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**THOMAS L. (PEG-LEG) SMITH'S
HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY FUR TRADE OPERATIONS**

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When practically all mountain men had to abandon their Rocky Mountain beaver hunting operations after 1840, Hudson's Bay Company posts at Fort Hall and Fort Boise remained practically unchallenged in their Snake country fur trade. Prominent trappers based out of Saint Louis, including Jim Bridger who elected to continue his career as a business man and guide in his vast western homeland, needed to find new outlets for their talents. Noting a promising future for Hudson's Bay Company expansion of beaver sources into United States territory far beyond Fort Hall, Richard Grant (chief trader at that post) decided to employ experienced mountain men who could continue to trap in country where British fur hunters were excluded by national policy. So he gave Jim Bridger an opportunity in 1842 to supply Fort Hall with beaver, but got no response. Bridger sent out Thomas L. Smith with a party to trap in Queaterra (where British hunters could not go) in 1842, but when Smith returned, Bridger was unprepared to pay him enough, so he brought 460 beaver to Fort Hall for Grant, who then employed him as a Hudson's Bay Company agent to operate in United States territory. Smith thus became a trader for Grant and diverted a lot of furs from Fort Bridger to Fort Hall, which on that account surpassed Fort Bridger in 1842 and 1843. Grant wondered whether Smith would continue to serve Fort Hall, but he did so in 1844, although Grant was careful to avoid advancing him any funds. In 1845, Smith brought in 150 beaver to Fort Hall, and in 1846 he continued to compete with Bridger, who no longer did much fur trade at all. Smith set out as Grant's agent again in 1847 on a contract that lasted through August 1848, but beaver prices were so low in 1848 that he insisted upon higher payments than Grant could afford to make. In 1848, Grant had too little a stock of goods to supply Smith anyway, so his service as a Hudson's Bay Company agent ended. From then on, California gold rush traffic displaced beaver trapping as a trading function at Fort Hall, and Smith went into that business himself.

As a base for his Hudson's Bay Company beaver operations, Peg-leg Smith (as he generally was known to trappers) selected a site on Bear River not far from Bear Lake. Located along an old fur trade route that became a primary Oregon and California emigrant road just after he settled there, his outpost had a strategic location when more direct Oregon and California Trail cutoffs bypassed Fort Bridger and Fort Hall. Emigrant markets rapidly surpassed Smith's British fur trade, and his primary sales item turned out to be his very large stock of Spanish horses that he had imported from southern California in 1840. (He had joined Walkera--a prominent Ute Indian leader--and Jim Beckwourth, a notable mountain man with early experience around Bear Lake, in that lucrative venture.) After unfavorable beaver prices terminated his Hudson's Bay Company contract, Smith continued to operate his gold rush supply

station near Dingle until 1850, when he retired to go to California's gold camps in search of greater wealth.

Information provided by Will Bagley

(This information has not been edited.)