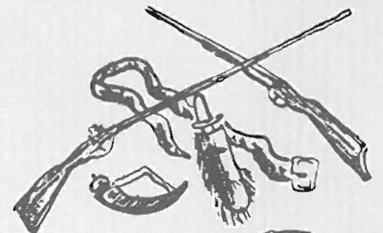
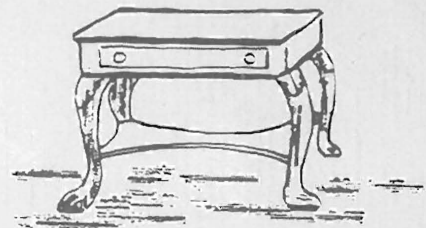
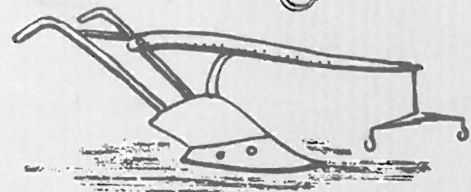
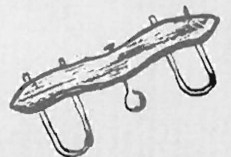
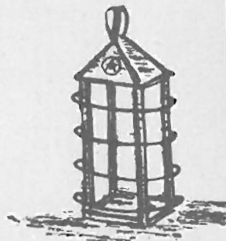
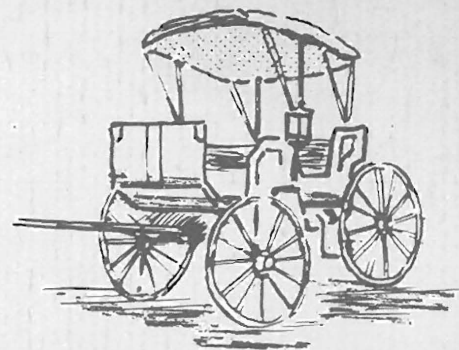


The Fort Leavenworth Museum

*During its
First Four Years of
Struggle*

By

Frederick Gilbreath, Major General USA, Retired



THE FORT LEAVENWORTH MUSEUM
DURING ITS
FIRST FOUR YEARS OF STRUGGLE

BY

FREDERICK GILBREATH, MAJOR GENERAL U.S.A. RETIRED

The genesis of the Fort Leavenworth Museum is attributable to three gallant soldiers: Colonel George T. Langhorne, U.S.M.A. 1889, General Jonathan M. Wainwright (Medal of Honor) U.S.M.A. 1906, and Major General Horace H. Fuller, U.S.M.A. 1909 (one time Commandant of the Command and General Staff School) all deceased. So far as I know none of the three has ever been given credit in any way for the inception and growth of the Fort Leavenworth Museum. However, but for them, there would be no such institution today. Many others participated in its progress to maturity and a few will be named in this narrative. My own intense nostalgic interest in it was born of a long hard life in the transition period from wagon trains to air travel.

Here is the story: In 1934-35 while stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas, I met Colonel Jonathan M. (Skinny) Wainwright, the hero of Corregidor, but then Assistant Commandant of the Cavalry School and Master of the Cavalry School Hunt. As I was an ardent fox hunter myself, Colonel Wainwright invited me to become joint master with him. In the spring of 1935 he was ordered away to be promoted to general. I shall never forget that cold Kansas morning we came to the end of his last hunt as Master of Hounds of the Cavalry School Hunt. It had been a long hard one at racing speed over some fifteen solid fences. As the Huntsman tossed several large hunks of

meat to the hounds as their reward, Skinny Wainwright rode over to hand me his cherished fox horn, with the words, "It's yours, you've earned it." A few days later Skinny told me that Mr. John Tough, a gentleman sportsman of Kansas City, had given him a sporting brake (a two horse, two seated, open light vehicle) and since he couldn't take it with him, asked if I would accept it as a gift from him and preserve it. I thanked Skinny and assured him it would be cared for. This was the sperm that spawned the Fort Leavenworth Museum.

It was not long before orders were received transferring me to Fort Leavenworth to be Executive Officer and Secretary of the Command and General Staff School (now the college). By early June, I was established with my private horses and the prized sporting brake at Fort Leavenworth.

Soon after arriving at Fort Leavenworth, I received a letter from Colonel Horace Fuller saying Colonel (Prince George) Langhorne, an old line Virginia Gentleman, as well as an outstanding Cavalryman, had accumulated harness and other appurtenances of the coaching sport which he was no longer able to use, and would Horace accept them as a gift, or if he could not use them, would he nominate someone who could. Horace transmitted the offer to me and I accepted. So in June, 1935 the coaching harness and allied equipment caught up with the sporting brake, which marriage produced the embryo that grew into the Fort Leavenworth Museum. The coaching equipment from Colonel Langhorne consisted of two sets of beautiful four in hand coaching harness, two coach horns, two coach whips and other minor accessories all in perfect condition.

As the hundreds of veterans of Army Schools at Fort Leavenworth know, Saturday afternoon at the C&GSS is a dull time in the dizzy swirl of

professional education. Some played golf, some drove around to look over historical places such as, Buffalo Bill's birthplace, the world famous Menninger Clinic in Topeka, the tobacco auctions just across the river in Missouri, the "I buy anything" store in St. Joseph and a little farther on the starting point of the old Oregon trail. Others visited Kansas City, Missouri for a night out with a legal alcoholic beverage (Kansas was dry) and a night club show. For me with many administrative responsibilities my place was in the Fort where I could be reached on a moments notice in case of emergency.

To pass away this monotonous half day, shortly after reporting for duty I hitched up a span of grey horses to Skinny's sporting brake and drove up and down the streets of Fort Leavenworth. Soon the children began to swarm out to see this strange contraption, a few grownups waked from their afternoon naps to gaze upon this unusual sight. Just another movie stunt they said and went back to sleep. Even a few golfers paused in their rounds to stare at this apparition.

But the next edition of Dan Anthony's Leavenworth Times took note of it and soon local citizens began to reminisce of the old days and word got around Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska. Within a very short time both friends as well as people unknown to me began sending word in telling of some old time treasures they possessed and asked if the Army would like to have them as mementos of long ago. Of course I accepted in the name of the Commandant and answered meticulously by letter every proffer. The official files of the C&GSS for the years 1935-39 will furnish information concerning the rapid growth of this unusual project. For the clerical assistance the School and the Museum owe their undying gratitude to Miss

Lulu Baum, secretary to the Commandant C&GSS.

While the foregoing incidents were happening, the Commandant, General Jimmie Brees, had given his blessing to the Museum and authorized me to employ all legal measures to build it up. He was born and raised in Wyoming and had lived there through much of the pioneer migration to the west. His experience, encouragement and help made my task much easier.

By the end of the first year the accumulation of pioneer relics was, to say the least, remarkable. Many irreplaceable items of priceless value began to roll in. My everlasting gratitude is small payment for the wonderful voluntary help of Wm. (Wink) McGlinn, his brother Johnny, his blacksmith, his wheelwright, in fact all his civilian assistants in the old transportation corral for their continuing service in collecting, sorting, overhauling those things that needed it, of our largely donated museum pieces. Special mention should be made of Fritz Schillo, an old time "gee & haw" jerk line teamster of long practical experience from his boyhood on the Santa Fe Trail. In his every day work clothes he resembled the ideal pioneer wagon master. He was a giant in stature, about six feet four and heavy, but active. Wearing a very large Stetson hat with broad roll brim and an unusually high undented crown, he was a sight to attract the attention of old timers. With Fritz's life time of experience in animal transportation he provided incalculable advice and practical demonstration in the renovating of old wagons and buggies. Sergeant Yount at the information desk of the C&GSS with his contact with antique publishers was a great contribution to the success of our project. And of course Warrant Officer (Cleve) Williams, as head of the Book Department, furnished untold assistance. It was through him we obtained the old Fort Leavenworth

Firewagon from his father-in-law. It had stood the extremes of Kansas weather in his barn lot since the advent of motors forced its retirement. Credit must also be given to Sergeant Overstreet in the book department shops whose skill as a carpenter made easy some of Wink McGlinn's restoration problems. Contrary to a general impression most of the animal drawn vehicles we acquired were in fair to excellent condition, so with a little axle grease and a few tightened nuts they were road worthy. Two exceptions come to mind: the Conestoga wagon and the stage coach both of which required major renovation.

Mr. Bayer, long time carriage maker of Leavenworth, probably contributed the most valuable museum pieces. The Lincoln carriage in which Mr. Lincoln rode from Lawrence, Kansas to the old Planters Hotel in Leavenworth was his first gift. It was built some time before 1842 as determined by the peculiar type of hub caps that hold the wheels on to the axles. Next he gave me personally his cherished Lincoln lantern. This tallow candle was carried by his father down the muddy path from his home to the Planters Hotel to hear Mr. Lincoln's campaign speech in his first bid for the Presidency. I proceeded to spoil it by electrifying it, but it is now safe in the Museum and I hope the curator may sometime have it restored to its original smoky candle burner. Incidentally, Mr. Bayer built an automobile about the time of or before Mr. Ford's tin lizzy made its appearance in the old dirt roads, but abandoned the idea because he honestly believed the horse drawn vehicles could never be economically replaced. Mr. Bayer also contributed a harness makers vise, a truly rare specimen.

About June 1936 General Brees was promoted and assigned to command

the Army with headquarters at Fort Sam Houston. He was succeeded by Brigadier General Charles M. Bundel whom I had known as an instructor at the C&GSS in 1921-26. A very impassive individual but keenly alert and of such sound judgment as to leave his imprint on all who were fortunate enough to serve with him. He was from Pennsylvania and in early youth was acquainted with the small town of Conestoga from which the famous wagon took its name. From him I learned the origin of the "stogie" or "stogy", a long dark cigar designed to accommodate a teamster plodding along across the plains with a good long smoke before burning down to a butt. Naturally he was much interested in the budding museum and not only blessed it but gave me free rein to enlarge and expand the project.

By the time General Bundel assumed command the museum had grown to such proportion and was so widely known that it seemed desirable to seek official War Department sanction of its continuance and authority to set aside public housing for at least a part of it. Accordingly General Bundel directed me to prepare a letter for his signature recommending these things. It was promptly approved by direction of the Secretary of War, who, fortunately at that time was Mr. Harry Woodring of Kansas. This bit of strategy probably saved the museum from complete abandonment, though it suffered from neglect, by a post World War II commandant who apparently had no appreciation of its historical value. It gives me great satisfaction to know that this priceless collection, now being housed in its own building, right in the center of the college area, is firmly and legally established with a curator and several assistants. It is supported at least partially by public funds, a feature of Fort Leavenworth to which commandants can point with pride.

During the period of my connection with it, the museum's greatest growth occurred during the years 1936-39. Citizens from many parts of Kansas and Missouri wrote in offering all kinds of precious heirlooms. Others visiting our budding venture would on the spot offer some of their own prized antiques. So it grew and grew. Wink McGlinn was tireless in his search for the things we could use. The acquisition of only one vehicle caused us worry. Through the underground we got wind of a very old stage coach in a small town in Nebraska. Wink and Johnny McGlinn with Fritz Shillo were dispatched to get it. Before they got to the town, the underground had warned the owner that some buyers were on the way for the coach. It disappeared as if by magic and it took several days of diligent searching to locate it, then of course at a higher price. How this trio maneuvered it I will never know but it rolled in one afternoon atop a large flat truck. A well kept Irish jaunting cart was produced by Margaret Joe Helmers (Mrs. Jean Sams) of Kansas City, Missouri. The old time barn, part of a pretentious estate in Leavenworth, yielded several museum pieces. I was able to get in perfect condition an ox yoke in Wichita, Kansas and another one complete with bows from a farm near Bastrop, Texas. To add some local color, one day while riding along the bridle path on Pope Avenue my horse stepped on a piece of metal. Dismounting to explore, I found to my amazement an ox shoe that had lain there in the dust of the Santa Fe Trail for at least the past half century (an ox would wear 8 shoes because of it's cloven hoofs). It is now in the museum resting with other relics of its time.

I can no longer remember all of the items of the pioneer vintage or the names of their donors, for there were hundreds. But I still have a

warm feeling for all who graciously contributed so many worthwhile items and so much of their time.

By the time the museum was a year old it became standard procedure to display the vehicles during the Easter recess along Pope Avenue, with the head of the column near Grant Avenue, opposite the old Post Exchange. This was the main route used by most student officers from their quarters to the old Academic Building, Sherman, Sheridan and Grant Halls. This exhibition furnished the topic for much conversation and even amazement among those, most of whom had little or no knowledge of such ancient means of travel. Of course the museum was open at all times for visits from interested military and civilians. The display in the spring of the year on Pope Avenue, however was the climax and brought in much favorable comment. The Leavenworth Times gave us a great deal of publicity. The editor himself donated to the smaller items of collection an antique bedside table of cherrywood construction. The list of visitors became impressive.

As the end of the second year approached, the Commandant felt secure in authorizing a sort of pioneer folk gathering and picnic. Of course at that time, Fort Leavenworth was not devoid of animals. The 10th Cavalry was fully mounted, but draft horses were scarce. An artillery team of four coal blacks constituted the only hitch that really accepted collars and breeching with poise. The Quartermaster transportation included mule teams. The original pair of greys was still in harness and a few troopers mounts succumbed to the degrading transition from saddles to collars and hames and tugs, but still we had to rely largely on our civilian farmer supporters. They certainly did not fail us. On the appointed day Grant

Avenue was lined almost head to croup with a wonderful display of the fast fading animal drawn vehicles of both farm and city. I remember distinctly a wonderful four in hand of Clydesdales lent by a prosperous farmer in southwest Missouri to draw the Conestoga wagon. The display was a huge success. A large crowd gathered to watch the parade of long ago vehicles which was commonplace before the turn of the century but practically unheard of a generation later. Many visitors remained to see the lesser items of interest then housed in what some will recall as the old plumbers shop on the road to the Hunt Lodge. Others took the occasion to offer their prized vehicles to the Army for safe keeping. This demonstration was repeated in following years.

One such display brough unexpected publicity. A colonel of the Illinois national guard, member of the special class, was so impressed he asked permission for his regiment to sponsor a display of the old Conestoga wagon in Chicago. At the appointed time it was dispatched by rail with a four mule jerk line team. Fritz took it, drove around the loop in Chicago during the 5 o'clock busy hour and returned without incident. When I asked him what he thought of Chicago, he said with no emotion: "Well, there's a lot of people there."

As General Bundel approached the age of retirement in the spring of 1939, there was much speculation as to his successor but not for long. It soon was announced that Brigadier General Lesley J. McNair was to be our next commandant. He was a Field Artillery Officer, U.S.M.A. 1904. I had not known him except by reputation which was very high. (He was killed in the early days of World War II while inspecting the front lines in Europe). General McNair was an ardent horseman and interested in all

outdoor activities. Much younger than his predecessors but with less experience in C&GSS matters, he retained me as executive and secretary and gave me free rein in administrative matters while he spent unnumbered hours in academic changes. The loss of General Bundel to me was poignant. He had guided me through almost three years of difficult administrative and academic crises and given me priceless advice.

About two years after my assignment to the C&GSS it became obvious that the Fort Leavenworth Hunt had to be taken in hand. Organized several years earlier it had degenerated into a bunch of hill top nondescript hounds, kenneled in an old cow barn remnant of the once prosperous Disciplinary Barracks Dairy vacant for years, and the pack totally undisciplined. After some consideration General Bundel decided to appoint me as Master of Foxhounds in addition to my other onerous assignments. This required assistance and my first choice was Paul R. Davison, a contemporary Lieutenant Colonel of Cavalry, a hard riding fox hunter and a man of extensive experience and rare but sound imagination. He was currently the School Librarian which he updated and introduced into it modern procedures. With time to spare he eagerly accepted my invitation to become joint master of the Hunt. In a few months he took over most of the hunt duties and still had time to spare. The man who does the most is invariably the man who gets the most assignments, so it was natural that in the course of time Paul became my principal assistant in building up and improving the museum. His contribution to its success is known only to me. I am grateful to him for reviewing this all too brief history. (His son Mike, now a major general, is presently Commandant of the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth).

When the end of my tour of duty drew near it was only natural for the commandant to ask me to recommend my successor and equally natural for me to suggest Paul Davison whom I considered to be the best available prospect. So, when I drove down Grant Avenue and out the front gates headed for Fort Riley to assume the position of Assistant Commandant of the Cavalry School, vacated four years before by Skinny Wainwright, I did so with a sense of satisfaction that my extra curricular services at the C&GSS would continue in good hands uninterrupted and that the Fort Leavenworth Museum would somehow attain its own place in history. Knowing that the assembling of the everyday tools, weapons, furniture, utensils, transportation, and symbols of a pioneer life fast fading when I was born eighty years ago had been accomplished is ample reward for any part I may have taken in it.