

INVENTORY
CHRISTOPHER (KIT) CARSON

COLLECTION NUMBER 109
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DENVER, COLORADO

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October 1984

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INTRODUCTION:

Christopher (Kit) Carson, preeminent among the pathfinders and founders of the “Great West,” was born on December 24, 1809 in Madison County, Kentucky. Just after his first birthday, the Carson family relocated to Howard County, Missouri. Carson spent most his boyhood there.

From 1824 to 1826, Carson was apprenticed to a saddler in Franklin, Missouri. Franklin was, at that time, the jumping-off spot for the West. Traders, trappers, explorers, French-Canadian voyageurs, soldiers and Indians often stopped in Franklin. Carson heard talk of the mountains, the plains, the buffalo hunts—the allure and excitement of the West. All this talk spurred Carson’s curiosity, which resulted in his running away to join a trading outfit bound for New Mexico. He eventually settled in Taos, New Mexico.

From his late teens until his death, Kit Carson lived the life of a hunter, trapper and trader. At times he was in the company of other trappers; at times he traded on his own account between New Mexico and California; and at other times he lived among the Indians. For eight of those years, Carson was employed by Bent and St. Vrain as the supplier of meat for Bent’s Fort.

When Carson was in his mid-thirties, he married an Indian woman, with whom he had a daughter. Shortly thereafter, the mother died, leaving Carson with a youngster to raise. Wishing to provide his daughter with proper schooling, Carson took her to live with relatives. While in St. Louis, Carson met John C.

Fremont. He agreed to join Fremont for his survey of the “Great West” to explore the overland passage to the Pacific from the Mississippi to South Pass in Wyoming.

After the Fremont expedition, Carson returned to Taos, where in 1843 he married Maria Josefa Jaramillo, the daughter of a highly respected Spanish family living in the area.

In 1846, Carson once again agreed to accompany Fremont on an expedition in the capacity of guide. This second expedition went as far as the mouth of the Columbia River, thus completing the survey of an overland route from the Mississippi to the Pacific.

Upon completion of the survey, Carson returned to Taos. In 1853, he was appointed Indian Agent. It is said that the Indians referred to Carson as “Father Kit,” simultaneously fearing and respecting him.

Carson was active as a Union officer during the Civil War. He was brevetted a brigadier general at the close of the conflict. Following the end of the war, Carson returned to Taos to resume his civil life. Shortly after his return, and because of his recognition as a frontier diplomat, Carson was again appointed Indian Agent.

Carson’s last years were spent at the Tom Boggs ranch near the junction of the Las Animas and Arkansas Rivers. In 1868, while accompanying the Ute embassy to Washington, Carson fell ill. He was diagnosed as suffering from an aneurism. Upon his return West, Carson was put up at Bent’s Fort, where he was attended by Assistant Surgeon H.R. Tilton of the United States Army. In April 1868, Carson’s beloved wife passed away. Just one month later, on May 23 1868, Carson died.

Kit Carson, called the “Prairie King” by the Red men and the “Hero of the West” by the White men, was revered by all. According to one contemporary, Kit Carson became a man with “all the tact and ingenuity of our great frontiersmen and pioneers like Daniel Boone and David Crockett.”

SIGNIFICANCE:

The collection contains correspondence (1863-1955); interviews of Kit Carson, Jr. and Kit Carson, 3rd (1924, n.d.); genealogical information; a historical sketch and biographical data pertaining to the Kit Carson family; certificates (1842, 1843, 1869); a copy of the last will and testament of Kit Carson (1868); a copy of the estate executor’s account (1874); publications (1883-1956); and newspaper clippings.

The collection provides the researcher with first- and second-hand accounts of Kit Carson, a plainsman whose name is synonymous with the founding of the “Great West.” One can also glean useful information on Carson’s fellow frontiersmen such as Tom Tobin, the Bent brothers and Ceran St. Vrain.

PROVENANCE:

Historical documents found in the Christopher (Kit) Carson Collection have been donated by numerous people over the years. Donors include Jack K. Boyer, John J. McCurdy, Frank G. Mirick and the Federal Abstract and Title Company, Pueblo, Colorado.

COLLECTION CONTENTS:

- FF 1 Correspondence, 5-8-1863 – 2-12-1955.
- FF 2 Interview of Kit Carson, Jr. by Albert B. Sanford, 7-15-1924.
- FF 3 Interview of Kit Carson, 3rd, presumably by school children, n.d.
- FF 4 Genealogical material pertaining to the Christopher (Kit) Carson family.
- FF 5 Historical sketch/biographical data pertaining to the Christopher (Kit) Carson family.
- FF 6 Certificates: Roman Catholic baptismal certificate of Christopher (Kit) Carson, 1-28-1842; marriage certificate of Christopher (Kit) Carson and Maria Josefa Jaramillo, 2-6-1843; burial certificate of Christopher (Kit) Carson and Maria Josefa Carson, 5-25-1869 (copies).
- FF 7 Marriage agreement: Lindsey Carson and Rebecca Robinson, 7-6-1956 (copy)
- FF 8 Last will and testament of Christopher (Kit) Carson, 5-15-1868; estate executor's account prepared by Tom Boggs, 8-3-1874 (copies).
- FF 9 War Department, the Military Secretary's Office statement of the military services of Christopher (Kit) Carson, 5-2-1906 (copy).
- FF 10 Flyer/drawing of the proposed Kit Carson State Park, Taos, New Mexico.
- FF 11 Announcements (3) from the Pueblo Title Guaranty Company, Pueblo, Colorado, featuring a story about Kit Carson, written by Mary C. McNally and a facsimile of Carson's last will and testament, n.d.

- FF 12 Publications: “Hamilton Carson,” History of Howard and Cooper Counties, Missouri, 1883; “Kit Carson The Nestor of American Plainsmen,” Charles Fletcher Allen, Sports Afield, 4-1909; “Kit Carson,” F.T. Cheetham, New Mexico Historical Review, 10-1926; Adventures of Kit Carson: Frontier Hero, Stanley Vestal, 1927; Recollections of Kit Carson, Captain Nelson Thomasson, 3-1-2928; “The Education of Kit Carson’s Son,” Robert G. Athearn, New Mexico Historical Review, 4-1956.
- FF 13 Newspaper clippings, 8-4-1848 – 6-9-1968.
- FF 14 Christopher (Kit) Carson bibliography prepared by the Library, Museum of New Mexico, 2-27-1957.