

Mary Nottingham Smith left quite a legacy

The following tribute to Mrs. Mary Nottingham Smith was compiled by the officers of the Mary N. Smith Alumni Association, 1935-70, in honor of the woman who advanced education for blacks in Accomack County. Officers of the association include Russell Corbin, president; Julia Major, vice president; Jesse Poulson, secretary; Bernice Griffin, financial secretary; and William Custis, treasurer.

"Bless and praise
we famous men
Men of little showing
For their work continueth
Great beyond their
knowing."

Of no one could this have been better said than Mrs. Mary Nottingham Smith and her interest in boys and girls, her work with teachers, parents, and all people to give the best to all in Accomack County. The standard of excellence she set for both teachers and students, and above all the faith, trust, and hope she had in them, and the unassuming way in which all of this was accomplished, places her in that group of famous people, "people of little showing."

Mrs. Smith was always an inspiration to the teachers with whom she worked. She planned with them and for them, and the plans always envisioned a program that called for better teaching, better understanding on the part of teachers for pupils, better understanding on the part of teacher problems, and a better understanding of the responsibility of all teachers. Her vision extended beyond the school room and took in the

communities to which these teachers and schools belonged.

Mrs. Smith approached Mr. J. Edgar Thomas about the land on which the school was begun. School was held in the old Odd Fellows Hall.

Mrs. Mary N. Smith was one of the first Jeanes supervisors in the state and served as supervisor in Accomack County for 32 years. During that time, her outstanding service set a pattern not only for Accomack County, but in the state as a whole. She was a lady of high ideals and great integrity. She was a loving wife, outstanding educator, and concerned humanitarian. Her goal was to improve the quality of education and educational opportunities specifically for the children of Accomack County and the entire Eastern Shore in general.

Her legacy has been left to those whose lives were inspired by her benevolence.

There is now a group whose intention truly honors her memory; the recently incorporated '35-'70 Mary N. Smith High School Alumni Association, Inc. The major goals of this group are to foster a desire for education beyond high school by providing financial assistance to the youth of the Eastern Shore. The group also expects to generate a gathering of Mary N. Smith graduates from across the United States on the Eastern Shore Virginia where Mrs. Smith lived, worked, died, and is now buried.

The school which bears her name is a continuing monument and reminder of her life and work. The Mary N. Smith High School, established in 1932, was most ap-

propriately named by the Accomack County School Board in honor of Mrs. Smith and as recognition of the work she had done in getting a high school for the Negro boys and girls of Accomack County. As long as the school remains, she will be in perpetual memory and her impact will be felt.

Mrs. Bernice Griffin, a member of the 1936 graduating class of Mary N. Smith High School, recalls that there was never anything of the "Great I" about her work, but always the modest "we." Mrs. Griffin felt Mrs. Smith took a personal interest in her following the death of Mrs. Griffin's mother. "She asked the teachers in my community school about me...and began to make contacts to help me find work. I was called as a substitute and it is no fault of Mrs. Smith that I am not a professional teacher because she gave me every opportunity to prepare myself. Mrs. Smith did not talk christianity--she lived it." Mrs. Griffin currently serves as financial secretary of the '35-'70 Mary N. Smith Alumni Association.

It seemed the general con-

sensus of all who met Mrs. Smith was that she "lived in a house by the side of the road and was a friend of man."

Scholarships will be awarded in her memory to local high school graduates who intend to pursue an education beyond the secondary level. The goal is to give her posthumously the continuing recognition she deserves.

Russell Corbin, president of the newly incorporated '35-'70 Mary N. Smith High Alumni Association, remembers Mrs. Smith very well. When the time came for Russell to enter high school, the bus came as near his home as Temperanceville. Those students like Russell who lived in the Jenkins Bridge, Makemie Park, and Messongo areas had to walk to Temperanceville to catch the bus, a distance of five miles.

Russell and several others from his community sometimes caught rides, but most of the time they walked to meet the bus. When they could no longer endure it, they began to miss days. A resident of the community decided to contact Mrs.

Smith who promised to have a bus coming to their community within a week and designated where Russell and his schoolmates were to go to meet the bus. On the day the bus was to make its first stop, Mrs. Smith personally followed the bus to pick them up, thereby preserving what most likely would have been another group of dropouts.

When the portrait which adorns the wall of the Mary N. Smith Middle School was unveiled four decades ago, Jesse Poulson vividly remembers being a member of the countywide chorus of school children who sang "Lest We Forget." He also remembers the recitation, "When Earth's Last Picture is Painted."

Mrs. Barbara Upshur-Mossett, niece and foster daughter of Mrs. Smith, recalls that from the age of 2, emphasis was placed on education. In fact, it now seems to Mrs. Mossett that she was always in school. During the summer months, whenever

Mrs. Smith attended school, so did Mrs. Mossett. Mrs. Smith constantly reminded her foster daughter that a little black girl had to learn, know, and do more than her white counterpart, and education was the key to success for Negro children.

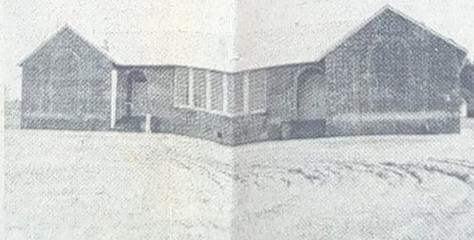
Mrs. Smith was extremely family oriented. She considered the Negro schools of Accomack County as much a part of her family as her immediate family. For example, during many of the trips to the community schools, Mrs. Smith carried clothing, food, fuel or whatever was required to keep children in school.

It was a result of Mrs. Smith's quiet and gentle persuasion that the schools were built in their prominent locations. She was successful in her request to Mr. Thomas for the land to build the original Mary N. Smith. She was equally successful with her husband, R.L. Smith, in obtaining the land for the present location.

An ardent church worker, Mrs. Mossett made up the third part of the R.L. and Mary Nottingham Smith trio that set out from Accomack for Sunday School in Capeville. The singing that occurred during those trips helped them in their performances throughout the Shore.

The one thing that is perhaps most memorable is "We Will Answer Every Call," the rallying song for the many joint efforts the teachers and communities would share.

Mrs. Smith belonged not only to the Nottingham and Smith Families, but to the Eastern Shore as a whole.



The original Mary N. Smith High School, later T.C. Walker School.



Mary Nottingham Smith