by Guy Rocha, Nevada State Archivist

"I inquire if the correct name of this place is Carson City," asked M. G. Parker of Silver City during the second Nevada State Constitutional Convention in July 1864. Delegates were preparing to approve Carson City as the proposed state capital of Nevada. "I named the city myself," delegate and co-founder of Carson City Frank Proctor proudly proclaimed on July 27, 1864, "Carson City is what we used to call it."

The passage of time has obscured the facts surrounding the beginnings of Carson City, and today Abraham Curry is generally given the credit for naming the town and not Proctor. Co-founders John Jacob Musser, Benjamin Franklin Green and Francis Marion Proctor, who came with Curry to Eagle Valley from Downieville, California in 1858, have been all but forgotten.

It has long been incorrectly assumed that "Uncle Abe" named the community after Christopher "Kit" Carson because Carson passed through the small valley as a scout for John C. Fremont in his expedition of 1843-44. Fremont's journals and the maps of the expedition clearly demonstrate that Carson did not enter Eagle Valley. While Fremont named the Carson Lake (Sink) and Carson River in honor of Kit, the explorers did not follow the river through Eagle and Carson valleys to it's source but veered southward into Mason and Antelope valleys, then turned north, and eventually crossed the Sierra Nevada just south of Carson Pass. Fremont did not name Carson Valley or Carson Pass, those names would be applied after the publishing of the survey maps in 1848.

What most people don't know is that Kit Carson passed through Eagle Valley in 1853 on his way to Sacramento from New Mexico Territory. Maybe this event was lost to history because it was only a sheep and goat drive, but herding some 7,000 head of those critters was no mean feat and he sold the livestock for $32,000.

We do know the town laid out in Eagle Valley was known as Carson City by early September 1858, and whether it was named for the Carson River or Carson County, Utah Territory, created in 1854, or directly for Kit himself, ultimately the naming could be traced to Carson's association with the western Great Basin. Ironically, while Kit Carson surely came to know of Carson City, he never visited the community prior to his death at Fort Lyon in Colorado Territory on May 23, 1868.

The following year Carson's remains were removed to a small cemetery near his old home in Taos, New Mexico Territory. Statues on the legislative mall pay tribute to the famous frontiersman and to Abe Curry, the "father" of Carson City.

Photo: Kit Carson Memorial Foundation, Inc., Kit Carson Home and Museum, Taos, New Mexico.

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