

## **Brother Buffalo**

Penned by Steven Campbell

International showman, stage coach driver, visionary, stockman, developer, Pony Express rider, advocate, state legislator, famed hunter, Justice of the Peace, U.S. Army Scout, entrepreneur, Medal of Honor recipient, Freemason. That is quite an introduction, yet it is for a man whose name is still, today, known throughout the world: “Buffalo Bill” Cody.

### The Boy to Man

William Frederick Cody entered upon the stage of life on his parents’ small farm in Scott County, Iowa, on Thursday, Fe. 26, 1846. He would outlive his parents (Issac and Mary Ann), as well as three of his five sisters (Martha, Julia, Eliza, Helen, May) and two brothers (Sam, 12, and Charles, 9), who died as young boys. When he was seven the family moved to the nearby Mississippi River town of Le Clair, where young Billy swam in the river, received some early formal education (which he would sporadically obtain until his teens), yet preferred to fish, trap, ride and “procure” apples and melons from farmers’ orchards. Isaac ran a local stage coach line and entertained thoughts of moving to California. However, election to the Iowa legislature changed those plans until 1854, when the Cody family immigrated to Kansas. With his father conducting business at nearby Ft. Leavenworth, Billy honed his practical skills of riding, herding and wagon driving at or near the post. Isaac was active in early “blood soaked” Kansas politics which resulted in his being stabbed in front of a large crowd while giving a pro-Union speech. Fearful for his life and his family’s safety, Isaac moved about 30 miles away and constructed a mill. Several times pro-slavery activists harassed the family, one time placing two kegs of gunpowder under their house, which failed to detonate. Within three years his father died as a result of his stab wound and young Billy became “the man of the family.”

At the age of 11 Billy Cody was hired (\$25 per month) by Russell, Majors & Waddell Company, for whom he would work for 7 years as a cattle herder, wagon driver and Pony Express rider. Though now steadily employed, it did not prevent the teenager from seeking gold, without success, in the Pike’s Peak Gold Rush (1859). Two events during this time would impact the young man. (1) While serving as a driver with a wagon train, a man older than Cody ordered him to do something. When the young man did not move fast enough he backhanded Billy across the face. In response Cody threw a kettle of boiling coffee into the man’s face. The would-be assailant sprang up to strike Cody when a tall, quiet man interceded. When the older man asked him why he was interfering the man replied, “It’s my business to protect that boy, or anybody else, from being unmercifully abused, kicked and cuffed, and I’ll whip any man who tries it on.” Young Cody’s new friend was none other than James Butler Hickok, already known as “Wild Bill.” This first meeting would result in a lifelong friendship until Hickok’s murder in 1876. (2) The second event which won young Cody praise for stamina and dependability was a Pony Express ride of 320 miles in 18 hours. The young man’s preference for outdoor life, coupled with his exposure to all sorts of men and women along the frontier, matured him beyond his years.

### Youthful Encounters with the Indians

When his family moved to Kansas, Billy Cody had his first exposure to Native Americans (or as they were called in the 19<sup>th</sup> century America: Indians). He learned the language of the Kickapoo tribe. At the age of 14, while working with a supply wagon train, he shot and killed a hostile Pawnee warrior. When he was 17 he and a close friend, Dave Harrington, were trapping beaver along the Republican River (Nebraska) when Cody broke his left leg. With winter setting in they decided that Harrington should go into Fort Leavenworth for supplies. For 29 days the teenage Cody “holed up in a snowbound dugout.” One cold morning a Sioux war party entered the dugout where

pallet-bound Cody could offer no resistance. Making themselves comfortable, eating his food and taking his rifle and pistol, the warriors intended to kill the young white man, however the old Chief, Rain-in-the-Face, interceded. He and Cody had met at Fort Laramie where Cody had visited his teepee. The young man was spared and as the Sioux moved off he felt relieved as he had been able to conceal two pistols. Several days later Harrington returned and they traveled back to Fort Leavenworth where Cody “hobbled around on crutches for several months.” (He and Harrington would remain friends, with Dave visiting the Cody family and eventually dying there of pneumonia while being tended to by Bill’s mother.) Thus young Bill Cody had learned from and began to respect the Indians more so than most white men of that era by his up close and personal exposure.

### The Soldier, Scout and Buffalo Hunter

Though in and out of western Army posts since his early boyhood, Cody’s first military experience was when he was a young wagon driver employed transporting supplies to U. S. Army troops engaged in the Mormon Campaign. A large group of armed Mormons surrounded the wagon train on the trail, pillaged the supplies, set the wagons afire, and put the wagon drivers afoot until they agreed to let them retain a wagon and mules to return to their starting point. The hard life on the western frontier was not unknown to the young man.

In 1861 the fabric of our young nation would be tested by Civil War. The region in which Bill Cody lived was not bloodstained as much by marching armies rather than by roving bands of armed men. Without doubt the Cody family was loyal to the Union and as a result Billy joined up with a band of pro-Union men known as Jayhawkers. These men harassed and “procured” horses, property and supplies from pro-Southern families. His mother decried his actions as “neither honorable or right” and he abandoned his Jayhawking ventures. Later in 1861 he served as a regular Army dispatch rider and scout. Posted at Fort Learned, he learned the life of gambling, drinking, and in his own words “...becoming a very hard case.” “While under the influence of some bad whiskey...” he enlisted in the 7<sup>th</sup> Kansas Cavalry where his scouting skills were readily recognized and put to use. On one such scouting mission he was attired in gray colored civilian clothing, when he rode up to a house where he spotted a familiar face wearing a Confederate officer’s uniform. It was his friend Wild Bill, who asked “...you little rascal what are you doing in those secesh clothes?” After enjoying a light meal together they exchanged information on the movement of Southern troops and went their separate ways, Cody back to Army Headquarters and Wild Bill remaining behind to obtain more intelligence.

Always being close to his mother, the 17-year-old scout returned home when on Sunday, Nov. 22, 1863, Mary Ann Cody died. Bill would later write “...thus passed away a loving and affectionate Mother, and a noble, brave, good and loyal woman.” Prior to her death Mrs. Cody had written a long time friend, General Polk, in St. Louis. Ever concerned for her son’s safety, she requested that he be given a staff of headquarters assignment. From 1864 until the war’s end in 1865, Bill Cody was posted to Jefferson Barracks, St. Louis, Missouri. It was here that he met and fell in love with his future wife.

Margaret Louisa Frederici, the daughter of French immigrants, was born in 1844 (May 27). Her family were some of the founding members of the Roman Catholic Church in St. Louis. She was a skilled rider, though one day her spirited mount bolted and broke it’s bridle rein. Fortunately the tall handsome Army Scout was nearby and rescued her. Their courtship inspired Bill to seek a more lucrative line of employment. He resigned from the Army and took a position as a stage coach driver for \$150 per month! Smitten, Cody would write “...her lovely face, her gentle disposition and her graceful manners won my admiration and love.” On Tuesday, March 6, 1866, Bill and Louisa were married in a simple ceremony at her parents’ home. Immediately following the wedding the young couple boarded a Missouri river boat to their new home in Kansas. Wanting to be closer to home he left the stage driver’s job and leased the Golden Rule Hotel in South

Leavenworth. Growing bored with such a life, Cody longed to return to the plains and scouting. He sold out his interest in the hotel and upon reuniting with Wild Bill, once again signed up as an Army Scout (1866-67). His duty assignment resulted in his meeting with and scouting for Lt. Col. George Custer. The two men instantly liked each other, and Custer would, in his book "My Life on the Plains", write a glowing report of Cody. Giving up scouting, Bill entered into a business partnership in 1867. He and his partner, William Rose, invested in and established a new town near Ft. Hays, Kansas. Lots were surveyed and sold resulting in the town of Rome. At its peak, 200 frame and log houses, along with 3 - 4 stores, several saloons, and one hotel dotted the landscape. A railroad developer wished to become an investor, however Cody and Rose declined his offer. The result was the railroad diverting its course away from Rome to Hays. A mass exodus resulted in the town folding. Cody would write calling it "The rise, decline and fall of modern Rome." No longer being employed by the Army the restless man obtained a contract with the Kansas Pacific Railroad to provide buffalo meat for its 1,200 workers forging ahead with the rails for the "iron horse." His contract would pay \$500 a month. In less than 18 months Cody would shoot/supply 4,280 buffalo, thus being forever known as "Buffalo Bill".

It was also during this time that me met the famous Scout, Bro. Kit Carson, who was on his way to Washington, D.C. on Indian Agent business. He and Bill became friends and upon his return from the Capital, Carson stayed with Cody a few days before returning to Ft. Lyon (Colorado) where he shortly died. Fulfilling his railroad contract (1868) Bill was appointed "Guide and Chief of Scouts, with Command" in the 5<sup>th</sup> U. S. Cavalry (Dept. of the Missouri). Cody's and Wild Bill's paths would cross many times. During these days Bill met Col. E. B. C. Judson, known throughout the country as the writer and promoter Ned Buntline. Though separated from his wife and children, Cody's life upon the plains suited his disposition, as did racing horses along with partaking whiskey, brandy and gin. It was during this period that buffalo hunting became a very popular and well promoted pastime for the rich and influential men from "back east" and Europe. In realizing that solutions to the "Indian problem" were resulting in political challenges for the Grant administration, as well as the financial well-being of the nation, the Army encouraged these expeditions and Buffalo Bill's persona and appearance fit the role. In 1869, Buntline would publish his first of many dime novels depicting and, in some cases embellishing, the feats of Cody. His "Adventures on the Plains" electrified people throughout the nation. 1870 found Bill and Louisa living in Lincoln County, Nebraska, near Ft. McPherson. Their only son, Kit Carson Cody, was born that year. The post's Commanding Officer was concerned regarding the unavailability of a civilian court system. He enlisted Bill, and the Lincoln County Commissioners appointed William Frederick Cody as the Justice of the Peace.

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Along with holding hearings on criminal matters, he also presided over weddings. He wrote regarding his first wedding: After consuming a few drinks, "I could not find the marriage ceremony in the Nebraska statute book. I told the couple to stand up. Do you take this woman to be your lawful wedded wife, to support and love her through her life?" "I do," the groom replied. "Do you take this man to become your lawful wedded husband through life, to love, honor and obey him?" The bride said "I do." "Then join hands, I now pronounce you to be man and wife and whomsoever God and Buffalo Bill have joined together let no man put asunder. May you live long and prosper. Amen."

The 5<sup>th</sup> U. S. Cavalry was deployed to Arizona resulting in Cody's transfer to the 3<sup>rd</sup> U. S. Cavalry per the direct orders of Gen., Philip H. Sheridan. The popularity of big game and buffalo hunting drew the attention of Russia's Grand Duke Alexis, and in 1872 Buffalo Bill served as the hunting expedition's guide. Several influential businessmen from New York City joined the Duke, as did Generals Sheridan, Ord and Custer. It is reported that champagne flowed like streams and the event was a grand success. The business contacts Cody made established him with many of the "movers and shakers" back east. As a result of this media spectacle and his service, Bill was offered an Officer's commission, which he declined. After obtaining a leave, and for the first time in his life, Buffalo Bill left the frontier. He traveled by train to Chicago, Niagara Falls, Buffalo and Rochester, each time being lauded as a great hero, resulting from his exploits being heralded in Buntline's books and newspaper articles. In New York City he was wined and dined by the men he had guided on the Plains. Ned Buntline wrote a play entitled "Buffalo Bill, King of the Border Men," which Cody viewed and was offered the lead role, which he declined (being offered \$500 per week!). He traveled to Philadelphia to visit his uncle, Henry Guss, who owned the Green Tree Hotel. After two months, he returned to his family and Ft. McPherson, where he undertook scouting assignments and yet more than ever popular hunting expeditions. In the fall of 1872 Bill resigned his Army Scout position and was elected State Representative of Nebraska's 26<sup>th</sup> District. The following year (1873) he resigned his seat and traveled with his family to St. Louis to visit relatives, and then relocating and setting up house in Rochester, New York. Realizing that vast sums of money could be made from further hunting expeditions he traveled to Boston and New York City where he lined up contracts for this service. Cody spent time between The Plains and New York (1872-73). Sensing the public's interest in the adventures of the west, Bill, along with his partner "Texas Jack" Omohundro and Buntline (as their promoter) debuted with their first stage production "Scouts of the Plains." The idea was an immediate success. Cody even enticed "Wild Bill" to come east and play himself on stage, yet between his drinking, concern of percentages and the inability to remember his lines, the ever growing temperamental Hickok left the show. While performing in Springfield, Mass., Buffalo Bill received a telegram from Louisa informing him that their son Kit was seriously ill with scarlet fever. Traveling by train through the night, he arrived at their Rochester home. Cody wrote, "I found my little boy unable to speak but he seemed to recognize me and putting his little arms around my neck he tried to kiss me. On that evening at 6 o'clock my beloved little Kit died in my arms." (Thursday, April 20, 1876) His son's death at the age of 6 deeply saddened Bill and Louisa and he would write, "He was too good for this world. We loved him too dearly, he could not stay. And now his place is vacant and can never be filled, for he has gone to be a beautiful Angel, in that better world, where he will wait for us." (Kit Carson Cody is buried in the Mt. Hope Cemetery in Rochester, NY.) Bereaved by the death of his only son, Cody would dote upon his three daughters (Arta, Orra, Irma) though his wandering life would prove challenging to his relationship with them as well as his wife of 50 years. (Purportedly, at one time Cody sought a divorce from Louisa, however her strong religious convictions would not allow her to agree to such an action.)

With his son's death, Cody sought refuge in the familiar scenes of the West. In conjunction with the government's plan to rein in hostile Indian tribes, the 5<sup>th</sup> U. S. Cavalry was redeployed from Arizona to The Plains, and upon the defeat of the 7<sup>th</sup> U. S. Cavalry at the Little Big Horn, became the main strike force for a shaken military. Buffalo Bill was reappointed Chief of Scouts. Seeing the success of the Sioux and other tribes, the main Cheyenne Nation decided to unite with Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull's forces. Coming from the south, the Cheyenne body of several thousand warriors, along with their families, had to pass through War Bonnet (or War Hat) Gorge (Nebraska). The consolidation of Army forces was to be miles away, yet Cody convinced the commanding officer to divert and block the pass. On Monday, July 17, 1876, Cody led a delaying action to enable the main cavalry body to get into position. Riding out in front he observed a Cheyenne War Chief known as

Yellow Hand (or Yellow Hair). Seeing Cody, Yellow Hand yelled “I know you Pahehaska (Long Hair); if you want to fight, come ahead and fight me.” The men charged each other on horseback and within 30 yards, fired at each other. Yellow Hand’s shot missed; Cody’s took Yellow Hand’s horse down. At about the same time, Cody’s horse stepped into a hole. Both men, now afoot, ran toward one another and at about 20 paces (60 feet) fired again. Yellow Hand’s shot failed to hit its target, however Cody’s found his foe’s chest. Rushing upon the fallen warrior he plunged his knife into his heart and in front of the opposing forces took Yellow Hand’s top knot of hair, yelling “the first scalp for Custer.” The ensuing engagement resulted in a Cheyenne defeat and their being escorted to a nearby agency reservation. Yellow Hand’s father, Cut Nose, who knew Cody, sent word offering four mules for his son’s war bonnet, guns, pistols and ornaments. Though he wanted to comply, the Army would not permit the trade. Bill continued scouting until the fall of 1876, then traveled eastward to visit Louisa and his daughters in Rochester.

### The Showman and Investor

Again, Bill Cody left scouting the Plains and re-instituted his even more popular stage show, touring along the East coast’s largest cities, across the nation to San Francisco, yet taking time to visit his (now married) sisters in Denver. Louisa traveled with him on this 1877-1878 tour. The year 1878 found him establishing his first large cattle ranch with partner Major North along Nebraska’s Dismal River. He developed a large ranch outside of N. Platte (Nebraska) as well, with Louisa overseeing the construction of their new home. (This ranch, Scout’s Rest, still exists today and is open to visitors.) Whether a need for funds or just a result of his restless spirit, Buffalo Bill took to the road again in 1878, touring Washington, D. C., New Haven, Conn., Savannah, Ga., and across the country again. It was also during this time that Bill Cody penned his only autobiography (1879). In witnessing the degradation of the Indians and their habitat, he began to speak out as an advocate for the Native Americans, stating: “Every Indian outbreak that I have ever known has resulted from broken promises and broken treaties by the government.” He professed: “Never make a single promise to the Indians that is not fulfilled.”

In Omaha, Nebraska, in 1883, a production that was to endure for three decades began, “The Wild West” (and regardless of popular lore, it was never called The Wild West Show). Without today’s modern means of entertainment, live performances were the rage of the public, and Cody, the showman, realized this. Depicting the lives of Americans on the Western Plains, spectators lined up to see real cowboys, Indians, horsemen and sharpshooters. (In the 1880’s while traveling by train through Davidson County, N. C., near present Linwood, the Wild West’s train derailed. As a result, overnight the young Annie Oakley’s hair turned white!)

Even though away from Nebraska, Cody was not forgotten and was appointed to the rank of Colonel in the Nebraska National Guard. Now known as “Nature’s Nobleman”, Cody and The Wild West troupe embarked upon a tour of England where he was personally received by Queen Victoria. They returned to the United States for a brief time before heading to Europe for a four year tour, where he was greeted by the crown heads of the continent, as well as the Pope. The popularity of The Wild West skyrocketed, as did the box office receipts. In 1890, the Ghost Dance Uprising among several Indian tribes resulted in bloodshed. Gen. Nelson Miles requested Cody to return to duty with the U. S. Army to confer with its leader, Sitting Bull; however the Sioux leader’s death at the hands of Indian police negated his presence. Exposure to other cultures, beliefs and ideas found Buffalo Bill proving to be an advocate for women’s suffrage, equal rights and conservation. In 1895 he established the TE Ranch in Wyoming, near Yellowstone, and in essence becoming one of the founders of Park County’s seat of government, Cody, Wyoming. In 1899 he established “The Cody Enterprise” newspaper, which is still in print.

1900 found Cody diversifying large sums of money into crop development, irrigation projects, conservation programs, as well as oil and coal production. In 1902 he formed a mining company in Oracle, Arizona, in which he would lose a great deal of currency. With the town of Cody growing and an awareness of the developing tourist trade, he built the Irma Hotel, which he named after one of his daughters (which, based on personal experience, is an excellent place to dine and to view the hand carved cherry bar that Queen Victoria presented to Bill, finding its way to him by ship, rail and wagon). From 1903 - 1907 The Wild West returned to the crowds of Europe with updated productions including Arabs, Turks and Mongols along with cowboys and Indians. Though away, Cody agreed to and supported the development of the irrigation/electricity project Shoshone Dam (now the Cody Dam), in Park County.

#### The Curtain Lowers

From 1910 - 1913, an aging Buffalo Bill would begin and end a series of farewell tours across the United States, with the last show concluding in Portsmouth, Virginia. At this time Buffalo Bill Cody was probably the most famous American in the world. The next four years found him traveling and spending time with his dwindling family. In early 1917, while traveling, he developed a cold and stopped at his sister May Decker's home in Denver. On Wednesday, January 10, 1917, William Frederick Cody departed this world at his sister's home surrounded by Louisa, family and friends (COD kidney failure). Condolences poured in from around the world. Though earlier he had requested to be laid to rest upon Cedar Mountain just outside of Cody, Wyoming, he left the decision to Louisa. There is speculation (only) that the bereaved widow was unduly influenced by local and state politicians to have him buried in Colorado. No matter the reason, Buffalo Bill was laid to rest upon Lookout Mountain, Jefferson County, Golden, Colorado. Louisa would pass away four years later (Oct. 21, 1921), outliving all of her children, and be buried next to her husband.

#### Cody the Freemason

One of America's most famous Freemasons was initiated in the Platt Valley Lodge No. 32, in N. Platte, Nebraska, on March 5, 1870, passed to the Degree of Fellow Craft on April 2, 1870, and raised to Master Mason on Jan. 10, 1871. At the age of 40, Bill Cody was advanced to the degree of Mark Master, inducted into the Oriental Chair and received and acknowledged a most excellent Master on Nov. 14, 1888, and then exalted to the Royal Arch degree on Nov. 15, 1888. On April 1, 1889, Brother Cody was duly elected and received the Illustrious Order of the Red Cross and on the next day received the Order of Malta and was dubbed a Knight Templar. March 22, 1892, found him accepted into the Ancient Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine of Omaha, Nebraska. In April 1894 he was made a member of the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry for the Northern Jurisdiction of the United States in the Valley of New York City, along with having joined The Lodge of Perfection, the Council of Princes, the Chapter of Rose Croix, and the Consistory. Throughout his many, many miles of travels across the United States and the world, William F. Cody's name, without doubt, can be found upon the register and records of countless Lodges in his 46 year Masonic membership.

#### The Final Curtain Call: a Masonic Burial

However the decision was made where to lay the mortal remains of Bro. Buffalo Bill Cody, there can be no doubt of the degree of the respect which was paid to the man. Lookout Mountain, 18 miles southwest of Denver, in Golden, Colorado, is composed of solid granite. For nearly six months the famed frontiersman's remains were sheltered until a tomb and monument could be drilled and carved into the mountain top. Per the request of his Lodge (Platte Valley No. 32, N. Platte, Nebraska), the Golden City Lodge No. 1 performed Bill Cody's Masonic funeral. Prior to his burial, Louisa had his coffin laid in state in Denver's Capitol building. It is reported that over 30,000 people lined by his body to pay their respects. Along the funeral procession route police

officers wore their white leather aprons. Accounts placed 15,000 people in attendance at his funeral, making it one of, if not the largest Masonic funerals in American history. On the afternoon of June 3, 1917, at 3:00 pm, W. M. G. W. Parfet stated: "His spirit ascends to God who gave it. His memory we cherish in our hearts. His body we consign to the earth." The Freemasons of the West have not forgotten Bro. Cody, nor should we. The Grand Lodge of Wyoming laid the cornerstone to his memorial statue in Cody in 1927 and later dedicated the Cody Museum.

Bro. Buffalo Bill Cody was many things to many people and to the American West. His early life was difficult. He proved to be a self-made man; poor; wealthy; advisor to Presidents (Grant to Wilson); self-promoter; advocate, and visionary. It is reported that he lived his life as a true Freemason; he was a man of his word and dealt equally with people of all races. Yet perhaps Annie Oakley summed him up the best "...he was the simplest of men as comfortable with cowboys as with kings."

A Vex: More than 50 actors from Roy Rogers, Joel McCrea, Charlton Heston to Paul Newman have portrayed Buffalo Bill on film, yet do you know the first person ever to portray him on celluloid was?