



## Gist Settlements

Topic Guide for Chronicling America (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>)

### Introduction

Samuel Gist was born in England in 1717 (sometimes reported as 1723). In 1739, Gist sought to improve his financial status by becoming an indentured servant in America. He traveled to Virginia, where he was indentured to John Smith, a tobacco farmer. Upon Smith's death in 1747, Gist married Smith's widow. This marriage resulted in Gist immediately acquiring immense wealth, including hundreds of slaves and large landholdings. In 1776, Gist opposed the American Revolution and returned to Great Britain. In 1808, Gist wrote his final will, freeing and providing for his slaves upon his death. Upon his death in 1815, most, if not all of his slaves were freed. Many remained in Virginia on Gist's land, while a large portion moved to Ohio creating the Gist Settlements. The first of these settlements was in Erie County, with others in Adams, Brown, and Highland Counties. While the Erie County settlement was eventually abandoned, other settlements survived until the twentieth century, with some descendants still on the land at the start of the twenty-first century.

### Important Dates

- 1717 or 1723: Samuel Gist is born, growing up in Bristol Hospital, Bristol, England.
- 1739: Gist begins indentured servitude under James Smith in Virginia.
- 1747: Smith dies; Gist marries his widow, acquiring Smith's wealth, including slaves.
- 1776: With the start of the American Revolution, Gist returns to England.
- June 22, 1808: Gist drafts the first version of his will, freeing and providing for his slaves upon his death. Later amendments say his executors do not have to follow this provision.
- 1815: Gist dies; his executors freed many or all of his slaves.
- 1810s-1830s: Gist Settlements are created in Erie, Adams, Brown, and Highland Counties, Ohio; Erie county settlers later left due to poor soil.
- 1840s-1920s: Around 150 people still live in the remaining Gist Settlements, many farming and many living in log cabins.

### Suggested Search Strategies

- Try the following terms in combination (as an "all" word search), proximity or as phrases: Samuel Gist, Samuel Gest, Gist Settlement, Gest Settlement, Gist Estate.
- Search newspapers in all states, not just Ohio.

### Sample Articles from Chronicling America

- ["Foundation for a Lawsuit Laid Seventy Years Ago"](#) *Dalles Weekly Chronicle* (Dalles, OR), March 23, 1895, Image 1, col. 2.
- ["The Gist Estate"](#) *Highland Weekly News* (Hillsboro, OH), June 20, 1883, Image 1, col. 6-7.
- ["Negro Claims to Virginia Property"](#) *Princeton Union* (Princeton, MN), March 10, 1881, Image 5, col. 2.
- ["Gest Settlement"](#) *News-Herald* (Hillsboro, OH), July 18, 1901, Image 3, col. 6.
- ["The Samuel Gist Estate"](#) *Highland Weekly News* (Hillsboro, OH), January 14, 1885, Image 1, col. 7.