

The Family Heritage Series

A weekly discussion of Americanist truths and traditions for those "heirs of all the ages" who will have to preserve that most important inheritance of all — freedom. Produced by the Movement To Restore Decency.



Volume II

Lesson Sixty

Frémont And Carson

LESSON IDEA

Continuing the study of Kit Carson, to see how stories of his exploits and adventures in the western wilderness encouraged others to settle and tame the frontier.

PREPARATION

Look up the definition and pronunciation of *chapeau*, *chaparral*, and *caballada* — three foreign words used in this lesson which family members may not understand. Review the portion of last week's lesson which discusses Indian warfare.

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LIEUTENANT JOHN FRÉMONT leaned on the rail of the steamer bound for the upper Missouri River and studied the man at his elbow. The stranger was small in stature with brown, curling hair and little or no beard — an unassuming man with clear, steady blue eyes and a direct way of talking. Frémont, an ambitious young Army engineer from the East, needed a guide to lead his party along the Oregon Trail and across the Rocky Mountains. The Westerner offered his services.

"What experience have you had?" Frémont asked cautiously. "Do you know the mountains?"

Kit Carson spat into the river and summed up his fourteen years on the frontier by simply stating that a ten-pronged buck was still a fawn when he had "last sot on a chair!"

Frémont said he would make inquiries, did so, and promptly engaged Kit at a hundred dollars a month — three times the amount that Bent's Fort was paying him for keeping its kitchen supplied with buffalo meat.

The days of the lucrative beaver trade had passed. Since 1838, when high silk hats had come into vogue, replacing beaver *chapeaus*, fur prices had taken a nose dive. Trappers could no longer earn a living at their trade. Most of them were working as guides or buffalo hunters. Going west with Frémont over the Oregon Trail and across the Rockies, a fairly routine trip for a mountain man, was far more to Kit's liking than chasing herds of buffalo on the plains. He had no way of knowing, nor would he have cared, that traveling with the flamboyant Frémont would bring him worldwide fame — or that the written reports of his new employer would create a romantic image of his adventures and of the West that would encourage pioneer families to push across the Mississippi in increasing numbers.

Frémont was what Westerners call a "fool tenderfoot." It was not so much his Army training that caused problems, but his swashbuckling romanticism — his enthusiasm for meeting an Indian war party head-on, for example, if it crossed his path. Yet he was an excellent leader — a man willing to work harder than any in his party and one whose courage was unsurpassed. Because of these qualities, Kit was willing to rescue the "fool tenderfoot" whenever the need arose.

FRÉMONT AND CARSON ultimately teamed up for three western expeditions. After each, Frémont wrote a report which not only was factual and accurate in detail but also captured the color and adventure of the awesome plains and moun-

