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It is not an easy task to preserve America's historic treasures! The Kit Carson Home in Taos is a designated National Landmark, but the Museum receives no federal or state support. We depend on members and donors to help us preserve the site and keep it open to the public. The Kit Carson Home was important in the history of the American Southwest. **Please join us in our efforts to preserve it by becoming a Friend of the KCHM today!**

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All memberships include a membership card, free admission to the Museum, notice of upcoming events and The Carson Courier, the Museum's semi-annual newsletter.

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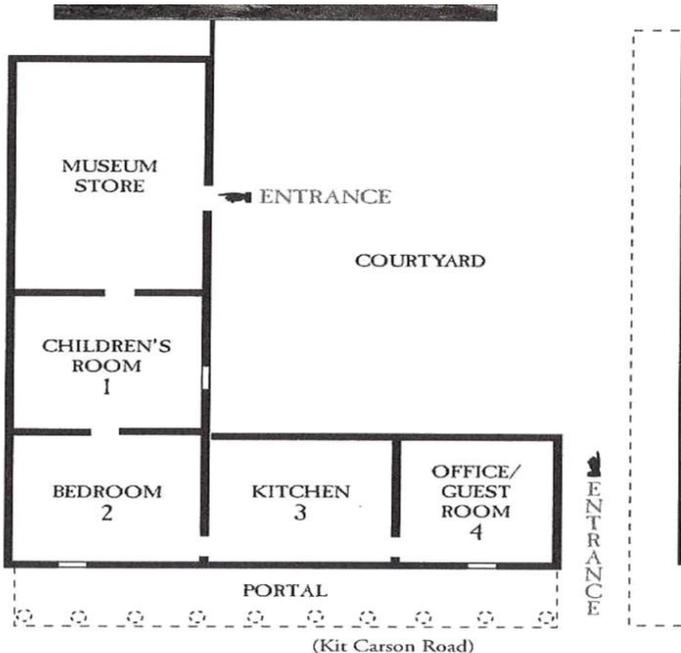
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Please return to The Kit Carson Home and Museum
 113 Kit Carson Road, Taos, NM 87571
 575-758-4945 www.kitcarsonmuseum.org

THANK YOU!

Museum Floor Plan



GUIDE TO THE MUSEUM

Christopher (Kit) Carson was one of the most dramatic and controversial characters of the American West. He was a trapper, scout, and rancher, officer in the United States Army, transcontinental courier and U.S. Indian agent. Carson was instrumental in discovering the passageway to the Pacific Ocean. He was a rugged frontiersman who understood the ways of tribal Native America. A true enigma, Carson remains to this day a revered yet misunderstood historical figure.

Modern biographers portray Carson as a complex and enigmatic man who participated in many of the major historical events of America's westward expansion. A modest man, Carson became embroiled in one of the most dramatic events in the history of the West—the conquering of the Navajo people at Canyon de Chelly in Arizona.

Early Years

Kit Carson was born in 1809 and raised in Missouri. Apprenticed to a saddle maker, he ran away at age sixteen. Out on his own he learned the ways of mountain men and became an expert trapper. During this time he married a young Arapaho woman named Singing Grass with whom he had two daughters. After her death Carson married a Cheyenne woman named Making Our Road. Their marriage dissolved and Carson, then living in Taos, married Maria Josefa Jaramillo. Kit and Josefa moved into the house which is now the Museum, and raised seven of their eight children in the small territorial style adobe dwelling.

Travels

In 1842, John C. Fremont hired Carson as a guide for his first expedition to map the Oregon Trail. Their efforts were so successful that Fremont hired Carson for his next two expeditions to map the lands west of the Rocky Mountains. Fremont's written accounts of these trips, in which he exaggerated Carson's exploits, made Carson a hero in the public's eyes. Gradually his legend grew beyond the hero portrayed by Fremont into a nearly mythical figure. Carson was a man of extraordinary practical intelligence: confident, decisive and immensely skillful. Although he could not read or write he learned to speak some degree of Navajo, Apache, Comanche, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Crow, Blackfoot, Shoshone, Paiute, Tewa and Ute and learned the sign language used among Western tribes.

The Taos Revolt

Although Carson was not present at the revolt of 1847, Josefa Carson and her sister were in Governor Bent's home when the attack occurred. They escaped by scraping a hole in the adobe wall of the home. Governor Bent was killed in the attack.

The Carson Home

The original adobe home (those rooms bordering Kit Carson Road) were most likely built around 1825. Carson purchased the small four room house in 1843 as a wedding present for his third wife, Maria Josefa Jaramillo, the daughter of a prominent Taos family. Although Kit and Josefa spent some time away from Taos ranching and at several military garrisons, they occupied the house until 1866.

The one-story home was built in the Spanish territorial style with thick adobe (mud) walls situated around a large courtyard. The courtyard was very important to their lives, as cooking, gathering, socializing went on there. Building the structure around a courtyard was also important for protection.

The interior walls of the original rooms were most likely whitewashed local clay mixed with mica. The rooms would have been sparsely furnished with a few beds (camas,) tables (mesas,) chairs (sillas,) chests (cofres,) and armoires (armarios.)

Each room had a fireplace, which provided the only heat. Cedar, juniper and pinon wood were burned as they still are today in New Mexico. The floors would have been ox blood floors, which over the years become as hard as cement. The ceilings were lower than they are today and made of hand-hewn beams (vigas) which were covered with cedar boards or aspen poles (latillas.) Then, cattails, grasses and sage were laid on top of the roof and covered with two feet of dirt.

Museum Courtyard Entryway

The Courtyard (placita,) was the central point of the home. Life was lived out of doors as much as possible. The Courtyard provided protection for the families and a place for activities such as cooking, laundering, processing wool, leather working and blacksmithing.

You enter the Museum through the Courtyard into what is today the Museum Shop. This area was a three-walled stable area open to the Courtyard. This area was enclosed in the 1940s.

Room One

This room was originally smaller and where the children slept either on small beds or straw mats. Now the room contains exhibits and where one can see the DVD about Kit Carson produced specifically for the Museum by the History Channel.

Room Two

This room was used as a combination parlor/sleeping room. With an exterior door to the street guests and family entered by this door. This room now holds family portraits of Kit and Josefa, as well as some of their children and grandchildren.

Room Three

Watch your head in the doorways! Carson was said to be about 5'6". Josefa was slightly taller than Kit. This room was the kitchen. The fireplace was larger and covered to enable several pots to cook on the fire at the same time. The large window to the Courtyard was once a door to allow Josefa easy access to her outside horn (oven) and the water well, which is now covered.

Room Four

This room was also a parlor with an entrance to the street. Carson used this room as his office after he was appointed Indian agent to the Ute people. Carson received many Native peoples in this room, who came from great distances and stayed for many days and even weeks, camping in the courtyard in tents and teepees.

The Navajo Campaign

With the outcome of the Civil War decided, the Commander of the U.S. Army forces in New Mexico, Brigadier General James Carleton, turned his attention to the increasing aggressions between settlers and Indians in the Southwest Territory. Carleton devised a cruel and naïve plan to relocate the Navajo people from their homelands in Arizona to Bosque Redondo in New Mexico. Because of Carson's renowned skills and relationships with Native Americans, Carleton chose him for the job. Carson, whose health was declining, wanted nothing more than to stay in Taos with his family and tried twice to refuse the assignment. Carleton, however, would not relent and threatening Carson with dismissal, Carson agreed to take the command.

Although his orders were to capture women and children and kill all men, Carson chose to disregard the orders. He ultimately gained the submission of the Navajo peoples by destroying their food sources at Canyon de Chelly.

Escorted by U.S troops, over 9,500 men, women and children were led on foot to Bosque Redondo, a reservation in eastern New Mexico 400 miles from their homes. The march was brutal and many Navajo died on The Long Walk.

Realizing the utter failure of the Bosque Redondo reservation, Carson was influential in urging Congress to grant permission to the Navajo peoples to return to their homeland in 1868. Today, the Bosque Redondo Memorial at the Fort Sumner Historic Site stands as a testament to The Long Walk of the Navajo peoples.

Indian Agent and Freemason

In 1854, at the age of forty four, Carson became the Federal Indian Agent for the Moache Ute, Jicarilla Apache and the Taos Pueblo tribes. He met with his constituents at his home in Taos (Room 4 of the Museum) and became one of the most effective agents in the history of US/Indian relations. During his time as Indian agent, Carson became a Freemason and was inducted at the Masonic Lodge in Santa Fe, which he attended for many years. He soon became a charter member of Bent Lodge #42 AF and AM which was formed in Taos in 1860. Carson's involvement with the Civil War prevented him from being an active member of the Taos Masonic lodge.

Last Years

Carson moved his family to Boggsville, Colorado in 1867 to try his hand at ranching. Things did not go well for the Carsons in Boggsville and on April 23, 1868, Josefa died at the age of 40 from complications in giving birth to their eighth child. Kit died on May 23, 1868, one month to the day after Josefa, from an aortic aneurism. He was 58 years old. Shortly after their deaths their bodies were moved, according to their wishes, to Taos where they were buried next to each other in a field not far from the Museum. That field is now the Kit Carson Memorial Cemetery.

