

Smith, Conaro Drayton ^[1]

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1 Apr. 1813–30 Jan. 1894

Conaro Drayton Smith, clergyman, geologist, and author, was born in Buncombe County ^[2], the son of Samuel and Mary Jarrett Smith. The family moved in 1820 to land the elder Smith bought that year when some Cherokee ^[3] land was sold. It had been the site of the Indians' Tessentee town and later fell in Macon County ^[4] when that county was formed in 1828. There C. D. Smith attended local subscription schools. In 1832 the young man returned to Buncombe County to live on Caney River and work as a clerk for Smith and McElroy, general merchants and ginseng ^[5] collectors. When Yancey County ^[6] was formed in 1833, it included the site of the Smith and McElroy store. John W. McElroy became clerk of court and made C. D. Smith his deputy.

In 1836 a camp meeting ^[7] was held at the Caney River Camp Ground at which Smith was converted and joined the Methodist church ^[8]. The following June he was licensed to preach. His first appointment was in LaFayette, Ga., which belonged to the Holston Methodist Conference. Subsequent appointments took him to the Lebanon Circuit (1838–39); Holston College, New Market, Tenn. (1839–40), as agent; Wytheville, Va., circuit (1840–41 and 1844–45); Jonesboro, Tenn., Circuit (1841–42); Emory and Henry College (1842–44), as agent; Athens Station, Tenn. (1845–46); Rogersville, Tenn., Circuit (1846–47); and the Rogersville (1849–50) and Greeneville districts (1850–51), as presiding elder. Hiwassee College in Tennessee awarded Smith an honorary doctor of divinity degree.

Poor health obliged him to retire from the active ministry. After his formal retirement, Smith became an agent for the American Colonization Society ^[9], a position in which he was able to send two emancipated black families to Liberia. He was a delegate from Macon County to the Secession Convention ^[10] of 1861–62 and represented the county in the state senate from 1862 to 1864. He must have returned to the pulpit from time to time as opportunities arose, for his Semi-Centennial Sermon, Delivered . . . Before the Holston Conference, M.E. Church, South At Its Session in Asheville, N.C., October, 1888 ^[11] was published in the latter year.

Long interested in geology and mineralogy ^[12], Smith had been making discoveries and reporting observations in those fields. As a result of this work he served as assistant state geologist under Ebenezer Emmons ^[13] and was a coworker with W. C. Kerr ^[14]. Appendix D of Kerr's Report of the Geological Survey of North Carolina ^[15] (1875) contains two contributions by Smith: "Corundum and Its Associated Rocks" (5 pages) and "Essay on the Geology of Western North Carolina" (22 pages). The Smithsonian Institution Report for 1876 contained a piece by Smith on "Ancient Mica Mines in North Carolina." He once possessed a remarkable collection of mineral specimens gathered over nearly a lifetime that he delighted in showing, but their eventual fate is unknown. He was also the author of A Brief History of Macon County, North Carolina ^[16], published in 1891, and he wrote a number of biographical sketches for the Holston Methodist.

In 1847 near Knoxville, Tenn., Smith married Margaret R., the daughter of Captain Marcus D. Bearden. They became the parents of eight children, but only five—Frank T., C. C., Emma, Conaro, and Marcus—survived childhood. While crossing Nantahala Mountain ^[17] between Hayesville in Clay County ^[18] and Macon County ^[4] to gather timber and mineral specimens for display at the Chicago World's Fair, Smith suffered a serious injury. In dismounting from his horse, his foot slipped on a damp, mossy root dislocating his thigh bone, and he lay on the damp ground for eighteen hours before being found. Smith had a physical disability and pain, he died about a year later.

References:

John P. Arthur, Western North Carolina: A History, 1730–1913 (1914). ^[19]

Asheville Daily Citizen, 30 Jan. 1894.

John L. Cheney, Jr., ed., *North Carolina Government, 1585–1979* (1981).

R. N. Price, *Holston Methodism*, vol. 4 (1912 [portrait]).

Additional Resources:

Smith, C. D. (Conaro Drayton). *A brief history of Macon County, North Carolina*. Franklin, N.C.: Franklin Press Print. 1891. <https://archive.org/details/briefhistoryofma00smit> ^[16] (accessed April 15, 2014).

Smith, C. D. (Conaro Drayton). *Semi-centennial sermon delivered before the Holston Conference, M.E. Church, South, at its session in Asheville, N.C., October, 1888*. Asheville: Randolph & Keer, Steam Printers. 1888. <https://archive.org/details/semicentennialse00smit> ^[11] (accessed April 15, 2014).

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