

State Historical Society, November 10, 1879

Gen. Simeon Mills in the chair.

Gen. David Atwood submitted the following remarks:

Mr. President and Gentlemen of the State Historical Society:

As we meet here from time to time, to pay a slight tribute to the memory of an associate member of this Society who has been taken from us, we are forcibly reminded of the shortness of life and the certainty of death. The pioneers in the noble work of building up an Historical Society in Wisconsin, are fast falling by the way, and the time is near at hand when its destinies will be left to the care of those who know nothing, by experience, of the toils and struggles attending the first few years of its existence. Its early founders will have done their work on earth. It is eminently proper, however, that, as they pass away, a brief record of their lives be left with the Society, that their successors, to the last generation, may know to whom they are indebted for so much that is of substantial historical value as is found gathered together in these rooms. Our meeting at this time is to deposit a record of one who, in his life, has done very much—perhaps as much as anyone who has not devoted his whole time to the work—in advancing the interests of this Society. His heart was in the work from the start, and his labors were constant and efficient. I have reference to Hon. George B. Smith, whose career on earth suddenly closed on the morning of September 18, 1879. It is to pay a proper tribute to his memory that we are here tonight. I feel entirely inadequate to perform the task assigned me, of presenting an appropriate paper on this solemn occasion. Taken from us, in the prime of life, as was Mr. Smith, and at a time when his friends least expected, forcibly warns us, his old associates, to be ever ready to meet death; that, at best, we have but little time for work; for doing good; and no time for doing evil. We are admonished to “work while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work.” A distinguished writer, in terse language, has said:

“There is no appeal for relief from the great law which dooms us to the dust; we flourish and fade as the leaves of the forest;