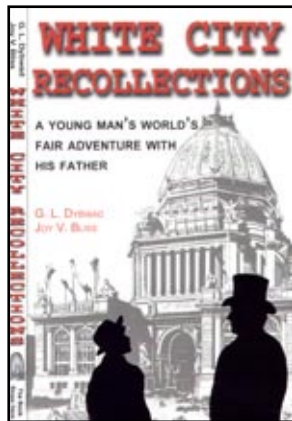


West Point Cadets: AWOL From the World's Columbian Exposition

By Joy V. Bliss and G. L. Dybwad #1926

In August 1893, eighteen-year-old Friend Pitts Williams and his father entrained at Olean, New York, and headed for Chicago and the World's Columbian Exposition. While at the Exposition, young Williams made careful notes about all he saw and typed a lengthy diary of his two-week adventure upon returning home. We purchased the original missal and amplified it with 270 pictures that show the exact sights he describes. The resulting book is *White City Recollections*.



Within a day of his arrival at the Exposition, Williams watched as West Point Cadets arrived from New York and marched to their camp on the Government Building Plaza near Lake Michigan. He wrote in his diary: “Their erect forms, straight backs, and finely fitting clothes made them appear great.” Williams later heard and wrote by way of incident that cadets were found AWOL at the downtown Chicago Palmer House hotel enjoying an unauthorized dinner, and that after a guard reported this activity, they were quartered in a tent when not on duty for the duration of their Chicago experience. News writers recounted the incident, and Williams learned that an examination was to be held to determine whether the cadets should be expelled when they returned to the academy.

Were they expelled? Finding the answer to this question uncovered interesting information about the West Point cadets and the Columbian Exposition encampment.

Each spring, cadets removed to summer camp. Coincident with the move in 1893 the cadets were told that the Corps would attend the Columbian Exposition in August. “That news made everything else taking place that summer seem insignificant,” writes Colonel George S. Pappas, in his article “The USMA Class of 1894.” [*Register of Graduates, Class of 1894 Centennial Edition, 1994*]. The Class of 1894, now Firsties, devoted special care and attention to training Plebes (second year cadets); they had to be well drilled and thoroughly disciplined before the trip. Pappas continues, “Special training was not limited to the Plebes; the happy-go-lucky Yearlings in summer camp were given special disciplinary attention.”

In mid-August, selected cadets rode the overnight train to Chicago to find their bivouac ready—a camp duplicating Fort Clinton summer camp at West Point. These cadets were officially representing the U.S. Army along with the U.S. Military Academy Band and a hospital detachment. The cadet contingent left West Point Station on August 19 and returned August 30. They were directed to follow regulations of their “blue book” (Orders, U.S. Corps of Cadets, March 15, 1893).

Cadets were honored at a reception in the New York State Building on August 21, and again the next evening with a grand ball attended by the prominent Exposition officers and Chicago

society people. *Report of the Board of General Managers of the Exhibit of the State of New York*, describes the cadets as “attracting universal admiration for their soldierly bearing, accurate drill and gentlemanly conduct when off duty.” Escapades (there were others) and disciplinary actions are not mentioned.

From the U.S. Military Academy Library Archives, Alan Aimone, Senior Librarian, identified the three cadets who had been AWOL at the Palmer House and uncovered further information about two of the men. Marcy W. Murray, Curatorial Assistant, Ringling Museum of Art, added information about the third cadet. Other details are from *Harper's Weekly*, September 9, 1893, and the internet.

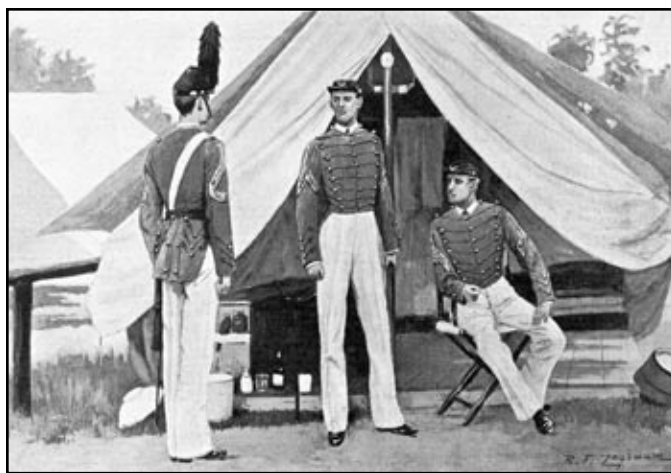
The cadets mentioned by Williams and identified by Aimone are Casper Hauzer Conrad, Jr., Louis Hermann Bash, and Herbert Barnum Seeley, all of the Class of 1895. They were discovered at the Palmer House on August 21 without authority and in civilian clothes. The threesome was placed in “close arrest,” meaning limited to the confines of the chain of camp sentinels, for the duration of their Exposition experience.

Conrad's appointment as a captain in the Battalion of Cadets was revoked, and Bash was relieved of being color guard. Seeley held no special position to rescind. Upon their return to West Point, the limit of arrest of the three cadets included the barracks, area of the barracks, and the gymnasium until further orders.

Harper's Weekly, September 9, 1893, applauds the cadets' severe treatment and the Corps' stern maintenance of discipline. “The three young men who suffered for their outing were dealt with wisely, and not only they but their fellows and successors will be better soldiers for their punishment.”

Did the three cadets become better soldiers? Their stories follow.

Casper Hauzer Conrad, Jr. [1872-1954] graduated in 1895, ranking fifth in the class and was commissioned Second Lieutenant of Cavalry. He held several cavalry positions before the 360th Infantry Texas Brigade was formed in 1917; Conrad, Lieutenant Colonel, Regular Army, was assigned as its Colonel. The next year he wrote, *A Short History of the 360th Infantry Texas Brigade*. Subsequently he was on the War Department Staff and commanded a Service of Supply (S.O.S.) in Europe. After the War, he graduated with honors from Army Service Schools and in 1922 earned a degree in Agriculture with honors from the University of Illinois. The



West Point Encampment—World's Columbian Exposition
Harper's Weekly: September 9, 1893



Cadet Casper Hauzer Conrad, Jr.



Drill of the Cadets on the Government Plaza Parade Grounds, August 1893
Their camp in the left background

Rossiter Johnson, *A History of the World's Columbian Exposition*



General Louis Hermann Bash



General Conrad

following year he graduated from Army War College and served as Inspector General in Manila. In 1928 he was appointed Brigadier General in the Regular Army and for the remaining years before his retirement in 1936, he was Commander and Post Commander at several forts. He died in 1954 and is buried in the National

Cemetery at Arlington, Virginia.

Conrad's service included positions of high command and staff and administrative duties in many fields. He received the Distinguished Service Medal for meritorious service as S.O.S. Commander.

Louis Hermann Bash [1872-1952] graduated from West Point in 1895 forty-seventh in his class and was commissioned Second Lieutenant in the Infantry. He was recommended for promotion for gallantry in action for his service in Cuba during the Spanish-American War where he participated in the assault of San Juan Hill. In 1898 he was promoted to first lieutenant, serving in the Philippines to 1907. He was promoted to major in 1916. As Adjutant General to the S.O.S., he served with the 16th Infantry during World War I and earned the Distinguished Service Medal. In 1929 he was appointed Assistant to the Quartermaster General. He chose the date for the dedication of the Wright Brothers National Memorial and was master of ceremonies. "The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier" was completed in 1932 under control of Brigadier General Bash. He subsequently directed the huge Army building program during the great depression. In 1934 President Roosevelt appointed him Quartermaster General with the rank of Major General, a reward for more than forty years of service. On his death in 1952, a fellow West Point classmate wrote: "With such service as Louis', whose superior quality has been proven by the testimony from above and below, West Point's luster received an extra polish, his classmates' pride in him a lasting stimulation and his country an immeasurable benefit."

Herbert Barnum Seeley [1870-1914] was admitted to the Class of 1895 on June 15, 1892. His mother, the youngest of P. T. Barnum's four daughters, died when Herbert was seven. At West Point his academic performance lacked and he accumulated many

demerits. His archives file card reads: "Absent without leave August 21, 1893, while Corps of Cadets were at World's Fair in Chicago, Ill. Tried by G.C.M. [General Court Martial] ... September 26, 1893." Seeley immediately resigned from West Point effective that day.

In 1896 Seeley came into prominence when he hosted a bachelor party for his brother. The party was raided at its height by a New York City precinct captain who understood "Little Egypt" and others were performing indecent dances. The women and several diners were arrested, and Seeley was indicted for conspiring to induce the women to commit a crime. The investigation excited much interest, as several prominent men had attended the party. Seeley protested, but in the end, the police were exonerated. All later news mentioning Seeley includes the infamous "Seeley Dinner" at Sherry's. Three years later Seeley took the Keeley Institute Gold Cure, passing himself as G. B. Haggar. This popular, albeit humbug, treatment was touted for alcoholism and other addictions. At White Plains, Seeley made himself popular with other inmates as well as people of the town.

P. T. Barnum left a sizable estate when he died in 1891 and Herbert's one-ninth was moderately estimated at over \$250,000. His aunt and brother were appointed trustees of his fund, and he fought for years for a release. They steadfastly refused on the ground they did not consider him capable but finally gave up the fight and resigned in December 1900. Meanwhile, Seeley had married Lucie Mitchell on New Years Day 1900. She divorced him in 1903. When the *New York Times* announced the divorce it added that Mr. Seeley had inherited a fortune from his grandfather, which he succeeded in spending in just a few years. He died in 1914 at age forty-four.

We speculate that even before Seeley entered West Point he was overindulged and troubled and would have been dismissed for academic and disciplinary reasons had he not resigned. Might this affable, carefree, and rich older cadet have been the ringleader of the Palmer House hijinx? We suspect so. Perhaps the severity of punishment set Conrad and Bash back on course. They quickly recovered and proceeded on to distinguished military careers.

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