

Edward Butler's Park Drag

by Lynne Belluscio

Horse shows can be boring, just watching horses going around in circles until the judge decides who looks the best, or which horse trots the right way, or whether you're holding the whip in the right position.

On the other hand, last week at Walnut Hill, I had the chance to talk with some folks about Edward Butler's park drag. Back in 1990, I wrote about the Butler carriages and explained that there was a lot of misinformation about which vehicle was here at the museum. We have Butler's C-Spring Victoria built by the Brewster Company of New York City. A newspaper article claims that the vehicle that was given to the Historical Society was the one that President McKinley rode in on the day that he was assassinated in Buffalo in 1901. The truth is, McKinley rode in a landau, probably owned by Butler. The same article claims that twelve people could ride on the roof of the vehicle – another stretch of the imagination. Butler owned a roof seat break or trap that could accommodate 12 people and the park drag could sit a lot of people on the roof.

Edward H. Butler was born in LeRoy in 1850. For a couple of years he worked for the *LeRoy Gazette*, but in 1873 he moved to Buffalo and eventually established the *Sunday News*. Later he started the *Buffalo Evening News* and although he lived in a variety of mansions in Buffalo, he maintained a home in LeRoy. He bought the former Lampson house on West Main Street, complete with green house and huge carriage house.

The Butler C-Spring Victoria is on display in the basement of the Academic Building, below the Jell-O Gallery. In back of the carriage is an image of the Butler house in LeRoy. (It was torn down in the 1960s and was located where Save-A-Lot is now. The Butler Carriage House is the Knights of Columbus building.) Someday I will write about Edward Butler, but here is the story about his elegant park drag.

The park drag is a class of



Butler's Park Drag c. 1895

private coaches that were built for members of driving clubs that were formed in London in the early 19th century. This was a sporting hobby of the rich and famous. The design of these coaches was taken from a larger version of the Royal mail coach of 1835.

There were two coaching clubs in London and the members drove their coaches to race meetings and other sporting events. Their friends would sit on the top to view the event. A lavish meal could be served out of the back. The other style of coach of the period was known as a road coach. These were the public coaches that carried people from one town to another in England. They were marked with the names of the towns that they served and they often had names such as the "Nimrod" or "Tantivy".

Edward Butler had his park drag built to order by F & R Shanks of London about 1880. Shanks was one of the two best known coach makers in England. The coach was shipped to the United States and as far as I can determine was kept here in LeRoy for Butler to "play with" when he was home. There is no mention of a coaching club in either Rochester or Buffalo. I haven't been able to determine if Butler took his coach to Geneseo to hob knob with the Wadsworths, who

owned an Abbot and Downing stage coach – an American-made public coach.

Edward Butler died in 1914. His son maintained the home on West Main and he died in 1956. At some point the park drag was sold and it became the property of William C. Faugh, Jr. of Sky Acres Ranch in Rochester. In March 1954, Faugh sold the park drag to John M. Seabrook of Salem, New Jersey. Seabrook drove the park drag and had it repainted by Tom Shelton in 1990. In 2002, John Seabrook sold his entire carriage collection and the Butler park drag was sold.

This past week I talked with a man who worked for the Seabrook family and he told me that the

Butler's park drag was bought by a man by the name of "Bullock" who lived in California. After a little searching I discovered Peter Bullock, who owns and operates a breeding farm for Kladruber horses. These large carriage horses are from Czechoslovakia and are a very old breed. Most frequently they are white, but can also be grey. For a long time, breeding stock was not allowed out of Czechoslovakia. Today, several driving stables use the sturdy Kladruber carriage horse for competition. Perhaps, some day when I get out to California to visit my son and his family, I'll be able to visit the Kladruber farm and get a couple of photographs of Edward Butler's park drag.



Butler's Park Drag - Seabrook Collection.