This photograph of a mule driven wagon freight train being buzzed by an early American Airlines Boeing 247 was discovered by an Archives patron. It was so unusual that I decided to do a bit more research and use it as a posting on the Archives' Facebook page.

Mule 'freight trains' like the one pictured here, generally used 10 to 20 mules depending on the weight of the load. A 'mule skinner' seen riding the 'wheel mule' in this photograph, would control the entire team with one rein called a 'jerk line.' The wagon looks similar to models built by Stockton or Studebaker and they typically featured a tool box on the front end gate and a feed box behind. These wagons were high sided, which functioned much better as "freighters" than the typical covered wagon used on the Oregon Trail. When hauling ore, they were usually not covered but in Eastern Oregon the load of wooden barrels would probably have contained wheat or flour which would have warranted some sort of protective covering. The Facebook posting elicited a large number of comments and the son of the photographer was able to share the background of how this photographic image was created.

According to Kenneth Snelson, his father Jack Snelson took several photographs of this mule train and covered wagons set up by the Pendleton Roundup for publicity in the 1940's. This shot with the Boeing 247, was one of several fly-by shots both with the mule train and with a covered wagon set, featuring pioneer men and women in costume. Due to the difficulty of trying to catch the airplane in the right spot above the actors and the wagons, they resorted to having the airplane pasted onto the wagon photographs, the 1940's version of Photoshop! However, the photograph featured in this exhibit was not altered in this fashion and shows one of the many shots taken by Jack Snelson of the Boeing 247 fly-by over the three wagon mule train.

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