

## **Smyth, George Washington** <sup>[1]</sup>

### **Smyth, George Washington**

by Joseph L. Price, Jr., 1994

**16 May 1803–21 Feb. 1866**



Photographic portrait of George Washington Smyth, from the website of the Texas State Cemetery.

<sup>[2]</sup>George Washington Smyth, surveyor, jurist, and congressman, was born in North Carolina, the son of Samuel Smyth, a German-born millwright, and a Scots-Irish mother. His father owned a gristmill on Little Swift Creek in Craven County <sup>[3]</sup> a few years before the American Revolution <sup>[4]</sup>, and that is probably where young Smyth was born. When George was three, the family moved to Fayetteville, Tenn., and later to Alabama. While in Tennessee he received some elementary education in Maury County. On 20 Jan. 1830, against the wishes of his family, he left for Texas, arriving at Nacogdoches on 14 February. He served for a time as a schoolteacher, then became surveyor at Bevil's Settlement near present Jasper. He continued as surveyor until 1834, when he was elected a land commissioner.

In 1835 Smyth was appointed first judge of the town of Bevil by the Provisional Government of the Republic of Texas. He was a signer of the Texas Declaration of Independence and on 1 Feb. 1836 was elected a delegate to the constitutional convention. He was also a signer of the Texas Constitution. With the establishment of the Republic of Texas, he was appointed to survey its boundary with the United States, a task that occupied him until June 1841.

A delegate to the state constitutional convention in 1845, Smyth afterwards was commissioner of the General Land Office from 1848 to 1857. Elected to Congress, he served a single term (1853–55) and was not a candidate for reelection. Although he opposed secession, his son enlisted in the Confederate army with his father's approval. Smyth died in Austin while attending the convention to form a new state constitution after the Civil War <sup>[5]</sup>. He was buried in the state cemetery in Austin. In 1936 the state erected a marker at the site of his home ten miles southwest of Jasper. Smyth's grandchildren gave his papers to the University of Texas Library in the early 1930s.

In April 1834 Smyth married Frances M. Grigsby, and they were the parents of seven children: Sarah (Mrs. J. T. Armstrong), Susan (Mrs. Samuel S. Adams), Matilda (Mrs. R. T. Armstrong), George W., Jr., Francis, Emily (Mrs. W. Hansford Smith), and J. G.

#### **References:**

"Autobiography of George W. Smyth," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 36 (January 1933).

*Biog. Dir. Am. Cong* (1989).

Louis Wiltz Kemp, *Signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence* (1944).

Alan D. Watson, *A History of New Bern and Craven County* (1987).

Walter P. Webb, ed., *Handbook of Texas*, vol. 2 (1952).

#### **Additional Resources:**

"Smyth, George Washington, (1803 - 1866)." *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*. Washington, D.C.: The Congress. <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=S000647> [6] (accessed April 30, 2014).

Robert Wooster, "SMYTH, GEORGE WASHINGTON," *Handbook of Texas Online*, published by the Texas State Historical Association. <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fsm51> [7] (accessed April 30, 2014).

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"George Washington Smyth." Texas State Cemetery. [http://www.cemetery.state.tx.us/pub/user\\_form.asp?pers\\_id=70](http://www.cemetery.state.tx.us/pub/user_form.asp?pers_id=70) [2] (accessed April 30, 2014).

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