



No Horsing Around! Unusual Records in the National Archives

Horses were used in many capacities, including by infantry officers. Detail from “Headquarters of Company “F”, 11th R.I. Infantry, Miners Hill, Va.” (NAID 524686), Mathew Brady Photographs of Civil War-Era Personalities and Scenes (NAID 524418), Record Group 111, Records of the Office of the Chief Signal Officer, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.

Claire Prechtel Kluskens, a senior reference and projects archivist at NARA, served as NGS registrar (1996–98) and director (1998–2000). She can be reached at birdlady2011@icloud.com and blogs at twelvekey.com.

Sales of surplus federal government property have been occurring for decades. However, lists of purchasers and the items they bought are normally temporary records, so it’s uncommon to find these records in the National Archives. One such surviving record is the List of Horses Sold, February 1864 (National Archives Identifier 68141923) in Record Group 92, Records of the Quartermaster General.

Nineteenth-century war was hell on both humans and the horses that provided motive power for supply wagons and cavalry units. By 1864, the Union Army had numerous animals no longer fit for strenuous military use. Horses aged quickly and became too tired, weak, or nervous. Yet the same horses could still be serviceable for quieter and less demanding farm and family transportation needs. Indeed, “weak and trembling” horses that sold at auction for a few dollars had cost the government one hundred dollars a year earlier. A newspaper article implied the “ages” of auctioned horses weren’t based on chronological years but on how worn out they were from previous usage.¹

Captain and Assistant Quartermaster James A. Ekin held a “Public Sale of Condemned Horses” on the land of William Worman near Frederick City, Maryland, on 12 February 1864.² Ekin paid \$6.50 for the use of Worman’s property, \$8 on advertising, \$4 on rope, \$30 to Levi

1. “Curiosities!” *Reading Times* (Reading, PA), 31 March 1864, p. 2; *Newspapers.com*.

2. “Public Sale of Condemned Horses.” *Examiner* (Frederick, MD), 10 February 1864, p. 2; *GenealogyBank.com*.

248	Bay Horse	8	40 00	Josiah Moore	40
249	Bay	4	40 00	John Stark	40
250	Bay	10	26 00	Peter Boyer	26
251	Bay	5	40 00	Augustus Strocker	40
252	Bay	7	23 00	Stephen Hays	23
253	Bay	7	50 00	Samuel Mitzel	50
254	Sorrel	4	00 00	David Hertzog	32

Detail from List of Horses Sold, February 1864, pp. 24-25 (NAID 68141923). The number and description of the horse (color, age, and sale price are on the left; the buyer and the amount paid are on the right).

Vanfaussan, probably the auctioneer, and smaller amounts to seven other men who helped with the sale, including Thomas Campbell, George H. Collins, M. D. Hornan, Angus Fraley, George Hiles, and two unnamed clerks. The horses were sold individually, not in lots, with payment in cash.

In all, Ekin sold 193 horses in Frederick. For each sale, the following information is given: color and age of the horse, sale price, buyer's name, and amount paid. Horse colors are usually reported as bay, black, dun, gray, and sorrel, spelled "sawrel" in the Frederick City list. Names of purchasers are also spelled creatively, such as Collins, which the clerk wrote down variously as Colens, Colen, and Colins, or the surname Rice, which the clerk recorded as Rise. The sale prices ranged from one to fifty-six dollars. The most expensive horse, an "8-year old" bay horse was purchased by Rev. Winebrener, while the second most expensive, a "7-year old" sawrer [sorrel] mare, was purchased by Lewis Bentz for fifty-four dollars.

Some purchases were made by men who could have been horse traders, such as Moses Andis, who bought thirty-one horses. Thomas Poffinberger, Aron Andis, Adam Ridenbaugh, and Milton Burk purchased a couple horses each. Other recurring surnames are Collins, Ogle, and Knockman. Professional men such as Dr. Savington (or Lavington) and Reverend Winebrener also purchased mounts. A few military officers bought horses, including Captains Reno and Heiskell and Major Bloomfield.

A week later on 19 February 1864, and continuing on 22 February, Ekin and fellow Captain and Assistant Quartermaster E. C. Reichenbach held an auction of 292 horses at Reading, Pennsylvania.³ They

sold 109 on the first day and the remaining 183 horses on the second day. A few horses died before the sale ended, as the expense list includes eight dollars for "vet[erinarian] & Dead [horses]." The auctioneer cost thirty-five dollars for two days. People involved in the sale were clerks named Karns, Forney, and Pollertin; twenty-one unnamed laborers, and an unstated number of unnamed riders who showed off the horses before or during bidding.

The clerk who recorded the information for the Reading list was a better speller of surnames than the clerk for the Frederick list. Purchasers of multiple horses included Jacob Smith, Joseph Rambo, F. Stucker, George Rice, Isaac Yoder, Peter High, N. S. Ludwig, Peter Boyer, G. A. Baker, John Yerger, and perhaps others. The most expensive horse, a "9-year old" sorrel (#274) was purchased by Peter High for sixty-nine dollars.

Researchers may want to check the list to see if it includes the names of ancestors who lived near Frederick, Maryland, or Reading, Pennsylvania, in 1864. Digital images of the List of Horses Sold, February 1864 (NAID 68141923) are available at <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/68141923>. The Frederick list is recorded on pages 2–10, while the Reading list is on pages 12–26. The final page of each sale gives a list of expenses involved in operating the sale, including hay, rope, sale yard rental, auctioneer fees, and pay to individual clerks and other persons.

The List of Horses Sold, February 1864, is just one of many unusual federal records held in the National Archives. More information and images of records are added frequently to NARA's online Catalog at <https://catalog.archives.gov>. 🌳

3. The sale was advertised as "Auction Sale of Condemned Stock" in the *Reading Times* (Reading, PA), p. 2, daily from 10 to 22 February 1864; [Newspapers.com](https://www.newspapers.com).