USES OF SMITH HOUSE

Illinois College’s women’s literary societies hold business meetings, conduct rush activities and work on projects at Smith House. The Board has recently added a student lounge on the second floor, which is shared by all the women’s societies. The lounge is a popular spot for studying and socializing.

In addition to the societies, the home has hosted, with Smith House Board approval, bridal showers, baby showers, and other special occasions.

HISTORY OF THE WOMAN’S BUILDING ASSOCIATION OF ILLINOIS COLLEGE (SMITH HOUSE BOARD)

The David A. Smith House was purchased in 1924 by the Woman’s Building Association of Illinois College, also known as Smith House Board. This was done so the women of Illinois College could have a place to “rest, read, and relax” as well as providing the women’s literary societies a place to meet. Now the association preserves the integrity, beauty, authenticity, and governs the use of the home.

Today, the women’s literary societies of Chi Beta, Gamma Delta, and Sigma Phi Epsilon occupy specific designated double rooms for their literary society gatherings and meetings.

Woman’s Building Association of Illinois College
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David A. Smith and his wife, Eliza, were married in 1831 and became the parents of 11 children, although one son died in infancy. The Smiths encouraged their children to acquire a good education in Jacksonville. Four of their sons attended Illinois College, three of the daughters attended the Jacksonville Female Academy, and three attended the Young Ladies Athenaeum.

Mr. Smith was an active member in the Jacksonville community serving as an Illinois College trustee (1842-1865), as a trustee and patron of the Jacksonville Female Academy, as an elder at the First Presbyterian Church, and as one of the founders of the Westminster Presbyterian Church.

David A. Smith was a member of the Whig Party, who later joined the Republican Party. He supported Abraham Lincoln’s nomination for president in 1860 and 1864.

WHO WAS DAVID A. SMITH?
1804-1865

Born in the state of Virginia in 1804, having moved with his family from Alabama to Jacksonville, Illinois in 1839, David A. Smith was a pioneer lawyer and colleague of Abraham Lincoln, John J. Hardin, and Jonathan Baldwin Turner.

While conducting law business in Jacksonville, Smith invited Lincoln to share the study in his residence on Grove Street. The two men had 68 cases either together or as opponents.

Having been raised in the South, Smith was appalled by the treatment of slaves. He was active in the anti-slavery movement in Jacksonville.

Mr. Smith paid $15,000 for the land and house in 1854.

The Smith estate consisted of orchards, a pasture, smokehouse, and outbuildings extending south to Mauvaisterre Creek.

The home’s symmetry, elegance, and simple style are characteristic of Federal architecture.

The grand porch is Greek Revival Style due to the columns and ornate design.

It is a 16 room residence that originally contained 6 staircases and 11 fireplaces.

The foyer features a beautiful walnut staircase.

There are several original furnishings from the Smith family still in the home today.

A huge Dutch oven/fireplace in the basement prepared the meals for the Smith Family. The meals were brought to the family in the dining room by a dumbwaiter.

The desk/secretary in the Dwight Parlors was a gift to the family from Jonathan Baldwin Turner. A chair given to the Smiths by Abraham Lincoln is now in Whipple Hall on the Illinois College campus.

Pictured above: Smith’s great, great, great granddaughter, Carolyn Lansden Whittle, donating David A. Smith’s portrait to Illinois College. It now hangs in the stairwell at Tanner Hall.

FAMILY AND CONTRIBUTIONS

David A. Smith was a member of the Whig Party, who later joined the Republican Party. He supported Abraham Lincoln’s nomination for president in 1860 and 1864.