

pARTy for Peg

Peg Newton Smith

Written for the Encyclopedia of Arkansas by Bill Worthen

Peg Newton Smith was a pioneer in the field of history and historic preservation, as well as an exemplary public citizen and effective political campaigner. A founder of both the Arkansas Museums Association and the Quapaw Quarter Association, Little Rock's historic preservation organization, she served as a significant resource for many local history researchers and historians.

Born February 10, 1915, Peg Smith came from a family deeply engaged in Arkansas history. Two Arkansas counties – Newton and Hempstead – are named after ancestors, and her grandfather Fay Hempstead was an Arkansas historian as well as Poet Laureate of Freemasonry. She grew up in the historic Packet House on Lincoln Avenue and graduated from Mount St. Mary's Academy. She attended Little Rock Junior College and spent a few months at Draughon's School of Business before entering the job market. She married George Rose Smith, himself from a prominent Arkansas family, in 1938. Peg Smith became his most vigorous supporter as George Rose Smith was elected and reelected to the State Supreme Court, ultimately offering 38 years of service as Associate Justice. She was known as a much better political campaigner than her husband. Her love of history led her to involvement in the fields of historic preservation and museums. She enjoyed a sixty-two year career as a volunteer at the Historic Arkansas Museum, where she served as Commission Chair from 1978 to 1983. She was named Chair Emerita of the Commission in 2002. Her commitment to history has also included decades of service on the Mount Holly Cemetery Association Board of Directors, where she was famous with Mary Worthen for tours of the cemetery, often hot items at charity auctions.

Because of her instrumental work for the Arkansas Museums Association and the Quapaw Quarter Association, both organizations named significant annual awards after her. She was appointed to the inaugural Review Committee of the State Historic Preservation Program and with architect Edwin Cromwell was the first Arkansan named to the Board of Advisors of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. She was appointed to the Arkansas Bicentennial Commission, was elected president of the Junior League of Little Rock, was a founding member of the Board of the Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas, and was active in the Pulaski County Historical Society.

Her civic involvement included service on the boards of the Ada Thompson Home, the Speech Correction School, the Visiting Nurse Association, and the Little Rock Community Concert Association, and she was the first woman elected to the board of Downtown Little Rock Unlimited Progress, now the Downtown Partnership. She was also president of the Aesthetic Club.

She was honored by many groups, being named 1967 Greater Little Rock Woman of the Year by the *Arkansas Democrat*, Shield of the Trojan Award winner from the UALR Alumni Association in 1979, Fellow of the Museum of Science and History in 1981, and Candlelight Gala Honoree of the Historic Arkansas Museum in 1994. She became the first recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Arkansas Museums Association in 2003.

Peg Newton Smith died on July 20, 2003.