

Biographies of West Virginia statehood leaders were prepared by Marshall University Humanities Program graduate students enrolled in Dr. Billy Joe Peyton's Fall 2010 "Historical Studies" class at Marshall's South Charleston campus.

By Andrew J. Wood

Benjamin H. Smith was born on October 31, 1787 in Rockingham County, Virginia. His father, Benjamin H. Smith Sr. was a strong Methodist, who opposed the owning of slaves, to such an extent that he freed his slaves and made his son work as a farm hand. In September of 1810, his family moved to Fairfield County, Ohio. Later, in 1819 he attended and later graduated from Ohio University in Athens. He then studied law under Thomas Ewing in Lancaster and was admitted to the bar in 1821. By 1822, there is some speculation as to the reasoning to his move to Charleston, West Virginia. One source believes his move to Charleston was due to his law practice, but another was to be near the salt industry in Charleston, where his first wife was connected to the industry through her father. He married Roxlanna Noyles, the daughter of Issac Noyles on December 19, 1826. Of this marriage there were three children: Cynthia Elizabeth, Issac Noys, and Roxlanna Emeline. In 1833, he served as a Senator for the Virginia General Assembly and followed the Whig party politics. In 1849 with the appointment of President Taylor, he was serving as District Attorney of the Western Virginia district. He served as a delegate to the 1850 Virginia Constitution Convention and a delegate to the General Assembly in 1855-6. During the statehood movement, he was a delegate to the Constitution Convention. After which President Lincoln appointed him to District Attorney Western Virginia in 1862. After the war, in 1866 he ran for Governor, but was defeated. His last public office was the Kanawha County delegate to the State Legislature in 1870. He died at his home on December 10, 1887.

Bibliography

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