

Amzi Smith

(25 Aug 1843 – 24 Aug 1907)

Smith. On Saturday, August 24, 1907 at 9:30 p.m., Amzi Smith, aged 64 years. Funeral service at residence, 314 Maryland avenue northeast, Monday, August 26 at 4 p.m. Interment private.

The Evening Star, August 24, 1907, p. 11

Mr. Amzi Smith's Condition

The condition of Mr. Amzi Smith this afternoon was regarded as showing no improvement. He suffered another hemorrhage this morning and while it seemed to leave no appreciable effect, it was not encouraging.

The Evening Star, August 25, 1907, p. 10

Amzi Smith Is Dead

Was Many Years Head of Senate Document Room

Friend of Famous Men

Known Far and Wide for His Marvelous Memory

Valuable To Government

No Index Necessary When He Was Around --

Funeral Arrangements Announced Later

Amzi Smith, for forty-three years connected with the document room of the United States Senate, and for many years in charge of that important branch of the Senate, died last night of typhoid fever, in the sixty-fourth year of his age. He would have been, had he lived until today, just sixty-four years old.

Mr. Smith was known by every public man whose business took him to the United States Capitol for the last generation, and he possessed a remarkable memory both for faces and for the indexes of public bills, documents, reports and executive communications which annually found their way into both houses of Congress.

It took him but a moment to indicate where any public document could be found in the vast storehouse over which he presided. Senator George of Mississippi once said to him: "You might burn up all he indexes in he Senate, Amzi, and you would be all right."

When the end came the deceased was surrounded by his wife, two daughters, Mrs. Richard Hawes of this city and Mrs. John Schreyer of Milton, Pa., and his son, Frank P. Smith, an architect of Boston. Another son, Amzi Smith, jr., of Johnson City, Pa., has been telegraphed for, but has not reached the city.

Mr. Smith became ill about one month ago, but said little to the members of his family. Finally, about ten days ago, he was compelled to take to his bed, and the physician in attendance announced that he was suffering with typhoid fever. His condition gradually grew worse until the end. The funeral arrangements have not been completed.

Since the Forty-Seventh Congress

Probably no better test of the esteem in which Mr. Amzi Smith was held by those who were his employers can be shown than by the annual insertion in the appropriation bills of Congress of this item: "For superintendent of the document room (Amzi Smith), \$3,000." In other words Congress stipulated that the appropriation for that office should be expended only in favor of one man, Amzi Smith.

This was done for one purpose; namely, that in event of a change in the head of the department to which Mr. Smith was accredited, during the recess of Congress, no one would dare to appoint another man to his place. It also served notice upon the horde of hungry office-seekers ever thronging the Senate that the Senate was satisfied with Mr. Smith and did not want any one to come prowling around after his place.

Since the Forty-seventh Congress (and that is a long time) this provision has appeared in the annual supply bills. In recent years it has probably been superfluous, since no man who had knowledge of affairs as they existed would have possessed the temerity to ask for Amzi Smith's place. It was acknowledged that he was invaluable and that the Senate so regarded his status.

Col. Bright's Tribute

Col. Richard J. Bright, who served twice as sergeant-at-arms of the Senate, told a Star man the other day an incident bearing upon this phase of the case.

"When I first took charge of the office of sergeant-at-arms, in 1879," said Col. Bright, "Mr. Smith's position was under my office. There had been a change of administration, the democrats coming in, and there were about 5,000 applications for some one hundred positions. Among the demands I received was one for Mr. Smith's place. I pointed out to those who asked for it, that Mr. Smith's office was peculiar; his office was a workshop of the Senate, and it was necessary to have a man at the head of it who could do the work demanded by the Senate. It was far more important to the democrats of the Senate that they should have in that place a man who could on the spur of the moment answer calls made upon him, for information to be used for partisan purposes, if you please, than it was that some good democrat should be provided with a place. That view was accepted and Mr. Smith was not disturbed."

Col. Bright went on to say that later, when he was about to go out of office, he was called upon to supplant Mr. Smith. One of the greatest republicans in the Senate was back of the applicant for Mr. Smith's place. Col. Bright went to this senator and suggested that while he would not take it upon himself to anticipate his successor (Col. Dan Ransdell) and would not make a change in Mr. Smith's place anyhow, he suggested that if this senator should try it, he would find the Senate unanimously opposed to the change. The senator concurred in his view and withdrew his indorsement.

Later, Mr. Smith's office was placed under the jurisdiction of the secretary of the senate, and it would probably have required a caucus of senators to have displaced him at any time.

Held in High Esteem

Disbursing Officer Nixon, who is one of the oldest and most valued employes of the Senate, said of Mr. Smith:

"I have served the Senate contemporaneously with him for forty years and more. No man had a wider acquaintance among public men or was held in higher regard. He knew everyone, he seemed to know everything that every one wanted to know and he knew all about it. I was looking over the records the other day and found that Mr. Smith came here in 1864. He held minor positions at first, but was steadily advanced. I think he obtained his great hold upon his position in 1877. In that year the Senate adopted a resolution directing the removal of the public documents from under the roof of the Capitol and their proper assortment. This work Mr. Smith undertook. He became acquainted with every public document on file, and possessing a remarkable memory was able thereafter to refer at a moment's notice to the document treating of any specified subject, and could give its number off hand."

This was Mr. Smith's great forte. If a senator should come to him and say, "Amzi, I am going to talk about so-and-so; what can you refer me to having a bearing on that subject?" Mr. Smith in a jiffy could tell him that away back yonder in the year so and so the Secretary of the Treasury, or the Secretary of State, or the public printer, or somebody else had sent in a report on that question. Also, senator or

representative this or that had made a speech on it; all of which he would refer to in his records, and in a few minutes have the inquirer loaded down with information.

This faculty came in handy to men of both parties, in both the House and Senate. Mr. Smith's mind was encyclopaedic and not partisan. He was employed to remember, and he did remember. If there was a hot debate in either the House or Senate, and some statesman sent a page scurrying to Amzi Smith with perhaps just a hurried scrawl, giving the head of the subject only, before the page had time to catch his breath for the return trip Mr. Smith would have the documents forthcoming. He did not stop to inquire if the solicitor was democrat or republican.

His Greatest Faculty

Mr. Smith's greatest faculty lay in his ability to help seekers for information. Often, and, indeed, in most of the instances, public men would come to him with the vaguest kind of ideas as to what they wanted. They knew in a general way what they were after, but did not know in what directions to look for it. Mr. Smith would set them right at once. He seemed to divine what people were after, and indeed tell them what they themselves did not know they wanted. Then he would tell them where to find it, which was a double service.

As might be supposed, he was a busy man. His office was likely to be thronged with people making all kinds of harassing and sometimes seemingly impossible requests. The man has yet to appear who will say that he ever failed to receive courteous treatment at Mr. Smith's hand. It seemed as if nothing was too much for him. Let the Senate sit, thirty or forty hours at a time, as often it has done, and he was at his desk ready to answer promptly, politely and effectively. That is what wore him out. His acquaintances will tell you that he wore out his life in this service of detail; his friends know it to be true.

In recent years he had been failing physically, but never mentally. His frame was meager and delicate, but his mind was strong. Once he dropped out of his chair completely exhausted, but in a day or two insisted upon being back at the desk. He was not only held in high regard by public men, but was beloved by them. Senators and the older representatives looked upon him as a friend. He was something more than an employe of Congress.

He was widely known over the country. Every one who wrote to the document room for information received attention. Scientists, literateurs, writers on economics and politics, historians and others depended upon him. Every librarian in the country knew Amzi Smith, by reputation if not personally, and probably felt that he knew him personally.

He was born in West Newton, Pa., in 1843, and had resided here since 1864. He left a wife, two daughters and two sons; Mrs. Schroyer of Milton, Pa.; Mrs. Richard Hawes of this city; Amzi Smith, jr., of Johnson City, Tenn., and Frank Smith, an architect, of Boston.

His office was left in charge of trained men, who served under him for years, at the head of whom is George Boyd, who has been Mr. Smith's right-hand man in recent years and upon whom has devolved most of the hard work of the office.

The Evening Star, August 26, 1907, p. 16

Funeral of Amzi Smith

Many Friends Attend the Services at the Family Home

Funeral services for Mr. Amzi Smith, late superintendent of the Senate document room, were held this afternoon at 4 o'clock at the family residence, 314 Maryland avenue northeast, conducted by Rev. John Weldley, pastor of the Church of the Reformation. The services, which were both simple and beautiful, were attended by many friends of the deceased. Interment, which was private, was in Congressional cemetery. The pallbearers were George H. Boyd, W.E. Burns, R.B. Dixon, Henry Blair, Frank Bright and Horace Dodge.

The family has received letters and telegrams from all parts of the country and from many prominent people conveying expressions of regret at Mr. Smith's death and of tribute to his worth and the esteem in which he was held.