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Buffalo Bill is Coming



The monument at Cody.

The museum in the town he made famous is only one aspect in a campaign to add new lustre to the greatest name in the Old West

BY RICHARD JOSEPH

The Fourth of July may have been Independence Day for the rest of the country, but in Cody, Wyoming, last Thursday's firecrackers went off mainly to honor Buffalo Bill, the almost legendary western hero who founded the town and gave it his name back around the turn of the century.

July 3 and 4 marked Cody's annual Stampede, one of the outstanding rodeos in the west — a Wild West pocket version of Colonel Bill Cody's original war-whooping extravaganza plus bronc-busting, calf-dogging and steer-roping, all set in motion by a parade of the contestants down Sheridan Avenue, which Bill himself named for Phil Sheridan, the general who first made him Chief of Scouts for the U.S. Army in the west.

This year's celebration saw something special, though, with the laying of the cornerstone for the new \$2,000,000 building complex of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center on the western edge of town. It will include the already-opened Whitney Gallery of Western Art, named for the late Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (who was devoted to American art and had a high personal regard for Colonel Cody), a new and enlarged Buffalo Bill Museum (to open next May), a Museum of Western Transportation, a Museum of Geology and Natural History, and a new Administration Building.

**\$1,000,000
none of it
from taxes**

According to Dr. Harold McCracken, the distinguished author and explorer who became Director of the Historical Center in 1959, the project represents an investment of \$10,000,000; half of that for the Whitney Gallery, close to \$2,000,000 in the new buildings, and the remainder for exhibit acquisitions. "And not one cent is taxpayer's money," McCracken says proudly. "It has all been financed by private gifts and donations, helped along by admission fees."

Certainly Buffalo Bill is a character well worth commemorating. He was a giant of his time, an authentic American folk hero — hero-worshippers all over the world knew every detail of his life. Yet the last of some 1,000 Buffalo Bill books and paper-

backs, which had enjoyed world-wide popularity, came off the press in 1918 and, today, most American kids have never even heard of William F. Cody.

Before he was 14, he had been a wagon-train helper, stagecoach driver, gold prospector, Indian fighter, buffalo hunter and fur trapper. As an early Pony Express rider, at the age of 14, he set a record by galloping 322 miles in 21 hours, changing horses every hour. Still in his teens, he served in the Union Army during the Civil War, and later won his nickname by shooting more than 4,000 buffalo to supply meat for the postwar railroad construction camps.

He is said to have killed his first Indian when he was 11. That was never substantiated, nor is it known just how many Indians he did kill. Certainly he did dispose of two chiefs — Tall Bull, in a battle to free two white women hostages — and Yellow Hand, whom he shot in single combat and scalped in revenge for the Custer massacre. Less well known is the fact that Cody was a great friend of the Indians when they weren't on the warpath. He learned the Sioux language while still a boy, and his half-Indian costume of fringed buckskin and his long hair were really his version of an Indian chief.

While he was a dispatch bearer for the Army he was captured by a band of Kiowas, but managed to talk them into releasing him. He served also as military guide and adviser; and after he had ridden about 350 miles in less than 60 hours, he was made Chief of Scouts. He was guide and scout for Generals Custer, Sheridan, Crook and Miles and, in 1872,

was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

But it was as a showman that Cody achieved his greatest fame. After creating his celebrated Wild West Show in 1883, he went on to tour the capitals of Europe demonstrating his riding and shooting and parading his cowboys, Indians and Mexican *vaqueros* before Queen Victoria and other crowned heads. More than any other man he created the image of the American cowboy and frontiersman. Swinging his trusty Winchester and his wide-brimmed Stetson, some say his exploits inspired the Rough Riders and the Boy Scouts to use their version of his hat and neckerchief as part of their uniform.

**A man's man
— and also
a ladies' man**

And he also found time for all sorts of related and unrelated activities. He was the father of the modern rodeo and guided the buffalo-hunting expedition for the Grand Duke Alexis of Russia. He founded the town of Cody, persuaded the railroad to run a line between Cody and Yellowstone Park, built a hotel on the main street and named it after his daughter. He dug for gold and oil, and — most important of all — he planned the 328-foot-high Buffalo Dam on the Shoshone River just west of Cody. Designed to create electricity and irrigate 300,000 acres of farm and range land, it was the first major project of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and, when completed in 1909, was the highest in the world.

He was what was known in those days as a

BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST AND CONGRESS OF ROUGH RIDERS OF THE WORLD.



WILD ENTAILMENTS * SAVAGE, BARBAROUS * CIVILIZED RACES.

BUFFALO BILL and Annie Oakley lead the charge of the international brigade in one of the colorful posters announcing his rodeo

"ladies' man" — completely at ease in the sophisticated company of New York's exclusive Union Club, to which some of his wealthy friends had introduced him — yet at heart he was always the frontiersman, proud of his ability to out-shoot, out-ride and out-drink any of his contemporaries and ready to take off on the trail, bright and clear-eyed, after a full night of stud poker and bourbon.

Although his Wild West Show made more than a million dollars a year, Cody spent and gave away money faster than he could make it, and he was broke when he died at his sister's house in Denver in 1917. Yet he certainly wasn't forgotten. Within two months of his death, the Memorial Association was formed in Cody "to build and maintain a historical monument . . . to William F. Cody, 'Buffalo Bill'."

The monument became a reality seven years later with the unveiling of an heroic statue of Buffalo Bill by sculptress Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, who also donated the plot of ground on which it and the memorial buildings now stand. The gallery houses one of the finest collections of western art on display in any museum, including many of the best works of such noted artists as Frederic Remington, Charles M. Russell, Charles Schreyvogel and Albert Bierstadt as well as the famed equestrian painting of Colonel Cody done by Rosa Bonheur in Paris in 1889. Many of the artists were friends of Buffalo Bill, and had stayed with him at his TE Ranch near Cody.

There are some wonderful old photographs of Buffalo Bill and his friends — Sitting Bull, Annie Oakley, Kit Carson, Wild Bill Hickok, Jim Bridger, General Custer and Crazy Horse, one of the Sioux chiefs who led the massacre at the Little Big Horn.



Bill and his friend, Sitting Bull

**He collected
souvenirs
of the frontier**

The museum, which is sharing the gallery till the new building opens next year, reflects Cody's wonderful capacity for collecting all sorts of things — bowie knives, fringed buckskin jackets, uniforms, Stetsons, saddles and bridles, medals and trophies, thousands of letters and his Winchester rifle.

There is also a fine collection of Colt revolvers and a remarkable Army report, written in a precise Spencerian hand, of the Custer massacre. Scalps of both whites and Indians are in the showcases, together with an Indian bone necklace supposedly made from the trigger fingers of Custer's men. There are jeweled gifts from his royal



CIRKUSZ

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Cody in his romantic "Buffalo Bill" show costume

(FROM PAGE 9) friends, a \$20 gold piece from General Phil Sheridan, the scalp and war bonnet he took from Yellow Hand after Buffalo Bill killed him with a single rifle shot and the Deadwood-Cheyenne Stagecoach from his Wild West Show — in Great Britain in 1887, the Kings of Greece, Belgium, Saxony and Denmark rode in the coach, while the Prince of

Wales sat high on the front seat with Buffalo Bill, who was driving.

More than 200,000 visitors trooped through the Historical Center last year; a like number is expected this year, and the visitor count is expected to jump well over the quarter-million mark when the new building is opened next year.

They'll be spurred by a renaissance of interest being fanned in — of all unlikely places! — New York City's famed "21" Club, where film producers and television packagers are kicking around ideas for a Buffalo Bill feature film and television series, and you can almost see the "spin offs" starting to spin off — Buffalo Bill pistol and holster sets, buckskin shirts, hats, Buffalo Bill comic strips and magazines, toys and games — flip the wheel to the right number and get to scalp Yellow Hand!

Why "21"? Because Pete Krierdler, one of its proprietors and a notorious Wild West buff, is a trustee of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center.

Already the Winchester gun people have sold about 100,000 Buffalo Bill commemorative rifles and carbines and have virtually sold out a "limited issue" (300), packaged in mahogany, velvet-lined cases, at \$1,000 each. Since the proceeds of the limited sales go to the building fund for the non-profit Buffalo Bill Memorial Association, the purchase price is tax-deductible. Which makes for a cheap way for a man in the right tax brackets to buy a magnificent rifle and honor a legend at the same time.

(THE END)