

## Edward Smith Diary, 1848, 1851-1853

Fresno City & County Historical Society Archives, Fresno, California

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### Descriptive Summary

**Title:** Edward Smith Diary

**Date:** April 29 – November 11, 1848 and 1851-1853

**Collection Number:** MSS 18

**Origination:** Edward Smith

**Extent:** One Volume

**Repository:** Fresno Historical Society, Fresno, California

**Language:** English

**Acquisition:** Unknown

**Access:** Collection is open for research by appointment only.

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**Preferred Citation:** [Identification of page/date], Edward Smith Diary, MSS 18, Fresno City and County Historical Society.

### Biography:

Edward Smith was a merchant with some education in law, originally from Ulster County, New York. He married Jane Whittacer in Kingston, New York and had two children. His family later moved to Springfield, Illinois where four more children were born. They lived in Springfield for another seven years before leaving for California in 1848. Smith had a brother-in-law that practiced law in San Francisco, which might have motivated him to move his family west. Once

they arrived to San Francisco, Smith worked as a merchant for a short while before eventually settling with his family in San Juan, Monterey County, California. In San Juan, Smith established a post office and also worked as a land surveyor and a postmaster. In his diary, he made several land surveys of the Monterey County between the years of 1851 through 1853 when he passed away in San Juan, California.

Edward Smith originally left from Independence, Missouri with four other wagons and during the journey he joined the Kelly party lead by Reverend Clinton Kelly. He originally wished to set off with the Joseph Chiles wagon party, which he joined once they met up in Fort Laramie. Joseph Chiles was an experienced wagon leader that made the trip several times, and it was the last wagon company of the migrating season that was travelling to California for the year.

### **Scope and Content:**

The diary itself is roughly twenty-one pages where Edward Smith chronicled the six month overland wagon trail journey westward from Independence, Missouri to San Francisco, California from April 29 to November 11, 1848. The entries end once his family arrives in San Francisco and do not start up again until 1851. The diary is mainly concerned with basic facts and daily experiences with few personal thoughts. Smith documents nearly every day things like distance traveled, campsites, encounters with Native Americans, weather, crossing rivers and mountains. Some entries of note include passing Chimney Rock and meeting celebrated mountain man, Joseph Walker. Smith also describes forging a new trail with Joseph Chiles known as the Carson Trail. Only about four-hundred known emigrants traveled west overland in 1848. This diary is one of only seven known overland trail accounts that chronicled the westward trail experience prior to the 1849 Gold Rush.

The second half of the diary contains Monterey County land surveys (1851-1853), a list of goods bought for the overland journey, a record of overall miles covered, and drawings of different brands used by acquaintances of Smith. The diary itself is written in old style cursive with dates labeled on the side of each new entry. There are only twenty-one pages of written content with many empty pages in the end.

### **Inventory:**

Number of Items: One Volume

Size: 7 in. x 1 1/8 ft.

Condition: The diary itself is fairly old and fragile with some grease stains and unattached pages.