

Christopher Houston “Kit” Carson¹



Christopher Houston “Kit” Carson was born in Madison County, Kentucky on December 24, 1809², Christmas Eve, to Lindsey and Rebecca Carson. There were already ten other children in the family by the time Christopher was born: five from Lindsey’s first wife, Lucy Bradley, and five from his second, Rebecca Robertson; they went on to have four more children. Lindsey Carson was originally from Iredell County, North Carolina and Rebecca Robertson was from Greenbrier County, Virginia.³

Lindsey and Lucy lived in Iredell County until the urge to follow Daniel Boone drew them Westward (probably between 1773 and 1782). In 1773 Lindsey loaded his wagon with his wife Lucy and their four children: William, Sarah, Andrew, and Moses, and followed where Boone had led over the uneven, rutted Wilderness Road. Soon after their arrival in Kentucky, a second daughter, Sophie, was born. Not long afterward Lucy died. Two years later, Lindsey married Rebecca Robertson. Six of their children were born in Kentucky: Elizabeth, Nancy, Robert, Matilda, Hamilton, and Christopher Houston. He came into the world the day before Christmas in 1809, making thirteen persons to share the log cabin Lindsey had built on Tate’s Creek in Madison, County, Kentucky.

When Christopher was about two years old, Lindsey moved the family to Howard County, Missouri where Christopher grew up.⁴

Lindsey lost his life working at his endless project of clearing the land. One day in early September 1818, while he was working near a burning tree, a flaming limb broke away and fell on him, killing him instantly. He was 64 years old.⁵

Christopher was only nine years old when his father died and the need to work prevented him from ever receiving an education,⁶ (attending school only to the third grade).⁷

At an early age, Christopher shortened his name to Kit and that name stuck

with him for the rest of his life.⁸

Kit spent most of his boyhood in the Boone's Lick district of Missouri (then part of the Louisiana Territory), which later became Howard County. When he turned 14 he was apprenticed to a saddle and harness maker, but grew restless after a year and left home in 1826 with a wagon train heading west to Santa Fe, New Mexico.

From Santa Fe, he went north to Taos, New Mexico where he worked as a cook, errand boy, and harness repairer. When he was 19, he was hired for a fur trapping expedition to California, where, in spite of his small stature (he never exceeded 5 and a half feet) he soon proved himself able and courageous.⁹

In 1829, Kit left Taos for California with Ewing Young's trapping expedition. They were plagued with bad luck to and from California. They trapped very few beavers and many of their horses and mules drowned crossing the Rio Grande river.¹⁰

Kit became a fur trapper and a mountain man. In common with many mountain men, he lived among the Indians and in 1835 he married an Arapaho woman, Waa-Nibe (Singing Wind), with whom he had a daughter, Adaline. Waa-Nibe died in 1838 and in 1840 he married a Cheyenne woman, Making-Out-Road, who left him when her tribe migrated.¹¹

In about 1840, he was employed by William Bent as chief hunter for Bent's Fort in Colorado, where his job was to keep the Fort supplied with meat. In 1842, while returning from Missouri, where he took his daughter to be educated in a convent, Carson happened to meet John C. Fremont on a Missouri Riverboat. Fremont hired Carson as guide for his first expedition to map and describe Western trails to the Pacific Ocean.

After returning to Taos from California in 1843, he married his third and last wife, the fourteen-year old Maria Josefa Jaramillo at Guadalupe Church, in Taos, New Mexico.¹²

Kit's real fame grew through serving as a scout for the scientific and mapping expeditions of John C. Fremont. From 1854 until 1861, Carson served as an Indian Agent. In 1861 Carson began the final stage of his career as a military

officer, first in the civil War and later in the army campaigns of the Indian Wars. Kit Carson was truly one of America's great frontiersmen. In 1843 Carson purchased the large adobe house (built in 1825) in Taos, New Mexico, as a wedding present for his young bride.¹³

Josefa was from a prominent Hispanic family and was not quite fifteen when she married Carson. Kit was already thirty-three. It was not uncommon for women to marry at such a young age. Anglo-Hispano marriages were also common. Often, this was the easiest way of becoming first Spanish, then Mexican citizens. Being a citizen entitled one to own property. Kit and Josefa made their home primarily in Taos. She bore him eight children; one child died at infancy. They both died in 1868, within a month of each other near Boffsville, Colorado. Kit's death was caused by an aneurysm (untreatable at the time) and Josefa died from complications of childbirth.¹⁴

When the Civil War erupted in April of 1861, Kit Carson resigned his post as federal Indian agent for northern New Mexico and offered to help organize the New Mexico volunteer infantry. Although the New Mexico Territory officially allowed slavery, geography and economics made the institution so impractical that there were only a handful of slaves within its boundaries. The territorial government and the leaders of opinion all threw their support to the Union.

Early in 1862, Confederate forces in Texas, under General H. H. Sibley, undertook an invasion of New Mexico territory. The goal of this expedition was to conquer the rich Colorado gold fields and thus deprive the Northern war machine the valuable resource and direct it instead to Southern coffers.

Advancing up the Rio Grande River, Sibley's command clashed with Canby's Union force at Valverde on February 21, 1862. The day-long Battle of Valverde ended when the Confederates captured a Union battery of six guns and forced the rest of Canby's troops back across the river with losses of 68 killed and 160 wounded. Colonel Carson's column spent the morning on the west side of the river, out of the action, but at one o'clock, Canby ordered them to cross and Carson's battalions fought until ordered to retreat. Carson lost one man killed and one wounded.

Colonel Canby had little or no confidence in the hastily recruited, untrained New Mexico volunteers, "who would not obey orders or obeyed them too late to be

of any service,” In that battle, under the command of Colonel E. R. S. Canby, the first New Mexico Volunteers broke, as did many of Canby’s Regulars, and the Union side was forced to retreat, leaving the Confederates in charge of the battlefield to claim victory. However, in his battle report he did commend Carson, among other volunteer officers, for his “zeal and energy.”

After the battle of Valverde Colonel Canby and most of the regular troops were ordered to the eastern front, but Carson and his New Mexico Volunteers were fully occupied by “Indian troubles.”

The new commander of the District of New Mexico, Brigadier-General James H. Carleton, ordered Carson to lead an expedition against the Navajo Indians, who continued to resist the white invasion of their land.

Colonel Carson pursued the Navajo across much of New Mexico. There were no pitched battles and only a few skirmishes, for Carson’s principal tactic was to destroy and capture the Navajos’ crops and animals. In this effort he was aided by other Indian tribes, long-standing enemies of the Navajos, chiefly the Utes. Carson was pleased with the work the Utes did for him, but felt some irritation when they went home in the middle of the campaign, having collected what they thought was sufficient booty. He also had difficulty with his New Mexico volunteers. Troopers deserted and officers resigned.

In 1864, the Navajos surrendered and were marched off to a reservation, the Long Walk of the Navajo. In October 1865, General Carleton recommended that Colonel Carson be awarded the brevet of Brigadier-General, “for gallantry in the battle of Valverde, and for distinguished conduct and gallantry in the wars against the Mescalero Apaches and against the Navajo Indians in New Mexico.”¹⁵

It is well to note that when the Utes, Pueblos, Hopis, and Zunis, who for centuries had been pray to Navajo raiders, took advantage of their traditional enemy’s weakness by following the Americans onto the warpath, the Navajo were unable to defend themselves. In 1864, when most of them surrendered to Carson, nearly 8,000 men, women and children were forced to take what came to be called the “Long Walk” of 300 miles from Arizona to Fort Sumner, New Mexico, where they remained in disease-ridden confinement until 1868.¹⁶

On April 21, 1866, Brigadier General Christopher Carson, took command of

Fort Garland, in the Colorado Territory. A fellow officer, Major General John Pope, said of his appointment, “For the garrison of Fort Garland, by far the most important post of the Ute frontier, I have authorized the retention of four companies of New Mexico Volunteers, to be consolidated from other companies of the regiment under the command of Kit Carson.” Carson was at Fort Garland less than a year, but made his mark there as a peacemaker with the Utes.¹⁷

Ill health forced him to resign the following year, and in 1868 the family moved to Boggsville, near present-day La Junta, Colorado.¹⁸ Carson retired at the ripe old age of 58. His only assets were a \$3,000 note from Lucien Maxwell and a \$7,900 estate.¹⁹ He died in nearby Fort Lyons on May 23, 1868 at the home of General William Henry Penrose.²⁰ Kit and Josefa were first buried in Boggsville, Colorado but their remains were moved to Taos in 1869, as stipulated in Carson’s will.²¹

The Masonic Record of Christopher Houston “Kit” Carson shows that he was initiated an Entered Apprentice on April 22, 1854, passed to the degree of Fellowcraft June 17, 1854, and raised to the sublime degree of Master Mason December 26, 1854 in Montezuma Lodge #101 in Santa Fe Territory of New Mexico. By 1850 there were at least 10 Masons living in the Taos vicinity. On November 16, 1859 they applied for and received a dispensation from the Grand Lodge of Missouri to form Bent Lodge #204 A. F. & A. M. in Taos, New Mexico. Brother Carson was the first Junior Warden and the following year moved up to Senior Warden, being a charter member of the same. With the surrender of the charter of Bent Lodge #204 in 1864, Brother Carson re-affiliated with Montezuma Lodge #101 A. F. & A. M. Santa Fe Territory of New Mexico.

Due to his service in the U. S. Army during the Mexican and the Civil War he was never able to sit as Master of a Lodge.

Brother Kit Carson was a statesman, a muleskinner, trapper, guide, and soldier. He was proclaimed a National hero in 1854.²² The Masonic fraternity was fortunate to have had such a man as Christopher Houston “Kit” Carson as a member.

Researched and compiled
by Grover W. Brunton, 33^o
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End Notes

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1. The picture of Col. Christopher Carson was found in an article in the Los Caminos Antiguos News entitled "Fort Garland Museum Opens New Kit Carson Exhibit" loscaminos.com/kcexhibit, April 10, 2004, pg. 1
 2. Kit Carson, Frontiersman, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kit_Carson, April 10, 2004, pg. 1.
 3. The Adventures of Kit Carson -- History, koolpages.com/thegreatlvc/aokc, April 10, 2004, pg. 2.

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4. Brother Christopher “Kit” Carson, The Man, The Mason, nmmasons.org/kitcarson, April 10, 2004, pg. 1.
 5. Family History of Kit Carson, history.cc.ukans.edu/heritage/families/kitcarsn, April 10, 2004, pp. 3-4.
 6. Kit Carson, pbs.org/weta/thewest/people/a_c/carson, April 10, 2004, pg. 1.
 7. Brother Christopher “Kit” Carson, The Man, The Mason, nmmasons.org/kitcarson, April 10, 2004, pg. 1.
 8. Kit Carson: Mountain Man, by Matt Thome and Katie Wurden, [lams.losalamos.k12.nm.us/heacock/heacockss/Kit Carson](http://lams.losalamos.k12.nm.us/heacock/heacockss/Kit%20Carson), April 10, 2004, pg. 1.
 9. Christopher Huston “Kit” Carson, Authentic Legend of the Desert Southwest, desertusa.com/mag99/jan/papr/kitcarson, April 10, 2004, pg. 1.
 10. Kit Carson: Mountain Man, by Matt Thome and Katie Wurden, [lams.losalamos.k12.nm.us/heacock/heacockss/Kit Carson](http://lams.losalamos.k12.nm.us/heacock/heacockss/Kit%20Carson), April 10, 2004, pg. 1.
 11. The Adventures of Kit Carson -- History, koolpages.com/thegreatlvc/oakc, April 10, 2004, pg. 2.
 12. Christopher Houston “Kit” Carson, Authentic Legend of the Desert Southwest, desertusa.com/mag99/jan/papr/kitcarson, April 10, 2004, pg. 2.
 13. Kit Carson, Frontiersman, obituariestoday.com/Obituaries/ObitShow.cfm?Obituary, April 10, 2004, pg. 1.
 14. Fort Garland Museum Opens New Kit Carson Exhibit, loscaminos.com/kcexhibit, April 10, 2004, pg. 2.
 15. Kit Carson, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kit Carson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kit_Carson), April 10, 2004, pp. 1-2.
 16. Kit Carson (1809-1868), pbs.org/weta/thewest/people/a_c/carson, April 10, 2004, pg. 2.
 17. Los Camino Antiguos, Fort Garland Museum Opens New Kit Carson Exhibit, loscaminos.com/kcexhibit, April 10, 2004, pg. 2.
 18. Christopher Houston “Kit” Carson, Authentic Legend of the Desert Southwest, desertusa.com/mag99/jan/papr/kitcarson, April 10, 2004, pg. 3.
 19. Kit Carson: Mountain Man, by Matt Thome and Katie Wurden, lams.losalamos.k12.nm.us/heacock/heacockss/KitCarson, April 10, 2004, pg. 2.

20. Family History of Kit Carson, history.cc.ukans.edu/heritage/families/kitcarsn, April 10, 2004, pg. 6.

21. The Adventures of Kit Carson – History, koolpages.com/thegreatlve/aokc/aokc_history, April 10, 2004, pg. 3.

22. Brother Christopher “Kit” Carson, the Man, the Mason, nmmasons.org/kitcarson, April 10, 2004, pg. 1.