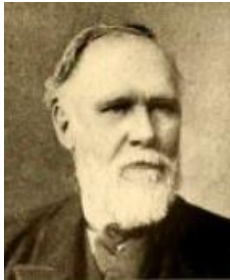


Smith, Hildreth Hosea ^[1]

Smith, Hildreth Hosea

by Bennett L. Steelman, 1994

17 Feb. 1820–14 Sept. 1908



Hildreth Hosea Smith.

Image courtesy of
History of the
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Carolina.

^[2]Hildreth Hosea Smith, educator and journalist, was born in Deerfield, N.H., the son of William True, a farmer, and Martha Ambrose Smith. He was the father of Senator Hoke Smith of Georgia. His ancestors included the Reverend Henry Smith, a seventeenth-century Puritan missionary in Connecticut, and he himself was a first cousin on his mother's side of Mary Baker Eddy, founder of the Church of Christ, Scientist. Smith attended Foxcroft Academy in Maine and Bowdoin College, where he was graduated near the top of his class in 1842. Afterwards he taught school briefly in Bucksport, Maine, then returned to Bowdoin and received a master of arts degree in 1845. He next proceeded to Washington, D.C., where he read law and was licensed to practice, but failing eyesight soon forced him to retire from the bar.

For a time he apparently wandered, traveling briefly to the California gold fields and teaching for a year in Lancaster, Pa. In 1851 he was appointed professor of mathematics, natural sciences, and modern languages at newly founded Catawba College ^[3] in Newton, N.C. Smith seems to have impressed Catawba's students and trustees from the start; appointed president of the college in 1853, he is generally credited with setting the school on a firm academic foundation.

In December 1856 Smith was elected professor of modern languages at The University of North Carolina ^[4], a chair he held until the coming of President Solomon Pool's ^[5] Reconstruction administration in 1868. He offered courses in French, German, Spanish, and Italian, reportedly demonstrating a high proficiency in all of these languages, as well as in mathematics and astronomy. Although described as a gentle man, he was nicknamed "Old Tige" by his students, partly because of his great physical strength and partly because of his courage, displayed in fighting a sensational house fire off campus.

After leaving Chapel Hill in August 1868, Smith for several years operated a small academy in Lincolnton. During 1871 he moved to Atlanta, Ga., to become principal of the Luckie Street Grammar School. In 1873, at the request of the Peabody Fund, he took over the organization of the Shelbyville, Tenn., public schools, with such "marked" success that in 1877 he was called upon to organize a similar system in Houston, Tex. In September 1879 Smith was elected principal of Sam Houston State Normal College ^[6] at Huntsville, Tex. The next year he received an honorary doctor of letters degree from Baylor University. ^[7]

Smith returned to Atlanta about 1882 and served as principal of Girls' High School. In 1888 he resigned to become literary editor of the Atlanta Journal. ^[8] In which his son Hoke had recently acquired a controlling share. Retiring in 1893 due to ill health, he resided in Atlanta until his death.

In addition to articles for the *Journal*, Smith wrote *The Robertsonian System of French, with Rules of Pronunciation, and a Full Vocabulary* (1858). On 19 May 1853 he married Mary Brent Hoke, a sister of Robert F. Hoke ^[9], the Confederate ^[10]major general. Besides [Michael] Hoke Smith (2 Sept. 1855–27 Nov. 1931), the couple had three other children: Frances (Fanny, b. 1854), Lizzie (b. 1861), and Burton (b. 1864), a prominent Atlanta attorney and a partner in his brother's firm.

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