

ARTIFACTUALLY SPEAKING JAMES SMART

HIS ADVENTURES, HIS COMPANY & THE FIRST SMART KITCHEN



James Smart was born in Scotland in 1820, but moved to Canada with his family when he was just 12. That meant the end of formal schooling, as James needed to help provide for the family. From then on he was self-educated.

In 1841 he moved from the Ottawa area to Brockville, Ontario, to apprentice as a tanner and currier. With three years training under his belt, James moved to Sarnia where he purchased a tannery. But within a couple of years it was expropriated by the Grand Trunk Railway.

In 1851 James was on the move again, this time much further west, to California. With no tannery to purchase, he started his own, the first in the state, and started manufacturing Mexican saddles and harness. Success came quickly, but also disaster, as in 1853 a great fire followed by a flood destroyed nearly everything he had. James "had his clothes and his pluck left, but not his health, nor much money; so when the waters had subsided, he went into the mountains, soon regained his health, and mined with fair success."



Early tannery in California



Panning for gold

Perhaps thinking it was best to return to a more predictable lifestyle, in the autumn of 1854 James started for home. However, the boat he chose was shipwrecked just twenty-four hours out from San Francisco with two hundred lives lost. While much of his savings went down, James himself was spared with a money belt containing a thousand dollars or more in gold dust. A quick two month mining trip restored some of the loss and James left again, this time arriving safely in Brockville.