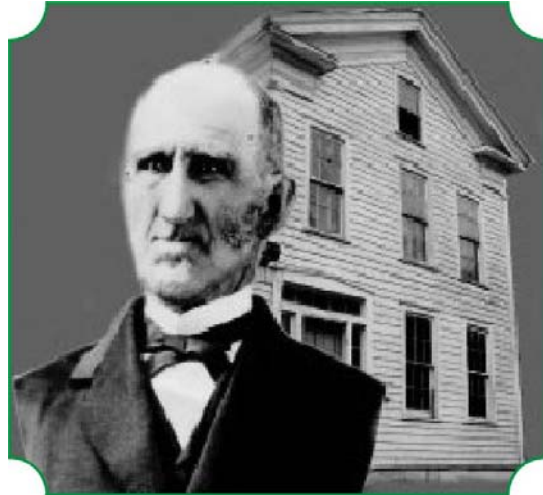


**Alvin Thompson Smith** was born November 17, 1802 in Branford, New Haven County, Connecticut. He spent his childhood in Branford, later learning the carpenter's trade. In 1827, at the age of 25, Alvin moved to Fairfield, Illinois, to farm with his brother, Caleb. Fairfield is now named Mendon and is about ten miles northeast of Quincy, Illinois.



While living on the Mendon farm, besides farm chores, he worked as a carpenter in Quincy. After attending a camp meeting in Quincy, on September 23, 1838, Alvin became a member of the Quincy Congregational Church. The church, a major influence throughout his life, was associated with the Oberlin Missionary Society, which was actively seeking missionaries to minister to the West's Native Americans. On March 19, 1840, Smith married Abigail Raymond, a native of Sherburne, New York, and 9-1/2 years his senior.

Accompanied by two other couples, the newlyweds left Illinois for the Oregon Territory in 1840. On August 14, 1840, the group arrived at Dr. Marcus Whitman's mission at Walla Walla. The Smiths stayed in the area for slightly over a year, serving as missionaries at Lewiston, Idaho, and with Alvin taking charge of several construction projects.

On September 1, 1841, A.T. Smith, his wife, and several like-minded companions, headed west again, arriving in the Willamette Valley later in that same year. Having arrived on the Tualatin Plains toward the end of September, the first order of business was to find a location and construct some sort of lodging. Since he still had hopes of bringing Christianity to the Indians, he chose a place close to an Indian village for his home. In September 1841, Smith and his missionary companions settled on a site about one mile south of the future town of Forest Grove and near the confluence of the Tualatin River and Gales Creek. After staking out his claim he chose a spot under a large fir tree for his home site.

For the rest of 1841, Smith was kept busy building his first of two log cabins and developing a farm. Smith continued to work on his house and on November 5, 1841 with the help of neighbors, he "Finish't raising the house." All through the winter months he continued to haul timber to the house and gathering supplies. The roof was completed by November 27, 1841. By the end of February 1842, Smith was plowing, although the plow was giving him difficulty and in need of much repairing.

In addition to starting his farm and bringing its produce to market or to the mill at Oregon City, Smith was constantly busy with community and church affairs. He continued to be concerned with the Christianizing and education of the native population, even though his original plan for a mission was abandoned, replaced instead by a boarding school. Alvin Thompson Smith was passionate about his religion and was not easily influenced where it was concerned. His observance of the Sabbath and the philosophy guiding his day to day activities was absolute, and he expected the same uncompromising adherence of those visiting this home.

During the 1840s a constant stream of people stayed at the Smith's cabin. Abigail Smith writes of having 9 to 10 people eating at her table every evening, many of them newly arrived pioneers, assorted farmhands and a series of children boarders. Many early pioneer families sought to have a safe place to leave their children while they set up homesteads of their own. The Smiths were a welcoming family, and it was especially attractive that the children would have an opportunity to be educated at the Tualatin Academy once it was established.

Alvin Smith was also involved in Oregon Territorial politics, reportedly attending the 1843 meetings in Champoege to form the state's first provisional government (though his diary indicated that on the day of the crucial vote he was at home planting potatoes). In the June 1851 elections, A.T. Smith ran for Probate Judge. In April 1855, Smith was appointed as a Judge of Elections.

In addition to helping innumerable neighbors with the construction of their own houses and barns, in 1855 A.T. Smith also participated in the planning for, and work on, a fort. The impetus for this project was the panic caused by the Native American Uprisings of 1854. Among other defenses, an open ditch was dug on the University campus, surrounding Old College Hall as a defense from attack. A lookout guard was set in the cupola for several nights. The ditches around the college building lay open for many more months.

In the 1850s, Smith traveled to Portland on an almost monthly basis to trade with fruit from his orchards, seeds, dairy products, eggs, and even bacon. Smith's farm was increasingly prosperous. The Oregon State Archives in Salem note that in 1852 Smith had 15 horses, 30 sheep, 72 head of cattle, and 19 hogs. Also listed was one watch (or clock), \$100 of money earning interest, and improvement on land claims estimated at \$1,100. His total property valuation was \$4,456. In 1853, he added 2 horses, 9 sheep, and 7 cows, with an increased valuation to \$5,358. In 1854, his valuation increase to \$10,600 which may represent construction on his new frame home.

With all this activity and involvement, A.T. Smith must have had difficulty in finding time to consider, let alone build, a proper house to replace the cabin he and Abigail were living in. Nevertheless, in 1852, Alvin Smith began to look forward in earnest to the construction of a frame house. He went to see Mr. Patrick Cain, a local sawmill operator, for the lumber for his house and struck a deal that called for a two year old colt and the "use of 200 dollars for 30 days from this date."

In June 1854, Smith was getting timbers out for his new home. He commenced building the frame on July 3. On September 7 and 8, he worked on the foundations. Two days later, the two-story part was raised into place. He worked all through September and finished shingling the roof of the two-story part on October 13. On November 1, he raised what he called the lean-to part of the house. November and December were dedicated to the house with the roof completed on December 9. January 1855, he worked off and on, taking time off from the house for spring and summer farming obligations. In August and September, he again noted working on the house. On December 13, 1855, he paid E.D. Whitlow what was due him for working on the house since spring on such things as making a mantelpiece and stopping roof leaks. On March 21, 1856, Smith took time out to build a fence around his "new Yard." It was the last entry in the diary concerning the new house until September 16, 1857, when he hired Mr. Larson to "lay my seller [sic] wall."

On October 5, 1857, he brought home a bookcase which cost \$75. Later that month, October 24, Mr. Young worked at the cellar. October 27 through November 7, work continued on the cellar, hauling stone and sand for the job. On November 28, Smith again worked on the basement and hired John Stewart & William Wills for four months at \$15 per month each, presumably for work on the house.

It is not known if Abigail ever had the opportunity to enjoy the new house. On the morning of April 16, 1858 after finishing his morning chores, Alvin came to the breakfast table and was nearly finished eating when Abigail complained of her eyes and her numb leg. She said she "felt very strange and thought she was going to die." Alvin stayed with her through the day and night and the following day when "her spirit took its flight to the one who gave it."

Without the chimney completed the new house would have been uncomfortable during the winter of 1857-58, and Alvin did not set up a stove until November 1858. With the death of his wife in April 1858, the diary becomes silent about the new home until May 21, 1858, when he put down his chores and retired to the "new house for supper." Work continued on brickwork for the chimney and the cellar through October 1858. Mr. Philips was paid \$45 for brick at \$10 per 1,000.

The house seemed to be completed by November 5, 1858 based upon diary references.

Through 1860 his land holdings are listed as his original donation land claim of 640 acres. In 1861, he showed an increase to 960 acres and in 1862, 1,600 acres. It stayed at this level through 1869, the latest records available, except for the addition of some town lots in Hillsboro and Forest Grove.

As Smith had when he only had a cabin for a home, when new settlers came to the area, it was A.T. Smith who continued to give them temporary work to recoup their resources and help them find suitable properties to claim. And when they were ready to build their homes, he was again there to give them assistance. It is true that he was also a businessman. When he loaned money, which he did, interest was figured. Those who worked his land were also paid by dividing the profit.

In 1866, after his house had been built and his first wife passed away and his two adopted daughters married, Smith traveled to the East Coast to visit his family, a trip that would last over three years. In a surprising move, A.T. Smith proposed marriage to one Jane Maria Averill, a Branford Connecticut native a full 34 years younger than him. His October 14, 1869 diary entry read, "Overhauled & regulated some of my things & in the evening called on Jane Maria Averill. We decided to be married next Tuesday the 19th day of the month at 2 P.M., Providence willing." The newly married couple arrived back in Oregon in November 1869.

In 1871 Alvin was making plans for a city home in Forest Grove. Alvin was retired now and still supervised his properties, but was not active in the farming operation. In 1874, Alvin and Jane moved into Forest Grove at 2104 "B" Street.

Alvin Thompson Smith died at his Forest Grove home on Sunday, January 22, 1888, at 12:30 p.m. He was 85 years old. In his final will, Alvin Smith gave his home and the proceeds of his estate to the widow until her death. Jane Averill Smith lived on for 41 more years. Jane saw to the safety of Smith's writings, correspondence and other personal papers by donating them to the Oregon Historical Society.

*Excerpt from the Historic Structure Report, courtesy of the Forest Grove Historic Landmark Board.*