

# The Preacher and His Bottles

By David Kyle Rakes





The 1850s cobalt blue A.P. SMITH / CHARLESTON, S.C. soda bottle is a good one to have in any Southern soda collection. I've always admired this bottle and eventually added an example to my own collection.

Smith started his business in Charleston in 1851 at 97 Meeting Street, according to Leon Robinson and Joe Holcombe in their little 1970 book, "Charleston Colored Soda Water Bottles." There are at least four different types and all are considered rare.

The earliest is believed to be a paneled bottle in either cobalt blue or green and is embossed SMITH & CO. / CHARLESTON, S.C. Another is a cobalt blue soda with a mug base. The other is embossed A.P. SMITH & CO. / CHARLESTON, S.C., cobalt blue in color and with or without a slug plate.

All are considered rare, especially since Smith's business ended about 1855.

But I was curious about what A.P. stood for. No one seemed to

know. All the usual sources proved negative, so I decided to apply my genealogical skills.

First, let's start with his first name. The most common male names starting with the letter "A" were listed as Alexander, Anthony, Andrew, Aaron, Asher, Austin, Adam, Alan, Arthur and Axel. One turned out to be Smith's. What types of people used initials? Prominent writers came to mind, like H.G. Wells, J.K. Rowling, E.E. Cummings, J.R.R. Tolkien and T.S. Eliot, to name a few.

But it was unlikely that A.P. Smith was a writer and a bottler at the same time, unless he was sending messages in bottles out of Charleston Harbor.

Some people who aren't fond of their first two names or for other reasons might opt to be called by their initials, such as A.J., J.R., T.J., C.J. J.D. or J.J.

My own great uncle is a good example. He was JC Rakes, but





the initials were not name abbreviations. JC was born in Virginia and while a young man moved to Maryland with his parents. When he entered the public school system, he was told by school officials he had to use his full name which did not exist.

To avoid recurring conflicts with school officials, he legally changed his name to James Charles Rakes. The officials were satisfied and his family and friends continued to call him JC.

So A.P. Smith could have been named after a prominent family member, or perhaps he used the initials to keep business expenses down. Cost of typesetting advertisements and bottle molds would be more economical than using a full name.

Those were some of my “initial” thoughts as I pursued more factual knowledge.

Then I had an “Eureka, I Have Found It” moment when I discovered a Rev. A.P. Smith and an Andrew Smith in the 1861 census of the city of Charleston. Could it be the former bottler had become a preacher?

Then I discovered his full name was Andrew Pickens Smith, named after his maternal great-grandfather Brigadier General Andrew Pickens, who commanded American troops in both Carolinas and Georgia during the Revolutionary War. The general had made a name for himself during the Battle of Kettle Creek near Washington, Ga., the sieges of Charleston and Augusta, Battle of Cowpens, Siege of Ninety Six and the Battle of Eutaw Springs, S.C.

Pickens also was a Congressman in the U.S. House of Representatives from South Carolina. On the paternal side, I discovered A.P. Smith was a great-grandson of the Rev. Josiah Smith of the old Circular Church of Charleston, a cousin of Frank Pickens, South Carolina's governor at the time of secession and a descendant of Thomas “Landgrave” Smith, governor of colonial South Carolina.

A.P. Smith was born June 16, 1833 in Dallas County, Ala., son of William Stephen Smith and

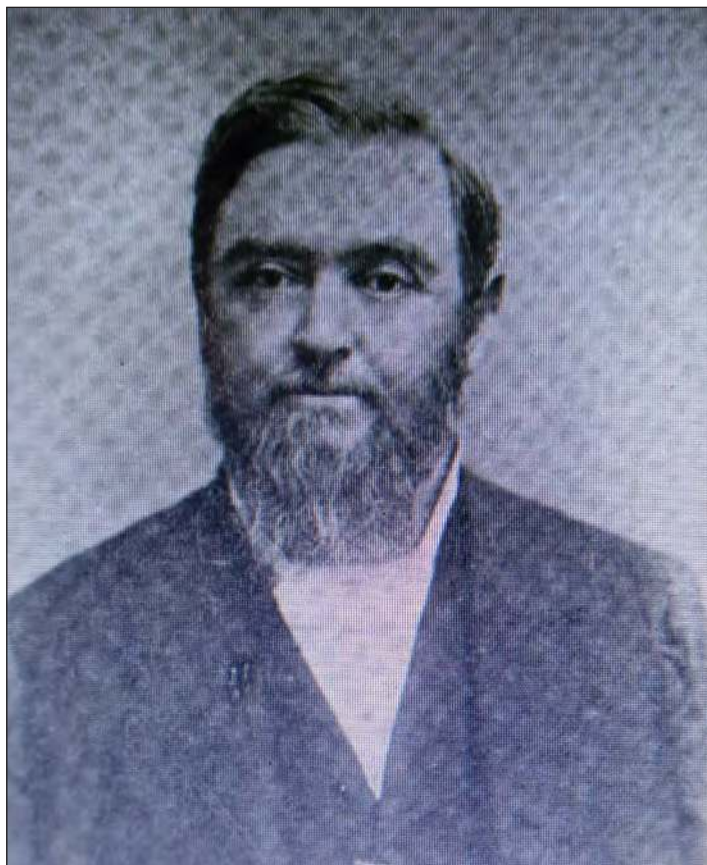


Image of A.P. Smith



Another fine example of a A.P. Smith, Charleston S.C. bottle

Louisa A. Bowie. A.P.'s father was an attorney in Charleston and later a planter in Alabama. As a teenager, A.P. attended military school in Selma, Ala., before moving to Charleston.

He was involved in a soda business at age 18 while attending Oglethorpe University. It is possible that his salary at such a business could have helped pay for his four years in college. A.P. could have joined Uncle James E. Smith in the soda business which is why the firm was named Smith & Co., in its early days. After becoming sole owner, A.P. had his initials embossed on future bottles. In 1855, he found himself a college graduate, left the soda water business and moved to Columbia, S.C., where the 22-year-old enrolled in the Theological Seminary in the state capital. After graduating from the ministry in 1858, A.P. Smith was installed as pastor of the Second Presbyterian

Church in Charleston and later Summerfield Presbyterian Church.

About the same time, A.P. married Elizabeth Thomasine Smith, his first cousin and daughter of Uncle James E. Smith who now becomes A.P.'s father-in-law, the same man suspected to be A.P.'s soda water business partner.

When the Civil War started, records show A.P. left the church and his wife to enlist in the Army of Northern Virginia and was commissioned as chaplain of the 2nd S.C. Regiment. Near war's end, he was sent home suffering from rheumatism brought on by exposure to the elements.

He became a minister in Spartanburg, S.C., later moving to Aberdeen, Miss., where he was president of a female college for five years. Next, he moved to Dallas, Texas where he was pastor of First Presbyterian Church for 22 years.

A.P. Smith died at age 62 on May 10, 1895. He and his wife are buried in Dallas' Greenwood Cemetery.

So, if you own antique bottles whose origins are unknown, check out the many genealogical web sites and you may discover interesting stories like my own “Preacher and His Bottles.” After





Close-up of the gravestone of A.P. Smith

making the connection, I am moving my A.P. Smith bottle from its place on the second shelf of my bookcase straight to the top shelf!

(David Kyle Rakes is also author of two nature books, "Botanizing with Bears" and "Dream About A Trail.")

SOURCES: Charleston Colored Soda Water Bottles by Leon Robinson and Joe Holcombe, privately published, 1970; 1861 City of Charleston, S.C. Census, the Rev. A.P. Smith, Coming Street, East Side, Ward No. 6, No. 9, Page 71; Andrew Pickens (Congressman), Wikipedia; Dallas County, Ala., 1850 Census, Household Nos. 240/240, William S. Smith, with A.P. Smith, student born in Alabama, Pages 247-B and 248; Marriage of the Rev. A.P. Smith and Eliz. T. Smith, The Charleston Mercury, Dec. 6, 1858; Obituary for the Rev. A.P. Smith, The Southern Presbyterian, Clinton, S.C., Sept. 22, 1898 (obituary courtesy Brent Holcomb, genealogist, Columbia, S.C. Confederate Veteran Magazine, Late Chaplain Trans Miss. Dept., Page 384. Obituary for Dr. A.P. Smith, Dallas Morning News, May 11, 1895. Tombstone photos for A.P. and Elizabeth Smith, Greenwood Cemetery, Dallas, Texas. Photos by Kelvin L. Meyers, Forensic Genealogist, May 23, 2019.



Right image - Tall gravestone for the Preacher and soda bottler A.P. Smith

