



# CASTOR CANADENSIS

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

SUMMER 2015

## The Fur Trade

*(Continued from Spring 2015)*

BY HOWARD C. LEWIS

Consider the handicap of the North West Company and the Scotch and French Canadians working out of Montreal. They were taking trade goods to the area of La Pas, about 100 miles north of Lake Winnipeg, near the connections to the major Canadian waterways. The North Westerns were in direct competition with the Hudson Bay men working out of York Factory on Hudson Bay. The French had 1,500 miles further to travel, with 34 portages, this can be translated into 5 months travel versus 45 days travel. In the end, it was this economic handicap, as well as the war of 1812 and the bloody fur trade skirmishes around 1820, that helped force the 1821 merger of the North West Company into Hudson Bay Company.

Consider also the tremendous advantages of water transportation to both the North West Company and Hudson Bay Company. They could take a canoe from Lake Superior to the Arctic Ocean going east of the Rockies, with only two significant portages.

1. Grand portage — 9 miles from the Superior Lake drainage — Pideon River — into the Lake Winnipeg system.
2. McKenzie portage of 12 miles from the Athabasca River system into the McKenzie drainage.

Keep in mind that the North West Company and Hudson Bay Company used freight canoes capable of carrying 10 men—paddlers, plus each canoe carried 4 tons of freight.

An interesting example, in U.S. waters, Ramsey Crooks, Chief Executive of Astor's American Fur Company, could go from St. Louis to Montreal in a canoe, using only minor portages. AND, he had the choice of six routes: Plus, with one additional portage from the St. Lawrence Rivers into Lake Champlain and the Hudson River system, he could go on to New York. All by canoe.

Similarly, John McLoughlin, the chief HBC factor at Vancouver, Washington, could go to York Factory on Hudson Bay with only one significant portage, near present-day Jasper, Alberta, where it is only 13 miles from the upper Columbia River to the headwaters of the Athabasca.

The trappers in the Western U.S. were faced with very different transportation problems. The main thoroughfare—the Missouri River—was steep with fast water. Also, the shores were lined with unfriendly Indians. It was William Ashley who first shifted to ground transportation. He freighted trade goods and necessities from St. Louis over South Pass to the Green River using mules and horses as pack animals. This meant at least 40-50 men with 100-200 animals.

Think about this, assume 6 ton of trade goods. That's 12,000 pounds. For prolonged travel every day, even 200 lbs. per animal would be a heavy load. That's 60 animals just for the trade goods. Now, assume 50 men—and their supplies for 70 days on the trail. At 2 lbs. per man per day, that's 3,500 man-days or 7,000 more lbs. or 35 more horses, with still an additional 50 horses for the men, or a total of 145 horses, not counting extras for injuries or sickness. And that does not consider the bedrolls, cooking equipment, extra tools, guns, ammunition, etc.

What I have just outlined would be a monumental problem in logistics even today. The numbers of the men in the party served a double purpose. The leaders depended on the work parties to provide their own army for protection from Indians.

Now, let's think about the return trip. For instance, in 1826 the Rocky Mountain Fur Company took 12,000 lbs. of furs from Cache Valley on the Bear River in Utah, back to St. Louis. Packers can haul 300 lbs. on an animal for short trips, but these men were under way every day for 70 days; therefore,

*Continued on page 2*

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the weight per animal could not run over 200 lbs. This means 60 horses or mules just to carry the furs. You can see why they, sometimes used bull boats in the Platte River on the return trip, starting near Ft. Laramie, if the water flow permitted.

The fur trade has given rise to much philosophical discussion about exploiting the Indians. Such complaints rise from the situation where the white man gave an Indian 5 cents worth of colored beads and some red ribbon for several beaver skins. What has been forgotten, is that, in the beginning, the Indians had such a surplus of pelts that they placed virtually no value on them. The Indians soon learned that, with furs, they could bargain and obtain the items which added to their enjoyment and better living standards.

To adequately understand these economics, we must look at two conditions.

First—the Indian's desire when he was introduced into the Iron Age. For instance, consider a virtually unbreakable iron kettle setting over a hot fire warming his pemmican or corn meal, as compared to putting hot stones into a woven basket.

Also—how about a knife or saw vs. the edge of a chipped rock. Or—an axe vs. a stone tomahawk. Or a steel trap vs. chasing a rodent with a wooden stick or using a bow and arrow.

Once introduced to the white man's tools, the Indian developed an overwhelming desire to obtain the items which improved his own way of life.

The second economic phase had to do with the end result of the first. That is, once the Indian conditioned himself and his family to using the white man's tools, and customs, the trade goods became necessities rather than novelties. By then, he had given up the primitive methods; and, ultimately, the Indians forgot the old ways of survival.

It was this fact that was a major influence at the Annual Rendezvous. The Indians came to the rendezvous to trade when they learned they could bring in their furs and trade for knives, axes, kettles, blankets, clothing, etc. The Indians did—just as the trappers did. As the years passed, more and more Indians came to rendezvous to trade for the white man's advantages.

The writers of history have played up the impact of firewater; but little has been written about the cultural and economic advantages the fur trade brought to the

Indians. The trading for white man's equipment gave him a significant upward thrust in the way he lived or survived, depending on your point of view.

Philosophically, the Indians considered game taken from their lands or territories as property owned in common by the entire tribe. The early trappers learned to respect this very important part of the Indian's customs. Trappers and traders bartered with the tribes to obtain their meat by giving goods in exchange. Other trappers shot and dressed their own meat, and by doing so, incurred the wrath of the tribal chiefs. An understanding of these differences is essential to understand why Indians fought so desperately to preserve their hunting grounds.

Before we leave this somewhat philosophical side of the fur trade, let's also compare how the competing forces entered the Indian territories.

Of the Hudson Bay Company, it has been said, and indeed their history demonstrates, that they opened an area first with traders, then with soldiers, and finally they let in the missionaries.

The U.S. policy has seemed to be applied in the reverse order. For instance, look at the mission activities in Texas and along the California Coast. Think of the intense activities of Father DeSmet and his assistants across the upper U.S. Rev. Samuel Parker, Dr. Marcus Whiteman and Rev. Henry Spalding. Each of those mentioned entered the territories before it was safe.

The North American fur trade was dominated by the Hudson Bay Company. Several writers have referred to the upper half of North America as a HBC town. History tends to prove it to be true. Hudson Bay Company governed its people with a tight rein. The local "Governors," as they were called, had authority.

One quotation attributed to a Hudson Bay Company governor in 1821 sheds light on the strength of their supervision and loyalty. "You might break all the ten commandments in one clatter, but to break any rule of the company, that—was quite another thing.

Remembering the extreme cold and hardships of the far North, another quotation is of interest: 'Deference to authority inside the ramparts and deference to nature beyond them.'

All of the recorded history of Canada begins with the fur trade. There is no other history.

In 1840, the Hudson Bay Company ruled 1/12 of the earth's surface, under their 1670 charter issued by

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English government. The area would approximate 3,000,000 square miles or 10 times the Roman Empire at its height. Three of Western Canada's largest cities and provincial capitals were Hudson Bay Company colonies. Fort Victoria, Fort Edmonton, and Fort Garry—now Winnipeg.

By contrast, the U.S. trappers had no such established organization, governing structure, or unifying force. Each company or entrepreneur operated as a separate unit. They fought their own battles against Indians, politicians and bankers, as well as against each other.

Any discussion of the fur trade is incomplete without mention of the Great Lakes area. The lakes were a most important boatway of trade. Mackinac Island, just south of Sault Ste. Marie, guarded the entrance to Lake Michigan. The original fort and trading post was called Michilimackinac.

The little Island of Mackinac, and the establishments on it, were most important to the American fur trade. Drummond Island, about 35 miles to the northeast, was equally important to the Canadian, British and French trade. All trade canoes large and small went past these points. Government duties were assessed and collected at these strategic bottlenecks, astride the roads of the fur commerce. It was at these points where the movers and shakers of the fur trade, government officials, and Indian leaders met to face each other down, assign territories, hire and fire, and destroy the careers of others, if it took that to save their own.

The history of the posts at Michilimackinac, Fort Chicago, Green Bay, Fond du Lac (Duluth), Fort William, and Grand Portage would each fill an entire book, so we can't deal with them in this short overview.

The demise of the fur trade within the U.S. areas has been documented as due to three major forces.

1. The silk hat was introduced in the early 1830's and soon diminished the demand for beaver.
2. The Hudson Bay Company was not only a strong competitor, but they also were ruthless. When American trappers began to move northward, before the 49th parallel was established as the U.S./Canadian Line, The Hudson Bay Company sent all available brigades into the northern U.S. trapping areas and almost exterminated the beaver. It was for this reason that the volume of furs out of the U.S.

Rockies dripped so dramatically during the last years of the Mountain Rendezvous.

3. The U.S. Trappers were loners. They had no central voice, whereas the Hudson Bay Company voice was well-planned and, politically, the Hudson Bay Company was well-heard.

All trappers and traders, British, French and American, had routinely violated the rules intended to eliminate the use of whiskey in the Indian trade. Recorded history leaves little doubt as to the extent the Indians were abused and cheated through the use of liquor. Also, liquor created many problems for the white traders.

There was a bitter and vicious competition among the traders, especially along the Canadian border and the Great Lakes, between the Canadian (British) and the Americans. Also, the U.S. supported trading forts, or "factories", became such a controversial problem that it was bucked up to Congress for an ultimate decision. The pro-factory group lost.

Government officials were ineffective at best, and, if we can believe what historians wrote, corruption, favoritism, and personal vendetta were commonplace. Liquor was often a root cause of the problems. It was this atmosphere that prevailed before and during the bloody skirmishes among the trappers, traders and Indians about 1820. These troubled times were partially settled by some mergers among the traders and by the Congress which established an office of Indian Affairs headed by a full-fledged commissioner.

By 1827, William Ashley and Thomas Hart Benton were alerting Congress and the people that: "The Hudson Bay Company (the British) had removed \$600,000 worth of beaver from disputed U. S. areas during the preceding two or three years."

It soon became obvious that the American trappers' political voice was not effective. And so, the U.S. fur trade continued to decline as the beaver population was reduced and trapping was less and less profitable.

The Rocky Mountain Rendezvous of 1840 was the last. The few trappers who continued after 1840 were the squaw men who had no other alternatives and the Indians themselves, who marketed their pelts by trading at established forts, or with trusted mountain men.

*To Be Continued...Fall 2015*

## Castor Announcements



### The Fall 2015 Rendezvous

**November 7, 2015**



Join us for a great meeting,  
pioneer dinner, speaker on the fur trade and making new friends.

**We have to have a final count by October 1**  
and would appreciate your help in sending in your reservations early.

*There will be no tickets sold at the door*  
as we need to give a final head count to the chef at Sutter's Fort.

Meet our JSS member Jim Smith from Helena, Montana.

Date	November 7, 2015	
Location	Sutter's Fort, Sacramento, CA, 2701 "L" Street	
Time	4:00 pm	General Membership Meeting
Speaker	4:45 pm	"California Fur Trapping Industry" by Friends of Sutter's Fort
Dinner	Pioneer Style: BBQ Sliced Sirloin, Chicken, Sides, Salad, Brownies, drink.	
Cost	\$60.00 per person, includes: dinner, talk, hall rental and and Fort Entry.	

For further information or if you have a question, contact:  
Rich Cimino (rscimino@gmail.com)

Make Check payable to: Jedediah Smith Society  
Mail to Treasurer: 1040 West Kettleman Lane, #147, Lodi, CA 95240

*More details to come in the Fall Castor newsletter*



## Members' Section

### Eager Beaver Award 2015

#### Joe Molter

The 2015 Eager Beaver Award was presented to Joe Molter, JSS member and Castor editor emeritus. Joe has given his untiring efforts to making the Castor a better newsletter. His work has kept this publication well received by the members. In addition, Joe's work on exploring, researching and documenting several trails that Jedediah Smith has travelled is excellent.



l-r Joe Molter and  
Wayne Knauf

### New Members

Please welcome Richard Ravalli, PhD., history professor, William Jessup University, Auburn Ca. His interests include fur trade and sea otter trade, his email address is [rravalli@jessup.edu](mailto:rravalli@jessup.edu)

### Jedediah Smith Society Board of Directors

Two new directors have been added to the board. Both have been previous members and will bring the history of Jed Smith to the Board. Please welcome Jim Smith, Helena, Montana and Mary Drachler, Bainbridge, New York.

### Member Roster

The long awaited Member Roster has been sent by email, and surface mail to those without computers last month. The Roster includes Mission Statement, Officers and Board Members, Calendar and Membership Roster. We hope this will provide better communication between members and board members. If there are any edits as far as name, address, phone, email etc. please send a note to the editor. It will be corrected and changed on the mailing list. The Roster will be published once a year.

Thank you to all members who returned their membership questionnaire with comments. This questionnaire allowed us to assemble a Roster which we can effectively communicate with all members quickly. Irene Steiner did a great job of taking the names from the questionnaire's and placing them in a readable format then sending to each of you. If you get a chance, send her a thank you. We are now electronic.

### Scholarship Winner

The University of the Pacific and Dr. Greg Rohlf, Chairman of the History Department has announced a second winner of the Jedediah Smith Society Scholarship. "Marissa Keisling graduated with an overall GPA of 3.43, with a GPA of 3.61 in her History classes. Marissa's first area of historical interest is in ancient history. As a first year student in the Chair's Seminar, she described her interest in ancient Egypt; as a senior, she wrote an "A" paper on ancient Egypt entitled, Ancient Egypt in the New Kingdom: The Women, the Art and the Female Pharaoh." While at Pacific, Marissa also took courses in Imperial China, Modern Germany, The Civil War Era and California History. Marissa worked in the student life division at Pacific as a resident assistant and as an assistant resident director. Marissa volunteered for many years with Perfect Pet Rescue in Los Angeles, where she also makes her post-graduation home.

### Web Site

The Web Site is being reviewed and organized for the Society by Joe Molter and Irene Steiner. Currently the books and previous Castor issues are not currently available from the JSS warehouse. The publications can be accessed from UOP Special Collections for a moderate copying cost (\$0.20 per page) and sent by mail or .pdf file. There is a \$5.00 processing charge. Contact Trish Richards, Special Assistant at 209-946-2404. email: [trichards@pacific.edu](mailto:trichards@pacific.edu)

### Castor Editor Appointed

The Jedediah Smith Society Board of Director appointed Ed Sieckert as the new *Castor Canadensis* Editor. Ed brings with him his experience in publishing in peer reviewed journals in his field of agriculture sciences, and as historian for Tuolumne City Memorial Museum. He is also a volunteer map archivist at Special Collections, Holt-Atherton Library, University of the Pacific. A set of Castor manuscript guidelines for future authors is being developed and will be presented to the board of directors in November. The Editorial review board consists of, Irene Steiner, Wayne Knauf, Darrel Thomas, and Joe Molter. If you have an article, submit it double spaced in MS Word and send to the editor. *Please note: The Castor Canadensis is not responsible for either the research or opinions of our writers.*



## Archives Corner

The following references were shared in a “What’s in the JSS Archives at University of the Pacific Special Collections” presentation at the Spring meeting held on May 19 at San Joaquin Historical Society and Museum Micke Grove, Lodi, Ca.

Jedediah Smith  
Bibliographical Timeline - Books

- 1902 Hiram Chittenden, *History of the American Fur Trade of the Far West*
- 1918 Harrison Clifford Dale, *The Ashley— Smith Explorations and the Discovery of a Central Route to the Pacific, 1822-1829 With Original Journals \*\**
- 1920 John G. Neihardt, *The Splendid Wayfaring, Jedediah Smith and the Ashley-Henry Men, 1822-1834*
- 1934 Maurice Sullivan, *The Travels of Jedediah Smith*
- 1953 **Dale Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West***
- 1954 Dale Morgan and Carl Wheat, *Jedediah Smith and his Maps of the American West*
- 1977 George R. Brooks, *The Southwest Expedition of Jedediah S. Smith, His Personal Account of the Journey to California, 1826-1827 \*\**

## Events Section

### San Joaquin Historical Society and Museum, Lodi Ca.

We thank David Stuart, Executive Director for his talk about the Fur Trade and its associated Exhibit at the museum. He also gave the members a tour of their new exhibit on Native American life and basketry . Should you want to research history contact Dr. Leigh Johnson, Archivist. A very special visit is in store for you. Visit their web site at [www.sanjoaquinhistory.org](http://www.sanjoaquinhistory.org) .

### Events of Other Societies

#### San Bernardino County Museum

Joe Molter shared this information on Mountain Men who came to Southern California. “Turn left at the Rockies” exhibit will introduce visitors to the “Mountain Men” who came to Southern California between 1828 and 1850. The exhibit runs from Feb. 7 to the end of 2015. This museum is located at 2014 Orange Tree Lane, Redlands, CA. For more detailed information contact [www.sbcountymuseum.org](http://www.sbcountymuseum.org).

### Spring Meeting

The Spring meeting was success thanks to Wayne Knauf, JSS Secretary. The presentations were excellent. Thank you Wayne for your diligent efforts.



Darrell Thomas



Dave Stuart  
Director, San Joaquin Historical Society/Museum



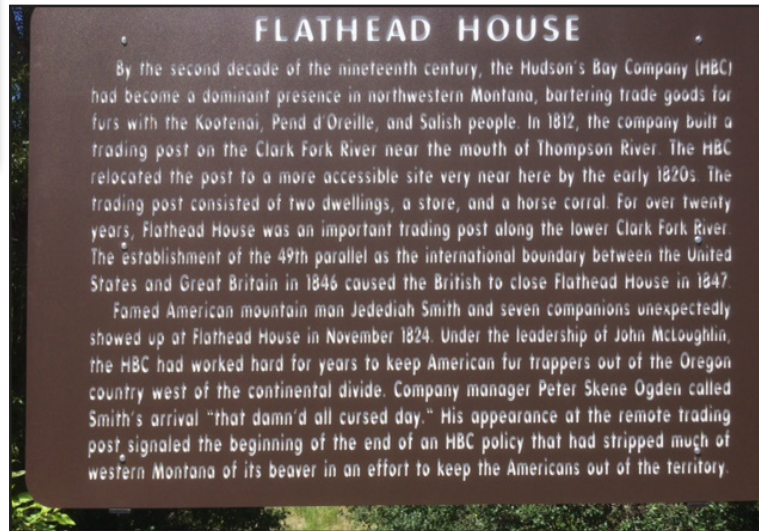
President Bob Shannon







Jim Smith, JSS Board Member, reports on the establishment of the new Flat Head House Marker on the Clark River in Montana. A forthcoming article will published in the Castor.



“In the second decade of the nineteenth century, the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) had become a dominant presence in northwestern Montana, bartering trade goods for furs with the Kootenai, Pend d’Oreille and Salish people. In 1812 the company built a trading post on the Clark Fork River near the mouth of the Thompson River. The HBC relocated the post to a more accessible site very near here by the early 1820’s. The trading post consisted of two dwellings, a store, and a horse corral for over twenty years. Flathead House was an important trading post along the lower Clark Fork River. The establishment of the 49th parallel as the international boundary between the United States and Great Britain in 1846 caused the British to close the Flathead House in 1847.

Famed American mountain man Jedediah Smith and seven companions unexpectedly showed up at Flathead House in November 1824. Under the leadership of John McLaughlin the HBC had worked hard for years to keep American fur trappers out of the Oregon country west of the continental divide. Company manager Peter Skene Ogden called Smith’s arrival ‘that damn’d all cursed day.’ His appearance at the remote trading post signaled the beginning of the end of an HBC policy that had stripped much of western Montana of its beaver in an effort to keep the Americans out of the territory.”

### Jedediah Smith Donor List 2015

The Board of Directors thank the following members for their donations to the Society.  
Donations can be made annually and are in addition to the annual dues.

#### Sponsor **\$50 to \$99**

#### Patron **\$100+**

William Rich  
David Malahar  
Robert Gilbert

#### Life Membership **\$1000**

Dr. James Shebl  
John Talbot (Dec.)

#### Other donations

Amanda and Steve Cottrell  
Richard Cimino  
William Barr

#### Honorary Members

Dr. James Shebl, Professor, UOP  
Dr. Ron Limbaugh, History Professor, UOP  
Dr. Robert Dash, Professor, UOP  
Margaret Wood  
Alexander Schwed

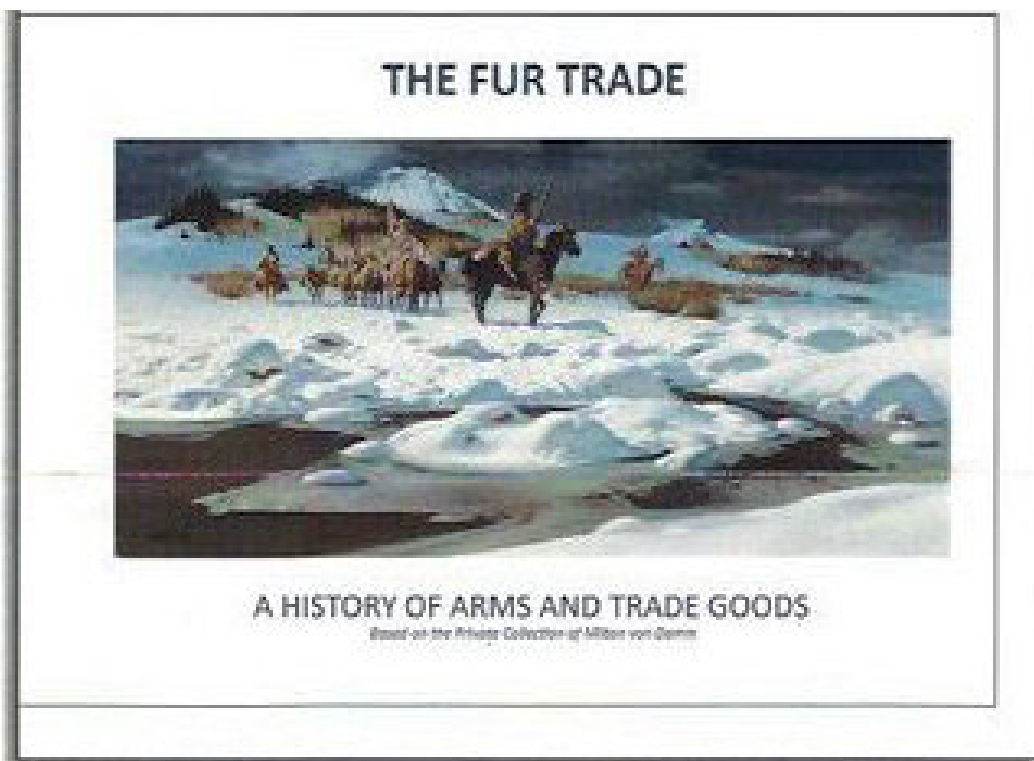
*If we have missed you please email the Editor, Ed Sieckert at [ed@sieckert.com](mailto:ed@sieckert.com).*

Milton Von Damm is a Jedediah Smith member and has written a great book entitled The Fur Trade- A History of Arms and Trade Goods. Published in 2013.

Mr. Von Damm is going to donate \$10.00 per book to the Jedediah Smith Society Scholarship Endowment Fund.

Price includes shipping and a signed copy.

This will be a great book for your library.



This book is about the history of Fur Trade guns and trade goods in an industry that constituted a notable segment of North America's economy in its infancy and early adolescence. The fur trade contributed to the development of commerce, manufacturing and transportation improvements. It was also an important ingredient of internal and external political and military conflict between nations and between the Native Americans and Manifest Destiny. There are over 460 colored pictures of arms and trade goods, brief historical references to the fur trade in New France, The Hudson's Bay Company, The American Fur Company and The United States Government. Rifle makers include Dickert-Gill, Christopher Gumpf, Henry Gibbs, Perer Gonter, James Henry, George Tryon, Henry Leman, and others

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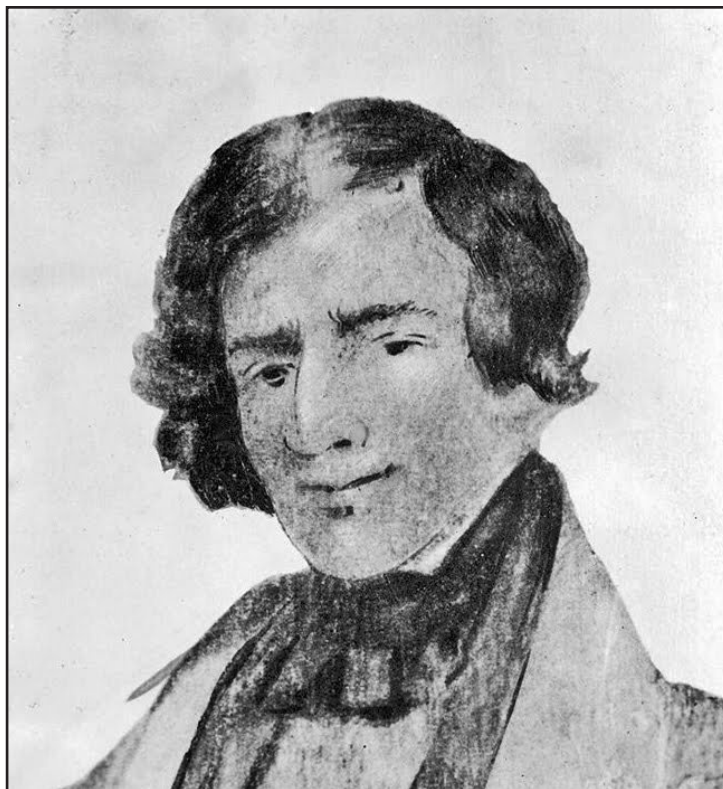
## INVITE A FRIEND TO JOIN

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.

Student \$10.00	Individual \$20.00
Sponsor \$50.00	Patron \$100.00

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**Your dues will expire Jan 1, 2016**