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HOW WILLIAM F. CODY HELPED SAVE THE BUFFALO WITHOUT REALLY TRYING

DAVID NESHEIM

We grieve only for what we know.
—Aldo Leopold¹

Although Leopold's aphorism refers to the common response to human suffering, it also reflects the way many historical accounts of the restoration of the American bison omit an important piece of that phenomenon. Most historians have focused their attention on two elements: western ranchers who started the

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earliest private herds and eastern conservationists who raised funds and lobbied for the creation of the first national preserves.² However, the perpetuation of the image of buffalo in the hearts and minds of Americans was equally important in the eventual recovery of the species. No one was a more effective popularizer than William F. Cody, despite his belief that bison neither could nor would recover. Buffalo Bill's *Wild West* exposed millions of North Americans and Europeans to live buffalo; it provided a market for fledgling buffalo ranchers; and, to a lesser degree, the *Wild West* raised awareness of the precariously low population of American bison. Cody's exhibitions were important beyond the sheer number of people they attracted. The *Wild West* rose in popularity at the very moment that bison in North America verged on extinction.³

Buffalo Bill Cody is not the first name that comes to mind when one considers preservation of the American bison, primarily because he is best known for killing them. By his own accounting, he shot 4,862 over eighteen months supplying meat for the Kansas Pacific



FIG. 1. *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* exposed millions of North Americans and Europeans to live buffalo, offering an opportunity to watch them in action. Seeing a display of mounted animals at a museum, or one or two in a small enclosure at a zoo, was one thing; watching them run at full gallop was quite another. Courtesy of Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, Nate Salisbury Collection (call number X 22275).

Railroad construction crews.⁴ Some would argue this was not such a transgression. He did not kill solely for sport or for the hide and then wastefully leave the carcass to rot; rather, he supplied sustenance for the laborers of progress. In Cody's last interview, Chauncey Thomas portrays him as considering it "not . . . so much hunting as it was railroad building, opening the wilderness to civilization. . . . [T]he buffalo had to go as the first step in subduing the Indian." In the same article Thomas states that "the elimination of the buffalo was not wanton; it was necessary."⁵ In an earlier article written by Buffalo Bill, he suggests that there were, as of 1897, not enough buffalo left to repopulate the Plains "even if it were desirable to restore them."⁶ Based on these admittedly select quotes, one would be hard pressed to make a case for Cody as a friend of the buffalo, much less any sort of preservationist.

However, Buffalo Bill left a complex legacy.⁷ After his time in the West as a buffalo hunter and scout, Cody had a long career as an entertainer, replaying his frontier persona for

hundreds of audiences. He gained his first theatrical experience in an 1872 stage production of *The Scouts of the Prairie*, a play very loosely based on his experience in the West.⁸ Cody had an impressive show-business run, performing until 1916. During his years with *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*, Cody began to have a role in preserving bison. His role as a bison advocate proceeded gradually, and his commitment to the task remains questionable. Nevertheless, he played an important part in the restoration of this once abundant creature.

Buffalo Bill ran his first *Wild West* exhibition in 1883. Although Cody would not have approved of the comparison, the *Wild West* resembled a circus, one that recreated the "wild life on the plains." Cody maintained a large cast, comprised of "Indians, cow-boys, Mexican vaqueros, famous riders and expert lasso throwers, with accessories of stage coach, emigrant wagons, bucking horses and a herd of buffaloes."⁹ The show's program included trick and speed shooting exhibitions, and in the first year, the impressively foolhardy "lassoing and

riding the wild bison."¹⁰ Although the *Wild West* constantly changed its arrangement, and some events lasted just a season, the buffalo hunt was a staple of the show for three decades.¹¹ Cody had a vested interest in making sure there were at least a few bison around.

AT THE EDGE OF EXTINCTION

Cody's first foray into buffalo management coincides with another significant event in the animal's history. The hide trade was over for all practical purposes in the winter of 1883, although the hunt did not stop—it was simply the last year it produced any appreciable results. The hide hunters went out again in the fall of 1883, only they found nothing to shoot.¹² This same year saw the last buffalo hunt for the Blackfeet, and they were only able to kill six in the Sweet Grass Hills.¹³ The same can be said for the Lakota of the Standing Rock Reservation, whose last hunt occurred in October 1883, although the number killed was much larger.¹⁴ Even though large herds were a thing of the past, small pockets of buffalo were found, and killed, in the next two decades in Colorado, Wyoming, and Texas.¹⁵ The destruction of the Plains bison herds was staggering, but not absolute.

Buffalo ceased to be a common sight in the West, yet no immediate uprising occurred in their defense. As late as 1886 a group of twelve wealthy young men set out from Philadelphia on an extended hunt with, among other supplies, twenty-five cases of champagne. Leaving in December, they planned to hunt in Yellowstone National Park and the Yosemite Valley and return "when the flowers begin to bloom."¹⁶ There was no hint of condemnation in the article announcing their hunt; on the contrary, the piece overflowed with romantic imagery. America was a little slow to come to the defense of bison.

Eventually, many vocal groups and individuals called for the animal's preservation. However, in 1883, few realized that the "end" was so near at hand. People had been prognosticating the bison's eventual and inevitable

demise for decades. George Perkins Marsh, writing in 1856, commented that the buffalo "are likely soon to perish."¹⁷ Marsh worried about deforestation and environmental degradation and came as close to an ecological perspective as any contemporary observer, but even he accepted the eventual demise as a necessary event. For many, the passing of the bison was such a foregone conclusion that it took a few years to notice when it actually occurred.

William Hornaday stands out as the most famous early spokesman of the fate of the buffalo, helping to form the American Bison Society in 1905. As the chief taxidermist at the Smithsonian Institution, he became personally aware of the extent of the devastation in 1886 after two excursions to Montana to procure specimens for the museum. Although unsuccessful in his first trip, Hornaday was eventually able to acquire twenty-four buffalo. The fact that Hornaday killed the last few he found in an effort to preserve the animal seems paradoxical today. It is important to realize that Hornaday thought the extinction complete and that by creating a museum display he could at least preserve the image of the bison as a moral reminder of man's destructive power.¹⁸ In addition to his display, he wrote *The Extirpation of the American Bison*, published in 1889. Within its pages, Hornaday recognized the important role Cody held in the preservation campaign by placing his herd fourth in a rank-ordered list of existing herds. He commented that "the celebrated 'Wild West Show' has, ever since its organization, numbered among its leading attractions a herd of live buffaloes of all ages."¹⁹ Until the beginning of the twentieth century, concern for the future of bison was relatively rare.

PRECURSORS TO THE WILD WEST

The transition of the buffalo from an obstacle to progress to a symbol of American identity was a necessary element of its preservation. The beginnings of this transformation can be traced at least as far back as the 1830s.

Titian Peale accompanied Major Stephen Long's expedition of 1820, and his *Indian Hunting Buffalo* was perhaps the most widely disseminated image of the West in the 1830s.²⁰ George Catlin received recognition as the first person to suggest a national park to preserve bison, doing so in 1832. Around this time, he traveled in the West and studied the Indians of the Plains and Upper Missouri River, recording sketches and observations of their daily life. Upon his return to the East, he published travel accounts and gave public exhibitions of his drawings, eventually including Indians in the cast of these exhibitions. Catlin published his *North American Indian Portfolio of Indian Hunting Scenes and Amusements* in 1844, which included thirteen large lithographs that featured bison. Historian Paul Reddin argues that this portfolio prefigured the standard bill of the Wild West shows by featuring "buffalo, hunting, horses, and rodeo-style riding."²¹ Catlin painted and wrote about buffalo but did not include them in his performances.

The first live reenactment of a buffalo hunt, at least that was well documented, occurred in 1843. P. T. Barnum, a most noted showman, happened upon a herd of fifteen "starved and weary" yearling buffalo in Philadelphia driven there by C. D. French. Barnum arranged to purchase the herd and keep French on as manager. He moved them to New Jersey and rented a racetrack in Hoboken. Barnum (and this is where his genius really comes through) advertised a "Grand Buffalo Hunt" free to the public. Of course, there was and is no such thing as a free lunch. Barnum had also chartered all the ferryboats for that day. He profited from the 24,000 people that purchased ferry tickets, unaware they were going to see a herd of baby buffalo.²²

Despite their diminutive stature, the buffalo managed to cause quite a bit of excitement. Although the surviving reports conflict, it seems that they smashed their barriers and ran through the crowd, escaping into a swamp. In the ensuing melee, real bodily harm did occur. An unfortunate soul climbed a tree to escape the rumbling herd, and, sadly, fell to his

death. In a memoir, Barnum takes great delight in pulling over this "humbug," although he does not mention the accidental death.²³ The Hoboken affair may be the first time a buffalo hunt was performed, but it was an unimpressive and short-lived production.

A dozen years later, three companies combined to present a large production that included a buffalo hunt, dances, a corn harvest, and "Pocahontas rescuing John Smith." Mabie Brothers' Menagerie and Den Stone's Circus joined Tyler's Indian Exhibition to present this version of a "Wild West" show, although the spectacle more closely resembled the Colonial East.²⁴ The fact that buffalo appeared in this entertainment suggests the power they would eventually have in the American imagination.

Another forerunner that had a little more in common with Cody's display occurred in 1872. Colonel Sidney Barnett owned a museum near Niagara Falls with lagging gate receipts. In an effort to increase revenue, he planned to stage a buffalo hunt with Indian participants. Barnett took two trips out west to assemble his cast. During the first trip he engaged Texas Jack Omohundro, co-star of *The Scouts of the Prairie* and friend of Buffalo Bill, to oversee the buffalo acquisition. After a successful roundup, delays in getting permission to employ the Indians proved fatal for the bison.²⁵

In the time that transpired, most of the captured animals died, necessitating another attempt to acquire replacements. On his second trip, Colonel Barnett employed Wild Bill Hickok as his herd manager. This time they managed to get some animals to New York. Due to delays, the hunt occurred late in the tourist season and was a financial disaster. Only three buffalo appeared in the display, resulting in disappointing attendance. Barnett had invested heavily in the project, building grandstands and fenced enclosures on an eighty-acre site. The cast of the show contained Indians, cowboys, and Mexicans, and the animals included buffalo, horses, and steers. Added to these costs was Hickok's fee. Barnett's organization never recovered from the losses. Within five years, the Barnett family



FIG. 2. Moving the show's herd was never taken lightly; it appears that six riders were assigned to move five buffalo in this 1901 photograph. Courtesy of Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, Nate Salsbury Collection (call number NS 253).

withdrew from the museum business in Niagara Falls.²⁶ If these shows established a framework for Cody to follow, they also demonstrated that performing buffalo hunts was risky business.

It is clear that Buffalo Bill's *Wild West* did not really break too much new ground in the entertainment world. His boosters can make the claim that he was the first to make a grand western spectacle into a going concern, traveling and performing from season to season, year after year. This was no small feat, if only in terms of the logistics of traveling with a herd of bison. The animals could die in captivity, or they could escape from the arena grounds; indeed, any number of mishaps could occur when traveling with an entourage of bison.

CODY'S WILD WEST

Cody took a number of steps that insured his venture had a good chance of success, staffing his show with personnel who knew their business. He partnered with some of the best

production managers in show business, most notably Nate Salsbury and James A. Bailey. In addition to their business acumen, these partners brought considerable capital. The capital provided by the partners offered stability for more than just the cast of characters. Cody's productions were large affairs, assuring that when buffalo did escape, there were several capable cowboys to chase them down and return them to the arena grounds.²⁷

Buffalo Bill may have had held top billing on the marquee, but he did not go it alone. There were only two years, 1907 and 1908, in the entire history of the *Wild West* that Cody did not have a partner. After a brief pairing with Dr. W. F. Carver for the 1883 season, Nate Salsbury became the vice president and business manager of Buffalo Bill's *Wild West* for ten successful years. James Bailey, of circus fame, replaced Nate Salsbury after he became ill in 1894. Bailey provided transportation and routing for the show, staying until his death in 1906. Both men supplied a ready amount of the

operating funds, a feat Cody proved incapable of maintaining. To be sure, Cody made money on the *Wild West*, but he constantly reinvested it in speculative ventures out west. He was involved in mining in Arizona and town building and irrigation development in Wyoming. The *Wild West* required a lot of money, and Cody seldom had much to spare.²⁸ Although Cody's finances are fascinating, it is only necessary to realize that it was expensive to run a *Wild West* show. Cody's associates had deep pockets; this capitalization was one of the most important factors in the ongoing success of the *Wild West*. The buffalo herd was another.

Cody first staged a live buffalo exhibition in 1882 during a Fourth of July celebration in North Platte, Nebraska. He originally planned to use steers to reenact a buffalo hunt, until he learned that M. C. Keefe had a small herd nearby.²⁹ Keefe's animals likely suited Cody's needs for a time, as no further mention of acquisition appears until 1884. In the first programs for the *Wild West*, a picture of Cody out on the plains rounding up his herd appears. Perhaps he did indeed capture some animals in this fashion, but a series of disasters in the coming years forced Cody to seek his bison on the open market.

Tragedy first struck the show's herd on the Mississippi River. At the end of the 1884 season, Salsbury and Cody decided to take the show south to New Orleans for a winter engagement. The partners reasoned that if they could just make enough money to defray the costs of wintering the show, the venture would be a success. In what would become a hallmark of Salsbury's management style, his booking coincided with the World's Industrial and Cotton Exposition of 1884.³⁰ The idea appeared practical; the reality failed to meet the partners' expectations.

The original plan consisted of playing in the towns along the route from Cincinnati to New Orleans, in an attempt to cover the expenses of the trip. Around Rodney, Mississippi, the show's steamboat collided with another vessel. Cody and Salsbury differ on the details of the sinking, but the more amusing version has the boat

nursed to shore and quickly patched up, only to sink in thirty feet of water seconds after being relaunched. The result of the crash was less humorous. With the exception of the horses, the Deadwood stagecoach, and the bandwagon, all of the show's components were lost. No people died, but losses were estimated at \$20,000. Salsbury wired the funds to Cody, as he was in Denver with his group, the Troubadours.³¹ Buffalo Bill eventually pieced together the show. But for the opening performance on December 23, the buffalo had yet to arrive.

The animals began to arrive in New Orleans on that day, and Cody promised a buffalo hunt for the following performances.³² It is unclear where this herd came from, but an interesting suggestion appears in 1897. In an article discussing the status of buffalo in the United States, Cody states that "there is a small herd that we are trying to protect down in Texas."³³ This is no doubt a reference to Charles Goodnight's herd; the use of "we" suggests Cody felt some connection with the endeavor. Additionally, the *Wild West* arrived in New Orleans on December 12, and the boat wreck was in early November.³⁴ It would have taken Cody time to locate the animals and to transport them. It is probable that they came from the surrounding region, and Goodnight was a well-known rancher. Although Cody arranged to have some buffalo while in New Orleans, how many is not known.

The status of his herd preoccupied Cody for the next few years. The buffalo hunt continued as part of the show in New Orleans, but a letter from Cody to Salsbury dated March 9, 1885, suggests that Cody would have liked more. Cody stated that he planned on heading to Washington, DC, with the stock on hand, but he needed more buffalo by the time they arrived in the city. Suggesting the extent of his search, he referenced six head somewhere in Dakota Territory but did not specify where. By 1885 Cody faced concerns about the number of buffalo available for the show and the difficulties of procuring more animals.³⁵

The experiment in New Orleans proved a financial disaster. After playing a regular



FIG. 3. The stuffed bison photographed at Cody's town house in North Platte, Nebraska, are possibly the same animals mounted following the deaths at Madison Square Garden in 1886. Courtesy of Nebraska State Historical Society Photograph Collections (RG3004 PH110).

summer season, the show went into winter quarters for 1885. The 1886 season started in St. Louis and worked its way east. In June, it began an extended engagement at Erastina, Staten Island. After closing at Erastina in the end of September, the show moved to Madison Square Garden for a winter season.³⁶ Constant rainfall had plagued the New Orleans exhibition; Cody and Salsbury decided to try their cost-saving experiment indoors. By all accounts, this engagement proved to be a monetary success, but it was catastrophic for the bison.

By December 8, 1886, one of the buffalo had died, while an additional three or four showed symptoms of disease. A letter from Ed Goodman, Cody's nephew traveling with the show as a program vendor, provides this information, along

with a clue as to Cody's disposition. Goodman wrote to his parents that "if [the buffalo] should all die it would go hard with him [Cody] as they are getting very scarce now days."³⁷ By the end of the Madison Square Garden engagement, all the show's buffalo had succumbed to respiratory disease. The fallen buffalo were taken to Professor Ward, a taxidermist in Rochester, and the mounted specimens soon traveled with the show across the Atlantic.³⁸ However, stuffed animals could not be counted on to impress the crowds, and again Cody was desperate. For the second time in as many years, the *Wild West* was without a herd of buffalo.

The loss of the herd portended disaster for the *Wild West*, as the next scheduled appearance was in England. The ensuing search for

replacements is fairly well documented, mostly because of Hornaday. Cody bought a cow and bull from the Philadelphia Zoological Gardens. He also purchased fourteen head from M. T. Groom of Wichita, Kansas. Cody made an offer to the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad for their entire herd at Bismarck Grove, Kansas, but they were not for sale at any price.³⁹ In what had to be a flurry of activity, Cody was able to assemble a herd of sixteen to make the journey to England.⁴⁰

INTERPRETING THE HERD'S MEANING

The trip to England resulted in the death of another buffalo, providing an opportunity to examine how different members of the *Wild West* viewed the creatures. Cody valued the herd as a crucial element of the show, but the animals themselves, at least at this point, did not have any intrinsic value. The Lakota who made the trip to England did not share this perspective. On this first tour of Europe, Black Elk was a member of the Indian troupe attached to the show. His account records the death of a buffalo on the passage over. He described the event with a great amount of emotion, evoking the connection between the Lakota and the animals. After a buffalo and some elk died, Black Elk recalled that "the Wasichus threw them in the water. When I saw the poor bison thrown over, I felt like crying, because I thought right away they were throwing part of my people away."⁴¹

The nature of this relationship is hinted at by Gall, another Lakota, who visited the *Wild West* in New Orleans during the winter of 1884-85. In a newspaper account of his visit, Gall is recorded as saying that seeing the buffalo made him "homesick."⁴² Perhaps this word did not exactly describe his feelings. The inference is that Gall could see buffalo at home. While it was possible to encounter an occasional bison in Dakota Territory, these sightings were no longer commonplace.⁴³ The animals did not remind Gall of his home, as such, and he likely had an equally ambivalent reaction to seeing a

caged buffalo. The buffalo held a central place in Lakota spirituality and cosmology and were an essential element of their daily existence for most of the nineteenth century. On the one hand, seeing buffalo had to bring to mind some of that connection. However, as with Black Elk, he also had to view their captive existence as a painful reminder of his people's recent past.

No white observers recorded the death of the bison on the oceanic crossing. In a surviving ledger from this period, the death of a horse was recorded, and on the return trip some years later, the passing of Cody's favorite horse, Charlie, received special mention.⁴⁴ In part, this is due to the position horses held at this time. Roger Hall likens the appeal of a splendid horse in this era to that of a high performance sports car for the modern man.⁴⁵ The horse's identity was secure, the buffalo's was ambiguous. They were kept separate from the rest of the stock, but at least in the early years of the *Wild West*, the same person tended both bison and steers. It is unclear whether the show buffalo were considered wild or tame, as they are mentioned in newspaper accounts of the day in both ways.⁴⁶ Although the meaning of buffalo was culturally secure for the Lakota that traveled with the show, this was not the case in the programs or the press.

In the first programs for the *Wild West*, there is a lithograph depicting Cody and some cowboys out on the plains rounding up his herd with lassoes. Within a few years this illustration is out of the program, a deletion doubtless reflecting the difficulties Cody faced in procuring replacement bison and the reality that such a roundup was impossible by the late 1880s.⁴⁷ By the 1890s the program for the *Wild West* did describe the show's buffalo as "the last of the only known Native herd." However, as Paul Reddin notes, "[T]he show emphasized hunting bison more than preserving them."⁴⁸ With the exception of one line, the rest of the program mentions only the brave exploits of buffalo hunters and the thrill of the chase. Buffalo Bill considered the demise

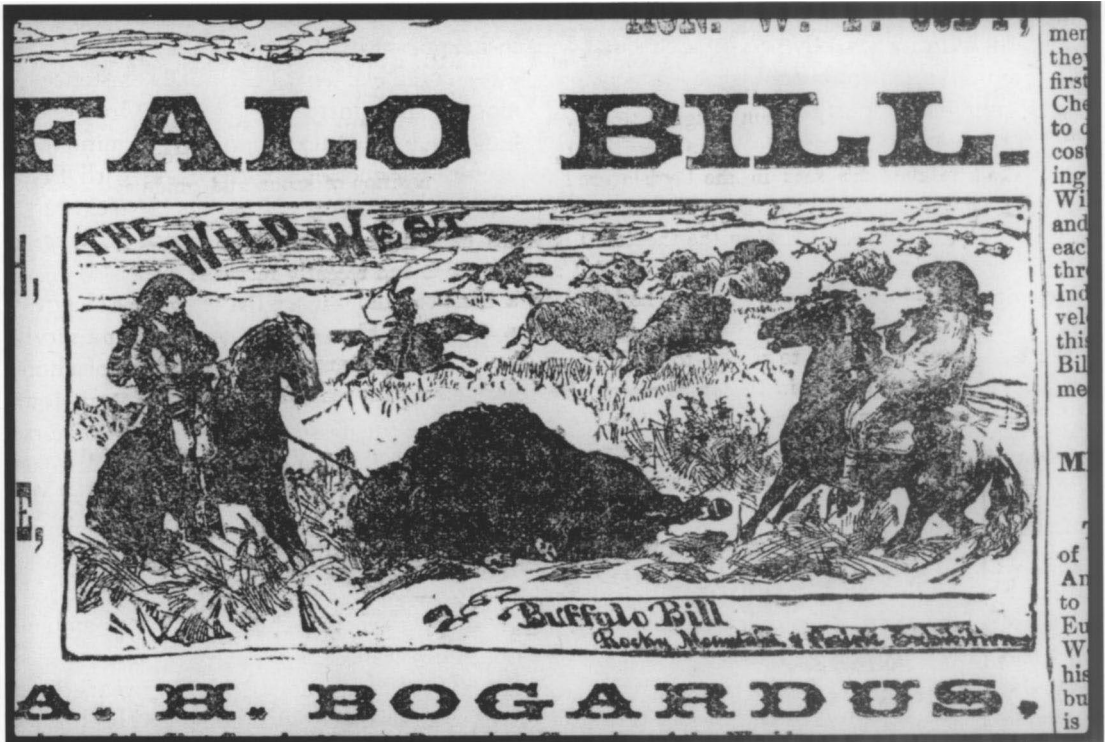


FIG. 4. This image appeared in the publicity for the 1883 Rocky Mountain and Prairie States Exhibition, a precursor to the Wild West. Reflecting the lack free-roaming herds on the Plains, the illustration was taken out of the show's programs by 1890. Courtesy of Nebraska State Historical Society Photograph Collections (RG3004 PH190).

of the buffalo as “a natural consequence of the advance of civilization” and the show’s narrative reflects this view.⁴⁹

Occasionally, the press coverage of the *Wild West* would mention the devastation to the bison population. The Washington Post reported in an article on the *Wild West* that “the buffalo is fast becoming extinct.”⁵⁰ A newspaper article from 1894 on the *Wild West* show states that buffalo are “almost extinct” and recommends a visit to the “buffalo pen” while attending the show.⁵¹ While the show was in Crawfordsville, Indiana, in 1896, an impromptu welcoming committee estimated at “2,000 boys and not a few older ones” came out to see the buffalo and steers in the “gray morning hours.”⁵² It was quite possible for the audience to interpret the *Wild West* in ways

that differed from the narrative intended by the show’s creators.⁵³

The *Wild West* offered America an opportunity to view buffalo and watch them in action. Seeing buffalo in a small enclosure at a zoo was one thing. Watching them run at full gallop was quite another. Although a few accounts of the *Wild West* portrayed the show’s bison as rather tame, Harry Webb, a performer with the show, offered a different version. He reminisced that the buffalo had been repeatedly powder-burned from the blanks fired at them and “would head pell-mell” when the cowboys began firing.⁵⁴ Buffalo were the largest mammals on the North American continent at the time of European contact. Their massive physical presence must have left a lasting impression on audiences.



FIG. 5. The show's herd had an impact far beyond the staged performances. Even mundane events like grazing outside the show grounds could draw a crowd. Courtesy of Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, Nate Salsbury Collection (call number NS 647).

CONCLUSION

Buffalo Bill's *Wild West* achieved huge popularity in its day. It traveled to Europe several times, performing for royalty and the average citizen. Although estimates of the total number of spectators over the years are difficult to compile, the total attendance for certain seasons is better known. In 1885, after just two seasons, the show played to an estimated one million people. The next year, over a period of six months the attendance neared two million.⁵⁵ In the summer of 1893, an estimated six million saw the *Wild West* during an extended engagement in Chicago.⁵⁶ When one considers the thirty years that the *Wild West* performed,

it is clear the total number of people who saw the show ran in the tens of millions.

William Matthews, in his poem "Why We Are Truly a Nation," wrote, "[W]e all dream of saving the shaggy, dung-caked buffalo, shielding the herd with our bodies."⁵⁷ Matthews penned these lines in the late twentieth century. Buffalo Bill Cody would not have shared these sentiments, nor would he have seen any reason for them. Nevertheless, through his show the image of the buffalo remained in the popular imagination for decades before the establishment of any national preservation efforts. Cody helped a generation of Americans "know" the buffalo—a generation that otherwise would not have had much of

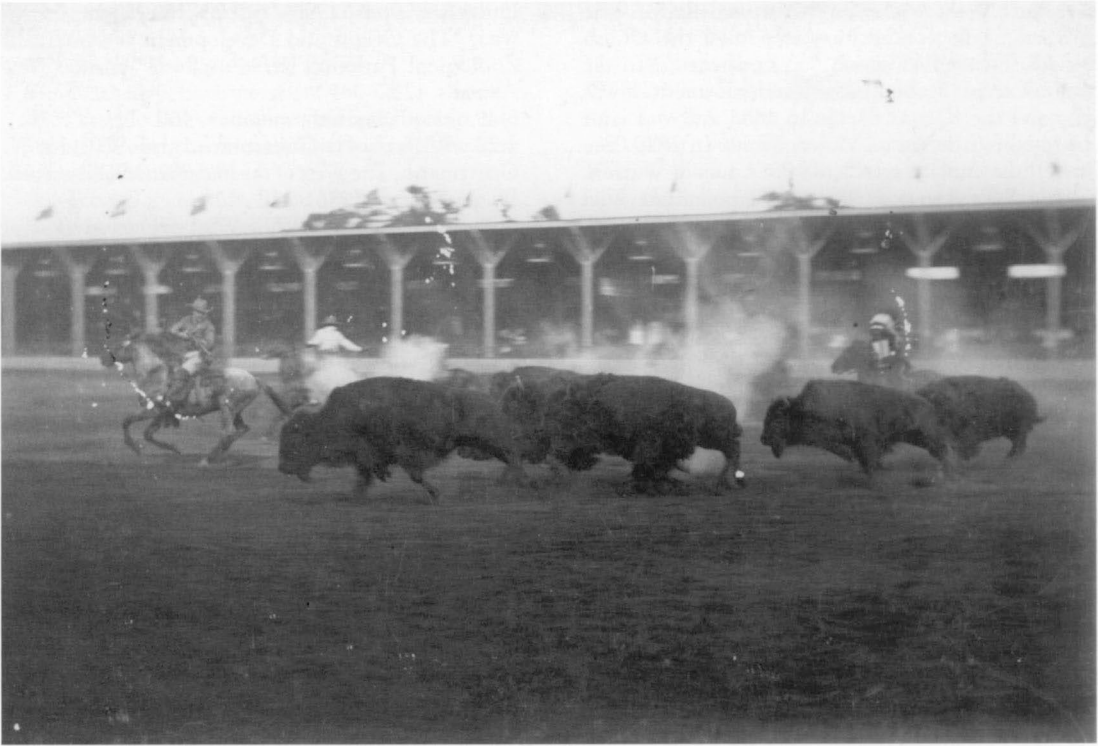


FIG. 6. *The Wild West programs celebrated hunting and killing bison, making only passing reference to their dwindling numbers. However, audience members were free to decide the merits of preservation, and the power and grace of the animals in full motion offered compelling testimony.* Courtesy of Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, Nate Salsbury Collection (call number NS 647).

an opportunity to see these animals. The fact that Cody himself did not consider the restoration of the bison desirable does not lessen his impact. By providing a market for early buffalo ranchers and exposing millions of people over a thirty-year period to the “last of the only known Native herd,” William Cody helped save the buffalo without really trying.

NOTES

1. Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 48.

2. Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 175; David A. Dary, *The Buffalo Book: The Full Saga of the American Animal* (Chicago: Sage Books, 1975), 222. Ken Zontek maintains the binary formation

but argues that “all the saviors of the bison were involved in the exploitation of their environment.” Zontek, “Hunt, Capture, Raise, Increase: The People Who Saved the Bison,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 15 (Spring 1995): 146-47.

3. For a similar view of Cody’s importance, see Don Russell, *The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), 347. Andrew Isenberg mentions Cody’s role but places more importance on negative publicity generated by the Miller Brothers in 1911 (*Destruction of the Bison*, 173-76).

4. Chauncey Thomas, “Buffalo Bill’s Last Interview,” *Outdoor Life*, May 1917, William Frederick Cody/Buffalo Bill Papers, WH72, Box 3, FF 2, Western History Collection, Denver Public Library, Denver, CO (hereafter DPL). I take his figure at face value, while Cody’s most scholarly biographers dispute the total. Don Russell suggests the actual number killed for the railroad was 2,928. Louis Warren convincingly argues that Cody’s estimate was low, assuming 360 working

days and a daily total of twelve animals killed. The railroad Cody worked for was named the Union Pacific, Eastern Division (no connection to the Union Pacific) at the time of his employment. It was renamed the Kansas Pacific in 1868 and was later absorbed by the actual Union Pacific in 1880. See Russell, *Lives and Legends*, 88-89; Louis S. Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America: William Cody and the Wild West Show* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 55, 559n36.

5. *Ibid.*, 493.

6. Buffalo Bill Cody, "The Last of the Buffalo: by Buffalo Bill who has slain them by the Tens of Thousands?" *New York Journal*, May 16, 1897, William F. Cody Manuscript Collection, MS6, Cody Scrapbook 1897, McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, WY (hereafter BBHC). At least this article is credited to Cody; there is a substantial history of ghostwriters for Cody. See Russell, *Lives and Legends*, 265-84.

7. For a full investigation of Cody's multifaceted legacy, see Louis Warren's recent biography, *Buffalo Bill's America*, note 4.

8. Russell, *Lives and Legends*, 192-93; Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The West as Myth and Symbol* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), 106.

9. William F. Cody, *Story of the Wild West and Camp-Fire Chats* (Philadelphia: Historical Publishing Company, 1888; reprint, Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 693.

10. William E. Deahl Jr., "Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show in New Orleans," *Louisiana History* 16, no. 3 (1975): 291.

11. Sarah Blackstone, *Bullets, Buckskin, and Business: A History of Buffalo Bill's Wild West* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), 72.

12. William T. Hornaday, *The Extermination of the American Bison, with a Sketch of its Discovery and Life History*, reprint 2202 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, 1889), 512.

13. Louis Warren, *The Hunter's Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-Century America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 131.

14. Hornaday, *Extermination*, 460.

15. Zontek, "Hunt, Capture," 135-36.

16. "To Hunt Buffaloes," *New York Times*, December 19, 1886.

17. George Perkins Marsh, *The Camel, His Organization, Habits and Uses Considered with Reference to His Introduction to the United States* (New York: Boston Gould and Lincoln, 1859), 189.

18. Hornaday, *Extermination*, 371; Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, "Reflections on Zoo History," in *New Worlds, New Animals: From Menagerie to Zoological Park in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. R. J. Hoage and William A. Deiss (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins

University Press, 1996), 6; Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, "The Origin and Development of American Zoological Parks to 1899," in *New Worlds, New Animals*, 128.

19. Hornaday, *Extermination*, 460.

20. William H. Goetzmann and William N. Goetzmann, *The West of the Imagination* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986), 14.

21. Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 8, 9, 43-46.

22. P. T. Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs: Forty Years Recollections* (Hartford: J. B. Burr and Company, 1869), 148-49; Russell, *Lives and Legends*, 287-88.

23. Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*, 149.

24. Russell, *Lives and Legends*, 288.

25. Joseph G. Rosa, *They Called Him Wild Bill: The Life and Adventures of James Butler Hickok*, 2nd ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), 113. For a detailed version of the delays, including text of letters, see Joseph G. Rosa, "Wild Bill Hickok, Buffalo Bill Cody, and The Grand Buffalo Hunt at Niagara Falls," *Nebraska History* 86, no. 1, Spring 2005: 14-25.

26. Rosa, *They Called Him Wild Bill*, 114-16.

27. Escapes were the exception: "Buffalo Escapes: One of Buffalo Bill's Buffaloes Escapes and Causes a Sensation," *Terre Haute Tribune*, June 25, 1896, William Frederick Cody/Buffalo Bill Papers, WH72, Nate Salsbury Scrapbooks, C MSS Mfm18, Reel 1, Vol. 5, DPL.

28. "Buffalo Bill Could Handle Indians, But Not His Finances, Friend Recalls," *Lincoln Sunday Journal and Star*, February 26, 1956, 9A; Tom Allen, "Buffalo Bill Papers Tell of Mining Busts," *Omaha World Herald*, February 18, 1979, 9B; Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, 510-11, 524-25, 533-35, 536.

29. Russell, *Lives and Legends*, 290-91.

30. Salsbury often routed the show to take advantage of crowds from other events. See Roger A. Hall, *Performing the American Frontier, 1870-1906* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 144.

31. Nate Salsbury, "A Dilemma," in Nate Salsbury notes, M688, Western History Collection, DPL; Cody, *Story of the Wild West*, 698-99.

32. Deahl, "Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show," 290, 292.

33. Cody, "Last of the Buffalo."

34. Deahl, "Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show," 289.

35. Richard J. Walsh in collaboration with Milton Salsbury, *The Making of Buffalo Bill: A Study in Heroics* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1928), 243.

36. "Buffalo Bill's Route Book Season of 1896," William F. Cody Manuscript Collection, MS6, Cody Scrapbooks 1896, BBHC.

37. Ed Goodman, letter to parents, December 9, 1886, in Ed Goodman Letters, William F. Cody

Manuscript Collection, MS6, Box 1, Folder 1, BBHC.

38. Cody, "The Last of the Buffalo."
39. Hornaday, *Extirpation*, 460-61.
40. "Buffalo Bill's Goodbye: Indians, Buffalo, and Cowboys Crowd the Steamer Nebraska," *New York Times*, April 1, 1887, 8.
41. John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 169. The best study of Indians in the Wild West shows is L. G. Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).
42. Deahl, "Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show in New Orleans," 294-95.
43. A lone bison was discovered near Fargo, North Dakota, in 1883. "The Buffalo Slowly Disappearing," *New York Times*, September 10, 1883, 5.
44. R. L. Wilson with Greg Martin, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: An American Legend* (New York: Random House, 1998), 262; Cody, *Story of the Wild West*, 764.
45. Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 141.
46. Ed Goodman, letter to parents, May 29, 1886, in Ed Goodman Letters, William F. Cody Manuscript Collection, MS6, Box 1, Folder 3, BBHC.
47. After Madison Square Garden, the show's buffalo population stabilized and large-scale replacements were unnecessary.
48. Reddin, *Wild West Shows*, 73.
49. William Cody, "Famous Hunting Parties of the Plains," *The Cosmopolitan* 27, no. 2 (June 1894): 134, William Frederick Cody/Buffalo Bill Papers, WH72, Nate Salsbury Scrapbooks, C MSS Mfm18, Reel 1, Vol. 5, DPL.
50. Untitled clipping, *Washington Post*, June 1, 1896, William F. Cody Manuscript Collection, MS6, Cody Scrapbooks 1896, BBHC.
51. "Buffalo Almost Extinct," *New York World*, September 15, 1894, William F. Cody Manuscript Collection, MS6, Cody Scrapbooks 1894, BBHC.
52. "The Real Old Thing," *The Daily Journal*, June 25, 1896, William F. Cody Manuscript Collection, MS6, Cody Scrapbooks 1896, BBHC.
53. Jonathan D. Martin. "'The Grandest and Most Cosmopolitan Object Teacher': Buffalo Bill's Wild West and the Politics of American Identity, 1883-1899," *Radical History Review* 66 (1996): 106-7.
54. Harry E. Webb, "My Years with Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, Part One," *Real West* 13 (January 1970): 54. Paul Reddin contends that the animals eventually ignored their pursuers, citing limited evidence from 1885. Given the longevity of the buffalo hunt in the show, Webb's version is logical (Reddin, *Wild West Shows*, 73).
55. Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 142-43.
56. "Scatter to the Wind," *Chicago Herald*, November 5, 1893, William F. Cody Manuscript Collection, MS6, Cody Scrapbook 1893, BBHC.
57. William Matthews, *Ruining the New Road* (New York: Random House, 1970), 24.