

## **PREFACE**

The Al Kaly Mule Train has been active since 1957. As members of the Mule Train (or potential members), we believe it is imperative that our membership knows what it takes to keep this Shrine unit alive and well. We urge you to read this booklet so that you are aware of the level of effort and work, money (dues and fund raising), and fun that is required to make the Mule Train continue to be recognized as one of the most outstanding and famous units in the world of Shrinedom.

## AL KALY MULE TRAIN HISTORY

We like to say that the U.S. Army is to blame for the existence of the Al Kaly Mule Train. That's because in September of 1957, the Army decided that the day of mounted units had come to an end. Fort Carson, Colorado was the home of the 5th Infantry Division. The Division contained two pack mule units -- the Fourth Field Artillery Battalion (Pack) and the 35th Quartermaster Battalion (Pack) -- which were the last two mule units existing in the Army. The deactivation order for the units had been published and the day for auctioning off the animals had been set.

Al Kaly Temple had several members in those units, one being Warrant Officer Al Rodee. He approached Potentate Alan Ladd (also a member of the Army Reserve mule unit) and requested permission to form a mounted mule unit within the Temple. Permission was granted, and on the day of the sale Noble Rodee selected 28 animals that he considered suitable for the new unit. Twenty-eight animals were purchased for \$25 per head.

Later that afternoon, the new owners, with a great pride, took the mules to their new homes. During the night, over half of them managed to jump the corral fences and were back in the stables at Fort Carson the next morning. They had not yet been exposed to the good life of an Al Kaly Mule Train mule.

As with any new unit, numerous issues and questions arose daily. How much should dues be? What kind of uniforms should be selected? What kind of gear should be used? And what should we actually do as a unit? Imagine twelve charter members, each with different ideas and wishes, trying to formulate a coherent unit with a coherent plan. But they did, in time. The question of where to keep the mules was not actually a problem as each member of the new unit had to figure out where to keep his own mule(s).

Being proud of the new unit, plans were formulated to attend the 1958 Central States Shrine Association (CSSA) convention in St. Louis. Al Rodee was directed to sell two mules for the best possible price to help pay for the trip. Money woes were a constant headache and all sorts of fundraisers were proposed and rejected. The Mule Train started appearing in local parades and was soon attracting much attention. Uniforms and gear questions still arose and were debated in heated discussions.

In late 1960, Democrat John F. Kennedy was about to be inaugurated as President. Colorado had a Democratic Governor. Due to the influence of some powerful Colorado Senators, the Mule Train was selected to be the official Colorado Unit to participate in Kennedy's Inaugural Parade. The details of that trip are still vivid in the memories of those who participated in the adventure. One thing that remains in the memory of all was the biting cold weather. Eight inches of snow had fallen the previous night and a thirty-mile-per-hour wind kept the temperatures well below freezing all day long. There was an eight-hour wait to begin the parade, and at its conclusion, one of the riders was so stiff that he had to be lifted off his mule and carried into a waiting bus. A few good drinks and the heated bus restored a little life to him.

From the beginning, Mule Train members liked to see faraway places. The big trip in 1962 to the EAST-WEST Shrine game in San Francisco was no exception. This trip also included a detour to the Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena. The Mule Train was not invited to this parade, but we went just for fun. The freight from Colorado Springs to San Francisco was \$40 per head. Thirty-five years later, in 1997, the freight rate was \$2.00 per mile and would have cost about \$5000.00.

In 1964, when the Mule Train was seven years old, no set of uniform gear had yet been adopted. The members finally settled on the purchase of black saddles and white plastic gear to add a certain formality to the mules' parade tack. At the same time, the frock coat and striped gambler trousers were adopted as the riders' uniforms to add formality to the men. Now that the men and mules had formality and uniformity, we were ready for the big time, which was yet to come.

One of the best trips for the Mule Train was the summer of 1966. Charles O. Findley, owner of the Kansas City Blues, invited the Mule Train to appear at a Kansas City ball game with all expenses paid. It was an offer that could not be turned down. Another event occurred in 1966 when the El Paso County Commissioners notified the Mule Train that it would have to leave its rent-free El Paso County property and find another place for the mules. During our stay on county property the monthly dues, including mule care, would average about \$10.00 each per month.

In October of 1966, and with no money, 12½ acres were purchased for \$24,000.00 in Fountain, a suburb of Colorado Springs. 2½ acres were sold for \$16,000, with member Orvil Potts financing the balance with no interest. The Mule Train has truly had some dedicated Shrine members.

The Mule Train had assumed the care of Hambone, the famous Army jumping mule. In 1966, Hambone died and the Army requested that he be buried at Fort Carson. This was done and the Mule Train furnished the plaque for his grave.

In 1968 a ladies' uniform was designed and the tradition has been ongoing ever since. The uniform has changed several times over the years, but the ladies still have a uniform. They were officially known as the Assets for years. They are today known as the Mule Train Ladies.

Transporting mules in private trailers was getting to be a big chore so the Mule Train purchased a used trailer, financed by donations, and converted it to haul mules from a central point. This plan has worked well since its inception.

1973 was a year of decision for locating a permanent home for the Mule Train. We had to move the mules, so we purchased 4.887 acres on I-25, just south of Colorado Springs. The property had an old farmhouse, a large dairy barn and loafing sheds, hay sheds, and a small garage, all for under \$50,000. As usual the unit had no money but Mule Train members advanced the funds to the unit with no interest.

So the mules had a home but had no one to care for them. A deal was made with a retired rancher, and he moved his trailer home and wife onto the property and the unit was in business. We had an old house, but it was of no use as a clubhouse. One of our members agreed to demolish the house for the salvage. That took care of one problem, but we still had no suitable place for the members to meet or anything else.

So several members met and agreed to donate building materials and money for a 20' x 30' clubhouse. Further study indicated that this building would be too small and so we went back to our loyal members and the contributions were increased to build a 30' x 50' shell building. Due to zoning regulations, a building permit could not be issued for a clubhouse, but by calling it a "Tack Room" everything was made legal. A concrete pad was poured, supplies arrived, and enough volunteers arrived to construct the shell in one eight-hour day. It took considerably longer to finish and furnish the room, but now the Mule Train had a very nice clubhouse aka the Tack Room.

By 1974 the Mule Train had established itself as a successful parade unit, but something was missing. In order to fill this void, we decided to form a precision drill team to compete with other Shrine mounted units. It was formed and is still the only mule precision drill team in all of Shrinedom.

The drill team enjoyed immediate success and began to accumulate numerous trophies, which soon exhausted the available space for them in the Tack Room. One of our parade drill team members named Art died in 1980, and his widow's generosity made it possible to add a 12' x 50' addition to the tack room. In honor of them it was named "Art's Room." The addition made it possible for us to construct a nice bar and lounge area and to provide more room for the trophies.

Against the opposition of the Colorado State Highway Department a big Shrine logo was painted on the roof of the barn. The barn is located next to I-25 and the vehicle count that passes our sign runs into thousands of cars per day. Money cannot buy this kind of advertising for the Shrine.

An agreement was made with Fort Carson to bury the last surviving army mule, Wind River, alongside Hambone at Fort Carson. When she died at the age of 46, the Army requested that Wind River be stuffed and placed in the Fort Carson Museum. This was done with the Mule Train paying the expenses. The Army moved Wind River to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, where she is on display at the museum.

We had a trailer for the mules but lacked motor power. Ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) was approved for the purchase of a 1970 Kenworth tractor in good condition. Our action was just like getting married -- the initial price was cheap, but the upkeep was terrific. It was sold a few years later much to the relief of the membership.

The year of 1977 was another year of expenses. Twenty-two acres of pastureland adjoining the corrals were purchased and this necessitated raising the rent for the Mule Train from \$525.00 to \$900.00 per month and eventually to \$1100.00. In spite of everything, a group

traveled to Bishop, California for the Bishop Mule Days Celebration. This proved to be one of the most enjoyable trips for the Mule Train.

Everyone loves a mystery, and in 1980 a mystery trip was planned. The trip started out with three motor homes filled with members and wives. The couple bringing the least amount of luggage was to be awarded a prize. All types of scams were presented. Some members put on three sets of underwear and the ladies' purses were loaded with everything but the kitchen sink. The luggage was weighed and the winner weighed-in at just a few ounces. Cries of foul were heard from those hauling heavier luggage.

In 1982, the 25th Anniversary of the Mule Train was celebrated with a roast pig as the main entrée. Some of the guests accused the Mule Train of having roasted a mule for the event. That year the mules traveled 5,834 miles at a cost of \$1.00 per mile.

After winning 1st Place in the 1983 Imperial Parade in Denver, the Mule Train was invited to participate in the 1984 Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena, California. Sixty-five members, wives, and guests made the trip. Participating in the Rose Parade was a chore. We had to get up at 2:00 a.m. in order to enter the parade lineup, and then we waited hours before being able to parade. After the five-mile parade route with thousands of cheering people on the sidelines, satisfaction was guaranteed. Many amusing things happened on this trip but space does not permit recounting them here.

Columbia, Tennessee was another big event. They take their mules seriously in Tennessee, and our mules received a warm welcome especially with the drill and flag ceremonies. This was the year of inflation, and the Mule Train rent was increased to \$1100.00 per month, and that is a lot of money for such a small unit to pay.

Mulehaven, Ltd, the real estate owners, received a windfall in 1986 when a large outdoor sign company offered to lease space on the property for two signs. This space is in a prime location on I-25, and this rental enabled Mule Train to pay less rent that scaled back the financial burden on its members.

For the second time, Al Kaly hosted the Central States Shrine Association with three Mule Train members as the top players: Past President of the Association John I. Ladd, President of the Association, Myron Bodam, and Director General Dave Frank. Shrine attendance for this session was one of the largest in the Association's history.

Property ownership always presents problems, and so it was with the Mule Train. Due to real estate developments in our area, our supply of domestic water from an adjacent spring became very erratic. With the aid of two water witches looking for a stream of underground water, a well was drilled to a depth of 36 feet. The flow was sufficient to provide enough water for the clubhouse, the caretaker's house, and the mules, all for the cost of \$2,000.00.

Entering into the 90s we were occupied with the usual trials and tribulations. We participated in Imperial Parades, competed in several Associations, rode in another Rose Bowl parade, participated in three Fiesta Bowl parades and various other bowl game parades. Also in

this timeframe, the Mule Train became the source of mules for display at the Army-Air Force football games in Colorado Springs.

The big project for 1990 was to completely tear out the interior of the large dairy and hay barn. Due to its age, some of the pillars had to be replaced, a new concrete floor was poured, and restrooms were added. Upon completion, the Mule Train now had a facility to entertain over 500 guests. In the renovation, a dance floor upstairs was finished so we could hold old-fashioned barn dances.

1991 was a very busy year with numerous parades, drill practices, BBQs, a Halloween barn party, and entertaining the Imperial Potentate. We even got him to ride a mule.

A highlight of 1992 was the invitation by the veterans of the 10th Mountain Division to bring some mules to their reunion in Leadville, Colorado. Three riders with mules and their wives spent two days with the veterans. Our riders were provided with authentic WWII uniforms that did not fit and appropriate gear for the mules. When the group appeared in the parade, many of the Vets had tears in their eyes. Some had not seen a mule since the war. The second day the riders moved to Camp Hale, home for the Division. Most of the day was taken by the veterans petting the mules, taking pictures, and some actually mounted the mules for old time's sake, and of course, to have their picture taken.

The scrap and photo albums from 1993 through 1996 do not show any outstanding events. Routine appearances, Shrine Association competition, and Imperial Sessions were in order. These were in addition to the numerous local Shrine activities and parades.

The Mule Train membership has contributed in excess of \$4,000,000.00 to Shriners Hospitals for Children Salt Lake City to help the hospital help children.

Celebration of the 40th Anniversary of the Mule Train occurred on September 27, 1997 with a brunch for all present. In attendance were the only two living Charter Members -- Darrell Stone and John Ladd. In addition to the brunch, George McCleary, President elect for 1998, had a beautiful medallion cast and each member received one as a permanent memento of the occasion.

In 2007 we held our 50th Year Anniversary celebration, which was well attended by Shriners, many people from the community, as well as members of other Shrine equestrian units from out of state. It was a fun day for everyone, the high point being the Flag-Presentation Ceremony, which many of our Shriners and Ladies had never seen until then.

As the years go by there is always maintenance to do, and in 2014 we had the Mule Barn painted and other structural items that needed attention. In 2015, the interior of the Tack Room was painted and repaired after many years of use.