

The Smith Family, Part One

A B R I E F H I S T O R Y

SMITH is the most common surname in the United States, as well as in England, where it was first officially documented in the year 975. The name originally referenced the blacksmithing trade. In America, the Smith name is more widely found in the Southern states than in other regions.

Tracing any Smith family's early origin is challenging. It's safe to say that Hugh Elzer Smith's ancestors emigrated from England in the late 1700s. The earliest known of them were Henry Smith and his wife Margaret Curtis, the parents of Benjamin Bennett Smith (1786 to 1877), who was born in Washington County, Georgia, and eventually settled with his wife Mary Ann (Polly) Whitaker (1786 to 1880) in Tallapoosa County, Alabama. Their son John Griffin Smith was Elzer Smith's grandfather.

John Griffin Smith (1809 to before 1870)

Louvena Baldwin (1811-76)

Their Children

Kenchun S. Smith (1831 to 1906)

David Mitchell Smith (1833 to 1913)

Mary Smith (1836 to unknown)

Phebe A. Smith (1847 to unknown)

William Thomas Smith (1850 to unknown)

Known as Griffin, he was a farmer. He apparently participated in the Georgia Land Lottery of 1827, which was organized that year to distribute land that had formerly belonged to the Indian tribes. He was eighteen years old, the minimum age for entering, and luck was with him: He was awarded 202.5 acres in Troupe County on the state's western border and paid only \$18.00 to register his grant. On Dec. 7, 1828, he married Louvena Baldwin there, and their son Kenchun was born three years later. Louvena would give birth to two more children before they moved to Alabama sometime after 1836, where another two children were born. Few in the family would be in a position to farm on a scale that required enslaved laborers, and neither Griffin and Louvena nor any one of

their children ever learned to read or write.¹ Griffin was not only ignorant but also restless, given the family's wandering over the following decades.

In 1832, Alabama's Tallapoosa County, named for the river that bisects it, was established on former Muscogee-Creek tribal land and opened for homesteading. Griffin and Louvena were among the hundreds of primarily Georgia-born settlers lured by the prospect of fertile acreage practically free for the asking. His parents, Benjamin and Polly Smith, and possibly other relatives soon followed. In 1850, Griffin was farming near Dadeville, the county seat, where many of the family's nearest neighbors were also Smiths. His parents lived several miles away. In that year's census, Griffin's real estate was valued at \$575.

By 1860, the three eldest children had married,² and Griffin, Louvena, Phebe and William had moved to Wetumpka in Coosa County.³ Straddling the Coosa River, Wetumpka was a cotton boomtown. From its landing, steamboats transported bales of cotton from the state's northeastern counties to Mobile. In Wetumpka, Griffin's farm, which was appraised at \$1,000, was adjacent to his parents' farm. According to the census of 1860, his father owned slaves valued at \$3,000. Griffin also purchased eighty acres from the federal government. It was on the eastern side of the river near the Alabama Penitentiary, which was known as "the Walls," in an area dedicated to commercial enterprise rather than farming.

Sometime in the 1860s, the elderly Griffin and Louvena moved up the Coosa River to Fayetteville in the southwestern corner of Talladega County, where their son Kenchun and his family had settled. It was an area removed from the Union Army's incursions during the final year of the Civil War. After Griffin's death in 1870, Louvena continued there with her two youngest children before her own death in 1876.

Kenchun S. Smith (1831 to 1906)

Martha Ann Green (1835 to 1892)

Their Children

Mary Elizabeth Giddings (1852 to 1873)

Amanda Melvina Coleman (1853 to 1944)

Missouri (Missie) Hammett (1854 to 1911)

Sarah Ann (Lucy) Coleman (1858 to 1882)

Georgia Ann (Georgie) Hammett (1861 to 1929)

Charles Henry (Charlie) Smith (1863 to 1928)

William (Willie) James Smith (1865 to 1923)

Mattie Wood (1867 to 1955)

Hugh Elzer Smith (1870 to 1952)

Icie Bell Bazemore (1875 to 1946)

Kenchun Smith came of age while the family farmed in Tallapoosa County. He married Martha Ann Green there in December 1850, when he was 19 years old. Four years younger, she was the daughter of William Villett Green (1795

1. It was no doubt Griffin and Louvena's being illiterate that accounts for the alternate spellings of their family's names in public records.

2. Kenchun married Martha Ann Green in Tallapoosa County in 1850. David married Nancy Ann Gardner in Tallapoosa County in 1854 and they moved to Winn Parish, Louisiana, about 1860. In May 1862, he enlisted in the 28th Louisiana Infantry and returned to farming after the war. Nothing is known of Mary.

3. During Reconstruction, this portion of Coosa County became part of the newly created Elmore County.

to unknown) and Mary Ann Hallmark (1802–60).⁴ Unlike Kenchun, Martha could read and write. They soon moved to Fayetteville, Alabama, most likely accompanying several of her Green and Hallmark relatives. There, each of the ten Smith children would be born between 1852 and 1875.

Fayetteville is a community several miles east of the Coosa River in the Southern District of Talladega County, an area noted for its marble quarries and sulphur springs. Fort Williams, nearby at the mouth of Cedar Creek and the Coosa River, had served as a supply depot before the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in 1814; the victorious General Andrew Jackson returned there to bury the more than one hundred Tennessee Volunteers and Native American allies who had died in battle. Once the Creek Indian War ended, some of Jackson's men returned to the area with their families. Many hailed from Fayetteville, Tennessee, so they called their settlement Fayetteville.

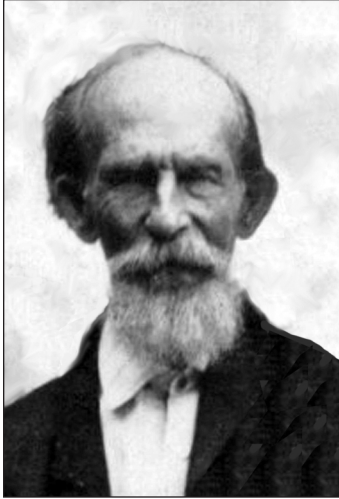
The family of Kenchun Smith went uncounted in the 1860 census for Fayetteville. In June 1862, he rode his horse to Talladega to join Co. F of the 51st Alabama Cavalry Regiment, Partisan Rangers. He enlisted as a 31-year-old private. Placed under the command of General Nathan Bedford Forrest, the regiment engaged in frequent skirmishes in East Tennessee before their first major battle at Shelbyville in late June 1863. Described as one of the most dramatic cavalry clashes of the Civil War, it resulted in the deaths and capture of nearly half of Kenchun's regiment. They continued to fight with some success in East Tennessee, finally joining in the failed effort to halt General William T. Sherman's Atlanta campaign in the spring of 1864 and ultimately his march into the Carolinas. By then the South's defeat was eminent. The 51st Alabama Cavalry Regiment laid down its arms at Durham Station near Raleigh, North Carolina, on April 26, 1865, when Kenchun was discharged, still a private, never having been wounded.⁵

Kenchun was described as being a kind man devoted to his family and having a "jolly" disposition. His return to farming after the war was simplified by his never having relied on slave labor; unlike the prosperous planters, he wouldn't miss what he'd never had. Records indicate that he was by then partially literate—he could read, but not write—and he registered to vote in July 1867. At the time of his enlistment, Martha had given birth to five daughters and was expecting their sixth child, their first son. There would be ten children—seven daughters and three sons—all born in Fayetteville over a period of 22 years, all educated at the Fayetteville Academy. Sometime in the 1860s, Kenchun's parents and younger sister and brother moved from Wetumpka to Fayetteville to live out their final years.

In the 1870 Census, Kenchun's farm was valued at \$350 and his property at \$300. Living in a separate house on the farm were his widowed 61-year-old mother and siblings, 21-year-old Phebe and 20-year-old William. In the early 1870s, Kenchun and Martha Ann's firstborn, Mary Elizabeth, married Riley Giddings, the son of one of their neighbors, only to die in childbirth at age 21. The Smiths were Baptist, and Martha Ann joined the Fort Williams Baptist Church (by letter) in February 1872; Kenchun joined a month later; and their daughters Amanda, Missouri and Sarah Ann became church members in August 1874. The family left that church in January 1879 and joined the Mt. Sharon Baptist Church five or six miles away. By this time, Fayetteville was known for its proximity to the health resort and hotel at mineral-rich Talladega Springs, and that corner of Talladega County had become known as Marble Valley. There, the Smiths lived modestly and quietly.

4. Villett and Mary Ann had married in Jasper County, Georgia, in 1825. Like Griffin Smith, Villett had won land in Troup County through the 1827 lottery before relocating to Alabama. Mary Ann's ancestors, the Hallmarks have a distinguished history beginning in colonial Virginia, where Richard Mynatt, her great-great-great grandfather, served as the cook to the Lee family at Stratford Hall, their country estate. Richard was an indentured servant, contracted to work for the Lees for a period of two years before his release to live at liberty in the colony. When his term ended, Philip Ludwell Lee refused to free him, resulting in a lawsuit. On July 31, 1754, Richard Mynatt became the first indentured servant in the colonies to succeed in suing his master to gain release.

5. In 1900, Kenchun began receiving a monthly pension payment of \$21.27; by 1905, it had increased to \$30.00.



Kenchun Smith

In 1876, grandmother Louvena Smith died at age 65. Neighboring farm families included Satawhite Hallmark (a cousin of Martha Ann), the Isaac Colemans and William Hammetts. That same year, their daughter Amanda married Henry Warren Coleman, and the newlyweds set up housekeeping on the Smith property, possibly in the house Louvena had occupied. Amanda, known as “Missy,” was the first of two of the older daughters as well as their son William to marry Colemans. Sarah Ann Smith Coleman’s marriage was brief; she died in 1882 at age 24. Two other daughters—Missouri and Georgia—married into the Hammett family.

Martha Ann died in 1892 at age 57 year and was buried in the Fayetteville Cemetery. In 1900, Kenchun, then 69 years old, had given up farming and made his living by selling livestock. He lived with Icie Bell, her husband Ocie Bazemore and their two children. His son William and his family lived nearby. Within a few years, Icie’s and William’s families moved to Sandersville, Mississippi, and nearby Laurel. Kenchun accompanied the Bazemores to Sandersville, where he died at age 75 in 1906. He was buried beside Martha Ann in the Fayetteville Cemetery near the Methodist Church.

Hugh Elzer Smith, known as Elzer as well as H.E., was the youngest of the three Smith sons. He was of medium height (five foot ten inches by one account) with a slim build; his most distinctive facial features were his deep-set, pale blue eyes and his cleft chin. His sister Amanda was seventeen when he was born in 1870 and most likely helped care for her infant brother through his early years, before marrying Henry Coleman five years later. Amanda named her first son Hugh Elbert, possibly in honor of her eight-year-old brother. Henry and Amanda farmed on the Smith property, but eventually gave up on farming. That area of the county was known for its quarries, and Henry took jobs selling stone to support Amanda and their eventual eleven children. In 1910, they were living in Anniston, where he worked as a traveling salesman for a limestone quarry. But soon after, Henry, Amanda and the families of five of their grown children relocated to Texas. In San Antonio, Henry took a job selling stone monuments, only to die at age 55 in 1912. Amanda lived the remainder of her life there, dying at age 91 in 1944.

Elzer wed 14-year-old Louisa (Lula) Lowery on Dec. 2, 1888. Eighteen years old with a seventh grade education, he worked on his father’s farm, and he seemed destined to remain a farmer. She was the daughter of a Fayetteville Baptist preacher, and it’s said that the couple ran away to get married in defiance of her parents’ understandable objections. They returned to live with her parents before moving into the Waters home place, a house described as across the road from his parents’ farm. Two of his sisters, Missouri Coleman and Georgia Hammett, and their families were farming nearby, and Elzer joined them. Of the older siblings, he was particularly close to Amanda Coleman. When it came to a vocation, most young men in the rural South followed in their father’s footsteps,

Hugh Elzer Smith (March 3, 1870 to Aug. 30, 1952)

Louisa (Lula) Elizabeth Lowery (1874 to 1910)

Their Children

Rena Valonia Ware (1890 to 1965)

Otis Oliver Smith (1892 to 1968)

Ethel Lanora Tinney (1894 to 1984)

Ruby Edna Smith (1896, died in infancy)

Rhoda Bertie Lindsey (1898 to 1984)

Roselle Jackson (1901 to 1927)

William Marvin Smith (1905-07)

William Clem Smith (1908-40)



Elzer Smith (third from the right) and his fellow employees of a drug and dry goods store, Wilsonville, about 1900.



The Smith Family (l-r): Rena, Lula and Roselle, Bertie, Otis, Elzer and Ethel, 1901.



The Smith Family (l-r): Bertie, Roselle, Ethel, Elzer, Lula, Otis and Rena, about 1906.



The Smith Family (l-r): Roselle, Elzer, Clem, Bertie, Rena, Ethel, Otis and Lula, 1909.

but it was Amanda's husband, Henry, who would have the most decisive influence on Elzer's future.

Their first child, Rena, was born two years into their marriage. By 1896, they had a son and three daughters. When the three girls contracted typhoid fever that year, three-month-old Ruby died. The sisters never forgot Ruby's tiny coffin being brought to their bedside for one last look.

The family's first home was typical of the simple residences of small farmers and sharecroppers found throughout the deep South. Its open central hallway, known as a dogtrot, allowed breezes to cool the rooms that opened onto it from either side; a covered front porch provided shade. Crudely constructed of pine, these houses were rarely painted.

Elzer had grown up on his father's modest farm, but wasn't a born farmer. In Henry Coleman, his salesman brother-in-law, he recognized possibilities other than farming for making a living. It was a choice of town over country, and Elzer would follow Henry's lead. About 1901, he, Lula and their five children relocated to Wilsonville, across the Coosa River in Shelby County and about ten miles to the north of Fayetteville. The two towns were connected by the Mardis Ferry. Wilsonville had evolved from a stop on the

stagecoach road between Ashville and Montevallo in the 1830s to become a depot on the rails that linked Selma with Rome, Georgia. It remained unincorporated until 1897, and three years later, its population topped one thousand.

By then, Wilsonville boasted three hotels, as well as general stores, a drug store, a grist mill, a bank and three blacksmith shops. Elzer took a job at one of the dry goods stores, and the family settled into a house on the road to Harpersville at the eastern edge of town. Elzer enlarged it to accommodate his growing family, adding a piano and tennis court for recreation. On Sundays, the family walked to the Baptist church and often returned home with company for dinner. It's said that cooking for guests sometimes began three days earlier. Elzer eventually (possibly as early as 1906) sold this house and moved into town to the McGowen home place on Teague Bridge Rd. behind the Baptist church. Their neighbors were the William Tinney family. (His son Otis and daughter Ethel would marry Tinney children.)



"The Drummers Home" Advertising Card, 1911.

It was as a traveling salesman—a drummer, as they were called—that Elzer discovered his vocational calling. According to the census of 1910, he worked as a "solicitor (photography)," presumably for the Helms Portrait Co. in Birmingham. The letterhead on his business stationery read:

H.E. Smith,
Dealer in
High Grade Portraits and Picture Frames.

Advancements in photographic technology and the ability to print unlimited copies of an image—as well as the rarity of personal cameras—had created a huge demand for portraits. For Elzer, that meant a good, reliable income.

He and Lula had been married 21 years when she died at age 37. It's said that the children, ranging in age from two to twenty, couldn't bear living in the house where she died, within sight of the cemetery where she was buried. So, the family moved to a large house nearby, where, to supplement his income, Elzer took in boarders and offered overnight lodging and home cooking to his fellow traveling salesmen. For an advertising card, five salesmen were photographed with Elzer and his children in front of what he called "The Drummer's Home."

Within a year of Lula's death, Elzer was engaged to marry 29-year-old Etta English of Talladega County.

The Children of Elzer and Lula Smith

Six of the eight children from Elzer's first marriage lived to adulthood. Rena, the eldest, worked as a milliner in a Wilsonville dry goods store before marrying Richard M. Ware about 1914. He was a watchmaker, seven years her senior. They resided, without children, in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Two months before his father exchanged vows with Etta, 19-year-old Otis married Mary Jane from the neighboring Tinney family. Otis is said to have previously studied at the Presbyterian College in Anniston, boarding with his aunt and uncle, the Colemans. The parents of two children, he and Mary Jane were living in Birmingham in 1920, where he worked as a timekeeper for the L&N railroad. By 1930, the family had moved to Louisville, Kentucky, where he was employed as a railroad inspector.

Ethel also married into the Tinney family. Osie Ola Tinney was ten years her senior. They and their four children remained in Wilsonville, where Osie died in 1936. Ethel never remarried.

Bertie's marriage to Alexander W. Lindsey, a railroad engineer, 16 years her senior, ended in divorce in 1933. They remarried in 1941. The parents of two sons, they lived in rural Shelby County.

Roselle wed Dr. James Walter Jackson, a chiropractor, in 1924. Their marriage lasted only three years before her death at age 26, leaving no children.

Clem was three years old when Elzer married Etta. She was the only mother he would remember, and her four children loved him as their big brother. He married Louise Donahoo and worked as a house painter in Birmingham before his untimely accidental death at age 32 on April 14, 1940. They were the parents of two children.

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