

Margaret C. Smith



Margaret Smith was happy playing with children her age at her neighbor's farm house ten miles outside of Ranton, New Mexico. But it certainly wasn't all fun and games in the early 1900's when outlaws gangs rode into town. It was commonplace to relocate the women and children while Ranton was being ransacked. But nothing bothered the always enthusiastic Smith who married young and loved to Mexican Hat Dance using the castanets.

Coal mining was the common way to make a living during the depression years and Smith did not see a bright future in Ranton, and was determined to rise above her childhood surroundings. Inevitably the 20th century led to the Santa Fe Trail giving way to the Santa Fe Railway which she rode to California in 1922. Five years later her husband was laid off from the railroad and they used his two tickets for severance to move to his mom's house in Seattle. Ten years later they relocated to Port Orchard and Smith started working for the county. She steadily progressed from a switchboard operator to the County Auditor's Office, before being appointed as the Kitsap County Clerk in 1957.



Picture courtesy of John W. Smith

(Margaret Smith and Gov. Rosellini in 1965)

Reina Osburn, a Republican, had retired that year and the county commissioners appointed Smith, a Democrat, to fill her position. They were not required to select along party lines until the law was repealed eight years later. Smith drove her 1955 Willys station wagon along Division Street each day, probably looking back to yesteryear and wishing her AM radio could pick up southwest music she had grown up listening to when automobiles were scarce. The post-war baby boom population explosion led to the need for inexpensive town house tract homes and Port Orchard expanded. Smith was determined to have her office grow in kind and more than doubled her employees after taking office. Never forgetting the poverty of her formative years, Smith kept an open mind and considered herself socially liberal, but fiscally conservative.

Smith moved the Clerk's Office from old school to the first days of modern technology, and consistently made decisions that helped with expansion. She worked hand in hand with the Superior Courts as their workload increased dramatically with the population boom. Politically savvy and known as a straight shooter, she served as a delegate to the Democratic National Conventions for both Kennedy and Johnson. Her reputation as honest and straightforward led to a long-time friendship with then-governor, Albert Rossellini, who shared Smith's vision of technology, as proven by his bringing the 1962 World's Fair to Seattle.

Retiring County Clerk Started at Switchboard

By KURT SHARAR
Sun County Writer

In 1942, Mrs. Margaret Smith was hired into Kitsap County government as a switchboard operator.

Yesterday, she asked the county commissioners to let her retire as county clerk effective on April 30. Thus, ends more than 23 years of service to the county. The position of county clerk is one of nine elective offices in the county.

The only regret Mrs. Smith has is that she is not leaving to whomever succeeds her more office space and at least two more people to help administer the volumes of daily work coming before the county's three superior courts.

The county commissioners reluctantly accepted the resignation yesterday and asked Mrs. Smith's political party, the Democrats, for a list of nominees. The Democrats will probably produce the list the middle of April and the commissioners will make an appointment to replace her before the end of that month.

As a young married woman, Mrs. Smith first came to Port Orchard with her husband, George, in 1936 and the couple made their home at 1120 Morton St. Mrs. Smith still lives there.

She first started work with the county in 1942 as a switchboard operator, then switched over to work in the auditor's office, and finally in the sheriff's office identification section.

Then she temporarily quit county work. She went to work

for the American Red Cross as a home service worker, a job she held for about five years.

On Aug. 15, 1957, she was appointed county clerk to replace retiring county clerk Reina Osburn. She has won re-election twice.

Mrs. Smith was born in Illinois, but spent her younger years in the Southwest. She married her husband in New Mexico and he brought her to the Northwest.

Mr. Smith died two years ago. Mrs. Smith has three grown sons, Robert E., in Lompoc, Calif., George L., in Olympia, and John W., in Colorado Springs, Colo.

One of the first things Mrs. Smith plans to do once she is retired is to return to the Southwest for visits.

"I've lived in dampness all these years," she remarked. "Now I'm ready to go back down South and get dined out."

She also intends to concentrate on her hobbies, knitting, sewing and painting.

About two weeks after Mrs. Smith came to work for the county, the trial of the defendant in the famous Erland Point murder case got under way in the only Kitsap superior court at that time, presided over by Judge H. G. Sutton. The defendant was found guilty of killing six people and subsequently hanged.

Mrs. Smith caught glimpses of the famous trial, never realizing that in years to come she would sit just below the judge's bench as the formal court clerk.

There are now three superior courts and the workload on the clerk's office has increased correspondingly. There were four clerks when Mrs. Smith took over the office.

"Now there are nine clerks," Mrs. Smith said. "That includes myself and I count myself because I work."

She needs two more clerks, she said, and more room in her office.

"We just can't progress here," she said, waving her hand around the record-packed office. "I was thinking of having a platform built outside my window with some pulleys to hold it up so I could put a couple of desks out there," she said with dry humor.

She remembers many things about her years in the courthouse. One winter, when she was working in the auditor's office in the 1940s, she had to come to work during one of the county's worst snowstorms in history.

Vehicles couldn't get up the hill to the courthouse and there was no heat in the building. But there she was, helping put out the monthly payroll.

The grandmother eight times over is unquestioningly an ardent and active Democrat. She was a state committeewoman for 14 years and was a delegate to two Democratic presidential conventions.

She was in Los Angeles when John F. Kennedy was nominated for president by the Democrats and four years later she was in Atlantic City to see Lyndon Johnson chosen as the party's standard bearer.

She is one of the founders, a member and a past president of the Port Orchard Business and Professional Women's organization. When this county's Civil Defense was run completely on a volunteer basis, Mrs. Smith was one of the first workers.

As a veteran professional observer of many courtroom dramas in Kitsap County, Mrs. Smith undoubtedly could give vivid accounts of some of the famous trials.

Perhaps through professional ethics, she prefers not to talk about the cases or personalities for publication—even though she is on the eve of retirement.

Margaret Smith

Former Kitsap County Clerk Margaret C. Smith, 79, of 150 Circle Drive, Lacey, died Saturday in Lacey.

She was born March 15, 1906, in Sherard, Ill., and raised in Raton, N.M.

She married George R. Smith in Albuquerque, N.M., moving to Port Orchard from Seattle in 1937.

As a Port Orchard resident, she served as Kitsap County Clerk and also worked in the offices of the Kitsap County Auditor, Kitsap County Sheriff, and the American Red Cross of Bremerton.

She was a member of the Kitsap County Democratic Party, a founding member and president of the Port Orchard Business and Professional Women, and president of the State County Clerks Association.

Mrs. Smith also served on the Kitsap County Welfare Advisory Board and was a member of the National Council of State Governments before moving to Lacey in 1978.

Surviving are two sons, George of Lacey, and John of Port Orchard; two sisters, Christina Evans of Reno and Bea Wilson of Rock Springs, Wyo.; eight grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren.

Her husband and oldest son, Robert E. Smith, died previously.

Private memorial services are pending.

Memorials may be made to Children's Orthopedic Hospital, 4800 Sand Point Way NE, Seattle 98105.

Arrangements are under the direction of Bleitz Funeral Home in Seattle.



Mrs. Smith Quits County Clerk Post

By KURT SHARAR
Sun County Writer

Margaret Smith, Kitsap County's clerk for the past 11½ years, is retiring.

She is the second long-time woman county official to retire in the past few months. Margaret McPherson retired as the county auditor Dec. 31 after 42 years service to the county.

Mrs. Smith's retirement letter was to be read at the county commissioner's meeting this morning. She will ask to be relieved of her duties effective April 30.

Mrs. Smith will ask the commissioners to appoint Mrs. Betty Stoops to fill out the remaining 20 months of her current term as county clerk. Mrs. Stoops, a veteran employe in the clerk's office, resigned from county work last year, but apparently would take the job if offered.

By state law, the commissioners must select a new county clerk from a list of three candidates nominated by the Kitsap County Democratic Central Committee.

Mrs. Smith is a Democrat and the way the law reads the appointee to an unexpired elective term must be someone of the same party as the person

vacating the office. A slate of three nominations is required from the central committee of the political party and county commissioners are obliged to make the appointment from that list.

The commissioners will undoubtedly accept Mrs. Smith's retirement today, then immedi-



MARGARET SMITH
Ending service

ately ask the Democrats for the list of three nominees. Mrs. Stoops is a Democrat and will probably be one of those prominently considered by the central committee for nomination.

Mrs. Smith, a widow, was appointed as county clerk in August, 1957, upon the retirement of the then county clerk Reina Osburn. Prior to that, she was employed 9½ years in the county auditor's office and 1½ years in the sheriff's office.

Mrs. Smith has won re-election to the county clerk's post since her appointment in 1957.

The clerk's job basically involves administering the volumes of paper work which daily comes before the county's three superior courts. It pays \$10,600 a year.

In addition to having served under Mrs. Smith's employ, Mrs. Stoops is a good friend of Mrs. Smith's. Mrs. Stoops' husband, Leslie, lost his eye sight early in January when a compressed gas tank blew up near his face.

Stoops, an employe for the Bremerton City Water Department, was trying to use the gas tank to thaw some frozen water pipes leading to a South Kitsap trailer when the tank exploded.