

John M. Smith, a member of the law firm of Corwin & Smith, is one of the self-made men of Jay County, having by his own efforts successfully contended with opposing forces in early life, and attained to prominence in his profession.

Mr. Smith is a native of Jay County, born in Richland Township September 29, 1853, a son of James A. Smith of Knox Township and a grandson of George M. Smith, who settled in Jay County as early as 1836.

When our subject was thirteen years old his mother died, leaving him at an age when a mother's love and care are most needed. After his mother's death, he went to live at the home of his maternal grandfather.

Early in life realizing the value of an education he determined to put forth all his efforts to attain that object and improved his very limited opportunities. He worked by the month to secure means to pay his way to Liber College, where he was a student for some time, and when he had qualified himself to do so, he engaged in teaching school. He began reading law in 1874 at Hartford City, with Jacob Wells, and was admitted to the bar in 1875. He began his law practice at Portland in 1880, a member of the firm of Taylor & Smith, the firm being afterward changed to Taylor, Smith & Bailey, and in 1885 the present firm of Corwin & Smith was named. The success to which Mr. Smith has attained in his profession and the confidence in his ability that is entertained by his fellow citizens is indicated by the fact that in 1882, when but twenty-nine years of age, and having an experience of but two years as a lawyer, he was nominated by the Democratic Party, with which he affiliates for State Senator, and was elected, serving as State Senator during the sessions of 1883 and 1885, he being the youngest member of the Senate.

He now holds the office of City Solicitor and attorney for the Board of County Commissioners.

For his wife, Mr. Smith married Miss Ettie Leonard, a native of Wayne Township, Jay County, Indiana. They are the parents of two children, whose names are Glenna and Rufus Choate.

Biographical & Historical Record of Jay County, Indiana, Lewis Publishing Company, 1887

Transcribed by Jim Cox

Note: John Matthew Smith 9/29/1853 – 3/27/1931 buried Green Park Cemetery

SMITH, JOHN M.

JOHN M. SMITH, dean of the bar of the Jay Circuit Court, former judge of that court, former state senator from this district, former member of the lower house of the Indiana General Assembly and for many years one of the most active factors in the public life of this part of Indiana, is a native son of Jay county and has ever taken a just pride in the amazing development that has marked this region in his generation. Judge SMITH is a member of one of the real pioneer families of Jay county, his grandfather, George M. SMITH, a soldier of the War of 1812, having been among that considerable number of settlers who came over here from Greene county, Ohio, in 1836, the year in which Jay county became formally organized as a separate civic unit, and located on lands entered from the Government in Richland township. George M. SMITH also owned land in the neighboring county of Delaware and died there in 1849. One of his sons, James A. SMITH, father of Judge SMITH, was ten years of age when he came to Indiana with his parents in 1836, the family settling in Jay county and later moving over into Delaware county. After the death of his father in this latter county, James A. SMITH returned to Jay county and became a substantial farmer and landowner in Richland township, where he had established his home after his marriage and where he was living when the Civil war broke out. In February, 1864, he enlisted for service as a soldier of the Union and went to the front as a member of Company H of the 130th Indiana Volunteer Infantry, with which he served for twenty-one months, or until long after the close of the war, and during which service he participated in the battles of Nashville and of Missionary Ridge and in the Atlanta campaign. Not long after the completion of his military service James A. SMITH moved from Richland township to Knox township and on his farm in this latter township spent the remainder of his days, his death occurring there on January 1, 1895. James A. SMITH was twice married. His first wife, Eliza J. HOPPES, was born in Fayette county, Ohio, and was but a child when she came with her parents to Indiana, the family settling in Richland township, this county, among the early and influential pioneers of that region. To that union were born four children, two of whom are still living, Judge SMITH and his brother, Henry Clay SMITH, also of Portland. The mother of these children died in 1865 and James A. SMITH later married Mary FLESHER, who also was a member of one of the pioneer families of this county.

As will be noted by a comparison of the above dates, John M. SMITH, who was born on the home farm in Richland township on September 29, 1853, was about twelve years of age when his mother died. Following this bereavement he made his home with the family of his maternal grandfather, Jacob Hoppes, and grew to manhood on the Hoppes farm. He completed his schooling in the old Liber College and began teaching school, at the same time giving his attention to preparatory studies in law. He secured advancement in these studies under the preceptorship of Jacob WELLS and William A. BONHAM at Hartford City, Indiana, and in 1875 was admitted to the bar, but continued teaching until 1880, when he opened an office for the practice of law at

Portland, where he ever since has resided for a period of more than forty years and is thus the oldest continuing practitioner at the bar of the Jay Circuit Court; a practice which is not confined, however, to the local court but extends into the courts of the neighboring counties and into the state courts, besides which he has for many years served as the local attorney for the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. In 1882, two years after entering upon the practice of law at Portland, Judge SMITH was elected to represent this district in the Indiana state Senate and thus served during the memorable sessions of 1883 and 1885, the youngest member of that body. In 1898 he was elected judge of the Jay Circuit Court and for six years occupied the local bench. In 1908 he was elected to represent this district in the lower house of the Indiana General Assembly and served during the session of the legislature in 1909. Judge SMITH also has rendered public service as county attorney for Jay county and as attorney for the city of Portland. He is a Democrat and has for many years been recognized as among the leaders in that party not only in the Eighth district but throughout the state. The Judge is a Royal Arch Mason and is a charter member of the local lodge of the Knights of Pythias at Portland. Upon the opening of the natural gas boom hereabout back in the '80s. Judge SMITH took an active interest in that development and it was he who drew up the articles of association of the company at Portland which was the first to develop natural gas for commercial uses in the state of Indiana, as is set out elsewhere in this work. When the new court house was dedicated in January, 1919, Judge SMITH was asked by the bar association to prepare a review of the local bar to be read on that occasion and his compliance with this request preserved for future generations a most illuminating chronicle, valued highly by the local historical society and a synopsis of which, through the Judge's courtesy, is presented elsewhere in this centennial history of the county.

In 1881 John M. SMITH was united in marriage to Etta LEONARD, who was born in Wayne township, this county, daughter of John and Catherine LEONARD, natives of the Emerald Isle, and to this union have been born five children, Glenna, Rufus C., Kathryn, Anna and Robert L., all of whom are living. Kathryn SMITH married William J. KIRKE, of Portland and has one child, a daughter, Mary Margaret.

SOURCE: Milton T. Jay, M.D., History of Jay County Indiana, Historical Publishing Co., Indpls. 1922, Vol. II, pp.56-57. Transcribed by Eloine Chesnut.