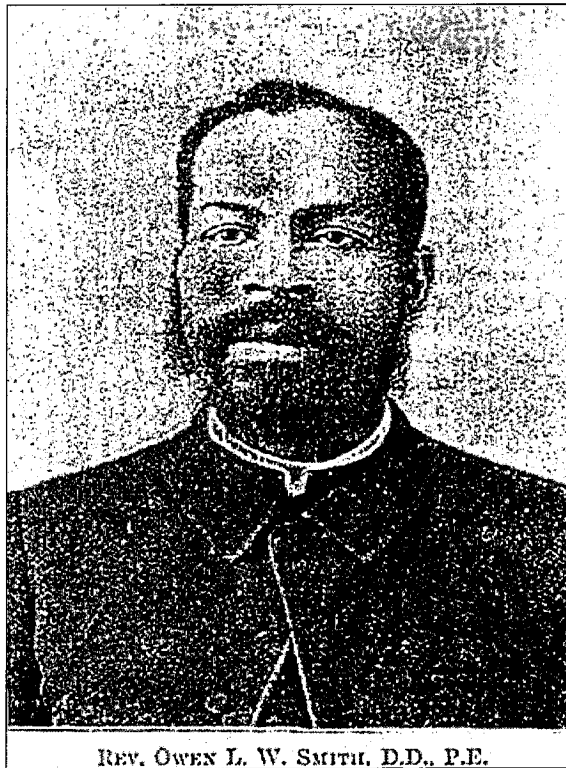


(UNEDITED & UNPUBLISHED VERSION)

for the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society Journal

**FROM MINISTER
TO
MINISTER RESIDENT
AND
CONSUL GENERAL**



Photograph from the *Biographical Souvenir Volume of the Twenty-Third Quadrennial Session of the General Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church*, Anderson, J[ames] Harvey. [1908] p. 91

Reverend Dr. Owen Lun West Smith

The Department of State was the first major government department to appoint blacks to positions of importance and one of the few departments to continue to appoint blacks in these positions in the period from post-Reconstruction through World War I.¹

One African American diplomat who served as minister resident and consul general to Liberia was Reverend Dr. Owen Lun West Smith, from Wilson, North Carolina. Reverend Dr. Owen L. W. Smith was minister resident and consul general to Liberia from February 1898 until May 1902.²

Biographical Sketch

Owen L. W. Smith was born a slave on 18 May 1851, in Giddinsville, Sampson County, North Carolina³ to Ollin Smith and Maria Hicks Smith.⁴ There are two accounts of Owen L. W. Smith's involvement in the Civil War and that he served as a personal servant in the Confederate Army and was present at the Battle of Bentonville in March 1865. Subsequently, he followed the Union Army across North Carolina and finally to Washington, DC, where he is said to have in the parade and review marking the end of the war.⁵ After the Civil war, he returned to the South in

¹ *Black Studies: A Select Catalog of National Archives Microfilm Publications* (Washington, DC: National Archives Trust Fund Board, 1984), p. 6.

² Richardson Dougall, and Mary Patricia Chapman, *United States Chiefs of Mission 1778-1973* (Washington, DC: Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, Historical Office, 1973) 93; *Notable Names in American History A Tabulated Register Third Edition of White's Conspectus of American Biography* (New York: James T. White & Company, 1973) p. 432.

³ Appointment Records – Application for Office certified by Owen L. W. Smith, 22 February 1898. General Records of the Department of State, Record Group (RG) 59; National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, D.C.

⁴ Standard Certificate of Death, North Carolina State Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics. *One Hundred Years of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church; or, The Centennial of African Methodism*, Hood, J[ames] W[alker] A. M. E. Zion Book Concern, New York, 1895) 287; *Biographical Sketch of Rev. Owen L. W. Smith, D.D.: U.S. Minister to Liberia*. (United States: 1900) The Library of the University of North Carolina, North Carolina Collection), 3; *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography, Volume XIV* (New York: James T. White & Company, 1910) p. 206.

⁵ *Biographical Sketch of Rev. Owen L. W. Smith, D.D.: U.S. Minister to Liberia*. (United States, 1900) The Library of the University of North Carolina, North Carolina Collection, presented by R[obert]. D[iggs]. W[imberly]. Connor, 3; *The Daily Star of Zion, Washington, DC 1900* by W. A. Blackwell, 21 May 1900, Wilson, North Carolina: Wilson Public Library, Owen L. W. Smith File.

pursuit of his mother, whom he found in New Bern, North Carolina.⁶ Owen L. W. Smith attended a private school in New Bern and by March 1871, he had relocated to Pickens County, South Carolina to teach school.⁷

In 1873, South Carolina Governor Franklin J. Moses, Jr., appointed Owen L. W. Smith magistrate for Aiken County with his office at the Graniteville Cotton Mill.⁸ Owen L. W. Smith secured a State scholarship and began to study law at the University of South Carolina from 1874-1876.⁹ On 3 March 1869, the University of South Carolina was opened to all races. In 1876, Owen L. W. Smith was listed as a sophomore in the modern studies track; however, the [Radical University of South Carolina] was closed in 1877 after Wade Hampton was elected governor.¹⁰ It is possible that Owen L. W. Smith may have been forced to leave the school without completing a degree.”¹¹

Owen L. W. Smith's known religious interests began in 1880 when he was converted at a camp meeting in Whiteville, North Carolina and joined the A.M.E. Zion Church. By February 1881, he obtained a local preacher's license from Whiteville and entered the North Carolina Conference. He was later ordained a local deacon at Whiteville in April 1881. In December 1883, Owen L. W. Smith received elder's orders at Raleigh, North Carolina and pastured the Stantonburg, Magnolia, Elizabethtown, and Ingold Circuits, and Kinston and Tarboro Stations in the North Carolina Conference. Owen L. W. Smith built

⁶ Rev. O. L. Smith Candidate For Appointment as Minister Resident to the Republic of Liberia: A Sketch of His Life: African American Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in America Charlotte, North Carolina: 21 January 1897. P. 1.

⁷ Anderson, J[ames] H[arvey]. *Biographical Souvenir Volume of the Twenty-Third Quadrennial Session of The General Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1908. P. 90.

⁸ Hood, J[ames] W[alker] *One Hundred Years of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church; or, The Centennial of African Methodism*, (New York: A. M. E. Zion Book Concern, 1895) 287-288

⁹ Appointment Records – Application for Office certified by Owen L. W. Smith, 22 February 1898. RG 59, NARA, Washington, D.C.

¹⁰ Hollis, Daniel Walker, *University of South Carolina Volume II*. Chapter IV, The Radical University, 1873-1977, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press. (1956) pp. 61-79.

¹¹ University of South Carolina Archives. E-mail from Elizabeth Cassidy West [E-ADDRESS FOR PRIVATE USE],] to E. Renée Ingram. 30 May 2000. Privately held by Ingram. [E-ADDRESS, & ADDRESS FOR PRIVATE USE], Washington, D.C. 20004.

*three churches on the Magnolia Circuit, four on the Ingold Circuit, three on the Speight's Bridge Circuit and Trinity Church in Wilson, North Carolina.*¹²

"In 1898, an honorary *Divinitatis Doctor* [Doctor of Divinity] degree was conferred upon him from Livingstone College located in Salisbury, North Carolina. As a result of his accomplishments, President William F. McKinley appointed Reverend Dr. Owen L. W. Smith in 1898 to serve as the Minister Resident and Consul General of Liberia and to serve in the capacity of presiding elder of the A.M.E. Zion Church mission work in Africa."¹³ During his time in Africa, Reverend Dr. Smith provided financial assistance in establishing other mission work on the Gold Coast (now Ghana).¹⁴

Reverend Dr. Owen L. W. Smith married Lucy Ann Jackson on 9 April 1878¹⁵ and were married for thirteen years until her death in 1891. They had one son, Jesse Alexander Smith born 12 February 1881.¹⁶ In 1892, Reverend Dr. Smith married Adora Estelle Oden in Beaufort, North Carolina.¹⁷ They were married until her death in 1906. During their fourteen-year marriage, they had two daughters, Flossie Eleanor Maria Smith born 6 August 1895¹⁸; and, adopted daughter, Carry Emma

¹² Anderson, J[ames] H[arvey]. *Biographical Souvenir Volume of the Twenty-Third Quadrennial Session of The General Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1908. p. 90.

¹³ Ibid. p. 90.

¹⁴ Walls, William Jacob. *The African Methodist Episcopal Church: Reality of the Black Church* (Charlotte, North Carolina: A.M.E. Zion Publishing House, 1974), p. 235.

¹⁵ "North Carolina, Marriages, 1759-1979," index, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/F887-X18>; accessed 10 Nov 2012), Owen L.W. Smith and Lucy A. Jackson, 09 Apr 1878; citing reference p 40, FHL microfilm 557730.

¹⁶ United States Selective Service System. *World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918*. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration. M1509, 4,582 rolls. Imaged from Family History Library microfilm. State: Arkansas: Locality: Ashley County, Draft Card S. Image 273. *Biographical Sketch of Rev. Owen L. W. Smith, D.D.: U.S. Minister to Liberia*. (United States: 1900) (The Library of the University of North Carolina, North Carolina Collection), p. 10.

¹⁷ "North Carolina, Marriages, 1759-1979," index, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/FZ1C-R5D>; accessed 10 Nov 2012), Owen L. W. Smith and Adora E. Oden, 29 Nov 1892; citing reference 97 f, FHL microfilm 262415.

¹⁸ *Biographical Sketch of Rev. Owen L. W. Smith, D.D.: U.S. Minister to Liberia*. (United States, 1900) The Library of the University of North Carolina, North Carolina Collection, presented by R[obert]. D[iggs]. W[imberly]. Connor, p. 10.

Smith, born in Liberia, Africa in 1899.¹⁹ "In 1908, Reverend Dr. Smith married Cynthia Ann King Isler,²⁰ a widow, with four children, who also preceded him in death on 21 February 1921."²¹

Selected Records from the State Department

Some of Reverend Dr. Owen L. W. Smith's papers along with other documents are housed at the National Archives and Records Administration at Archives II in College Park, Maryland.

Reverend Dr. Smith had many supporters for his appointment to Liberia, which included Thomas Settle, a Republican Congressman from North Carolina, who stated, "...I will gladly support you in preference to many from Tennessee..." Other Republican Congressmen from various districts throughout North Carolina commended Reverend Dr. Smith's appointment that included George Henry White, a Howard University graduate and lawyer; Henry Plummer Cheatham, a Shaw University graduate and President of the Negro Association of North Carolina; and Romulus Zachariah Linney, who served in the Confederate Army during the Civil War.

Zebulon Vance Walser, the Attorney General from Raleigh, North Carolina; five bishops and other representatives from the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, including Bishop John B. Small of York, Pennsylvania, who had charge of the missionary work in Liberia and other foreign fields; and Lieutenant Governor C[hables] A[lbert] Reynolds of Reynolds Brothers [Manufacturers of Plug, Twist and

¹⁹ North Carolina State Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics. *North Carolina Death Certificates*. Microfilm S.123. Rolls 19-242, 280, 313-682, 1040-1297. North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina.

²⁰ "North Carolina, Marriages, 1759-1979," index, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/FZYH-199>; accessed 10 Nov 2012), Owen L. W. Smith and Cy[n]thia A. Isler, 31 Mar 1908; citing reference 225-2, FHL microfilm 333704.

²¹ Original data: North Carolina State Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics. *North Carolina Death Certificates*. Microfilm S.123. Rolls 19-242, 280, 313-682, 1040-1297. North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina; William S. Powell, ed. *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography Volume 5 P-S*, (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), p. 386.

Smoking Tobaccos] in Winston [Salem], North Carolina, submitted letters of endorsement.

Trustees from Livingstone College in Salisbury, North Carolina submitted a letter of support Reverend Dr. Smith for the Liberian mission and stated, “...we appreciate most highly the laudable desire of our race representatives to win recognition at the hands of new administration in other lines that the menial and utterly subordinate stations of laborers and watchmen and occasional petty clerkships usually accorded them...We should be Ministers and Consuls not only to Hayti and Liberia but to other posts when our qualifications both mental and diplomatic may have chance to develop the finesse which stamps the finished diplomatist...”²² Livingstone College began as an educational institution for aspiring clergy in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. “Originally named the Zion Wesley Institute, the College had its name changed by an 1887 Act of the North Carolina Legislature and at the recommendation of Reverend Dr. Joseph Charles Price, president of the College, in honor of David Livingstone, British Christian missionary, philanthropist and African explorer.”²³

Not without opposition to his appointment, Alabama Senator John Tyler Morgan’s sentiments were expressed and stated in a letter to the Assistant Secretary of State, Honorable W. R. [William Rufus] Day. Specifically, the letter stated, “that I am opposed to sending a colored man to Liberia and will oppose the confirmation of Dr. Smith...” Senator Morgan’s opposition was expressed to Senator J. C. [Jeter Connelly] Pritchard, a Republican from North Carolina and Chairman of the Committee on Civil Service and Retrenchment. In addition, Senator Morgan requested “...a

²² *Appointment Records* Letter to Rev. O. L. W. Smith dated 22 Jan 1897 from Livingstone College, signed by the Trustees- Prof B. A. Johnson, A.M., Financial Book-keeper, Prof. E. Moore, Ph.D., Secretary, Prof F. H. Noble, LL.B., Treasurer. General Records of the Department of State, (RG) 59, NARA, Washington, D.C.

²³ *BlackPast.org Remembered and Reclaimed* <http://www.blackpast.org/?q=aah/livingstone-college-1879>

*statement giving the names and nationality of all persons appointed as Minister to Liberia for the last ten years..."*²⁴



Owen Lun West Smith

Photograph from the Owen Lun West Smith Files
Wilson County Public Library
Wilson County, North Carolina

During Reverend Dr. Smith's four year appointment to Liberia, his reports to the Department of State consisted of his ceremonial address to the President of Liberia upon his arrival in 1898; an official Inventory of Books, Archives and Furniture of the United States Legation and Consulate General; the racial tension in the United States, which effected the principal Liberian merchants; the deplorable housing conditions of the Legation; the *Dahomey* shipwreck off the coast of Wales on 9 April 1898,²⁵ which he and his family were aboard at the time; a Thanksgiving Day dinner invitation to the President of Liberia, his Cabinet and others; and the confidential reports on the existing prospects of hostilities between the Liberian Government and the Golah tribe, which the United States monitored closely.

²⁴ General Records of the Department of State, (RG) 59, NARA *Appointment Records* Letters to the Assistant Secretary of State, Honorable W. R. [William Rufus] Day and to North Carolina Senator J. C. [Jeter Connelly] Pritchard, 2 February 1898.

²⁵ The Times, London Saturday, 9 April, 1898, *The Wreck of the Dahomey* p 4 Library of Congress, Newspaper & Current Periodicals Reading Room, Microfilm Edition of The Times London, 1898, Mar 1 – Apr 30, No. 327.



An 1897 street scene in Monrovia, Liberia, is part of a new exhibition in Florida exploring the "Back to Africa" movement of the 1890s.

1897 Liberia, Monrovia photograph

reflecting the conditions of the city prior to Rev. Dr. Owen Lun West Smith's arrival. Photograph from National Endowment of Humanities, Humanities, November/December 1998 Volume 19/Number 6, Compiled by Erin Erickson, "Around the Nation: A roundup of humanities activities across the country in November and December." P. 37

Conclusion

Reverend Dr. Smith returned to Wilson, North Carolina, and became the pastor of St. John A.M.E. Zion Church.²⁶ On 5 January 1926, Reverend Dr. Smith died at the age of seventy-four²⁷ at his home located at 200 Pender Street, a Queen Anne style house,

²⁶ Standard Certificate of Death, North Carolina State Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics; Wilson Public Library, Owen L. W. Smith File, The Wilson Daily Times 6 Jan 1926, Society Section *Prominent Colored Citizen Dead*

²⁷ "North Carolina, Deaths, 1906-1930," index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/F38B-8X2>; accessed 10 Nov 2012), Maria Hicks in entry for Owen Lun[n] West Smith, 05 Jan 1926; Wilson Public Library, Owen L. W. Smith File, The Wilson

built around 1908, which still stands today in the East Wilson Historic District.²⁸ He was interred at the [Mount Hebron Masonic Lodge] Masonic Cemetery in Wilson, North Carolina on 8 January 1926.²⁹

The United States Department of State records are a wonderful resource that provides a wealth of information for further investigation in conducting genealogical and historical research.

Daily Times 6 Jan 1926, Society Section *Prominent Colored Citizen Dead*; North Carolina State Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics Standard Certificate of Death Registration District No. 98-2708, Owen Lun[n] West Smith. North Carolina Vital Statistics, Death Certificates S.123.184 File 999, p. 231.

²⁸ *National Register of Historic Places, East Wilson Historic District, Wilson, North Carolina, 1988.*

²⁹ "North Carolina, Deaths, 1906-1930," index and images, *FamilySearch*

(<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/F38B-8X2>: accessed 10 Nov 2012), Maria Hicks in entry for Owen Lun[n] West Smith, 05 Jan 1926; Wilson Public Library, Owen L. W. Smith File, The Wilson Daily Times 6 Jan 1926, Society Section *Prominent Colored Citizen Dead*; Johnston, Hugh Buckner. *Biography of the Rev. Owen L. W. Smith*, Type-written paper. 13 January 1979, North Carolina, Wilson: Collection of the St. John A.M.E. Zion Church.



OWEN W. L. SMITH
Late U. S. Minister to the Republic of Liberia.

Photograph from *The Story of a Rising Race; The Negro in Revelation, in History and in Citizenship*
Pipkin, J[ames] J[efferson], N.D. Thompson Publishing Company, [c 1902] p. 335

Bibliography

Biographical Dictionary of the United States Congress 1774-Present. Office of the Clerk. 10 May 2000 <http://clerkweb.house.gov/histrecs/history.htm>.

Burkett, Randall K., Burkett, Nancy Hall, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., eds. *Black Biography 1790-1950: A Cumulative Index, Volume Indexes*. Alexandria: Chadwyck-Healey, 1991.

Culp, D[aniel]. W[allace]., A. M., M.D, ed. Twentieth Century Negro Literature or the Cyclopedia of Thought Vital Topic Relating to the American Negro (Toronto, Canada, Naperville, Illinois, Atlanta, Georgia: J. L. Nichols & Co.) 1902.

Dougall, Richardson, and Mary Patricia Chapman, eds. United States Chiefs of Mission 1778-1973. [Complete to 31 March 1973] Historical Office, Bureau of Public Affairs, Department of State, Washington, D.C. 1973.

Hollis, Daniel Walker. *University of South Carolina Volume II College to University*. Columbia: University of South Carolina: 1956.

Johnston, Hugh Buckner. Biography of the Rev. Owen L. W. Smith, Type-written paper. 13 January 1979, North Carolina, Wilson: Collection of the St. John A.M.E. Zion Church.

The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography: Being the History of the United States. Volume XIV. New York: James T. White & Company, 1910.

Notable Names in American History: A Tabulated Register, Third Edition of White's Conspectus of American Biography, New York: James T. White & Company, 1973.

Padgett, James A. *Ministers to Liberia and their Diplomacy*. The Journal of Negro History, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Jan., 1937), p. 50-92 Washington: Association for the Study of African American Life and History, Inc. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2714318>

Skinner, Elliot P., *African Americans and U.S. Policy Toward Africa 1850-1924: In Defense of Black Nationality*. Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1992.

United States. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

_____. Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, 1870-1920

_____. General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59

United States. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

_____. Ham, Debra Newman, ed. *The African American Mosaic: A Library of Congress Source Guide for the Study of Black History and Culture*

_____. Index to the McKinley Papers (President William F.), Presidents' Papers Index Series, Manuscript Division

_____. Map of Liberia, *The Geographical Journal*, published by the Royal Geographical Society. Geography and Map Division, 1909.

Walls, William J., *The African American Methodist Episcopal Zion Church: Reality of the Black Church*. Charlotte: A.M.E. Zion Publishing House, 1974.

Who Was Who in America with World Notables: Indexed to All Who Was Who Volumes, Volume IV 1961-1968, Chicago: Marquis-Who's Who, Inc.

Photographs:

Photographs-Black Biographical Dictionaries, 1790-1950, Microfiche Collection. Chadwyck-Healey Publishers, Inc., Alexandria: Chadwick-Healey, 1991.

Erickson, Erin compiled. Around the Nation: A roundup of Humanities activities across the country in November and December. "Back to Africa" traveling exhibit. The Magazine of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Washington, DC: November/December 1998; Volume 19. Number 6. p 37.

Owen L. W. Smith file, Wilson Public Library, Wilson, North Carolina (letter to author, 24 May 2000)