



William Hamilton "Ham" Smythe, III

FEB 20, 1930 - SEP 10, 2021



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MEMORIAL PARK
Funeral Home & Cemetery

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Both “Ham” and the Sterick Building came to the public square on the same day. He often made this Memphis-centric reference, and if anyone was a tried-and-true Memphian, Ham was, from the muddy Mississippi River to his entire educational and residential life lived proudly within the Parkways.

The only son of W.H. “Pappy” Smythe, Jr. and Mary Clay “Mommee” Tate Smythe, Ham was the second generation Smythe born in the United States to the family of Dr. William Hamilton “Doby” Smythe, Sr. and Henerietta “Gamma” Clarke Smythe who immigrated from Greencastle, County Donegal, Ireland in the 1890s.

The Doby Smythes settled in Midtown Memphis, Central Gardens, where Ham’s parents ultimately met at Central High School before establishing themselves on Vinton Avenue to raise their son. According to his dotting mother, their son “never got in trouble a single day of his life” - decades of credible witnesses citing evidence to the contrary.

Ham attended Idlewild Elementary and Fairview Junior High before being expelled “for the good of the institution.” He found welcomed respite for a brief foray outside 38104 in Bell Buckle, TN at his cherished Webb School, again departing for the institution’s benefit. He returned to Memphis and graduated from Christian Brothers College when it was the high school on East Parkway.

Transitioning to North Parkway for college at Southwestern at Memphis (Rhodes College), Ham met Katherine Powell Hinds of Tupelo, MS. He was Sigma Alpha Epsilon president, and his mother served as House Mother. Ham and Katherine’s lively and involved campus life as Lynx foreshadowed their joint legacies of a lifetime of entrepreneurial service, civic, and business commitments to numerous Memphis citizens and their local institutions.

Defending the homeland from the encroaching Red Menace, Ham was stationed stateside at Fort Jackson, South Carolina during the Korean Conflict serving in the 81st Airborne. He confidently maintained that, “he kept the North Koreans out of South Carolina!” At his 90th birthday party



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last February, he proudly stated that he could still wear his G.I. standard-issue combat boots refurbished through the years by Henry Galtelli on Union Avenue where he would regularly stop by the neighboring Wiles-Smith Drug Store to visit with Charlie Smith and imbibe in a chocolate soda.

Married in August of 1955, Ham and Katherine began their life of 57 years of marriage before Katherine preceded him in 2017. What began in a garage apartment at Rozelle and Harbert, then moved to their duplex on Carr Avenue before establishing their 50+ years on Rozelle Street where Ham lived out his days.

Ham began his employment with National Guard Products where he built and sold metal security doors, travelling Eastern Arkansas before being hired as GM of the Yellow Cab Company in 1960. By 1979 he purchased both the company and the property at 581 South Second Street, securing charter bus and van transportation services for the Southland Dog Track, West Memphis, AR and the Millington Naval Base, respectively. He started the Checker Cab Company in 1989. On occasion, he took great joy as a chauffeur of the stars who made their way through Memphis, most notably Ella Fitzgerald, the Beatles, and Dave Brubeck.

Dedicating much of his energy to the Taxi industry, Ham brought family along for vacations to annual International Taxicab and Livery Association conventions, serving as President in 1970/71 and was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2015. Through his association work, he was instrumental in creating the Paratransit Insurance Company, bringing a unique self-insurance product to the diversified passenger transportation industry. He served as Paratransit Chair (1994-2020), and Paratransit is now one of the premier insurance companies of its type in North America. Additionally, Ham was an active Board Member of Memorial Park, Inc., his wife's family business, where he served at her side building the four-generation business into a nationally recognized cemetery and funeral company. The Lower Mississippi Valley Taxicab and Cemetery Company was established by Ham and the Luce family of Mobile, Alabama who had the same unique family business concerns and opportunity to exercise tax deductions for the annual meeting.

Weathering the social turbulence of Memphis in the late 1960s and the general economic malaise of the 1970s, Ham and Katherine saw opportunity among a number of remarkable peers, men and women, black and white, Gentiles and Jews, who dedicated their lives to seeing Memphis emerge as stronger for the struggle. Their efforts were not in vain.



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Ham invested deeply with his colleagues, spearheading Agricenter, International, a major initiative of Governor Lamar Alexandar's 1979 Jobs Conference for economic development. As the founding Chairman of the Agricenter Commission, Ham was proud that it remains robust today promoting Memphis and the Mid-South as a leader in the future of agribusiness. In the face of intruding Urban Renewal, he helped create the National Historic designation for Central Gardens, thus securing the neighborhood from utilitarian ingress.

During the troubles surrounding public school integration and busing, Ham became a charter member of the Phoenix Club and the Boys Clubs of Memphis (now Boys & Girls Clubs) providing safe educational, recreational activities for area youth. Chairman of the Greater Memphis Arts Council (1975), he championed beauty in all its forms, giving support and limelight to the aesthetic humanity we dearly need. He was a primary benefactor of his daughter's New Ballet Ensemble. He was a lifetime congregant and former Vestry member of Grace-St. Luke's Episcopal Church and board member of Grace-St. Luke's School. He and Katherine were supporters of the Community Foundation of Greater Memphis, donating the former Hinds-Smythe Cosmopolitan Funeral Home building to them to serve as their headquarters. Ham was the founding Chair of the Memphis Convention & Visitors Bureau when it was birthed from the Memphis Area Chamber of Commerce. He was a founder and past board chair of the Porter-Leath Children's Center. In 2008, Ham was recognized as one of Shelby County's Extraordinary Citizens for his lifelong work to benefit our community.

A charter member of the Dennis Thatcher Society (husbands who labored quietly under the overbearing shadows of their prominent wives), Ham saw life, fun, and light in much of life. A regular of the downtown Wolf River Society For The Prevention Of Taking Oneself Too Seriously, Ham and his cronies often pontificated for hours on topics ranging from the serious to the mundane, never veering too far into the political mood of the day but always encouraging humor and commonality, and a thick skin.

The Memphis Yacht Club and boating on the Mississippi River was a loyal pastime inherited from his father, and Ham continued the practice with his children throughout their lives. He commanded a keen ability to navigate the often treacherous and volatile river, exploring with genuine love the native intercoastal shorelines from Shelby Forest to Helena, Arkansas, even traveling the Tennessee River from Knoxville to Paducah to Memphis as part of the purchase of the de-commissioned towboat "Sullivan."



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A University Club Legend, Ham played tennis, squash, racquetball, handball, and fatball there for years while weekly dining at Sunday brunch with his family. He enthusiastically supported the varied exploits of his children and grandchildren with generosity and interest. He extended that same keen attention to numerous individuals (and their dogs) whose paths and passions intersected with his, often the craftsman or artist whose talents he championed and for whom he desired to extend opportunities and encouragement.

In his final chapter, he found love and companionship as a widower with Stephanie, the widow of his great, longtime friend Roy Harrover. Their example can teach us all a lot about aging with enthusiasm, dignity, hope, and grace.

Down to earth, a little politically incorrect but never mean-spirited, Ham told it how he saw it, offering to help if could. His romantic notions of being set ablaze and adrift downstream on a makeshift raft at sunset on the Great River were thwarted by the Corps of Engineers and the Mapco oil refinery who saw liability in the event. Therefore, he will be buried in Memorial Park Cemetery to the right of his partner of a half-century, in earshot of his forefathers who crest the hill to the east.

He leaves three children: Ham, IV (Julie), Katie (Jimmy), and Clay (Gracey) along with eight grandchildren strewn far outside the Parkways, from Seattle, Oakland, Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York, to Midtown Memphis.

The visitation will be held from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., Wednesday, September 15, 2021 at Memorial Park Funeral Home in the Fireside Chapel. A private funeral service at Grace-St. Luke's Episcopal Church.

The public celebration of life service at the Levitt Shell, Overton Park has been postponed. His celebration of life service will be reschedule in the near future.

In lieu of flowers, both Ham and his family request any memorials be directed to New Ballet Ensemble and School, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Memphis, or a local non-communist charity of the donor's choice.



Events

William Hamilton "Ham" Smythe, III

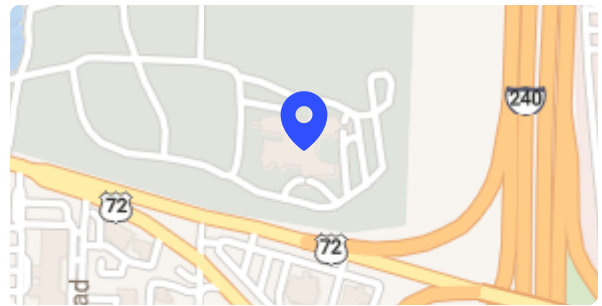
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Visitation

 **Wednesday**, September 15, 2021


 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM CT

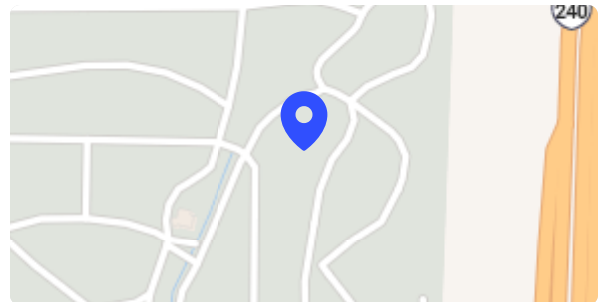
 **Memorial Park Funeral Home**
5668 Poplar Ave, Memphis TN 38119



Cemetery Details

 **Memorial Park Cemetery**
5668 Poplar Ave, Memphis TN 38119

 **(901) 445-8475**





Tribute Wall

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Charlie Lambert posted:

I did not know ham well but my several encounters with him as a member of a small group of movie lovers made a deep impression on me. He was kind, considerate, and interested in me and my view of some of the films we watched at my lake house in MS. or at another friend's country Tudor escape. He was just one of the group and never tried to call any attention to himself or his extraordinary achievements. I feel privileged to have known Ham, even though not well enough to claim deep friendship. He treated me well and was a jolly companion. He will be missed by many.
Charlie Lambert

September 17 at 4:00 PM



Tamara Hoffmann D'Aoust posted:

My last memory of Hamilton Smythe was when I went to his house to do personal training just days before he went to the hospital. I arrived for our 12:00 noon training session and Ham was finishing the bacon, eggs and coffee he had made and was determined to finish, and share with Stella his fairly recent rescued dog. We then went into the sunroom to do our normal workout, Stella too..For some reason I decided for the first time to ask him about the music collection by the bar and if he wanted some music..we then ended up playing Nat King Cole CD he knew all the word to, while practicing side stepping for balance. He was so alive and such an inspiration, I am so grateful for our workouts and conversations! Sante, dear Mr Hamilton Smythe. Tamara

September 14 at 4:40 PM



Martha Muse posted:

Condolences from our family to yours. We've all had wonderful lives and enjoyed our times together. Ham IV and Sherman had young, fun days at Grace-St.Luke's, and we watched the entire family grow and prosper. Glad we knew all of you. Martha, Sherman and all The Muses.

September 14 at 8:57 AM



Tommy Farnsworth posted:

Ham was my friend for many years. He was a fine , honest man who was opinionated about everything that he cared about . I'll miss hearing his thoughts and opinions at regular lunch meetings. His obit accurately spelled out his wonderful life !

September 13 at 3:14 PM



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The Voldengs - Brianna, Bonnie And Kurt sent a Heart's Companion Bouquet to the Smythe, III family.

September 13 at 10:29 AM



Maurice posted:

What a wonderful man ,to the Smythe family may God be with you.

September 13 at 10:10 AM



Memories only last if you share them

Join us in honoring William Hamilton by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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