

Moses Hartz—A Conestoga Wagon Teamster

By H. C. FREY *

The following brief story of the life of Moses Hartz, a Conestoga Wagon teamster of the early nineteenth century, was told to the writer by the great, great nephew of the former guardian of young Mr. Hartz. While the story has been handed down from generation to generation, it is reputed to be authentic in every detail.

More than a century ago, Moses Hartz, a young man nineteen years of age, came to the Conestoga Valley of Lancaster County in search of work. He applied at the home of Mr. Mast, a farmer, a former teamster, and the fore-father of what proved later to be a family of teamsters. Mr. Mast turned the stranger away, telling him that he had no such employment as the young man desired. The penniless young man, with his worldly possessions wrapped in a handkerchief and tucked under his arm, was broken-hearted and turned to walk away. As he walked down the path from the farmhouse, the heart of the old farmer was touched and he beckoned him to come back. A rear view of the youngster showed that he was a strong, robust man of perfect physical proportions with the possibilities of making a hard-working and useful farm hand. Mr. Mast consented to give him work and adopt him into his home, for a while at least. The young man proved his worth on the farm during the summer and attracted the attention of the neighbors by his honest and trustworthy habits and his willingness to do plenty of hard work.

In the fall the farmer fitted up young Hartz with a Conestoga Wagon, six horses and bells, and told him to wend his way to Pittsburgh and on to Ohio. He was instructed to take on any hauling he could get en route, and to bring from Ohio a load of clover seed for the use of the Conestoga Valley farmers for their spring sowing. He was requested to be sure to get back in plenty of time to help to do the spring work on the farm. With those parting words young Moses Hartz started his career and venture as a teamster across the sparsely settled mountainous region of Pennsylvania. For the time being the young teamster and his team were in a sense lost to civilization. The means of communication were such that the young man neither communicated with his guardian nor did the old gentleman expect to hear from him during the severe, but what later proved to be a short winter season. Days, weeks, and months passed (the ground hog probably failed to see his shadow) and the warm days of spring made an earlier ap-

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pearance than in former years. Of course, it goes without saying that young Moses Hartz suffered the same experience as all other long distance teamsters in those days. He ate but two scanty meals a day, slept on the bar room floor, became hard-bitten (maybe frost-bitten) and toughened to the point of despising comforts.

When the spring season rushed in and the weather was favorable for spring work the time was up for the young Conestoga wagon teamster to make his way back to the fertile farm in the Conestoga Valley. Mr. Mast became alarmed and anxious concerning his whereabouts. The suspense of waiting was so great that the old farmer decided he would make a search for the missing teamster. From the number of horses in his stable, he selected his best rider, placed a saddle on his back, mounted him and proceeded westward on horseback over the only wagon road then in use in the hope of finding out something about the fate of the boy teamster. He continued on to Pittsburgh and over the Ohio state line. There he found the young man on his way east with the load of clover seed. The team was sleek looking, in excellent shape, and the young fellow was in a most happy mood. Mr. Mast was about to reprimand his ward (tactfully, of course) for his tardiness on his return trip, when young Hartz drew from his pockets goodly sums of money which he had earned for his guardian over and above his expenditures. He had been doing short hauls in the western state, business was so good, he was making money, and he consequently delayed his return trip just as long as possible. The old Pennsylvanian was pleased with this report, immediately proceeded back to Lancaster County on horseback, leaving the young man with the Conestoga wagon load of clover seed to find his way back over the mountains to his destination in the east.

By the time Moses Hartz got home clover seed had advanced considerably in price and the Conestoga Valley farmer sold it at a much greater profit than he had expected. The young man who was nearly turned away from the farmer's door had proven his trustworthiness and had shown that his ambition in life was to give unselfish service to others. With this initial trip for Mr. Mast, young Moses Hartz inaugurated his career as a teamster. As was the custom in those days, he worked on a farm during the summer season and teamed to the west in the winter. He was what was commonly known as a "Militia" teamster. Moses proved to be a good manager, and indefatigable worker and a righteous man. He attended and later united himself with the church of which the Masts were life-long members—called the Old Order Amish Congregation. He married a young woman of the same congregation and he later became Bishop in charge of the church.

Moses Hartz's career as a teamster, a farmer, and a minister, was a remarkable one. He often told of how he started farming with "five wheels," the four wheels on his old Pittsburgh wagon

and a wheel barrow. He and his wife were the industrious, self-sacrificing individuals that worked six days in the week and walked or rode horseback many miles to attend religious services on the Sabbath. He became one of the most prosperous farmers in Lancaster County, was a much-respected citizen, a leader in his community, and was reputed to be the owner of the largest farm in Conestoga Valley. He was hale, hearty, and robust and managed to ward off the calls of a physician all his life. He accumulated wealth and died at the ripe old age of ninety-eight, a splendid example of a successful life on earth and an eternal crown of glory as a reward for his sacrificial service to mankind.

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