



# CASTOR CANADENSIS

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“SMITTY” :

## The Living Legacy of Jedediah and Peter Smith

By Troy S. Tuggle

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*The Holt-Atherton Special Collections, University of the Pacific,  
Stockton, CA. Also a special thanks to the author, Troy Tuggle, for  
his kind cooperation and generosity in sharing additional interesting  
information, making this reprint a pleasurable experience. (Editor, J.J.M.)*

Already I knew something of the man I was about to meet; one thing apparent from our correspondence was his genteel sense of humor. More important though, he was the great-grandson of Peter Smith, younger brother of fur trapper and explorer Jedediah Strong Smith.<sup>1</sup> After having met and spent some time with Smitty (the preferred nickname of Julian Smith Bacon, Jr.), J.J. Warner's description of Jed Smith somehow came to mind: “. . . I met a well-bred, intelligent, and Christian gentleman.”<sup>2</sup> With Smitty the latter adjective required a liberal definition, but time never altered my feeling about the appropriateness of the overall sentiment.

On first impression my interviewee seemed reserved but friendly. Soon he was talking freely in that deep, mellow, dignified voice. Had I been able to foresee the future that day in 1973, I would have known that this was only the first of several talks, visits, and exchanges of letters. Most gratifying of all was Smitty's kind and thoughtful manner. The many strands of the Smith-Bacon story began to come together, and realized that this lean, greying, six-foot tall man was the vital link, probably the only link, to understanding an important historic family.

Several of Smitty's traits seemed to me to resemble those of his great-granduncle Jed. Both, for example, had a good deal of energy and enterprise. With a longtime friend and business partner, Smitty seems to have worked a near miracle completely renovating a decrepit old house. When it was purchased, the lumber was dilapidated, the plaster hung down, and the roof leaked; today that old structure is Smitty's modest but attractive beach home perched high on a cliff overlooking Newport Harbor at Corona Del Mar, along the coast south of Los Angeles. In earlier years at least, the teachings of John Wesley and Methodism add another parallel between Smitty and Jed and his kindred. Some of Smitty's close friendships date from his some fifteen years singing tenor in the choir of the First United Methodist Church of Hollywood.

To learn more of Smitty's family background, let us go back to 1913. Ruth Burns, a young student from Santa Ana was attending Judson's Art Studio in what is today Highland Park (then Garvanza). Down the same avenue was the home of



Smitty on his front deck overlooking Newport Harbor - August 1957.  
(Courtesy of the author)

Walter R. Bacon, a prominent Los Angeles attorney, where Ruth boarded. A romance blossomed between Ruth and the Bacon's younger son, Julian Smith. The couple married New Year's Eve, 1914; in a year came daughter Jessie Evelyn, and on July 15, 1919, Julian, Jr.—Smitty—was born.<sup>3</sup>

The lady of the Bacon household, affectionately called “Mama Evelyn” was the youngest daughter of Peter and Juline Smith. Although Evelyn died in 1921, Smitty heard much about her. Years later, Ruth wrote that Jedediah's niece, her mother-in-law, had told me of her experiences.<sup>4</sup> Naturally, from a very early age, Smitty and his sister were steeped in the family lore and tradition surrounding Peter and “Uncle” Jedediah Smith.

Born in Long Beach, Smitty was reared in the Baldwin Park district of Los Angeles (a city he pronounces with the hard “g” sound). His father managed a real estate development in homes and agricultural land in partnership with Grandfather Bacon. While Smitty attended Belmont High School in Los Angeles, he was encouraged by a teacher to display the family-prized Jedediah Smith memorabilia.<sup>5</sup> After graduation and two years working for the J.J. Newberry department store, he went to work for Lockheed Aircraft Corporation in Burbank. His career interrupted by Pearl Harbor, Smitty spent three years in the United States Coast Guard, including a year and a half aboard the *U.S.S. Glendale* patrolling the isles of the South Pacific, and saw duty on both the east and west coasts.

The salt seems never to have left Smitty's veins. His large windowed sun-porch is the “front deck,” and the upstairs

### **“SMITTY”: The Living Legacy of Jedediah and Peter Smith**

bedroom the “crow’s nest.” While we were talking, almost any vessel seen coming in or going out of Newport Harbor was cause for binoculars to go up and occasion for a few comments about the craft in nautical terms.

After the war, Smitty went back to work at Lockheed, where he remained for a total of 34 years until he retired in August 1974. His last position was as a material control analyst, responsible for estimating cost and time of arrival of component aircraft parts. One result of retiring, he told me, was a noticeable improvement of distance vision once he no longer needed to squint to read the fine-print computer reports. Off hours for many years found Smitty working on rentals with partners.

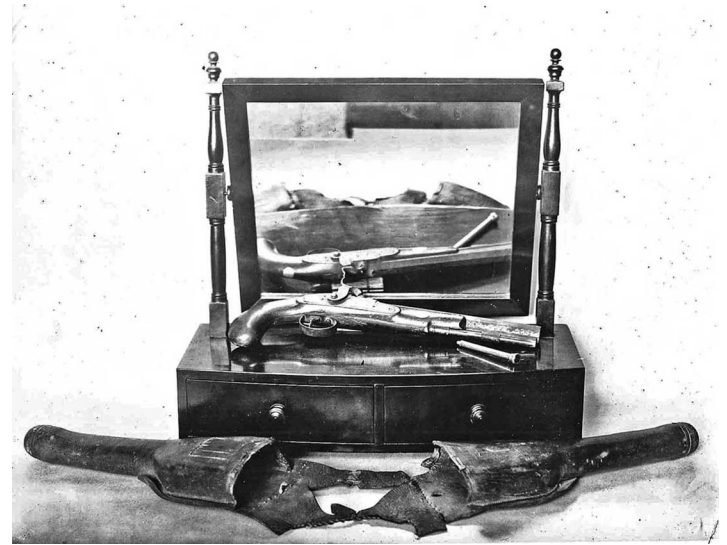
Smitty seems understandably proud of his ancestry, while keeping an admirable perspective about it. “I am delighted someone outside the family is interested,” he said. Characteristically modest about what he knows and remembers about family history, Smitty laments: “I’m another generation down the line, and it’s a shame I wasn’t always listening. You know, my parents would be talking about their friends and relatives in these pictures, the things so familiar to them. I do recall some things, but it didn’t occur to me to write any of it down.” Fortunately, Smitty does know and can remember, for he is the last of his immediate family. His father died February 20, 1964; gone are his sister, Jessie Bacon Bossert, and his mother Ruth, one of whose paintings of fruit still graces a wall of his home.<sup>6</sup>

Some time ago Smitty found himself the sole heir to a garage full, and more, of family-related materials: letters, pictures, papers, and assorted documents of every description. “They saved everything!” he bemoans good-naturedly. “There were boxes, and boxes, and boxes . . . You should have seen the bundles of papers held together with rusty paper clips, old rubber bands . . .” It was Smitty’s painful duty to sort through and decide what to do with each item: what to keep, what to throw away, and how to dispose of the rest. This task was not taken lightly, and to Smitty’s everlasting credit, everything of any historical value or significance was saved.

Among the heirlooms was a mahogany shaving case or cabinet (sometimes referred to as a “colonial” dressing case) which had always been kept protectively inside the Bacon home. For years it was atop an old-fashioned highboy chest of drawers in the bedroom. This memento had belonged to none other than Jedediah Smith. Family tradition holds that it signified Jed was a clean-shaven mountain man, in contrast to most others of this rugged, often unkept breed. The relic was found, say family documents, by Jed’s brothers Peter and Austin Smith in one of the wagons on the ill-fated Santa Fe caravan where Jed lost his life. The shaving case was refinished many years ago by a furniture repairman family friend named Ratty. Any changes he made from the way it was originally are but slight. The silver-backed mirror now has faded and tarnished with the passing of the years. The dove-tail construction in the sides of the two drawers denotes the fine workmanship.

Two tiny snuff boxes with the shaving case all these years measure three by two by one inches. One is made of tortoise shell; the other, somewhat less ornate, is of French design with

a picture of a woman on its lid. Finished in lacquer, the latter is deep reddish brown, the color of burnt umber. Since Jedediah is not believed to have used tobacco, the boxes may have been trade goods or, more probably, may have kept dry such things as caps, powder, needle and thread, or medicine needed by mountain men.<sup>7</sup>



**Photo of Jedediah’s Smith mahogany shaving chest taken in 1912, showing his now missing pistol.**  
(Courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society)

Sometime later, these items, together with other family papers, documents, and pictures, were taken by Smitty, personally, the several hundred miles north and donated to the Jedediah Smith Society headquartered at the University of the Pacific. The paper material is neatly filed in manila folders stored in a blue-gray documents box labeled “Smith-Bacon Family Collection.”

Smitty brought down from upstairs stacks of papers, letters, old newspapers – some yellow and brittle with age – pictures, and documents of various sorts, laying them on a large table. Picking something up, he would tell its significance as he saw it in relation to this family or Jedediah Smith. Among the pictures were several of his grandmother Evelyn, one a large charcoal portrait. Also there were scenes inside and out of the Garvanza residence. “Never in my life,” he commented, “have I seen so many pictures of our house!” There were also photos of friends and relations, known and unknown.

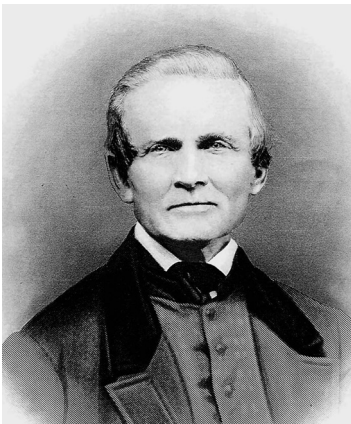
Smitty’s grandmother, Evelyn Frances Bacon, was born July 22, 1857, the youngest of four daughters to Peter and Juline Babcock Smith, who had married at Ashtabula, Ohio in 1836. Three of the girls including Evelyn were born at Mount Pleasant, Iowa, where the Smiths maintained their longest continuous residence. Information about Sara, the eldest daughter, will be contained in a forthcoming article about the Jedediah Smith pistol. Virtually nothing is known of the second daughter, Josephine or “Josie,” who is believed to have died giving birth to a daughter in 1871; neither is it known whether or not her baby survived.<sup>8</sup>

Lina, the third daughter, was born in California after Peter “heeded the call of gold,” and moved his family to Jackson in the Mother Lode. Family tradition holds that Lina was



## Smitty's Family Tree

Jedediah Smith;     PETER SMITH married Juline Babcock  
|  
daughters: Sara; Josephine; Lina (married George Thummel); daughter, EVELYN married Walter Bacon  
|  
son, Fran; son, JULIAN married Ruth Burns  
|  
daughter, Jessie; son, JULIAN (SMITTY)



**Peter Smith, 1810-1879,**  
**Jedediah's younger brother.**  
(Courtesy of the author)

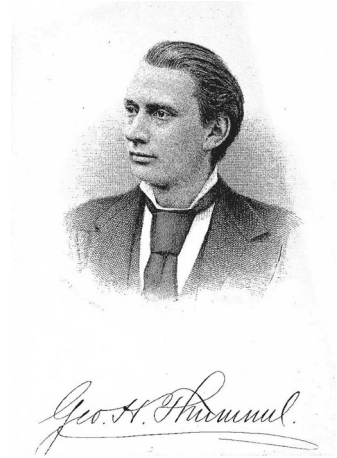
moved to Pasadena, California in 1883. One of Smitty's tattered clippings reports Lina's death September 7, 1888, at age 36. Thummel remarried and became a noted Omaha jurist; for the remainder of his life he kept on cordial terms with the relatives of his first wife and maintained an active interest in Jedediah

Smith.<sup>10</sup> His correspondents included E.D. Smith of Meade, Kansas, grandson of Jed's elder brother Ralph and author of an unpublished biography of Jed; he also met with the Nebraska poet and historian, John Neihardt, Jed's first published biographer.<sup>11</sup>

One intriguing tale which Thummel attributed to "Mother Smith" (Juline) was that Jedediah took his maps, charts, and manuscripts to New York to place at the disposal of Washington Irving. According to this account, probably told Juline by her

Irving. One good candidate is Robert Campbell, trusted friend and confidant of both Jed and William Sublette. Campbell was named the first executor of Smith's estate, afterwards was Sublette's business partner, and was an informant for Irving in *Bonneville Adventures*. Campbell and Sublette visited New York in 1832, and Sublette returned the next winter. Another possible go-between was William H. Ashley, Jed's former employer, partner, and the man he named to handle his estate. Ashley served in the House of Representatives during this period, and Sublette was frequently in touch with him for business reasons. It may have been that all three men – Campbell, Ashley, and Sublette – each of whom had been quite close to Jed, decided that giving his documents to Irving would best bring them before a public eager for information about the West.<sup>14</sup> Still another courier could have been Ira Smith, Jed's younger brother, who wrested the administration of the estate away from Ashley. Ira, too, traveled east during the correct time period.

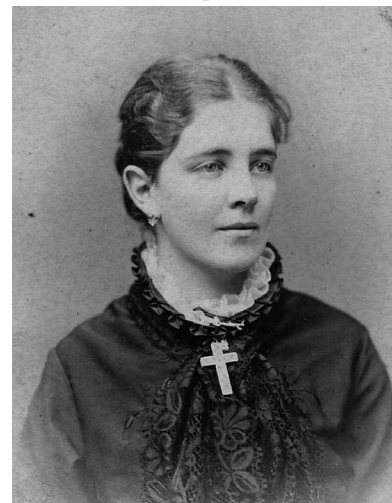
Early in December 1835, while Irving was completing his Astoria manuscript, he lost money in insurance stock because of



**George H. Thummel married Lina Smith. Although she died rather young, letters indicate he retained a keen interest in the life of her uncle Jed.**  
(Courtesy of Julian Smith Bacon, Jr.)

a major fire in New York. It is not clear, however, whether his residence was affected. Unless or until other, indisputable documentation is found, the story of the disposition of Smith's records must rest here.<sup>15</sup>

Like her sisters, Evelyn, the younger daughter and Smitty's grandmother attended Iowa Wesleyan College. By 1871 both the Smiths and a family named Bacon lived in Grand Island, Nebraska.



**Mrs. Evelyn Smith Bacon.**  
(Courtesy of Julian Smith Bacon, Jr.)



**Evelyn (left) and Lina (right), two of Peter Smith's four daughters.**  
(Courtesy of Julian Smith Bacon, Jr.)

husband Peter, Irving's home soon burned down with all the Jed Smith materials in it.<sup>12</sup> There is, however, a problem with this account, for Irving was still living in Europe during Jed's last years. By 1832, though, the year following Jed's death, Irving was traveling the West gathering material for his books on the frontier and fur trade.<sup>13</sup> If there is a kernel of truth in this story, an intermediary may well have transferred Smith's papers to

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**Bacon home at Garvanza (now Highland Park) Mama Evelyn (Peter Smith's daughter) seated at left on front porch.**  
(Courtesy of Julian Smith Bacon, Jr.)

November 24, 1880, Evelyn married Walter Bacon, a lumberyard worker studying the law. Their wedding was a festive occasion attended by many friends and relations.<sup>16</sup> The town newspaper even listed each gift to the bride and groom beside the donor's name. From this union Smitty's Uncle Fran was born in 1889, and his father in 1891, shortly after the Bacons moved to southern California.<sup>17</sup>

Both Bacon sons were handsome young men. Francis Romaine (“Uncle Fran”) married Molly Bishop from Galt, California. Their three girls, Smitty's cousins, were Evelyn Louise Kramer, Mary Frances Bongiolatti, and Dorothy May Smith. Francis Bacon was an attorney for a time in partnership with his father in San Francisco. He left law during the depression, working first in the hardware business, later as a credit manager for Signal Oil and Gas Company in Los Angeles. In 1954 he donated a sizable number of Peter Smith letters and other materials to the Bancroft Library at the University of California, including the brief diary Peter kept during his dramatic journey alone to Guanajuato, Mexico, in 1843. Fran Bacon died in 1963.<sup>18</sup>

Smitty's father, Julian Smith Bacon, Sr., called “Smith” or “Mike,” apparently was a quiet man and much reminded his mother of her father, Peter. Born July 8, 1891 in Los Angeles, he studied agriculture at the Davis campus of the University of California. In 1939 the family attended the dedication of a marker commemorating a Jed Smith camp site at Mud Springs, near San Dimas, California.

“My grandmother Evelyn was a very strong woman,” observed Smitty. “One thing, she seems to have had means independent of Walter.” Smitty's mother once told him how she “hitched up a horse and buggy and drove clear out to” the Coachella Valley where his father was farming near Thermal. “She loved the Indians,” he added, “and would talk to them, just as she did later on with the Eskimos when the family spent some time around Kodiak, Alaska.” The grandparents brought back an Eskimo baby casket made of solid wood which they kept in their front room. “My dad kept it by his chair,” recalled Smitty. “Well, it gave me the ‘willies,’ and I sold it. It gave me

the ‘willies,’” he repeated as if for emphasis.<sup>19</sup>

Smitty himself remembers Grandfather Walter, since he lived eleven years longer than Evelyn. Although there are suggestions that they lived apart some of the time in her last years, on Evelyn's obituary notice is written, apparently in Walter's scrawling hand: “Our's is the sorrow, Sweetheart. Our's the sorrow, and your's the Crown!” Walter lived long enough to see the Great Depression and suffer some tragic financial reverses as a consequence. He died October 1, 1932.<sup>20</sup>

Not so many years ago the Bacons still had Peter Smith's bedroom set, brought all the way out from Grand Island. Everything could not be saved, and quite understandably this was eventually sold. Something else once belonging to Jedediah now missing is a dark silver, collapsible pencil. A 1911 picture showed it lying on the mahogany shaving case, and one of Mama Evelyn's photos shows her wearing this keepsake on a necklace.

One picture in Smitty's collection shows a trimly-bearded gentleman, “Uncle Paul” Heffleman, the son of Evelyn's sister Sara. Born in Washington, Iowa, on August 27, 1866, he was a onetime newspaper reporter and a scholarly man interested in Jedediah. In declining years, he was looked after by Smitty's father, who assisted him in his affairs. Consequently, the family came to possess remnants of Paul's letters, writings,



**In a wooded setting, believed to be in the Santa Cruz Mtns., are youthful Julian (Smitty's father) right, Uncle Fran foreground and Mama Evelyn seated. (Courtesy of Julian Smith Bacon, Jr.)**

and genealogical memoranda, including correspondence with George Thummel and Walter Bacon discussing Jedediah and speculating about what happened to his effects. One of Paul's repeated lamentations was that a fire burned his homestead at Tujunga Canyon north of Los Angeles, September 13, 1913, destroying two family Bibles, books, papers, and documents.<sup>21</sup> He died in Los Angeles in 1960.

Time had come to leave Smitty at Corona Del Mar. As I bade him goodbye that day back in 1973 I couldn't help but feel that this was as close as I would ever come in *this* life to meeting



## “SMITTY”: The Living Legacy of Jedediah and Peter Smith



**Dedication of Jed Smith campsite marker at Mud Springs, CA, in 1939. Smitty's father Julian at left; Smitty, sister Jessie and his mother Ruth at right. (Courtesy of Julian Smith Bacon, Jr.)**

Jedediah face to face. On trips and in armchair imagination I had “joined” Smitty’s noteworthy ancestor “on the trail,” had thrilled to his adventures and achievements fraught with danger, but which were partially eclipsed by those coming soon after, as is so often the case. And here was his brother’s descendant before me. Falteringly, I tried to put all this into words for my host. A modest smile with perhaps just a trace of “Smithian” pride crossed his face. Except for the oft-printed old woodcut likeness said to have been sketched from memory by a friend after death, there are no known contemporary pictures of Jed. The thought thus naturally dawned: Yes, Smitty surely does bear a remarkable resemblance to Jedediah Smith!



**Smitty & parents.**  
(Courtesy of Julian Smith Bacon, Jr.)

### NOTES

1. Jedediah Strong Smith (1799-1831) needs no introduction to most readers. This trapper-entrepreneur, whose base was St. Louis and was primarily engaged in quest of beaver fur, literally crisscrossed the unmapped Western frontier of his day; in the end, he earned for himself an early grave and slow posthumous recognition for his exploratory achievements which paralleled his commercial activities.
2. J.J. or Jonathan Trumbull Warner, quoted in J.M. Guinn, *Captain Jedediah S. Smith*, the Pathfinder of the Sierra, (Annual Publications, Historical Society of Southern California, 111, 1896) 46.
3. Newspaper Obituary (Highland Park Herald, California, September 2, 1921) 6.
4. Ruth W. Burns to Leland Case correspondence, 1967 (Jedediah Smith Collection, MS 18, Box 3, Holt-Atherton Special Collection, University of the Pacific, Stockton, CA) hereinafter HASC, UOP.
5. “Some of (Jed) Smith’s personal belongings were on display in the fall of 1937. Among them were a mahogany shaving cabinet... the exhibit was arranged by Julian Bacon, Jedediah’s great nephew who is a junior at Belmont High School,” Dr. Violet G. Stone, *A Knight in Buckskin: Jedediah Strong Smith*, (California History Nugget, V, November 1937) 63. This reference led to the writer’s efforts to locate Julian Smith Bacon, Jr. – “Smitty”.
6. The family plot is at Angelus Rosedale Cemetery, where stately palms line narrow streets and markers fan out in all directions, located at W. Washington Blvd. and S. Normandie Ave., Los Angeles, CA.
7. The writer is indebted to Hugh Hayes of Stockton for elaborating upon the practical uses to which the Mountain Man could put the snuff boxes.
8. A widow and infant son are mentioned. (Council Bluffs Daily Nonpareil, July 10, 1890).
9. Involved in a “county seat war” with Mokelumne Hill, Jackson became the county seat of newly-formed Amador County in April 1852, just weeks before Lina’s birth. Remi Nadeau, *Ghost Towns and Mining Camps of California*, (Ward Richie Press, Los Angeles, 1965) 78-79.
10. On Thummel’s life and career, see J. Sterling Morton, *Illustrated History of Nebraska*, (Jacob North, Lincoln, 1907) 386-387.
11. Ezra Delos Smith, *The Life and Adventures of Jedediah S. Smith, A Knight of the West, Path Finder of the Mountain Country*, (Connelley Collection, Manuscript Div., Kansas State Historical Society) also copy in Bancroft Library and HASC, UOP. John G. Neihardt, *Splendid Wayfaring*, (Macmillan, New York, 1920, rpt. Univ. of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE, 1970).
12. Correspondence: Thummel to Heffleman, April 14, 1923 and Thummel to Bacon, March 9, 1927 (Smith-Bacon Family Collection, HASC, UOP).
13. Introductory Essay, John Francis McDermott, *A Tour on the Prairies*, (University of Oklahoma, Norman, 1956) xvi-xvii.
14. “Mr. Robert Campbell, from whom we have most of these facts...” Irving’s “Bonneville Adventures” in *The Works of Washington Irving*, (Peter F. Collier, New York) 314, 283. John E. Sunder, *Bill Sublette, Mountain Man*, (Univ. of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1959) 64-66, 113, 119, 132. Dale L. Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West*, (Univ. of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1964) 349, 388. “Last Will and Testament of Jedediah Smith,” April 31, 1831, Parkman Papers, MB 10:7, Bancroft Library.
15. Several Irving references where studied and inquires made to two Irving scholars: Andrew B. Myers, Fordham University, 12/06/1978; Ralph M. Aderman, University of Wisconsin, 02/02/1979.
16. Walter R. Bacon, born Sept. 14, 1857, Mexico, Miami County, Indiana, son of Francis Marion and Sarah Felton (Griswold) Bacon. Studied law in the office of Thummel and Platt, Grand Island: J.C. Bates, *History of the Bench and Bar of California*, (San Francisco, 1912) 218. “Marriage Certificate,”: Walter Bacon and Evelyn Smith, November 24, 1880, Grand Island, NE, Smith-Bacon Family Collection, HASC, UOP.
17. Julian Smith Bacon, Jr., March 31, 1978.
18. *Bancroftiana*, (#12, May 1955, published occasionally by the Friends of the Bancroft Library, U.C. Berkeley) 1.
19. Smitty, taped interview, August 16, 1975.
20. Baldwin Park Bulletin, October 7, 1932.
21. A lengthy letter to his niece about Jedediah and family genealogy is indicative: Heffleman to Evelyn (Wright) Messenger, Jan. 25, 1945, (Writer’s copy courtesy of Mrs. Messenger).

## INVITE A FRIEND TO JOIN

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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### Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor

This is my response to the letter in the last JSS Newsletter from Jim Hardee with comments on my article on the 1826 Fur Trade Rendezvous. I have great respect for Mr. Hardee as a historian of the fur trade and his position as editor of the Rocky Mountain Fur Trade Journal.

I agree with his comment where he states that researchers should examine the field to verify their statements. I believe that no one, including Dale Morgan, should be taken for granted. Although I have tremendous respect for him, Morgan is not infallible. My statement about Morgan was not that he shouldn't be questioned regarding his statements of fact but that one should proceed with caution when challenging his conclusions about a person or event based on his research. Proceeding with caution is not the same as giving his work a pass. I believe that all writers of history should do their own research regardless of the sources used and that all sources should be investigated to the extent possible. In this instance, my point was that Morgan was correct about Hyrum as the site of the 1826 Rendezvous.

I accept his 2nd point regarding William Ashley and the annual rendezvous. I could have worded that comment more clearly in the manner he suggests. There are other researchers who credit Ashley as the person who conceived the idea of an annual rendezvous. In my view, this is not a significant point in terms of the purpose of the article.

In terms of his 3rd point, I was aware of another possible location of the Bear Lake rendezvous. However, I did not want to choose the location most favorable to Hyrum to seem to be piling on in arguing for Hyrum over Cove. Therefore, I used the Rendezvous Beach site as a more neutral location which still made the point about distance. I was not intending to attempt to support that location over the Covington one as the true location of the Bear Lake Rendezvous. Just making the point that using Rendezvous Beach does not favor Cove over Hyrum. I agree that historical monuments have been placed in wrong locations and with inaccurate info many times for all sorts of reasons. I used the "as the crow flies" distance measurement because the statements about Cove that I was refuting used that measurement. My point was that Cove is not a shorter distance to Bear Lake than Hyrum so it cannot be an argument in support of Cove.

I am pleased that the supposed Campbell journal has turned out to be a lost journal of William Ashley as is shown in an article in the 2014 issue of the Rocky Mountain Fur Trade Journal. I did not know that when I wrote my article. I do recommend that all readers purchase a copy of that publication as it has many interesting articles.

Sincerely,  
Stephen Darley



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Dues will expire Jan 1<sup>st</sup>

