

Castor Canadensis

The Journal of the Jedediah Smith Society ❖ University of the Pacific, Stockton, California



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*Cover photo of the Columbia River today. (image in the public domain)

Jedediah Smith Outward Bound Via the Columbia River, 1829

by William G. White

William G. White was born in La Junta, Colorado, not far upstream from Bent's Old Fort, and grew up in Santa Fe, New Mexico. After four years of military service during the Cold War era, he completed a BA in Anthropology at California State University and an MA at the University of Nevada, specializing in Historical Archaeology. Mr. White was employed as an archaeologist for more than thirty years with various cultural resource management firms and federal agencies in the West. Now retired, he continues to work parttime as a consultant in archaeology and history. He especially enjoys the "chase" in historical research.



Fort Vancouver, ca. 1845, a Hudson's Bay Company trading post
Early drawing by Lt. Henry J. Warre
Print by Dickinson and Co., London
Held in the Library of Congress (public domain)
(This is not the original fort, but the second one,
on which construction began in 1829.)

On the afternoon of 12 March 1829, Jedediah Smith and Arthur Black, carrying their meager possessions, descended a high bluff on the Columbia River's north side and crossed a wide fertile plain south to a wharf. The pair had been guests of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) at "old" Fort Vancouver over the winter months. Not far from the river's edge, construction of the "new" fort was underway on the plain.¹ At the wharf they found the usual number of three batteaux (bateau), shallow-draft, flat-bottom boats used for Columbia River traffic, being expertly loaded with baggage, supplies, personal mail, official correspondence, and district reports. This was in readiness to launch the annual east-bound York Factory Express.² Clerk Donald Ross was in command, at least as far as Fort Colvile.³ Aside from a crew of approximately thirty Canadian and Iroquois *voyageurs*, passengers included Dr. William Todd, Fort Vancouver's surgeon reassigned

to Brandon House, Smith and Black, possibly Elizabeth Sinclair, wife of Thomas Sinclair, an officer in HBC's maritime coasting trade, and a few others, yet unnamed.⁴

Of the four 1828 Umpqua massacre survivors, John Turner and Richard Leland (Layland) chose not to renew their employment contract with Smith or to accompany Smith and Black on their return to rendezvous with company partners David Jackson and William Sublette. Five months after Smith's exodus, Leland was banished from the Columbia territory on unspecified accusations and ended up working as an HBC boatman in the Saskatchewan District at Fort Edmonton.⁵ Turner temporarily remained behind in the Umpqua region with HBC's Southern Expedition and pushed south into California with them as an unpaid freeman for the remainder of Outfit 1828. Ongoing research reflects that Turner later participated in the Snake Country Expedition for Outfit 1831. His name shows up when he and four other trappers purchased £45.9.5 (Halifax currency) in supplies and equipment with the debt charged to that expedition.⁶

Smith carried three items of importance in his baggage. Under an undated Sundries heading for Fort Vancouver, Smith was inked with a sizable credit of £495.2.3 for "Furs & Horses Supplied the Co," his stolen property earlier recovered from lower Umpqua River natives. This credit was likely cancelled when Governor George Simpson generously provided Smith with a payable note for £555.2.6 on 29 December 1828. Three days prior to Smith's departure, however, another note in the amount of £541.0.6 was issued by Simpson. Both notes were payable to "Smith Jackson & Sublet" for furs and horses received. Furthermore, Smith and Dr. John McLoughlin, the Columbia Department's Chief Factor, paid a complimentary visit to Captain John Dominis aboard the American Brig *Owhyhee*, then trading along the lower Columbia in direct opposition to HBC's commercial traffic and authority. Dominis subsequently wrote a letter addressed to the ship's owner, Boston merchant Josiah Marshall, and provided it to Smith for conveyance

eastward overland; Smith may have also carried letters from the ship's crew.⁷As was custom, the bateaus with crew and passengers cast off in the afternoon on their first short travel day; Smith's nearly 600-mile-long excursion between Forts Vancouver and Colville took three and a half to four weeks, the time required by similar recorded passages. The boatmen quickly established a strong, efficient rowing rhythm, moving the crafts steadily forward against the river's ocean-feeding current. Advancing only five to six miles, Ross directed the crews to shore, probably at Mill Creek, site of the fort's grist and sawmills. This command served two primary purposes: the distance allowed an easy return to Fort Vancouver if anything important were forgotten and yet was far enough from the fort to prevent interference with its daily operations if the *voyageurs* shared in a "regal." Provided a pint of rum each, the crew spent the rest of the day and night involved in various amusements, the drunkenness ending amicably but causing the inevitable hangovers. If Smith had not previously visited the mills at this location, the debauchery would have provided him time to observe them.⁸

The Columbia's reach between Forts Vancouver and Nez Perce (Walla Walla), roughly 210 river miles, was considered the most difficult, mainly due to challenging rapids, variable wind conditions, and the unpredictable temper of the natives.⁹ Three major rapids—the Cascades, Narrows (Dalles), and Chutes (Celilo Falls)—required the *voyageurs* to unload the bateaus, portage baggage, and cargo, often in 90-pound bales, around the obstacles; whereas, the crafts were either laboriously pulled up by ropes or carried overland. While the travelers were in transit, resident natives were variously tempted to pilfer by stealth, demand payment for trespass, assist in the portage with expectations of payment in goods, or a combination depending on their mood and the size of the white party. Also, within the Columbia River Gorge forceful head winds often halted progress, while tailwinds allowed bateau crews to hoist a square sail for a speedy advance.

On or about 20 March the express landed at Fort Nez Perce, situated roughly five miles south of the Columbia and Snake River confluence. Founded by the North West Company in 1818, it was considered the strongest fort—the Gibraltar of the Columbia—west of the Rocky Mountains. When Smith arrived, the fort, the second of three in this vicinity, was dilapidated and in need of repairs. An 1825 district report indicates the fort was "about one hundred & seventy feet square surrounded by a Stockade Eighteen feet" high. Archaeological testing of the second fort revealed evidence of a stockade roughly 200 feet square enclosing a trader's house, stores, barracks along the west wall, and a horse corral occupying the east half. Samuel Black was in charge, assisted by six servants during the year of Smith's visit.¹⁰

Chief Trader Black extended the fort's hospitality to passengers and officers while servants and crew unloaded the bateaus and made repairs. Sundry items delivered for Black's use included "2 Bags Ball [lead projectiles], 1 pair Smiths tongs, a Bale [and] 1 Tea Kettle;" undelivered were "Tobacco" and "Material for Gun Locks." Earlier instructed by memorandum, Ross was directed to leave "Boat No. 2" at the fort as well as "1 case Guns [and] 2 Bags Ball" intended for use at the Thompson River post and "1 Case Canton Beads fine, 1 Case Canton Comm [on beads and] 1 Basket Open Copper Kettles" destined for Fort Colville.¹¹ Ross, passengers, and the crew manning the two remaining bateaus likely departed the following morning. The next river stretch was less arduous, and the natives were friendlier and more accommodating.

Roughly 220 river miles upstream the express reached Fort Okanogan on or about 29 March after rowing and towing the bateaus up a ten-mile-long series of obstructions collectively referred to as Priest's Rapids, named after a local native medicine man.¹² Throughout its colorful history Okanogan served as a focal point for brigades entering and leaving the distant northern Thompson River and New Caledonia districts. The fort was established by John Astor's Pacific Fur Company in 1811 on the southeast bank of the Okanogan River near its junction with the Columbia. Initially this post consisted of a single dwelling, sixteen by twenty feet in size and constructed of drift timbers secured from the rivers. In the summer of 1816, a proper stockaded structure, "Eighty feet Broad by a hundred deep," with opposing bastions, "two dwelling Houses a Store and an Indian Shop" was constructed. At an undetermined date a second stockaded fort was constructed by HBC on the Columbia's northwest bank, a mile from the original location and more advantageous to company operations. It is uncertain at which of the two forts Smith and Black spent a brief stopover. Andie Picard, an HBC servant, is listed as being "In charge of Okanogan" with an unknown number of men to assist in maintaining the post during Outfit 1828.

At Okanogan and as directed by McLoughlin, Ross unloaded a limited amount of merchandise destined for use at Thompson River.¹³ In the dispatches Ross carried was a note addressed to Francis Ermatinger, clerk in charge at Thompson River, providing him with an account of "Sundry supplies" issued for that location and informing him that

a case of guns and two bags of lead balls were left behind at Fort Nez Perce. Otherwise, supplies left for Thompson River included forty pounds of “Copper Kettles,” one bag of lead balls, a keg of gunpowder, and a bale of “T R.”

Though numerous rapids were encountered over the next 168 river miles above Okanogan to Fort Colvile, none of the passages presented difficult impediments to upriver travel. It is probable that Smith, Black, and other passengers chose to walk along the riverbank for variety’s sake and to lighten the bateaus. If so, they might have explored the massive opening to the Grand Coulee, an ancient, abandoned stream channel cut by the Columbia River. Additionally, at the mouth of the Spokane River, Smith and Black may have opted to take an overland route to Fort Colvile with horses supplied by a part-time servant, Jacques Finlay, operating out of the now decommissioned Spokane House. There is, however, no found evidence to support these conjectures.

Rather, on or about 4 April the east-bound express arrived at Fort Colvile’s “portage landing” situated on the Columbia’s east bank a half mile below raging cataracts that impeded further travel, the Kettle Falls.¹⁴ The two bateau were taken no farther, and the crew unloaded all that remained and placed the baggage and supplies in carts provided by the fort. At the fort, Ross was instructed to deliver a case of guns, a bag of nails, a plow share, a bale, junk metal for the blacksmith, and “Iron works for the [grist] mill” later constructed on the nearby Colville River.

From the landing Ross and passengers trekked a mile and a half north by crossing a high bluff above the Columbia’s east bank—capturing a glimpse of the mist-shrouded falls along the way—then descended onto an extensive plain where a seventy-acre farm adjacent to the fort was established. John Work, clerk in charge, greeted them. Fellow clerk William Kittson was at Kutenay House trading with the Kutenai Indians. Smith and Kittson were old acquaintances; Kittson once characterized Smith as a “sly cunning Yankey” during Ogden’s 1824-25 Snake Country expedition. Likewise, Chief Trader John W. Dease was absent from the fort conducting trade at the Flathead Post. Both the Flathead and Kutenay establishments were interior outposts administered within the Fort Colvile district. Aside from the three assigned officers, the fort had a complement of twenty-four servants at this time.¹⁵



Aged Fort Colvile after the stockade was removed. The photo reveals what the fort might have looked like during Smith’s brief visit. (National Park Service, Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area, Washington).

On 14 April 1825 Governor Simpson staked out the site for Fort Colvile with the intention of abandoning the less efficient and costly Spokane House situated some sixty miles inland from the Columbia.¹⁶ Simpson instructed John Work to begin construction immediately. Building, however, was slow and unsatisfactory for various reasons that year; the first completed structure was a root cellar in which thirteen kegs of harvested potatoes were stored over the winter. Construction at the fort did not begin in earnest until the spring of 1826. Sited a short distance above Kettle Falls on a wide flat valley of rich alluvial soil, the embryo fort was eventually finished on a low sandy ridge 600 yards from the Columbia.

To get an impression for what the early fort looked like during Smith's short stay, we turn to a brief description provided by fellow American fur trader Joshua Pilcher, who spent twenty days at the fort some five months after Smith's departure.¹⁷ Pilcher had this to offer: "It consisted, when I saw it, of log houses for the accommodation of the company, and for [four] storehouses for the merchandise and furs." Unlike Forts Vancouver, Nez Perce and Okanogan, Fort Colville was not surrounded by a defensive palisade of timbers when Smith was there. According to Pilcher, a "stockade was begun before I left there" in late September 1829. This defensive posture was brought about by a fracas among opposing native combatants during the annual salmon harvest at the falls in August, thereby placing the HBC occupants in danger. Archaeological excavations at the fort in the early 1970s suggest the earliest buildings included the trader's house, a couple of storehouses, and barracks for the men.

Smith and Black parted company with the Columbia and HBC's east-bound express at Fort Colville. After acquiring new bateau above the falls on or about 14 April, the express continued upriver to Boat Encampment and then crossed the Rocky Mountains headed for York Factory at Hudson Bay. When Smith began his return journey to reunite with his business partners, he and Black had been guests at Fort Vancouver of Simpson and McLoughlin, who graciously saw to their immediate needs. As such, Smith likely lacked cash in pocket or furs in hand. He therefore found it necessary to purchase supplies and equipment at the fort to continue their trip, now overland. Though a list of what Smith purchased at that fort has not been found, he nonetheless created a £8.3.10 debt to HBC, no doubt later written off as an uncollectable loss.¹⁸

Setting off eastward from the fort in early April, Smith and Black were on horseback, likely guided by an expressman bound for the Flathead Post carrying correspondence composed by Governor Simpson and addressed to Chief Trader Dease, Joshua Pilcher, and David Jackson.¹⁹ The party initially followed an old and well-worn Indian path referred to as the Kalispel Trail. This sixty-mile-long trail generally adhered to a southeasterly direction from the fort and Kettle Falls, across the crest of the Kalispel Mountains and down to the Pend Oreille River in the vicinity of present-day Cusick. At this point the party crossed the river where they continued following the north shore of Lake Pend Oreille and then up the Clark Fork River to Thompson Falls and the Flathead Post. Pilcher referred to this trading post as a "mere wintering establishment" consisting of a "few log cabins and a stockade, and has nothing permanent in its appearance, and no other defenses than the usual precautions." Once again in familiar territory based on an 1824 visit, Smith and Black parted company with HBC personnel at the post and turned north-northeast headed for Flathead Lake and river. In late April or early May, Smith reunited with business partner David Jackson and his brigade, who had trapped and overwintered there. The party of American trappers soon turned south-southeast, bound for Pierre's Hole on the west side of the Tetons and a rendezvous with partner Sublette.

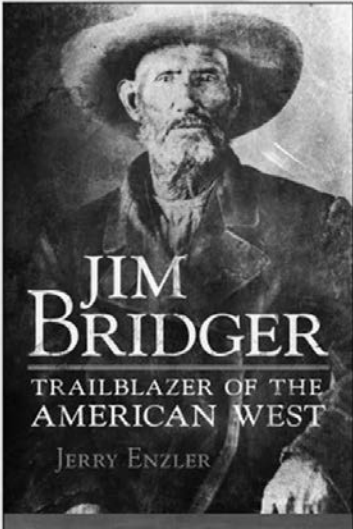
Notes

1. Fort Vancouver was the principal depot and hub of operations for HBC's Columbia Department in Oregon Country. At the time of Smith's stay, the old stockaded fort measured 150 feet in width and 250 feet in length and was situated on a high bluff nearly a mile north of the river. Because of difficult access a new fort was being constructed on the lower plain closer to the river in the spring of 1829, a reproduction of which the public visits today. John A. Hussey, *The History of Fort Vancouver and its Physical Structure* (Washington State Historical Society, 1957); James R. Gibson, *The Lifeline of the Oregon Country: The Fraser-Columbia Brigade System, 1811-47* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997), 143-145.
2. Gibson, *The Lifeline of the Oregon Country*, 30.
3. Donald Ross was Governor George Simpson's confidential secretary and had accompanied Simpson on a horrendous descent of the Fraser River in canoes during an 1828-29 inspection trip of the Columbia Department. It is here speculated that Ross was in command given several timely letters naming or directing Ross in the delivery of supplies to posts along the Columbia River. Archibald McDonald, *Peace River: A Canoe Voyage from Hudson's Bay to Pacific* (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle, 1971); Donald Ross, RedRiverAncestry.ca, electronic file acquired 2022; Burt Brown Barker, *Letters of Dr. John McLoughlin* (Portland, Oregon: Binford & Mort, 1948), 1-5, 322.
4. Focusing on the date of departure, both Todd and Sinclair were issued advance money by Governor Simpson a few days prior to express departure. Hudson's Bay Company Archives (HBCA), Columbia District and Fort Vancouver Account Books, Bills Drawn on England and Canada Outfits 1828/1829, B.223/d/21a, p. 2.

5. William G. White, "Richard Leland/Layland—1828 Umpqua Massacre Survivor." *Castor Canadensis* (Summer 2021): 1-3.
6. An HBC outfit year was from 1 June of one year to 31 May of the next year; for example, Outfit 1828 or Outfit 1828/29 (HBCA uses both designations) was from 1 June 1828 to 31 May 1829. HBCA, Columbia District and Fort Vancouver Account Books, Outfit 1828/29 District Statements, B.223/d/19, p. 8; Sheri Wysong, personal communications, 2002; HBCA, Columbia District and Fort Vancouver Account Books, Fort Vancouver Depot Supplies to Districts 1830, B.223/d/32a, p. 40. Francis D. Haines, Jr., *The Snake Country Expedition of 1830-1831* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 152-153.
7. Dominis's letter eventually reached Marshall in Boston a year later. Samuel Eliot Morison, "New England and the Opening of the Columbia River Salmon Trade, 1830," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (June 1927): 111-132; Jim Hardee, "Jedediah Smith and the Brig *Owhyhee* at Fort Vancouver," *Castor Canadensis* (Winter 2015): 1-3.
8. Gibson, *The Lifeline of the Oregon Country*, 159; Message from the President of the United States, in Compliance with a Resolution of the Senate Relative to the British Establishments on the Columbia, and the State of the Fur Trade. 21st Congress, 2nd Session, Volume 1, Senate Document 39 (1831): 21-23.
9. Gibson, *The Lifeline of the Oregon Country*, 125-130.
10. Alexander Ross, *Fur Hunters of the Far West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956), 144-146; Clarence Hines, "The Erection of Fort Nez Perce," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (Dec. 1939): 327-335; HBCA, Columbia District and Fort Vancouver Account Books, Fort Vancouver District Report—1825, B.223/e/3, p. 1a; Thomas R. Garth, "Archaeological Excavations at Fort Walla Walla," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (Jan. 1952): 27-50; HBCA, Outfit 1828/29 District Statements, B.223/d/19, p. 7.
11. The express was carrying merchandise in immediate need by a few interior posts prior to being supplied by the inbound Outfit 1829-1930 delivery conducted in July. The inbound outfits, however, were greatly hampered by the sinking of the re-supply ship *William and Ann* at the mouth of the Columbia River two days before Smith and Black left Fort Vancouver. Barker, *Letters of Dr. John McLoughlin*, 1, 3-4.
12. Alexander Ross, *Adventures of the First Settlers on the Oregon or Columbia River* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2000) 144, 154; William C. Brown, "Old Fort Okanogan and the Okanogan Trail," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 15, no.1 (March 1914): 1-38; HBCA, Fort Vancouver District Report—1825, B.223/e/3, p. 2a; Louis R. Caywood, *Excavations at Two Fort Okanogan Sites* (San Francisco: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1954), 1-37; HBCA, Columbia District and Fort Vancouver Account Books, Outfit 1828/29 District Statements, B.223/d/19, p. 7.
13. Barker, *Letters of Dr. John McLoughlin*, 2-4.
14. William G. White and Ray DePuydt, *Condition Assessment of Fort Colville, Stevens County, Washington* (Washington: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area, 2014), 28-53; Barker, *Letters of Doctor John McLoughlin*, 3-4.
15. E. E. Rich, editor, Appendix A, "Journal of Occurrences in a Trapping Expedition to and from the Snake Country in the Years 1824 and 25 Kept by William Kittson," in *Peter Skene Ogden's Snake County Journal, 1824-26* (Publications of the Hudson's Bay Record Society XIII, 1950), 221; HBCA, Outfit 1828/29 District Statements, B.223/d/19, p. 6.
16. Fort Colville was the principal producer of furs taken in the interior Oregon Country, the last major stopping place along HBC's transportation/communication line west of the Continental Divide, a source of boats used on the Columbia, and principal food producer east of the Cascades. Orin J. Oliphant, "Old Fort Colville," *Washington Historical Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (Jan. 1925): 29-48; White and DePuydt, *Condition Assessment of Fort Colville*, 28-39; Rich, E. E., editor, *Part of Dispatch from George Simpson Esq., Governor of Ruperts Land to the Governor & Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company London* (London: Champlain Society, 1947), 47-50.


17. Message from the President of the United States, Senate Document 39 (1831): 9; White and DePuydt, *Condition Assessment of Fort Colville*, 40-42; David H. Chance, *Fort Colville: The Structure of a Hudson's Bay Company Post, 1825 to 1871 and After*, University of Idaho Anthropological Research Manuscript Series 1 (Moscow: University of Idaho, Dept. of Sociology/Anthropology, 1972).
18. HBCA, Outfit 1828/29 District Statements, B.223/d/19, p.6.
19. John C. Jackson, *Shadow on the Tetons: David E. Jackson and the Claiming of the American West* (Missoula, Montana: Mountain Press, 1993), 146-151; Goldie Putnam, "Kalispel Indian Trail," in Patrick J. Graham, comp. *Colville Collection: Book 1*, rev. ed. (1989 rpt., Colville, Washington: *Statesman-Examiner*, 2003), 7-18; Message from the President of the United States, Senate Document 39 (1831): 9.

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Bridger Discovers Great Salt Lake, 1824-1825

by Jerry Enzler

Jerry Enzler is the founder and now President Emeritus of the National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium, a Smithsonian affiliate in Dubuque, Iowa. His first book, Jim Bridger: Trailblazer of the American West (University of Oklahoma Press, 2021), won the True West Magazine Best of the West 2022 Reader's Choice Award for biography. Now in its third printing, it also received the Western Writers of America 2022 Spur Finalist Award for biography.

This description of Jim Bridger's discovery of the Great Salt Lake comes from that book, chapter 5, pages 34-40. We are grateful to Mr. Enzler and the University of Oklahoma Press for permission to reprint this excerpt.

The course of Bear River is like a giant question mark in its route, and so it was in the trappers' minds. Where would it go next? Could it be the "Bonaventura," that mysterious river that rumor held might be the water passage to the west? They argued among themselves about the course of the Bear, and some trappers made a wager. Twenty-year-old Bridger was selected to explore its course.

Bridger mounted his horse and followed the Bear. He was going to see where the river flowed. This experience was different than setting traps in icy streams. He wasn't making money; he was making dreams. He studied what lay ahead, not knowing what he might find or if the Indians he would meet would be friends or foes. Bridger's reflection in still water showed a man far different in appearance than two years earlier. His skin browned from the sun, he could easily be mistaken for an Indian at a distance.

The Bear's winding course took him through Bear River Canyon, a deep, two-mile gorge. The towering rock walls could fill a person with both wonder and fear. It was also a perfect spot for an ambush. Even "friendly" Indians might kill a lone man for his horse and gun. But Bridger emerged from the canyon safely and continued to follow the Bear.

Then he saw it. The canyon walls fell away and the river flowed into a great expanse of water that extended for miles, its choppy waters dotted with whitecaps. He rode up to its shore and tasted it. It was salty, and a white rim of salt edged the shoreline. White seagulls and pelicans flew over the gray-green waters, and several hilly islands broke the surface. Salty spray stung his eyes, and even someone who couldn't swim could easily float in the brine. The land surrounding the water was arid, and few trees grew along the shoreline. An army general later recalled Bridger saying, "The valley was covered with the skeletons of animals that had perished in a terrible winter of a few years before."

Great Salt Lake is the largest natural lake between the Mississippi River and the Pacific and the largest salt lake in the Western Hemisphere. Indigenous peoples had known of this lake for thousands of years. Trapper and trader Etienne Provost saw the southern portion of the lake from a distance in fall of 1824. Bridger made his discovery in late 1824 or early 1825. He went to the shore and tasted its waters, and became the first Euro-American to discover that it was a salt lake.

Bridger made his way back to Weber's camp and described what he'd seen. Some of the trappers supposed it "certainly to be the Gulf of California or the Pacific Ocean." They were pleased to hear of a source for salt, since they had been short for some time and were tired of putting gunpowder on their meat.

After his exploring expedition, Bridger and his companions were surprised to find a Hudson's Bay trapping brigade just eight miles upriver. Peter Skene Ogden was leading a group of British and Iroquois trappers who were well equipped with horses, traps, and guns. The land west of the Divide and north of the Arkansas River was jointly claimed by England and the United States, and Hudson's Bay Company's plan was to kill all the beaver along a wide swath of territory along the border, purposely creating a "beaver desert."

The British wanted to stop American trappers from advancing farther west, just as burning a strip of forest would stop a fire from advancing. HBC North America leader George Simpson knew the country was a rich preserve of beaver, and for political reasons he intended to "destroy it as fast as possible." Jedediah Smith learned at the HBC's Flathead Post that in the last four years the British had trapped and traded for eighty thousand beaver pelts from the Shoshone lands on both sides of the Rockies.

Ogden and his trappers were flying the British flag, and the Americans swore they would tear it down. Johnson Gardner, a free trapper traveling with Weber's party, saw it as an insult, so he took the U.S. flag and marched with twenty-five Americans to the British camp. He intended to trample their colors, and he bellowed that the British were in U.S. territory. He told the free trappers in the HBC camp that he would buy their pelts at \$3.50 a pound, far more than the British were paying. Fourteen HBC trappers deserted and came over to Gardner's side with their furs. Many of them felt mistreated; George Simpson had once referred to them as a "worthless and motley crew . . . the very scum of the country."

The next morning Gardner again hoisted the flag and led a march to Ogden's tent, where he demanded, "Do you know whose country you are in?" When Ogden stated it was under joint occupancy, Gardner replied, "Remain at your peril." Gardner then persuaded John Gray, whom HBC considered "a turbulent blackguard, a damned rascal," to have all the Iroquois take down their lodges as if to leave. Gardner and the deserting trappers cocked their guns in support of the Iroquois. The Iroquois hurled insults and obscenities at the British as they left with their furs, insinuating they might even pillage the British camp one night. Ogden set a double watch on his diminished camp.

The following day the Americans and Iroquois rode into the British camp once again. Three more free trappers deserted. Ogden rode away with what was left of his brigade, having lost twenty-three men, seven hundred beaver skins, and nearly his life. Bridger later well remembered how the trappers "drove the Hudson's Bay Company from American soil." This would not be the last time Bridger found himself in competition with the Hudson's Bay Company.

By the summer of 1825, Bridger and his fellow trappers wondered when they would be able to buy blankets and britches. When would they taste sugar or coffee? In the two years since the Arikara fight, Bridger had wintered with the Crows, crossed the South Pass, trapped the Seedskedee, discovered the Great Salt Lake, and nearly fought a war with the British. There had been plenty of losses—boats, horses, supplies, and men. But now they had found beaver, and they had gathered thousands of pelts that they needed to be paid for.

The previous summer Thomas Fitzpatrick, along with trappers Branch and Stone, had tried to take pelts down the Sweetwater River by bullboat, but rapids made it impossible to float the heavy furs in buffalo-hide boats. When the river abruptly took two of their guns and all of their lead, they had to rip the brass from their remaining gun and pound it into rifle balls in order to survive. They finally reached Fort Atkinson and sent a message to Ashley that they had crossed the Continental Divide at South Pass in 1824 and taken a large number of furs.

Weber, Bridger, and the others trapping Bear River country wondered when they would be able to sell their pelts. They were rewarded when Zacharias Ham and seven others searched them out and told them there was to be a rendezvous where the trappers could turn in their beaver skins and get credit for their work. Andrew Henry was no longer a leader of the company, and William Ashley had come out with plenty of supplies to sell to them in exchange for their furs.

In early 1825 Ashley had led an overland caravan of twenty-five men and fifty pack horses west from St. Louis—a laborious and troubling winter journey following the South Platte across the plains. They finally reached the Front Range near present-day Fort Collins, cut northwest toward the Laramie plains, and then rounded the Medicine Bow Mountains to reach the North Platte River. From there they proceeded westward, crossing the Divide just south of present-day Rawlins, Wyoming. They reached the Green River in April 1825, where Ashley set up camp. He sent trapping parties in every direction with the additional task of finding company men and free trappers and telling them of the summer gathering.

In a land where rivers and buffalo trails were the primary pathways, Ashley needed to find more than one hundred scattered trappers. In addition to sending Zacharias Ham to Bear River country, Ashley sent James Clyman and six men north up the tributaries of the Green River to find trappers there. Thomas Fitzpatrick and six men went southwest to the Uinta Mountains to search for trappers. Ashley himself took seven men and made a harrowing journey in bullboats down the Green River, shooting frightening rapids and cataracts that would later be known as Flaming Gorge, Ashley Falls, and Disaster Falls.

The message Ashley disseminated across the mountains invited the trappers to come to a rendezvous, at a yet-undecided place, on or before July 10. As he sent his scouts out, Ashley told them he would transport the goods down the Green River to a “conspicuous point not less than 40 to 50 miles from this place.” He told them the place of rendezvous would be marked by trees peeled of bark near a junction of rivers. If there was no timber, he would “raise a mound of earth five feet high or pile rocks to that height and paint the top red with vermilion. Thirty feet northwest from the pile of earth or rocks he would bury a letter with any further instructions.”

It worked! By the first of July 1825, 120 trappers were gathered in a lush bottomland on Henry’s Fork, twenty miles above the Green River (near present-day McKinnon, Wyoming). There was plenty of water and beaver sign as well as abundant willows and large timber along the banks of the stream. The camp of the trappers who came to celebrate their survival and reap the rewards of their labors resembled a small village: tents, campfires, bales of beaver pelts, and herds of horses covered the landscape. Ashley’s clerks set up scales to weigh the beaver pelts and stands to sell the products they had hauled out from the East.

The company men opened their bales of goods and took payment in beaver pelts (sometimes jokingly called “hair bank notes”): coffee and sugar at \$1.50 a pound; knives at \$2.50 each. Bridger could buy flints for \$1 a dozen, powder for \$1.50 a pound, and lead at \$1 a pound. Prices were three times what these goods cost in St. Louis, but Bridger and the other trappers relished them at any price, knowing the financial and human cost of freighting them across the country. The beaver pelts he had trapped these many months were recorded by company clerks and valued at \$3 a pound. The eager trappers could buy axes, kettles, tobacco, sewing silk, needles, ribbons, combs, earrings, soap, and sleigh bells.

This first Rocky Mountain rendezvous marked the beginning of a new way to supply American trappers and collect their hauls. Bridger and the others would remain full-time hunters, spending the whole year in the mountains instead of taking time to travel to and from St. Louis each spring and fall. A supply caravan would come west each spring laden with goods and return to St. Louis with beaver skins.

Rendezvous was not a new concept. The Shoshones had long held summer trade gatherings. In the 1770s French voyageurs, trappers, and traders paddled the rivers from New Orleans, Montreal, Quebec, and other locations to gather for an annual trading fair at Prairie du Chien, in present-day Wisconsin. Ashley’s contribution was bringing the rendezvous to the Rocky Mountains, and it became the primary trading event for the mountain men for the next fifteen years.

Rendezvous was not just a time to swap goods. For Bridger it was a connection to the life he had left behind some twelve hundred miles to the east. It was also a time for him to learn what had happened to fellow trappers who had been hunting other regions and what had transpired within the leadership of the company during the past year. They talked of Henry, who had quit the fur trade, and Ashley, who had run for governor of Missouri, only to lose by about five hundred votes.

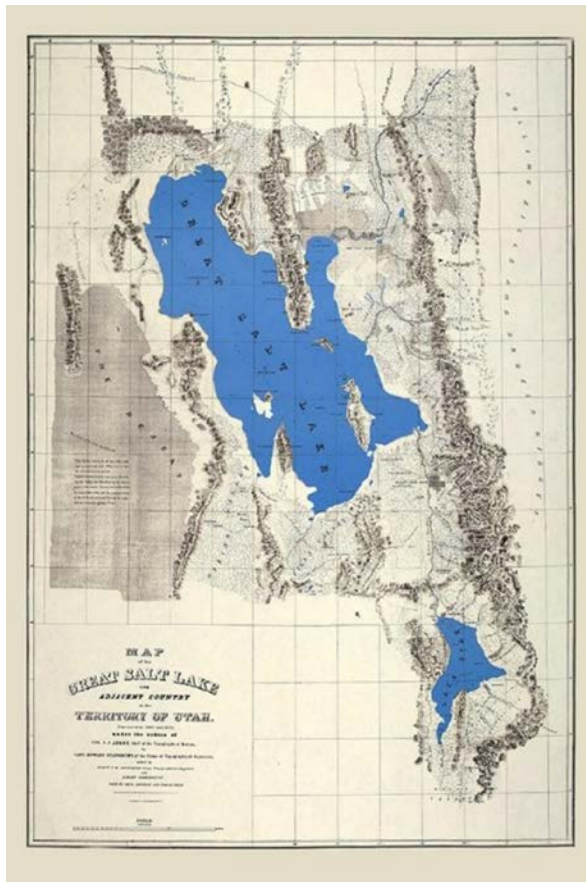
Ashley was intrigued to learn about Bridger’s report of a salt lake, and Jedediah Smith told Ashley that the lake was a “free and easy passage and abounding in Salt.” Smith gave some specimens to Ashley, who felt they “equal[ed] in appearance and quality the best Liverpool salt,” referring to the salt works in Liverpool, New York. Jim Clyman, who was thought to be dead, came in alive but with most of his hair cut off. The Indian who had saved him asked for his locks as a memento. They talked of Johnson Gardner and others driving the British off, and they planned their trapping strategy for next year.

They brought their pelts to the scales, and it was an enormous haul. Weber’s party, which included Bridger, had the largest taking—3,100 pounds of beaver fur. Jedediah Smith and his six men brought in 668 pounds. Zacharias Ham’s party had 461 pounds. Caleb Greenwood’s party brought in 202 pounds. When Ashley’s clerk finished tabulating the returns at rendezvous and the furs that had already been cached, he counted 8,829 pounds of beaver skins, worth nearly \$50,000 in St. Louis. The wealthy in St. Louis built their expensive mansions for a fraction of that amount.

A Note on Jed Smith and the Great Salt Lake

Although the honor of discovering the Great Salt Lake is Bridger's, Jed Smith knew the lake and its environs well. He considered it "a home of the wilderness"—though not at first.

In the spring of 1826, Jed investigates the lake and its surroundings, and he is greatly disappointed. The salinity of the lake and assumedly of any river flowing from it convince him that there are few if any beaver in the area. His search for the fabled Buenaventura proves likewise fruitless in the sterile landscape of the Salt Desert west of the lake. Traveling north in the direction of the Snake River, he finds a region nearly as unproductive. No doubt forlorn, Jed returns to the fecund and hospitable Cache Valley, the location of the 1826 summer rendezvous where he joins David Jackson and William Sublette in purchasing William Ashley's fur trading operation. Jed's obligations to this new enterprise compel him to leave Cache Valley in August 1826, move west to the "Big Salt Lake," then south to Uta (Utah) Lake. His first great expedition to California has begun.



This early map of the Great Salt Lake in the Territory of Utah is based on an 1849-1850 survey by Capt. Howard Stansbury of the Corps of Topographical Engineers, under the direction of
of
Col. J. J. Abert, Chief of the Topographical Bureau.

In his journal, Jed describes his motivation for this arduous and life-threatening odyssey: "What that great and unexplored country might contain we knew not but hoped to find parts of the country as well stocked with Beaver as some the waters of the Missouri which was perhaps as much as we could reasonably expect." Like any inspired Yankee capitalist, Jed acknowledges his ". . . strong inclination to . . . unfold those hidden resources of wealth . . . which I readily imagined a country so extensive might contain." However, Jed's curiosity transcends his desire for material gain: "I wanted to be the first to view a country on which the eyes of a white man had never gazed and to follow the course of rivers that run through a new land." Jed declares that he "expected" to find not only beaver but also "some considerable river heading up in the vicinity of Salt Lake."

Jed reaches California by November 1826, though in May of the next year he leaves most of his men with his clerk Harrison Rogers in camp near the Stanislaus River. With only Robert Evans and Silas Gobel as companions, Jed crosses the snow-packed Sierra Nevada and then the arid landscape of the Great Basin in time to reach the 1827 rendezvous. In a later letter to General William Clark, then Superintendent of Indian Affairs for St. Louis, Jed tells of "travelling over a country completely barren and destitute of game" and of being "without water sometimes for two days over sandy deserts." Conditions are so deplorable that only one of Jed's horses and only one of his mules survive, but the animals are "so feeble and poor that they could scarce carry the little camp equipage which I had along." Jed adds that "the balance of my horses I was compelled to eat as they gave out." The journey is worthy of Homer or Virgil or Dante.

On June 27, 1827, as his long return is nearing an end, Jed thinks once more of the Great Salt Lake, but now in a positive light: "Those who may chance to read this at a

distance from the scene may perhaps be surprised that the sight of this lake surrounded by a wilderness of More than 2000 Miles diameter excited in me those feelings known to the traveler, who, after long and perilous journeying, comes again in view of his home. But so it was with me for I had traveled so much in the vicinity of the Salt Lake that it had become my home of the wilderness."

Four days out from the rendezvous, Jed, Evans, and Gobel reach the lake, where they enjoy “fat venison.” Jed fully appreciates the moment: “So much do we make our estimation of happiness by a contrast with our situation that we were as much pleased with our fat venison on the bank of the Salt Lake as we would have been in the possession of all the Luxuries and enjoyments of a civilised life in other circumstances.” The Great Salt Lake must seem like Paradise by contrast to the torturous environment the three intrepid travelers have had to endure!

Their bellies satiated by fat-meat, the beleaguered trio succeeds in reaching the Bear Lake rendezvous on July 3, 1827. Deservedly, a cannon is fired to salute their return!



Cache Valley today (photo in public domain)



The Great Salt Lake today at its lowest levels in recorded history (photo in public domain)

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Janet Maldonado and Ben Aghazarian Receive Scholarships

The Julian Smith Bacon Jr. and Jedediah Smith Society Endowed Scholarship for fiscal year 2021 was awarded to Janet R. Maldonado, a senior from Stockton, California, at the University of the Pacific, majoring in social sciences.

Ben Aghazarian, also a student at the University of the Pacific, received the 2022 scholarship. Ben says that he recently wrote a paper on Jed's interactions with Mexican authorities in California and hopes to continue his research into the history of the American West.

Congratulations, Janet and Ben, on your achievements!

2023 Rendezvous Planned for April 3-6!

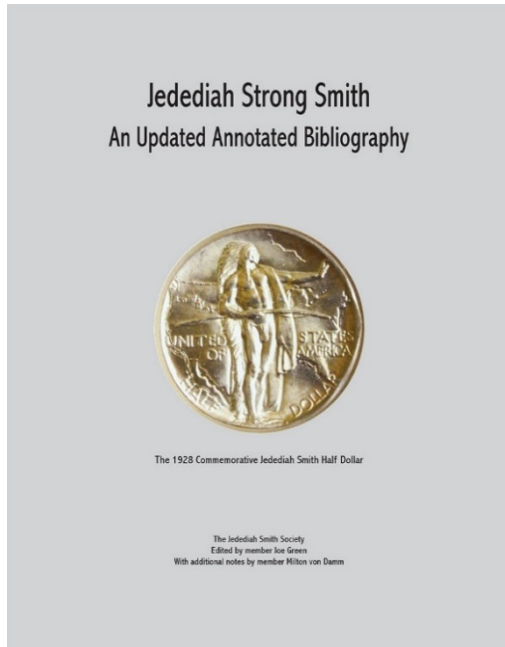
The Jedediah Smith Society invites its members and all readers of *Castor Canadensis* to participate in the 2023 Rendezvous trip on April 3-6. This guided journey will visit important sites on Jed Smith's trail as he traveled northward from California into Oregon. Plans are now being developed for an exciting and educational experience for all participants.

Our fall newsletter and the Jed Smith Society website will eventually announce the details, including information about places, speakers and guides, transportation, meals, lodging, and registration.

If you feel you *may* wish to join this stimulating and informative gathering, please contact JSS vice-president Rich Cimino via email (rsCIMINO@gmail.com). Contacting Rich will help him with planning.

Now Available!

Jedediah Strong Smith: An Updated Annotated Bibliography



Edited and written by member Joe Green and coordinated by current JSS president Milton von Damm, this limited printing of this 112-page book contains primary and secondary sources, map sources, and a special report about Jed Smith-related sources in the Hudson's Bay Company archives prepared by HBCA research consultant Kenton Storey in collaboration with lifetime JSS member David Malaher. Also included is a two-page trail map of Jedediah's travels in the West. A reviewer in the *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* calls this bibliography "a paradigm of great scholarship and dedicated research."

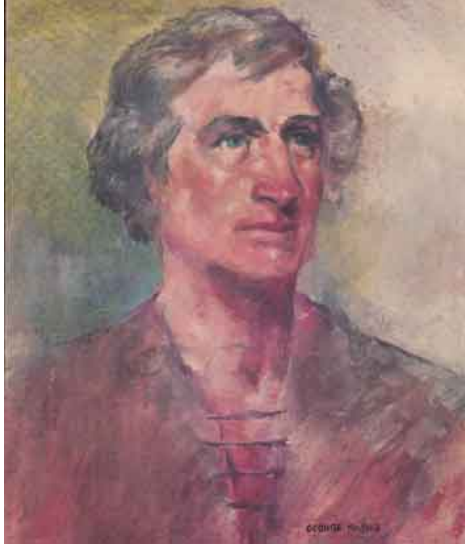
Member price: \$30. Non-member price: \$40. To order, send a check to the Jedediah Smith Society, c/o Milton von Damm, 1322 Shattuck Ave., Apt. 401, Berkeley, CA 94709.

Publishing in *Castor Canadensis*

We welcome articles on topics related to Jed; his historical, geographical, religious, economic, or political milieu; and his interactions with others, including the indigenous people, the HBC, and Mexican Californians.

Please follow these guidelines:

- Authors should submit articles by email at any convenient time in MS Word as *pdf* attachments to Joe Green, editor, GChaucer1950@yahoo.com. Home phone: 308.832.2256.
- We prefer articles of no more than 4,000 words, but we will do our best to accommodate exceptions to this guideline.
- End notes should be numbered consecutively. (No footnotes, please.) You may format citations in any appropriate academic style (MLA or Chicago preferred).
- Photographs, maps, illustrations, or other images should be sent as separate attachments and not embedded in the article. They should be sent as *jpg* or



George Mathis' pastel portrait of Jedediah Smith, ca. 1970, appeared on the cover of *The Pacific Historian* 17, no. 3, Fall 1973.

JSS Website to be Renovated

The JSS website, located at <http://jedediahsmithsociety.org/>, contains interactive maps, links to videos, a history of Jed Smith, photos, membership information, scholarly articles, and a host of other useful and interesting features. Our site will be undergoing a major renovation in the near future and will be an even better source of information about Jed and the fur trade.

(Readers who wish to suggest ways to improve the site should contact the editor at GChaucer1950@yahoo.com.)

Selected Fur Trade Organizations and Places of Interest to Readers

Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Winnipeg, Manitoba: <http://gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/>

Museum of the Fur Trade, Chadron, Nebraska: www.furtrade.org

Museum of the Mountain Man, Pinedale, Wyoming: www.museumofthemountainman.com

National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium, Dubuque, Iowa: www.rivermuseum.com

The [Robert] Campbell House and Museum, St. Louis, Missouri: www.campbellhousemuseum.org

The Bancroft Library, University of California-Berkeley Campus: www.lib.berkeley.edu

University of the Pacific, Holt-Atherton Special Collections—Digital Archives:

<http://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu>

Jed Smith's Mysterious Final Letter

Twenty-three days before he died on May 27, 1831, Jedediah Smith wrote a brief letter dated May 4, 1831, to one A(lexander). W(illiam). Doniphan (1808-1887). Though at first glance, Jed's letter may seem insignificant, it is fraught with mystery, and the questions it raises are many.

Here is a transcription of the letter as it appears on page 362 of Dale L. Morgan's *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West*:

[Jedediah S. Smith to A. W. Doniphan]

*Camp near Big Blue morning
of 4th May 1831*

Mr Donaphan

Dear Sir

In the hurry of the time I was ob[l]iged to omit even the formality of taking your hand. But now I send you my best wishes for your welfare. I hope you will succeed in resting

[Jedediah S. Smith]

Who wrote the letter for Jed? The letter is not in Jed's hand, as Morgan points out, so who wrote it? Samuel Parkman, probably. We know that Parkman was recruited by William Sublette, who was in St. Louis in the winter of 1828-1829. When Jed returned to St. Louis in 1830, Parkman accompanied him, drafting Jed's map and organizing notes for the journals. Jed then departed on a trade caravan to Santa Fe on April 10, 1831. Was Parkman with Jed on May 4, the date of the letter to Doniphan? He was, indeed, serving with Don Juan Jose Warner as one of Jed's clerks. Parkman would thus have been a natural choice to be Jed's amanuensis. The letter appears on one of the flyleaves of Jed's transcript journal, which Parkman penned. Parkman's handwriting in the transcript journals appears to be identical to the handwriting used in the Doniphan letter.

Where was Doniphan in 1830? When Jed left St. Louis, he passed through Lexington, Missouri, in late April. Doniphan was there. After earning admission to the Kentucky bar, Doniphan had moved to Lexington in March 1830 (one source says April 19), where he stayed for three years before going to Liberty, Missouri.

Where was Jed when he wrote the letter? By May 4 the Santa Fe caravan was ready to begin its journey in earnest. Morgan says that "the party launched its journey from the camp near the Big Blue, ten miles southwest of Independence, on the morning of May 4, 1831" (327). "In the hurry of the time," Jed would have been focused on his goal of Santa Fe—a quality typical of the indefatigable Jed. Any expression of friendship had to take place by mail, and be brief at that.

Why does Jed send "best wishes" for Doniphan's welfare and express his hope that Doniphan will find time to rest? Was Doniphan ill? Was he injured? And, perhaps most important, why would Jed, who admittedly had pressing business and travel concerns, take time to dictate even a brief letter to Doniphan? More than a professional communication, Jed's letter suggests friendship. What was the nature of that friendship, and how did it come to exist? Was Jed grateful for Doniphan's help in some legal matter? Was there a connection between Doniphan and Robert Campbell, the executor of Jed's will?

Finally, why would Jed endear himself to a then relatively unknown lawyer? We know that Doniphan was a novice at practicing law in 1831. Later he acquired a reputation as an adept defense attorney and became famous for his spirited defense of Mormon leader Joseph Smith, for his military exploits in the Mexican American War, and for writing legal codes still used today. Did Jed recognize Doniphan's potential for fame? And, by the way, we cannot help but wonder how Doniphan reacted when he learned that Jed was killed before completing his Santa Fe journey.

If Jed were not one of the greatest explorers in our nation's history, and if Doniphan were not famous for his legal, military, and political achievements, we might dismiss Jed's letter as trivial. However . . .

In Memoriam
Troy S. Tuggle, June 6, 1932-May 2, 2022

by Joe Molter

Recently the Jedediah Smith Society lost one of its longstanding members and one to whom the Society owes much gratitude. Troy was a true gentleman, friendly and encouraging to all that approached him, and a persistent researcher and historian. He was a native Californian, born, raised, and educated in the San Joaquin Valley. He also spent his career there as a public-school teacher, and it was while teaching a California history lesson that he became intrigued with Jedediah Smith, the first known US citizen to visit the San Joaquin Valley! In the late 1960s Troy joined the Jedediah Smith Society, and for 55 years he faithfully participated in its activities, which included attending events, giving presentations, serving on the Board of Directors, chairing the Gun Committee, and researching and writing papers for *Castor* and other journals. Troy also traveled to many of the sites pertaining to Jedediah's history.

Troy's efforts in dealing with the stolen Jedediah pistol were mammoth. Not only did he visit the crime scene to interview the staff of the museum from where the pistol was stolen and law enforcement personnel who investigated the incident, his diligence in contacting numerous gun collectors and organizations for advice and help and his multiple attempts using various methods to find and retrieve this gun were tireless. Even though the pistol was never located, Troy's research, documentation, and articles are worthy groundwork for future efforts.

His research on the pistol led Troy to reach out to one member of the family through which the pistol had been passed down. Taking a chance, he wrote to Julian Smith Bacon Jr. in the hope that Bacon was a relation of Jedediah. He was, being Jedediah's great grandnephew, a descendant of Jed's brother Peter Smith. Over time, a close friendship and trust developed between the two. "Smitty," the name Bacon preferred to be called, was also introduced to the Jedediah Smith Society by Troy. What resulted was Smitty's generous gifts of artifacts to the Society, including Jedediah's shaving case, pictures, and documents pertaining to Jedediah and Smith family history, which today are archived in the University of the Pacific Library's Holt-Atherton Department of Special Collections. Prompted by Smitty, other relations subsequently donated items, too, such as Jedediah's watch. Moreover, Smitty's financial support facilitated several Society projects, including publishing and start-up funding for an endowment and scholarships.

Even though Troy has passed onto God's happy hunting grounds, his earthly efforts to document Jedediah's history are lasting tributes to him. The friendship we shared will last long in the hearts of those of us who were fortunate to know him.



Troy Tuggle (center) receiving the Jedediah Smith Society Award of Excellence in 2016
at the 60th Anniversary Rendezvous in Lodi, California.
Jim Hardee (left) and Jim Auld (right)
(Photo courtesy of the Joe Molter)

The Editor's Corner . . .

In 1920 John G. Neihardt wrote the first book-length biography of Jedediah Strong Smith, the man Dale Morgan also judged an “authentic American hero.” Neihardt’s book, *The Splendid Wayfaring*, is still in print today. So, too, is his *Cycle of the West*, a five-part epic poem that includes *The Song of Jed Smith*.

At the beginning of his *Cycle*, Neihardt asks his readers, “Who now reads clear the roster of that band?” and Neihardt himself provides an answer: “Time” has blotted out the “deeds and dooms of mighty men.” Neihardt then sets about redressing our collective forgetfulness of those “mighty men” by writing of the Henry-Ashley men—including Mike Fink, Hugh Glass, and, of course, Jed Smith.

Neihardt was optimistic that our nation would eventually learn Jed’s story, and he chooses Robert Evans to voice this optimism. Because Evans accompanies Jed and Silas Gobel during their 1827 crossing of the Sierra Nevada and the Great Basin, he speaks with authority about Jed:

He was seeing all the white
Map westward as a page on which to write,
For men to read, the story of a land
Still lying empty as the Maker’s hand
Before creation. From the Great Salt Lake,
Between the Colorado and the Snake,
From burning sand to high Sierra snow,
He wrote it. Some day men will read and know
The man he was.

Neihardt was right: America *would* come to know Jed. Historians like Maurice Sullivan, Dale Morgan, George Brooks, David Weber, Barton Barbour, and dozens of others, both amateurs and professionals, would write extensively and insightfully about Jed and the Henry-Ashley men. And many readers, including this editor, would benefit from the hard work and wisdom of these dedicated scholars.

To all the Troy Tuggles of this world, we are grateful.

Please Invite a Friend to Join!

The Jedediah Smith Society welcomes new members! If you wish to join the society in supporting research, writing, teaching, and learning about Jed Smith, one of our nation’s greatest explorers and an important leader in the fur trade, please fill out this form (or put the information on a separate sheet of paper) and mail it with a check payable to the Jedediah Smith Society. Mail your information and check to the treasurer: Arthur Hurley, 1230 Olive Hill Lane, Napa, CA 94558. You will find a similar form online at www.jedediahsmithsociety.org.

Yearly membership: Student: \$10.00; Individual (minimum level): \$30.00; Sponsor: \$50.00; Patron: \$100.00

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*Optional: Please tell us your area(s) of interest: _____

* The JSS publishes a quarterly newsletter and a semiannual journal, *Castor Canadensis*. To save on printing costs, we use email to distribute our newsletter. If you do not have an email, we will use the US mail. We distribute *Castor* by regular US mail.

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Mail to:
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1230 Olive Hill Lane
Napa, CA 94558





An early drawing of Jedediah Smith, ca. 1835.

According to Jed Smith biographer Dale Morgan, "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," as indicated by the date above. See *The Pacific Historian* 11, no. 2 (Spring, 1967): 36. See also Daryl Morrison, "Images of Jed," JSS website.

