



# CASTOR CANADENSIS

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

FALL 2020

## Jedediah Strong Smith: Riverman

BY, KEVIN KUCERA

Born in 1799 on the banks of the majestic Susquehanna River, Jedediah Strong Smith was a Riverman from the beginning. This beautiful river filled with trout was an early American transportation corridor, much like many of the rivers Jedediah followed during his full yet short life. His Father and his Uncle, Cyrus Strong; "...opened a general store in the Village of Jericho. Bartering lumber for merchandise, they floated great rafts down the Susquehanna and resupplied themselves from wholesalers on the river towns below." <sup>1</sup> As the edge of frontier continued to move west, so followed the Smith Family to new locations where they would establish their future frontier homes on or near water.

The Smith family next moved to western Pennsylvania, and this relocation would change the course of their future. There they most likely met the gifted Dr. Titus Gordon Vespasian Simons and his family who lived in the Warren and Oil City area. These Methodist families became close friends and there were intermarriages between the families that followed. Dr. Simon's youngest child, David Simons, was born in 1807 at Warren, Pennsylvania. He lived in the Warren and Oil City area, and he was engaged in commercially rafting lumber on the Allegheny, Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. <sup>2</sup> With this information it is clear that commercial rafting was a source of income for both the Smith and Simons families. The Smith Family then moves again landing on the banks of Lake Erie near the mouth of the Allegheny River.

It is in this area of the great lakes that Jedediah Smith was supposedly a "clerk of supercargo" on a ship during the war of 1812. <sup>3</sup> At thirteen plus years old this would have been a risky under taking for the young Jedediah. Finally, and the last time for Jedediah, his family moved with the Simons Family to Perrysville, Ohio, on the banks of the Mohican Black Fork River in late 1816, early 1817.

While in Perrysville, Jedediah Smith Jr. was on record doing business with a local farmer named Ebenezer Rice in 1820. His granddaughter,



Unknown Artist - 19th Century Wood Engraving

the famous early Ohio Historian, Rosella Rice, wrote that Jedediah Smith Jr. was commercially involved in rafting with an entrepreneurial venture:

"One very enterprising young man took a load of thirty barrels of good whiskey pickles, of his own raising and making. He raised the cucumbers on one acre of rough ground, and tended them himself. He took the boat to New Orleans, sold it at a good figure, sent the money home, went away into the mountains, was abundantly prospered, hired a tutor

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## Jedediah Strong Smith: Riverman (Continued)

for his five brothers at home, bought farms in time for all of them, struck into the territories bravely, and at last was shot by Indians, and Smith was his name.”<sup>4</sup>

The following is Rosella Rice’s description of the flatboats or packets and how they were constructed at or near Judge Coulter’s property, which was adjacent to the Smith cabin:

“These boats were forty to sixty feet in length, and from twelve to sixteen feet in width... They were constructed on the banks of the creek, made bottom side up of two-inch plank, and seams calked, sides put on them, about three feet high, then when ready to launch, as many men as could surround the boat did so, one end of it was worked down over the bank and then by united efforts the boat was turned over in the small water, and it was soon in readiness to load... It was managed by poles in small streams, but when it reached the large rivers it was allowed to go with the current.”

Perrysville locals used flatboats to carry goods down the Black Fork, the Mohican, the White Woman, Muskingum, and on to New Orleans via the Ohio and Mississippi. It was the custom of these local men to walk back to the Western Reserve after they sold their goods in New Orleans. This would have been a dangerous return hike starting with the poisonous snakes, alligators, and pirates. The famous Mississippi River explorer, Sieur de La Salle, learned the hard way with his life that this was not a safe area to be traveling by foot.

We find Jedediah next in Northern Illinois in the summer and fall of 1821. The Smith Family is thought to have had relatives in this region; and some Perrysville bandits supposedly were forced to leave and they moved to this area of Northern Illinois in the early eighteen twenties. Jedediah then spent the winter of 1821/1822 at the Rock (Rapids) River which feeds into the Mississippi near Dubuque, Iowa. In early 1822 Smith headed down to St. Louis when he heard about the planned Ashley Expedition going up the Missouri to hunt beaver.<sup>5</sup>

What happens next changes the history of the West. In the spring Jedediah Smith travels up the Muddy Missouri on board a keelboat, the *Enterprise*, as part General Ashley’s

famous fur trade expedition. Further up the river in Missouri the boat sank near the mouth of Sinabar Creek. The lost boat was soon replaced by General Ashley in eighteen days with another keelboat from St. Louis, and they continued on while Jedediah proceeded on foot as one of the few hunters.<sup>6</sup>

Mike Fink, the “king of the keelboaters” in the transport business of the Ohio and Mississippi was on this Ashley expedition with fellow Ohioan, Jedediah Smith. Fink, also a pirate was an unsavory and sadistic character in a large frame, and he backed down to nobody. He spent the winter of 1822 on the Musselshell River with Jedediah Smith and other members of the expedition. While in camp Fink was in a caustic challenge with a friend named Carpenter for the favor of an unknown woman who was possibly down in the settlements. Both men ended up dead in a nonsensical murderous tear. How fortuitous as Jedediah Smith would march on to become the legendary Rivermen and Explorer of the West, and Mike Fink became a foot note.<sup>7</sup>

During the eighteen twenties J.S. Smith walked many great rivers of the West for self-described exploratory and commercial purposes. His adventurous goals were to be the first explorer in unknown areas of the West beyond the Rocky Mountains, and in the process find and develop business opportunities to best provide for his family and beyond to accomplish his dreams.<sup>8</sup>



Traveling by Flatboat. Engraving by Alfred R. Waud

Transportation of goods is one business in which Smith had experience based on his rafting, etc. All of Smith’s western trails are on the Jedediah Smith Society Interactive Map - see [www.jedediahsmithsociety.org](http://www.jedediahsmithsociety.org). It is interesting to note that Jedediah bought a home on Federal St. in St. Louis in late 1830. His house was close to the river front and the nearby residence of his friend General William

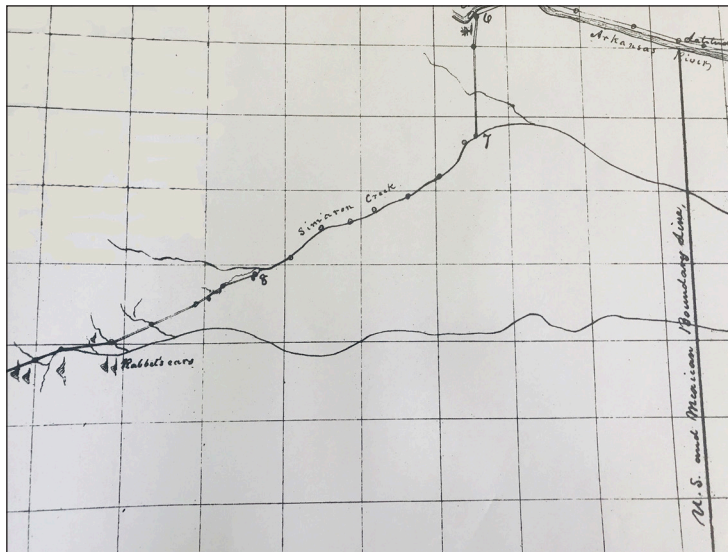
Clark. How appropriate for Jedediah Smith to live near William Clark on the St. Louis Riverfront at what is now called The Gateway to the West.

Smith even took two boat trips on the Pacific Ocean, first in late 1826 onboard the hides transport ship, the *Courier*, from San Diego to San Pedro as a guest of Captain Cunningham. The *Courier* transported cattle hides from the California Missions back east to be used in the manufacture of products during the Industrial Revolution. While in route,

## Jedediah Strong Smith: Riverman (Continued)

the *Courier* took on new ballast (fresh) water at Santa Catalina Island which is a historical home base for a significant population of Great White Sharks. Upon the ship's arrival at San Pedro, Smith returned to the San Gabriel Mission. Jedediah also traveled by ship in November, 1827, from Monterey to The Presidio on San Francisco Bay on board the *Franklin* as a guest of Captain Bradshaw. After a week in San Francisco, Smith's visit concluded with a dinner aboard the man-of-war ship, the *Blossom*, commanded by Captain Beechy. Several other boat captains were in attendance including Captain Bradshaw and Captain Cunningham of the *Courier*. Beechy was a famed explorer who aided Perry and Franklin in their polar expeditions.<sup>9</sup>

Jedediah also experienced great tragedy on the banks of rivers during his second expedition to California. Twenty six of his men in total were killed by Indians on the Colorado River in 1827, and later on the Umpqua River in 1828. Finally, in late May, 1831, on the Santa Fe Trail in Mexico Jedediah Strong Smith went missing and his body was never recovered. The location of his disappearance was reported to be on the "Simaron Creek" or river which was a known part of the Santa Fe road that was previously surveyed and mapped by J.C. Brown of the George Sibley Expedition, 1825. Sadly, the greatest of all American Rivermen of the West was declared



J. Brown Survey Map - G. Sibley Expedition, 1825-1827

deceased in absentia by William Sublette and Austin Smith four months later from the Walnut Creek Campground on the Arkansas River in U.S. territory, north east of where Smith went missing in Mexico. Jedediah was reported to have been killed by Indians on the Cimarron, a shallow intermittent stream on the high plains of southwestern Kansas.

J.S. Smith covered an immense amount of territory in a short period of time, much of it he was the first to explore. He created the first transcontinental routes to California, and he helped disprove the age old River of The West theory. In the process of exploration he was the first white person to walk from the Mohave Desert (Colorado River) to the Puget Sound (Columbia River). J.S. Smith was as skilled and knowledgeable a Riverman as any person who was traveling the rivers of the West during the fur trade era. Of all the great explorers of North America, only David Thompson walked and navigated more rivers in distance than the Great American from New York - Jedediah Strong Smith.

### Foototes:

1. Dale L. Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West*, Indianapolis, 1953, pg. 24.
2. *David Roberts to Maurice Sullivan Letter*, July 31, 1931. Maurice Sullivan Collection, Jedediah Smith Society and the University of Pacific, MSJS19. A copy of the letter is in the Archives section.
3. Robert West Howard, *The Back East Background of Jedediah Strong Smith*, Pacific Historian, Vol. 12, No. 3, pp. 16-17.
4. Rosella Rice, *Grahams History of Richland County*, Chapter XXV.
5. D.W. Garber, *Jedediah Strong Smith – Fur Trader from Ohio: A Postscript*, Pacific Historian, Vol. 22, No. 1, pg. 13.
6. Dale L. Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West*, Indianapolis, 1953, pg. 29.
7. Dale Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West*, Indianapolis, 1953, pg. 49.
8. Maurice S. Sullivan, *Jedediah Smith Trader & Trailbreaker*, New York, 1936, pg. 10.
9. David Dale, *The Ashley Smith Explorations and the Discovery of a Central Route to the Pacific, 1822-1829*, Glendale, CA., 1941, pg. 236.



"The Jolly Flatboatmen" - oil on canvas by George Caleb Bingham

## President/Editor's Comments - Kevin Kucera



**Kevin Kucera  
President/Editor**

Fr. Sanchez is rolling over in his grave! It is hard to fathom the continual burning of California, especially the recent fire at his beloved San Gabriel Mission Church. Yet life moves forward, and with enthusiasm the people of California will rebuild on all fronts. The San Gabriel Mission Church has burned before, and like Notre Dame in Paris, it will be rise from the ashes and shine like never before! Next year the San Gabriel Mission celebrates its 250th Anniversary. The Jedediah Smith Society won't miss that celebration, and we understand from the Los Angeles Archdiocese that they will have the mission church ready being that the mission church is a centerpiece of the greater Los Angeles Catholic Church. More information on this anniversary celebration will be provided in the next Castor issues.



**Interior of Mission San Gabriel after the fire**

This summer, board member Jim Smith came up with the idea of the new Castor section called "On the Trail". What a wonderful idea! We want to publish your trip and adventures on any of the Jedediah Smith Trails. You can see all his trails on the interactive map at [www.jedediahsmithsociety.org](http://www.jedediahsmithsociety.org). Please see details in this issue regarding how to submit your adventure. Also, please see Jim's fun "On the Trail" Article in this issue.

In the lead article we see the young and determined Jedediah Smith achieve success with an entrepreneurial venture that included product creation and transportation. His sweat equity landed him in New Orleans selling his finished product of Whiskey Pickles. Rosella Rice described "...Diar as poor and plucky". Throw in resourceful and driven and you have the assets of a Silicon Valley Entrepreneur. Over the years we can trace how the Smith and Simons families were involved in transportation for many decades. Even as late as the 1870's when Oscar Simons, the great grandson of Dr. TGV Simons, was a principal shareholder in the first railroad from Ft. Wayne to Warsaw, Indiana.

Kevin Kucera  
September, 2020

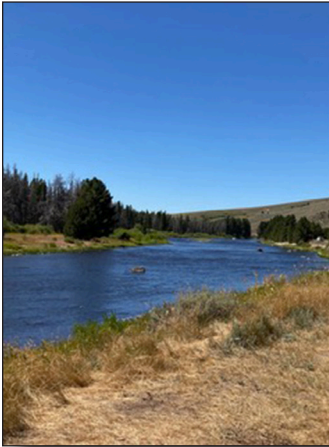
### **CASTOR CANADENSIS NEWSLETTER GUIDELINES**

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

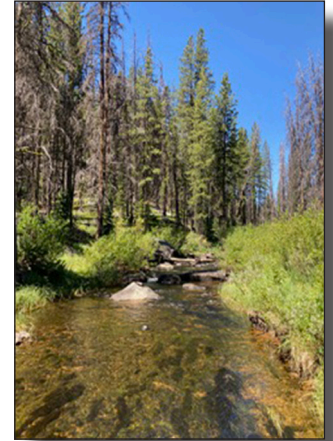
1. Prospective authors should send their articles or questions to Kevin Kucera at [kckucera@msn.com](mailto:kckucera@msn.com)
2. Submit in MS Word.
3. End notes should be numbered consecutively.
4. Photographs, maps or illustrations should be sent as an attachment and not embedded into the article. They 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.

# On the Trail

By, Jim Smith



You can hardly travel anywhere in the Rocky Mountains or Great Plains without trailing along in Jedediah's footsteps. Some of these trails are quite long. From St. Louis up the Missouri River to its source in Montana is over 2000 miles. From Cache Valley to Mission San Gabriel is over 1000 miles. The journey up the California-Oregon coast Jed made in 1828 is over 600.



Over a recent August weekend, me and a friend had the chance to retrace one small but significant and very beautiful part of the Jedediah Smith Trail (as I call it). In 1824 Jed and his party went from their winter quarters near Crowheart Butte in Wyoming, over South Pass to the Green River, the Snake River and eventually to the HBC Flathead Post in far northwestern Montana. Along the way they crossed the Continental Divide

at Lemhi Pass, and re-crossed it at Gibbons Pass. All of this country looks darn near the same now as it did in the 1820s.



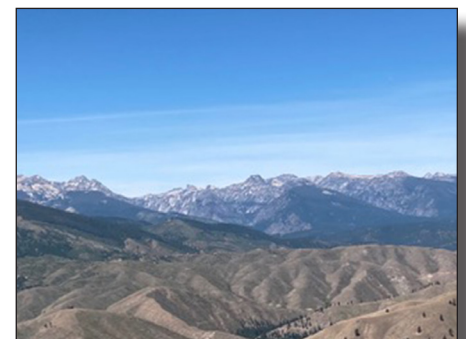
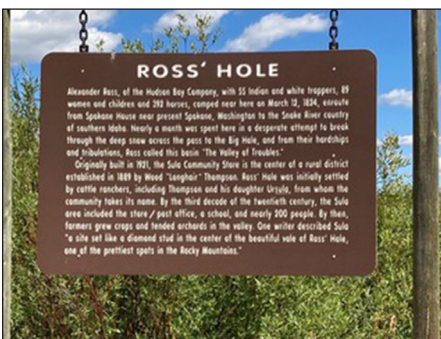
We picked up Jed's Trail near Wisdom, Montana in the Big Hole Valley and followed it up Trail Creek, over Gibbons Pass, and down into the Bitterroot River near Sula, Montana. On paved roads today you'd head west on MT highway 43 to its junction with US 93 near Lost Trail Pass on the Montana-Idaho border. It's only about 50 miles from Wisdom to Sula, which is not a great distance in Jedediah Smith terms. But as noted it is both beautiful and historically significant.



The original route, up Trail Creek and over Gibbons Pass is a good dirt road today. It was used by the Salish people for centuries when they journeyed to the Snake River to lay in salmon for the winter. The route was used by William Clark on his return journey in 1805, and by Jedediah in 1824. In

1877 the Nez Perce, led by Chief Looking Glass, crossed the Divide going from west to east on August 7th. On August 9th U.S. Army troops under the command of Col. John Gibbons attacked the Nez Perce in their camp in the Big Hole Valley.

Dropping from Gibbons Pass into the Bitterroot Valley brings you to the historic USFS Sula Ranger Station. But back in the day it was known as Ross' Hole, named after the HBC's Alexander Ross. Jedediah met Ross there in October, 1824 and traveled with him up to the Flathead Post.



## Upcoming Events



# 2021 National Fur Trade Symposium

New Date: Sept. 8-11, 2021 • Fort Atkinson State Historical Park

## Call for Papers!

The focus of the 2021 symposium will be on the era of trade on the Missouri River between the return of Lewis and Clark in 1806 through the abandonment of Fort Atkinson in 1827.

**We are looking for:**

- Papers pertaining to notable individuals, companies or events occurring in that time.
- Papers about the impact of the U.S. Army and the implementation of federal law upon the fur trade and the Missouri River native tribes.

Email a copy of your paper, abstract or outline 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** by June 1, 2021.



**NEBRASKA**  
- GAME PARKS -

Visit us at [OutdoorNebraska.org/FortAtkinson](http://OutdoorNebraska.org/FortAtkinson)

 Find us at “2021 National Fur Trade Symposium”

201 S 7th St. | Fort Calhoun, NE. 68023

**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.**



# Archives Corner

The following are documents located in the Maurice Sullivan Collection at the University of Pacific, California. They contain information on the family history of Dr. TGV Simons. Below are two different views of Dr. Simons' tombstone.

The Jedediah Smith Society thanks the *Special Collections & Archives Librarian University Libraries UNIVERSITY OF THE PACIFIC* for permission to publish the letter reprinted on page 8-9.

**Wednesday, July 8**

Dr. Titus G. V. Simons, Died Dec 13 1851 Aged 78 Yrs 7 Mos and 28 days Buried in Allen Chapel Cemetery 2 miles So. East of Kendallville. His father a colonel in the Revolutionary War.

Grave and tomb well kept. Saw this tomb July 8.

Gave notice to News -- Sun, local paper, and discovered that Miss Natalie Robert, East Mitchell Street, Kendallville was a Gr. Grand daughter. Her father has data in old Family Bible. He said he would write you.

Yours very truly,  
*M. C. Wright*

Days Past	1931 JULY							1931	Appointments
Sun.	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.	Sun.	
188	5	6	7	8	9	10	11		
176	12	13	14	15	16	17	18		
	19	20	21	22	23	24	25		
	26	27	28	29	30	31			
Days to Come	WEDNESDAY, JULY 8								

Dr Simons lived at Lisbon a small village 4 miles south of here

**Searching For Grave of Dr. Simons In This Locality**

Rev. M. C. Wright is endeavoring to locate the grave of a Dr. Simons whose grave, it is presumed is at a cemetery in this community. The Rev. Mr. Wright received a letter from M. S. Sullivan, Redlands, Cal., asking for the burial spot of Dr. Simons. In his letter he writes: "I have a notation that Dr. Simons is buried in the Allen Chapel cemetery. Can you tell me whether there is a tombstone which tells anything of Dr. Simons, the date of his birth and death? His history is connected with the Smiths. Perhaps there is a Smith near the Simon's plot. These burials were probably in the early forties of the last century."

The Rev. Mr. Wright visited the Allen Chapel cemetery yesterday and was able to find the grave of Dr. Simons. Any information on the subject would be appreciated by the Rev. Mr. Wright.



## Archives Corner

710 E. Mitchell St.  
Kendallville, Ind.  
July 13, 1931

Mr. Maurice S. Sullivan  
8 Beacon Street  
Redlands, California

Dear Sir:

Through a newspaper item my attention has been called to your letter of July 1st to the Reverend Mr. Wright, Methodist minister at Kendallville, relative to the burial place of Dr. Titus G.V. Simons.

I beg to advise you that Dr. Simons, who was my great-grandfather, lies at Allen Chapel near Kendallville, and that his grave is marked with a tomb-stone bearing the following inscription: "Dr. T. G. V. Simons, died December 13, 1851. Aged 78 years, 7 months and 28 days."

*should be*  
*Vespasian*  
From talks with my mother, who was born Lucy Simons, I learned that her grandfather, Dr. Titus G. Vespuccius Simons (I am unable to say what name the letter G. represents) was born in Connecticut in 1773, his father having been an officer under General Israel Putnam during the Revolution. His forbears originally came to America from the Isle of Mann, and either his father or grandfather was the one to emigrate to America.

My great-grandmother, Dr. Simons wife, was named Smith but where her home was or where they were married I do not know. My grandfather, David Sylvester Simons, was the youngest of several children and was born in 1807 at Warren, Pennsylvania. His mother died very shortly after his birth. As a young man, Grandfather (David) Simons lived in the vicinity of Warren and Oil City and was engaged in rafting lumber and other



## Archives Corner

commodities on the Allegheny, Ohio, and Mississippi rivers. From infancy until his marriage in 1838, his home was with his maternal grandparents, the Smiths.

In about 1835 or 1837, he began teaching school at Wooster, Ohio, and in 1838 he married one of his pupils, Frances Wible. They came to Noble County, Indiana, in 1840, and his father, Dr. Simons, came here soon thereafter and until his death in 1851 made his home with David Simons at Swan, Noble County, Indiana. During this time he practised his profession of medicine in this vicinity and was one of the earliest practitioners in northern Indiana.

Of the other offspring of Dr. Simons I know nothing, except that an elder son, Titus, lived for a time in this vicinity and then went to Plymouth, Indiana where his descendants lived when I last heard of them.

Should there be any further information I might have that you desire I should be glad to furnish it and I would be pleased to hear further from you, as naturally I am much interested.

Yours very truly,

*David A. Roberts*

P.S. I might add that Dr. Simons was a graduate of Yale University of (if I remember correctly) the class of 1796.

## Members' Section

### Your Officers & Board Members

**President**  
Kevin Kucera

**Vice President**  
Jim Smith

**Secretary/Treasurer**  
Milton von Damm

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Kevin Kucera  
Jim Smith  
Milton von Damm

### 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.
- New member, Kenneth Rendell made a general donation of \$100 when paying his initial dues making him a JSS Patron.

Thank you!

### 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.

#### John J. Lesjack

2814 Sonoma Ave.  
Santa Rosa, CA 95405-6854  
jlesjack@gmail.com

#### James A. Ocallaghan

20790 The Oaks Drive  
Red Bluff, CA 96080-9628  
530-527-7939

### Interesting Links

**Museum of the Mountain Man**  
Pinedale, Wyoming

[www.museumofthemountainman.com](http://www.museumofthemountainman.com)

**Museum of the Fur Trade**  
Chadron, Nebraska

[www.furtrade.org](http://www.furtrade.org)

**San Joaquin Historical Society and Museum**  
Lodi, CA

[www.sanjoaquinhistory.org](http://www.sanjoaquinhistory.org)

**California Conference of Historical Societies**

[www.californiahistorian.com](http://www.californiahistorian.com)

**Sutters Fort**  
Sacramento, CA  
[www.suttersfort.org](http://www.suttersfort.org)

## INVITE A FRIEND TO JOIN

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

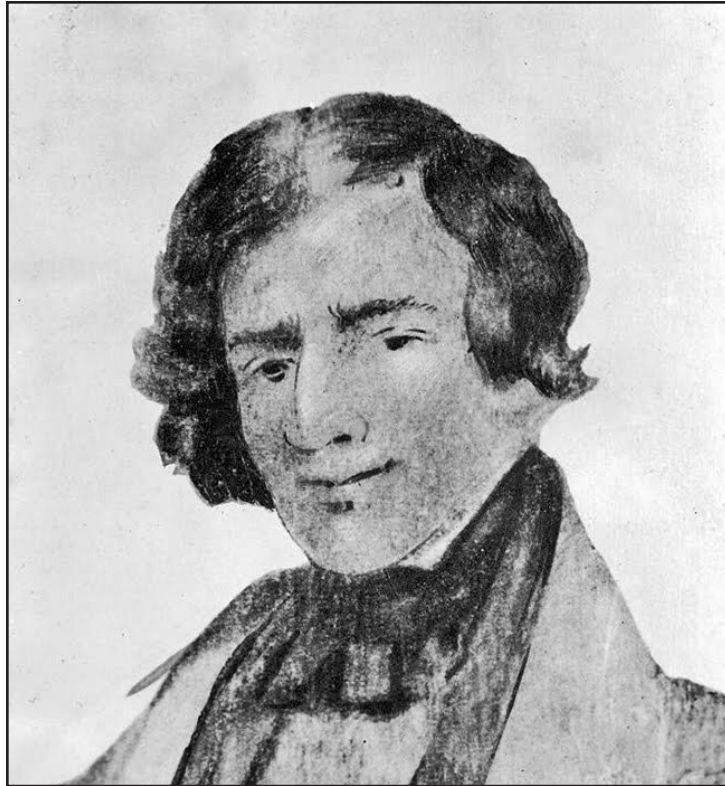
Student \$10.00	Individual \$30.00
Sponsor \$50.00	Patron \$100.00

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Please make check payable to: JEDEDIAH SMITH SOCIETY  
Mail to Treasurer: 1322 Shattuck Ave. Apt. 401, Berkeley, CA 94709

Need a Membership Application?

See website: [www.jedediahsmithsociety.org](http://www.jedediahsmithsociety.org) Go to Membership then click "Application"



Jedediah Smith Society  
1322 Shattuck Ave. Apt. 401  
Berkeley, CA 94709