

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Jedediah Smith

The California Historical Society recently published an outstanding addition to its list of historical books, gotten out by distinctive printers, which have all become collectors' items and increased in value almost as soon as the supply was exhausted.

The latest book is entitled "Jedediah Smith and his Maps of the American West." No doubt many motorists who have traveled north over U.S. Highway 101 through the Jedediah Smith State Park in Del Norte County have pondered over the name "Jedediah Smith" and why he had been honored by having his name perpetuated in this park of majestic redwood trees.

On the cover of the May-June issue of Motorland, published by the California Automobile Assn. and by the way that issue is very handsome, there is a colored picture of a scene taken in the park – a photograph to provoke the vacation spirit. But back to Jedediah Smith and his history.

Smith was probably the most respected and most widely traveled Western explorer of his era (1822-1831). He passed from the scene when only 32 years of age, and both the man and his extraordinary career were long largely forgotten. Today, however, Smith has been accorded a place in American exploration overshadowed only by Lewis and Clark.

As a single figure he stands second to none; as a cartographer his achievements were unequalled for almost a generation, writes Carl I. Wheat, co-author with Dale L. Morgan of the Historical Society book.

Wheat is chairman of the Friends of the Bancroft Library, president of the Book Club of California, director of the California Historical Society, and a member of the advisory board of the National Park Service, besides a successful and busy lawyer. Morgan is a member of the Bancroft Library staff.

The "Special Publication No. 26" is an authoritative volume on Jedediah Smith's maps, the first to consider them in detail. Full scale reproductions of seven maps influenced by the great explorer are included, and the authors discuss the import of Smith's brief but astonishing career in the then-unknown West, the problem of his long-lost original maps, and the recent

discovery of a map reflecting his own manuscript chart of his wanderings and discoveries.

The map fortunately uncovered in 1953 by Mr. Wheat in the collections of the American Geographical Society in New York, affords the closest and most comprehensive view of Jedediah Smith's own map ever likely to be had. When the explorer left St. Louis for Santa Fe in the Spring of 1831, after his nine years of adventuring in the Far West, he had in view early publication of his map and his Journal.

But his career was suddenly cut short by Comanche marauders, who killed him as he sought water for his distressed company in the Cimarron desert. Fragments of his journal were found 20 years ago, but his map has eluded all investigators.

The gift of the papers of Jedediah's younger brother, Peter, by his grandson, Mr. F.R. Bacon of South Pasadena, was received by the Bancroft Library in 1954. Other members of the family had added to the collection until it now numbers more than 500 pieces. Other accessions may further enlarge this collection of the papers of a remarkable American family.

Only 530 copies of this outstanding book were printed at a price of \$25 per copy. Already the price has tripled for collectors are desirous of adding it to their libraries of Californiana and Americana.