

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

November 22, 1968

State's '76 Veteran Honored

After 122 years, a suitable plaque will be placed on the grave (in the Mountain Cemetery outside Sonoma) of Capt. William Smith, California's only known Revolutionary War veteran.

This does not indicate a previous lack of interest on anyone's part.

Indeed, various historical and patriotic organizations for years have searched in vain for the site of the captain's demise and his final resting place.

Only recently both came to light in the "Personal Business and Official Correspondence of Thomas Oliver Larkin, U.S. Consul in California," compiled and edited by George P. Hammond.

Capt. Smith's experiences were legion and could fill several volumes, according to a squib in the California Genealogical Society's newsletter.

So someday we'll have to dig into his life more extensively.

He must have been a lad in his very early teens when he served with the Virginia Navy in America's War of Independence.

For on Nov. 14th, 1768, he was on the "Banks of the Potomac born" as Jacob Leese puts it in his quaintly phrased and even more quaintly spelled communication (The war terminated in 1783, remember?)

Eight times Smith sailed around the world and visited California as early as 1800.

He was an acquaintance of Sir George Vancouver, the renowned English naval officer and explorer who had navigated the West Coast during the final decade of the 18th Century.

Capt. Smith died on May 5, 1846, in Sonoma at the age of 77 years, 5 months and 22 days, reported Leese meticulously. He then went on to describe the Captain's peaceful passing:

"About 4 p.m., he left this World in a Dream, Sound a Sleep and perfectly natural as If he had life in him."

Leese, presumably realizing his importance in local history, saw that he was "entered" with all formalities of the Episcopal Church on "the South Side of the

Sonoma Mountain North of the town in a very Noted Place."

Just a few days before Smith had returned from a visit to Yerba Buena, complaining of "the Doppsey," and toward the end he lost the power of speech.

His clothing observed Leese, was not worth mentioning, as it was "no use to any one but Indians."