

## [The Mormon Church West of the Rio Grande]

Interview

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THE MORMON CHURCH WEST OF THE RIO GRANDE

SETTLEMENT OF CARSON

In 1880 when Judge W. K. Shupe was [18?] years old, he broke his right arm and was forced to spend a great deal of time in reading rather than in the active life of a [18?] year old boy. Among the books which helped to speed recovery was the Autobiography of Kit Carson. Ten years later when a young man of twenty-two, he went to Tres Piedras, New Mexico, from his home in Independence, Virginia, and was employed by the Stewart McConnell sawmill. He was again taken ill and during his convalescence reread the famous Kit Carson autobiography. His first visit into Taos came shortly after his illness and was made particularly to see the old Kit Carson headquarters and his grave. Meanwhile Shupe had tho'ught some of homesteading and that great area south of Tres Piedras and west of the Rio Grande. For eighteen years he investigated the flow of the (flooded ditch arroyo aguajo — main source of water for the country. He had covered this area tho'roughly, roaming it on horse-back for hundreds of square miles, finding a suitable spot for his father and uncle who had left Virginia, to also settle in New Mexico. So when the time came for Shupe to settle down it was in 1909 that he decided on the present site of the town of Carson. Shupe had decided that the Spanish names were too difficult to pronounce and since there was the town Kit Carson in Colorado, and Carson City in Nevada, he felt that New Mexico should have one town noted after the famous trapper and scout. The Shupe family were an old Virginia family and thro'ugh their many 2 contacts,

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interested two other families in homesteading with them. C18-6/5/41-N. Mex. These were the Roger and Baugartner Baumgartner families. These three families were the first of a Mormon group. Then came the Klings in the spring of 1910, another family from Virginia. By this time the spot had become known as "The Virina Settlement".

The group petitioned for a post office and September 6, 1912, Mr. J. X. Shupe was appointed first post master. They were also assigned a school district and December 1, 1912, school opened for the children of eight or ten families. School was held in a small frame house and Mr. Shupe was the first teacher. Other families came in 1913 and especially during the year 1914 there was an influx of new homesteaders.

This ambitious group began constructing a road across the Rio Grande canyon, the one which is still in use today. Previous to this all wagons or cars came by way of the Arroyo Hondo road over John Dunn's toll bridge. It was during this year of 1914 that it was thought admirable by a group of the Latter Day Saints in the community to organize a branch of the Mormon Church and also a Sunday School. The settlement was visited by Mr. John L. Herrick, resident of the western states [?] with headquarters in Denver. A branch organization was formed and Mr. [?]. [?]. Shupe was appointed the first residing elder. [?] Mr. C. J. Stover, another early pioneer, was Sunday school superintendent. The church grew and soon after 3 its organization had ninety-eight members including children. It has been the only church organization in Carson.

This little settlement of courageous homesteaders, who year after year, planted suitable dry farming crops and then hoped that they would harvest enough to live on, grew and prospered until 1920. At that census the precinct showed 243 persons. Then in 1923 high wages were being paid at the sawmill at [?] Piedras and the mica mines near-by-were very active. Soon many of the homesteaders, who have been gradually discouraged by the increasing drought each year, left their plows and the town of Carson to earn money in other fields of work. But W. K. Shupe remained and was elected Taos county Probate Judge in 1929 and 1930. By 1930 the population of Carson had dwindled to less than

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150 including Taos Junction, some five miles to the west. This was the railway station of the Denver and Rio Grande Western and had been nothing but a railway building while Carson was prospering. However, the railroad had attracted business and a small community had been slowly developing there at Stong, (Taos Junction) while Carson had been going downhill.

The year 1933-34 brought the most severe drought and tho'se few farmers who still remained on their homesteads were reduced to bringing water in barrels and tanks loaded on trucks and wagons hauled five miles after being filled from the Rio Grande River itself. This hauled water supply had to take care of both household and stock purposes. This further reduced the 4 population. Later a [?] land purchase by the government bought land to the south and west of this area which further reduced the population of Carson.

The Carson dam was finally built thro'ugh the untiming efforts of Shupe and was built to make a reservoir of the natural flow of water thro'ugh the arroyo aquago. This dam, one of the Government projects, was finished in March, 1938 and has made irrigable land of several tho'usand sores which were slowly turning into waste land.

Again Carson expects to prosper. Six families have already returned and others have written in inquiring about conditions and are very hopeful of joining the settlement. During this period the Mormon Sunday school had continued. There are at present [?] registered. It was necessary to disorganize the church of the Latter Day Saints about 1925. It is hoped, however, by Mr. Shupe and other strong Mormon leaders in the community, that they will again be able to carry on their church affiliations.

### SOURCE OF INFORMATION

Personal knowledge of writer and interview with Mr. W. K. Shupe.