



# CASTOR CANADENSIS

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## Indian Horse and American Western Expansion

BY, O.N. EDDINS

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### Introduction:

Where did the Indian horses originate and how did Native Americans acquire them? This question not only intrigued Indian Ethnologists for years but led to wrongful assumptions that exist today.<sup>1</sup> The acquisition of horses made it possible for American Indians to move onto the Plains and fully embrace a hunter-gatherer lifestyle.<sup>2</sup> Besides revolutionizing Plains Indian cultures, the Indian horse was an essential ingredient of the Rocky Mountain Fur Trade; no one demonstrated this more than Jedediah Smith.

### Indian Horses:

The horse evolved from a small multi-toed animal (*Eohippus*) to a single-toed horse, *Equus caballus*. Developing species of the Equine family had three toes, others four toes, and others one toe. No single branch in the Equine fossil record led directly from a small multi-toed horse to the single-toed horse of today.<sup>3</sup>

Twenty-five million years ago, a three-toed horse named *Meshippus* roamed the North American Plains.<sup>4</sup> The skull of *Meshippus* measured eight inches from the base of skull to the upper front teeth, and three and a half inches from jawbone to the forehead above the eye.<sup>5</sup>



**Meshippus Fossil – Courtesy of Albert Eddins**

The Equine evolutionary record in North America spans a period of sixty million to ten thousand years and then abruptly ends.<sup>6</sup> Prior

to the disappearance of horses in North America, horses had migrated from North America to Eurasia.

The modern-day horse, *Equus caballus*, was domesticated around 2500 B. C. in the Middle East and Asia.<sup>7</sup> Four thousand years later, Spanish Conquistadors brought horses back to North America. The first domesticated horses (*Equus*) to arrive in North America were Spanish horses that had been brought to the Caribbean Islands. Hernán Cortés brought horses to the Vera Cruz area of Mexico in 1519, Hernando De Soto arrived in Florida with horses in 1539, and Coronado took horses into the Southwest in 1541.<sup>8</sup>

Early Indian Ethnologists believed the American Indians acquired their first horses from wild horse herds roaming the American Plains. Ethnologists claimed these feral horses were descendants of horses lost by Spanish explorers: Francisco Vazquez de Coronado (1540 – 1542) on the Plains and Hernando De Soto (1539 – 1541) in the Gulf states.<sup>9</sup>

This hypothesis by early Indian ethnologists was questioned by Roe, Ewers, Haines, and others. These researchers

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believed Indians west of the Mississippi River acquired their first horses, and the knowledge required to handle horses, through trade originating with the Southwest Indians.

John Ewers noted the recorded reactions of Indians first seeing a horse was an expression of fear. Ewers stated:

*It is hardly creditable that any northern tribe obtained their first horses by stealing mounts of a neighboring tribes who had acquired horses at a somewhat earlier date. I believe peaceful contact was a necessary condition of horse diffusion in order that some members of the pedestrian tribe might learn to overcome their initial fear of horses and learn to ride and manage these lively animals.*<sup>10</sup>

Ewers described the horses originally brought by Conquistador as:

*The adult male Indian Pony averaged a little under 14 hands in height, weighed about 700 pound, possessed a large head in proportion to its body, good eyes, head and neck joined like the two ends of a hammer, short thick neck, large round barrel, relatively heavy shoulders and hips; small, fine, strong limbs and small feet. Indian ponies exhibited a wide range of solid and mixed colors.*<sup>11</sup>

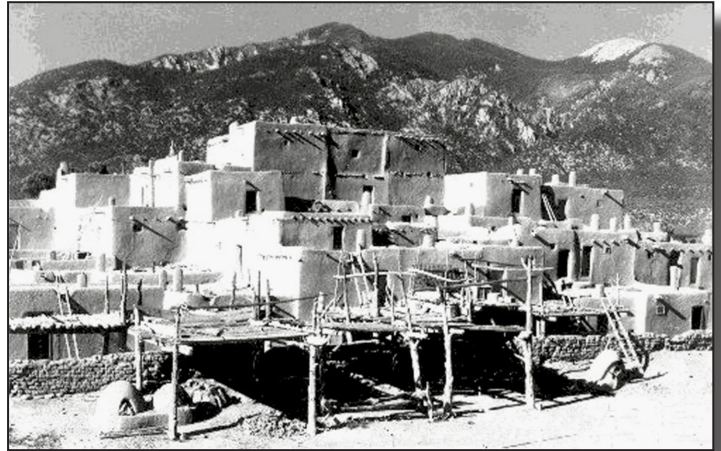


War Chief - Courtesy of Dr. Castle McLaughlin

I digress to bring out an important point. By present-day standards Indian horses were small, but based on standards of the time, these horses were considered average size. A well-known horse of this time period was the foundation sire of the Morgan breed, Justin Morgan...Justin Morgan was 14 hands and weighed 1000 pounds.<sup>12, 13</sup>

By the mid-sixteen hundred horses stocked Spanish ranchos in northern Mexico and the Spanish Southwest. The harsh-brutal treatment of the Pueblo people by the Spanish led to

the 1680 Pueblo Revolt. Prior to the Pueblo Revolt, Spanish horses were difficult for Southwest Indians to acquire, but Indian slaves fleeing from ranchos occasionally took horses with them.<sup>14</sup>



Taos Pueblo

Popé, leader of the Pueblo Revolt, planned the attack from the Taos Pueblo. The Pueblo uprising forced the Spanish out of the Southwest leaving horses behind, especially mares and foals, on abandoned ranchos.<sup>15</sup> As crop farmers and sheep raisers, the Pueblo Indians had no experience with horses, or use for them, but these abandoned Spanish horses were easy prey for Comanche, Ute, Apache, and Pawnee Indians.<sup>16</sup>

By the early seventeen hundred, the progeny of horses brought to this country by Conquistadors stretched from Florida to the Carolinas, west through Tennessee, and throughout the western mountains and great plains.<sup>17</sup> Dr. Phillip Sponnenberg wrote:

*...the Colonial Spanish Horses were the most common of all horses throughout North America at that time and were widely used for riding as well as draft. In addition to being the common mount of the native tribes...*<sup>18</sup>

The major driving force behind this rapid-widespread distribution was the Comanche Indians. The Comanche separated from the Wyoming Shoshone tribes in the sixteen hundred and eventually settled along the Colorado Front Range. By 1705, the Comanche had moved into Nuevo Mexico to be closer to Spanish horses. Once settled in the Southwest, the Comanche had a dramatic increase in population. This population increase was due to a better and more consistent food supply from abundant buffalo coupled with use of the horse. An influx of Shoshone Indians, kidnapping women and children from rival tribes, and captives from Mexican settlements contributed to this rapid growth.<sup>19</sup>

Within a few decades, Comanche warriors become the dominate supplier of horses for a trading network involving



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the Mississippi River Valley settlements, the Columbia Plateau, and the Missouri River villages. The northeast trading partners of the Comanche were the Kiowa, Pawnee, and Wichita Indians. These three tribes supplied horses to the Omaha; Omaha Indians supplied horses to the settlements along the Missouri and Mississippi rivers.

The Comanche provided the Shoshone and Crow with their first horses. From the Shoshone and Crow tribes, horses spread to the Columbia Plateau tribes and the Missouri River Fur Trade centers.<sup>20</sup>

Within a hundred-year period, Spanish horses spread from the Mexican Southwest to Canada. This rapid dissemination of horses was possible through an already extensive Indian Trade network between the Plains tribes and the semi-sedentary Missouri River villages. These yearly trade fairs had existed for generations between the Plains Indians and the villages of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Indians. This trade network was often between linguistic similar tribes.<sup>21</sup>

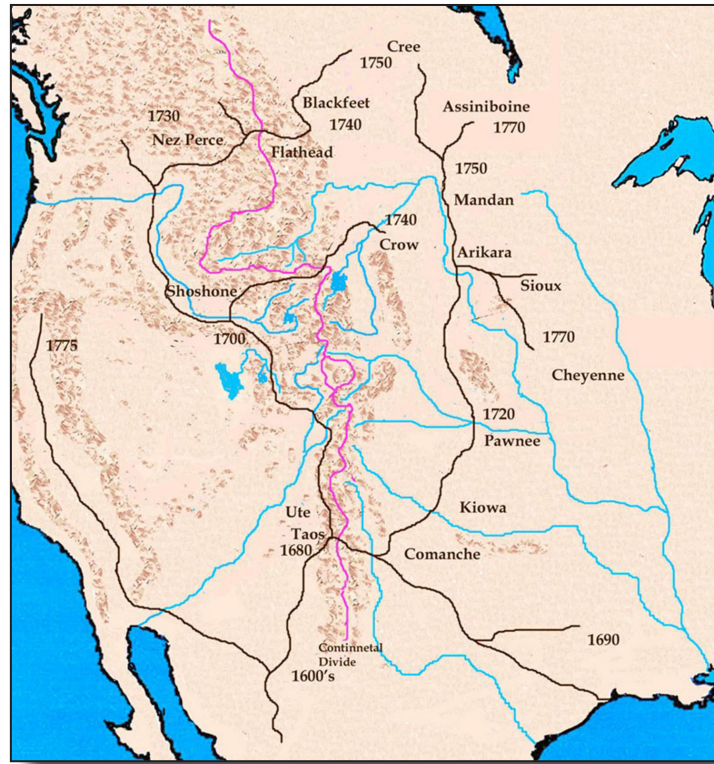
By the late seventeen hundreds, the Indian Trade network included Canadian fur traders at the Missouri River Trade centers. Trade goods exchanged at these Trade Fairs were:

- 1) agriculture products (beans, squash, corn, etc.) raised at the Missouri River villages.
- 2) horses, furs, robes and meat from the Plains Indians.
- 3) guns, iron goods, and Hudson Bay point blankets from Canadian traders.

Two items traded at Indian Trade fairs with the biggest effect on the Indian Culture were horses and guns. Horses from the southwest and guns from the northeast met at the Missouri River Trade fairs.<sup>22</sup>

There were other trade fairs besides those held at the Missouri River villages. The Sioux held a trade fair on the James River that attracted up to three thousand Sioux warriors. The Sioux trade fairs were between various Sioux tribes and Canadian traders.<sup>23</sup> Since the Sioux acquired

their guns from Canadian traders, they opposed American traders trading guns to Missouri River Indians; these tribes were often at war with the Sioux.<sup>25</sup>



**Territorial Spread of Horses**

The Blackfoot tribes traded with Canadian traders on the Bow and Saskatchewan rivers.<sup>25</sup> Like the Sioux, the Blackfoot were opposed to fur traders trading guns to Missouri River Indians.

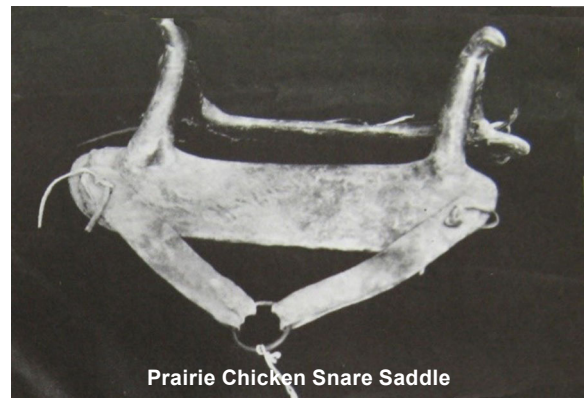
Feral horses were of little value in Plains Indian's efforts to acquire enough horses for their needs. Robert Denhardt stated:

*...that the natives obtained their original horses, and always by far the greatest numbers, from the Spaniards or from neighboring tribes and not from the wild herds. The Indians had mounts by the time the wild herds dotted the Plains,*

*and always preferred domesticated animals to the wild Mestenos. Mustangs later called were hard to catch, and once caught, harder to tame.*<sup>26</sup>

John Ewers's Blackfoot Indian informants told him the Blackfeet never tried to catch mustangs (feral horses), and the only tribe they had heard of doing it were the Kiowa.<sup>27</sup>

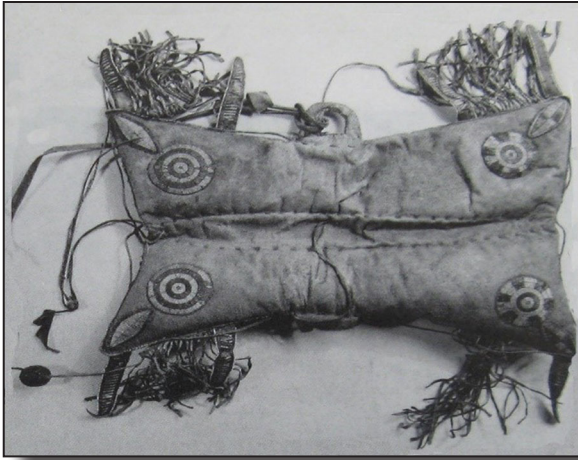
The horse was one trade item that did not make Indians dependent on fur traders. Bridles were made from rawhide, or in some cases, braided buffalo hair. In terms of saddles, Ewers states...an active man's saddle, which was little more than a soft, skin pillow stuffed with hair was known as a "pad saddle."<sup>28</sup> Warriors carried their weapons with them



**Prairie Chicken Snare Saddle**

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at all times, and the high pommel and cantle on the wooden saddles were too confining and cumbersome for a warrior and his weapons. In terms of handling, riding, and use of horse equipment, Indians adopted the ways of the Mexican vaquero.



**Warrior Horse Pad**

Horses were originally used to carry baggage, but once warriors started to ride horses, the warriors brought back longer tipi poles. The longer poles allowed construction of larger buffalo hide tipis. Another use for long poles was for the framework of travois. <sup>30</sup>

The use of the horse drawn travois enabled the Plains Indians to become true nomadic hunters. In dog-days, the travois load size was limited to 75 pounds, and Indians lived primarily in brush shelters on the edge of the Plains. <sup>31</sup> Once horses were used to pull a travois, several hundred pounds could be carried on the travois framework. A drawback to the large horse drawn travois was it restricted the type of terrain over which the movement of a village could travel. <sup>32</sup>



**Google Images**

Indian horses brought about a dramatic change in the Indian Culture, but horses did not initially change the Indian hunter-gatherer lifestyle. Prior to introduction of the horse, the primary way of hunting buffalo was for members of a village to surround a herd and drive it into a corral (Piskun) or run the herd off a cliff (Buffalo Jump). At first, mounted riders handled buffalo in the same manner as they had done on

foot. Eventually the equestrian tribes replaced the surround and buffalo jump techniques with the buffalo chase. During the buffalo chase, buffalo were killed with lance or bow and arrows by horse mounted warriors.

A prized possession among warriors were the buffalo horses. <sup>33</sup> A buffalo horse was trained to run beside a buffalo during the chase. The highest individual war honor for many tribes was a warrior stealing a picketed buffalo horse from an enemy village. <sup>34</sup> Some warriors kept the highly-valued buffalo horses inside their lodge at night or picketed nearby.

The number of horses within a tribe could be increased through a war party, breeding, or trade. The only one of these options open to a young man was the war party, and this option was only available after he had some experience in handling horses. <sup>35</sup> The same methods warriors used for stealing another tribe's women and children was applied to stealing enemy horses. <sup>36</sup>

Indian efforts, if any, to breed horses was directed primarily toward producing a particular color. All owners did was select a stallion with this characteristic; nothing was done to improve the quality of the mares. Ewers stated most men were too poor, or careless, to devote thought or time to any kind of mare selection. <sup>37</sup>

Individuals, not the tribe, owned the horses. This produced a class system based on ownership of horses. <sup>30</sup> Large numbers of horses elevated the owner's prestige and power and increased the number of wives he could support; additional wives were needed to dress the beaver pelts and buffalo hides from the increased number taken through the use of horses.

Owners with abundant horses loaned them to poorer village members during camp moves, or buffalo hunts. In the Indian culture, generosity was the mark of a true leader.

By the early eighteen hundred, Comanche warriors were raiding the San Antonio and Santa Fe areas and deep into Mexico to fulfill an increased demand for horses. By 1820, Mexican authorities estimated Comanche warriors were stealing upwards of thirty thousand horses a year from Mexican ranchos. September was the month for the largest horse raiding parties. The Spanish referred to September as the Comanche Moon. In September, a pregnant mare usually had a foal at her side.

Other Indian tribes followed the Comanche horse raiding practices, and soon wide trails stretched across the staked plain of Texas and New Mexico. <sup>39</sup> The Old North Trail along the east slope of the Rocky Mountains was used by northern Indians.



Despite enormous benefits to the Plains Indian Culture, the introduction of horses created problems.<sup>40</sup> One problem was campsite selection, especially winter camps. Indian villages with large numbers of horses were confined to areas with abundant pasture, and in the winter, areas with tall grasses and sweet-bark cottonwood trees (*Populus trichocarpa*).<sup>41</sup> This made the village vulnerable to attack by other tribes and later by the United States Cavalry.

Some of these wintering problems applied to mountain men and their horses. Zenas Leonard left an account of spending the winter of 1831 on the Laramie River.

*About the 1st of December, we commenced feeding our horses on peeled Cottonwood bark; to our utter surprise the horses would not eat it. After tasting the bark, we found it to be the bitter, instead of the sweet Cottonwood. Here we were in this valley, surrounded on either side by insurmountable barriers of snow, with all our merchandize and nothing to pack it upon, but two mules - all the rest of our horses being dead.*<sup>42</sup>

### **Indian Horse and the Rendezvous System:**

William H. Ashley conceived the Rocky Mountain Rendezvous System in 1823–24; the first Rendezvous was held in 1825.<sup>43</sup> Key to the Ashley Rendezvous System was horse and mule caravans taking trade goods to the rendezvous and packs of pelts back to St. Louis. There is no evidence to support any other type of horse being used during the fur trade era other than Indian horses.<sup>44</sup>

It is of interest to note how the Rendezvous System came about. On his way up the Missouri River to re-supply Fort Henry in 1823, William Ashley stopped to trade for horses at the two Arikara villages located ten miles above the mouth of the Grand River.<sup>45</sup> The Arikara traded for nineteen horses, but when they insisted Ashley give them guns and powder for more horses, trading broke off.<sup>46</sup>

The next morning, Arikara warriors fired on the shore party guarding the horses. Most of the horses and twelve trappers were killed on the beach.<sup>47</sup> Ashley was forced to retreat downriver to the mouth of the Cheyenne River.<sup>48</sup> There Ashley waited for help from Fort Atkinson.

Colonel Leavenworth arrived with a force of six hundred men, including Missouri Fur Company trappers and several hundred Sioux Indians. After a couple of days of ineffectual action, Leavenworth signed a treaty with the Arikara.<sup>49</sup>

Joseph Pilcher of the Missouri Fur Company wrote a letter to Colonel Leavenworth concerning his actions against

the Arikara:

*You [Leavenworth] came to restore peace and tranquility to the country, & leave an impression which would ensure its continuance, your operations have been such as to produce the contrary effect, and to impress the different Indian tribes with the greatest possible contempt for the American character. You came to use your own language to “open and make good this great road”: instead of which you have by the imbecility of your conduct and operations, created and left impassable barriers.*<sup>50</sup>

Following the Arikara battle, William Ashley went downriver to Fort Kiowa. Ashley borrowed horses and a guide from the French Fur Company agent to outfit a party of eleven men under Jedediah Smith to travel overland to the Rocky Mountains.<sup>51</sup>

Smith obtained new horses from a Brule Sioux village on the Southfork of the Cheyenne River.<sup>52</sup> From there, Smith traveled through the Black Hills, over the Bighorn Mountains, and up the Bighorn and Greybull rivers to the Wind River Valley.<sup>53</sup>

After wintering (1823-24) near Crowheart Butte in the Wind River Valley, the Smith party crossed South Pass in the early spring of 1824. Smith split the group in two parties to trap the Green River Valley; Smith headed one group, Fitzpatrick the other group. The two men agreed to meet at a fur cache east of South Pass in June.<sup>54</sup> Jedediah Smith sent Thomas Fitzpatrick and two men with the accumulated furs back to Fort Atkinson. Fitzpatrick was to inform Ashley of abundant beaver in the Green River and Bear River valleys and to bring trade goods.

In November 1824, William Ashley organized a supply train of twenty-five trappers, fifty pack animals, a wagon and a team for the 1825 Rocky Mountain Rendezvous.<sup>55</sup> Ashley went up the South Fork of the Platte River to the Cache la Poudre then to the upper reaches of the North Platte. From the North Platte, Ashley made his way into the Uintah Basin where he met Etienne Provost. Provost guided Ashley to the junction of Chalk Creek and the Weber River. Provost left Ashley and made his way to the Great Salt Lake.<sup>56</sup> Ashley continued up Chalk Creek to Bear River and on to Henry's Fork of the Green River where the 1825 Rendezvous was held.

At conclusion of the 1825 Rendezvous, Ashley and Smith used horses and mules to pack the furs to the Bighorn River. The packs were floated to the Missouri River and loaded on the Atkinson O'Fallon Expedition boat and taken to St.

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Louis.<sup>57</sup> In subsequent rendezvous, the pelts were taken by horse and mule caravans to St. Louis.



*When the large camp is on the march, it has a leader, generally one of the Booshways, who rides in advance, or at the head of the column. Near him is a led mule, chosen for its qualities of speed and trustworthiness, on which are packed two small trunks that balance each other like panniers, and which contain the company's books, papers, and articles of agreement with the men. Then follow the pack animals, each one bearing three packs--one on each side, and one on top--so nicely adjusted as not to slip in traveling. These are in charge of certain men called camp-keepers, who have each three of these to look after. The trappers and hunters have two horses, or mules, one to ride, and one to pack their traps.*<sup>64</sup>

Jedediah Smith accompanied by Robert Campbell left St. Louis with 60 men and a 160 mule and horse caravan in the fall of 1825. Snowed in on the Republican Fork, Smith sent word to Ashley that they had lost a third of the pack animal. Ashley left St. Louis in March with more supplies and replacement animals; he found Smith and the pack train on the Platte River near Grand Island.<sup>58, 59</sup>

It should be pointed out trappers employed by the Ashley-Henry Fur Company were not the first to trap or use horses in the Rocky Mountains. The North West and Hudson Bay Company fur brigades had trapped the Green River and Snake river country several years before the first Ashley-Henry trappers arrived in the area. Dr. Dale Morgan noted:

*In 1818, a North West Company brigade leader, Donald Mackenzie, instituted a system of supply and the transport of his furs, which involved the use of horses in place of boats to which the fur trade had been wedded.*<sup>60</sup>

In trade with the Indians, an ordinary Indian horse could cost a gun and a hundred rounds of ball and powder. A buffalo horse, required ten guns or more. Horses purchased in St. Louis for thirty- to forty dollars sold in the mountains for one hundred and fifty to three hundred dollars, and some as high as five hundred dollars.<sup>61</sup>

There was a high turnover of horses in the mountains.<sup>62</sup> Buying or trading for enough animals for riding and packing was a problem for the Mountain Men and the Fur Trade Companies; most nomadic tribes did not have sufficient horses for their own needs.<sup>63</sup>

Joe Meek left a description of the number of horses and mules required to move a camp. This would apply in general to the number of animals used by fur trapping brigades.

Horses dictated the site chosen for each year's rendezvous. Sites were selected on ease of access for the supply trains, sufficient water, and large enough pasture areas for both trappers and Indian horse herds. Mountain man and Indian camps were spread over most of the area selected for the rendezvous.<sup>65</sup>

The 1830 rendezvous near present day Riverton, Wyoming was supplied by wagons. Led by William Sublette, the 1830 supply caravan consisted of eighty-one men on mules, ten wagons drawn by five mules each, two Dearborn carriages, twelve head of cattle, and a milch [milk] cow.<sup>66</sup> Sublette's use of wagons demonstrated the feasibility of taking horse, or mule, drawn wagons to the Rocky Mountains.



**1830 Rendezvous**

Two years later, Captain Benjamin Bonneville brought the first horse-mule drawn wagon train over South Pass into the Green River Valley. Captain Bonneville crossed South Pass in July of 1832 with twenty wagons and one hundred and ten men.<sup>68, 69</sup>

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The last Mountain Man Rendezvous in 1840 ushered in the first of the Oregon immigrants to follow the mountain men trails to the Oregon Country. The emigrant wagon trains were often guided by former mountain men.

The end of the Rendezvous System signaled the beginning of the end for the nomadic Indian Horse Culture. Forty-six years after the 1840 rendezvous, the Indians were being confined to reservations, and the last recorded horse ridden buffalo hunt was held in Montana's Judith Valley. Once on reservations, the horses that created the nomadic Indian Horse Culture were replaced by horses big enough to pull plows.<sup>70</sup>

The board scope of Jedediah Smith's exploratory accomplishments over an eight-year period are well known to member of the Jedediah Smith Society; the problem is fur trade literature primarily refers to Jedediah Smith's accomplishment in relation to his role as a fur trader.

An area Jedediah Smith has received little credit for is his role in providing a viable wagon route across the Rocky Mountains for America's Western Expansion.<sup>71</sup> After finding the Smith supply train on the Platte River, Ashley sent Smith and Moses Harris ahead to locate fur trappers and mark a trail for the 1826 Willow (Cache) Valley Rendezvous.<sup>72</sup> The route selected by Jedediah Smith was up the North Platte River to the Sweetwater River and over South Pass into the Green River Valley. Smith's trail proceeded up the Green River's Henry's Fork to Ham's Fork then over a low divide to Bear River. Smith went down Bear River to the Bend of the Bear River and followed Bear River into Willow Valley.<sup>73</sup>

Jedediah Smith's Platte River route to the Bend of the Bear River provided a feasible wagon train route across the Rocky Mountains to the Snake River Plains. This route first used by Jedediah Smith was traveled a few decades later by over 500,000 emigrants using the Oregon and California trails. Many cutoffs developed on the emigrant trail, but three areas traversed by all of the Oregon Territory bound emigrant trains were:

- 1) Platte River Road
- 2) South Pass.
- 3) Bend of the Bear River.

These three geographic points, connected by Jedediah Smith provided the easiest and best wagon route across Rocky Mountains.

As part of the Jedediah Smith Society's interactive mapping team, I was astonished at the distances Jedediah Smith covered each year in search of new trapping territories. In

terms of exploring new territory, Jedediah Smith ranks second only to Canada's great cartographer, David Thompson.

### Notes:

1. Early American History text books commonly stated the Indians acquired their first horses from bands of Mustangs roaming the plains. The belief was these wild bands originated from horses lost by Conquistadors. This belief is still believed by many people today. (Author Survey)
2. The first Winter Count of a Sioux riding a horse on the Plains and seeing the Black Hills was in 1775.
3. Gambino, Megan, *Prehistoric Horse*. Smithsonian, Magazine. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/issue/january-2012/>
4. Haines, Francis, *Horses in America*. p. 11.
5. Actual measurements of a 3-year-old Mesohippus skull.
6. Simpson, *Horses*. p. 79. Horses that had not already left this continent died here.
7. Ibid, pp 32. There were multiple sources of domestication around this time period.
8. In May 1539, Hernando de Soto landed nine ships with over 620 men and 220 horses in an area generally identified as south Tampa Bay. By 1541 he had explored as far northwest as the Mississippi River.
9. Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture*. p. 2. Chittenden, *American Fur Trade of the Far West*. Volume I, p. 822.
10. Ibid p. 14.
11. Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture*. p. 33. Ewers account was based on Indian informants and experience under a wide variety of field observations. John C. Ewers lived on the Blackfoot Reservation in Browning, Montana for three and a half years. He was the first curator of the Museum of Plains Indians. Ewers studies relied heavy on elder Indian informants.
12. Ewers does the very thing I am talking about. In his description, he refers to the Indian Horse as Pony. During this time frame, the people using and riding these horses considered them horses, not ponies. Mountain men write about horses never ponies. Some historians refer to them as the Indian Pony, but this is their term, not the people using them. Justin Morgan reference [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morgan\\_horse#Justin\\_Morgan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morgan_horse#Justin_Morgan)
13. Ewers on page 33 of *The Horse in Blackfeet Indian Culture* refers to a Vernon (1941. *The History and Romance of the Horse* p. 512) whom states any horse under 14.2 is considered a pony. This is not true. Justin Morgan, or the foundation sires of the American Quarter Horse Association (1950), were never considered ponies. On average the foundation sires of the American Quarter Horse Association were 14 to 14.2 and weighed approximately 1200 pounds, mares averaged around 14 hands. A hand is 4 inches from the horse's withers to the ground.
14. Simpson, *Horses*. pp. 80-81.
15. Weiser, Kathy, *Legends of America*, updated March, 2017. <https://www.legendsofamerica.com/na-comanche/> Ten years after the 1680 Pueblo Revolt, the Spanish returned and reclaimed the rancheros. Spanish vaqueros rode stallions and paid little attention to the mares and foals kept in separate pastures.
16. These tribes were among the first to acquire a working knowledge of horses.



## Indian Horse and American Western Expansion (Continued)

17. Sponenberg, D. Phillip, [www.conquistador.com/mustang.html](http://www.conquistador.com/mustang.html) Common names for the Spanish Colonial Horse were Indian Horse and Spanish Mustangs.
18. The common name for the Spanish Colonial Horse was Indian Horse or Mustang.
19. Taylor, A. *American Colonies*. pp. 412. By 1800 the Comanche numbered about twenty thousand, twice as many as all other native people on the southern plains.
20. Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture*. pp. 6-7.
21. Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture*. p. 2. This trade pre-dates horses. Coronado (1541) and La Verendry (1739) make reference to the inter-tribal trade.
22. Wood, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*. pp. 3-4. Ewer, *The Horse in the Blackfoot Indian Culture* p. 13. The Spanish would not trade guns to the Southwest Indians.
22. Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture*. p. 10.
24. Ibid, p. 10. Lewis and Clark's reports made mentioned of this opposition by the Sioux to the Missouri River trade as a source of future problems.
25. Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture*. The Blackfeet Nation consisted of the Piegan, Blackfoot, Blood, and the Sarsi tribes. The Gros Ventre (Atsini) were not part of the Blackfeet Nation.
26. Ibid, p. 14.
27. Ibid, p. 59.
28. Ibid, pp. 81-82. Children, older men, and women rarely rode pad saddles, unless they did not have access to a frame saddle. Ewers Indian informants mentioned some warrior used short stirrups and stood up in the saddle high enough to clear the pommel and cantle to use their weapons. This is highly doubtful. If you did this and the horse swerved, you are on the ground...Author, years of bad experiences.
29. Haines, *Horses in America*. p. 70.
30. It should be pointed out that not all tribes used the A frame travois, especially the mountain tribes. A more universal travois was a framework on two bundles of lodge poles.
31. Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture*. p. 306.
32. It varied with the type of travois used, but the dragging end of the poles on an A type travois took at least a six- foot- wide trail. Compare the size of the man and the horse in the picture below.
33. Haines, *Horses in America*. pp. 73, 186-187. Warriors wanted all of the horses they could find, but they were constantly on the lookout for war-horses, or buffalo runners.
34. Lowie, *The Crow Indians*. p. 5. High on the list of Crow war honors was stealing a picketed Buffalo Horse from an enemy's village.
35. Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture*. p. 14.
36. Carlson, *The Plains Indians*. p. 48. Many tribes used captured women to increase the size of the tribe. This is a major reason the Comanche become so powerful in a relatively short time.
37. Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture*. p. 54. The good horse breeding establishments of today are successful because their breeding program is based on the quality of their mares.
38. Ibid, p. 338.
39. Llano Estacada
40. Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture*. p. 124.
41. Horse pawed for grass and ate sweet cottonwood bark.
42. Leonard, *Adventures of a Mountain Man*. pp. 19-21.
43. Following the 1825 Rendezvous, the pelts were taken from the mouth of the Yellowstone to St. Louis by the Atkinson O'Fallon Expedition. After the 1825 rendezvous, horses and mule pack trains carried trade goods to the Rendezvous and pelts back to St. Louis.
44. There is no reason to suspect the mountain man used anything but Indian horses. A few reasons for using Indian horses were: These were the predominate horses in the Missouri River settlements; they were roughly a third cheaper in St. Louis than Kentucky bred horses; larger faster horses would attract more Indian thefts: Indian horses were easier to pack and require less maintenance, example shoeing.
45. Fort Henry was at the junction of the Yellowstone and Missouri rivers. Hugh Glass was with Andrew Henry, and a few days after the battle, Glass was mauled by a grizzly bear.
46. Nester, William R., *The Arikara War: The First Indian Plains War 1823*. pp 145
47. Ashley lost a total of 15 men. 12 of Ashley's men were killed on the beach, Aaron Stephens was killed in the Arikara Village before the fight, and two more died from wounds sustained in the battle.
48. Nester, William R., *The Arikara War*. pp. 145-146. Most of Ashley men refused to go on. Ashley's second boat, Yellowstone Packet, took the men back to St. Louis with the stipulation, they would inform Col Leavenworth of what had transpired.
49. Ibid. pp. 154. This was the first engagement between the Plains Indians and the United States Military.
50. Dale, *The explorations of William H. Ashley and Jedediah Smith, 1822-1823*. pp 82.
51. Located just above the White River near Chamberlin, South Dakota, Fort Kiowa was constructed in 1822 by Joseph Brazeau Jr. of the Berthold, Chouteau, and Pratte Company. At Fort Kiowa (Fort Lookout, Fort Brazeau) Ashley borrowed horses from the French Fur Company to use until they could get Indian horses from a Brule Indian village on the South Fork of the Cheyenne River. Later Smith obtained more horses on the Powder River from Crow Indians in order to reach the Green River and Bear River valleys.
52. The French Company Guide took the borrowed horses back to Fort Kiowa.
53. The Smith Party spent the winter near Crowheart Butte in the Wind River Valley. In February they attempted to follow the Astorians trail over Union Pass, but deep snow forced them back to the winter camp.
54. This meeting between Smith and Fitzpatrick is sometimes referred to as the first Mountain Man Rendezvous. It is not known if Fort Atkinson was the original destination, but after sinking the boat loaded with furs in Devils Gap on the Sweetwater, Fitzpatrick, Branch and Stone were lucky to reach Fort Atkinson.
55. Gowans, Fred. *Rocky Mountain Rendezvous*. p.15. The wagon and team were abandoned along the trail. Ashley did not follow the North Platte, Sweetwater, South Pass route into the Green River Valley.
56. Provost arrived at the Great Salt Lake in June of 1825. Jim Bridger didn't see the Great Salt Lake until the Fall of 1825.
57. This is the only time during the Rocky Mountain Rendezvous period that furs were floated to St. Louis.
58. The Platte River's Grand Island become the hub for the various emigrant trail traveling the Platte River Road in American Western Expansion.
59. Gowans, Fred. *Rocky Mountain Rendezvous*. p.24.



### Indian Horse and American Western Expansion (Continued)

60. Morgan, Dale L. *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West*. pp. 117-118.
61. Bagley, p. 215. Potts Letters. This may be high, Jedediah Smith estimated the lowest mountain price for an ordinary horse at sixty dollars.
62. Winter kill, injury, and Indian thefts were a constant problem.
63. During the Plains Indian Horse period the Comanche, Kiowa, and Crow had the most horses. It is interesting to note, warriors of these three tribes were regarded as the most proficient horse thieves.
64. Victor, Francis Fuller, *The River of the West: The Adventures of Joe Meeks*. p. 52.
65. Gowans, *Rocky Mountain Rendezvous*. p. 66. The 1832 Pierre's Hole Rendezvous was one of the largest. The rendezvous area was approximately 10 to 15 miles wide and 30 miles long (Personal Communication).
66. Sunder, *Bill Sublette Mountain Man*. pp. 84-85.
67. Ibid, p 88-89. Use of the overland trail by Sublette showed horse-mule drawn wagons could reach the Rocky Mountains.
68. Irving, Washington. *Adventures of Captain Bonneville*. pp. There is no information on it, but Bonneville probably used mules and possibly some Morgan horses to pull his wagons.
69. William Sublette (1830) and Captain Bonneville followed the trail pioneered by Smith up the North Platte River. Sublette split off just before South Pass and went over the Popo Agie mountains to the 1830 Rendezvous while Bonneville continued over South Pass to the Green River Valley.
70. Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture*. p. 35.
71. Jedediah Smith's contributions to western expansion were basically unknown until Dale Morgan published *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West*, 1953, and George R. Brooks' published *The Southwest Expedition of Jedediah Smith*, 1977. The Smith-Gibbs map was found on a John C. Fremont map by Carl Irving Wheat in 1953.
72. While at Grand Island, Ashley sent Smith and Moses Harris ahead to notify trappers of the 1826 Rendezvous site. Before leaving Smith would have explained in detail the trail, he planned to follow to Willow Valley, and would have left trail markers at the key junctions for Ashley to follow.
73. Smith was familiar with this route from trapping and traveling through this general area in 1824 and 1825.
74. After crossing South Pass the Mormon trail headed toward the Great Salt Lake Valley.

### President/Editor's Comments - Kevin Kucera



**Kevin Kucera**  
**President/Editor**

Ned Eddins D.V.M., is an adventurous person who has walked the talk of the early fur trade so to speak. He has personally mastered the craft of packing horses over long distances in the Rocky Mountain West. Ned's horse history earns much praise for his perspective on how horses greatly influenced the opening of the west for all peoples.

We are grateful and blessed to have contributors like Ned, who are excellent story tellers and authors. A partial list of JSS members who have contributed over the years include: Barbara Bush, Clint Gilchrist, Joe Green, Andy Hahn, Jim Hardee, Eric Jung, Mark Kelly, David Malaher, Joe Molter, Edie Sparks, Bill Swaggerty, Milton Von Damm, Sheri Wysong, and Scott Young. All members are encouraged to submit articles for the *Castor Canadensis*. Let's not leave any scholarly work on the shelf.

The JSS Board of Directors is pleased to announce that we will hold our **2020 Annual Meeting and Rendezvous in conjunction with the Fur trade Symposium to be held at Ft. Atkinson, Nebraska, September 9-12, 2020**. More details will be provided in the next *Castor Canadensis*, and it will also be posted on [www.jedediahsmithsociety.org](http://www.jedediahsmithsociety.org).

Happy Trails, Kevin

## Upcoming Events

**Fort Atkinson State Historical Park  
north of Omaha, Nebraska  
is hosting the  
2020 National Fur Trade Symposium from  
September 9-13.**



### **Call for Papers!**

**The primary focus of the 2020 National Fur Trade Symposium is that era of trade on the Missouri River spanning from the return of Lewis and Clark in 1806 to the abandonment of Fort Atkinson in 1827. Papers pertaining to notable individuals and/or companies and particular events occurring during that time-period are encouraged. Papers pertaining to the impact of the U.S. Army and the implementation of federal law on the fur trade and the Missouri River native tribes are encouraged, as well.**

**Email a copy of your paper to [jason.grof@nebraska.gov](mailto:jason.grof@nebraska.gov)  
or mail a hard copy to Fort Atkinson SHP, PO Box 240, Ft. Calhoun, NE 68023**

### **CASTOR CANADENSIS NEWSLETTER GUIDELINES**

The editor welcomes articles for publication. Please review the following guidelines:

1. Prospective authors should send their articles or questions to Kevin Kucera at [kckucera@msn.com](mailto:kckucera@msn.com)
2. Submit in MS Word.
3. End notes should be numbered consecutively.
4. Photographs, maps or illustrations should be sent as an attachment and not embedded into the article. They should also be numbered i.e. Fig 1. A separate list with Fig. No. should be attached with a short title of the photograph etc.
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.
6. Please note the *Castor Canadensis* is not responsible for either the research or the opinions of the writer.



## Past Events - Green River Days, 2019

### Report from Pinedale, Wyoming

By, Jim Smith

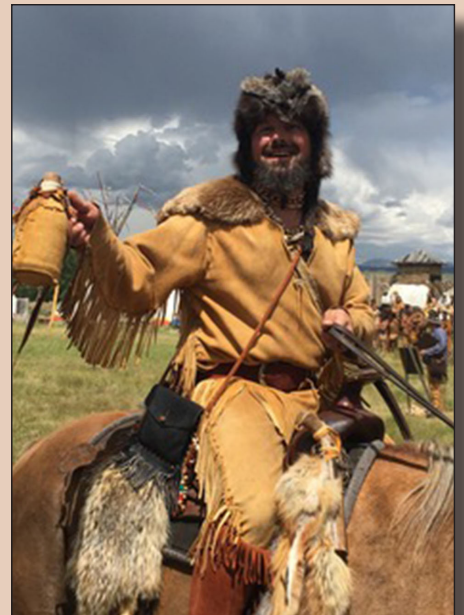
Although Jed never attended a Rendezvous on the Green River, he's still an honored guest each year at the Green River Rendezvous Pageant in Pinedale, Wyoming. The 84th Annual Pageant last July was no exception. Patrick Ingram portrayed Jedediah Smith. He entered the pageant grounds on horseback, as the iconic figure portrayed by the early chroniclers of the mountain men: reading from his bible.



Since 1936 the people of Pinedale and Sublette county have put on this production to commemorate the history of the fur trade era in the Green River Valley. The initial encounter between the trappers and the Shoshone people who were indigenous to the area is recreated in a Pipe Ceremony at the beginning of the Pageant. The simple ceremony takes place in the middle of the arena with the several tipis of the Shoshone Village to the north, the trapper's camp to the south, and the majestic Wind River mountains in the east as the backdrop. Following this, all the colorful visitors to Green River valley, or any of the six Rendezvous that were held on the Green between 1834-40 make an appearance on the grounds: the Astorians, Capt. Bonneville, William Sublette, Moses "Black" Harris and his bride, Jim Bridger, Andrew Dripps, Lucien Fontenelle, Father DeSmet, Sir William Drummond Stewart, Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, Henry and Eliza Spaulding, to mention a few of the principals. There are wagon teams and drivers arriving with trade goods for the Rendezvous. There are horse races and partying. The Shoshone are well represented by the Antelope Soldiers. Alfred Jacob Miller, who accompanied Stewart to the 1837 Rendezvous is on hand painting people and festivities at the annual Saturnalia in the mountains.



The Rendezvous Pageant on Sunday concludes Green River Days in Sublette county. The weekend begins on Thursday evening at the Museum of the Mountain Man with the annual Western Art and Wine Auction. Another highlight every year is the release of the new *Rocky Mountain Fur Trade Journal*. This year a framed copy of the Society's map, "**The Travels of Jedediah Strong Smith, 1822-1831**" was an item at the auction. This was a gift from the Jedediah Smith Society to the Museum of the



## Past Events - Green River Days, 2019 *(Continued)*

Mountain Man. We hear it fetched a fine price at auction. Wagh!

On display this season at the Museum is the original of “Jed’s Bear,” sculpted by Mark William Kelly of Leavenworth, Kansas. This beautiful bronze sculpture depicts Jedediah’s close encounter with the grizzly bear in 1823 in the southern Black Hills near Buffalo Gap, South Dakota. The statue is on loan from its owner: historian James C. Auld. This is a very fluid, dynamic bronze that shows the bear standing upright, while Jed’s body is in the air, horizontal to the earth, at about shoulder height to the grizzly due to the fact that the bear has lifted Jed off the ground by his head, which is caught between the jaws and in the mouth of the griz. It’s a wonderful piece of historic art.



All in all, another great Green River Days in Pinedale.



**Please remember to go to our website: [www.JedediahSmithSociety.org](http://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.



## Jedediah Smith and the Hudson's Bay Company

By, Milton von Damm

Our Society has been continuously searching for Jedediah Smith maps and any direct correspondence from Jedediah to the HBC. Recent information from the **Hudson's Bay Company Archives** in Winnipeg, Canada suggests that the HBCA files contain no maps drawn by Jedediah Smith, nor any written correspondence from Jed to Fort Vancouver or any HBC officer. However, the most recent search for information from HBCA files has raised our consciousness about a need to identify by file, original sources such as letters, journals and reports about Jedediah Smith in the well preserved and extensive files in the HBCA.

When our member, Dale Morgan, looked to the HBC for information about Jedediah while writing his book, he had to communicate with the HBC in both Canada and their headquarters in London. Now, the historic London files reside in Winnipeg, but although HBC's historic information base is now in one place, there are two sets of codes and cross reference files to navigate to seek documents. Independent professional contract researchers familiar with how files are organized the HBCA are often hired to search files.

The Jedediah Smith Board has authorized and is providing funding to create a reference file, in the form of an Annotated Bibliography, of all files at HBCA that deal with Jedediah Smith. This Bibliography will be published on our web site and be available to historians, members and the general public. Each entry will identify exactly where to search in the HBCA files for the information being sought. The primary focus will be on primary documents because secondary sources may be incomplete and, more difficult to navigate as a path to locate an original source.

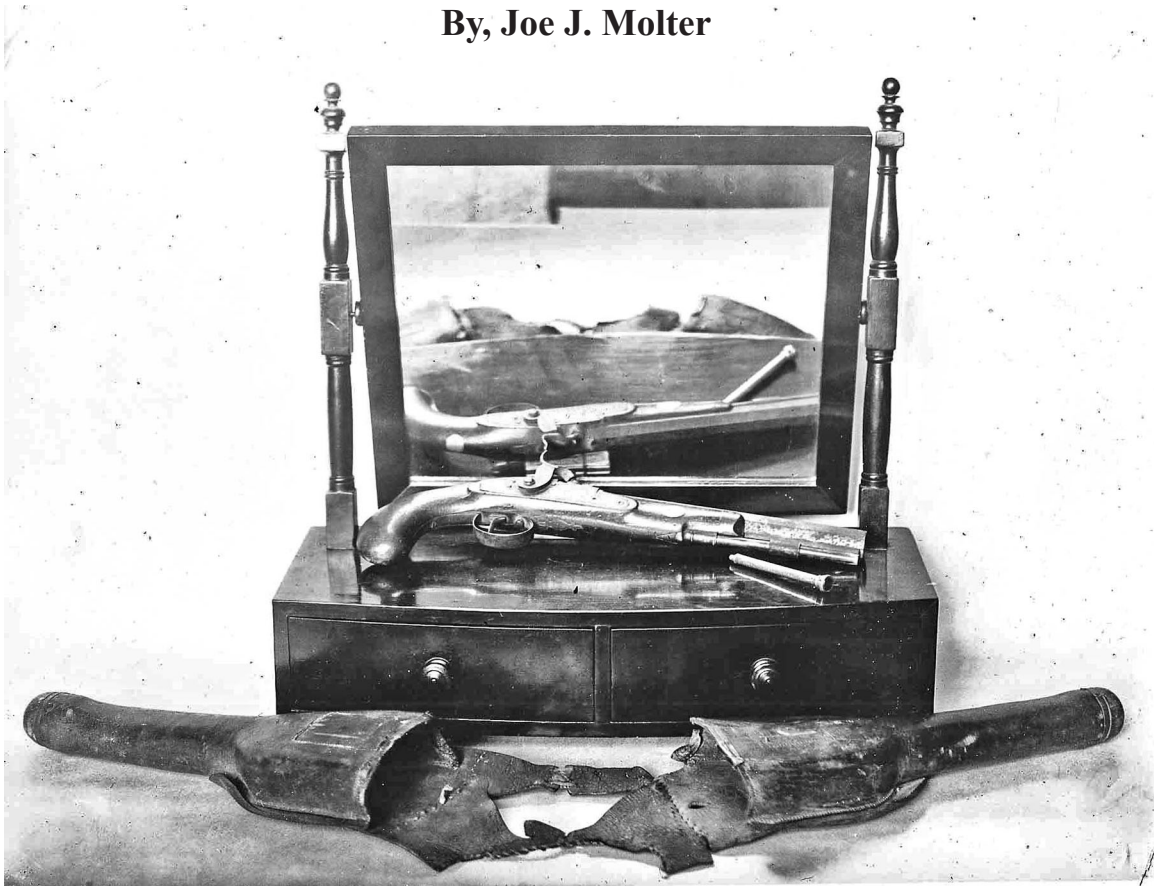
Considerable work has already been done to identify the most likely places in the vast HBCA wealth of information, to locate files that deal with Jedediah Smith. Current findings are already suggesting new stories such as the narrower, more trapping related perspective toward the future by the HBC as opposed to Smith realizing that settlement by Americans was the real endgame.

David Malaher, a JSS member who lives in Canada and is a member of our Research Committee, has the lead role in directing the file search and he is contracting with Kenton Storey to search the files and prepare the Annotated Bibliography. In David's words - *"Ideally from the archives, and already published books, we could assemble a complete chronological string of correspondence relating to Smith from the first mention of his arrival at Fort Vancouver in 1828 to Simpson's last mention of Smith in, I think, about 1842."* Kenton has been invaluable in locating and describing files.

Regarding finding maps or Jed written correspondence, who knows, there may be some needles in the haystack. At least we now have a haystack.

### Jedediah Smith's Pommel Holster

By, Joe J. Molter



**Jedediah Smith's mahogany shaving chest, photo taken in 1912 and showing his pommel holster and his now missing pistol.** *Courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society.*

On 07/29/2019, I had the privilege of viewing and examining Jedediah's pommel holster. This is the last vestige known to exist pertaining to the weapons that Jed carried with him during that fateful journey to Santa Fe where he perished by the hands of Indians along the Cimarron River on May 27, 1831. These weapons, as far as we know, consisted of a matched pair of percussion-lock pistols, housed in a pommel holster and a rifle; all believe to be "about 50 caliber".<sup>1</sup> These were recognized and retrieved by Jed's two brothers, Austin and Peter Smith, who had come along on this trip.

J. Earnest Smith, grandson of Benjamin Smith, another of Jedediah's brothers, in corresponding to the well-known historian and biographer Maurice Sullivan, states with authority that these weapons "*were made by the finest gunsmith in the country, Phillip Creamer of St. Louis*".<sup>2</sup> He also goes on to tell what price Jedediah had to pay for each gun and other pertinent and interesting facts previously unknown pertaining to them, including that his "*Uncle Austin gave the rifle to my grandfather and he took it to California when he went in 1850-1852*".<sup>3</sup> Benjamin was joining yet another brother, Ira Smith, who preceded him to California and was a constable in Sacramento.<sup>4</sup> Ironically this rifle was lost sometime while his grandfather resided there when loaned to a brother-in-law! J. Earnest didn't remember what relative was given the two pistols but we know for sure, through documentation and early photos, that one of those pistols along with the holster, came down



## Archives Corner

### Jedediah Smith's Pommel Holster (*Continued*)

through the relations of Jed's brother, Peter Smith. Peter also came during the "Gold Rush of 49" and was the only one to stay in California! It was through Peter's heirs that these cherished items were preserved.

Years later in October 25-26, 1961, when this pistol was on display, either on loan or through a donation, there being some confusion to which, it was stolen with other unique and valuable weapons at the Junipero Serra Museum in San Diego, CA. The holster wasn't part of the display and was saved from the fate of those other stolen items which have never been recovered. The holster no longer resides at this museum but has been incorporated into the Object Collection of the San Diego History Center located nearby in the heart of Balboa Park. Viewing of this item requires a "One on One" appointment and if you're not a member of the Historical Center, a \$35.00 non-member service fee is charged.

My viewing experience was very pleasant. Working with the Center's Registrar, Tammy Bennett, I was able to view the holster up close and take photos. I was also provided with the Center's stock photos showing all sides of this two piece holster, which over the years have been separated into two halves. I was also provided with the wording from an older Catalogue sheet associated with this holster that was typed years later after its original accession was made. It reads:

*SDHC 38.16.2A&B – Pair of holsters*

*Collection of the San Diego History Center, Gift of Mr. & Mrs. Leroy A. Wright*

*History: belonged to Jedediah Strong Smith, donor (Mrs. Wright) was Smith's niece; donated in 1938.*

*Holsters, leather, 13-1/8" Long, pocket top 4-7/8" Width, 1.5" Thick, width round tapered down to 5.25" to 2.25" wide to 1-5/8" round at bottom round wooden end cap to which leather is tacked, groove 1/4" down from leather, leather stem (seam?) saddle-stitched, back sewn on and has flap extends 1.5" below the pocket with belt type slots and extending above pocket 1" with leather cover flap stitched on with leather lacing and edge-stitched with same; face of pocket has 2.25" square pattern of stitching holes appearing to have held another piece, possibly a keeper for the tip of the cover flap; two holes in pocket 1" below the fragments of leather thong; part of cover flap missing from each holster.*

The style of holster, i.e. the Pommel Holster, was originally used by the military and later adapted for civilians in the early 1830's. This time period fits well with the timeline when it's believed Jedediah would have bought these guns for his Santa Fe Trip and also being the period of time when the percussion ignition system really started to infiltrate the west. <sup>5</sup> These pommel holsters were important because the pistols that were most often used were bulky, so being able to carry them draped over the front of a saddle on the "pommel" allowed safer and easier access.

Alone and looking for water for his thirsty party, Jedediah Strong Smith was confronted on the Cimarron River by his adversaries. Being outnumbered and with no way for escape, he knew the seriousness of the situation. On May 27, 1831, having his two loaded pistols in front of him in his pommel holster and his rifle in his hand, Jedediah prepared to "sell his life dearly". His Eulogy lamented: "*but he fell under the spears of the savages and his body has glutted the prairie wolf, and none can tell where his bones are bleaching, he must not be forgotten.*" <sup>6</sup>

## Archives Corner

### Jedediah Smith's Pommel Holster (*Continued*)



**38.16.2A-1 (Left) Holster Front.** *Courtesy of the San Diego History Center.*



**38.16.2A-2 (Left) Holster Back.** *Courtesy of the San Diego History Center.*



## Archives Corner

### Jedediah Smith's Pommel Holster (*Continued*)



**38.16.2B-1 (Right) Holster Front.** *Courtesy of the San Diego History Center.*



**38.16.2B-2 (Right) Holster Back.** *Courtesy of the San Diego History Center.*

1. Troy S. Tuggle, The Pistol of Jedediah Smith, *The Pacific Historian*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Winter, 1984) pp. 55-63. A well-researched paper if you want to learn more about this pistol and its history.
2. J. Ernest Smith to Maurice S. Sullivan, 11 June 1933 & 02 July 1933, Sullivan Papers, MSS 19, Box 1, folder 8 of 1933, Holt-Atherton Special Collections, University of Pacific.
3. Ibid.
4. Stella D. Hare, Jedediah Smith's Younger Brother Ira, *The Pacific Historian*, Vol. 11, No. 3, (Summer, 1967) pp. 42-52.
5. Carl P. Russel, *Guns on the Early Frontiers*, (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1957) p. 242.
6. Unknown author and a portion of: Captain Jedediah Strong Smith: A Eulogy of that Most Romantic and Pious of Mountain Men, *First American by Land in California*, published after his death in June, 1832, found in Dale L. Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West*, (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1953) p. 330.



## Members' Section

### New Members

**Please welcome our new members to the Society.** We welcome you to our events and participation on various committees. If you'd like to write an article please see the guidelines under the editor column.

**Kenny Libben, Perrysville, OH**

**Herman Zittle, Susanville, CA**

### Donor List

The Society wishes to thank the sponsors and patrons and all members for the investment in the future of our society.

#### Special thanks to:

- Theresa Melbar donated \$1,000 to our Society to help fund a replacement of a Jedediah Smith monument near Bakersfield that was stolen. The Bakersfield Historical Society has the lead in this project.
- The James Irvine Foundation has awarded a grant of \$500 to the Jedediah Smith Society to help pay for the costs associated with having Professor Stephen Beckham speak at the 2019 Annual Meeting. This grant came from the Staff Discretionary Grants Program through Adam Cimino. His father is Rich Cimino, a member of our Board.
- Jim Smith donated \$150 to help pay for printing expenses associated with the Annual Meeting.
- Member Jon Warn made a general donation of \$100 over and above his dues which will be used to help fund the map project.

*Thank you!*

## Your Officers & Board Members

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**Kevin Kucera**

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**Jim Smith**

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

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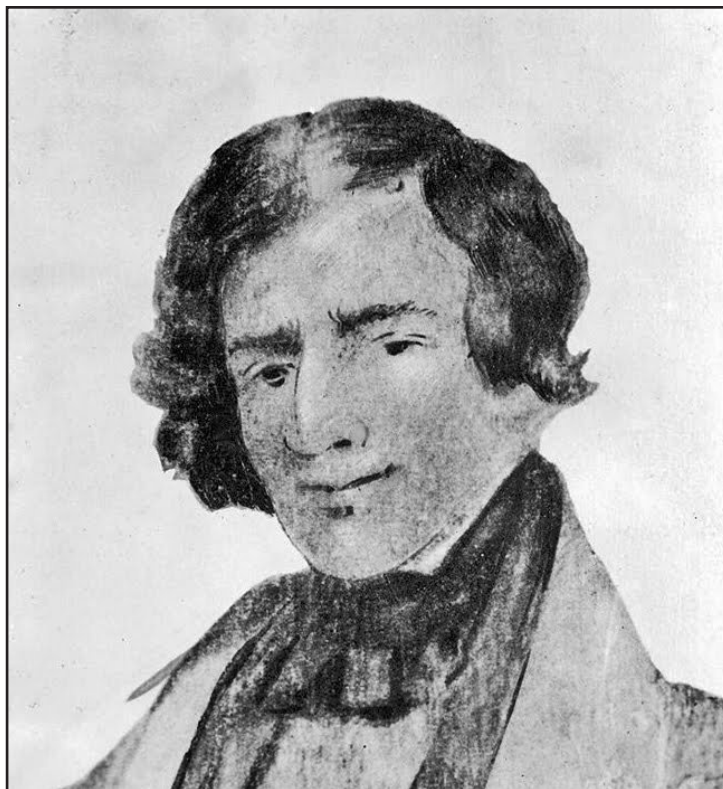
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