

John S. Smilie

(16 Sep 1742 – 30 Dec 1812)

The National Intelligencer, December 31, 1812

Died, in this city, at 2 o'clock yesterday afternoon, the venerable John Smilie, a Representative in Congress from Pennsylvania, aged about 71 years. He was a native of Ireland, but arriving in this country at an early age, was engaged in the war of the Revolution both in civil and military capacities. Since that period he has never been out of public service, in conventions, in the Legislature of Pennsylvania and of the United States, in which several capacities he has distinguished himself as the firm and undeviating supporter of Republican government and of his country's rights. At the commencement of the present session the estimation in which he was held was evinced by his appointment to the important station of Chairman of the committee of Foreign Relations. He has descended to the Tomb of his Fathers, crowned with years and honor, carrying with him the profound regrets of his intimate acquaintances, and the respect of all mankind.

The funeral of John Smilie will take place this day at half past 2 o'clock from the Capitol.

In the House. Melancholy Interruption

Mr. Findley rose. It is my melancholy duty, said he, to announce to this House that my venerable colleague; and old friend and associate John Smilie, is no more. He departed this life at 2 o'clock this afternoon.

A committee was then appointed to superintend the funeral of the deceased, consisting of Messrs. Findley, Lyle, Brown, Roberts, Davis, Lacock and Hynenian.

A resolution was unanimously adopted, requesting each Member of the House, in testimony of their respect to the memory of John Smilie, to wear crape on the left arm for one month.

And, on motion of Mr. Fitch, the House adjourned.

The National Intelligencer, Friday, January 1, 1813

John Smilie

As the name and public services of our deceased venerable friend have been long known, some account of his history may be proper. He was a native of the county of Down, in the North of Ireland; from whence he came to the then colony of Pennsylvania in the year 1762, and settled in the county of Lancaster, where he married into a respectable family, and continued to reside until 1781, when, with his family, consisting of his wife and three children, he removed to the county of Fayette, in the Western parts of Pennsylvania, to an excellent farm, on which his family still reside. During his residence in Lancaster county, the revolutionary war commenced, in which Mr. Smilie was not an inactive looker-on; he was a member of the early committees of conference, etc. preparatory to that event, and when it actually commenced was among the foremost in actual service in the militia, particularly in the winter of 1776-7, when the American cause was at the lowest ebb and wore the most unpromising aspect. He was a member of the state Legislature for Lancaster county when the important law for the gradual abolition of slavery passed, which, being the first law for that purpose passed in America, still reflects great honor on that assembly. Its passage, for which Mr. Smilie was a zealous and influential advocate, was opposed by a numerous minority.

After removing to the western country he was in 1783 elected to the Council of Censors, an important political body peculiar to the first constitution of that state, and continued ever after, till his decease, to be a member of either the State Legislature, the Executive Council, two State Conventions,

or of Congress, without, it is believed, the intermission of one year. He had nearly completed his sitting in seven successive Congresses, besides having been a member of the third Congress, at his decease, and was elected to serve in the 14th Congress, which from a sense of his increasing bodily frailty he had wished to decline.

His honest and ardent zeal for and promptitude in advocating what he believed to be for the public good, has been long known and acknowledged by all political parties. In private life, as a citizen and neighbor, his character was wholly unimpeachable. She who was the wife of his youth still survives to deplore his loss, and also one son and daughter with their families, and several grandchildren by a daughter who has been many years deceased.

The above is a short outline of the history and character of one of the most steady and zealous patriots of 1776, of whom but few now remain.

The complaint which terminated his mortal career at the advanced age of 71 years, was a typhus fever.

Biographical Directory of the United States Congress 1774-1989

A Representative from Pennsylvania; born in Ireland in 1741; immigrated to the U.S. and settled in Pennsylvania in 1760; attended the public schools; served in the Revolutionary War; moved to Fayette, Pa. in 1780; was a member of the State house of representatives 1784-1786; member of the State constitutional convention in 1790; served in the State senate from 1790 to 1793 when he resigned; elected as a Democrat to the 3rd Congress (March 4, 1793 to March 3, 1795); Democratic presidential elector in 1796; elected to the 6th through 12th Congresses and served from March 4, 1799 until his death; had been reelected to the 13th Congress, but died in Washington, D.C., December 30, 1812 before the close of the 12th Congress. Interment in the Congressional Cemetery.