

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Benicia Excursion Set

The California Historical Society announces an excursion to Benicia on Saturday, Oct. 9, for members and guests.

One-time capital of California, center of learning, site of the earliest U.S. military installation in the state, depot of the Pacific Mail Steamship Co., Benicia was for many decades the hustling approach to the Bay Area for transcontinental railways.

It possesses a romantic lore enhanced by names of Concepcion Arguello, Jack London, Stephen Vincent Benet, Gen. Sherman, Vallejo, Semple, Larkin, Jim Corbett and the fabulous Mizners.

All of this was Benicia according to the folder just gotten out and to "Notes" published by the California Historical Society.

Most of these men prominent there in the early 1800's were also prominent in Monterey's early history. Today the little town is unique in that many of the devastating encroachments of 20th Century progress have passed it by.

The tour will begin after arrival in Benicia, at California's beautifully restored and oldest state capitol building, which housed the State Legislature from Feb. 11, 1853 to Feb. 25, 1854.

Monterey had been the capital, and was then moved to San Jose, where the first California constitutional legislature was held.

On Feb. 25, 1854, the fifth session of the California State Legislature permanently located the capital at Sacramento. Previously, it had been in San Jose, Vallejo and Benicia.

After luncheon in the Veterans Hall in Benicia the tour will include the famous Masonic Hall; St. Paul's Episcopal Church, built in 1860; the once thriving water front; the Dominican Cemetery containing the grave of Concepcion Arguello and many historic buildings of the Benicia Arsenal, oldest military installation built by the United States in California.

Tour tickets may be obtained from the California Historical Society, 2090 California St., San Francisco. The price is \$8.00, including transportation and luncheon.

The University of the Pacific and the Jedediah Smith Society are sponsoring a 1965 rendezvous on Atherton Island in Stockton on Saturday Oct. 2.

Jedediah Strong Smith and his men were camped near this spot 138 years ago and it is quite possible beaver were taken from this identical location.

Ordinarily, a beaver rendezvous was an annual gathering to swap experiences and renew acquaintances, according to Dr. Lealand D. Case, the man who first suggested the formation of the society.

He will be the new director of the California History Foundation and secretary-treasurer of the Jedediah Smith Society.

Jedediah Strong Smith was born in Mohawk Valley, Chenango County, New York, and Jan. 6, 1799, the oldest of a family of 13 children. His ancestors were men originally Scotch, and they were Calvinists in belief. Jedediah was the son of a New Hampshire family, "always on the westward edge of frontier advance."

Many expeditions, remarkable in themselves, were followed by his great life work, beginning in 1826. Having heard of the attractions of the Great Central Valley of California, Smith resolved to proceed to the San Joaquin Valley as a partner in the firm of Smith, Jackson and Sublette.

He set out at the head of a company of 15 men from a rendezvous near Salt Lake. In the late autumn, undaunted by repeated hardships, he made his difficult way across the Great American Desert and through the mountains by way of Cajon Pass. In late November the hardy band camped at San Gabriel Mission, the first Americans actually to enter California by way of an overland route from the east.

His trail to California later became a great transcontinental route, and the line of communication he opened between Northern California and Oregon was quickly taken advantage of by the Hudson Bay Company; he had "traversed the Pacific Slope from the Mojave Desert to Puget Sound."

He was finally killed by a band of hostile Indians. He was a young man but a pioneer of our civilization. California owes him a tremendous vote of thanks.

On Lincoln's birthday in 1924, a 15-ton granite boulder, brought from Cajon Pass, was fittingly unveiled at Carthay Center, in the outskirts of Los Angeles, bearing

the inscription "Dedicated to Jedediah Strong Smith,
pathfinder of the Sierras."