

Rarely is it that two members of the same family start out their lives on a humble farm in rural Vermont and end their lives being Brigadier Generals in the United States Army. Rodney Smith and his younger brother, William Smith, both achieved that feat. They both entered the paymaster's department of the Union Army, albeit by slightly different means, one joining from Vermont and the other enlisting from Kentucky. Both even signed up about the same time. Each worked his way up from lowly Private to gold star Brigadier General. Each one had over thirty years in the service of the United States Army. Both were buried in their hometown of Orwell, Vermont after spending much of their adult lives living outside the Green Mountain state. Rodney and William truly were brothers in arms as well as brothers in life.

William Smith was born on March 26, 1831 in Orwell, Vermont. He was one of ten children born to Israel Smith (1790-1865) and Delia Ferguson (1795-1882). From the time these two were married about 1818 until 1842 (twenty-four years), the couple produced a newborn child about every two years. William was the middle child of the clan. He had five older siblings and four younger ones: Cynthia (1819-1895); Orson (1821-1890); Walter (1824-1892); Sidney (1826-1911); Rodney (1829-1915); Pliny (1833-1866); Anna (1836-1928); Allan (1838-1914); and Delia (1842-1931).<sup>[1]</sup>

Additional information on the Smith family can be found in the article on Rodney Smith written by this writer and posted on Vermont in the Civil War website.

William and his older brother, Rodney, both attended the University of Vermont (Class of 1854) in 1850. The two of them boarded with the Pepper family in Orwell while they attended school. William became licensed to teach in the town of Orwell in 1850 by the two Superintendents of the school district. The brothers graduated from the University of Vermont on August 12, 1854.<sup>[2]</sup>

After graduation, Rodney went to Kentucky and while there did some teaching himself prior to the eruption of the American Civil War. William remained in Vermont. Since he had been licensed to teach even before he graduated from UVM in 1854, it was assumed that was what he did for a living afterwards. It would make sense for someone with a

brand new degree from college to do so. In any event, William stayed close enough to Orwell to go "riding" with his father upon occasion. This was evident when, years later during a newspaper interview after receiving one of his military promotions, he shared an anecdotal story with the reporter which explained how his decision to launch his military career happened: "...he was riding with his father one day at the outbreak of the civil war and asked his advice as to joining the army in some capacity. His father, who, by the way, was a Paymaster during the War of 1812, suggested to him that service in the pay department would be most congenial, and 'this' said General Smith, 'I presume accounts for my present position.' " <sup>[3]</sup> William, like his brother, had a long, accomplished career in the Army.

William was commissioned an Assistant Paymaster on August 29, 1861. He was stationed in Washington, D.C. from September, 1861 to February, 1862. In that month, he was assigned to Louisville, Kentucky where he remained for two and one half years paying troops in Kentucky and Tennessee. <sup>[4]</sup> While doing duty there, he almost lost his job as a paymaster. He shared his near miss with his parents in a letter dated "Jackson, Tennessee - February 1st, 1863": "...My work in this section is ended for there has recently been a division in our old pay district and in the division of paymasters I am retained in Louisville." The cause of the shake up in the paymaster's department was a result of corruption within the district. It seemed that one Major I.N. Cooke, William's boss, was siphoning off Government funds to satisfy his gambling habit. He had been caught and arrested gambling in Cairo where he was in possession of over seventy thousand U.S. Treasury dollars. An investigation revealed an additional one hundred thousand was unaccounted for. After his arrest, Major Cooke turned over a million dollars to the new paymaster, Major Larned. When the heads stopped rolling, only five of thirty officers remained on duty in the paymaster's department at Louisville. William confessed to his mother and father, "...I don't know why he (Major Larned) retained me....he had his own selection in the paymasters." <sup>[5]</sup>

In the Fall of 1864, William was transferred from Louisville, Kentucky to St. Paul, Minnesota. Here, he was brevetted Lieutenant Colonel on March 13, 1865 for "faithful

and meritorious services during the war...." On July 26, 1866, he was mustered out of the Army while working in St. Paul. Just after the new year began, on January 17, 1867 to be exact, citizen Smith re-enlisted into the regular Army as a Major in the Paymaster Department. <sup>[6]</sup> During his brief return to private citizen, William must have done some "sightseeing" in St. Paul and he must have liked what he saw. On October 10, 1867, he was married to Miss Mary Otto McAllister (1843-1935). They were married in Ramsey, Minnesota. She had been born on January 1, 1843 in Fort Hunter, Pennsylvania. The ceremony was held in Christ Church in St. Paul with the Reverend S. McMasters officiating. Both the bride and the groom resided in St Paul. Mary's father was Colonel J.H. McAllister, the St. Paul capitalist. <sup>[7]</sup>

After their marriage, the newlyweds remained in St. Paul only a short time. William transferred to Louisville again and spent two years there. In 1869, they were living in San Antonio for one year. 1870 to 1872 found the Smith's in New Orleans. They spent one year in Sioux City between 1872 and 1873. Before 1873 was out, William and Mary were back in St. Paul. <sup>[8]</sup> At this time, they began having a family. Between 1873 and 1880, three children were born to the couple: Katherine Delia (1873-1951); William McAllister (1875-1966); and Harry Hale (1877-?). <sup>[9]</sup> In 1880, the family headed for Washington, D.C. for three years. Then they went back to St. Paul for four more years. Their next duty station was the windy city of Chicago in 1888. They spent two years in Illinois. During that tour of duty, William was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, Deputy Paymaster-General on September 6, 1888. Next stop was back in St. Paul for a year and a half. In 1890, it was back to Washington, D.C. which would be William's final duty station. <sup>[10]</sup> After thirty-four years of service to the United States Government, William, like his brother, was forced to retire by law in 1895. His final promotion to Brigadier General came at the same time as his final transfer to Washington, D.C. <sup>[11]</sup> A young Private in 1861. A Brigadier General in 1895. Not bad for a farm boy from Vermont.

After his retirement, William and Mary returned to St. Paul, Minnesota for a time. They lived at 365 Summit Avenue in 1900. William was sixty-nine. He and Mary were boarders in the American Hotel. <sup>[12]</sup> They were, of course, living off of the retired

Brigadier General's military pension. Five years later, in 1905, William and Mary returned to the North Country, exchanging the warm climate of Minnesota for that of Pelham Manor, New York. Their daughter, Catherine, and her husband, Henry Myrick, lived with them. Catherine kept house while Henry worked in a Trust Company (bank). Living in the same household was a cook, Sarah Bartlin, forty and from Ireland, and a waitress named May Brennan age twenty. <sup>[13]</sup> Whatever type of community the Smiths were living in appeared to contain a high level of retirees with servants in the household.

By 1910, seventy-eight year old William and his sixty-seven year old wife, Mary, were still residing at Pelham Manor. Their daughter, Catherine, and her husband, Henry, continued residing with them in the rented home on Fowler Avenue. Henry was employed as a secretary at a local bank. The young couple had no children. The old cook had been replaced by a new one. Her name was Sarah Gartland age forty. The new waitress was twenty-nine year old May Brown. <sup>[14]</sup> In the winter of 1912, William became very ill. He eventually developed pneumonia which took the life of Brigadier General Smith on January 17, 1912. <sup>[15]</sup> One of several obituaries written about William appeared in the Army And Navy Register on January 20, 1912: "...Died January 17 of pneumonia at his home, 435 Fowler Avenue, Pelham Manor, New York. He was eighty years old. He was paymaster of volunteers in 1861, and was mustered out in July, 1866. In the following year he was made major in the paymaster's department, and in September, 1888, he was raised to (the) rank of lieutenant colonel. In March, 1890, he was made brigadier general and paymaster general by President Harrison. He was afterward brevetted lieutenant colonel of volunteers from 1865 for meritorious service during the war. He was retired (by law) March, 1895. While he was paymaster General Smith traveled over many parts of the country, making some of his trips in a wagon with an escort. He suffered much hardship while traveling in the northwest. He was caught in a blizzard on the plains and narrowly escaped death. His party managed to reach some abandoned Indian tepees and got shelter from the storm. General Smith lived in Washington for many years. During the last seven years he had been a resident of Pelham Manor. He was born in Orwell, Vermont, where internment took place. He is survived by his wife (Mary Otto

McAllister), his son, William McAllister Smith, of New Rochelle, and his daughter, Mrs. Catherine S. Myrick, of Pelham Manor." <sup>[16]</sup>

Mary filed for her widow's pension benefits around February 8, 1912. <sup>[17]</sup> She remained at 435 Fowler Avenue, Pelham Manor, New York with her daughter, Catherine, and her son-in-law, Henry Myrick. In the 1915 New York State Census, Henry was listed as head of household. Mary had been demoted to "mother-in-law". Twenty-nine year old Mary Brinson labeled a waitress, and forty-five year old Sarah Gartland from Ireland, the cook, rounded out the family members. <sup>[18]</sup>

The next Federal Census in 1920 found Mary Mce Smith of Pennsylvania widowed and still living at Pelham Manor. Henry had been promoted to Treasurer of the bank he worked at. Everyone else who was living in the household in 1915 were still present in 1920 including the two domestics, May Brennan and Sarah Gartland. <sup>[19]</sup> Five years later the core of the family had not changed. Henry was still at the bank. Katherine was the housewife and she had taken up being an artist as well. Mary, at eighty-two, was the matron of the house. The only new additions to the household were two different servants. The new cook was a seventy-five year old alien from Ireland named Bridget Hogan. There was a new chamber maid as well - Elizabeth McKenna, twenty-three and also from Ireland. Even the rented house had a new number. It used to be 485 Fowler Avenue. In 1925, it had been changed to 424. <sup>[20]</sup>

Mary was seventy-seven years old in 1930. Her life remained consistent from year to year. There were just more candles on the cake now. Henry, on paper at least, seemed to rule the house. The home they lived in was valued at an impressive \$30,000 when the Federal Census was completed for Pelham Manor. Henry now rented it, at least on paper. There were new servants in the household, both from Ireland which Mary most likely was responsible for choosing. Both of them were categorized as aliens in the Census. They had only recently arrived in the United States from their homeland. Katherine McCabe, thirty, had immigrated to the U.S. in 1924. Katherine Lynch, the other servant, had arrived in 1925. <sup>[21]</sup> Mary hung on for another five years. She died at ninety-two years

of age on March 17, 1935 in Pelham Manor, Westchester, New York. She was buried along side her husband, William, in Mountain View Cemetery in Orwell, Vermont. <sup>[22]</sup>

## NOTES

1. Ancestry.com, Edgerton Family Tree for William Smith; Ibid., North America, Family Histories, 1500-2000 for William Smith.
2. Ibid., 1850 U.S. Federal Census for William Smith; photocopy of license to teach dated Nov. 30, 1850 by Superintendents Cushman and Murray in Orwell, Vermont; photocopy of University of Vermont Commencement program, August 2, 1854. Both photocopies courtesy of Marsi Woody Smith, descendant, from Boise, Idaho, November 2017.
3. Photocopy of newspaper article, "How Col. William Smith Received Tidings of His Promotion", St. Paul Pioneer Press, March 12, 1890 courtesy of Marsi Woody Smith, Boise, Idaho, Nov. 2017.
4. Vermont in the Civil War/Cemeteries/Vermont/Orwell/Mountain View Cemetery/Smith, William/Biography.
5. Transcribed letter courtesy of descendant Marsi Woody Smith, Boise, Idaho, Nov. 2017.
6. Vermont in the Civil War/Cemeteries/Vermont/Orwell/Mountain View Cemetery/Smith, William/Biography.
7. Ancestry.com, Minnesota, Marriage Index, 1849-1950 for William Smith; Ibid., Family Tree for Mary Otto McAllister; Ibid., North America, Family Histories, 1500-2000 for William Smith; Photocopy of newspaper article, "How Col. William Smith Received Tidings of His Promotion", St. Paul Pioneer Press, March 12, 1890 courtesy of Marsi Woody Smith, Boise, Idaho, Nov. 2017.
8. Vermont in the Civil War/Cemeteries/Vermont/Orwell/Mountain View Cemetery/Smith, William/Biography.
9. Ancestry.com, Edgerton Family Tree for William Smith.
10. Vermont in the Civil War/Cemeteries/Vermont/Orwell/Mountain View Cemetery/Smith, William/Biography.
11. Obituary of William Smith, Army And Navy Register, January 20, 1912, photocopy courtesy Marsi Woody Smith, descendant, Boise, Idaho, Nov. 2017.
12. Ancestry.com, 1900 U.S. Federal Census for William Smith.
13. Ibid., 1905 New York State Census for General Williams Smith.
14. Ibid., 1910 U.S. Federal Census for William Geo Smith.
15. Ibid., Edgerton Family Tree for William Smith; Ibid., Pension Files for Smith, William.
16. Obituary of William Smith, Army And Navy Register, January 20, 1912, photocopy courtesy Marsi Woody Smith, descendant, Boise, Idaho, Nov. 2017.
17. Photocopy of Pension Files for Smith, William, Major & Paymaster, USA courtesy of Marsi Woody Smith, descendant, Boise, Idaho, Nov. 2017.
18. Ancestry.com, 1915 New York State Census for Mary Smith.
19. Ibid., 1920 U.S. Federal Census for May Mce Smith.
20. Ibid., 1925 New York State Census for Mary Mch Smith

21. Ancestry.com, 1930 U.S. Federal Census for Mary Smith.
22. Ibid., Family Tree for Mary Otto McAllister; [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com), Memorial # 112223941 for Mary O. McAllister Smith.