

The Al Kaly Shrine Mule Train Celebrates Fifty Years

Submitted by Gale Fortney



John Ladd beside a statue of a Shriner and a child. Remarkably John Ladd is the last of the riding charter members of the Mule Train and is currently 94 years old. John was also on the cover of the Western Mule Magazine in February of 2000

In 1957 the Army decommissioned its mule units at Fort Carson, Colorado (south of Colorado Springs). Fort Carson was the last Army fort to maintain Army mules. Several enterprising Nobles who were Army Reserve members of the mule units decided to begin a new Shrine Mounted Patrol and named it the Al Kaly Shrine Mule Train. They purchased twenty-eight of the decommissioned mules for \$25.00 per animal.

The twelve new Mule Train Nobles transported their mules to new homes and made them comfortable in their corrals with hay and water. The mules would have none of it and half of them escaped during the night. They made their way back to Fort Carson some fifteen miles away, the place they called home. The mules broke out the following two nights and quickly retraced their steps back to Fort Carson. Finally they adapted to their new homes and decided to stay put.

The early years of the Mule Train were spent hashing out constitutions and bylaws, uniforms, transportation hassles, planning for a better future, but mostly dealing with money woes. The Mule Train paraded in the Central States Shrine Association Convention in St. Louis, Missouri in 1958 and became active in local parades and functions.

Highlighting the early years' performances was the Mule Train's selection to represent the state of Colorado in President Kennedy's Inauguration. The Mule Train Nobles and their mules suffered through eight hours of waiting for the parade in very cold conditions. Eight inches of fresh snow had fallen the night before.

1966 brought about major changes. The El Paso County Commissioner notified the Mule Train that they were to vacate their rent-free county land the mules enjoyed. The Mule Train members with little money, purchased twelve and a half acres of land for \$24,000. This land was located in Fountain, Colorado, south of Colorado Springs.

The chore of moving to a new location was repeated in 1973. The Mule Train members purchased a little less than five acres just off of I-25, south of Colorado Springs. The property, a former dairy farm, had some old buildings, a barn and silo. The old farmhouse was demolished but a trailer was moved in to house the retired rancher hired to run the ranch. Later a new clubhouse called the Tack

Room was constructed for the members to enjoy.

Twenty-two more acres of adjoining land was purchased in 1977. This brought the ranch property up to twenty-seven acres which is the current size of the mule ranch. The Tack Room was extended to its current configuration in 1980.

The success and fame of the Mule Train grew over the years. An invitation to parade in the 1984 Tournament of Roses Parade was received and welcomed. Sixty-five members, wives and guests made the trip. Members and their wives arose at 2:00 a.m. in order to ready the mules and arrive at the marshaling area. They waited for hours to enter the parade and when they did they rode proudly over the five-mile route and made a wonderful impression on those that saw them. Despite the financial burden of transporting the animals that distance and the time and cost for each member to travel to Pasadena, California, the mule train again participated in the Tournament of Roses Parade in 1995.



Mule Train property owned since 1973.

This property is located just off I-25 south of Colorado Springs, a familiar sight to all passers by.

Other highlights over the years included two appearances in the Tournament of

Roses Parade in Pasadena, California three appearances in the Fiesta Bowl



The Al Kaly Shrine Mule Train riding in the Fiest Bowl Parade in Phoenix, Arizona

Parade in Phoenix, Arizona and Internationally the Calgary Stampede in Calgary, Canada as well as providing mules for the Army Air Force football games and attending most of the Shrine Parades and conventions in the central and western states along with supplying mules for the 10th Mountain Division reunion in Leadville, Colorado in 1992.

The Mule Train members feel an air of excitement as they plan their many celebratory activities this year. One of the highlights will be a barbecue which will

be held at the mule ranch on Saturday, July 21, 2007. The members will also create a memorabilia book with photos from years past as well as articles and photos of the current year.

The Mule Train 50th Anniversary activities chairman is Gale Fortney. If any readers have anecdotes or extra photos of a Mule Train memory you'd like to share, please contact Gale at 719-596-5248 or mail him at 5019 Half Moon Drive, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80915-1120.

The philanthropy of the Shrine is to support eighteen orthopedic hospitals and three burns institutes for children. Care is provided at no cost to the patients who qualify regardless of race, creed or color.

The Al Kaly Mule Train Motto is "We Ride So Children Can Walk".

