

New York: William Smith

Much like Henry Dearborn, William Smith had an illustrious and colorful career as a soldier, diplomat, U.S. marshal, and politician that spanned the course of four decades. Smith was born in New York on November 8, 1755. Prior to the outbreak of hostilities with Great Britain, Smith graduated from the College of New Jersey (Princeton) and established a law practice in 1774. When the American Revolution reached his home state of New York in the summer of 1776, Smith was commissioned a major in the Continental Army and worked as an aide to Major General John Sullivan, one of the heroes from the Battle of Long Island. Throughout the rest of his military career, Smith participated in numerous battles and campaigns, all the while rising through the ranks. By the end of the Revolution, in the fall of 1783, Smith rose to the rank of lieutenant-colonel and served as an aide to General Washington.⁶⁷ That was also the year that he became a founding member of the *Society of the Cincinnati*, to promote and preserve the ideals and fellowship of the officers of the Continental Army.



Among his numerous accomplishments, William Smith helped found the Society of the Cincinnati, shortly after the American Revolution.

Courtesy of Yale University Art Gallery

In the six-year period between the end of the American Revolution and his appointment as the first U.S. marshal of New York, Smith worked as diplomat overseas (1785-1788). During this time, he married Abigail “Nabby” Adams, the oldest daughter of John Adams and sister of John Quincy Adams, on June 12, 1786, and returned to New York City two years later to pursue business and new political opportunities.⁶⁸ Because of his personal ties to influential politicians like Washington and Adams, Smith became the first U.S. marshal for New York in the fall of 1789.⁶⁹

As such, Smith was responsible for overseeing the enumeration of New York’s population and overcoming any obstacles that emerged. For example, some New Yorkers were superstitious and associated censuses with tragic events. In the minds of these participants, their fear seemed rational because an epidemic occurred in part of New York during a colonial-era enumeration of the area.⁷⁰ Despite struggling to convince people to complete the census, Smith and his eight deputies were able to determine that the state of New York had a total

⁶⁷ “History - The First Generation of United States Marshals/The First Marshal of New York: William Smith,” U.S. marshals Service, last estimated release October 17, 2019, <https://www.usmarshals.gov/history/firstmarshals/smith.htm>. (Accessed October 17, 2019).

⁶⁸ His sister, Sally, married Charles Adams, younger brother of Smith’s wife Abigail.

⁶⁹ “History - The First Generation of United States Marshals/The First Marshal of New York: William Smith.”

⁷⁰ W.S. Rossiter, “The First Census of the United States,” pgs. 45-46.



A Plan for New York City c. 1789
Courtesy of the Library of Congress

population of 340,120 people.^{71 72} Furthermore, Smith's final 1790 census schedule noted New York City was the largest city in America with a population of 33,131 people in 1790-91.⁷³ Today, New York City is still the largest city in the United States with a population of 8,398,748 people.⁷⁴ In addition to providing the total population of New York in 1790, Smith and his deputies' enumerations are unique because they have two extra columns in their returns with information about whether the enumerated area had more males or females in the population. This extra information is

significant because Smith, apparently on his own initiative, went beyond the scope of the instructions in the 1790 Census Act.⁷⁵ Regardless of the challenges and time to gather extra information, Smith and his deputies completed the enumeration of New York's population on July 26, 1791.⁷⁶ Despite his successes, Smith left the U.S. Marshal Service after only a year to accept the more lucrative federal position of New York's Supervisor of the Revenue.^{77 78}

⁷¹ "New York". *Return of the whole number of persons within the several districts of the United States: according to "An act providing for the enumeration of the inhabitants of the United States," passed March the first, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-one.* pg. 41, PDF. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/content/census/en/library/publications/1793/dec/number-of-persons.htm>. (Accessed October 17, 2019).

⁷² "Assistant marshals for the state [New York]: 1790," in *Heads of Families/1790/A Century of Population Growth New York & Pennsylvania* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1908), 3:11.

⁷³ "Summary of population [of New York], by counties and town: 1790," 3:9.

⁷⁴ "QuickFacts: New York City: New York," U.S. Census Bureau, last estimated release July 1, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/newyorkcitynewyork/PST045218>. (Accessed October 17, 2019).

⁷⁵ W.S. Rossiter, "The First Census of the United States," pg. 47. It appears Smith added the two columns on his own initiative as there are no instructions from Governor George Clinton, President Washington, or Secretary Jefferson to William Smith regarding the specific instructions for the census.

⁷⁶ "New York," *Return of the whole number of persons within the several districts of the United States: according to "An act providing for the enumeration of the inhabitants of the United States," passed March the first, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-one.*

⁷⁷ "History - The First Generation of United States marshals/The First marshal of New York: William Smith".

⁷⁸ "Spirits, Foreign and Domestic, Communicated to the Congress, November 1, 1791," *American State Papers*, NA, Finance 1: 110. Retrieved from <https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsp&fileName=009/llsp009.db&Page=110>. (Accessed October 7, 2019).

Smith held this position until 1800, when his father-in-law, now President of the United States, appointed him as the surveyor of the Port of New York. Smith was able to leverage these two positions to increase his family's pre-existing wealth, which proved to be beneficial because the Jefferson Administration removed him from his post shortly after taking office in 1801. In 1806, Smith's status within American society and wealth were further threatened, when he was arrested and tried for violating the Neutrality Act of 1794 for his role in failed Miranda Expedition of 1806, which attempted to free Venezuela from Spanish control. However, he was acquitted of all charges and eventually elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1813.⁷⁹ Ultimately, Smith would serve only one term. After losing his re-election bid, he returned to the town of Lebanon, N.Y., where he died on June 10, 1816.⁸⁰

NEW YORK.
Summary of the Totals of the different Counties.

COUNTIES.	Free white males of 16 and upwards, including the number of free negro & mulatto males under 16 years.	Free white males under 16 years.	Free white males including the number of females.	All other free persons.	Slaves.	Aggregate total.	Male females there in excess.	More or less than in 1790.
Richmond,	749	751	1449	127	750	5835		51
Kings,	952	709	1414	46	1432	4493		189
Queens,	3254	2625	6440	908	3509	16074	63	
Suffolk,	3756	3273	7187	1125	1098	16440	158	
N York city & Co	3306	3927	15234	1101	3560	33131	847	
West-Chester,	4939	5230	10938	577	1419	24303		311
Dutchess,	10968	11052	20940	440	1836	43266		1090
Orange,	4694	4340	8335	201	656	18492		555
Ulster,	7058	6791	13449	177	290	28397		1354
Columbia,	6573	6737	12744	55	163	27732		566
Albany,	18349	18865	34227	170	3984	73736		3188
Montgomery,	7466	7303	14126	41	594	28846		1515
Washington,	3515	3733	6625	3	47	14042		742
Clinton,	546	537	676	16	17	1614		235
Ontario,	524	192	346	6	1	1075		574
Total,	83700	78182	162333	4654	21324	340128	10681	10570

NEW YORK, July 26th, 1791.
W. S. SMITH.

The two columns on the far right of Smith's 1790 census return were not required by the 1790 Census Act

⁷⁹ "Spirits, Foreign and Domestic, Communicated to the Congress, November 1, 1791," *American State Papers*, NA, Finance 1: 110.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*