

Mary Nottingham Smith was born in Townsend, Virginia on August 22, 1882 to John W. and Fannie Wright Nottingham. She was one of five children. After their father died, she was responsible for helping her mother raise her brothers and sister. She married Robert L. Smith, and although they did not have children of their own, they raised her neice, Mrs. R. C. Upshur. They took special interest in all of their nieces and nephews. Mary Nottingham Smith was a woman who cared about the youth.

Knowing early that she wanted to be a teacher, Smith went to the Norfolk Mission College. While the college did not offer teaching certificates, her time there reaffirmed that teaching was her life long career choice. Upon graduation, she moved to Essex County to teach, and was made principal of a small school. Two years later, she returned to her beloved Eastern Shore to teach and to her church Ebenezer A. M. E. at Capeville.

After marrying, she and her husband moved to Louisiana to teach. While Serving as Principal of a school in Louisiana, she enrolled in Hampton Institute, and went on to be become not only a teacher but, a school supervisor.

Five years later, she returned home to Accomack County as a "Jeanne's" supervisor. In fact places far from the Eastern Shore asked for her help. Summers, she would travel to other states to work with principals and teachers. In 1929, she went to South Carolina, and in 1930, she worked with educators in Florida. Whether she was in Accomack or away, she was known as a "Jeanes" Supervisor. She rolled up her sleeves and went to work because the Negro students Accomack County needed a new high school. With the help of local churches and farmers, Smith's students in Accomack County first went to the old Odd Fellows Hall, which they rented. The high school which she advocated building was named for her and established in 1932. Finally, Accomack County received money from the "Battle Fund" and a new school was built.

Teaching and working with the students of Accomack was not Smith's only job in the community. During World War II, she served on the County Red Cross Board, the School Savings Committee, and the Infantile Paralysis Committee. On Sunday, after attending church, she visited with her brother and his family.

Smith never did get to see the new school completed because she collapsed December 30, 1951 on her way to work for the Negro students of Accomack County. Smith, who never woke up, had served the students for 32 years. Mary Nottingham Smith is buried at her beloved Ebenezer A. M. E. Church at Capeville.

When the new school was completed, it was named Mary N. Smith High School. It later became Mary N. Smith Middle School and now has been closed. One of her former students recalled that there was never anything of the great "I" about her work but always the modest "WE." We shall never forget what she did for the people of Accomack County.