

John McNeill Smith Jr., 92, a founder of the American Freedom Association, died on January 15, 2011, at his home in Greensboro, NC. Smith was a pioneering lawyer, civic leader, politician, and World War II veteran, best known by many for his defense of civil rights and liberties.

Known to friends as McNeill, Mr. Smith organized the World Federalists of North Carolina in 1947 and served as its President for many years. He was a charter member of World Federalists, USA, and the World Committee on World Peace Through Law. He helped found and incorporated the American Freedom Association in 1953 and served as its President for 24 years. He chaired and moderated the Southeastern World Affairs Institute where his interest in world peace through world law helped to bring in internationally known figures like Norman Thomas to speak during the annual Institute. Smith was a member of the Lawyers' Alliance for World Security, which supported nuclear arms control, and otherwise promoted world peace through law in diverse forums national and local. In a 1970 speech Mr. Smith remarked that "America cannot police the whole world and should not try to. World problems need world institutions to solve them. Our main effort should be to get such institutions going."

Smith was a former state lawmaker and civil rights attorney. He worked to segregate businesses in the 60's and successfully sued UNC officials to overturn a state law giving college presidents wide latitude to ban known communists from speaking on college campuses. He was elected 3 times to the North Carolina senate, and taught constitutional law at UNC's law school. McNeill Smith was known to be an excellent clarinet player, and was a recognized figure riding his bicycle to work everyday in a suit and fedora.

According to his daughter, Smith's law firm represented a wide range of clients including large corporations, wealthy industrialists, and celebrities, but he was most proud of the pro bono work he did to protect individuals' civil rights. In 2006, the North Carolina Bar Association established an award in Smith's name to honor "a person who has demonstrated extraordinary commitment to the ideals embodied in the constitution of the United States and the constitution of North Carolina."