



National Stagecoach and Freight Wagon Association NEWSLETTER

Spring 2010

Letter from the President


Greetings fellow enthusiasts!

We are eager to announce that we have put together an exciting event for our upcoming Annual Meeting. This year we will be meeting in Cody, Wyoming, home of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, housing intriguing artifacts, history, and original Buffalo Bill stagecoaches. Our two resident directors, Rawhide Johnson and Ashlee Ganoung, have put together an exciting program. We have also lined up some great speakers and presentations, as well as a walk through the museum archives. This exclusive offer is only available to our members, and we hope you will take advantage!

This event is a great opportunity to get together and share the vast knowledge of our membership group. These conferences provide an opportunity for social enrichment and the perpetuation and assimilation of lost knowledge—only regained through the mutual sharing of ideas and experiences by our members. Our membership includes persons that are interested in many different aspects. Through the collaboration of our efforts, we can learn more about the many aspects of our subject, such as the following:

- Unique vehicles of study
- Historic trails these vehicles traveled
- Interesting individuals involved in the associated trades
- Related equipment – such as the harnesses and hitches, roughlocks, and drag shoes
- Interesting attributes of the individual vehicles
- Places of interest – the forts and stage stops, wagon factories, etc.

I am excited to announce that our 501(c)(3) tax-free organization status is complete, and we are now in a position to become more active in pursuing some greater events. As we grow, we hope to formulate several subcommittees to research and look into different activities and investigate ways to increase membership involvement in accomplishing many intriguing projects.

Please sign up and register early for our annual meeting! If you are not a member, take advantage of our membership savings that we have negotiated with the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. I look forward to seeing you in Cody and meeting you personally. 

Sincerely,

Doug Hansen, President

NEWS

- Our official website was launched this past year, and we continue to make improvements and add more content for our members, so please take some time to browse the site at www.stagecoachfreightwagon.org, and let us know if you have more ideas for the website or additional information you would like to share with other members.
- Our 501(c)(3) application has taken a considerable amount of time to process but is complete.
- The month of June will be here before we know it. Make sure you've scheduled plans to attend our Annual Meeting in historic Cody, Wyoming, from June 11 to 12. You won't want to miss this one. In addition to a feature-packed itinerary of events, a number of our directors have been involved in special research projects and travels. We'll be able to share even more about these ventures during the meeting. Some research project highlights include that Ken Wheeling attended the Conference of English Coach Building at the City of London Museum and cochaired the Carriage Association of America (CAA) Highways and Horses Symposium in Williamsburg, of which Deborah Tranter of the Australian Cobb & Co Museum also gave a presentation. Doug Hansen assisted member Bobby Tanner with his 20-mule hitch while also taking some time to get an up-close inspection of the huge Borax freight wagons of Death Valley. Elsewhere, David Sneed spent some time in December and January working with archaeologists excavating and studying a Civil War-era St. Louis wagon maker site, and Michael Sanborn presented "Phineas Banning: Southern California Freighting and Stagecoach Empire" to the CAA International Carriage Symposium. In many cases, these travels and experiences are opening up new details and discoveries that are helping add greater understanding to the early stage and freighting industries.
- Last year's event in Santa Ynez, California, was an equally exciting event. If you weren't able to attend, you can read more about it on our website.

DIRECTOR LIST

Board of Directors

Doug Hansen, President, Letcher, SD
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Read more about our directors

<http://stagecoachfreightwagon.org/aboutFounders.html>



Conestoga Wagons – Original American Freighters

by David Sneed

During our 2009 NSFVA annual meeting which took place in Santa Ynez, California, I was asked what types of wagons could be labeled as freight wagons. It's an excellent question and one that we'll address, at least in part, in this brief article.

Defining and exploring the term "freight wagon" has been the subject of numerous books and could easily take up more space than this newsletter allows. We would all likely concur that there were numerous types of early vehicles specifically built to carry some product or material. That said, for the sake of this discussion, if freight wagons are generally agreed to be heavy, four-wheeled, animal-drawn vehicles used for transporting bulk quantities of commercial goods, supplies, raw materials, and equipment over lengthy distances, we can start to narrow down the description a bit.

Types of freight wagons could include large business and express wagons, drays, heavier farm wagons and, certainly, the impressively sized, tall-sided wagons. These big carriers with straight and also sloped ends are the stereotypical images that often come to mind when many think of wagons carrying materials and supplies into America's western frontier. Looking at the origination of most tall-sided western freighters, though, requires a review of what is likely America's original bulk commercial freighter – the Conestoga.

While the Conestoga is not typically thought of as a "western" vehicle, it was among the very first heavy wagons to travel America's primitive roads and trails. As such, it helped grow areas that were considered the "West" in the early development of the United States. Dominating areas from the Ohio Valley and Appalachian Mountains sections to the more populated eastern states, most of these wagons were used in the century between 1750 and 1850. Undoubtedly, there were exceptions to this time frame, but the span does give us a strong reference to the primary era influenced by these vehicles.

German and Swiss emigrants in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, are generally given recognition for developing these wagons, while the name, itself, is taken from the Conestoga River and Native Americans in that area. As large freighters, there were thousands of these "big rigs" daily hauling everything from fruits, vegetables, and grain to iron, equipment, clothing, and weapons between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The National Road—today's U.S. 40—included the route from Baltimore to Wheeling, West Virginia, and saw equally substantial traffic.

Some of the most accurate and studied information on Conestoga wagons can be found in several books researched during the late 19th century as well as early and middle portions of the 20th century: a time when teamsters and a few remaining wagoners could still be found. Three vintage works that are always a great part of any early vehicle library are "The Old Pike – A History of the National Road" by T.B. Seawright (1894), "Conestoga Six Horse Bell Teams" by John Omwake (1930), and "Conestoga Wagon, 1750–1850" by George Shumway, Edward Durell, and Howard C. Frey (1964, 1966, 1968). These volumes not only outline the history of some of America's earliest freighters, but through detailed illustrations, photographs, and text do a very good job of profiling the wagons, various accessories, hitches, and other details. Additional publications of interest include:

"Conestoga Wagon – Masterpiece of the Blacksmith" by Arthur L. Reist, copyright 1975.

"The Adventures of a Waggon Tracker" by Franklin A. Zirkle, copyright 2005.

"The Conestoga Wagon, Ship of Inland Commerce" by Harry S. Hill – pamphlet, copyright 1930 and 1958.




Conestoga Wagon ("freight wagon")

Even with this information available, there are other late 19th and even 20th century designs that, because they share similar construction traits with a Conestoga, are sometimes confused with these grand ships of commerce. Vintage English farm wagons, smaller schooners, tobacco wagons from the Carolinas, and even what's often referred to as a "farm-style Conestoga" carry related design influences, but none is a Conestoga. Each of these is an example of a lighter wagon. An important distinction to keep in mind is that the Conestoga was a large, heavy transport. That immediately implies several things. These wagons will almost always have between 8 and 13 bows with accompanying bow staple hardware. These details are important as most true Conestoga freighters would have been equipped to cover and protect the cargo. Of course, there are always exceptions, and there were often variations between the wagons of the Conestoga "regulars" and those of the "sharpshooters." The term "regulars" was generally applied to those who made their living by freighting, while "sharpshooters" usually referred

to farmers and occasional teamsters who got involved when freighting was more profitable than their typical work.

As a general rule, Conestoga wagons were of sufficient size to carry several tons of supplies and gear and included raked or flared end gate designs, a feed box, lynch pin wheels, a toolbox on the left side, and extra side rails. To keep the freight from shifting in the terrain they traveled, the bed was bowed upward so the floor had a “belly” helping items to lean inward for greater security and stability. Certainly, the shape of the Conestoga is a powerful example of engineered form following necessary function.

With time and the development of the American West, the designs of heavy freight wagons began to evolve. As with the early Conestoga vehicles, these changes took place to better match multiple challenges, including terrain, available resources, business schedules, and the variations of materials being hauled. In an upcoming newsletter, we’ll look closer at the variations of tall-sided freighters so prevalent on western trails after the mid-1800s. When it comes to these giants, we’re extremely fortunate that six of the best-preserved examples are displayed each year during Labor Day weekend at Ketchum, Idaho’s “Wagon Days” festival. Originally built in the late 19th century, these massive wagons stretch as much as 16 feet in length, 14 feet in height, and include a carrying capacity close to 9 tons and rear wheels measuring 7 feet tall. They were part of Horace Lewis’s Fast Freight Line serving Ketchum, Idaho, and the backcountry silver and lead mines. A team of 16–24 mules and/or horses pulled multiple wagons hooked in tandem. Such an arrangement meant that a single train could easily stretch out more than 200 feet, making the negotiation of sharp turns on the steep, narrow paths a feat in itself.

As the NSFWA continues to grow, we’re all learning more about the vital roles and distinctive design features of vehicles that were so common to many of our ancestors. Through accurate research and knowledge gained, we’re encouraged to share those findings while reinforcing the same spirit of adventure, independence, and opportunity that built America into a world power. 

Deadwood Coach 1885 Abbot-Downing Mud Wagon

DIRECTOR’S BIO



Doug Hansen, *President*

Doug Hansen is founder and owner/operator of Hansen Wheel & Wagon Shop, established in 1978. He has worked as a wainwright and wheelwright since that time, specializing in the building and restoring of heavy wagons and wheels. Doug has made a point of researching and studying the original, authentic vehicles and performs all of his work with special attention to following the original design and detail—to produce only authentic, quality workmanship.

Doug’s fascination with horse-drawn vehicles brought about self-study of their designs and qualities. He truly believes that traditional wagon making and its methods are his connection with the original artisans of the past, and his inspiration comes from the study of their work.

Doug’s primary interest is in the realm of the western vehicles that traveled across the prairies of Dakota Territory, as well as the heavy commercial vehicles that kept our nation supplied. Iconic American vehicles such as stagecoaches, chuck wagons, freight wagons, and hitch wagons combine to make up his largest area of study.

Examples and contributions of Doug’s work can be found in private collections, museums, and corporate holdings. His company and its products have been featured in numerous articles and have been displayed nationally and internationally. Doug’s reputation and experience have led to consulting work, evaluations, workshops, and speaking engagements that he enjoys doing all across the country.



LIST OF THE MEMBERS

Cameron Bean – Melba, ID
 Wayne Berger – Buckingham, IL
 Jem Blueher – Livingston, MT
 Nancy Bull – Solvang, CA
 Douglas Champlin – Cardnerville, NV
 Ricky Day – Wortham, TX
 Marietta Dinneen – Cheyenne, WY
 Tom Elliott – Clinton, AR
 W. Eugene Goodrich – Sackville, New Brunswick,
 Canada
 Wayne Grouett – Longview, Alberta, Canada
 *Jason & Ashlee Ganoung – Lovell, WY
 *Gerry Groenewold – Grand Forks, ND
 Jack Greenhalgh – Reno, NV
 Kathy Graves – Yreka, CA
 Robin Haynes – Cheyenne, WY
 Dave Harper – Darby, MT
 Stan Haidle – Mitchell, SD
 *Doug Hanson – Letcher, SD
 David Jasie – Scottsdale, AZ
 *Rawhide Johnson – Cody, WY
 Rick Joy – Portola, CA
 Steve Limper – Yuba City, CA
 Arthur Lacerte – Santa Ynez, CA
 Sut & Margaret Marshall – Conway, NH
 Jeff McManus – Greybull, WY
 Swede Malmberg – Raynesford, MT
 Al Mulder – Murray, UT
 Roy Nonella – Santa Rosa, CA
 Buz Nyhart – Twin Bridges, MT
 Bill Nigg – Browns Valley, MN
 Debbie Oquist – Santa Barbara, CA
 **Arthur Perry – Santa Ynez, CA
 Roger Peterson – Long Beach, CA
 Pat Palmer – Lamar, CO
 Gordon Rock – Mercer Island, WA
 Jessie Rucker – Los Alamitos, CA
 Cecelia Reuter – Fort Jones, CA
 Bill Rice – Turlock, CA
 *David Sneed – Flippin, AR
 Ray Stokes – Sidney, NE
 Meade Simpson – Wilton, CA
 *Michael Sanborn – Wilmington, CA
 John Sullivan – Maple Valley, WA
 Alden Townsend – Valley Center, CA
 Bobby Tanner – Santa Barbara, CA
 David VanOvershelde – Overland Park, KS
 *Ken Wheeling – North Ferrisburg, VT
 Cub Wolfe – Wellington, CA
 Allan & Renay Watt – Aubrey, TX
 Santa Ynez Valley Historical Museum – Santa
 Ynez, CA
 Carriage & Western Art Museum of Santa Barbara –
 Santa Barbara, CA

* Board member.

** Lifetime member.

2010 membership dues are due, so please submit them early to take advantage of the discounts offered at the Cody event for all National Stagecoach and Freight Wagon Association members.

Individual	\$30.00
Family	\$50.00
Institutions	\$150.00
Corporate	\$1500.00

Please make checks payable to the *Yellowstone Historical Center*, and send your membership dues to:

Ashlee Ganoung
 PO Box 264
 Lovell, WY 82431

*Looking forward to seeing you at
 the meeting and conference in Cody!*

