers the 305 acres William took ownership of after the Revolutionary War may have come at the expense of a NY Tory landowner. William's will written on 27 September 1811, and recorded in Dutchess Co., NY. His will was modified on 11 June 1814 and recorded in Putnam Co., NY, and lists Charles as an heir and executor of his estate. These wills provide documentation connecting William to his son, Charles. My wife and I visited the gravesites of William and Charles Dusenberry at Adams Corner in the beautiful Putnam Valley, NY, area along the Hudson River on a vacation trip to the Northeast in 2012 and highly recommend such a side trip to any relatives visiting the New England area.

Substantial confirmation of Samuel's relationship to Charles can be found in the 29 November 1839 will of Charles Dusenberry, in the Putnam Co., NY, probate records. Charles' son Samuel's whereabouts were mentioned as follows:

"...and Samuel, son of said testator, who resides outside of this State but whose place of residence cannot be ascertained after diligent search..."

This evidence connecting Samuel to Charles and Charles to William was sufficient for the Sons of the American Revolution to grant membership to some of our relatives in the mid 1900's. However, SAR/DAR documentation requirements are much more difficult now.

Samuel's military Service:

U. S. Navy service:

Although much has been written by several family researchers about Samuel's military service, much of it cannot be accurately documented. Family traditional stories make reference to Samuel's service as a surgeon's mate in the US Navy on board the USS Constitution, aka, "Old Ironsides" during the War of 1812. Extensive professional research has been done and recorded on the website, The Captain's Clerk, USS Constitution, by Commander Tyrone G. Martin, USN Ret., who actually served as captain of Old Ironsides from 6 August 1974 to 30 June 1978. CMDR Martin has written and published two books in the 1990's on the history of the ship and her crew. It was with Commander Martin's personal help via email that I found old Navy records in the National Archives and Records Administration that do record a Samuel Dusenberry serving aboard Constitution as a midshipman, not a surgeon's mate. A midshipman is a cadet in training to be an officer and usually a young person.

According to those records a Samuel Dusenberry was warranted a midshipman on 16 Jan 1809 and reported aboard Constitution on 20 March 1809. Constitution's records also indicate that she performed coastal patrol duty from New York to Hampton Roads, VA enforcing trade laws during that time. About a year later Midshipman Samuel Dusenberry submitted his letter of resignation to Capt. John Rodgers, who forwarded same with some interesting comments to the Sec. of the Navy as follows:

From Captain John Rodgers, USS CONSTITUTION, 12 Mar 1810:

Forwards resignation of Midshipman [Samuel] Dusenberry of CONSTITUTION, "an amiable young man, but he is, by no means, calculated for the Service."

My research found no other record of our Samuel serving aboard Constitution. However, to confuse matters even more two other Samuel Dusenberry's can also be found in the ship's records but do not seem to match in terms of age and location of service. One even died while in service aboard Constitution. Perhaps you can see the dilemma the researchers have encountered.

Samuel's age in 1809 being appropriate for a midshipman, his coming from a family of some prominence, his apparent literacy and the proximity of his New York residence to the port of New York, one might conclude that Samuel could have served aboard USS Constitution, but if so, his service in the U. S. Navy occurred before the outbreak of the War of 1812. However, Samuel's tombstone located in Union United Methodist Church, near Conway, S.C., states that he did serve in the War of 1812 in the U.S. Navy. Since the tombstone also misstates who was the U.S. President during the War of 1812 and was probably erected many years after his death in South Carolina near the end of the War Between the States, the accuracy of that stone is in question, in my opinion.

U.S. Army Service:

US Army records regarding Samuel's military service are stronger. National Archives and Records Administration documents indicate that a Samuel Dusenberry from New York served as a surgeon's mate in the US Army beginning on 25 March 1812 until his resignation on 1 May 1814. Samuel's army service as a surgeon's mate is mentioned in the book, Florida Fiasco, Rampant Rebels on the Georgia-Florida Border 1810-1815, written by Rembert W. Patrick in 1954. His book chronicles the ill-fated, surreptitious efforts of the US government under President James Madison to instigate and support the revolution brewing in South Georgia to take over East Florida from the Spanish.

Samuel Dusenberry, Capt. and Garrison Surgeon's Mate, is named in the 1813 list of staff officers of the 8th Infantry under the overall command of Major General Thomas Pinckney and was possibly stationed at Fort Point Petre on the St. Mary's River separating East Florida and Georgia. Col. Thomas Adam Smith commanded the US Army infantry unit to which Samuel was attached. The medical skills of Dr. Dusenberry are also mentioned in the detailed accounts of activities in East Florida, 1812 and 1813, in the Col. Thomas Adam Smith Letters which are housed in the Missouri Historical Library. Unfortunately, the comments recorded by Col. Smith are not complimentary of our ancestor's medical treatment abilities. However, before passing judgment we should consider the rudimentary state of military medical service in the early 1800's, when far more men died from disease than battle injury especially while serving in the insect infested swampy areas between south Georgia and east Florida.

Dr. Dusenberry submitted a letter to Major General Pinckney on 19 February 1814 requesting transfer to the North citing health reasons, specifically stating that the environment in the South was so detrimental to his health that he could not continue to render his service to his country and that if such transfer could not be done, he wished to resign from his commission. Here are Dr. Dusenberry's actual words transcribed from his 1814 resignation letter found in the National Archives:

**General Hospital, James Island, So. Carolina
19 February 1814**

Sir,

I find this climate so unfriendly to my constitution and my health so much impaired that I am not (*illegible*) and find I shall not be able to render that service my country expects and requires, and have taken the liberty of requesting you to have me removed to the North.

In case that should be impracticable, I must beg that you (*illegible*) accept this as my letter of resignation, which if accepted, I wish to take affect from the first of May next.

**I have the honor to be in your obedient service,
Samuel Dusenberry
Surgeons Mate
U. S. Army**

About a month later on 30 March 1814 Dr. Dusenberry writes to his superiors requesting that they accept his letter of resignation as of 1 May 1814. These documents provide clear evidence in my opinion that our ancestor did serve as a U.S. Army Surgeon's mate during the War of 1812.

Some family researchers have proposed that later in his life our Samuel received a pension for his service in the War of 1812 and that he took a settlement of \$160.00 over 160 acres of land out West writing:

"By virtue of this service on "Old Ironsides" in the year 1849, the United States Government awarded him a land warrant for 160 acres of land. This land was located out west and he realized it for \$160."

The War of 1812 Pension Application Files I have studied indicate that a Samuel Dusenberry {sic} applied for a pension but that Samuel served in the NY Militia under a Capt. Daniel St. John. Of course, another pension record may exist in the National Archives but has not yet been found and documented in the genealogy.

Another family legend that some family researchers have shared is that of Dr. Dusenberry's commission as a Surgeon's Mate writing:

"The original commission granted to Dr. Samuel Dusenbury was written on sheepskin and the last known account of that, it was in the possession of Lt. James Saye Dusenbury, USA of Fort Totten, New York. Several years ago, one dozen imperishable photographs were made of this commission and promiscuously distributed among the Dusenbury Family."

Unfortunately, the living relatives of Lt. Saye have indicated to me that they have no recollection of the existence of the sheepskin commission for Dr. Dusenbury.

Wife and Family

None of our family researchers has been able to accurately establish with strong evidence where Samuel and his wife, Mary Ellis (Lay?), met and were married and is, therefore, subject to much conjecture. However, one researcher claims to have located an Ellis family in the records of the Charleston, SC area and that the family included a young widow and mother of four, named Mary. Other researchers state that her maiden name was Dresden, of Irish heritage, and that she was a milliner by trade. Some also indicate that Mary was born in 1779 thus making her 13 years senior to Samuel and marrying him in 1818. Some think that Mary had family members living at that time in the Columbus or Robeson County N.C. areas. The 1810 U.S. Census records for Columbus County, N.C. show an E. Ellis and a J. Ellis family residing there.

Considering that Dr. Dusenberry was in the Charleston, S.C. area due to his military service it is possible that they met and married there. They may have then moved to North Carolina where they settled and added four more children to the family starting in the early 1820's. The U. S. Census of 1820 shows a Samuel Dusenberry living in Columbus County N.C.

and engaged in agriculture. Included in the household of 7 are 2 adults over the age of 25 and 5 children under the age of 16. The 1830 U. S. Census for Columbus County, NC shows the Samuel Dusenbery{sic} family now totaling 9 with 2 adults age 30-39, 1 person age 20-29 and 6 persons under 20. Occupation was not collected as part of the census data.

It is a general consensus of family researchers that Mary and Samuel had four Dusenberry sons: Charles Timothy born in 1819, Zaccheus William born in 1820, Samuel Solomon born in 1822 and James Elkanah born in 1824. It is believed that all four of the Dusenberry sons moved to Horry County, SC just prior to the War Between the States. One researcher indicates that Mary died in 1827. However, no records of her death and place of burial have been discovered yet.

It is thought by some that the last name spelling was changed by Samuel and his sons in the 1850-60's, perhaps as a result of the unrest in the country before and during War Between the States. However, the name spelling change could have been simply the result of creative spelling skills by census and government officials recording family names on documents.

Samuel's Professional Life and Later Years

Some family researchers have described Samuel as an industrialist, landowner, educator and Baptist preacher. Evidence of Samuel's landownership and business ventures have thus far eluded researchers. No records in Robeson, Columbus nor Horry Counties have yielded any documents to support these claims as of yet. Although specific land ownership in North and South Carolina court records relative to Samuel have eluded researchers, his name as a witness to legal transactions and as a poll keeper have been found in N.C. court records in 1825, 1828 and in Horry County(District) in 1840.

However, there is significant evidence documenting that Samuel was a minister and educator in the middle 1800's in North and South Carolina. Samuel can be found in numerous entries in the Minutes of the Robeson (NC) Baptist Union 1832-1849. He was most prominently mentioned as a church leader/elder from Bear Swamp Baptist Church and was often called upon to serve as recorder, corresponding secretary and clerk. Rev. Samuel's ordination is mentioned in the minutes of the 28 January 1843. Some researchers have written that Samuel lived with William Ayers, perhaps since Samuel may have been a widower by that time. The Robeson minutes do record that a William Ayers was also an elder from Bear Swamp BC. Rev. Samuel resigned the clerkship at the December Robeson Union meeting in 1849. More recent documentation of Samuel's minister and teacher professions are found in the old church records of Hebron United Methodist Church in the 1850's and 1860's. The Hebron ministers wrote their names and the date in the church Bible in the margin at the Bible verses from which they were preaching. In my research I found 8 separate entries by Rev. Samuel starting on 11 February 1857 with the last entry on 3 June 1860.

Samuel's time as an educator has been frequently cited by many researchers and probably has merit. Although NC records found so far do not document his teaching there, we can document his work as an educator in Horry District through the personal writings of one of Samuel's pupils, Moses Floyd Sarvis about his mischievous boyhood school experiences. Rev. Samuel taught school at Beauty's Bay in the southern part of Horry District. This brief story can be found in the records maintained by the Horry County Historical Society, (IRQ Vol. 2, #4 1968 Oct.) which are available online.

Samuel's sons all moved to Horry District in SC sometime prior to the War Between the States. Some researchers have concluded that two of Samuel's sons, James Elkanah and Zaccheus William, Sr. probably followed the timber industry to Horry District. Son, Charles, is reported by many researchers to have been a farmer and likewise son Samuel Solomon was described as a tailor in Conwayborough, the early name for Conway, SC. The U. S. Census of 1850 lists Samuel Dusenbury, age 58, Minister B(Baptist?), born in New York, living with Z. W. Dusenbury. ZW, his wife, Mary and five of their children, ages 9 years to 2 months are also listed as members of the household. ZW's occupation is listed as lumber surveyor on the Confederate States of America enlistment records. Samuel is listed in the 1860 U. S. Census records living with his son, James E along with James' wife, Fanny, and their five children ages 12 to 3 years.

Samuel, according to some researchers was a great sufferer of rheumatism although that assertion cannot be documented until more undiscovered documents are found. The last written record of Rev. Samuel Dusenbury is also the last entry in the old Hebron Methodist Church Bible, 3 June 1860. Hebron Church in their church refers to Rev. Samuel Dusenbury as their first minister. A speaker at one of the last services at Hebron Church, now defunct, in recounting the church history related the story that when a church member mentioned that they had not gotten the Methodist Bishop to come down and officially consecrate the church building, another church member stated that was not necessary since the Rev. Samuel Dusenbury was such a man of prominence and had already preached the first sermon in their sanctuary. What a fitting reminder for a man of God and an American patriot.

Rev. Samuel Dusenbury is buried in the Union United Methodist Church cemetery along with at least five succeeding generations of Dusenbury family members.