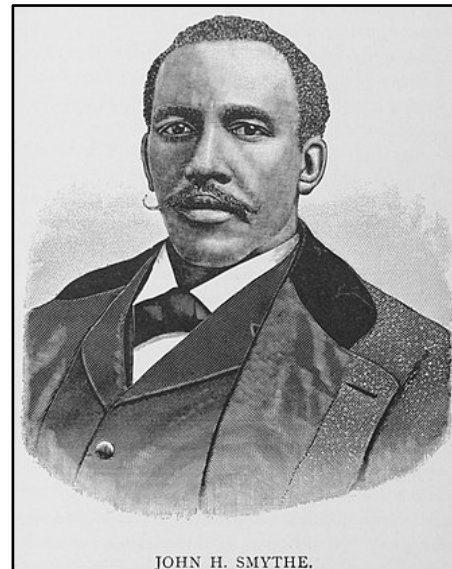


John Henry Smythe

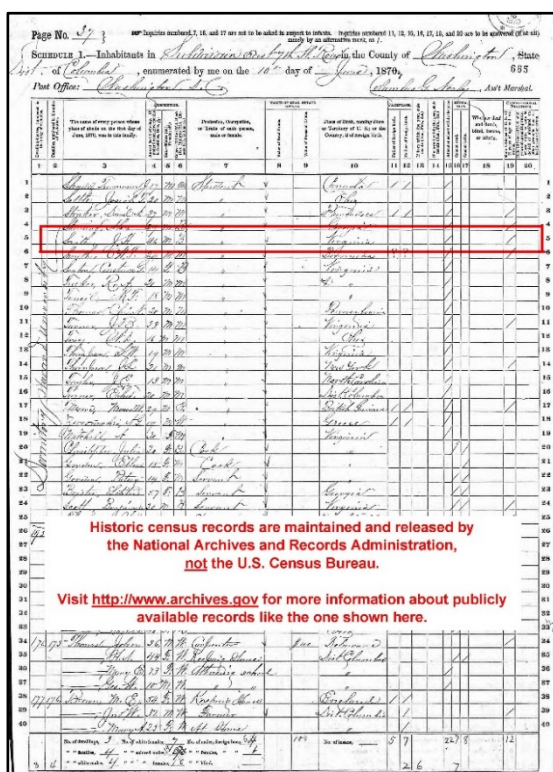
Census Clerk, Lawyer, Teacher and Civil Rights Activist

The U.S. Census Bureau is proud of its history of continually evolving to ensure an accurate count of the people of the United States. To accomplish this, the Census Bureau has long embraced the hiring of a diverse workforce representative of local communities and the people who were a part of the neighborhoods that they counted. For this reason, census work was often one of the few government jobs open to minorities. Beginning with the 1870 Census (the first after the abolition of slavery), the Census Bureau began hiring African Americans as enumerators and data processors. With the creation of a permanent Census Bureau in 1902, Black workers and statisticians found an environment with an inclusiveness far greater than many contemporary institutions.



JOHN H. SMYTHE.

William J. Simmons and Henry McNeal Turner, Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive and Rising (1887).



Historic census records are maintained and released by the National Archives and Records Administration, not the U.S. Census Bureau.

Visit <http://www.archives.gov> for more information about publicly available records like the one shown here.

John listed as a student on his 1870 Census.

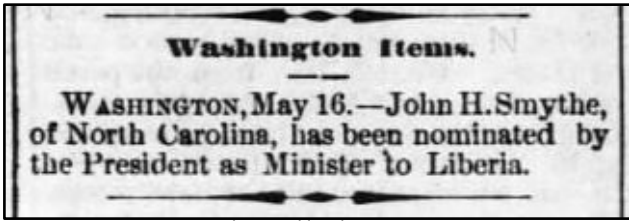
John Henry Smythe was born on July 14, 1844, in Richmond, Virginia. John's father, Sully, was

a slave, while his mother, Ann Eliza, was free, meaning that under Virginia law, he was free as well. As a young boy, John's family sent him to Philadelphia to receive his education, something which would not have been possible in Virginia. John attended grammar school and Quaker run schools, however in 1857, when his father died, he returned home to work as an errand boy at a dry goods store. He returned to school in Philadelphia in 1859, where he attended the Institute for Colored Youth, from which he graduated in 1862. John then became the first African American to gain admittance to the Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia, where he studied painting. John worked as a china painter at a Philadelphia firm in 1864, before a brief stint as a sutler's clerk. In 1865, he traveled to London to become an actor. However, he soon ran out of money and returned to Pennsylvania to teach in Wilkes-Barre.

In 1869, John moved to Washington, D.C., and enrolled at Howard University Law School. In 1870, he married Fannie Shippen and began working as a clerk at the Freedman's Bureau. On August 15, 1870, John transferred to work as a census clerk on the 1870 Census. The 1870 Census, under Superintendent Francis Amasa Walker, marked the beginning of a statistical revolution in the census office. Assistant marshals filled out five improved schedules for "General Population," "Mortality," "Agriculture," "Products of Industry," and "Social Statistics," which were then sent to the army of census clerks in Washington, D.C., who distilled the data into useful statistics.

APPOINTMENTS IN THE CENSUS OFFICE.—The following having passed a satisfactory examination were yesterday appointed to first class clerkships in the census office:—J. G. Bigelow, Me.; John Miller, N.Y.; Frank Best, Penn.; F. H. Sprague, R. I.; E. B. Cottrell, Pa.; Edward Renand, N. Y.; W. B. Thompson, N. J.; S. D. Charles, N. Y.; J. Quinan, Md.; C. B. Bryant, Va.; G. E. Armstrong, Pa.; C. Wierman, Pa.; W. H. Babcock, J. W. Clarke, James Gosler, T. W. Soran, T. T. Nell, J. G. Adams, V. H. Olmstead, L. A. F. Harvard, H. Braggeman, G. F. Green, **J. H. Smythe.**

Evening Star
(Washington, DC) August 20, 1870.



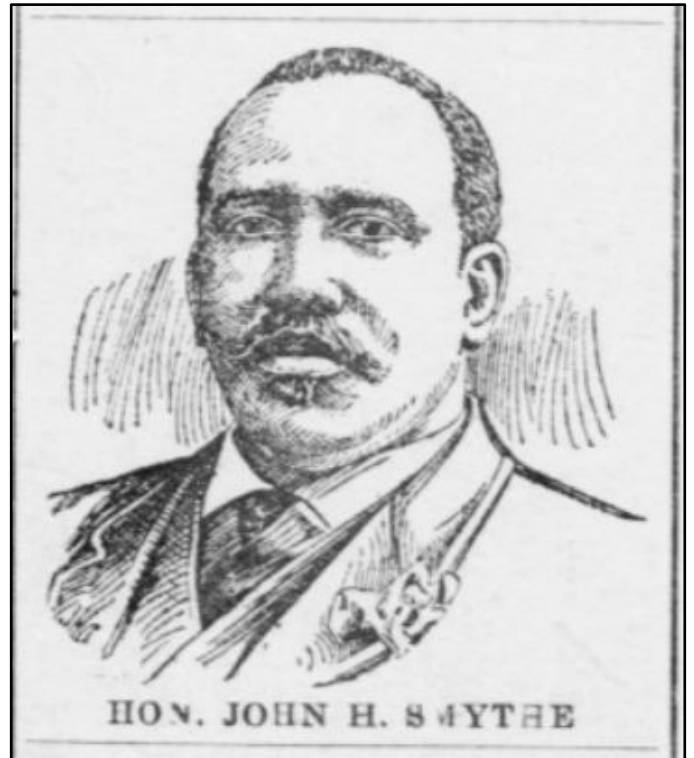
The Weekly Observer
(Raleigh, NC) May 21, 1878.

For the first time, Superintendent Walker hired the census clerks through tests rather than patronage. 438 individuals passed the entrance examination between February 18, 1870 and November 21, 1871, many of whom were women and minorities. Thanks to the new Seaton tabulating machine, clerks were able to finish

the majority of census tabulations by 1872, and most, including John, then moved on to new work.

John quickly maneuvered through a variety of clerical jobs following his census work, as his skills were easily transferable and in high demand. Within a year he worked in the Treasury Department, as an internal revenue storekeeper, and finally as a clerk in the Freedman's Savings Bank. While with the Freedman's Savings Bank he traveled to Wilmington, North Carolina, to work as a cashier in the bank there.

When the whole bank failed in 1874, John decided to remain in Wilmington, where he had become active in local politics. John spoke at meetings and frequently participated in the Wilmington Memorial Day celebrations. In 1874, John and several other prominent men formed a local cavalry regiment, which functioned as more of a social club. In 1875, he was elected to the State Constitutional Convention, and in January 1876, John joined the bar to practice law in North Carolina.

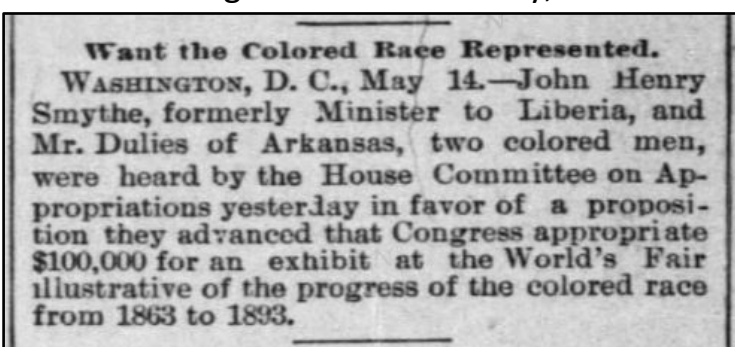


Colored American (Washington, DC) August 32, 1902.

John returned to Washington in 1876, to resume a clerkship and practice law, but the political connections from his time in Philadelphia, Washington, and Wilmington all culminated in a recommendation for John to become United States Ambassador to Liberia. Several prominent senators, as well as Frederick Douglass, supported John's appointment, which he received on May 23, 1878. Other than a brief recall in 1881, he would remain in this position until 1885.

In Liberia John excelled and earned enough trust from several other nations, such as Norway and Sweden, that he acted as consul for their affairs as well. He earned the trust of Liberians, receiving an honorary LL.D. and knighthood. John earned the respect of other West African nations as he recommended and assigned locals to act as consuls and agents, resulting in increased trade with these countries. John's experience in Liberia greatly influenced his understanding of race relations in the United States, and led him to believe African Americans needed to show more pride in their roots.

John returned to Washington following the completion of his mission to Liberia where he practiced law and became increasingly active as a social reformer. He started a newspaper, wrote and presented articles, and, in 1892, spoke to Congress about representation for African Americans at the World's Fair. John also was prominent in the founding of several organizations, such as the Negro American Society, the American Negro Academy, the Negro Reformatory



Chicago Tribune (Chicago, IL) May 15, 1892.

Association of Virginia and their Virginia Manual Labor School, and the Afro-American Council. After a life dedicated to improving his people and his country, John passed away on September 5, 1908, in Richmond, Virginia. We are grateful to John for his extensive service to our country and the U.S. Census Bureau.