



National Stagecoach and Freight Wagon Association NEWSLETTER

Summer 2010

NSFWA Conference

Set within the history-rich, picturesque landscape of Cody, Wyoming, the 3rd Annual National Stagecoach and Freight Wagon Association (NSFWA) meeting enjoyed a huge success, with attendees from all over the United States. From the official kickoff of activities, the event calendar was chock-full of educational opportunities, including a wealth of information from numerous presentations, extensive museum collections, hands-on demonstrations, western vehicle tours, artifact displays, and vendor booths.

Throughout the diverse and in-depth itinerary, member comments were overwhelmingly positive and enthusiastic. In fact, rarely do western enthusiasts have the opportunity to learn so much about early trails and vehicles in such a short time while networking with so many others of like interest. It made for an exciting atmosphere with new friends and faces quickly becoming an important part of the NSFWA family.

With goals committed to providing authoritative resource information that reinforces the legacies of early American trails, western vehicles, and the people and industry that supported it all, the NSFWA worked to make this a special experience for all attendees. According to event coordinators, Ashlee Ganoung and Rawhide Johnson, "We worked closely with area businesses, speakers, and museum curators to help provide an extensive, motivating, and inspirational excursion for all attendees. It's been very rewarding to hear so much positive feedback."

Throughout the event, members invested their time into taking ownership and pride in this unique organization. A portion of the conference was in conjunction with the community of Cody since it covers so many of the same aspects the NSFWA promotes and emphasizes. We want to extend our sincere appreciation to the Buffalo Bill Historical Center for hosting the first day of the event.

The first day of the conference was filled with a number of presentations covering a wide range of informative and interesting topics.

Covering the history of his family's Buffalo Bill Stagecoach, Gerry Groenewold took us back in time to the actual trail that it was used upon, told the story of its history and restoration, and emphasized the importance of studying and preserving the knowledge of these relics of the West.

David Sneed's presentation, Western Vehicle Brands and Recent Discoveries, gave insight into the magnitude of the wagon builder's industry, with a look into the companies, their history, what each



Rawhide Johnson discussing harness details.

contributed to the region they were produced in, and how they influenced other makers and the industry as a whole.

Doug Hansen explained in his presentation, Ft. Pierre Deadwood Trail Revisited, how reenactments and participation in reliving the actual trails answered many questions about how and why things were done and presented a number of new questions to be explored and discovered.

Paul Fees revealed the history of the BBHC's Buffalo Bill Stagecoach and the part it played in entertaining audiences from around the world and giving them a taste of the Wild West.

Private tours of the inner workings of the museum gave participants insight into how museum pieces are acquired, cataloged, and preserved. This exclusive opportunity to take part in a vault walk of the archives gave members a good understanding of the importance of preservation.

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





Courtesy of David Sneed, Wheels That Won The West® Archives.

Rawhide Johnson and one of his recent vehicle conservation projects.

The social hour and dinner provided an excellent chance for members to share their interests and connect with one another as they dined on a delicious prime rib meal at the Cody Cattle Company.

The second day, members showcased their information through photos, books, and artifacts as they presented and explained their particular interests and shared their stories. It was great to see this diversity of interests in people who share the same passion for the preservation of the horse-drawn world. Members shared interests in organizations, historic trails and reenactments, collections, and documents. It was expressed that one of the main objectives of the NSFSA should be a focus on combining these pieces of information, thereby to help our existing organization to grow, to develop a better understanding of the significance of the stagecoaches and freight wagons in building our country, and to preserve the knowledge and information for the benefit of future generations.

Jeff McManus gave an informative presentation on his research of the Local Freighting Trails in the Cody area where he has participated in actual reenactments. This presentation demonstrated the fortitude of the early pioneers and presented a large number of historic photos depicting the actual use of those trails.



Jeff McManus explaining wagon construction details at Trail Town.

Rawhide Johnson gave a hands-on demonstration of the evolution of the stagecoach harness—its parts and benefits—and also on the use and discovery of a number of related artifacts, as well as interpreting historic photos of the stagecoaches in Yellowstone.

Members had the opportunity to partake in an unscheduled, interactive tour of Cody's Trail Town Museum, which houses a large number of relics and vehicles. Doug Hansen and David Sneed led the tour to point out some of the identifying features of the various wagons and builders, including Bain, Peter Schuttler, Studebaker, Weber, Winona, Newton, Springfield, and Columbus, as well as a discussion of their uses and the terminology of the parts of the wagons. Vehicles ranging from mountain wagons, Yellowstone stages, ranch wagons, ice wagons, and sheep wagons illustrated the diverse characteristics of these rugged vehicles that served to help build this equally rugged country.



Ashlee Ganoung discussing restoration projects.

We were enthralled with the venue for the final evening activities hosted by the Mountain Trails Gallery. Rawhide Johnson started off the night with his accounts of the conservation of a Concord Coach and provided a talk on the use of the Yellowstone stagecoaches in the development of this National Wonder. The final event was appropriately displayed amid a great mix of western art sculptures and bronzes which served to showcase the artistry and design of these historic vehicles that had been admired over the 2 days of the conference. Sculpture artist Vic Payne presented an educational tour into the process of creating a bronze sculpture. The members enjoyed catered, delicious hor d'oeuvres and refreshments served right off an authentic cowboy chuck wagon. Western music entertainment made the night complete.

The NSFSA is not just an organization; it is an enthusiastic gathering of individuals passionate about stagecoaches, freight wagons, and every aspect of their history, design, use, and preservation. Made up of hard-working and devoted enthusiasts and experts, the NSFSA is committed to uncovering the history of our first stagecoaches and freight wagons, which helped provide communication, commerce, and industry to our nation long before railroads and motor vehicles, as well as preserving our heritage for future generations to explore.

making it 50 to 60 miles closer to the Hills than Sidney or Cheyenne. In 2008, marvelous reenactments of all three of these freight trails were brought together in a documentary history celebration. That historic event, primarily headed up by the South Dakota folks, had Jerold Kessler as the wagon master for its train, Ben Kern as wagon master for the Cheyenne train, and Ray Stokes as wagon master for the Sidney train.



In the modern world of today, the history of our country and communities is far more forgotten than retained. Through the work of great organizations such as the National Stagecoach and Freight Wagon Association, the Oregon-California Trails Association, and others, this history is being preserved. May we continue working to keep it alive for others to come.

References in this article are from the author and Loren Avey's book *Lynchings, Legends, & Lawlessness: The Story of Historical Sidney, Nebraska: The Gateway to the Gold Rush in the Black Hills of Dakota*. This 621-page book is a masterpiece for any historian's library.

By Ray Stokes,
Sidney, Nebraska
(with edits by Leah Hansen, Letcher, SD)

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