

Pioneers & Early Settlers

Widow Smith



Photo: Kurt Evans

Site Identification

Nearest Community:

Spences Bridge, B.C.

Geocache Location:

N 50°25.470'

W 121°20.438'

Altitude:

243m/797ft

Ownership:

Private Property

Accuracy:

1 meter

Overall Difficulty: 1

Overall Terrain: 1

Access Information and

Restrictions:

Off the Trans-Canada Highway near the center of Spences Bridge turn onto Chucker Crescent at the top of Log Cabin Pub property. Do not climb fence or enter cemetery! Do not wander onto private property left of the gravesite.

Parking Advice:

Park in parking lot by log cabin.

For more information or to report a problem with this site please contact:

Gold Country Communities Society
PO. Box 933
Cache Creek, BC.,
VOK 1H0

Tel: 1-877-453-9467
email: info@exploregoldcountry.com

For more site pages go to:
www.goldtrail.com

Apply Sticker Here

Just off the Trans-Canada Highway, near the center of Spences Bridge lays the gravesite of a remarkable pioneer woman, Jessie Ann Smith, otherwise known as Widow Smith of Spences Bridge.

Her story begins when Jessie Ann, her husband John and their good friend James Teit arrived in Spences Bridge after an arduous journey through the Fraser and Thompson River Canyons. The Smiths lived in Spences Bridge until their move to the wilderness of the Voght Valley in 1887. 1

In the summer of 1894, John Smith joined a party of prospectors in search of gold at Granite Creek. There John got buried up to his neck in a mining slide where he suffered some serious injuries from which he never fully recovered. John's health slowly improved and in 1897 the Smiths returned to Spences Bridge where they purchased John Murray's estate. The neglected orchard needed a lot of work to bring it back to bearing fruit. Eventually, the heavy labor became more than John Smith's declining health could bear as his heart had been damaged due to his mining accident. John Smith died on April 21st 1905, at 52 years old, much to the dismay of his dear wife Jessie Ann.

After the death of her husband, the management of the 3000 tree orchard and the marketing of the fruit seemed a daunting task for Jessie Ann. Yet she was determined to maintain her husband's high standards. As stated by Jessie Ann herself: "John's name on a box of apples was a guarantee of top quality." The Smith's hard work paid off. Thirty-seven varieties of apples flourished in their orchard, the most famous of which were the Macintosh red, the delicious and the award winning Grimes Golden (which were originally from cuttings taken from Jessie Ann's father's orchard in Scotland). Each of the apple varieties

were prized for their particular characteristics. Some were excellent eating apples; others were suitable for pies and sauces. Certain apples ripened early, others late and some varieties were good keepers for export.

Jessie Ann entered her apples in many international exhibitions between 1905 and 1914 where she won many top honors. On one particular occasion in 1909, at the London Horticultural Society exhibition, King Edward the VII requested to be shown the Golden Grimes apples of the “Widow Smith of Spences Bridge, B.C.”

In 1939, Jessie Ann received a friendly wave from Queen Elizabeth as she and her husband King George the VI travelled through Spences Bridge by train. Jessie Ann and her two sons managed the ranch and the orchard until her 93rd year. She passed away on the 7th of February 1946.

There remains little of the Smith’s original orchard; the Trans-Canada Highway passes through the middle of the Smith’s property. Their ranch house, built in 1910-11, can be seen adjacent to the Chief Whitemitsa Community complex. “The Packing House” coffee shop and its adjoining “Country Pantry” store is the original fruit packing house of Widow Smith of Spences Bridge. After a long life of hard work and dedication, Jessie Ann Smith’s gravestone reads that she is “Safe in the arms of Jesus.”

BIBLIOGRAPHY & SOURCES

¹ See site page “The Smiths” *Gold Country GeoTourism Adventures Field Guide Volume 1*, 147.

Ward, A. & Campbell, J.M. (1989) *Widow Smith of Spences Bridge*. Merritt, BC; Sonotek Publishing

Letterboxing Clues:

From parking lot walk towards memorial site.

Blends in.