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KIT CARSON, AGENT TO THE INDIANS IN NEW MEXICO 1853-1861

By MARSHALL D. MOODY

PERHAPS no area in the United States has offered greater challenge to Indian agents than that comprising New Mexico Territory in the 1850's. Here, in their mountain strongholds, lived some ten large Indian tribes and bands among which were the independent and fierce Apaches, Utes, and Navajoes. Traditionally hostile to the encroachments of white civilization, these tribes required the utmost efforts of the best agents obtainable to subdue them and make the country safe for white inhabitants.

A major step toward solving the problem of administering the affairs of New Mexico Territory, subduing the Indians, and making it a civilized state, was taken on January 8, 1851, when James S. Calhoun was confirmed by the United States Senate as Governor of the Territory and made, by virtue of his office, ex-officio Superintendent of Indian Affairs. Subsequently four agents were appointed to serve among the several tribes of the Territory. During Governor Calhoun's administration there were no major outbreaks among the Indians but relations were so strained that a threat of impending hostility and warfare was ever present. Governor Calhoun was in poor health and unable to prosecute a vigorous policy in his dealings with the Indians. On many occasions he wrote to Washington of the need for strong action and one of his last acts, prior to his death in June 1852, was to issue a warning to the administration of the urgency of the situation.

William Carr Lane, who succeeded Calhoun as Governor and ex-officio Superintendent of Indian Affairs, served from September 1852 until August 8, 1853, and, like Calhoun, did not attempt a strict policy toward the Indians.

David D. Meriwether succeeded Lane as Governor and ex-officio Superintendent of Indian Affairs, taking the oath of office in the City of Washington on May 22, 1853. Governor Meriwether arrived at Santa Fe on August 8 and, after an investigation of affairs there, charged that immediately prior to leaving office, Lane had spent large sums on the Indians and made lavish promises to them. It was not Meriwether's policy to coddle the Indians nor to deal lightly with them. His strict administration was immediately resented by the Indians and inadequate appropriations contributed to making his position a difficult one. By the end of 1853 it had become obvious that the destitute and hungry Indians were going to resort to stealing, marauding, and possibly warfare. There was little game left and, unless the Government supported the Indians, they were doomed to hardship and hunger. A crisis was at hand.

It was under these conditions and in this tense situation that Kit Carson became an agent to the Indians in New Mexico Territory. The exact date, the manner in which Carson received the news of his appointment, and his reaction to the news, seem to be in doubt. His appointment was dated March 22, 1853,¹ but Carson, having gone with a party which drove a herd of sheep overland to California in the spring, was not immediately informed of his appointment as agent. Numerous versions of his notification have been given but the predominant opinion seems to be that the party, having disposed of the sheep, was returning to New Mexico by the southern route when they met the Mormon delegate to Congress, Dr. John Milton Bernhisel, who informed Kit, on or about December 23, 1853, of his appointment as agent to the Indians of New Mexico. Having been thus informed, Kit reported to Governor Meriwether and was assigned to duty at the Utah

1. Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Miscellaneous Records, vol. 8, p. 32. Hereafter cited as B.I.A., Misc.

Agency, with headquarters at Taos, on January 9, 1854.² His bond, in the amount of five thousand dollars, was dated January 6, 1854, and was signed by himself, Charles Beaubien, and Peter Joseph. Certification of the bond and Carson's oath were made on January 9, 1854, and it was on that day that he entered into the duties and responsibilities of the office of agent to the Jicarilla Apache, Utah, and Pueblo Indians who were then under the jurisdiction of the Utah Agency.

The area over which Agent Carson was to have jurisdiction was not an exactly defined one. In lieu of being assigned authority over an area he was given, instead, charge over the Jicarilla Apache, Utah, and Pueblo Indians. This arrangement was necessary because, as Governor Meriwether stated:

There are no well defined and acknowledged boundary lines dividing the white people from the Indians of this Territory, nor between the several tribes and bands of the Indians themselves. Each tribe and band claims all the land which its people have usually hunted and roamed over, not actually occupied by the whites, and the whites deny that any Indians of this Territory have a valid claim to any lands except the Pueblo Indians holding under grants from Spain or Mexico.³

Agent Carson hardly had time to become accustomed to his new job and establish an agency office before trouble broke out among the Jicarilla Apaches and the Utahs who were under his charge. The Jicarillas first showed signs of unrest by committing depredations on the white settlers. Lt. Bell of the Second Regiment of United States Dragoons who was ordered to stop the marauding expeditions of these Indians set out with a small force to find them. They were encountered on the Red River and the Indians, though superior in numbers, were defeated and lost many warriors as well as one of their leading chiefs. When he heard of the battle Agent Carson feared that a general war would break out. He, therefore, set out immediately to visit a large party

2. Meriwether to Carson, January 9, 1854 (New Mexico Supt'y B.I.A., Letters Sent)

3. Meriwether to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, December 30, 1856 (B.I.A., Letters Received, New Mexico, 1857/N 220)

of Jicarilla Apaches which was encamped about twenty miles from Taos to try to pacify them and prevent further hostilities. Carson was well known to these Indians and they respected him. When they learned that he had been made their agent they were greatly pleased and professed their friendship. Carson, however, knew them well enough to realize that they could not be trusted. It was only three days later that they broke out in open revolt against the government and renewed their depredations on a larger scale than ever. A small band of soldiers under command of Lt. Davidson met some of these rebellious Apaches on the Embudo Mountain, the 30th of March, 1854, and a bloody battle was fought.

It now became clear that a strong force must take the field against the hostile Apaches in order to subdue them. Colonel Cooke of the Second Regiment of United States Dragoons commanded an expedition of regular troops which took the field on April 4, 1854, against the Apaches. The principal guide of this expedition was Kit Carson who went, not only as guide but also as Indian Agent, because he wanted to determine who the guilty Indians were and particularly to find out whether the Utes, who were friendly to the Apaches, were involved or not. On April 12, Carson wrote from a camp on the Puerco to William S. Messervy, Acting Governor and Superintendent of Indian Affairs at Santa Fe, reporting that it was his opinion that the Apaches had been driven to war by the actions of the officers and troops in the vicinity of Taos; that the vigorous pursuit of the Indians through the worst mountains he had ever seen had led them to believe that no quarter or mercy would be given, and that they had scattered in every direction. He further expressed the belief that it "would be best for them to be sent for, and a fair and just treaty made with them. . . ." ⁴ To this proposition Acting Governor Messervy replied on April 13: "you will see that war actually exists between the United States and the Jicarilla Apache Indians and that it was commenced by the Indians themselves. I can not under any circumstances make peace with these Indians, much less make overtures to

4. Carson to Messervy, April 12, 1854 (New Mexico Supt'y., B.I.A., Letters Received)

them.”⁵ On April 19, Agent Carson was back at his agency in Taos—the Apaches having scattered so widely that further pursuit of them had become impossible and when the expedition had returned to Abiquiú, the nearest settlement, to recruit animals preparatory to another expedition, Carson had returned to Taos.

During the Jicarilla outbreak the Utahs had remained comparatively quiet. The most serious incident to require Agent Carson’s attention was the theft by Utahs on February 26th of thirty head of animals belonging to Juan Benito Valdez and Jesus Maria Sanches. Upon learning of this Agent Carson applied for a military escort and was furnished sixty dragoons under the command of Bvt. Major Thompson and Lt. Davidson of the First Dragoons to go to the Utahs and try to recover the stolen animals. The expedition pursued the Utahs for sixty or seventy miles northwest of Ft. Massachusetts into the Wet Mountain Valley without success. Valdez and Sanchez subsequently recovered ten head of the stock which had been abandoned on the road. Other thefts were reported but investigations proved that they were made because of the scarcity of game and the inability of the Utahs to support themselves. On March 21, 1854, Agent Carson reported that “The game in the Utah Country is becoming scarce, and they are unable to support themselves by the chase and the hunt, and the government has but one alternative, either to subsist and clothe them or exterminate them.”⁶ He was of the opinion that these Indians would have to be made to know and feel the power of the government before they would become permanently peaceful.

It was reported that a party of Jicarilla Apaches had been pursued by Major Brooks until they crossed the Rio Grande del Norte north of Ft. Massachusetts. On May 23, Agent Carson left his agency to accompany Major James H. Carleton on an expedition against them. The trail of this party, which consisted of about thirty lodges, was found and followed to the vicinity of Fisher’s Peak in the Raton Mountains where the Indians were surprised on June 5 and a num-

5. Messervy to Carson, April 13, 1854 (*Ibid.*, Letters Sent)

6. Carson to Messervy, March 21, 1854 (*Ibid.*, Letters Received)

ber were killed. The expedition scoured the country on the headwaters of Red River, Cimarron, and Vermejo Rivers, and by the Moreno Pass, but found no signs of other hostiles. On the 11th of June the expedition had returned to Taos from whence Agent Carson immediately reported his part in the expedition to Acting Governor Messervy.⁷

The Jicarilla War continued and in early 1855 an expedition under the command of Col. Fauntleroy took the field against them. This was followed by an expedition of volunteers under the command of Ceran St. Vrain. The St. Vrain volunteers found the hostiles and fought seven battles with them. All these expeditions took heavy toll of the Indians and in August several of the principal men of the Mohuache Utahs⁸ and Jicarilla Apaches visited Agent Carson with a view of obtaining peace. He made an appointment to meet them on the 10th of September on the Chama River above Abiquiú. On the appointed date Governor Meriwether representing the United States met the Jicarilla Apaches and Utes and concluded treaties⁹ with them thus ending the war which had been in progress for a year and a half.

The war with the Jicarillas and—to a considerably less extent—difficulties with the Utahs occupied much of Agent Carson's attention during most of 1854 and 1855. The war was, however, more within the province of the military than the civil authority and Carson's role was subordinated to that of the army officers with whom he campaigned. His judgments and official position as Indian agent were respected, however.

Though conduct of the war was the chief objective, there were other matters which had to be given attention at Taos at this time. While Carson was away from the agency affairs were left in charge of John W. Dunn, Carson's interpreter and only employee. Dunn, who was described by Carson as of "steady habits, and attentive, industrious and skilful in the discharge of his duties,"¹⁰ was certainly more than an

7. Carson to Messervy, June 12, 1854 (*Ibid.*)

8. Mohuache is the preferred spelling. Variant acceptable spellings and terms include Mohuache Utahs, Mohuache Utes, Moaches, and Muahuaches.

9. Papers pertaining to Indian treaties with various and sundry New Mexican tribes, June 9 to Sept. 12, 1855 (Records of the U.S. Senate)

10. Carson to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, June 30, 1854 (copy in New Mexico Supt'y., B.I.A., Letters Received)

interpreter and was often referred to by Carson as his clerk though no clerk was authorized for the agency. In addition to acting as interpreter and taking charge of the agency during Carson's absences, there is little doubt that Dunn—by Carson's direction—conducted the correspondence of the agency and acted as administrative officer to Carson. While Agent Carson was away from his agency during the war much of the responsibility fell to Dunn.

Problems of peaceful Indians were given much attention by Agent Carson. Though these problems were varied in nature they could usually be traced to a common source—hunger and destitution. During the summer the Indians were usually able to care for themselves but in the severe winters they could not secure food and frequently lacked shelter. As the winter approached a party of Utah Indians visited the agency in September 1854 and Carson reported that they

... seem to manifest the most peaceable relations toward the United States and say they are desirous of remaining at peace with the United States—They complain that they are poor and that the game is scarce—and that while all the Indians of the North are receiving presents, they are receiving none—I would respectfully suggest that as the inclement season is now very near, that you, at an early day as possible call them together and make them presents of Blankets Shirts & I deem this to be a matter of great importance.¹¹

Carson well realized the suffering which these Indians would have to undergo if they were not taken care of and that they would resort to use of arms if not given the aid they required.

Usually there was little trouble among the various tribes of Indians under Carson's jurisdiction, but there were occasions when disturbances broke out between them and other tribes, particularly the Plains Indians. In early November 1854 a party of Pueblos went into the Raton Mountains to hunt for deer and antelope. These Indians, who were under the jurisdiction of the Utah Agency, were attacked by a party of Cheyennes or Arapahoes and twelve of the Pueblos were killed. The Pueblos had always been friendly toward the United States and among the party attacked had been a number who had served with distinction under command of Col. Cooke against the Apaches. Agent Carson filed a pro-

11. Carson to Meriwether, Sept. 25, 1854 (*Ibid.*)

test¹² and steps were taken to punish the guilty party. In matters of this type involving Indians of other agencies Carson could not exercise punitive authority himself. The extent of his power was to report the crime to officials having wider jurisdiction.

By 1856 the Indians of Carson's agency had been subdued and except for depredations committed by small bands consisting of warriors who had lost everything during the war all were at peace. Carson, relieved of the burdens of the war, was then able to concentrate more on affairs at Taos. His home there which also served as agency headquarters was a building one story in height which faced on the west side of the public square. It extended over a wide expanse of ground and was as comfortable as any house in that part of the country. It was in front of this house that Kit met the many Indians who came to see him for he preferred to meet people and do business in the open. The Indians always visited him when they were in the neighborhood whether they had business to transact or not. They could not come to town without having a smoke and a talk with "Father Kit" as they called him.

Kit did not enjoy the comparative quiet of his agency for he was involved in something that was more irritating to him than the Indian wars had been and that was paper work. He could neither read nor write—being barely able to sign his name—and intrusted the book work at first to John W. Dunn and later to John Mostin, C. Williams or J. P. Esmay who were employed by him at various times, but he could not escape entirely the responsibility of preparing the various reports required of him. His financial reports were usually submitted promptly—even in advance on occasion—but they were frequently returned for correction and his accounts became so confused that some of them had to be submitted to Washington for special audit. Governor Meriwether frequently returned his accounts for correction and called attention to such items as "Charges for expenses of *self and clerk* at Santa Fe \$13 when I am ignorant of any regulations

12. Carson to Meriwether, November 23, 1854 (*Ibid.*)

which authorize an Agent to have a clerk."¹³ By June 1856, the accounts seemed to have been largely corrected and adjusted and Governor Meriwether authorized Carson to draw upon him for amounts totaling not more than one thousand dollars but warned him to be particular to send the necessary vouchers. Subsequently there were other cases necessitating correction and adjustment and these were a constant source of annoyance to Agent Carson.

The narrative reports of operations proved to be almost as great a source of difficulty as the financial reports were. An example of this type of difficulty which was encountered by Carson is given in a letter from Governor Meriwether in which he states, "I have to acknowledge the receipt of your report for the month of February last and to inform you that I apprehend it will not prove to be such a document as is desired by the Department at Washington."¹⁴ Meriwether requested more specific and detailed information and returned Carson's original report for revision. Again in July 1855, in June 1856, and subsequently at intervals, Carson was asked to correct or enlarge upon his reports.

In August 1856, Governor Meriwether issued orders to assemble the Jicarilla Apaches and Capote Utahs at or near Abiquiú on the 4th of September for the purpose of giving them their annual presents. The Indians met on the appointed date and were given their presents which, in itself, was not unusual, but Carson became implicated in a situation that could have proved serious. There was a disturbance while the presents were being issued. A report was circulated that Agent Carson was the instigator of the disturbance during which a Tabaguache Utah chief, being dissatisfied with what he had received, raised his gun for the purpose of firing at the Governor. Other Indians seeing this action overpowered the chief and prevented him from harming Meriwether. Upon learning of the report Carson wrote to Governor Meriwether¹⁵ disclaiming any knowledge of the affair and stating that he was not present at the time of the dis-

13. Meriwether to Carson, Sept. 29, 1855 (*Ibid.*, Letters Sent)

14. Meriwether to Carson, March 10, 1855 (*Ibid.*)

15. Carson to Meriwether, Sept. 17, 1856 (*Ibid.*, Letters Received)

turbance. Governor Meriwether replied,¹⁶ assuring Agent Carson that he had heard nothing of such a report, that the disturbance had been a mild one, and that the Indians, particularly the Tabaguaches,¹⁷ appeared to be well satisfied with their gifts.

During the last months of 1856 and the first quarter of 1857 business was routine at the Utah Agency. These being winter months the Indians were quiet and in October Agent Carson took advantage of the situation to go on a hunt. Whenever business permitted it, this hunt was an annual affair in which Carson was joined by old friends and a select group of Indian braves of his agency.

Following his return from the hunt in 1856 Agent Carson took up the duties of his agency and attempted to determine the boundary lines of the lands belonging to the Indians under his charge, fed the many hungry parties that called upon him for assistance, and worked on the administrative problems of his agency. His estimate of funds necessary for his agency for the quarter ending March 31, 1857, was for a total of \$2,290.03; and for the quarter ending June 30, 1857, a total of \$1,387.50. These appear to be representative of the amounts usually required though the totals in exceptional circumstances were much larger. Depredations were at a minimum and included only cattle stealing and a murder.

April 1857 brought to a close Kit Carson's first term as Indian Agent in New Mexico Territory. His apprenticeship, as it were, had been a period of more serious troubles than most Indian agents ever encountered. He had experienced the Jicarilla War; the annoyances of paper work connected with his office; depredations, stealing and murders; and was doing all he could to keep the peaceful Indians in his charge from starvation and exposure. He had proved himself a capable agent.

Christopher Carson was reappointed Indian agent on April 9, 1857,¹⁸ for a term to end with the adjournment of the next session of the United States Senate. His bond, in

16. Meriwether to Carson, Sept. 20, 1856 (*Ibid.*, Letters Sent)

17. Tabaguache is the preferred spelling. Variant acceptable spellings include Tabahuache, Tabequache, Tabequache Utes, Tabewache and Tabiachis.

18. B.I.A., Misc., vol 8, page 287.

the amount of five thousand dollars, was signed by himself, Thomas A. Boggs, Peter Joseph, James B. Woodson and Ezra De Pew on the 26th day of May and on that day Carson accepted his reappointment to the office. David D. Meriwether had been succeeded by James L. Collins, appointed on March 17, 1857, as Superintendent of Indian Affairs to replace the ex-officio superintendency under the governor, and so Carson was to serve his second term under new and different supervision.

The affairs of Utah Agency gave every promise of being peaceful for the remainder of the year 1857 and this proved to be the case. Carson, in his monthly reports, was usually able to state that the Indians under his charge were in a state of peace and contentment and that no depredations had been committed. It was necessary for the agency to provide them with rations frequently and, in August 1857, the "Mohuaches and some of the Tabaguaches proceeded to Abiquiú, received their presents, and then returned to Conejos well satisfied."¹⁹ In regard to the groups who visited the Agency frequently for the purpose of receiving food, Agent Carson reported, "I give unto them liberally for as game is fast disappearing from their hunting grounds it becomes necessary to furnish them food or they will supply themselves with it from the flocks and herds of citizens that live in the neighborhood."²⁰ He also frequently reported that the Indians of his agency were friendly and that, if they were properly provisioned, he had no fear of their becoming otherwise.

Kit Carson, in 1857, had been an Indian agent for four years and had lived and fought with the Indians for twenty-eight years prior to becoming agent. He, if anybody, was well qualified to recommend how they should be treated. In June of 1857 he set down in simple terms his opinions which included: removal of Indians as far as possible from white settlements and separation of the various tribes by at least five miles if possible; maintenance of a sufficient military force among them to keep peace; teaching of practical arts by which they could learn to support themselves; placing

19. Carson to Collins, Sept. 1, 1857 (New Mexico Supt'y., B.I.A., Letters Received)

20. *Ibid.*

missionaries among them to instruct them in the laws of Christianity; and remove the Indians as far as possible from the Mexicans. This simple philosophy was a forerunner of the Peace Policy which was to embody the same general humane principles more than ten years later.

In November of 1857 some minor depredations occurred. The Mohuache band of Utahs stole some animals in the Arkansas River area and Agent Carson learned of the act. He made application to Capt. Morris commanding at Cantonment Burgwin for military aid and was given five men as an escort with which he set out and found the Indians on the Conejos. They were in a severe state of destitution and Carson gave them sixty-four and a half fanegas of wheat (about 102 bushels). The stolen animals were recovered without difficulty and returned to their owners after an absence of eight days.

The estimated expenses of Utah Agency for the quarter ending December 31, 1857, were given as follows:²¹

For contingent expenses including provisions and presents to Indians	\$1,200.00
For salary of Agent Carson	387.50
For salary of interpreter	125.00
Total	\$1,712.50

Late in 1857 and early in 1858 a new type of problem arose to give Agent Carson concern. In January²² he received instructions from Acting Superintendent Yost at Santa Fe to be especially watchful of attempts by Mormons who might attempt to estrange the Indians of New Mexico Superintendency from the United States as part of the conduct of the Mormon War. He was warned to keep close touch with the Indians and to make all reasonable efforts to secure their friendship to the United States. If necessary, he was authorized to exceed his estimates to furnish the Indians with increases in provisions to prevent their cooperation with the Mormons, and if hostile actions were observed the informa-

21. Carson to Collins, n. d. (*Ibid.*)

22. Acting Supt. Yost to Carson, Jan. 12, 1858 (*Ibid.*, Letters Sent)

tion was to be transmitted to Santa Fe for immediate relay to Washington.

Agent Carson immediately followed the instructions of Acting Superintendent Yost and proceeded to the Sierra Blanco near Fort Massachusetts for the purpose of ascertaining the disposition of the Indians in that region. En route Carson met Ancatah, Blanco and other Utahs who, with Guataname, an Arapahoe, and a Blackfoot, were on the way to Taos to conclude a treaty of peace and friendship with the Indians in the Taos area. On the 22nd of January a tentative treaty of peace was made between these tribes which had been at war with each other for years. When the sincerity of the Plains Indians could be assured, Carson proposed to take a party of his Indians to their country to effect a permanent treaty arrangement. Decreasing hostilities between the Indians of the plains and those of the mountains helped prevent a coalition of the Plains Indians with the Mormons against the United States. Carson was able to report at the end of January that "The Indians of this agency are apparently very well satisfied and friendly disposed toward the government and I have strong hopes of their remaining so even if urged by the rebels of Utah to commence hostilities."²³ These hopes proved to be well founded for none of Carson's Indians joined the Mormons against the United States.

The second term of Agent Carson came to a close in March 1858. The Utah Agency had been the scene of peace for a year and had had no serious depredations. The Indians evinced a firm friendship for their agent and toward the United States and gave every indication of wanting to continue in this manner. They were being as well cared for as any Indians in the superintendency and had little cause to revolt.

Agent Carson's third appointment to be agent to the Indians in New Mexico was made March 3, 1858,²⁴ and his bond in the amount of five thousand dollars, signed by himself, Peter Joseph, and L. Maxwell was dated July 27, 1858.

23. Carson to Yost, Jan. 28, 1858 (*Ibid.*, Letters Received)

24. B.I.A., Misc., vol. 8, p. 333.

After the year of peace, troubled conditions in the area around Carson's agency in early 1858 were moving to a point at which, at any moment, his Indians might become involved. The Mormons were at war against the United States and the Navajoes were restless. Agent Carson found it difficult to prevent the Utahs under his charge from either joining the Mormons or going on the warpath against the Navajoes. In March the Navajoes attempted to meet the Utahs at Santa Fe but the Utahs were skeptical, claiming that at the same time they offered peace the Navajoes were committing depredations against them. Carson, too, felt that it would be better if no treaty of friendship were made between the Utahs and Navajoes. During this same restless period Indians from Utah were coming into the Taos area with the story that there was a stream in the Mormon country over which United States troops had to pass and which caused instant death by their drinking from it, but for Indians the stream was healthy and the "Good Spirit" protected them. These stories affected the superstitious Utes and caused them to be more restless but they respected Carson and the Government he represented and refused to ally themselves with the Mormons.

Mohuaches, Jicarillas, and Capotes continued to visit the agency and Carson was as liberal in supplying them with food as he was able. Depredations were at a minimum but it was an ominous quiet.

The peace efforts which had been in progress between the Utes and the Arapahoes and Cheyennes for a few months terminated when the Arapahoes and Cheyennes wrote in March that they would not conclude a treaty with the Utahs because some of the Utahs had lately killed some of the Cheyennes and Arapahoes. The ugly temper of the Utes was further demonstrated by a quarrel which developed between Blanco, a Ute chief, and a Mr. Wilbon, or Wilbur, who was leader of a surveying party. There was some reason to believe that the surveyors had incited the Utes to quarrel and Carson attempted to reconcile both parties. Though there was no violence, ill feeling persisted on both sides and trouble threatened to break out momentarily.

Throughout the summer this condition of ferment persisted. The Utes volunteered to fight the Navajoes who had openly rebelled against the United States, so Carson collected two chiefs and eighteen warriors with whom he proceeded to Santa Fe on October 5th and delivered them to the Commanding General of the Department.

Though minor thefts and depredations were committed in the summer and fall of 1858 it appeared that, given a normal chance, agency problems might be worked out in the course of time. Carson continued to issue abundant supplies, a good location was found in which the Mohuaches could spend the winter, the Utes were expending their warlike energy against the Navajoes, and minor difficulties were being taken care of without recourse to force. The most serious immediate problem seemed to lie in the taking of captives, this being a practice of the Indians during war. To restore order and release these captives, Superintendent Collins wrote Carson that

Captain Bonneville and myself start to Defiance day after tomorrow for the purpose of concluding a peace with the Navajoes, and should it be accomplished steps will be at once taken to close the war between them and the Utahs.²⁵

While apparently everything possible was being done to restore order to northern New Mexico area and calm the Indians, the optimistic view of the future was suddenly shattered by an unexpected event. Gold was discovered in the vicinity of Pike's Peak and thousands of would be miners and camp followers with the slogan "Pike's Peak or Bust" began to invade the area. Many of these spread their search into the Taos area and the already restless Utes flared into action. By April 1859, the miners had reached the Balle Salado which was the favorite hunting ground of the Mohuaches. Agent Carson, anticipating trouble when the Indians and miners met, wrote to Collins:

The Balle Salado is the only hunting ground the Mohuaches have. They are now on their way and should they, on their arrival, find parties of whites thereon I fear difficulties would arise that can be

25. Collins to Carson, December 12, 1858 (*Ibid.*, Letters Sent)

avoided if a proper course is pursued, which is to inform Indians and miners of the case and not have them meet unexpectedly.²⁶

Carson set out to visit the Indians and on the way heard that an Indian had been killed by the miners. He knew that further trouble could be expected for it was the custom of these Indians to kill one or more persons of another nation as payment for loss of the deceased. Realizing this danger, Carson applied to Capt. A. W. Bowman, commanding at Fort Garland, for an escort. Capt. Bowman furnished five men of whom he assumed command and the party proceeded until they discovered the trail of a large number, some 100 lodges, of Indians. It was then thought prudent to return. Later it was learned that the information about the murder and trouble with the miners was only a rumor. This rumor, however, was indicative of the tense feeling which existed and in July the Utes killed two Americans. Carson reported:

They say 200 miners have started in pursuit of the Utahs, well mounted, armed and provisioned and if supplied with guides that know the country I have no doubt but that the Utahs will be summarily punished—Since the discovery of those mines I feared such an outbreak. It has come sooner than I expected.²⁷

It was subsequently learned that the trouble was caused by Tabaguache Utes with the Mohuaches almost as much involved. The Tabaguaches continued hostile for some time but the Mohuaches gave no more immediate trouble.

In August 1859, preparations were made to issue annual presents to the Indians in the New Mexico Superintendency. The regular issue was made to the Mohuaches in September and at that time they showed much dissatisfaction and discontent. A near riot developed when an Indian entered a cornfield near the Rio San Antonio and plucked a roasting ear. He was seen by a Mexican who got a club and beat the Indian almost to death. When news of this was received by the Indians they converged on the place bent upon massacring all the whites in the vicinity but Carson, who had been sent for, arrived and was able to pacify them. The issue of presents mollified them somewhat and Carson directed

26. Carson to Collins, April 27, 1859 (*Ibid.*, Letters Received)

27. Carson to Collins, July 20, 1859 (*Ibid.*)

them to move off at once fearing that if they remained further trouble would develop.

The Tabaguaches did not come in for their presents but remained in the area of Grand River in a hostile attitude. In August they had a fight with a party of miners during which five Americans and three Utahs were killed. This state continued until October when they informed Carson that they were ready to come in and make peace. On October 26, the agent visited the Tabaguaches at their camp some ten miles northwest of Abiquiú and, after a long talk during which the Indians professed innocence in connection with recent massacres, terms were agreed on. The Indians and Carson then proceeded to the Conejos where he issued their annual presents with which they seemed well satisfied.

The beginning of the year 1860 saw another force affecting Carson and this was the unsettled state of the nation. He feared the disruption of the Union and proposed to Superintendent Collins in January that he did not feel safe in advancing money for government purposes and that the Indians be required to wait until some decision came from Washington.

The Apaches and Utahs continued to commit minor depredations consisting chiefly of stealing animals from the Mexicans. Captives taken during the war were being located and returned to their proper places and general order existed again. Carson was once again able to report:

I have nothing of importance beyond the usual routine of the business of the agency to report. The Indians as heretofore have been frequent visitors scarcely a day passes but I have from five to twenty five to feed and take care of their only resource is upon Government and as they come in I must provide for them and send them away, only to be visited again when their supplies are exhausted and in this way some band of them are my daily visitors.²⁸

Similar reports were to be submitted by Agent Carson for several months. This was necessary because, while Carson was leading his horse down a steep graveled slope in the Ute country of southeast Colorado, the animal had fallen dragging Carson with him. Kit received internal injuries from this fall which were to grow worse with time though he at

28. Carson to Collins, January 31, 1860 (*Ibid.*)

first did not realize how seriously he had been injured. His injuries caused him to forego some of his more strenuous activities for awhile and he was unable to keep fully abreast of the events around him.

Much of his last year as Indian agent was spent quietly and with an ever growing interest in and concern for the state of the Union. He remained at his agency until June 1861, at which time he resigned to become Colonel of the New Mexico Volunteers. He was succeeded as agent by William F. N. Army and the agency was removed forty miles east to Maxwell's Rancho because of the whisky stills which had grown up around Taos. Reports indicated that the Carson influence continued to be felt and that the Indians to whom he had been agent remained friendly toward the United States.

Thus ended the career of Kit Carson as agent to the Indians in New Mexico. His association with them was not to end, however, for as an army officer he continued to fight them and to govern them as long as he lived. In 1868 a movement was begun by General Sherman and others to have Carson appointed Superintendent of Indian Affairs in New Mexico but his death came before the appointment could be completed.

In attempting to truly and successfully evaluate the work of Kit Carson as an Indian agent one must disregard, insofar as possible, his career prior to and following the time he served as agent and to consider only his accomplishments as agent. These periods cannot be completely disregarded, however, since he was given the appointment because of his past performances and won later fame on knowledge gained while he was an agent. Any correct evaluation must, therefore, be based primarily and objectively on his achievements while actually in office taking other periods of his life into consideration only when necessary.

At the time of his first appointment as agent to the Indians in New Mexico, Kit Carson had lived in the Rocky Mountain area for a period of some twenty-seven years; had traveled from Oregon to Mexico and as far west as the Pacific Coast; had trapped, served as guide, and had fought In-

dians. He had been twice married to Indian women and from the experience of living with the tribes came to know the Indians well. His third marriage, to the daughter of an old and respected New Mexican family, gave him advantages in wider acquaintances and dealings with the leading whites in the area beyond that already acquired in his association with the Bents and others. Without further elaboration on his background the writer feels safe in stating that, because of his great and detailed knowledge of the country, his intimate association with the Indians and their respect for him, Kit Carson was as well qualified as any person living to be agent to the Indians in New Mexico in 1853.

Carson, in the performance of his duties as agent, used great common sense and tact. As an example of this we find that at the very beginning of his service as agent he wisely assumed a detached position during the Jicarilla War. By so doing he kept the respect of both the military and civil authorities and of the Indians. His part in the expeditions against the Indians was confined to being an adviser and guide. It is very significant that when the Apaches realized that they had been defeated they turned to Carson and made their appeal for peace to him rather than to the military forces or to the authorities at Santa Fe. By this simple gesture they showed their confidence in and respect for him. Though conclusion of the treaty of peace was left to Governor Meriwether, it was Carson that the Indians turned to in their time of need. In the same manner, when the Utes had been on the warpath they, in August of 1859, reported to Carson their desire for peace and he listened to them. He displayed toward his wards in time of war an understanding and patience that few agents have been capable of.

In times of peace the Indians flocked to him as children would to an indulgent parent. The affectionate title of "Father Kit" was earned and merited in every sense of the word. His constant reports of Indians having visited him, been fed, and sent away well satisfied, were indicative of the care which he gave them.

Many writers have eulogized Carson and no doubt with justification. Their statements might well lead to the con-

clusion that Carson was a perfect agent. This is not altogether true because there were certain weaknesses in his service which must be considered before a just evaluation of his worth as an Indian agent can be arrived at. The chief of these was, of course, his inability to read and write because of which he was forced, in violation of regulations, to employ a clerk under the title of interpreter. In addition to this, relations between Carson and the Superintendent of Indian Affairs were sometimes a little strained. This appears to have been caused by Carson's independence and sometimes reluctance to abide by the orders of the Superintendent. Another weakness of Carson's lay in his inability to adjust his accounts properly and this led to considerable confusion before the matter was finally cleared up. Still another weakness resulted from his consistent refusal to move agency headquarters from Taos to a location nearer the Indians. Though he seemed to feel that agents should live among the Indians, he was adamant in his refusal to move from Taos. This obviously was for personal reasons.

There have been reports that Carson did not like the job of agent. Such reports are hard to believe because Carson accepted reappointment twice; he appeared to have been willing, even eager, to perform the duties of his office; his reports were consistently submitted on time; and, he caused some one hundred and fifty letters to be written to Santa Fe over a five year period. Carson may not have been overly fond of the job but there is little doubt that his heart was in it and remained so until more important and momentous duties called.

If one looks objectively, then, at Carson as Indian agent the conclusion must be reached that he was a man eminently well qualified, who served most of three terms efficiently, with humanity and consideration; that, while he made errors, he did the best he could to further the interests of the government which he represented and, at the same time, to secure the maximum of care and justice for the Indians of his agency. The impression which Carson left on the Indians of New Mexico had lasting and beneficial results for both the Indians and the United States. For this accomplishment he must be considered as one of the great Indian agents.