

Form 10-300
(Rev. 6-72)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Type all entries complete applicable sections)

STATE:
New Mexico

COUNTY:
Taos

FOR NPS USE ONLY

ENTRY DATE

1. NAME

COMMON:
Kit Carson House

AND/OR HISTORIC:
Kit Carson House

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
Kit Carson Street

CITY OR TOWN:
Taos

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:
1

STATE: New Mexico CODE: 35 COUNTY: Taos CODE: 55

3. CLASSIFICATION

| CATEGORY (Check One) | OWNERSHIP | STATUS | ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC |
|---|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object | <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both | Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress |
| PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate) | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment | <input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Museum | <input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No |

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:
Kit Carson Memorial Foundation, Incorporated

STREET AND NUMBER:
Box B

CITY OR TOWN:
Taos

STATE:
New Mexico

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:
Taos County Courthouse

STREET AND NUMBER:
U.S. Highway 64

CITY OR TOWN:
Taos

STATE:
New Mexico

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:
None

DATE OF SURVEY: Federal State County Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:
Taos

STATE:
New Mexico

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STATE:
COUNTY:
ENTRY NUMBER:
DATE:

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7. DESCRIPTION

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|---|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| CONDITION | (Check One) | | | | | |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent | <input type="checkbox"/> Good | <input type="checkbox"/> Fair | <input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated | <input type="checkbox"/> Ruins | <input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed |
| | (Check One) | | | (Check One) | | |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered | <input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered | <input type="checkbox"/> Moved | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site | | |

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Since 1952, the Kit Carson house has been a historic house museum, ably administered by the Kit Carson Memorial Foundation, Inc. It is owned by Bent Lodge #42, Masonic Order. Carson was a charter member of the parent Masonic Lodge in Taos, and it was this fact that led Lodge #42 to purchase the property in 1910 and restore it to its historic appearance. The Foundation is well endowed and has expressed interest in the Registered National Historic Landmark Program. The director is Mr. Jack K. Boyer.

The Kit Carson House is a single story adobe in the shape of a "U" with the right arm facing Kit Carson Avenue. From early deeds and descriptions of the property, plus historical photographs and drawings in the possession of the Foundation, it is known that the three rooms facing the street, plus the first one in the base of the U, are originals. The first three, living room, kitchen, and bedroom are authentically refurnished in period style--a combination of Spanish Colonial and Territorial. The fourth original room is devoted to displays on the life of Kit Carson. Offices and display rooms complete the building.

Though many improvements could be made in display techniques, the three refurnished rooms are exceptionally attractive and have a great deal of authenticity. The exterior is well preserved, and a period patio, with a typical Spanish mud oven, adds atmosphere to the place.

Boundaries

The landmark is bounded by the property lines of Tract 363, Map 18, Survey No. 2 of the New Mexico State Survey of 1941. This tract is approximately 150' square, with its southern boundary running concurrently with the north curb of Kit Carson Avenue. This tract contains the Carson building alone.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian | 16th Century | 18th Century | 20th Century
 15th Century | 17th Century | 19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1843-1868

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | | | _____ |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Kit Carson House, located on Kit Carson Avenue in Taos, was for twenty-five years the home of Kit Carson, perhaps the most renowned of the mountain men and free trappers who dominated the fur trade of the southwest. Taos in the second quarter of the nineteenth century was rendezvous point and winter quarters for many of the trappers in the west and southwest, who worked a great arc of country from the headwaters of the Rio Grande and the Arkansas River across deserts to the San Juan, the Gila, and the Salt, and the Colorado Rivers. In the process, they opened up trails to California and were the first Americans to make a lodgement there which became crucial to the Americans in the war with Mexico.

The Kit Carson House, built in 1825, was purchased by Carson in 1843 when he married Josefa Jaramillo, daughter of a leading family of Taos. To this home Carson returned from his duties as guide for John C. Fremont, as Indian agent, and as army officer in the Indian campaigns.

The U-shaped house, built in the Spanish Colonial style, is maintained today as a historic house museum by the Kit Carson Memorial Foundation, Inc.

History

From the early years of the fur trade, trappers found the village of Taos on the northern rim of New Mexico an excellent base of operations for trapping the southern Rockies and the elusive streams of the Colorado Basin. The plaza of Don Fernando de Taos attracted scores of famous trappers in the 1820's and 1830's--the Robidoux and Bent brothers, Ewing Young, Ceran St. Vrain, Hugh Glass, Milton Sublette, Pegleg Smith, Baptiste LaLande, Bill Williams, and the paragon of them all, Kit Carson.

They came to Taos because they worked the Southwest as free trappers, not members of company brigades as was the pattern farther north. For these independent agents, the fur traders and their stores in Taos took the place of the rendezvous and the company supply caravans to the north.

From Taos the trappers spread out in a great westerly arc. Having cleaned the surrounding mountains and the headwaters of the Arkansas and Rio Grande, they crossed the long silences of intervening deserts, finding beaver where it is difficult to imagine them today: The San Juan, the Gila, the Salt, the Colorado. Within five years they took \$100,000 in ~~pelts~~ ^{pelts?} from these

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streams. In the process they reopened the old Spanish trails to California, making a lodgement there that would be critical in the Mexican War.

The trapper was a man of peculiar attributes, one of a reckless breed. Rufus Sage, a contemporary, describes him:

His skin, from constant exposure, assumes a hue almost as dark as that of the Aborigine, and his features and physical structure attain a rough and hardy cast. His hair, through inattention, becomes long, coarse, and bushy, and loosely dangles upon his shoulders. His head is surmounted by a low crowned wool-hat, or a rude substitute of his own manufacture. His clothes are of buckskin, gaily fringed at the seams with strings of the same material, cut and made in a fashion peculiar to him and his associates.... His waist is encircled with a belt of leather, holding encased his butcher-knife and pistols.

When he arrived at Taos, life became raw, crude, and boisterous. Here was a conglomeration of races, and behind the sun-baked adobe walls could be found games of chance and pleasures of the flesh. Tall Missouri trappers in buckskin hunting shirts strode the dusty walks, their long, matted hair hanging down from under slouching beaver hats. New Mexicans shielded from the sun by broad-brimmed sombreros leaned against the adobe walls. The eternal serape was swung over their shoulders concealing their faces, a hand appearing from the folds only to remove the cigarito from their lips. They scowled at the brawny Americans clattering past--and feared for the safety of their wives.

Arrival of a band of American trappers was often the signal for a fandango, most often held in the sala of a householder. The musical instruments consisted only of a guitar, a violin, an Indian drum. Senoritas in silver jewelry and bright beads took their chances with men who seized their partners in the fashion of a grizzly bear and proceeded to whirl, jump, stamp, and whoop, using figures unknown to any but the inventor, who might borrow Indian deviations from the "scalp" and "buffalo" dances. Should a Mexican seek to join the throng, he was quickly sent sprawling by a trapper who warned, "Quit, you darned Spaniard! you can't shine in this crowd."

In this context Kit Carson grew to manhood. George Ruxton, who knew the mountain men well, described Carson at 30. Though a small man in the lank company that he led, Carson moved the experienced Ruxton to this paean:

And, the last in height, but the first in every quality which constitutes excellence in a mountaineer, whether of indomitable courage, or perfect indifference to death or danger; with an iron frame capable of withstanding

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hunger, thirst, heat, cold, fatigue and hardships of every kind; of wonderful presence of mind and endless resource in time of great peril; with the instinct of an animal, and the moral courage of a man--who was "taller" for his inches than KIT CARSON, paragon of mountaineers? . . . No name was better known in the mountains--from Yellow Stone to Spanish peaks, Missouri to Columbia River--than that of Kit Carson.

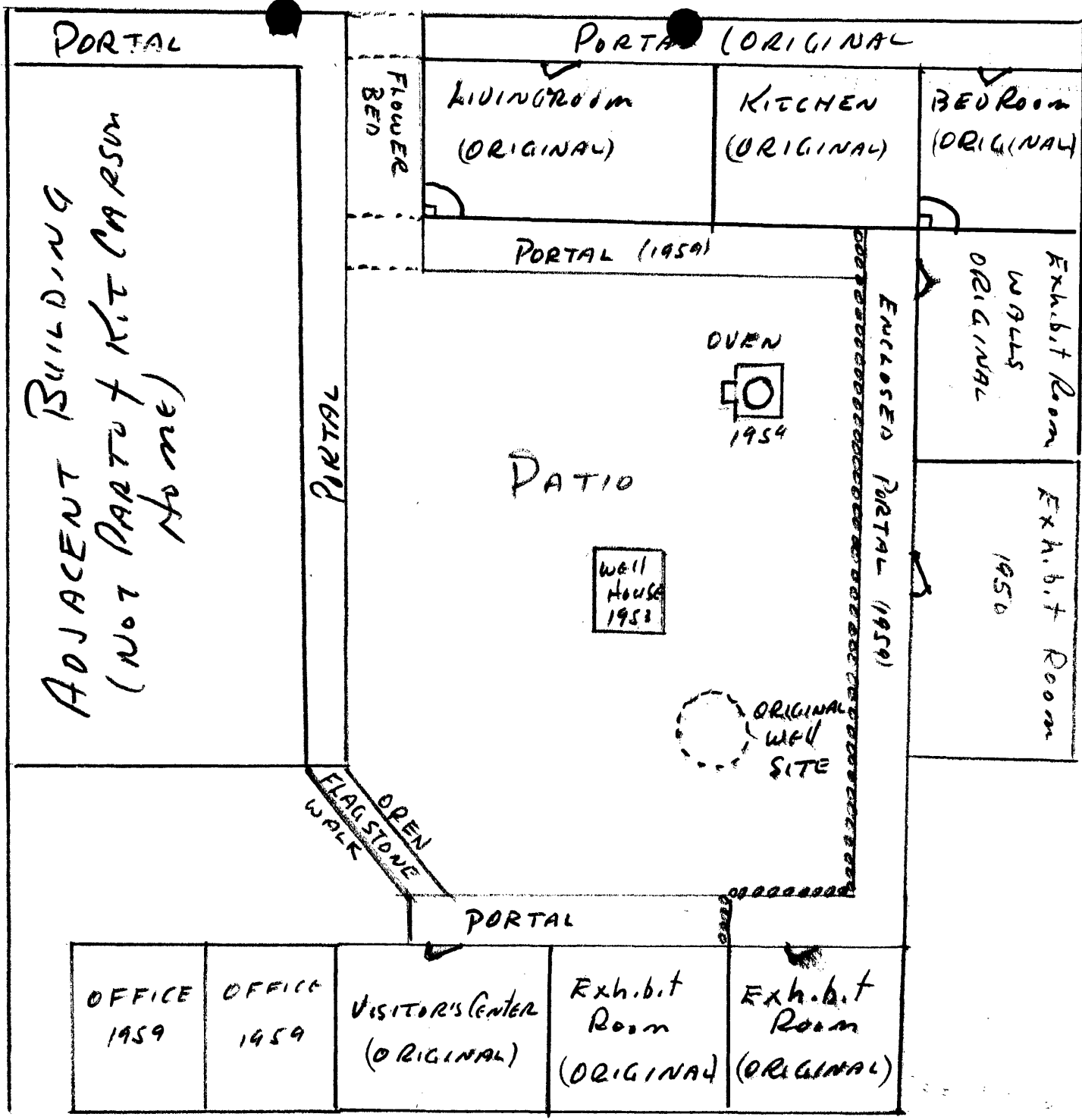
If Ruxton was right, then the house where this man lived is indeed a fitting symbol of an era--an era that left few historic sites except the long scattered ashes of dead campfires in a wilderness even now inaccessible.

The Kit Carson House was built in 1825. Carson bought the house in February 1843 when he married Josefa Jaramillo, daughter of a leading Taos family. The house was their permanent home for the next 25 years, their lifetime together, for they both died in 1868. Family tradition says that Carson bought the house as a wedding gift for his beautiful young bride. Records reveal that six and possibly seven of their eight children were born here.

Carson's vocations during his married life with Josefa allowed him very little time to be with his family in this house. But it was always home for him because the family was always there waiting for him when he did return from his various trips with John C. Fremont and others and from his duties as Indian agent and as an Army officer. The longest period of time that Carson was with his family in this house was from January 1854 to June 1861, when he was agent for the Utes with headquarters in Taos. For several months in 1854, before moving his family back to Taos from the ranch on Rayado Creek east of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, Carson used the Taos home as his agency headquarters. With the return of his family, however, he found space in another building.

There were three periods during the 25 years that the Carson family was not living in the Taos home. The first was during the years 1851 to early 1854 when Carson was ranching on the Rayado. The second was during his tenure as commanding officer at Fort Garland, May 1866 to November 1867. The third and final move from Taos was to Boggsville, Colorado Territory, early in 1868. There Josefa died in April, and Carson died one month later at nearby Fort Lyon.

OLD KIT CARSON ROAD



MAIN ENTRANCE NOW USED IS INTO VISITOR'S CENTER
 VISITORS GO FROM ROOM TO ROOM AND EXIT AGAIN
 THROUGH VISITOR'S CENTER. DOORS FROM LIVING ROOM
 AND BEDROOM ON TO FRONT PORTAL ARE LOCKED.

KIT CARSON HOME

NOT TO SCALE
 1975