(UNEDITED & UNPUBLISHED VERSION)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, [James] 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.\footnote{Black Studies: A Select Catalog of National Archives Microfilm Publications (Washington, DC: National Archives Trust Fund Board, 1984), p. 6.}

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.\footnote{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 Conspicuous of American Biography (New York: James T. White & Company, 1973) p. 432.}

\textit{Biographical Sketch}

pursuit of his mother, whom he found in New Bern, North Carolina. 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.

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. Owen L. W. Smith secured a State scholarship and began to study law at the University of South Carolina from 1874-1876. 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. It is possible that Owen L. W. Smith may have been forced to leave the school without completing a degree.

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

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8 Hood, James Walker. 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.


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.\textsuperscript{12}

"In 1898, an honorary \textit{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."\textsuperscript{13} During his time in Africa, Reverend Dr. Smith provided financial assistance in establishing other mission work on the Gold Coast (now Ghana).\textsuperscript{14}

Reverend Dr. Owen L. W. Smith married Lucy Ann Jackson on 9 April 1878\textsuperscript{15} and were married for thirteen years until her death in 1891. They had one son, Jesse Alexander Smith born 12 February 1881.\textsuperscript{16} In 1892, Reverend Dr. Smith married Adora Estelle Oden in Beaufort, North Carolina.\textsuperscript{17} There were married until her death in 1906. During their fourteen-year marriage, they had two daughters, Flossie Eleanor Maria Smith born 6 August 1895\textsuperscript{18}; and, adopted daughter, Carry Emma

\textsuperscript{12} Anderson, James Harvey. \textit{Biographical Souvenir Volume of the Twenty-Third Quadrennial Session of The General Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church}, 1908. p. 90.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid. p. 90.


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 proceeded 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[harles] A[llbert] Reynolds of Reynolds Brothers [Manufacturers of Plug, Twist and

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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
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.

Conclusion

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

built around 1908, which still stands today in the East Wilson Historic District. He was interred at the [Mount Hebron Masonic Lodge] Masonic Cemetery in Wilson, North Carolina on 8 January 1926.

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.

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**Photographs:**

