

Peg Leg Smith- early presence in Bear Lake- Paul

Tom “Peg Leg” Smith is right up there with the legends of American mountain men. Included in this group are: Bill Williams, Jim Bridger, Kit Carson, Joe Walker, Jedediah Smith and Tom Fitzpatrick. He was one of the greatest there was, but not a single picture remains of him. He was described as a rugged looking mountain man that had lost one of his legs in a fight with the Indians.

It was in the fall 1827 in North Park, Colorado that Smith was wounded in the left leg during a battle with Indians. With the help of Milton Sublette and a jug of “White Lightning,” a mixture that was strong enough to peel the paint off of a weathered barn, the two trappers amputated his leg. Smith was said to have himself, cut through the flesh, and then Sublette, sawed through the bone. The wound was then seared with a rifle barrel, that was heated in blazing campfire coals, until it was red-hot.

He was taken in by the Ute Indians and some how recovered from his amputation. He was helped by an Indian medicine woman, who chewed roots and berries into a concoction, and then spit the juice on his wound. That winter he whittled himself a new leg and gained his infamous nickname.

On the left side of his saddle, it was fitted with a long pouch instead of a stirrup, to accommodate the peg leg. He was known to be the meanest barroom scrapper in the West. It was said that when he got into a barroom brawl, he would unhook his wooden leg, and use it as a club to beat his opponent, always letting out his trademark blood curdling war cry, that further unhinged his adversaries.

Peg Leg Smith started a trading post that also was told to include the selling back of stolen livestock to Oregon Trail travelers. He was married to Chief Wakara’s daughter; Mountain Fawn, after she died, Smith reportedly had buried her on the east side of Bear Lake, overlooking a beautiful view and guarding a small treasure that was buried with her that is still sought after today.