

When San Jose Was Young

A Series of Interesting Articles of An Historical Nature Prepared Especially for The News by a Well Known Author and Journalist.

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A STRANGE PRISONER

One of the strangest prisoners ever held in the San Jose jail was Captain Jedediah Smith in the early twenties of the last century. Captain Jedediah Smith came from the United States. He was licensed by the United States government to go into the Rocky Mountain country with hunters and trappers commanded by him. In 1826 he arrived in southern California by way of the Colorado river. His men and horses were on the verge of starvation. By a great effort they reached San Gabriel Mission.

The father in charge told Captain Smith that the country was forbidden him and his men. Captain Smith wrote Governor Lecheandia at San Diego and told him of his straits. The Governor ordered him to San Diego to give an account of himself.

Always the Spaniards feared the Americans. Father Magin Catala of Santa Clara Mission, famous as a prophet, had foretold that the Americans would conquer California. Lecheandia did not believe Smith's explanation of his presence in California. The captains of the American trading vessels in the harbor joined in a signed appeal to the Governor to furnish Captain Smith and party with supplies so that they might peacefully depart. Lecheandia granted the request on condition that Smith and his men leave by exactly the same route they followed when they came from the United States.

Smith did not keep his promise to the Governor, but he left with some of his men by way of the San Joaquin valley. From there they intended to cross the Sierra Nevadas, when the mountains were blocked with snow. They re-entered the valley, and camped near Mission San Jose.

The Mission was greatly perturbed by the foreigners. When Captain Smith learned that his presence had upset the Mission, he wrote Father Duran, signing himself, "Your strange, but real friend and Christian brother."

This letter so won Father Duran that he allowed Smith to leave a portion of his party while the captain went to Salt Lake, where others of his men

awaited him.

Smith brought the men back into California over the Colorado River route, defying the government. Smith himself narrowly escaped massacre by the Indians. Ten of his men and two of his women were murdered. The captain and eight of his followers arrived in San Bernardino. At that place two of his men fell ill. The others went on to San Diego, took passage on an American ship and came to San Francisco. From there they sailed for Embucadero of Santa Clara at Alviso. Later they came to San Jose.

Captain Smith inspired real terror in San Jose. His explanations explained little to the people. San Joseans suspected that he was an invader whose object was to seize California. Smith was thrown into the San Jose jail in 1827. Again the captain wrote the governor, who by this time was at Monterey. The Governor ordered him to come to Monterey to explain why he had returned to California. Smith's reasons were unsatisfactory. The Governor ordered him back in the San Jose jail.

Again the sea captains interceded with the Governor for Smith. The Governor ordered him out of the country. He even refused to allow Smith's trappers to accompany him.

Alone, in exile, Captain Jedediah Smith set out from San Jose for Salt Lake through the mountains. He was never heard of again. Did he die of starvation? Did the Indians kill him?