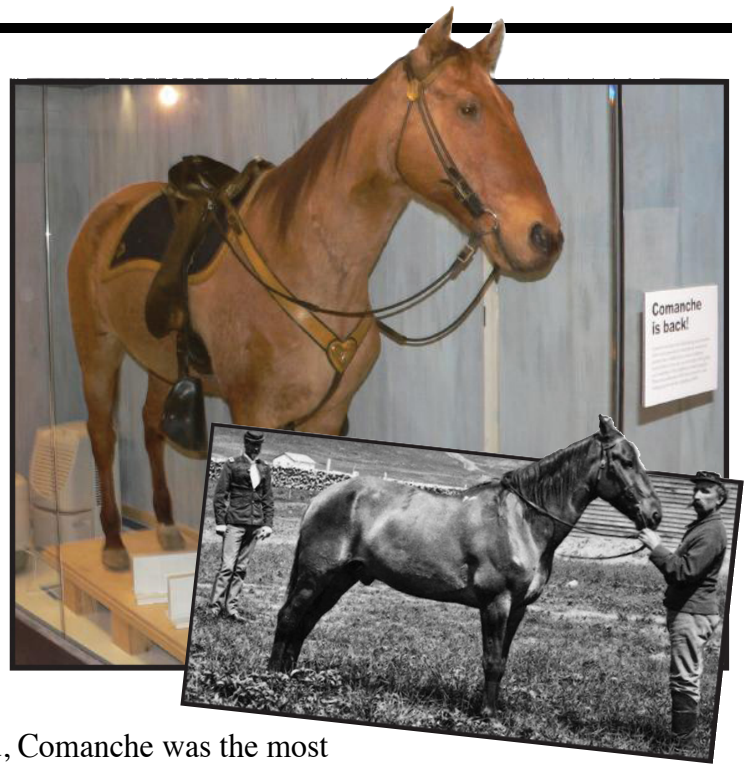




For a generation who are themselves now dead, Comanche was the most famous horse in America. He was quite simply a living legend and became as revered in death as in was in life. It is believed that Comanche was born to a mustang mare somewhere in the southwestern Great Plains around 1862. "Mustangers," or wild horse hunters, captured Comanche and the other mustangs in his herd in 1868. The mustangs were taken to St. Louis to be sold to the army, and on April 3 of that year that the Cavalry purchased Comanche for \$90. Skirmishes with the Indians in 1868 had left the Cavalry short of ponies, and Lt. Tom Custer, brother of the ill-fated general, was sent to Fort Leavenworth for new mounts. The Lieutenant returned to the 7th Cavalry's camp near Fort Hays with 41 new horses, including the one soon to be known as Comanche. Comanche was fabled to be the horse of General Custer. General Custer rose up the ranks during the American Civil War but is most noted for the Battle of Little Big Horn later coined "Custer's last Stand."

Comanche was the only living thing that the U.S. cavalry got back from the Battle of Little Big Horn. When reinforcements arrived, Custer and all 200+ of his soldiers were dead, and all the horses that survived had been taken by the Indians -- except Comanche, who was injured. The Indians had no use for an injured horse, but the White Man did.

Comanche was nursed back to health and became a living symbol of Manifest Destiny. The public loved him, assuming that he had been Custer's horse (he was not Custer's horse at all but rather the horse of Captain Myles Keogh) and that he was the Battle's only survivor (he was not the only survivor). This was fine with the Army and the federal government, who wanted the public on their side while they went about killing the indigenous people and stealing their land. Comanche toured the country, a favorite of parades and patriotic gatherings.

Comanche had been stabled at nearby Fort Riley. When he passed away in 1890, it was immediately assumed that he would be preserved -- and by a stroke of good fortune the best taxidermist in Kansas worked at the University of Kansas Natural History Museum. Comanche's remains were buried with honors, then his hide was given to the Museum and stuffed. But the officers from Fort Riley -- who perhaps realized that most Indians were by now either captured or dead -- never bothered to pick him up (or to pay the taxidermy bill). So Comanche stayed at the museum. Aside from being shipped to Chicago to be displayed at the 1893 Columbian Exposition, he's been at the Kansas museum ever since.

Comanche is still on exhibit, in a glass case, wearing in his cavalry blanket and saddle. The case used to have a brass plaque: "Sole survivor of the Battle of Little Big Horn." It was removed in the 1970s at the request of local tribes.