



Jedediah Smith has long been described as a devout, Bible-toting Christian on the western frontier. But there is little evidence to support such a characterization.

The Legend of Jedediah Smith: Fact, Fantasy and Opinion

by James C. Auld



This Charles Holloway mural in the South Dakota State Capitol shows Jedediah Smith offering a prayer for dying comrade John Gardner just after the 1823 Arikara ambush on the Ashley brigade. The mural, titled “The Peace That Passes Understanding,” memorializes what is deemed the first public prayer in South Dakota. JIM STEINHART, TRAVELPHOTOBASE.COM

Myystery surrounds Jedediah Smith. Many of his activities and personality traits are unknown. Most students of American history recognize his name, but the details of his personal life elude definition. Due to limited media exposure at the time of his solitary death and his

obscurity in the settled areas of the eastern United States, very few people were aware of his pursuits and contributions until the 1880s. Fortunately, some of his letters and journals still exist. Their content varies from dry descriptions of desert cactus to an agonizing admittance of a wretched

life without morals. There are times when Smith reveals his secret thoughts and intentions, but not nearly enough to give a complete picture of this misunderstood adventurer.

Over the years, his image has changed to fit the myth that each generation creates and nurtures around its heroes. Almost ten generations have passed since Jedediah Smith's reputation began to develop. First there were fireside yarns and stories told along the trails, at times fueled by grief, alcohol and the exaggeration of the narrator. There were letters written to his family, trying to explain the startling reality of his loss to his siblings and parents. Soon, written notes and other records appeared. A eulogy was printed to honor and praise him. His own journals, records and maps were dispersed among several recipients, each one a caretaker of Smith's legacy.

It is to be expected that the reputation of a historical figure will change as research expands, but in Smith's case, the original portrayal has had an unusually long-lasting effect. Books and encyclopedias are published almost every year that perpetuate earlier errors and exaggerations about Jedediah Smith's personality and religious convictions. These characterizations frequently isolate published historical accounts as their sources, but then twist one thread of accuracy into a cloak of self-serving pseudo-history.

He has been embraced and endorsed over the years by well-meaning citizens of various persuasions. Temperance societies, sober civic leaders, wild-eyed mystic time travelers and fundamentalist Christians; all have found something to elevate and worship in their sometimes make-believe world of Jedediah Smith.

This essay does not intend to tear him down from the lofty perch where he has been placed by earlier historians and writ-

ers. He certainly deserves his special place in American history and in the exploration of the West. His deeds reflect a certain inner strength and grittiness that is almost beyond our comprehension and his writings provide an extraordinary glimpse into the thoughts of a man traveling on the edge of circumstance.

The recurring montage description of Smith goes something like this:

- Jedediah Smith was a devout Christian whose habits bordered on those of an ascetic recluse.
- He never swore.
- He was always clean-shaven.
- Smith prayed and read the Bible every day.
- He never used tobacco or alcohol.
- Jedediah Smith avoided any sexual relations with Native American women.

Writers and speechmakers choose or discard certain parts of this litany to fit their own whimsy or the perceived preferences of a particular audience. In one instance, a Methodist minister leans heavily on the church-going characterization; somewhere else, a teetotaler glorifies the sobriety aspect of the Smith myth; a moral critic highlights his imagined celibacy; and so on, perhaps without knowledge of the error.

Some of the images that accompany these depictions show him with the countenance of a choirboy. Looking closely, one can almost see a halo.

Eulogy

Thirteen months after he died in 1831, an anonymous eulogy appeared in the *Illinois Monthly Magazine* published at Vandalia, Illinois by James Hall. Among other things, it states that:

Without being connected to any church, he was a christian. The lone wilderness had been his place of meditation, and the mountain top his altar. He made religion an active, practical principle, from the duties of which, nothing could seduce him. He affirmed it to be "the one thing needful," and his greatest happiness; yet was he modest, never obtrusive, charitable, "without guile."¹

Owing to the tragic circumstances of Smith's death on the road to Santa Fe, and his status as a recently successful entrepreneur in St. Louis, it is not surprising that he would receive a glowing tribute that would reflect the loss felt among his friends and associates. All eulogies are meant to paint someone in their best light, and if a eulogist does not reveal their identity, then exaggeration, however slight or intended, is easier.²

William Waldo

The next published account of Smith's character and activities is the *Recollections of a Septuagenarian* by William Waldo, published by the Missouri Historical Society in 1880. This is the wellspring of opinion that set the perpetuation of the myth into motion. Waldo's writings on Smith are part of a long, hand-written discourse describing some of the famous characters of the Rocky Mountain fur trade.

William Waldo writes about Smith: *I have now to record one memorable trait in the character of this man ... Smith was a bold, outspoken, profess-*



Ruth Framberg's version of Jedediah Smith gives him buckskins, a Bible, and the countenance of a choirboy.

FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE BORDER GALLERY, DAKOTA DISCOVERY MUSEUM, MITCHELL, SOUTH DAKOTA

ing, and consistent Christian ... No one who knew him well, ever doubted the sincerity of his piety. He had become a communicant of the Methodist Church before leaving his home in New York, and there are no doubt some Methodists living in the city of St. Louis who can call to mind the religious character and liberality of Jedediah Smith for when in the city he never failed to occupy his place in the church of his choice while he gave generously to all objects connected with the religion he professed and

*loved. There could be no better character found, on which to base a true and interesting book for Sunday schools, or a religious romance ...*³

It sounds like William Waldo had an agenda. He may have come by it on his own, or it might have been someone else's. Either way, it is unfortunate that the remarks of one writer have carried so much weight when Smith's behavior and reputation are measured against the sum total of the events and choices in his life. The snapshot view presented by Waldo comes from a person who had only peripheral contact with Smith, and would not be considered, by any standards, as one who shared experiences with Smith during his fur-trapping years in the West.

The line of connection between William Waldo and Jedediah Smith is complicated. There is no documented evidence that they ever met. But Waldo certainly had the opportunity to hear about Smith and receive impressions and judgments from several sources.

William's older brother, David Waldo, was in Santa Fe at the time of Smith's death on the Santa Fe Trail. But it is not clear that David Waldo had ever met Smith, either. After the trade caravan Smith had been leading arrived in Santa Fe in June 1831 (without Jedediah Smith), David Waldo went into partnership with David E. Jackson (Smith's former partner and also a member of the 1831 caravan to Santa Fe).

David Waldo and Jackson soon started a business venture involving California horses and mules. David Waldo's younger brother William apparently went to California with Jackson, accompanied by one of Jedediah Smith's younger brothers, Peter, also part of the earlier, ill-fated caravan to Santa Fe. It is to be expected that Jackson spoke about his old partner to the Waldo brothers. There is, however,

no documented evidence of any writings by him that comment on Smith's character or religious nature. What Jackson thought about his partner Jedediah Smith is not found in the historical record.⁴

It can be assumed that Peter Smith discussed Jed with William Waldo, although Peter had not been around his older brother for almost ten years. What Peter Smith said to Waldo about Jed is not known. In short, William Waldo's statements about Jedediah Smith are based largely on hearsay, as questionable as other oral histories and traditional accounts that become "fact" without much scrutiny.

Waldo states that Smith was a churchgoer, but no records have been located that can verify this, and his assertion is at odds with the Eulogy. Attempts have been made to find documentation in New York, Ohio and St. Louis, but there is no evidence of his adult membership or attendance (either occasionally or on a regular basis) in any church congregation.

As will be shown later, there is very little evidence elsewhere about Smith's behavior or motives that supports these comments by Waldo or his successors. However, Waldo's comments gained importance because they were used by later historians to characterize Smith while he was in the mountains during the years 1822-1830.

William Waldo wrote about Smith almost fifty years after Smith's death. He offered no documentation to support his statements as he described the purported religious beliefs, church membership and motives of someone he may have never met. Even if some of the statements made by Waldo are true, their obscurity and lack of detail makes it unfair to enlarge them into an all-pervading lifestyle. These questionable remarks about Smith's religious nature offered in William Waldo's *Recollections* became the shaky foundation of exaggerations offered by historians into the next

century. Until the early 1900s, there was no other known source material for writers and historians to consult about the personality of Jedediah Smith.

Hiram Chittenden

When Hiram Chittenden wrote *The American Fur Trade of the Far West*, published in 1902, he was completing a career as a civil engineer and independent historian whose travels led him to an interest in Western history and the fur trade era in particular. His work chronicled the fur trade and laid out a scholarly foundation for future studies of the West. Chittenden was writing in the era just after Frederick Jackson Turner announced that the American frontier had closed. This had a strong effect on the historical writing of this period. Some accounts became romantic and picturesque, written in the passive voice that is so shunned today, and they often reverted to the vibrant sentimentality of historians

and writers like Harrison Clifford Dale, John Niehardt and Edwin L. Sabin.

Chittenden embellishes the statements of William Waldo when he discusses the religious personality of Jedediah Smith. He further adds his own twist by comparing him to a well-known Civil War hero:

*[Smith] was like that distinguished character of later years, Stonewall Jackson, in combining with the most ardent belief in, and practice of, the Christian religion, an undaunted courage, fierce and impetuous nature, and untiring energy ... Smith was a bold, outspoken professing Christian ...*⁵

Because of Chittenden's generally solid scholarship (which is not necessarily questioned here), his assessment of Smith, borrowed from William Waldo, extended into the writing of the next generation of western historians and influenced their portrayals of Smith as a professing Christian. This

This oil painting of Jedediah Strong Smith was made in 1942 by his great grand-niece Alice Pike Larsen, a Los Angeles artist. In this primitive style work, Ms. Larsen adopted techniques used by nineteenth-century American folk painters, including simplified shapes and flattened perspective. Because no photographs of Jedediah Smith were available, Ms. Larsen worked from an image of a descendent of Eunice, Jedediah Smith's sister.

Jedediah Smith as depicted by his descendent Alice Pike Larsen.

SUZANNE LARSEN



story made for such good press in a time hungry for heroes that it is easy to understand why so many historians and writers found it easy to perpetuate. What Waldo began, Chittenden advanced. He was so widely respected that the next generation felt obliged to treat these characterizations as fact. This attitude achieved its full bloom in the writing of Edwin L. Sabin.

Edwin L. Sabin

The tale of Edwin L. Sabin's career in journalism and historical writing makes for a good story that can only be outlined here. After 1900, he began writing books for boys, eventually choosing prominent figures in Western history for his subjects. One of his purposes, according to Marc Simmons (who wrote the introduction to a 1995 edition of Sabin's *Kit Carson Days*), was to provide moral examples for youths.⁶ This book, originally published in 1914, was revised considerably in 1935. Sabin's reputation as an accurate historian suffered later because of his acceptance of the stories told to him by "Major" Oliver P. Wiggins, who claimed to have shared some exploits with Kit Carson. Eventually, Wiggins was declared a fraud and after some debate, Sabin's respectability was partially restored, although the popularity of his books fell off, and he died penniless in 1952.

Included in *Kit Carson Days: Adventures in the Path of Empire* are numerous references to mountain men, including Jedediah Smith. In the text of the book, Smith is described as

*a man of high ideals and of steadfast faith in the Christian religion, a combination of the wilderness hunter and the padre explorer, he can ill be spared from an area wherein characters like his are sorely needed.*⁷

Sabin didn't offer any new evidence to back up this estimation. When he states

that characters like Smith are needed, one must ask, "Needed by whom?" The average reader looking for a factual account of Western history? Or was this slanted portrayal of Smith needed by Sabin in his pursuit of a hero who possessed the Christian characteristics he so dearly desired him to display?

Sabin even includes the Eulogy to Smith in his appendix, but adds a subtitle: "A Eulogy of That Most Romantic and Pious of Mountainmen, First American by Land into California," making it clear what Sabin finds most important about Jedediah Smith.

Harrison Clifford Dale and John G. Niehardt

These historians used the available source materials of the early twentieth century without the skepticism needed to question undocumented claims about Smith. Dale had access to Harrison Rodgers' journal, two of Smith's letters and a William Ashley document that had not been available to Chittenden. The Rodgers journal reveals a more detailed view of Smith's behavior towards the Mexican bureaucracy while the authorities stalled them there. It also adds insight into the Americans' predicament in Alta California.

These contributions added detail to the study and scope of the Rocky Mountain fur trade in general and to the Southwest Expedition of 1826 in particular, but they did not add any significant, new or accurate testimony about Smith's moral conduct. Dale's characterization of Smith as having "that deep religious sentiment which marked him off from the mass of men with whom he was associated" fits neatly into the Waldo/Chittenden/Sabin paradigm.⁸

John G. Niehardt wrote *The Splendid Wayfaring* in 1919. It stands apart from the other biographies mentioned here in that it includes some narrative written in

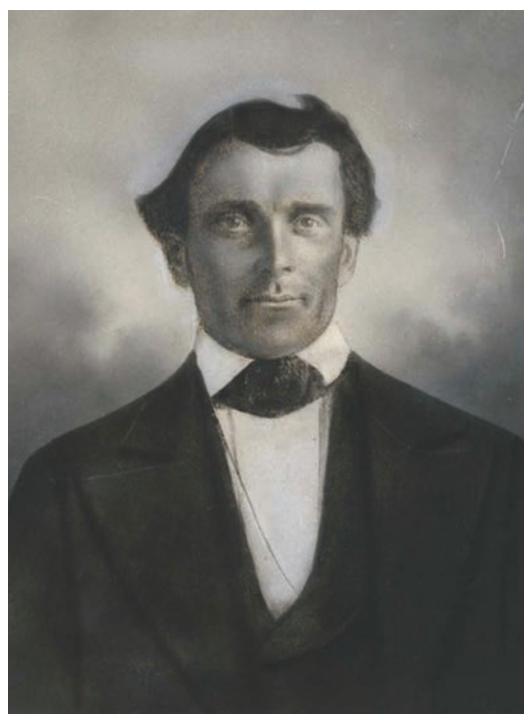
a novelistic style. Niehardt gives words to Smith's thoughts and feelings, offering language that rolls gently off the tongue. He lists Dale, among others, as a source, and predicts that the reader will become aware of Smith's "love for the Scriptures and the fear of God."⁹

Maurice S. Sullivan

The research of Maurice S. Sullivan added depth and texture to the character and personality of Jedediah Smith. Sullivan corresponded with descendants of Smith's brothers and sisters, and discovered journals that had not been seen outside of the family for over a hundred years. Sullivan's personal papers and rough drafts are housed at the Holt-Atherton Research Center at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California. They reveal Sullivan's doubts about the religious attitudes attributed to Smith, but even Sullivan finally falls into step in the last paragraph of his foreword to *The Travels of Jedediah Smith*. He proclaims, "Here then is an outline of the story of the pious, but nonetheless vigorous, fighting Knight in Buckskin."¹⁰

With all of Sullivan's good research and dogged tracking of extant journals, it appears that he could not resist this small comment. Unfortunately, people who use it for their own purposes give it the same weight as the more valuable substantiated archival material that Sullivan worked for years to uncover, accumulate and disperse by digging into trunks and pulling out forgotten letters from Smith's family that had been drying in attics for decades.

Sullivan corresponded with a brother and sister who were descended from Jedediah's younger brother, Benjamin Green Paddock Smith. Through this connection, Sullivan produced the only known copy of the 1823-1827 journals of Jedediah Smith, transcribed by Smith's employee, Samuel Parkman. This document survived



Benjamin Green Paddock Smith, a brother of Jedediah. SMITH-BACON FAMILY PAPERS, HOLT-ATHERTON SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, UNIVERSITY OF THE PACIFIC LIBRARY.

— whereas Jedediah's originals didn't. Sullivan discovered that they had been, sadly, burned long after Smith's death.¹¹

Sullivan's own list of major additions to Smith's odyssey includes the confirmation of Jedediah's presence on Ashley's first expedition up the Missouri River in 1822, and "the dramatic account of his starving, thirsty walk with two companions across the desert from the Sierra Nevada to Salt Lake in 1827."¹²

Dale Morgan

Finally, the comments of Dale Morgan, the recognized authority and biographer of Smith, bear re-examination. In his monumental work, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West* (1953), Morgan describes Smith as

a young man modest and unassuming, quiet and mild of manner, one who

*never smoked or chewed tobacco, never uttered a profane word, and partook of wine or brandy only sparingly on formal occasions ... Smith entered the West owning his rifle, his Bible, the clothes on his back and very little else.*¹³

Morgan was only stating what everyone else had said about Smith, embellishing just a little for added effect. As well-researched and documented as all of Morgan's work was, it is curious that he offered no footnote for these comments which appear in the preface of his book. The trusting public, who learned so much about the travels of Jedediah Smith from Morgan, was asked to picture Smith opening the West as a prudish bumpkin.

"I have tacitly admitted in print that Jedediah Smith carried a Bible with him into the West, but we have no actual evidence that he ever owned one ... we must resist any tendency to convert Jedediah into an essentially religious hero."

– Dale Morgan

It is easy to see why so many writers were led unwittingly into the trap of oversimplifying Jedediah Smith's religious nature, missing the inconsistencies between



Six books that helped create the Jedediah Smith legend: Dale Morgan's *The West of William H. Ashley*, Harrison Dale's *The Explorations of William H. Ashley and Jedediah Smith*, Dale Morgan's *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West*, Hiram Chittenden's *American Fur Trade of the Far West*, Edwin Sabin's *Kit Carson Days*, and Maurice Sullivan's *The Travels of Jedediah Smith*. SUBLETTE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

his meagerly documented exploits and Morgan's off-handed analysis. This image of Smith as a misplaced do-gooder became the most recent characterization available for Western historians and writers who researched and wrote after 1953.

Thirteen years after his work was published, at a meeting of the Jedediah Smith Society, Dale Morgan amended his earlier statements with the following comments regarding "the tendency by well-meaning enthusiasts to transform Jedediah Smith into a religious folk hero." He then went on to list the primary quotes of Waldo, Chittenden and Sabin on this subject. Morgan continues:

*Thereafter we begin hearing of Jedediah Smith as the 'Knight in Buckskin,' as the 'Bible toter,' and the religious legend has been evolving since. I have tacitly admitted in print that Jedediah Smith carried a Bible with him into the West, but we have no actual evidence that he ever owned one ... I think, then, that we must resist any tendency to convert Jedediah into an essentially religious hero.*¹⁴

Unfortunately, this admittance and warning by Morgan wasn't publicized beyond a small group of interested Western history folks. It went unnoticed by most historians, writers and novelists who, after minimal research, contributed (and still do) to the popular image of Smith as a religious oddity. Today, well-respected authors perpetuate this one-dimensional view without question and a trusting public continues to accept it as fact. Some continue the myth innocently enough, while others seem to "want" Jedediah Smith to be a Bible-toting mountain man.

Smith's Contemporaries

An examination of source materials on this subject reveals hardly a hint of what

his personality might have been like, compared to descriptions about some of his contemporaries. There is no record of any of Smith's close companions saying or writing anything about his religious beliefs or convictions while he was traveling from 1822 to 1830. There is no mention of Bible reading, refusing a smoke or a drink, or separating himself from Native American females he encountered.

William Ashley spoke of Smith as "a very intelligent and confidential young man," but although he was someone who obviously knew Smith well, no other comments by Ashley are available.¹⁵

William Kitson, a Hudson's Bay Company employee who traveled with Smith in the spring of 1825 for several weeks, later characterized him as "a sly, cunning Yankey."¹⁶

Hugh Glass was with Jedediah Smith on the beach when the Arikara ambushed the Ashley brigade on June 2, 1823. They witnessed some of the heaviest action of the attack. After the battle, the Americans retreated down the river and buried their dead. Writing to the father of a young Virginian named John S. Gardner, who was killed during the attack, Glass wrote:

*Dear Sir,
My painful duty it is to tell you of the death of yr son wh befell at the hands of the indians 2d June in the early morning. He lived a little while after he was shot and asked me to inform you of his sad fate. We brought him to the ship where he soon died. Mr. Smith a young man of our company made a powerful prayer wh moved us all greatly and I am persuaded John died in peace ...
Yr. Obedt. Svt.
Hugh Glass*¹⁷

This letter was saved by Gardner's family and later given to the South Dakota Historical Society. The description has been

immortalized in a Charles Holloway painting titled "The Peace that Passes Understanding" which hangs in the State Capitol in Pierre, South Dakota (see page 1). It depicts a fanciful scene of a kneeling Jedediah Smith, praying to the heavens with arms outstretched, while an angel hovers in the background. The pacified Indians stand nearby, seemingly awestruck by the strange behavior. This event is recognized as the first public prayer in South Dakota and Jedediah Smith holds the distinction as the state's first prayer-giver.

It is not surprising that someone would have been emotionally moved by the death of a friend after the sudden attack, and that he would have known a few words to offer over the body of the recently departed John Gardner. Hugh Glass doesn't quote the prayer, so we have no record of what was actually said. Even without the actual words, motivation or cause, this touching vignette brings the influence of the settlements into the wilderness and displays the spark of religious fervor that was part of the early nineteenth century American culture that spawned Jedediah Smith and other trappers.

It was not that unusual for an American to know and recite a graveside prayer in 1823, even if that person happened to be part of a large fur trading company halfway up the Missouri River. Whatever was said, it does not make the prayer giver a Bible-toter or a professing Christian. It may show the personality of a man who knew how to impress his superiors and companions, with hopes of a promotion or some special consideration. It could reveal a man who is not afraid to speak his feelings. Or perhaps he was asked to offer a prayer, and delivered one with such unrehearsed honesty that it left enough of an impression for Hugh Glass to mention it in his letter.

Smith's personal story includes the death of two younger sisters while he was an

adolescent in New York State. The graveside prayers offered at those times would have had a powerful effect on him and it is not unreasonable to expect that he might have remembered some or part of the ceremonies and prayers from these events. One wonders, then, about all the other deeds of Smith's that went unchronicled during his years in the West. There would be a more complete view of the man if other contemporaries described his actions as Glass did.

One additional item to consider about this incident: there were two men named Smith in the group. The other, Samuel M. Smith (age unknown) might have been the one who offered the powerful prayer, but because the Glass letter remained obscure for so long, the facts about which Mr. Smith offered it may never be known.

Letters and Journals of Jedediah Smith

The letters and journals of Jedediah Smith provide a rich but incomplete review of his day-to-day activities and business decisions as he traveled from Ohio to unmapped areas west of the Mississippi River. One set of letters, in particular, has been used to bolster his religious image.

He wrote them to his parents and his brother from his camp on the Wind River on Christmas Eve, 1829, without revealing a lot of detail about his business plans or schemes. Instead, he chose to reflect on his spiritual condition. His relationship with his parents and siblings had been ignored for years and yet the words he wrote to them cut right to the essence of a family's bond with one of its own.

The events of the last several years had been extremely difficult and dangerous for Smith. Many of his companions had been killed in Indian attacks, both on the eastern bank of the Colorado River and on a slippery tide flat of the lower Umpqua in Oregon. His dreams of successful business ventures in California had failed and although

the most recent trapping season had been a good one, there is still a sense of failure and disappointment in these short letters. It is very likely that he was suffering from survivor's guilt and the effects of what is known today as post traumatic stress disorder.

Letter to his parents
(December 24, 1829)

*The greatest pleasure I could enjoy, would be to accompany, or be in company, with my friends, but whether I Shall ever be allowed the privelege, God only knows, I feell the need of the wa[t]ch & care of a Christian Church – you may well Suppose that our Society is of the Roug[h]est kind, Men of good morals seldom enter into business of this kind – I hope you will remember me before a Throne of grace ...*¹⁸

Letter to his brother Ralph
(December 24, 1829)

*As it respects my Spiritual welfare, I hardy durst Speak. I find myself one of the most ungrateful; unthankful, Creatures imaginable O when Shall I be under the care of a Christian Church? I have need of your prayers ...*¹⁹

Later, in the same letter, as a P.S.:
*I must tell you, for my part, that I am much behind hand, oh! The perverse-ness of my wicked heart ...*²⁰

These very personal messages to his parents and older brother reveal not a professing Christian who has gone west to save anyone, or even a man who is successfully living by the scriptures and their lessons. They were written by someone traveling almost non-stop for eight years, involved in a business where crude behavior is the norm. Smith's lament sounds more like a man who regards himself as a sinner and wants some comfort from his family and the religious peace he knew while grow-

ing up in small communities in New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio.

Perhaps he was trying to reconcile his upbringing and expectations as a member of a Christian family with his behavior over the last eight years. It would have been difficult for him to explain his actions and thoughts to his family, owing to the novelty of his exploits and the context in which they had occurred. He had been doing some very hard traveling, under extremely stressful conditions for so many years that his thoughts of home must have been painful. His letter almost seems to be saying, "I want to be a good Christian, but I haven't been."

David Weber

In 1984 and 1985, historian David Weber found documents in Mexico attributed to Smith and his dealings with the Mexican authorities in Alta California. Weber writes in his introduction to *The Californios versus Jedediah Smith*: "Smith was more devious in dealing with the Mexican officials than has been supposed ..."²¹

Weber's work uses information that includes letters by and about Smith not available to earlier historians. These letters reveal Smith to be more self-serving and duplicitous than previous characterizations. He had little respect for the Mexican Governor, Maria Echeandia, and found the interrogation proceedings tedious and subsequent orders from the Governor to be a waste of time.

After recovering at Mission San Gabriel in December 1826, Smith disobeyed the instructions from Echeandia for Smith and his brigade to leave California the way they had entered. Morgan and others have explained Smith's justification for the detour as a technicality, whereby Smith thought he was out of California after he left the jurisdiction of Mission San Gabriel. The implication is that Smith was following

orders up until that time, and that he felt free to turn north after traveling east up to where the desert begins.

Weber says that, “Fully aware that he had disobeyed the governor’s orders, Smith invented an excuse.” Later, in Monterey, Smith explained this detour to Echeandia by claiming that the snow in the mountains had obliged him to “go northwardly.” Weber adds that Smith wrote in his own journal “there was no snow.”²²

After crossing the Sierra Nevada and returning to California eight months later, Smith spent several months in the San Francisco Bay area dealing with the Mexican authorities and their arbitrary rules as he marshaled his men and horses, preparing to return to the 1827 rendezvous north of Great Salt Lake. Exasperated by the paperwork, translators, and unreasonably strict orders that the Mexicans insisted on, Smith lied to throw them off his track, and then quietly left the area near Mission San Jose on December 30, 1827. He characterized the behavior of the Mexicans he had been dealing with as “the folly of men in power.”

As if it would have made any difference to Smith, Weber notes that Smith lied to a priest when he said he was moving his men and horses to “better grass.”²³

Smith’s words and actions reveal a person more interested in the success of his business enterprise than in religion. Weber’s findings in this regard offer a distinct alternative to the remarks printed in the Eulogy. Where the Eulogy describes Smith as being “without guile,” Weber’s research suggests Smith’s behavior (at least toward the Mexicans in Alta California) as possessing a good amount of guile. Instead of an innocent, pious Christian Knight, we are presented with a man who will sometimes say what his adversaries

want to hear, and then do what he believes necessary to complete his mission.

Further Research

To correct the inaccuracies found in past accounts, it is time for new scholarship to locate, collect and disseminate any authentic available source material relating to Jedediah Smith and the lost legacy of his complex personal journey. More research may yet yield credible findings that can be woven back into the fabric of his identity. But we should be careful with the evidence we use to draw conclusions. Unless more documents are discovered, we may never have answers to some of the questions posed here. We should keep looking – for letters from members of his various brigades, letters from relatives and friends who knew him, and public records that may reveal more about his travel and motives.

Did his acquired habits and predispositions help him withstand the trials he encountered, or was he broken down by the challenges and crudeness that he met? Or was the personal life of Jedediah Smith even more complicated than these two polarized views might suggest?

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NOTES

- 1 *Illinois Monthly Magazine*, Vol. II, no. 21 (June 1832), 393-398. This periodical was published at Vandalia, Illinois from December 1830 - December 1832. The eulogy was either written or printed in March, 1832 at Alton, Illinois, near St. Louis.
- 2 The most likely writer was James Hall (1793-1868), who also wrote poems and sketches in Timothy Flint's *Western Review*, signing himself "ORLANDO." (See Randolph C. Randall, *James Hall, Spokesman of the New West*, Cleveland, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1964; 184). Hall was a leader in Bible societies and a trustee of Illinois College in Jacksonville, Illinois. The eulogist's reference to J. S. Smith being "one of his latest friends" could relate to the visit Jedediah Smith made to Illinois College in January, 1831, to enroll his younger brother, Ira Smith, in the institution. (See Dale L. Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West*, Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs Merrill Co., 1953; 358).
- 3 William Waldo, "Recollections of a Septuagenarian," from *Glimpses of the Past*, Missouri Historical Society 5, nos. 4-6 (April-June 1938), 84-88.
- 4 Vivian Linford Talbot, *David E. Jackson: Field Captain of the Rocky Mountain Fur Trade* (Jackson Hole, WY: Jackson Hole Historical Society and Museum, 1996), 100-103.
- 5 Hiram Martin Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade of the Far West*, Vol. 1 (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 251-252. Originally published 1902. Chittenden quotes Waldo.
- 6 Edwin L. Sabin, *Kit Carson Days, 1809-1868, Adventures in the Path of Empire*, Vol. 1 (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 184, 821-826.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Harrison Clifford Dale, *The Explorations of William H. Ashley and Jedediah Smith, 1822-1829*. (Cleveland, OH: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1918), 176.
- 9 John G. Neihardt, *The Splendid Wayfaring* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1920), 14.
- 10 Maurice L. Sullivan, *The Travels of Jedediah Smith* (Santa Ana, CA: The Fine Arts Press, 1934), page 8 of unnumbered foreword.
- 11 Ibid., page 3 of unnumbered foreword.
- 12 Copy of a letter from Maurice S. Sullivan to Alfred A. Knopf, publisher, June 24, 1935, Holt Atherton Dept. of Special Collections, University of the Pacific Libraries, Stockton, CA.
- 13 Dale L. Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West*, 8.
- 14 Dale L. Morgan, "Jedediah Smith Today," *Pacific Historian* 11, no. 2 (1967), 35-46.
- 15 Dale L. Morgan, ed., *The West of William H. Ashley* (Denver, CO: The Old West Publishing Company, 1964), 118.
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