

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

July 30, 1951

A Quaker Quailed the Bandit

Mrs. J.M. Smith, whose recording of the stage robbery by a lone bandit at the summit of the Santa Cruz mountains in 1871, we related on Friday, was the wife of the late Capt. J.M. Smith. Their daughter, Mrs. J.C. Falkenberg, lives in Del Rey Woods with her son, Stanley Falkenberg and his family. Another son, Ray Falkenberg, also lives in Monterey.

Capt. John Morgan Smith was born in 1825 in Vermont. He and his wife came to California during the gold rush by boat and across the Isthmus of Panama. Mr. Falkenberg, who has kindly loaned the preserved clippings relating to the hold-up and a letter which had belonged to his grandmother to this Diary, also remembers hearing tales of the difficulties his grandparents had in getting onto a steamer at the Isthmus to continue their journey to California.

Capt. Smith went into partnership, and operated a river boat between Sacramento and San Francisco. In later years he was a wharfinger for the Cowell Lime and Cement Company at Santa Cruz. In these days they hauled the lime rock to the wharf with oxen. This wharf has since disappeared.

Mrs. Smith was a passenger on the stage from San Jose to Santa Cruz when the lone, armed "road agent," as a robber was called in those days, held up the stage near Patchen. Patchen is now marked as a state historical landmark on the road between San Jose and Santa Cruz, near the summit. The marker is adjacent to the highway.

As the robber turned down the mail bags and still demanded money from the passengers a man inside the stage insisted that he was a poor man, and had very little. The road agent replied that he hated to rob a poor man, but that he himself was poor, being dead broke. A young man named Hoe, who was on his way to go to work at Daughtery's saw mill, threw \$36 – all the money he had – out of the wagon.

Mrs. Smith opened her portmanteau, and with a great deal of self-possession, quietly emptied the greater portion of its contents on the seat beside her and flung the wallet with a few dollars to the brigand.

Mrs. Canney, a Quaker and the only other woman passenger, looked sharply at the villain, but did not

contribute anything to his financial levy, according to the report of the happening. She maintained her natural composure, and in reply to a friend, who afterward asked her why she did not give up her money, said that the robber never asked her, but that she had given him a look which must have made him quail.

Mr. J.S. Tam, of San Francisco, another passenger of this 1871 stage, also gave the robber a couple of dollars, but took good care to retain the larger portion of his traveling expenses.

The road agent secured in all about \$45. When the passengers had given up their money the driver asked if he might proceed with his journey. The road agent patronizingly remarked that he could, and then politely handed him back the mail bags. The stage then resumed its journey. As last seen by the passengers the robber was observed picking up the coins in the middle of the road.

About one week later, a strange man, corresponding to the description of the robber, came into Santa Cruz and obtained employment from George Boomer. He said he had no money, and would work for his board. Mr. Boomer engaged him as a cook. A few mornings later, the workman suddenly disappeared taking with him his benefactor's double barrel shotgun. No efforts were made to capture the scoundrel but there was no doubt in the minds of many but that this was the road agent who robbed the San Jose-Santa Cruz stage.

Mrs. Caroline Smith, the passenger on the stage, was the recipient of a letter which Mr. Stanley Falkenberg and his mother, the daughter of Capt. and Mrs. Smith, have preserved throughout the intervening years. The letter was written from Monterey on September 5, 1871, and is simply signed "Your true friend, Mary." The writer reports that "as the schooner is getting ready to start away, I will try and drop a few lines instead of myself going, as my pleasure is not in schooner travel. I went up to the city once on one and I would not like to go again. I will try my best to go to Castroville on Sunday by stage ... Last night a man got shot. His name is Hodges from San Luis."