

## LESSON 1

Carla Chatelain

### Standards

#### NYS SS 3.8

**3.8 The concept of universal human rights suggests that all people should be treated fairly and should have the opportunity to meet their basic needs.**

3.8a Across global communities, governments and citizens alike have a responsibility to protect human rights and to treat others fairly.

3.8b Across time and place, communities and cultures have struggled with prejudice and discrimination as barriers to justice and equality for all people.

3.8c When faced with prejudice and discrimination, people can take steps to support social action and change.

### Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Recognize and use different forms of evidence used to make meaning in social studies (including primary and secondary sources, such as art and photographs, artifacts, oral histories, maps, and graphs).
- Identify rights and responsibilities of citizens in the local community and compare them to those in world communities.
- Students will examine the extent to which governments and citizens have protected human rights and treated others fairly for each world community.

### Historical Context

Slavery -

### Materials

<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pdf/venture-smith-describes-his-p1985.pdf>

<https://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/adlit08.ush.col.smith/the-life-of-venture-smith/#.WXtbfdOrJww>

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part2/2p80.html>

<https://connecticuthistory.org/venture-smith-from-slavery-to-freedom/>

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/venture2/summary.html>

<https://youtu.be/TB19LiQpTkM>

### **Article**

Venture Smith describes his enslavement

Venture Smith, *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa: But Resident above Sixty Years in the United States of America. Related by Himself.* (New London, Connecticut: C. Holt, 1798).

### **Procedure**

Prior to having students examine a photograph of Venture Smith's tombstone and land transfer, they will view a video about Venture Smith. Why do you think we are looking at this person? How does this begin to determine legal and economic definitions of person hood? Then:

1. Watch the video Venture Smith
2. Complete the graphic organizer about the person they learned about
3. Why do they think the person is important?
4. Have students use the primary source graphic organizer to analyze the photograph from the article.
  - a. What do you see?
  - b. What else do you see?
  - c. How do you know?
  - d. Use the oral history graphic organizer to either complete the beginning, middle or advanced activities based on their abilities.
5. Explain to students that they will read the editor's note and discuss the background history before actually reading the eyewitness account.
6. Read the article and circle key words
  - a. Who is speaking?
  - b. What is the document?
  - c. When was it written?
  - d. How does the author explain the main idea?
  - e. Use the oral history graphic organizer to either complete the beginning or advanced activities based on their abilities.

[http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing\\_Oral\\_Histories.pdf](http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing_Oral_Histories.pdf)

### **Assessment (optional)**

Students will answer the activity questions from the article.

Students will share responses with their peers

# Venture Smith describes his enslavement

Venture Smith, *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa: But Resident above Sixty Years in the United States of America. Related by Himself.* (New London, Connecticut: C. Holt, 1798).

I was born at Dukandarra, in Guinea, about the year 1729. My father's name was Saungm Furro, Prince of the Tribe of Dukandarra. My father had three wives. Polygamy was not uncommon in that country, especially among the rich, as every man was allowed to keep as many wives as he could maintain. By his first wife he had three children. The eldest of them was myself, named by my father, Broteer. The other two were named Cundazo and Soozaduka. My father had two children by his second wife, and one by his third. I descended from a very large, tall and stout race of beings, much larger than the generality of people in other parts of the globe, being commonly considerable above six feet in height, and every way well proportioned.

---

[When I was about six years old] a message was brought by an inhabitant of the place where I lived the preceding year to my father, that that place had been invaded by a numerous army, from a nation not far distant, furnished with musical instruments, and all kinds of arms then in use; that they were instigated by some white nation who equipped and sent them to subdue and possess the country; that his nation had made no preparation for war, having been for a long time in profound peace that they could not defend themselves against such a formidable train of invaders, and must therefore necessarily evacuate their lands to the fierce enemy, and fly to the protection of some chief; and that if he would permit them they should come under his rule and protection when they had to retreat from their own possessions. He was a kind and merciful prince, and therefore consented to these proposals.

He had scarcely returned to his nation with the message, before the whole of his people were obliged to retreat from their country, and come to my father's dominions.

He gave them every privilege and all the protection his government could afford. But they had not been there longer than four days before news came to them that the invaders had laid waste their country, and were coming speedily to destroy them in my father's territories. This affrighted them, and therefore they immediately pushed off to the southward, into the unknown countries there, and were never more heard of.

Two days after their retreat, the report turned out to be but too true. A detachment from the enemy came to my father and informed him, that the whole army was encamped not far out of his dominions, and would invade the territory and deprive his people of their liberties and rights, if he did not comply with the following terms. These were to pay them a large sum of money, three hundred fat cattle, and a great number of goats, sheep, asses, &c.

My father told the messenger he would comply rather than that his subjects should be deprived of their rights and privileges, which he was not then in circumstances to defend from so sudden an invasion. Upon turning out those articles, the enemy pledged their faith and honor that they would not attack him. On these he relied and therefore thought it unnecessary to be on his guard against the enemy. But their pledges of faith and honor proved no better than those of other unprincipled hostile nations; for a few days after a certain relation of the king came and informed him, that the enemy who sent terms of accommodation to him and received tribute to their satisfaction, yet meditated an attack upon his subjects by surprise, and that probably they would commence their attack in less than one day, and concluded with advising him, as he was not prepared for war, to order a speedy retreat of his family and subjects. He complied with this advice.

The same night which was fixed upon to retreat, my father and his family set off about break of day. The king and his two younger wives went in one company, and my mother and her children in another. We left our dwellings in succession, and my father's company went on first. We directed our course for a large shrub plain, some distance off, where we intended to conceal ourselves from the approaching enemy, until we could refresh and rest ourselves a little. But we presently found that our retreat was not secure. For having struck up a little fire for the purpose of cooking victuals, the enemy who happened to be encamped a little distance off, had sent out a scouting party who discovered us by the smoke of the fire, just as we were extinguishing it, and about to eat. As soon as we had finished eating, my father discovered the party, and immediately began to discharge arrows at them. This was what I first saw, and it alarmed both me and the women, who being unable to make any resistance, immediately betook ourselves to the tall thick reeds not far off, and left the old king to fight alone. For some time I beheld him from the reeds defending himself with great courage and firmness, till at last he was obliged to surrender himself into their hands.

They then came to us in the reeds, and the very first salute I had from them was a violent blow on the head with the fore part of a gun, and at the same time a grasp round the neck. I then had a rope put about my neck, as had all the women in the thicket with me, and were immediately led to my

father, who was likewise pinioned and haltered for leading. In this condition we were all led to the camp. The women and myself being pretty submissive, had tolerable treatment from the enemy, while my father was closely interrogated respecting his money which they knew he must have. But as he gave them no account of it, he was instantly cut and pounded on his body with great inhumanity, that he might be induced by the torture he suffered to make the discovery. All this availed not in the least to make him give up his money, but he despised all the tortures which they inflicted, until the continued exercise and increase of torment, obliged him to sink and expire.

He thus died without informing his enemies of the place where his money lay. I saw him while he was thus tortured to death. The shocking scene is to this day fresh in my mind, and I have often been overcome while thinking on it. He was a man of remarkable stature. I should judge as much as six feet and six or seven inches high, two feet across his shoulders, and every way well proportioned. He was a man of remarkable strength and resolution, affable, kind and gentle, ruling with equity and moderation.

The army of the enemy was large, I should suppose consisting of about six thousand men. Their leader was called Baukurre. After destroying the old prince, they decamped and immediately marched towards the sea, lying to the west, taking with them myself and the women prisoners. In the march a scouting party was detached from the main army. To the leader of this party I was made waiter, having to carry his gun, &c. —As we were a scouting we came across a herd of fat cattle, consisting of about thirty in number. These we set upon, and immediately wrested from their keepers, and afterwards converted them into food for the army. The enemy had remarkable success in destroying the country wherever they went. For as far as they had penetrated, they laid the habitations waste and captured the people. The distance they had now brought me was about four hundred miles. All the march I had very hard tasks imposed on me, which I must perform on pain of punishment. I was obliged to carry on my head a large flat stone used for grinding our corn, weighing as I should suppose, as much as 25 pounds; besides victuals, mat and cooking utensils. Though I was pretty large and stout of my age, yet these burthens were very grievous to me, being only about six years and an half old.

We were then come to a place called Malagasco. —When we entered the place we could not see the least appearance of either houses or inhabitants, but upon stricter search found, that instead of houses above ground they had dens in the sides of hillocks, contiguous to ponds and streams of water. In these we perceived they had all hid themselves, as I suppose they usually did upon such occasions. In order to compel them to surrender, the enemy contrived to smoke them out with faggots. These

they put to the entrance of the caves and set them on fire. While they were engaged in this business, to their great surprise some of them were desperately wounded with arrows which fell from above on them. This mystery they soon found out. They perceived that the enemy discharged these arrows through holes on the top of the dens directly into the air.--Their weight brought them back, point downwards on their enemies heads, whilst they were smoking the inhabitants out. The points of their arrows were poisoned, but their enemy had an antidote for it, which they instantly applied to the wounded part. The smoke at last obliged the people to give themselves up. They came out of their caves, first spitting the palms of their hands together, and immediately after extended their arms, crossed at their wrists, ready to be bound and pinioned. I should judge that the dens above mentioned were extended about eight feet horizontally into the earth, six feet in height and as many wide. They were arched over head and lined with earth, which was of the clay kind, and made the surface of their walls firm and smooth.

The invaders then pinioned the prisoners of all ages and sexes indiscriminately, took their flocks and all their effects, and moved on their way towards the sea. On the march the prisoners were treated with [clemency](#), on account of their being submissive and humble. Having come to the next tribe, the enemy laid siege and immediately took men, women, children, flocks, and all their valuable effects. They then went on to the next district which was contiguous to the sea, called in Africa, [Anamaboo](#). The enemies provisions were then almost spent, as well as their strength. The inhabitants knowing what conduct they had pursued, and what were their present intentions, improved the favorable opportunity, [attacked them, and took enemy, prisoners; flocks and all their effects](#). I was then taken a second time. [All of us were then put into the castle, and kept for market](#). On a certain time I and other prisoners were put on board a canoe, under our master, and rowed away to a vessel belonging to Rhode-Island, commanded by capt. Collingwood, and the mate Thomas Mumford. While we were going to the vessel, our master told us all to appear to the best possible advantage for sale. I was bought on board by one Robertson Mumford, steward of said vessel, for four gallons of rum, and a piece of calico, and called VENTURE, on account of his having purchased me with his own private venture. Thus I came by my name. All the slaves that were bought for that vessel's cargo, were two hundred and sixty.

# Venture Smith, from Slavery to Freedom

By John Wood Sweet

Out of almost 12 million African captives who embarked on the Middle Passage to the Americas, only about a dozen left behind first-hand accounts of their experiences. One of these was Venture Smith, whose *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa: But Resident above Sixty Years in the United States of America. Related by Himself* was published in [New London](#), Connecticut in 1798.

Smith's brief, dramatic account is a powerful reminder of colonial Connecticut's diversity, shaped by networks of migration and trade that extended not just to England but also to the West Indies and West Africa. His story is a reminder that alongside the war over political principles and national autonomy waged by Revolutionary New Englanders there was another, bitterly fought struggle over slavery, freedom, and equality.

## A Child Named Broteer

Around 1730, in a place called Dukandarra in the savannah region of West Africa, a family named its new child Broteer. According to the narrative, his father, a local leader, exercised authority with honor and generosity. His mother was one of several wives. In time, young Broteer worked tending large herds of sheep. Their world was turned upside down when a marauding army threatened, betrayed, and ultimately overwhelmed their people. Broteer looked on as the army tortured and killed his father for refusing to disclose the location of his treasure. Broteer was taken captive and marched to the coastal slave-trading center Anomabo (in present-day Ghana) for sale.

As Broteer later recalled, an officer on a Rhode Island slaver commanded by a "Captain Collingwood" purchased him for "four gallons of rum and piece of calico cloth." The vessel was probably the *Charming Susannah*, which departed Newport in late 1738 and returned in September 1739. Renamed Venture by his captors, Broteer survived the smallpox epidemic that ravaged the ship during the Middle Passage, and while most of the surviving captives were sold in Barbados, he was brought to New England.

In Newport, where the slave traders landed Venture, and in the fertile New York and Connecticut farmland along the eastern end of Long Island Sound where he spent the next three decades, as many as one in five people were of African origin.

## A Man Called Venture

Smith's account of slavery emphasized two things: the system's violence and injustice, and the bargaining power he gained through his extraordinary physical strength and self-discipline. During the 1740s and early 1750s, George Mumford owned Venture. Mumford rented Fisher's Island from members of the Winthrop family. He operated the 3,000-acre property as a large, commercial farm, raising mostly sheep and dairy cows.

In his mid-20s, Venture married a fellow slave named Meg. And, soon thereafter, he made an unsuccessful runaway attempt. A newspaper advertisement placed by his owner in April 1754 confirms this account and offers the only contemporary physical description of Venture: "he is a very tall Fellow, 6 feet 2 Inches high, thick square Shoulders, Large bon'd, mark'd in the Face, or scar'd with a Knife in his own Country."

Soon thereafter, Mumford sold Venture to a farmer named Thomas Stanton II in [Stonington](#), Connecticut. Venture convinced his new master to purchase his wife Meg, but Venture's relationships with the Stantons were marked by betrayal and violence.

At one point around 1760, Venture intervened in a conflict between his wife and Mrs. Stanton. His master retaliated by clubbing him brutally and stealing the money he and Meg had been saving up to purchase their freedom. Venture complained to a local justice of the peace to no avail. Ultimately, Venture was sold to Oliver Smith, a small-scale Stonington merchant, and they reached a deal whereby Venture earned the money to purchase his freedom through various kinds of work, including cutting vast amounts of cordwood. It was in honor of the one master who did not betray or cheat him that Venture adopted the surname "Smith."

## Freedom Brings Success and Struggle

As a newly free man, Venture Smith set out earning money and investing it so that he could reunite with and support his family. Thomas Stanton still owned Meg and their two sons, and a member of Mumford family owned their eldest child, Hannah.

Smith worked as a sailor on a whaling expedition, fished, and cut cordwood in various places around Long Island Sound. He also invested in land. In 1770, he bought a 26-acre parcel that bordered the farm of his former master Thomas Stanton. (That area is now the Barn Island Wildlife Preserve.)

In 1775, he used proceeds from the sale of this land to purchase a small piece of land on Haddam Neck, Connecticut, where he cut lumber. Within a few years, his land in Haddam Neck grew to over 100 acres. There, he reunited his family and pursued a variety of



entrepreneurial activities—farming, lumbering, fishing, and working as a small-scale trader along the [Connecticut River](#) and the east end of Long Island Sound.

Recent archaeological excavations of his homestead, now owned by the Connecticut Yankee Utility Company, uncovered the remains of a house and barn as well as ancillary storage buildings, a blacksmith shop, and a dry dock for repairing boats. But Smith's account makes it clear that as proud as he was of his successes, he was also conscious of the obstacles that had been placed in his path. Long after he became free, unscrupulous and sometimes openly racist men continued to cheat him in business transactions. And the courts could not be relied upon to give him equal justice.

### **The Story He Told**

By the time Smith prepared his life story for publication in 1798, he was showing the signs of his old age: his strong, tall body was bowed and he was going blind. Since he was not literate, he must have had help getting his story written down. This may have been Elisha Niles, a local schoolteacher, but no contemporary evidence has surfaced to support this attribution. The narrative was published by a very politically active newspaper publisher. Nonetheless, there is good reason to believe that the *Narrative* as published in 1798 reflects Smith's own distinctive voice.

In many cases, specific details he mentions can be corroborated with contemporary evidence. But more importantly, the tone of his narrative and his emphases are distinctive and unusual and therefore unlikely to reflect the influence of others. Smith emphasized continuities between life in West Africa and in North America; he emphasized the violence of slavery in New England, and he described his struggle for freedom and equality as a lop-sided series of struggles rather than as a simple consequence of the spirit of freedom and revolution that swept the new nation.

Venture Smith died in 1805. He was buried in the graveyard of the First Congregational Church in [East Haddam](#). Alongside him are buried his wife Meg, who died several years later, and other members of their family. Smith's gravestone, which can be seen there to this day, was carved by John Isham, a well-known carver in the region. It describes him as "Venture Smith, African. Tho the son of a King he was kidnapped and sold as a slave but by his industry he acquired Money to Purchase his Freedom." Since then, he has been widely remembered in the region for his industry, integrity, and successes.

*John Wood Sweet, PhD, is an associate professor of history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and is currently working on a book entitled The Captive's Tale: Venture Smith and the Ordeal of the Colonial Atlantic.*

## Venture Smith, 1729?-1805

**A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa, but Resident Above Sixty Years in the United States of America. Related by Himself. New London: Printed in 1798. Reprinted A. D. 1835, and Published by a Descendant of Venture. Revised and Republished with Traditions by H. M. Selden, Haddam, Conn., 1896**

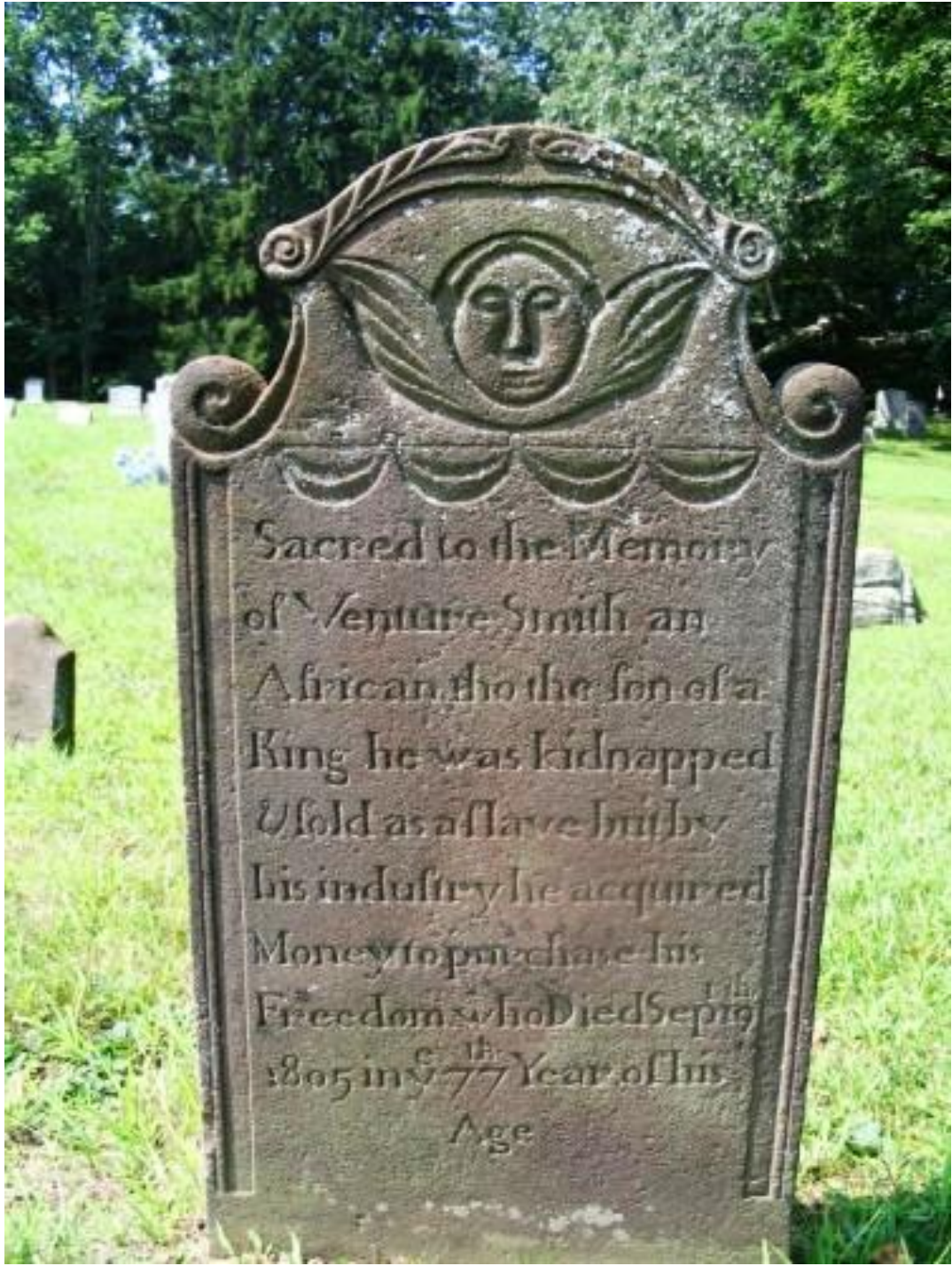
Middletown, Conn.: J. S. Stewart, 1897.

### Summary

Venture Smith was born ca. 1729 in Dukandarra, Guinea, the oldest son of a prince. When he was a young child, he and his family were taken prisoner by an invading army, and his father was killed for refusing to comply with their demands. Following his father's brutal murder, Smith and his family were taken captive. When another army defeated his captors, Smith was sold to Robertson Mumford, and they departed for Barbados and Rhode Island. He grew up as a household slave and married Meg, another of Mumford's slaves, when he was 22. Shortly after, he and a few fellow slaves attempted to escape, but their plan was aborted. Smith and his wife were then sold to Thomas Stanton. Smith describes the conflicts he encountered with his new master's family and tells how he purchased freedom for his wife and family by hiring himself out to others, cutting wood, farming, and fishing. He eventually bought property in East-Haddam, New York, and continued to amass and cultivate adjacent property, eventually acquiring over one hundred acres. He died in September 1805.

In 1798, when he was 69, Venture Smith dictated his narrative to Elisha Niles, a Connecticut schoolmaster. Throughout the work, Smith emphasizes his desire for acceptance and assimilation into American society and his disappointment that his material success does not remove the limitations he faces. In addition to expressing frustrations about the insurmountable disparity between whites and blacks, Smith continues his narrative with several instances of his being cheated out of money or property by other blacks. He concludes by briefly describing the infirmities of his old age.

**Works Consulted:** Andrews, William L., *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986; Andrews, William L., Frances Smith Foster, and Trudier Harris, eds., *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997; Garraty, John A. and Mark C. Carnes, eds., *American National Biography*, vol. 20, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.



Venture Smith's headstone – David C. Nelson



To all People to whom these Presents shall Come, Greeting.

**K** NOW YE, That *J. Abel Bingham of East Haddam in the County of Hartford & Colony of Connecticut in New England.*

For the Consideration of *Twenty Pounds Lawful Money* Received to my full Satisfaction, of *Venture a free negro Resident in Haddam*

*in the County aforesaid* Do Give, Grant, Bargain, Sell and Confirm unto the said

*Venture & his heirs & Assigns forever One Certain Tract of Land Lying in sd Haddam Bounded as follows (viz) Beginning at a Stake & Stone which is the northeast Corner of Francis Chapmans Land thence westerly by sd Chapman Land about 150 Rods to a Stake & Stone in Capt Joseph Seldins line thence northerly Ten Rods on said Bingham Land to Bounds sett. thence Easterly about 150 Rods to the fishing Cove thence by sd Cove to the first mentioned Bound. Said Tract containing Ten acres of Land. Said Venture to have liberty he & his heirs & assigns to Dig & Repep & to Cart ~~wood~~ sd Bingham Land in the Cart Path to the water & also liberty to Cover up his wood on the Banks the left to sd Bingham Damage.*

To Have and to hold the above Granted and Bargained Premises, with the Appurtenances thereof, unto *him the said Venture &*

and their own proper Use and Behoof. AND ALSO, *I the said Bingham*

*Do for my self* & my Heirs, Executors and Administrators, Covenant with the said *Venture* his Heirs and Assigns, That at and until the Easement of these Presents, *I am* well seized of the Premises as a good indefeasible Estate in Fee Simple; and have good Right to Bargain and Sell the same in Manner and Form as is above Written; and that the same is free of all Incumbrances whatsoever.

AND FURTHERMORE, *I the said Bingham* do by these Presents bind my self & my Heirs for ever, to WARRANT and defend the above granted and bargained Premises to *him the said Venture* his Heirs and Assigns, against all Claims and Demands whatsoever.

In the *15<sup>th</sup>* Year of the Reign of Our Sovereign Lord GEORGE the Third, of GREAT-BRITAIN, &c. KING. Anno Domini, 1775 *Abel Bingham & Seal*

Signed, sealed and delivered in Presence of  
*Samuel Huntington*  
*Dorothy Huntington*  
Recorded April 18<sup>th</sup> 1775  
*Hartford County ss. East Haddam March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1775*  
*Personally Appeared Abel Bingham Signer & Sealer of the foregoing Instrument & Acknowledged the same to be his, free act & Deed before me*  
*Samuel Huntington Justice Peace*

Venture Smith's first real-estate purchase in East Haddam, 1775 – Digitized by Cameron Blevins from the land records of the town of Haddam

# NAME

EARLY LIFE

SLAVE DUTIES

NAME OF THE SLAVE

WAYS THE GOVERNMENT PROTECTS THIS CITIZENS RIGHTS

HOW DOES THIS PERSON EXERCISE THEIR RIGHTS AS A CITIZEN

SUMMARY \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

