

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Taos and Kit Carson

In the year 1861, when the United States was so fraught with Civil War troubles, a flag was torn down on the Taos Plaza by the rebels. The whole village of Taos was aroused to action.

History in Taos tells us this story. A group of Taos' men went to the mountains, brought back a tall aspen pole, and to it they nailed the flag of the Union. Kit Carson and Capt. Smith H. Simpson were among those who nailed the flag to the pole, and Capt. Simpson said, with his hand on his gun, that the flag would stay there night and day.

Fifty years later, Capt. Simpson said, "I am the only one left of those who fought to keep the flag flying, but the flag is still there."

It was forever the captain's boast that the flag always flew over the Taos Plaza after 1861, and today Taos men carry on the tradition. The flag is renewed from time to time by men of the local forest service.

We have discovered that there are five places in the United States where the Stars and Stripes are displayed at night: (1) Washington, D. C., east and west fronts of the National Capitol; (2) Mount Olivet Cemetery, to honor Francis Scott Key over his grave; (3) Fort McHenry, Baltimore, Md. - It was the sight of the flag there that inspired Key to write the National Anthem; (4) Worcester, Mass., to honor the war dead the flag fly's day and night over the World War Memorial; (5) Taos, N. M., in honor of Kit Carson and Capt. Smith H. Simpson.

We visited Kit Carson's home in Taos. It is owned by the Masonic Lodge of Taos who have restored it and opened it to public view for a small charge. Many of the personal belongings of Carson and members of his family are on view within the walls of the old adobe building.

Christopher Carson was born in Richmond, Ky., Dec. 24, 1809, one of a family of 14 children. The family moved to Missouri where Carson apprenticed as a saddle maker. It was because he lived at the end of the Santa Fe Trail, he heard many tales of adventure in the country further west from the trail-drivers and their passengers. When he was 15 years old, he ran away from home to join the caravan of Charles Bent who was

later to become New Mexico's first territorial governor and Kit's own brother-in-law and friend. They arrived in Santa Fe in December 1825 and in April of the following year Kit went to Taos.

Carson married the young daughter of a prominent Spanish family of the community, Josefita Jaramillo, and purchased the home, which is now the museum, and there his seven children were born.

Carson's claim to a place in the Hall of Fame in Washington, D. C. grows as the records of his accomplishments come to light in old books, magazines, and collections of letters written during his lifetime. A small booklet published last year by the Archaeological Institute of America as "Papers of the School of American Research," is very good reading for those interested in the life and work of Kit Carson. Copies were on sale at the Carson home. Hewett, eminent New Mexico historian, states: "On the modest red sandstone obelisk in front of the Federal Building in Santa Fe, you read the authentic biography of Kit Carson in four words, 'He led the way.' "

Exploring the two routes to California, guiding Fremont on two of his famous expeditions, and guiding Gen. Kearney and his troops over the Gila Trail were but a few of his interesting excursions into unknown territory. He served with the United States Army during the Mexican and Civil Wars and led the long series of skirmishes that were necessary to subdue the Navajo and Mescalero Apache Indians after the war between the states. In 1866 he received his commission as brigadier general of the Army.

We stopped to call on "El Crepusculo," the newspaper published in Taos. In the year 1835, Padre Martinez founded El Crepusculo (the dawn) newspaper. For a period of more than 100 years this paper has reported the news, printing stories of history, of wars, of Indian happenings, of Kit Carson, and of native fiestas in both, Spanish and English, all of which it is continuing to do today.

In El Crepusculo there is a one-page feature, printed in English, edited by Spud Johnson, and called "Horse Fly." Mr. Johnson claims the unique distinction for his paper of being "The Smallest and Most Inadequate Newspaper in the World." We found much on this single page to be interested in and amused by, so we plan to repeat some of his philosophy and suggestions in a future column.