



CASTOR CANADENSIS

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

WINTER 2018-2019

Jedediah Smith, Human

BY, JOE GREEN

Fellow Jedediah Smith Society member, Joe Green, is a happily retired school teacher from Minden, Nebraska. Joe is on the Board of Directors of the John G. Neihardt Foundation in Randolph, Nebraska.

Do I contradict myself?

Very well, then I contradict myself.

(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*

In his 1902 classic of the American fur trade, Hiram Martin Chittenden asserted that Jedediah Smith was “a true knight errant . . . a Christian and a soldier.”¹ Sixteen years later Harrison Clifford Dale echoed Chittenden’s tribute: “He [Jed] was a man of great courage and devotion . . . a very brave christian gentleman.”² Joining the chorus of praise in 1920, John G. Neihardt called Jed “one of the great torch-bearers of the race.”³ In 1936 Maurice S. Sullivan celebrated Jed as “the herald of the Western American empire . . . [a] finder of paths for pathfinders,”⁴ and for Dale L. Morgan, writing in 1953, Jed was “an authentic American hero.”⁵

Reading these encomiums today, the discerning student of Jed—influenced by late twentieth and early twenty-first century histories—may wonder if they exaggerate Jed’s character and accomplishments. Is the adulation accorded Jed justified? What of his imperfections?

In fairness, we must acknowledge that the historians named above were *not* attempting to paint a romantic, greater-than-life portrait of Jed. Chittenden pointed out that while Jed’s “expeditions were full of romantic interest and thrilling adventure” he and his companions “endured great hardship and privations.”⁶ Sullivan wrote mainly of Jed’s accomplishments but conceded that “if Jed had any weakness, it was a weakness common to most men: that of giving himself the better of it in reporting a conflict or in making a bargain.”⁷ Dale noted that Jed’s “letters express his spiritual longings and the crushing sense of his own sin and unworthiness.” To substantiate this point, Dale included the oft-quoted passage in which Jed confessed his imperfections: “I find myself one of the most ungrateful, unthankful creatures imaginable . . . Oh, the perverseness of my wicked heart! I entangle myself too much

in the things of time.”⁸ Morgan asserted that this and other passages from the letters “are almost the only window into his [Jed’s] heart.” In these letters, said Morgan, Jed revealed a religious “thread both shining and dark.” Finally, Neihardt eventually tempered his effusive adoration in a 1941 poetic version of Jed’s story. As Jed stood on a ridge, surveying the barren desert that he, Robert Evans, and Silas Gobel had to cross to reach the Great Salt Lake, Evans observed hopelessness on Jed’s face:

It was an old,
Old man I saw a moment in his place,
The look of something broken in his face
That wasn’t to be mended any more.⁹

Jed’s spirit was sinking, momentarily, at the prospect of the many arduous miles to come. Neihardt thus humanized his hero.

In attempting to answer the question—Who was the real Jedediah Smith?—we may find ourselves vacillating between unmitigated hero worship, on the one hand, and skepticism or even cynicism, on the other.

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If we view Jed only as a saint, as superhuman, we blind ourselves to his weaknesses. We see him as incapable of moral lapses, prejudices, doubts, fears, and other flaws common to all humans. Jed then becomes what Northrop Frye designated as the Romantic Hero, superior in kind to others and to his environment.¹⁰ In which case, Jed will be relegated to folk tales, legends, and cheap novels—and, as a consequence, he will disappear from history.

Conversely, if we focus disproportionately on Jed's defects, we may fail to adequately honor his remarkable achievements and to fully appreciate the many laudable qualities of his character. Jed was the greatest explorer of his time, and his travels during the last ten years of his life encompassed most of the American West. Jed was also a visionary who sensed that his adventures would have a national import. As he faced the unrelenting and formidable challenges of a land little known to white Americans, he frequently manifested extraordinary courage, tenacity, intelligence, curiosity, and compassion. He possessed, declared George R. Brooks, "an inner superiority which neither the perfidy of man nor the privations of nature could deny, and it is still vibrant . . . after a century and a half."¹¹ Moreover, as Morgan and Carl I. Wheat noted, Jed "was [also] a close and accurate observer and student of nature" who augmented our knowledge of zoology, botany, and especially of ethnology and geography.¹²

Serious historians understand that the purpose of history is neither to vindicate Jed nor to impeach him. The purpose of history is to discover the true Jed. That discovery may not be without some discomfort for Jed Smith enthusiasts, for history must seek to accurately portray Jed in all of his complexities and contradictions, accomplishments and failures, virtues and vices. To do so, history must consider diverse perspectives: those of the Mexican government, of Native Americans, and of other trappers and traders, including the Hudson's Bay Company. This is not a matter of political correctness; it is a matter of historical accuracy.

Two historians, in particular, deepen our understanding of Jed from angles that have not been given adequate attention previously.

With letters discovered in 1984 and 1985, David J. Weber documents Jed's sometimes strained relationship with Mexican authorities. The Mexicans accused Jed of spying, of trespassing, of failing to obtain necessary permits, of insulting, deceiving, disobeying, and intimidating officials, of mistreating Indians and inciting them to rebel, and of violating international and national laws. Weber concludes that "the documents provide fresh insights into the views and actions of often-maligned Mexican officials, and reveal Smith as more devious and less 'perplexed' [Smith's word] by the californios than he himself suggested."¹³ However,

some readers of Weber's valuable book caution that because the Mexicans may have dissembled their actual motives for accusing Jed, we must be wary of giving credence to their claims.¹⁴ Perhaps the truth about Jed and the Mexicans lies in some middle ground.

In his 2009 biography Barton H. Barbour confirms that the historical Jed—a "not-so-simple man with human aspirations and failings"—belies the mythic Jed.¹⁵ Teasing out Jed's character from journals and letters, including important missives from Jed to William Clark and Secretary of War John Eaton, Barton presents an intriguing multidimensional Jed.¹⁶ In Barton we find a Jed tainted by the same economic "self-interest" that afflicted later white westerners as they, too, trespassed on and eventually usurped Mexican and Indian lands. Jed looked disdainfully on Mexican authorities, and, except in one telling journal entry, he felt little or no compunction when he killed Indians. Despite the helpfulness of the Hudson's Bay Company following the Umpqua Massacre, the pro-American Smith considered the HBC to be "interlopers," conveniently forgetting that he himself had violated HBC territory. In this, Jed mirrors the hypocrisy of an "all grasping"¹⁷ nation increasingly eager for westward expansion. Jed's expeditions into the unknown and foreboding West involved considerable risk; nevertheless, the indefatigable Jed pressed on after each disaster. Unfortunately, dozens died along his thousands of miles of trails—Indians and whites. Jed's ardent love of exploration and his dream of financial success exacted a great price—including his own life on May 27, 1831.

Romantic heroes, who sometimes rise to mythic status, are subject to the whims of the public imagination—and almost always forgotten when new heroes emerge to entertain the masses. However, as Harvey L. Carter points out, a long line of hardworking historians has rescued Jed from anonymity.¹⁸ These same scholars have also saved Jed from facile stereotyping by showing that he was a man of "infinite variety."¹⁹

Seen from one perspective, Jed *was* the epitome of the rugged individualist—of the sort that, say, a Teddy Roosevelt and an Ernest Hemingway did their best to emulate. This uniquely American conception encapsulates such traits as self-reliance, courage and composure under fire, a Job-like capacity to endure adversity, an unwavering determination, and a visionary's faith in some great purpose. However, time and again Jed complicated this stereotype—in both positive and negative ways.

Consider, as just one example, Jed's sensitivity to the beauty of his surroundings—certainly not a quality many Americans would associate with mountain men. Jed killed bison, but he also extolled their magnificence: ". . . on the evening of the second day after leaving the Arikara's

it seemed to my unaccustomed eyes that all the buffalo in the world were running in those plains, for as far as the eye could see the plains and hills appeared a moving body of life . . . they moved in deep, dense and dark bodies resembling . . . the heavy columns of a great army.”²⁰ Jed delighted in the “gently undulating” prairie of Mandan country and even in “the beautiful encrustation found in the Salt Plain [Soda Lake].” The soil near the Sacramento River he described as “a rich chocolate colored loom” and added that “the whole face of the country is a most beautiful green, resembling a flourishing wheat field.” Such Whitmanesque depictions, poetic in their vivid imagery, were recorded in Jed’s journal while he was engaged in a day-to-day struggle against the powerful and treacherous Missouri, against the growing resistance of Native Americans, against grizzlies, inclement weather, mosquitos, hunger, and thirst. Perhaps Jed’s heightened aesthetic awareness was his antidote to these many hardships.

Jed’s appreciation for natural beauty goes hand in hand with his heartfelt response to the mistreatment of wild horses on Rancho de Santa Anna. Blindfolded, whipped, tied up for two or three days, then secured by their necks to tame horses, captured horses either submitted or were killed: “. . . if a horse . . . proves refractory they . . . release him from bondage by thrusting a knife to his heart.” An even more horrifying fate awaited the many horses left in the pens. They were “. . . shut up to die a death most lingering and most horrible,” bereft of food and water, “. . . they gradually loose their strength and sink to the ground . . .” until “. . . the last and most powerful sinks down among his companions on the plain.”²¹ The gruesome killing of the wild horses appalled Jed and evoked an impassioned condemnation: “No man of feeling can think of such a scene without surprise indignation and pity. Pity for the noblest animals dying from want in the midst of fertile fields. Indignation and surprise that men are so barbarous and unfeeling.”

Here we see Jed’s better angel, but humans, alas, are inconsistent, and Jed was no exception.

Few passages are more revealing of his complex—sometimes conflicted—personality than a March 1, 1828, journal entry. Near the Wild (American) River Jed and his party approached an Indian lodge, the Indians panicked, and the trappers rode in fast pursuit. During the chase, Jed observed a young girl who had fallen to the ground.

She was still laying there and apparently lifeless. She was 10 or 11 years old. I got down from my horse and found that she was in fact dead. Could it be possible, thought I, that we called ourselves Christians were such frightful objects as to scare poor savages to death. But I had little time for meditation for it was necessary that I should

provide for the wants of my party and endeavor to extricate myself from the embarrassing situation in which I was placed. I therefore to convince the friends of the poor girl of my regret for what had been done covered her Body with a Blanket and left some trifles near by. . . .”²²

Jed’s words resonate with contradictory meaning. From one view, his account of the incident defines him as compassionate and contrite. He interrupted his participation in the pursuit to investigate the girl’s condition, and then, once he realized that she was dead, he bemoaned the hypocrisy of at once being a Christian and causing fear and death. Finally, Jed attempted to atone by leaving tangible expressions of his remorse.

When considered closely, however, Jed’s words impugn his character. The phrase “poor savages” reflects the pervasive belief of many white Americans that native peoples were unchristian, uncivilized, and thus inferior. Why did Jed’s party suddenly attack this village in the first place? Was this band of Indians a threat? The absence of an explanation suggests that there was no justification for the assault. Jed did not tell us if other Indians died, but the small scale of the attack would have made little difference to the Indians who ran in abject fear into the river or along its shore, and little difference to the family and friends of the little girl. Referring to the girl’s death as merely “an embarrassing situation,” Jed rationalized the brief time he spent in reflection: his men’s needs, he claimed, took priority. Was Jed really fleeing from his troubled conscience? Was he seeking to escape his culpability? Before leaving, he offered the propitiatory blanket and trinkets—a meaningless and perfunctory gesture when we consider that Jed, by his own admission, bore responsibility for an innocent child’s death.

Jed’s revelatory comments have a still larger implication. In the episode of the Indian girl, we witness the ongoing persecution of indigenous peoples. Numbering approximately 300,000 before 1769, the native population in California steadily declined under Spanish and Mexican rule.²³ When, on July 9, 1846, Commander John B. Montgomery raised the American flag over what is now Portsmouth Square, native numbers were estimated at 150,000 but rapidly declined to 30,000 by 1873.²⁴ An 1880 census reported only 16,000 natives in California.²⁵ Disease and starvation took many lives, and perhaps 100,000 were victims of random killings carried out by individuals or small groups.²⁶ Thousands more died in larger, purposeful, state-sponsored massacres—at Clear Lake, Bloody Island, Yontocket, and the Sacramento River—at more than 300 places.²⁷ These massacres—like those on the bloody killing fields of Sand Creek, the Washita River, and Wounded Knee—are evidence of a ruthless and efficient genocide. By 1900, whites had all but eradicated the California Indians. We must not overlook, or

excuse, Jed's role in this American tragedy.

Heroes are risk-takers, and in the course of their quests, they almost always expose their weaknesses *and* their strengths. Homer's Odysseus, gone from Ithaca for 20 years, loses all of his shipmates because of his insatiable curiosity and foolish pride. Yet, his bravery, fortitude, and love for family and country enable him to survive a perilous return voyage and to reestablish his kingship.²⁹ On his third expedition to Antarctica, the impatience of the celebrated explorer Ernest Shackleton nearly proved fatal. Defying the warnings of experienced seamen, Shackleton's ship, *The Endurance*, sailed too late in the season and was trapped and crushed by pack ice. Without their ship the lives of the crew were in jeopardy. Yet, Shackleton, who had honed his skills and knowledge on earlier voyages, daringly led his men in lifeboats to Elephant Island, a temporary refuge over 300 miles distant. From there Shackleton and five shipmates journeyed an additional 830 miles by small boat to South Georgia. The intrepid party eventually effected a rescue of all of Shackleton's crew.³⁰

Odysseus. Shackleton. Flawed and praiseworthy. Like Jed Smith.

Shakespeare's Hamlet, who of all literary characters best understands the ambiguous nature of humans, might say of Jed, "He was a man, take him for all in all."³¹

NOTES

- 1 Hiram Martin Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade of the Far West* (1902; Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 1:251, 283.
- 2 Harrison Clifford Dale, *The Explorations of William H. Ashley and Jedediah Smith*, rev. ed. (1918; Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 311-12.
- 3 John G. Neihardt, *The Splendid Wayfaring* (1920; Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 8.
- 4 Maurice S. Sullivan, *Jedediah Smith: Trader and Trail Breaker* (New York: Press of the Pioneers, 1936), 54, 125.
- 5 Dale L. Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West* (1953; Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 7.
- 6 Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, 1:287.
- 7 Sullivan, *Jedediah Smith*, 131.
- 8 Dale, *Explorations*, 310-11.
- 9 Neihardt, "The Song of Jed Smith," in *A Cycle of the West*, Bison Book Classic Annotated Edition (1949; Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 292.
- 10 Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 33.
- 11 George R. Brooks, *The Southwest Expedition of Jedediah S. Smith: His Personal Account of the Journey to California 1826-1827*, Western Frontiersman Series 18 (Glendale, CA: Arthur H. Clark, 1977), 28.
- 12 Dale L. Morgan and Carl I. Wheat, *Jedediah Smith and His Maps of the American West*, (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1954), 81-84. For Jed as botanist, in particular, see Joe J. Molter, "Jedediah Smith's Contributions to Early Western Botanical Science, Confirmed!" *Caster Canadensis* (Fall 2012): 1-4.
- 13 David J. Weber, *The Californios versus Jedediah Smith 1826-1827: A New Cache of Documents*, Western Frontiersmen Series 22 (Spokane, WA: Arthur H. Clark, 1990), 66.
- 14 See Dan L. Thrapp's review of Weber's book in *The Journal of Arizona History* 32, no. 3 (Autumn 1991): 338-40; and David J. Langum's in *Pacific Historical Review* 60, no. 2 (May 1991): 249-50.
- 15 Barton H. Barbour, *Jedediah Smith: No Ordinary Mountain Man*, The Oklahoma Western Biographies 23 (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 13.
- 16 See two reviews of Barton's book: Timothy G. Anderson's in *South Dakota History* 39, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 275-76; and Garry Topping's in *Utah Historical Quarterly* 78, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 88-89.
- 17 This phrase appears in George Simpson's report about Smith to the Hudson's Bay Company dated March 1, 1829, reprinted in Sullivan, *The Travels of Jedediah Smith: A Documentary Outline Including the Journal of the Great American Pathfinder* (1934; Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 150.
- 18 Harvey L. Carter, "Jedediah Smith," in *The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West*, ed. LeRoy R. Hafen (Glendale, CA: Arthur H. Clark, 1971), 8:331.
- 19 William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, 2.2.
- 20 The quotations in this paragraph appear in Jed's journal in Sullivan, *Travels*, 7-8, 33, 61.
- 21 The quotations in this paragraph are taken from Jed's journal in Brooks, *Southwest Expedition*, 113-15.
- 22 Sullivan, *Travels*, 65-66. See also Barbour, *Jedediah Smith*, 196-97.
- 23 Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 23.
- 24 Madley, *An American Genocide*, 3.
- 25 Madley, *An American Genocide*, 3.
- 26 Edward D. Castillo, "Short Overview of California Indian History," *Native American Heritage Commission*, hahc.ca.gov (2019).
- 27 Chris Clarke, "Untold History: The Survival of California's Indians." *Tending the Wild*, www.kcet.org. (Sept. 26, 2016); and Margaret A. Field. "Genocide and the Indians of California, 1769-1873." Master's Thesis. University of Massachusetts Boston (May 1993), 125.
- 28 Brendan C. Lindsay, *Murder State: California's Native American Genocide, 1846-1873* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 3.
- 29 See Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1996).
- 30 See Caroline Alexander, *The Endurance: Shackleton's Legendary Antarctic Expedition* (New York, NY: Knopf, 2001).
- 31 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1.2.

Editor's Note

From the *Castor* Editor - Kevin Kucera



Subsequent to Dale Morgan's masterpiece, *Jedediah Smith, and the Opening of the West*, 1953, there have been works done on Jedediah Smith describing him as a saint, and other works describing him as a sinner. Like most humans, Jedediah was both a saint and a sinner as portrayed by Joe Green in his wonderful feature article, *Jedediah Smith, Human*.

In this unbiased article it is interesting to see Jedediah in his own words seeks atonement on the lawless trail by leaving gifts for the family of the dead Indian child they scared to death. As an American leader and heroic figure of this era in the west, Jed is a unique character for the times in that he (at least) recognizes and acts on their wrongful actions against the Indians with his expressed human feelings of remorse and embarrassment, and in his own best way by covering the child's body and by leaving gifts for the respective family.

Also in this issue there is a *Pacific Historian* reprint of the 1968 Dale Morgan presentation, *Jedediah Smith Today*, given at the Jedediah Smith Society Annual Meeting. Dale was evolving his views on Jedediah, and Dale's untimely death precluded (at our loss) his planned future scholarship on Jedediah Smith. In this article Dale Morgan reiterates that Jedediah Smith was a heroic figure in the opening of the west, and that he was a human who was on various levels more complex than he originally thought. It is our hope, like that of Dale Morgan, that through our collective research efforts we may discover more original writings of Jedediah Smith to better understand his character, his accomplishment, and his respective place in western history.

Fast forward two hundred years to now and you see in the transparent media leaders and heroic figures with great human flaws. Better than thou attitudes and behaviors are still prevalent on our planet as we witness non-stop verbal and physical combat between humans on all levels. On the American River, Jedediah understood the difference between right and wrong in an environment where survival was paramount like in a theater of war. It would be nice today if our leaders could simply help us all by doing the right thing by using a more human approach in their words and actions versus business as usual. It still is hard to be a saint when you are a sinner.

Milton Von Damm continues to enlighten us on the material culture of the early fur trade with this edition's in-depth and fun to read article, *Early Western Fur Trade Traps*. Milt's high level of understanding of these money maker tools significantly helps us better understand their application and use in the Western Fur Trade.

Moving forward our future *Castor Canadensis* issues will feature original articles on the incomplete and mysterious accounts regarding the murder of Jedediah Smith, and, on the missing manuscript maps of Jedediah Smith that when found will change the cartographic history of the opening of the west.

President's Message - Jim Smith, Helena, Montana



Thanks to everyone who renewed their membership, and welcome to the new members of the Jedediah Smith Society. We're off to a good start in 2019.

As the year begins I'd particularly like to thank Kevin Kucera for the outstanding job he is doing as Editor of the *Castor Canadensis*. Since 1957 the *Castor* has been the voice and the face of the Society. He has carried on the tradition of quality and excellence established over 60 years ago. I know you will all enjoy this issue of *Castor*. Thanks Kevin.

And special thanks to Milton von Damm who has been taking care of business for the Society the last few years. Milt has led the annual membership drive, he maintains the roster, he mails the maps of Jedediah's Travels in the West, and performs plenty of other administrative tasks for the Society.

You'll get a chance to meet Kevin and Milton (if you haven't already) at the Annual Meeting of the Jedediah Smith Society on March 30th. You'll get a chance to hear about what the Society is doing and what goals for the future are being planned. You'll see we have arranged for a wonderful luncheon keynote speaker to join us, Dr. Stephen Dow Beckham. Please see the additional information about Dr. Beckham and the Annual Meeting in this issue of *Castor*. Come hungry because there's going to be a great Barbeque Luncheon catered by Pete's Outdoor BBQ. Please plan to join your friends and colleagues at the end of March in historic San Joaquin County. Looking forward to seeing you all and to catching up with everyone.

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Upcoming Events - Registration Form



2019 ANNUAL MEETING MARCH 30, 2019

SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
LODI, CA

10:00am-3:00pm

Cost: \$45.00

Register by March 15th

Use the attached registration form and send in with your check

Or

Use the Website: www.jedediahsmithsociety.org

We can accept your registration via the website & PayPal

- **The Speaker**

Stephen Dow Beckham, PhD, is an American historian known for his work with Native Americans and the American West, especially the Pacific Northwest and the Lewis and Clark Expedition. He has authored many works, and is a Professor Emeritus of History at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon.

He earned his B.A. at the University of Oregon and his M.A. and Ph.D. at UCLA. He served as a college professor for more than thirty years, and from 1993 until his retirement, he served as the Pamplin Professor of History at Lewis & Clark College. Beckham did his thesis at UCLA on George Gibbs. Gibbs had an 1828 Jedediah Smith Manuscript Map which he copied on to a Charles Fremont 1849 Map. This famous map called the Gibbs/Fremont/Smith Map is located in the American Geographical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Dr. Beckham's presentation will include remarks about this famous map. Part of that map shows Smith's route through San Joaquin County, California.

Beckham's many awards include the Oregon Professor of the Year, the American Historical Association's Asher Distinguished Teaching Award, and the Earle A. Chiles Award for "contributions to the understanding of the high desert interior of the American West." He has worked as a consultant with many American Indian tribes in Oregon and Northern California, including the Kelawatset Tribe who met with Jedediah Smith on the Umpqua River, California.

- **The Spot**

The beautiful grounds of the San Joaquin County Historical Society in Lodi, CA. The heart of Jedediah Smith Country. The heart of California wine country.

- **The Menu**

Pete's Outdoor Catering in Fresno, CA. "Good Food for Great People on a Grand Occasion" That's Pete's Motto.

Main Dish: 1) Tri-Tip Roast of Beef. 2) Boneless Chicken Breast.

Side Dishes: 1) BBQ Beans. 2) Fresh Green Salad. 3) Rice Pilaf. 4) Mac & Cheese.

- **The Agenda**

Election, Bylaws, Progress Reports and Future Plans for the good of the Society.

Name of Attendee(s) _____

Amount Enclosed(Number attending x \$45.00) _____

Please send your check by March 15 to:

Jedediah Smith Society
c/o Milton von Damm, Treasurer
1322 Shattuck Ave #401
Berkeley, CA 94709

Your check is your reservation! Call Milt if you have questions: 510-290-0329.

Early Western Fur Trade Traps

by Milton von Damm

The Summer 2010 issue of the *Castor Canadensis* reprinted a trap article written by Nick Drahos for a New York State Conservationist publication. The focus of that article was about Sewell Newhouse who started making traps for the Oneida Indians in 1823 at age 17 and by 1848 was beginning to mass-produce traps in a factory. By 1874 his company had manufactured over 750,000 traps. Mr. Newhouse died in 1888 but his company continued to grow. ¹

This article features early hand made traps, mostly for beaver, selected from my collection and including the period when Jedediah Smith would have been in the far West. This writer has no information about whether any early handmade Newhouse traps were sold to traders beyond the Great Lakes.

Beaver were hunted by both Indians and Colonists for food and far long before the introduction of the steel trap to North America. To avoid damage to pelts, beaver hunters used nets, underwater pens, deadfall and other methods to drown their prey. During the 1600's through the first half of the 1700's over two million beaver were taken in French Canada and the English colonies. ²

Iron traps with a single steel spring appear in records as early as 1761. ³ An English style trap featured a single spring to snap shut a pair of jaws when an unsuspecting animal released the tension by touching a flat pan being gingerly held in place by a "dog", became the basic trap model from which a standardized American trap emerged that was favored by Canadians, Americans and Indians. Early American steel traps featured two springs flanking a pair of jaws that were flat on top bending ninety degrees to the jaw post attachment to the trap base. Such traps are referred to as squared jaw traps. Later traps options had jaws that were slightly rounded at the top.

Picture #1 is a late 1700's or early 1800's trap that was found near Slave Lake in Canada. ^{4,5} It has eight-inch jaws, is twenty-two and one half inches long and weighs five and one half pounds.



#1. The Slave Lake Beaver Trap

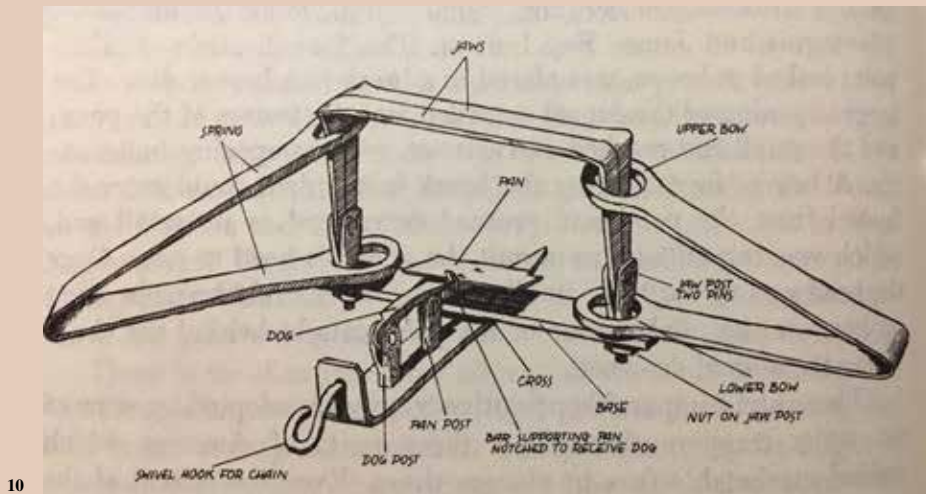
Picture #2 is a French style beaver trap. It has a single spring, is fourteen inches long with seven-inch wide jaws. It weighs three pounds, three ounces. The famous Chouteau fur trade barons of St. Louis ordered traps from France in the early nineteenth century. ⁶ The rounded jaws have teeth and the short broken chain is just looped wire. This trap differs from the French Traverse trap in that the round pan is not mounted on an axis that is attached to both sides of the round base. ⁷ A round bear trap was found near Astoria, Oregon ⁸ and other round traps have been found in Pierce County, Washington, near Tacoma, and Amador County in California. ⁹



#2. An Early French Round Trap

Early Western Fur Trade Traps - *Continued*

BEAVER TRAP COMPONENTS



10

The above drawing is of a beaver trap that was found in the Green River. This blacksmith made trap could have been made at Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Vancouver, or it also might have been a trap carried by the Smith, Jackson and Sublette. It has square jaws that are attached to the jaw posts with two rivets on each side. This drawing is helpful in identifying the various components, although there were many variations since these early traps were handmade by many different blacksmiths.

FORT VANCOUVER TRAPS

Fort Vancouver served as headquarters for trapping and trading in a large area of western Canada, the Oregon Territory, California, and rivers drainages West of the Rocky Mountains. Their traps were not only made by their own blacksmiths, but were also imported from England. Consequently it has been difficult for archeologists to assemble a "typical" Fort Vancouver trap from excavated components. William Cannon, an American from Kentucky, came west with Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company and remained to serve for thirty years as the Fort's senior blacksmith.¹¹ Barrel hoop iron, steel and horseshoe rods were imported from England as basic materials for fort blacksmiths to make traps. The steel for the springs and the iron for the trap bases and jaw posts were generally inferior, resulting in traps that did not work reliably. Trappers had more confidence in American products.

The following picture is of a presumably HBC trap that was found somewhere in British Columbia. According to Dr. James Hanson from the Museum of the Fur Trade, this trap is from the 1826 Peter Skene Ogden expedition to the Snake River country, based on "N 26" being stamped under the base. This trap has only one spring because half of the iron jaw post broke. A field repair connected the jaws to the remaining piece of the post, but the trap was either discarded or lost. The trap weighs four pounds with only one spring, the jaws are nine inches wide and the length would have been twenty-four inches with two springs. The jaws are the square type.



#3. A Fort Vancouver HBC Beaver Trap

Early Western Fur Trade Traps - *Continued*

This trap collection has a second trap that is very similar to the above-pictured HBC trap. It is an unmarked trap that has eight-inch wide square jaws, weighs five point one eighth pounds without the chain, and is twenty-one inches long. It has a large five by four-inch rectangle pan and a chain with links that are one and three quarters long and are slightly twisted. The chain terminates with a three-pronged grapple hook. The jaws are pinned to the jaw posts with one rivet on each side.



#4. An HBC Style Heavy Beaver Trap With Grapple



#5. The Single Pin Lock Post

AMERICAN TRAP TYPES

American trap makers improved upon the British eighteenth century trap design by making them lighter, stronger and with two springs that would turn into the base to facilitate transportation over land. Although individual blacksmiths and trappers had their own preferences about jaw shapes and whether jaws were attached to jaw posts with one or two rivets, a general standardization emerged. Even Canadian trap makers in Montreal and at Macinac adopted American standards. J.B. Masson, a Montreal maker, made high quality traps for John Astor's Southwest Company as well as the French Canadian Northwest Company and American markets.¹

Unsurprisingly, St. Louis was an important center for obtaining traps for the Western market and had several local blacksmiths making traps, chains, axes, tools and other metal products needed by traders. One blacksmith, Mr. J. Hill, was favored for the quality of his work in the 1820's for making heavy traps and may have made traps for Smith, Jackson and Sublette.

The American Fur Company was also supplying traps to St. Louis firms. Ramsey Crooks, John Jacob Astors' Chief Executive officer favored a blacksmith named Miles Standish. Miles was an American, born in Massachusetts, who moved with his new wife to Michilimackinac in 1817 where he began to make traps, but moved to Montreal in 1823 where there was more business. The Hudson's Bay Company increased their efforts to make their own traps at outposts employing blacksmiths and also purchasing more from England, so Mr. Standish welcomed orders from the American Fur Company and in 1828 he relocated from Montreal to Perry Street in New York, near the AFC headquarters. Miles Standish traps were consistently reliable and sturdy. He made traps from 1821 to 1868, making the standardized American style in two weights. The "Montreal" style was a light trap that was easier to transport, especially in Canada where transportation was by canoe. The second "St Louis" type was heavier and more reliable in the far West.¹² Miles eventually became the principle trap maker to the American Fur Company, but it is not clear when his traps began to appear in St. Louis. The American Fur Company established its Western Department in 1822 and had been furnishing supplies to St. Louis traders before that time, but it is unlikely that Standish traps were being delivered prior to William Ashley's first trip up the Missouri in 1822.

It is likely that William Ashley purchased at least some of the beaver traps shipped to the far West from the American Fur Company via Pratte, Chouteau & Co if he couldn't meet his needs from St. Louis Blacksmiths during the 1820's. When Miles Standish traps made their way to the Rocky Mountains and further West is unclear to me. There is a record of an order for Eastern made traps to the AFC from Pratte, Chouteau & Co., but that was dated 1834,

Early Western Fur Trade Traps - *Continued*

the year they bought the AFC Western Department. The American Fur Company had Miles make the traps to fill that order.¹³

Miles Standish traps are marked and the Museum of the Fur Trade has Standish traps with the following marks: **M Standish 89 Perry St. NY;** **M Standish** on both springs; **M Standish N. York.**¹⁴

The following Miles Standish beaver trap is marked **M. Standish**, on one spring. This is the earliest mark and was hand made before he developed methods for producing large quantities of traps. It is a typical “Mackinac” standard American style trap, it weighs three pounds eleven ounces, the jaws are seven inches wide and the length is twenty inches. The jaws are attached with two pins (rivets) on one side and three on the other.



#6. Miles Standish Beaver Trap

High quality traps were being made in St. Louis by 1817 by a new arrival from Brainbridge New York, Lewis Newell. Newell brought high-level skills that were not present until his arrival. He knew how to merge iron with steel and became noteworthy with local farmers and fur trade companies for edged tools such as axes, knives, plows and other implements. He also helped develop the area’s first foundry and developed a way to make wagon hub boxes that opened the door for local wagon manufacturing. He also made high quality, but very light all steel beaver traps for the far West fur trade that were easier to transport, but not as effective in drowning beaver quickly as the heavier Rocky Mountain style. Although he financially drifted between financial success and insolvency, he remained in business until 1860 and passed away in 1865.

Although trap orders from Ashley have not surfaced there is little doubt that Newell traps went up the Missouri during the 1820’s. After the keelboat “Enterprise” sunk with Jed Smith aboard in 1822, Ashley employed all able blacksmiths in St. Louis to replace traps, axes, knives and other metal tools and Newell must have been deeply involved. Robert Campbell kept meticulous business records and 1831 and 32 accounts reveal orders for Newell traps, springs and axes.

There are two noteworthy observations that link Newell with Jedediah Smith. The first is that Newell’s first blacksmith shop was in the same town where Jedediah was born and raised until he was ten, Bainbridge (Afton, Jerico) New York. Jedediah was 18 and living in Perrysville, Ohio when Newell arrived in St. Louis. Did they know each other? Also of interest is that Louis was the older brother of Robert, “Doc” Newell, who began his eleven-year fur trapping career with Smith, Jackson and Sublette in 1829. He was with Jedediah during his last trapping trip. Later along with Joe Meek, he was the first American to reach Oregon by wagon, where he remained and became prominent.

The Newell trap pictured at right is marked LN on one spring and weighs just one pound eleven ounces, but is all steel. It is nineteen inches long with eight-inch wide jaws.



#7. The Newell Trap

Early Western Fur Trade Traps - Continued

The next trap is another American style that features jaws that are curved at the top, not flat like earlier trap types. This trap is marked **J. Blasde** under the base and includes a thirty-three inch had forged chain with links being slightly twisted. This trap, with the chain, weighs three pounds eleven ounces and has six-inch wide jaws, is seventeen and one half inches long, has two rivet pins on each jaw pole, and has springs with different lengths. One spring is five inches long, the other is six and one half. Picture seven depicts the trap with springs folded and wrapped with the spring to demonstrate how the traps were prepared for transporting. Each trapper in a fur trade brigade was issued from eight to ten traps.



#8. The J. Blasde Trap

A fine muskrat trap is also pictured. It is nine and one quarter inches long, has four and one half inch jaws, with the jaw ends being rounded and bent ninety degrees and inserted into the jaw posts two secure the jaws to the trap base instead of using rivets. This technique was also used on earlier beaver traps like picture one. This trap is marked **A Bostwick**. There was a merchandise wholesaler named Bostwick & Stone during this period.



#9. A Muskrat Trap

Jedediah Smith and the HBC Brigades that hunted beaver in mid-California trapped the Western tributaries of the Sierra Nevada Mountains as well as the delta where the San Joaquin River flows through tributaries and the Suisun Tule dominated marshland. The Delta was the home to very large beaver that could not be trapped because of deep water and the beaver use of Tule to build their homes in the water. The following blacksmith made a nineteen-inch spear, along with their guns, hunting from Canoes was the solution.



#10. A Long Spear Point

Appreciation is expressed to Tom Holladay who provided helpful articles by Lester Ross about Fort Vancouver trap artifacts, Tom's *Fort Fun Facts 2012* article about Fort Vancouver traps, and an article from the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences by A.W. Schorger, "*A Brief History of the Steel Trap and It's Use in North America*".

Early Western Fur Trade Traps - Continued

End Notes:

1. *Castor Canadensis*, Summer 2010, pages 2 and 3.
2. *Firearms, Traps and Tools of the Mountain Men*, Carl P. Russell, page 100.
3. Ibid, page 124.
4. James Hanson, *Museum of the Fur Trade*.
5. *The Atlas of North American Exploration*, Goetzmann & Glyndwr Williams, page 116. The Northwest Company established a post at Slave Lake prior to 1812.
6. *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly*, vol 52, #1, Spring 2016 p 19.
7. op.cit. Carl P. Russell, p108-109.
8. bid, page 109.
9. op.cit. *Castor Canadensis*, Summer 2010, p3-4.
10. op.cit. Carl Russell, p102, drawing by Glen Dines.
11. Ibid, page 138.
12. Jim Hanson, *Rocky Mountain Fur Trade Journal*, vol 11, 2017 “*The Common Denominator*” p75 and vol 54, Winter, 2018, p8-13.
13. Op.cit. Carl Russell, p 133, Ibid-Jim Hanson, p73.
14. *Museum of the Fur trade Quarterly*, Vol 52, #1 *Marked Hand Forged Traps* ... p14-15; James Ha Jim Hanson, *Rocky Mountain Fur Trade Journal*, vol 11, 2017 “*The Common Denominator*” Hanson and Jon Nelson.

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CASTOR CANADENSIS NEWSLETTER GUIDELINES

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1. Prospective authors should send their articles or questions to Kevin Kucera at kckucera@msn.com
2. Submit in MS Word.
3. End notes should be numbered consecutively.
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5. After receipt the article will be reviewed by a technical editor. Once this is completed the author will be notified and an approximate date for publication will be provided.
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**Please remember to go to our website: www.JedediahSmithSociety.org
to check out the interactive maps that have been created by our map team. They're unbelievable!**

Also please consider purchasing a map for your wall.

They come in 2 sizes: 24" x 36" and 16" x 20". You may order the historic style or one with modern highways added. You will find the order sheet on-line with instructions.

Archives Corner

Jedediah Smith Today

by, Dale L. Morgan, of Bancroft Library,
distinguished biographer of Jedediah Smith.

REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION: *Pacific Historian* Spring 1967, Volume 11, No. 2.

All of the *Pacific Historians* are now available online with full-text searching on the University of the Pacific Libraries' Holt-Atherton Special Collections and Archives webpage (go.pacific.edu/archives, and click on "digital collections"). *Pacific* continues to add content for online searching and viewing. Read miners' letters from the Gold Rush, look at photographs of historic Stockton, transcribe Muir's journals for easier searching, watch videos about Mayor George Moscone, and of course peruse issues of the *Pacific Historian* and see this original article as it appeared in 1967. The staff of the Archives is always adding more so visit again and again.



Mr. Morgan at the tenth anniversary breakfast of the Jedediah Smith Society, of which he is a life member.

IT IS INDEED a pleasure for me to meet with the Jedediah Smith Society on the occasion of our tenth anniversary. Mr. Case, whose formidable importunities brought me to Stockton today, has advised you that my topic will be "the biographical trail of Jedediah Smith." But I shall spare you my memoirs this morning, reserving those for my old age — if I ever get there.

A society with a name like ours inevitably must have a heroizing tendency; and this morning you are hearing reports on such projects as the marking of Jedediah Smith trails in California's mountains and deserts, issuance of a postage stamp to commemorate his achievements, and his election to the hall of fame in New York. All of these are worthwhile endeavors, but we must be careful, it seems to me, what we venture to do in Jedediah Smith's name.

In my biography,¹ published some thirteen years ago, I described Jedediah Smith as "an authentic American hero, a man who packed a staggering amount of achievement into the time between his twenty-third and thirty-third years." "Yet his," I went on to say, "is a story with a strange aftermath, for Jedediah Smith dead has had to fight for survival in the American memory with the same tenacity he brought to the struggle for physical survival during the years he ranged the West. His countrymen did their best to forget him entirely, but the integrity and magnitude of his accomplishment, the energy and passion which infused his life and work, have finally brought him out upon the sunlit plateau for all to see."

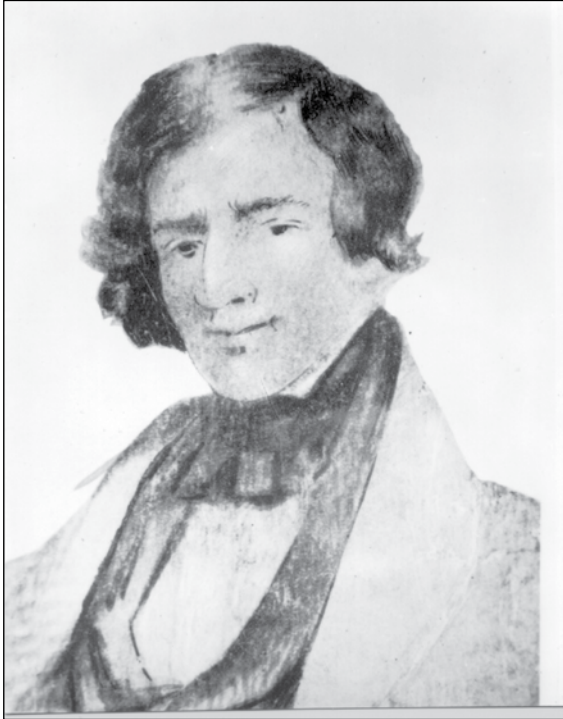
I think it significant that Jedediah's stature owes to the labors of serious scholars, much more than to his survival in folk memory, for thereby his name and reputation have kept in step with a sound body of fact. A deliberate effort to achieve fame for Jedediah may do him an actual disservice.

Let me ask a question. Do you regard it as desirable that a movie should be made, based upon the life of Jedediah Smith? I think all you would be inclined to say yes. But let us pause and reflect. Is it actually possible to make a moving picture out of Jedediah's life, one that will deal with his life as fairly and honestly as historians have dealt with it?

Consider some of the problems. Jedediah Smith seems principally important to us for his explorations, which helped so signally in opening up the West. His life was therefore one of almost unceasing movement over a period of nine years, from the spring of 1822, when he first voyaged up the Missouri River, to the spring of 1831, when he died under the lances of Comanche Indians on the Cimarron River.

Archives Corner

Jedediah Smith Today(Continued)



This portrait is the only one known with any claim to authenticity. It is said to have been done from memory by a friend after Jed died. Note how a later artist has “heroized” it in the oil painting at right .

— the semi-legendary Mike Fink or Hugh Glass, for example. But would this not do violence to Jedediah Smith and his place in American history? Would vulgarization of his story be honestly a service to his name? Perhaps a very fine craftsman, having an encyclopedic knowledge of Jedediah Smith’s era, might be able to bring off such a series. But the odds were clearly against it; and even conceding that I had the necessary skills and knowledge, was I justified in abandoning the pioneering jobs I really wanted to do in history to expend a year or two of my life on such a project?

I backed away. Since then, observing the inexpressible cheapness of what has been done with Davy Crockett, Wyatt Earp, and Daniel Boone, I have many times felt that we are better off without a Jedediah Smith television series. I, for one, think the presently-running Daniel Boone programs are a public disgrace, an immoral looting of the legend of the great Boone by men too lazy or too incompetent to create their own legend. I would have no objection to a completely fictional conception — let us say, the “John Henry Jones program.” This series however, has purported to deal with the historical Daniel Boone.

“His years in the West,” as I noted in my biography, “are a sustained, almost unrelieved chronicle of physical endurance, unflagging courage, and granitic purpose, with occasional climaxes in which his spirit burns clear and bright.”²

But nine searing years on the epic plane are really more than scriptwriters can cope with. They have found it almost impossible for, example, to render the Lewis and Clark story in moving picture terms, and the Lewis and Clark Expedition has a unity in time and purpose, a compactness, that we cannot find in Jedediah’s story. Very rarely is a satisfactory movie made even out of a novel; short stories lend themselves much better to dramatization. How much more difficult, then, to grapple with a life like Jedediah’s! I do not say the job cannot be done, but such a script would require imagination and a feeling for history far beyond the Hollywood norm.

Well, then, if not a movie, why not a television series? Surely Jedediah Smith’s life would lend itself to the episodic requirements of a series. A year or so after my biography was published, I had a letter from one of the principal agencies in Hollywood, soliciting my ideas on the subject. The objective would be a sustained series, each program complete in itself, each with its own definite beginning, middle, and end.

I began to think about the problem. The need was not just for one program, or thirteen, but for as many as thirty-nine; and assuming the success of the series, two or three times thirty-nine programs might be demanded. I could see immediately that Jedediah Smith’s life did not lend itself to a neat, rhythmic entertainment pattern. Conceivably he could be used as a central figure, a narrative device, with the individual episodes centering upon the experiences or exploits of individual Mountain Men



Portrait by Ruth Senf Fromberg, Friends of the Middle Border Gallery, Mitchell, South Dakota.

Archives Corner

Jedediah Smith Today(Continued)



A fanciful sketch of Jed Smith escaping from Mojaves on his return to California in 1827. Smith was a clean shaver, never had a moustache.

gradual emergence as a principal figure in American history, each building block supporting the next in a good and honest structure.

This brings me to a recurring problem, the tendency by well-meaning enthusiasts to transform Jedediah Smith into a religious folk hero. As we shall see, as early as 1880 William Waldo commended Jedediah to the attention of the Sunday schools, but the subject is one to be approached with caution — and close attention to the facts.

At the time my biography was published. I happened to be in Washington, carrying out some researches in the National Archives. One day a member of the staff came up to speak about the book — plainly he had not read it — and to ask if Jedediah Smith was not really a missionary to the Indians rather than a fur trader, if the fur trading was not just a means to this end.

I was dumfounded by the question, and have often thought about it since. That Jedediah Smith was a “religious” man is obvious; but it also seemed obvious to me that for him religion was primarily a personal ethic, a code he lived by, his preaching confined to exhortation within his own family.

Note what was said in the first eulogy of Jedediah Smith ever published, the anonymous tribute printed in the *Illinois Monthly Magazine* for June, 1832, a year after Jedediah’s death:

“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 sources of the Columbia River, and following it to its mouth, and of making the whole profitable to me, and I have perfectly succeeded.”

In these words, three months before his death, Jedediah summed up his life. The eulogist — we would give much to

Several fine novels have been written about the Mountain Men. But note that Harvey Fergusson’s protagonist in *Wolf Song* bears the name “Sam Lash,” not Kit Carson; and in A. B. Guthrie’s *The Big Sky* we are concerned with “Boone Caudill,” not with a Caudill labeled Jim Bridger. I object to television programs that are fundamentally irresponsible, which have pretensions to being historical but are perversions of history. So I ask again: Does it really strike you as a good idea to have Jedediah Smith converted into a movie or television “personality”? What would he gain? What would any of us gain? What might he and we stand to lose?

There is a point where we should make haste slowly in the heroizing process. I think that any thing this Society undertakes to do in Jedediah Smith’s name had better have long and prayerful consideration. It may indeed be better that Jedediah Smith should be left in the hands of the historians, who have done a rather good job of “raising him” thus far, in preference to turning him over to public relations experts, who, in exploiting him, may half destroy him. That Jedediah is truly making his way, without benefit of “forcing,” is instanced by the fact that the *Encyclopedia Britannica* asked me to do an article on him for the 1966 edition of that long-established reference work. A condensed entry in a general encyclopedia may seem a small matter, but such a development is of a piece with Jedediah Smith’s

Archives Corner

Jedediah Smith Today(*Continued*)

establish his identity — discussed Jedediah's accomplishments as an explorer of the Western wilderness, as the greatest American "traveler," and only then reflected upon the character of the man. Jedediah, he said:

... had 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 to 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. . . . In all his dealings with the Indians, he was strictly honorable, and always endeavored to give them favorable ideas of the whites. . . . He was kind, obliging, and generous to a fault. Without being connected with any church, he was 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."³

All this was said by someone who had actually known Jedediah Smith. We may infer that Robert Campbell, who spent the fall and winter of 1825-1826 with Jedediah, sharing a Pawnee lodge with him while winterbound on the Plains, formed a similar opinion, Jedediah seen as a man of probity who did not, however, flaunt his religion. This was expressed in a letter of July 12, 1827, that Robert sent his brother Hugh from the Bear Lake Rendezvous. Though Robert's own letter has not come to light, its purport is reflected in Hugh's unpublished reply, dated at Richmond, Virginia, on October 5 of the same year:

As to your prospects of settling down in the steady pursuit of a fixed mercantile business I can only say that such is my most ardent wish. If Mr. Smith be in all respects the exalted character you represent him to be the business will & *must* under your united management & with the capital you speak of, result advantageously.⁴

Robert like Jedediah was a basically God-fearing man, and the partnership they envisioned after his return from California might have worked out to the satisfaction of both.

William Waldo, in his "Recollections of a Septuagenarian," first published by the Missouri Historical Society in 1880, was at pains to stress the religious aspect of Jedediah's character. The young man, he said, was:

. . . a bold, outspoken, professing and competent Christian; the first and only one that was known among the early Rocky Mountain hunters and trappers. No one who knew him well ever doubted the sincerity of his piety. He had become a communicant of the Methodist Church before leaving his home in New York, and there are no doubt some Methodists yet living in the city of St. Louis who can call to mind the religious character and the liberality of Jedediah Smith, for when in the city he never failed to occupy his place in the church of his choice, while he gave generously to all objects connected with the religion he professed and loved. There could be no better character found on which to base a true and interesting book for Sunday Schools, or a religious romance; the tale of his life told through, would require no twisting or fixing up to fill its pages.⁵

Primarily it was on William Waldo's comments about Jedediah that Hiram M. Chittenden based his own memorable estimate of Jedediah's character in his *History of the American Fur Trade*, as published in 1902: Jedediah Smith, said Chittenden:

. . . was like that distinguished character of later years, Stonewall Jackson, in combining with the most ardent belief in, and practice of, the Christian religion, an undaunted courage, fierce and impetuous nature, and untiring energy. . . . He was a true knight errant, a lover of the kind of adventure which the unexplored West afforded in such ample degrees.

Edwin L. Sabin, in his *Kit Carson Days*, published in 1914, guessed that it might have been Jedediah who instructed the

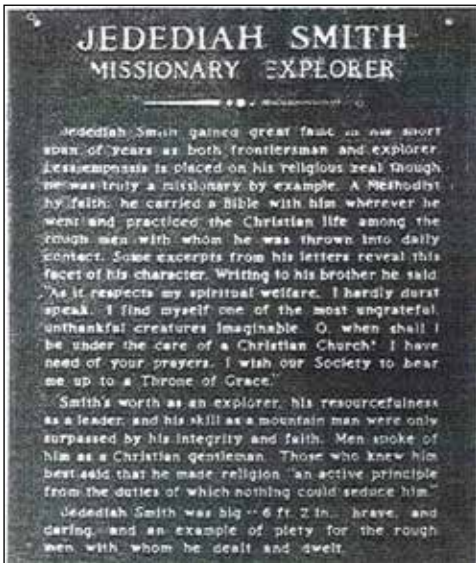
Archives Corner

Jedediah Smith Today(Continued)

Flatheads in the existence of the Bible, while spending the winter of 1824-1825 among this tribe.

Thereafter we began hearing of Jedediah Smith as the “Knight in Buckskin,” as the “Bible toter,” and the religious legend has been evolving since. I have tacitly admitted in print that Jedediah Smith carried a Bible with him into the West, but we have no actual evidence that he ever owned one. When he died, the inventory of his estate included the titles of twelve books, of which only three were religious in character, a volume of Charles Buck’s *Theological Dictionary*, and two works entitled *Natural Theology* and *Evidence of Christianity*.⁶ That no Bible was listed does not mean that Jedediah did not possess one; it is entirely conceivable that he carried one in his saddlebags, to be thrown away at last by the Comanches who killed him. The point is, this is all speculation, no proof about a Bible one way or another, nothing ever said about a Bible until the present century was well advanced. There is a touch of absurdity to the picture some have drawn of Jedediah sitting around the campfire reading his Bible each night. Is that the essence of being a Christian?

Sabin’s speculation about Jedediah’s having impressed the Flatheads with the existence of the Bible in the winter of 1824-1825 was a shot into the dark, and demonstrates the sparseness of the fur trade record available in 1914. We now know that



Smith was “a missionary by example,” explains this marker. It’s on US 12 in South Dakota near where Rees attacked Ashley’s party, 1823, and Jed first showed up as a leader of men.

The letter included a comment, “Mr. Smith a young man of our company made a powerful prayer which moved us all greatly and I am persuaded John died in peace.”¹⁰ This simple prayer over a dying companion may be what it has been called, “the first act of public worship in the State of South Dakota.” But how preposterous is the mural depicting this event which now hangs in the South Dakota State Capitol! The mural shows an angel spreading her wings back of the kneeling Jedediah, and five watching Indians (mostly armed, at that) scarcely concealed in a grove of trees ten feet away.¹¹ Gunpowder, not piety, is implicit in such a scene. Important as religion may be, a binding and moving force in our society, I think Jedediah Smith must primarily be conceived as an American of his times, determined to get on in life, though strongly motivated by his upbringing, his habits of mind, and the Christian ethic. His letters to his brother Ralph, placed in the Kansas Historical Society about 1915 by his greatnephew, E. D. Smith, give us some insight into these matters.¹² Let us have the blood and guts, the taut muscularity, and the brains of the whole man, not a Sunday school stereotype, and let us hope that more information to illuminate the whole man will be forthcoming.

Jedediah Smith did not reach Flathead Post until November 26, 1824, and that he turned southward again four weeks later.⁷ How would he have communicated usefully with these Indians, unable to speak any Indian language, least of all Salish? And why assume that he was overcome by missionary zeal in respect of these Indians, and these Indians only, among all the tribes he encountered during his years in the West? His fragmentary journal, known to the world since 1934, of course presents no such picture of his interests and contrasts forcibly with the diaries of the Methodist missionaries Jason Lee and Cyrus Shepard, en route to Oregon in 1834.⁸

Several recent works have shown rather conclusively that the Flathead interest in the white man’s religion was initiated by Iroquois trappers who came to dwell among them; that the Flatheads were further intrigued by information acquired from Spokane Garry, who during the 1820s was educated at the Red River school at present Winnipeg; that American trappers were continuously among the Flatheads from 1826 on, among whom Robert Campbell at least was fully capable of discussing the Bible; and that when some Flatheads came down to St. Louis at last, in the summer and fall of 1831, they traveled the whole way with the party of Lucien Fontenelle and Andrew Drips — the former a good Catholic to his dying day.⁹ The picture of Jedediah Smith as a voluntary or involuntary missionary to the Indians simply vanishes under close inspection.

I think, then, that we must resist any tendency to convert Jedediah into an essentially religious hero. The process has been accelerating for fifty years or so. You will remember that a letter from Hugh Glass turned up, describing the fight with the Arikaras in June, 1823, and the fatal wounding of John S. Gardner.

Archives Corner

Jedediah Smith Today(*Continued*)

What are the continuing tasks of Jedediah Smith scholarship? What in my view is the proper role of the Jedediah Smith Society in advancing this scholarship?

One worthy project, possible here and now, is publication of the genealogical researches of Stella Dory Hare, a remarkable lady now in her 83rd year, whom I have been privileged to call my friend these many years. A descendant of Jedediah's sister Sally, she has been indefatigable in working out family genealogy. When I published my biography, I had no information on Jedediah Smith's paternal ancestry back of his father; and it is far more difficult to backtrack a family named Smith than one named - say, Hassenpfeffer. Thanks to Mrs. Harte and those who have worked with her, we know that Jedediah's ancestors had been in America since Lieutenant Samuel Smith reached Watertown, Massachusetts, from England aboard the *Elizabeth of Ipswich* in the summer of 1634, that Jedediah belonged to the sixth generation after Samuel. I have seen large sections of Mrs. Hare's book, tentatively titled, *The Ancestry of Jedediah Strong Smith, 1799-1831, with Collateral and Related Families*, and I have no hesitation in describing it as the most significant contribution to Jedediah Smith scholarship since Carl Wheat's cartographic discoveries, a dozen years ago. In the light of this work, we can see the Jedediah Smith family in very broad perspective, as part of the mainstream of American life, from 1934 to the present day.

We would like to know much more than we now do about the experiences of the Smith family from the year of Jedediah's birth in New York, 1799, to the time of his departure for the West from the Western Reserve of Ohio, 1821. We may hope that patient search and the necessary quota of good luck will develop some of this information in civil, church, and personal records. Inquiries by individual members of this Society could well serve in bringing forth important facts, item by item.

Since Jedediah's eminence in American history rests above all upon his years in the fur trade and his feats of exploration, we have to go on hoping that fortunate finds will further extend the record. The greatest find we have any real expectation of making is his journal (or that of his clerk Harrison Rogers), kept on the first expedition to California, and known to have been sent to Mexico in December, 1826. Research in the more obvious places in the Mexican Archives has failed to produce this longed-for journal, as also at least one letter Jedediah is known to have written before leaving the San Francisco Bay Area in December, 1827. We will all have to be alert, as the Mexican archivists by degrees impose order upon the records in their custody. We may then hope that the significance of any find, when made, will be recognized. At the moment, even if unlimited funds were available to finance new searches after these manuscripts. I am not sure that the money could be spent to good purpose. I hope that I live long enough to see the Mexican Archives yield what should be, ought to be, *must* be there.

We may hear at any time that original Jedediah Smith maps have been discovered, in this country or in England. But, again, no one knows where to start looking.

Other possibilities exist.

After Jedediah Smith reached California in 1826, he and Harrison Rogers helped their men write letters to their families. Why should not some of these letters turn up, some day? The prospect of widespread recoveries is not great, owing to the twin disasters of 1827 and 1828, when so many of Jedediah's men died in Indian massacres; if some of them were capable of keeping diaries, these records must have perished with their owners. We are fortunate beyond expectation that so much of Jedediah's own journal, and that of Harrison Rogers, survived the Umpqua Massacre.

Lost records of the Hudson's Bay Company, including several of Jedediah's letters, may yet be found; and we go on hoping that diaries and letters by men who ranged the Rockies in the 1820s and 1830s have been preserved, some day to emerge into the light of day with fresh information on Jedediah's era.

Meanwhile, we who are interested in Jedediah Smith and his contributions to American history should be jealous of his

Notes

1. *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West* by Dale L. Morgan (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953; also Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press; Bison Books, 1964).
2. *Ibid.* p. 7.
3. Most modern scholars know the eulogy as it was twice reprinted in Edwin L. Sabin's *Kit Carson Days* (1914 and 1935). The title given by Sabin was: "Captain Jedediah Strong Smith : A Eulogy of that Most Romantic and Pious of Mountain Men, First American by Land into California." When a present-day scholar cites the eulogy in this fashion, Sabin is his unacknowledged source, for the title in the original is simply, "Jedediah Strong Smith."

Archives Corner

Jedediah Smith Today(*Continued*)

4. This letter, with some other materials relating to Jedediah Smith, is printed in my forthcoming *The Rocky Mountains and the Yellowstone: Robert Campbell's Era in the American Fur Trade* (Denver: Old West Publishing Co.).
5. William Waldo's recollections were first printed in Missouri Historical Society *Collections*, 1880. They were reprinted in the Society's *Glimpses of the Past*, April-June, 1938, vol. V, pp. 59-94. Frances Fuller Victor, writing up Joseph L. Meek's reminiscences as *River of the West* (Hartford, 1870), also drew attention to unusual aspects of Jedediah's character, describing him as "a pious man, one of the few that ever resided in the Rocky Mountains" (p. 60), and reiterating that he was "a religious man" who found distasteful the coarse profanity of the mountain men: "A very mild man and a christian; and there were few of them in the mountains" (p. 79).
6. Other books named in the inventory (St. Louis Probate Court, File 930, microfilm in the Bancroft Library), were: *Henry's Exposition*, 6 vols.; *Morris Gazetteer*, 1 vol.; *Seaman's Daily Assistant*, 1 vol.; Clapperton's *Second Expedition into Africa*, 1 vol.; Rollins' *Ancient History*, 1 vol.; *History of Mexico*, 1 vol., *Webster's Dictionary*, 2 vols.; *Josephus*, 4 vols; *History of Ancient Greece*, 1 vol. All these books were purchased from Jedediah's estate by his brother Austin.
7. For these and other biographical details, see my *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West*, noted above.
8. Lee's journal is printed in Oregon Historical Society, *Quarterly*, vol. 17, June-December, 1916. Cyrus Shepard's manuscript diary is in the Yale Western Americana Collection.

It should not be inferred, however, that Smith was oblivious to the need of Indians for benefits of the white man's religion. In his journal (*The Travels of Jedediah Smith* edited by Maurice S. Sullivan, Santa Ana, Calif., 1934), under date of March 21, 1828, p.72 he says:

"If missionaries could be useful in Civilizing and Christianizing any indians in the World their efforts should be turned towards this valley. The indians are numerous honest and peaceable in their dispositions. They live in a country where the soil is good and the climate pleasant with the exception of 2 or 3 months in the winter when there is too much rain. There is seldom any frost and I have seen snow but once in the valley of the Buenaventura [Sacramento] ."
9. See Clifford M. Drury, ed., *The Diaries and Letters of Henry H. Spalding and Asa Bowen Smith relating to the Nez Perce Mission*, 1838, 1842 (Glendale: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1958), for Spokane Garry; see in particular Smith's letter of August 27, 1839, pp. 106-107.

Further background on the awakening interest of Flatheads and Nez Perces in the white man's religion may be found in Gilbert J. Garraghan, *The Jesuits of the Middle United States* (New York, 1938), 3 vols., vol. 2, pp. 236-245, and in Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., *The Nez Perces and the Opening of the Northwest* (New Haven and London: Yale, 1965), pp. 85-103. See also Warren Ferris, *Life in the Rocky Mountains* (Denver, 1940), pp. 88-89, 96, 141, and the sketches of Fontenelle and Drips in Dale L. Morgan and Eleanor T. Harris, *The Rocky Mountain Journals of William Marshall Anderson* (San Marino, 1966).
10. See Dale L. Morgan, *The West of William H. Ashley, 1822-1838* (Denver, 1964), p. 31. Although a fair presumption, it is only a presumption that this "Mr. Smith" was Jedediah. There was also in Ashley's company at this time a responsible young man named Samuel M. Smith (*ibid.*, pp. 47-48, 240, 243).
11. This painting, by Charles Holloway, is reproduced in *The Travels of Jedediah Smith*, opp. p. 10.
12. See the appendix to my *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West*.

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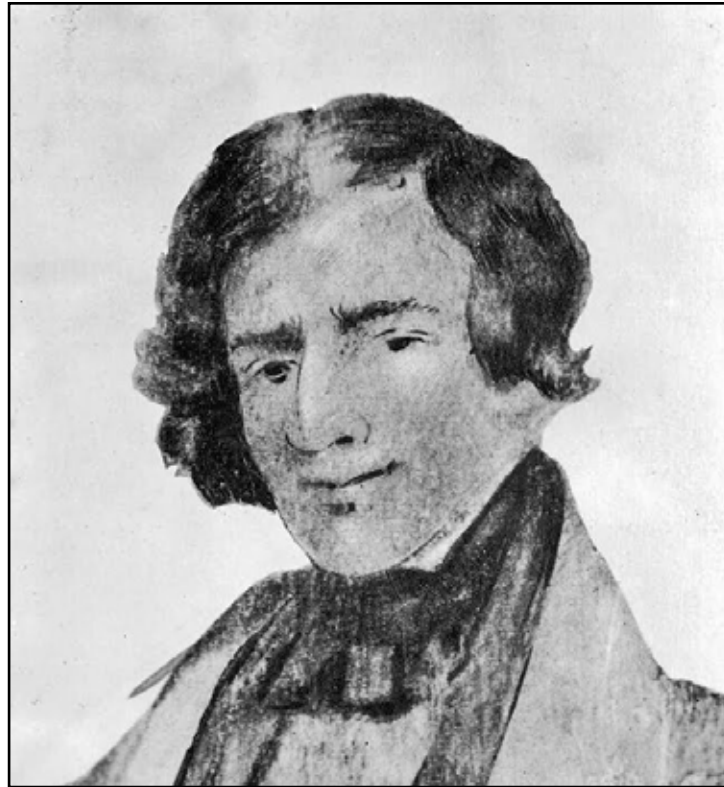
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