CASTOR CANADENSIS

Newsletter of the Jedediah Smith Society • University of the Pacific, Stockton, California

SUMMER 2013

Captain Jedediah Strong Smith: A Eulogy of That Most Romantic and Pious of Mountain Men, First American by Land into California.

I'm reprinting an article that probably many have heard about but few have actually seen or read. Originally it was published in the **Illinois Magazine** *and appeared in the* **June, 1832** *issue. To my knowledge it only has been reproduced twice since then, first appearing 82 years later in:* **Kit Carson Days (1809–1868) by Edwin L. Sabin, A.C. McClurg & Co., 1914, pp. 551**, *as well as subsequent revisions and reprints of this same book and again in:* **Men Against the Mountains, by Alson J. Smith, The John Day Company, New York, 1965, pp. 306.**

The author of this Eulogy is unknown! There has been much speculation on who this was and up until recently, I thought I had a pretty good idea. There were many close friends that could have written this, but why didn't they attach their name? After spending a little more time researching this, I now believe there could be another possibility which I had neglected to consider of who this could have been. What about the editor of the magazine it first appears in? This was James Hall, who not only was the editor but the owner and the one who started this magazine in 1830. Hall had been a Lawyer, Judge and Banker, but really won his distinction in the literary field as an editor and author. Even though he had a variety of well-known contributors, he still was the main, chief writer. It is my belief that if an article showed up in his magazine without an author, it would be assumed Hall would be the author. He could have met and got acquainted with Jedediah and the person hired to transcribe and prepare his Journals and Map for printing, Samuel Parkman, during several interviews in St. Louis just prior to them leaving for Santa Fe. In doing so, he would have probably had the opportunity to actually see these documents! If this is true then, Hall's statement as being "his latest friend" would be correct. He also could have met and interviewed Jed's friends, relations and business partners who were in St. Louis at that time, as well as those that were with Jed on this expedition on their return, to gain the information presented in the Eulogy. The style of writing seems to fit someone like James Hall, but of course this is all speculation on my part and realize more research is needed to prove or disprove these thoughts. — (Editor, J.J.M.)

Some remarks concerning the Columbia River, in a late number of this Magazine, bring strongly to mind the gentle man whose name is several times mentioned in that article; and the writer has been induced to inquire, with much interest, what notice has been taken of him at St. Louis, his place of residence when in the United States. With not a little concern and surprise, it has been ascertained that the death and character of our distinguished countryman, J. S. Smith, have been entirely unnoticed there.

It has become the duty, then, of one of his latest friends, to say a few words of a man whose memory ought to be cherished by every American. Our country has produced but few travellers; let it not be told, then, that we are unwilling to render the meed of praise where it is justly due. Let us not cast into oblivion the memory of one so richly deserving an imperishable monument — so worthy to be called the greatest American traveller. Ledyard has had his biographer, and he well deserved one. His intentions were noble, and his plans most extensive, both to open new sources of wealth and commerce for his country, and to trace out analogies in the manners, customs, and language of different nations. Had Ledyard succeeded in accomplishing that for which he traversed nearly the whole of the Russian empire, he would have done much that we are now proud to ascribe to Smith.

There is a marked resemblance in the characters of these two men; the same moral courage and untiring energy — the same perseverance and indifference to personal privation and suffering. But Ledyard had the advantages of a college education — Smith merely those of the common schools in the interior of New York; Ledyard made the whole world the theatre of his travels — Smith, more truly American, traversed the vast country west of the United States, between the Russian settlements, on the north, and the Spanish possessions, at California; Ledyard failed in all his great attempts — Smith, in his, succeeded perfectly. We are ready to weep for poor Ledyard, when, after so many difficulties and disappointments, he falls a victim to disease in Africa; but we are struck with horror, when, at the age of thirty-three, Smith falls beneath the spears of the savage Cumanchees, in the wilds between Missouri and Santa Fe.

The writer of this notice is little acquainted with the early history of Smith. It may, however, easily be obtained. He was born in Bainbridge, Chenango county, New York, 24th June, 1798 [1799].

He came to St. Louis, in 1821, with the intention, it is said, of accompanying an expedition of hunters to the Rocky Mountains. He enlisted in the service of Gen. Ashley, as a hunter, and started with the company in the spring of 1822.

"Few men have been more fortunate than I have," said Mr. Smith to the writer, in March, 1831. "I started into the mountains, with the determination of becoming a first rate hunter, of making myself thoroughly acquainted with the character and habits of the Indians, of tracing out the sources of the Columbia River, and following it to its mouth; and of making the whole profitable to me, and I have perfectly succeeded." Indeed, he did much more than he had planned out. For nine years and a half he was almost constantly traveling. He became well acquainted with the sources, direction, and length of most of the tributaries of the Missouri and Columbia rivers, and of the numerous tribes of Indians that dwell on their banks. He traversed the Rocky Mountains in every direction, found out the best hunting grounds and the best passes through the mountains. The salt lake, salt plains, and caves of solid salt were familiar to him. He had visited whole tribes of Indians that had never before seen a white man or a horse — people more rude and barbarous probably than any that have ever been described. There is no written notice of these people anywhere except in the notes of Mr. Smith.

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He was a close and accurate observer and a student of nature. He thought nothing in the works of God unworthy of his notice, and from constant observation he had amassed an immense fund of knowledge, exceedingly useful and interesting in every branch of natural history. More than this, by his intimate knowledge of the geography of that immense tract of country, he had found that all the maps of it were full of errors, and worse than useless as guides to travellers. Compare his travels with those of all who had gone before him, of all who have published anything of that country, and it will appear how much, I had almost said infinitely, greater his opportunities have been than all theirs, however great may have been their pretensions.

We have read with delight and instruction, expeditions and travels to the mountains, and the Pacific Ocean. The difficulties and dangers to be encountered, the perilous adventures, and hairbreadth escapes of which we have read and heard, have thrown over that whole land a fearful kind of romance — and the hunters themselves we have looked on as most daring, intrepid, persevering men; and so, indeed, many of them are. But where shall we find another who has braved and overcome more dangers and perils than Smith? Where one who has suffered so much, and still with an unbroken spirit? Much as we feel for Capt. Franklin and his party, in their travels to the Polar Seas, the Hudson Bay Company, with whom Smith spent a winter, and who were acquainted with the circumstances of both, will tell us that the exertions and sufferings of Smith were not exceeded by those of Capt. Franklin.

If there is any merit in untiring perseverance and terrible suffering in the prosecution of trade, in searching out new channels of commerce, in tracing out the courses of unknown rivers, in discovering the resources of unknown regions, in delineating the characters, situation, numbers, and habits of unknown nations, Smith's name must be enrolled with those of Franklin and Parry, of Clapperton and Park.

Is there one, then, who would detract one iota from his deserts? Can there be found one who, in danger, distress, and want shared his hospitality in the mountains, that would appropriate to himself the least portion of honor due to Smith, or would refuse him just praise and gratitude? For the honor of our country, let us trust there is not one.

It will certainly be gratifying to our literary men, as well as to all those engaged in the fur trade, to know that Smith took notes of all his travels and adventures, and that these notes have been copied, preparatory for the press. There may be some omissions in them, for reasons which will probably appear in the book itself. That country is attracting, every day, more and more attention. And particularly at this time, when people begin to talk of making an establishment near the mouth of the Columbia, where Smith spent a winter, and from whose communication to the secretary of war is derived the most authentic information we have of Fort Vancouver, such information as may be obtained from Smith's notes must be of immense interest and importance. This, however, is not all; convinced, as Smith was, of the inaccuracy of all the maps of that country, and of the little value they would be to hunters and travellers, he has, with the assistance of his partners, Sublitt and Jackson, and of Mr. S. Parkman, made a new, large, and beautiful map, in which are embodied all that is correct of preceding maps, the known tracks of former travellers, his own extensive travels, the situation and numbers of various Indian tribes, and much other valuable information. This map is now probably the best, extant, of the Rocky Mountains and the country on both sides, from the States to the Pacific. . . . It will be published, and exactly as Smith left it. This is perfectly proper, for it is very doubtful whether there is a man in our country, who is competent to mend it, where it may be erroneous, or supply its deficiencies where any exist.

A narrative of five or six years' residence on the banks of the Columbia, by Mr. R. Cox, is announced as about appearing in London. The American public will doubtless receive it greedily. No map is mentioned in connection with his work. It gives us pleasure to know that the whole of that region is about to be unlocked to the knowledge of the civilized world, and that one of our own countrymen is to have so much of the honor of doing it.

The circumstances of Mr. Smith's death, as nearly as they could be collected, are the following:

He left St. Louis on the 10th of April, 1831, at the head of a party of Santa Fe traders. On the 27th of May, about three hundred miles from Santa Fe, the party had been nearly three days without water, and as many as could be spared were sent in different directions in search of it. Smith, with Mr. Fitzpatrick, went forward in a south direction, the same the party were then travelling. They came to a deep hollow, in which water had usually been found by former parties, but it was then dry. Smith left Fitzpatrick to wait till the party should come up, with directions to dig for water, while he would push on a few miles further south, to some broken ground, visible in that direction. He was last seen, by a spy-glass, about three miles from Fitzpatrick. It seems that he came to the head of a stream, which was afterwards ascertained to be the Cimeron, and imprudently descended to it. He was discovered by some Indians, who kept themselves concealed from him, till they were sure of cutting off his retreat. He discovered them approaching, when they were within half a mile's distance; and knowing that it was too late for flight, he rode directly towards them. At a short distance, they halted at his order, and made efforts to frighten his horse, wishing to fire on him when he was turned from them. After conversing among themselves about fifteen minutes, in Spanish, which Mr. Smith did not understand, they succeeded in scaring and turning his horse, when they immediately fired. A ball entered his body, near the left shoulder. Smith turned, levelled his rifle, and with the same ball shot the chief and another Indian, who was immediately behind him, and before he could get command of his pistols, they rushed upon him, and despatched him with their spears. His body was probably thrown into a ravine, as nothing could be found of it, when search was made for it two days afterwards. This information was obtained of the Indians, by a Spanish Indian trader, after the party arrived at Santa Fe.

All who were intimately acquainted with Mr. Smith must look upon his death as a public calamity. No man was better able to give the government information of the character, numbers, and strength of the different Indian tribes, of the value of the lands they inhabit, the value of the lands of the Columbia, the best places for settlements, the resources of the new settlers, should a colony be established there, the dangers they would have to encounter, and the best means to meet them. He could have proposed practicable plans for ameliorating the condition of the Indians, infinitely superior to the theories of kind hearted philanthropists, who are little acquainted with the Indian character; for he was fully aware of many causes operating against their improvements, which are not sufficiently estimated, if at all; such as the pernicious effects of different hunting and trading companies with opposing interests; of

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English and Spanish influence, as opposed to us; of their perpetual hostilities among themselves. We need the experience of such men, in devising any plans of civilization among them.

In reflecting on the character of Mr. Smith, when we recollect how and where, and in what company he had spent the last ten years of his life, we are filled with admiration and delight. There was none of the uncouth roughness of a hunter — he was gentle and affable. Exposed as he had been, as captain or chief of a party, in that lawless country, to many and great temptations, he held fast his integrity; with his ears constantly filled with the language of the profane and dissolute, no evil communication proceeded out of his mouth. He was exact in his requisitions of duty, determined and persevering, always confident of success. When his party was in danger, Mr. Smith was always among the foremost to meet it, and the last to fly; those who saw him on shore, at the Riccaree fight, in 1823, can attest to the truth of this assertion. In all his dealings with the Indians, he was strictly honorable, and always endeavored to give them favorable ideas of the whites. He made it a sacred rule, never to molest them, except in defence of his own life and property, and those of his party. He was kind, obliging, and generous to a fault. Without being connected with any church, he was a Christian. The lone wilderness had been his place of meditation, and the mountain top his altar. He made religion an active, practical principle, from the duties of which nothing could seduce him. He affirmed it to be "the one thing needful," and his greatest happiness; yet was he modest, never obtrusive, charitable, "without guile."

Such is a feeble sketch of J. S. Smith, a man whom none could approach without respect, or know without esteem. And though he fell under the spears of the savages, and his body has glutted the prairie wolf, and none can tell where his bones are bleaching, he must not be forgotten. One, at least, who knew his worth, and who had listened with childlike delight to his tales of daring deeds, and perilous adventure, can never forget him. But after all, his character as a traveller — as the greatest American traveller — must depend upon his works. When they are published, exactly as he left them, there are thousands in our country, who, thirsting for more knowledge of the "farthest west," will delight to render him all the honor that is justly due him.

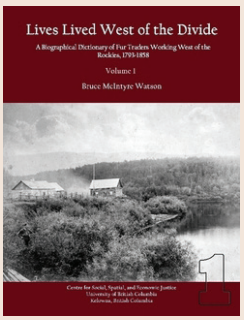
Alton, March, 1832.

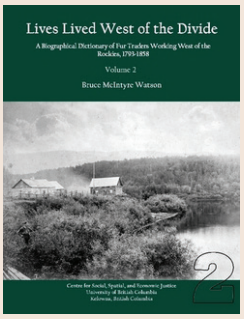
Book Review

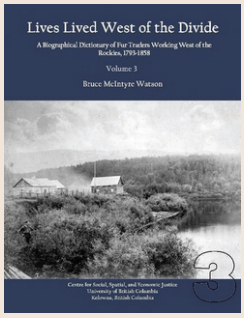
Lives Lived West of the Divide:
A Biographical Dictionary of Fur Traders Working West of the Rockies, 1793-1858,

by Bruce McIntyre Watson (Kelowna, B.C.: Centre for Social, Spatial, and Economic Justice, University of British Columbia, 2010). Available from Lulu.com in two formats: Paperback, 3 volumes, $13.50 per volume; or as a free eBook (PDF) download (1274 pages).

Reviewed by Lethene Parks







This book is a magnificent resource. I had the privilege of meeting Bruce Watson during the time he was researching this book. He had a vision of a story he believed needed telling, and in this work he has succeeded, and then some. The story he wanted to tell is "the story of those resilient individuals who were part of the fur trade which, during the first half of the 19th century, extended from northern British Columbia to southern Oregon. The subsequent imposition of international and regional boundaries . . . fragmented and erased from view this once vibrant era which this book reconstructs and returns to life."

To research this story, Watson spent most of his time for over twenty years, traveling to archives from the Orkney Islands to the Hawaiian Islands, and many places in between, seeking original records and documents. He traveled extensively in western Canada and the northwestern United States, talking to local historians and descendants of fur trade families. He paid for most of the research and travel out of his own pocket.

The book includes brief biographies of nearly 3,300 fur trade employees. For the most part, the information comes from original sources, supplemented by information from secondary sources and from descendants of fur traders. These biographies, most of which are very brief, take up about two-thirds of the book. But there is more: a summary of the people involved in the fur trade, both the indigenous peoples and the various European, American, and mixed-race groups; a list of the various fur trade companies that operated on the Pacific slopes and the years in which they operated; a list of all the fur trade posts in the area, when they were built, and by whom; diagrams of typical fur trade posts and the structures they included; information on equipment built for transportation, from snowshoes to ships. Then comes a capsule history of the fur trade and details of life at a fur trade post.

Several appendixes list the fur trade posts, the ships that served the fur trade, medical instruments and medicines used at fur trade posts, and lists of good that fur traders ordered from "outside" for themselves and their families. The Hudson's Bay Company had a circulating library, and there is a list of the books it contained, as well of lists of titles in several eminent fur traders' personal libraries. There is also a list of fur traders who became settlers in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, and British Columbia. And finally, there is a glossary, a general index, a biography index, and an extensive list of sources.

Everything you ever wanted to know about the western fur trade is here, and if it isn't, where to find it probably will be. There is a lot here for the price, and I know I will referring to these volumes often.

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Jedediah Smith Society membership is open to all who wish to join in support of research, preservation and information about the 1st American arriving overland 1826 and other California pioneers of the 18th & 19th centuries.

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An Appeal for Donations - Are there others that would consider this?

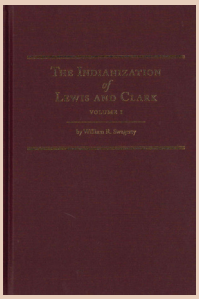
One of our Board of Directors and past President, John Talbot, recently donated $5,000 to the Scholarship Fund in hope that this action would stimulate others to follow suit! Thank you John.

Captain Meriwether Lewis depicted in his Indian outfit presented to him by Chief Cameahwait. Watercolor on paper by Charles B. J. Févret de Saint-Mémin (1807). Collection of the New-York Historical Society. Accession number 1971.125.

THE INDIANIZATION OF LEWIS AND CLARK

By William R. Swagerty
$90.00 Cloth/2 Volume Set • 978-0-87062-413-1
836 pages

Although some have attributed the success of the Lewis and Clark expedition primarily to gunpowder and gumption, historian William R. Swagerty demonstrates in this two-volume set that adopting Indian ways of procuring, processing, and transporting food and gear was crucial to the survival of the Corps of Discovery. *The Indianiaztion of Lewis and Clark* retraces the well-known trail of America's most famous explorers as a journey into the heart of Native America — a case study of successful material adaptation and clutural borrowing.



(*above*) Soldier of the Corps of Discovery in clothing and with gear as described by Meriwether Lewis from lists made in Philadelphia, 1803.

Jedediah Smith Society
P.O. Box 7937
Stockton, CA 95267

Dues will expire Jan 1st