

'KIT' CARSON'S LODGE

By
Sir Knight J. Mark Drummond

Bent Lodge No. 42 in Taos, New Mexico owns the home of Brother Christopher Houston 'Kit' Carson and is celebrating its 100th Anniversary. Around 1904, the Grand Lodge of New Mexico A.F.&A.M. bought the property and sold it to the local lodge, Bent Lodge No. 42, to keep and maintain as a memorial for such a great Mason as Kit. Since that time, the brethren of Bent Lodge have kept the property up and have educated literally millions of people. On average it hosts over twenty-five thousand people per year. Four years ago, the brethren voted to run the property themselves, renovated the property, and had a Masonic cornerstone ceremony with the Grand Lodge present as well as a large contingent of York Rite officers and members. Since then, the secretary of Bent Lodge No. 42 has been designated as the Executive Director. There are plans for the other building on the property.

The Lodge hopes that the other building on the property, now empty, will become the second national Masonic memorial



in the country; one situated in the West. The first national Masonic memorial is the George Washington Masonic Memorial in Alexandria, VA. With donations and fundraising, the brethren of Bent Lodge No. 42, along with their Secretary and Executive Director, hope to open the Kit Carson National Masonic Memorial to show and tell the story of Masonry west of the Mississippi River.

While master and father of American Freemasonry, George Washington, is a symbol for Masonry in general, Bro. Kit Carson and the army of the West are symbolic of Masonry west of the Mississippi River. During America's westward expansion, otherwise known as "Manifest Destiny," President Polk (another Mason) sent mapping and topography crews westward to map out routes for the



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military to move west to California. One of these cartographers was John C. Fremont, another Mason. He met Kit Carson by chance on a riverboat around St. Louis, and after checking on his abilities, found that Kit was not only one of the best mountain men but also one of the best guides. He promptly hired him, and it would be through this relationship that Kit Carson would become famous. Many

John Fremont, with Kit's help, took California without a single shot being fired. Kit was sent numerous times as a courier from California to Washington, DC. Even President Lincoln would say of Kit, "his words are as good as gold."

After mustering out of the military, Kit tried his hand at farming and ranching, but his wandering feeling would not go away. He was asked to join the military again.

Sitting around campfires and associating with officers taught Kit two things. First, they taught him to read and write his own name as he was illiterate, and second, they taught him Freemasonry. He was originally a member of Montezuma Lodge of Santa Fe until he moved his lodge membership to Taos. During the Civil War, the lodge went dark and re-formed some years later. Kit was



dime novels were published during his day called "Blood and Thunders," and Kit Carson was as famous during his lifetime as John Wayne has been during ours.

Down the Santa Fe Trail they went until they reached Bent's Fort in southwest Colorado. There he met the Bent brothers, both Masons and then headed for the Rockies with John Fremont to begin mapping the highest and lowest points for passage. They eventually made it to California thanks to the guiding and Indian warfare tactics of Brother Kit. Kit would guide Fremont to California three more times, and on the third trip the Mexican-American war began. When they reached the West Coast,

made a General in the Union Army at this time. He fought two skirmishes in New Mexico but spent most of his time serving as an Indian agent and managing the various Indian wars of the Southwest.

Although Kit spent a good portion of his life in the saddle, he always tried to make it back to his beloved wife, Josefa, and his children in Taos. He kept a house in Taos for the majority of his life, a good twenty-five years. After Kit and Josefa died, the house fell into dis-repair. After having acquired the property, the lodge transformed it into a Kit Carson Museum which is now open to the public. Although most of his personal possessions were sold at auction shortly after his death to

support his orphans, his famous Hawkin 50 caliber rifle, his double barrel 8 gage shotgun, and his Masonic apron are on display.

By the time you read this, the museum hopes to have prints of a painting of Carson by artist Peter Waddell, the painter of *The Initiated Eye*, to raise funds for what will be the second national Masonic memorial.

If you find yourself in beautiful Taos, New Mexico, come by the museum and the lodge. As a matter of fact, if you happen to be in the neighborhood during September of this year, make plans to be in Taos on Saturday, September 5, 2009. There will be a "200th Anniversary of Kit Carson" Parade and a BBQ that night at Bent Lodge No. 42 to celebrate their 100th anniversary.

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"THE OLDEST MUSEUM IN TAOS"



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Grand Encampment Membership Awards



732 Rex S. Lewis

Dallas Commandery No. 6
Dallas, TX 19-May-2009
bronze cluster

733-734 Richard P. Naegle

Crusade Commandery No. 5
Cockeysville, MD 20-May-2009
2 bronze clusters

735 Charles L. Schubert

Orange Commandery No. 36
Anaheim, CA 12-May-2009

736 Richard F. Izatt

Amarillo Commandery No. 48
Amarillo, TX 2-Jun-2009
bronze cluster