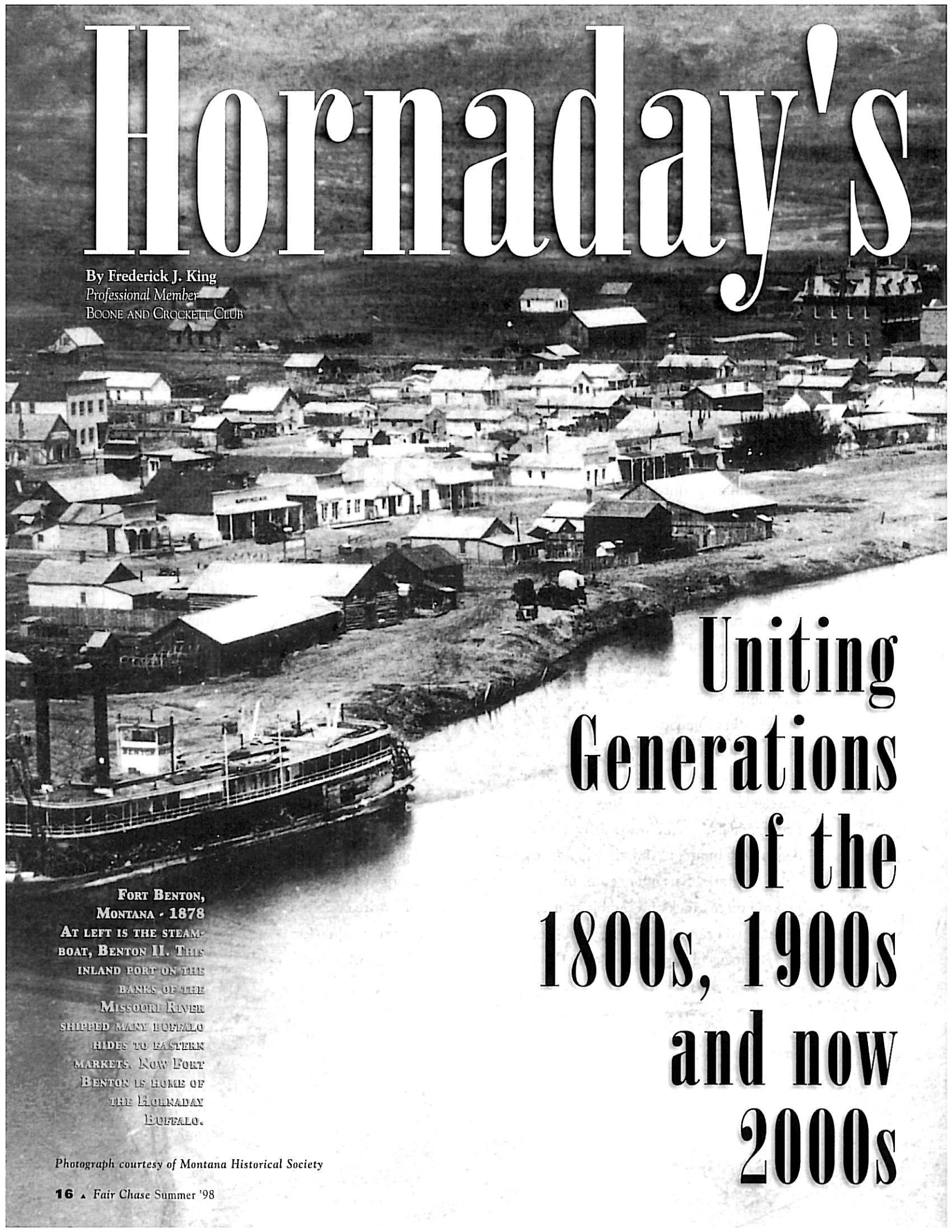


Hornaday's

By Frederick J. King
Professional Member
BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB



Uniting
Generations
of the
1800s, 1900s
and now
2000s

**FORT BENTON,
MONTANA - 1878**
AT LEFT IS THE STEAM-
BOAT, BENTON II. THIS
INLAND FORT ON THE
BANKS OF THE
MISSOURI RIVER
SHIPPED MANY BUFFALO
HIDES TO EASTERN
MARKETS. NOW FORT
BENTON IS HOME OF
THE HORNADAY
BUFFALO.

Photograph courtesy of Montana Historical Society

Buffalo

The story that you are about to read deals with a buffalo hunt that took place in the fall of 1886 on the eastern plains of Montana. The hunt took place at a time when most of the buffalo that had roamed the United States and its territories had been killed by market hunters. The hunt took place in some of the most remote and rugged land in the nation. This was a place where only a handful of the millions of buffalo remained alive and their time was going to be short.

With this article the author only hopes to kindle a spark of interest, curiosity and eventually pride about a part of our history that we can learn a great deal from. The complete story of this buffalo hunt is out there in written form and at the end of this article you will know where to look to find it. The complete story of the hunt is too complex and lengthy for this article and besides no one can tell the story better than the hunter himself, William T. Hornaday.

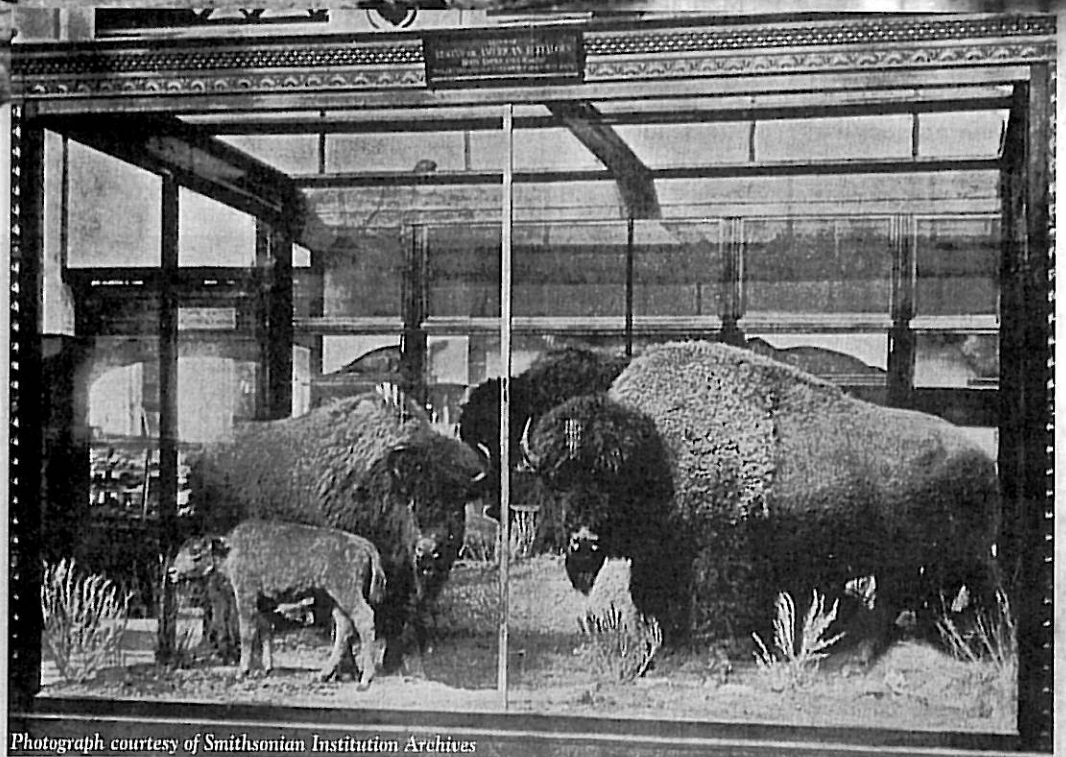
So with this I will start at the end of the trail for these buffalo which is actually a new beginning for them and also a chance for us to take a closer look and gain an appreciation for the complex quantity, quality and productivity of our American landscapes as they are expressed in these buffalo.

The date was Sunday, June 30, 1996. As my wife and I sat in the bleachers of the Fort Benton High School football field I couldn't help but think about how important this event really was. Forty-one years after his note was

found William T. Hornaday's written request "to protect these specimens from deterioration & destruction," was now finally being honored. The six specimens that Hornaday wanted to protect were part of twenty-four Montana buffalo that he and his men had collected for the Smithsonian Museum during the fall of 1886.

In 1886, William T. Hornaday was the chief taxidermist for the U.S. National Museum in Washington, D.C. His trip to Montana to collect specimens of American buffalo

HORNADAY'S ORIGINAL BUFFALO GROUP AS SEEN IN WASHINGTON, D.C. HIDDEN IN THE BASE OF THE DISPLAY IS HORNADAY'S NOTE WHICH REQUESTED PROTECTION FOR THESE MOUNTED BUFFALO.



Photograph courtesy of Smithsonian Institution Archives

He went to his death frustrated that more was not being done for the future of wildlife in the United States.

AFTER THE OFFICIAL RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY VISITORS WAIT IN LINE TO VIEW THE HORNADAY BUFFALO.

was almost due to sheer panic. He was quite sure that the buffalo populations were going to be shot by hide and market hunters into extinction. His fears were well founded for he was soon to find out that only remnants of the tens of millions of buffalo that once

roamed the nation were now left. A portion of these remnants were known to be in a very remote part of Montana, the upper Big Porcupine drainage south of the small community of Sand Springs.

Again I looked around to do a little reality check on just what was taking place. The bleachers were just about full now of about

three hundred people. This dedication of the Hornaday Bison show that was about to begin was part of a three day celebration of one hundred and fifty years of history of the town of Fort Benton. Knowing a little about the history of this town I couldn't help but feel that there could not be a better place for this living diorama of American buffalo to be put on public display.

Fort Benton was initially constructed as a fur trading post in 1846. The key to the success of this community, however, was due to its location along the Missouri River. This site allowed the town to establish itself as a trading and transportation center for raw materials and manufactured goods. In July of 1860, two steamboats the "Chippewa" and "Key West" arrived for the first time at Fort Benton. This event allowed the town to become known as the

"Head of Navigation" on the Missouri River. Fort Benton would be an inland port thirty-five hundred miles from the Gulf of Mexico. The town would rightfully take its place as the center of history for Montana.

It was 2:00 p.m. now and the formal speeches and acknowledgments were being made. The Hornaday Committee made up of John & Sue Lepley, David & Patty Parchen, Loren & Delores Perry, Fail & Ellie Stensland, plus many other hard working individuals put together a fast moving, well balanced program. With a backdrop of the Montana Agricultural Center and the colorful Steele Scouts - mounted horsemen from Calgary, Alberta, officials from the State of Montana, dignitaries from Canadian Provinces, Presidents of both University of Montana and Montana State University, plus the local organiz-



ers took their place at the speakers podium. The messages that were delivered by these leaders were all very appropriate for the moment that we were witnessing and becoming a part of. These messages centered around the history of Canada and the United States. About how the strength and success of these two nations grew from the use, marketing and exploration of natural and renewable resources. While the Hornaday Bison Group that we were dedicating represented the worst way that humans have dealt with a natural resource, a point was made by one speaker that the old buffalo populations were a representation of the quantity and quality of the productivity of the land. As an unprotected resource in the 1800s economic greed brought out the worst in the way humans made use of these buffalo populations, almost to the point of their extinction, but the productivity potential of the land still remains, giving us another chance to learn from a history of mistakes and some successes and to pass that appreciation for the land to future generations.

So after the speeches were finished, a couple more introductions were made to the audience. The first introduction was Bob Scriver, well-known Montana sculptor. His replica of the buffalo group in their natural setting was used to start the fund raising necessary for the restoration work on the buffalo. Fifty bronze copies were made and sold to start a financial base to work from.

Tom Hardesty was also introduced to the group. Tom, along with fellow taxidermist Bob Maier, are co-owners of Atcheson's Taxidermy in Butte, Montana. Because of their reputation of museum quality work their taxidermy shop was selected to do the cleanup and restoration of the Hornaday Buffalo Group. A better choice could not have been made.

WILLIAM T. HORNADAY, CHIEF TAXIDERMIST FOR THE U.S. NATIONAL MUSEUM, KILLED 24 MONTANA BUFFALO IN THE FALL OF 1886. THE BUFFALO WERE USED FOR SCIENTIFIC PURPOSES AND PUBLIC DISPLAY.

Now it was time to move on. The speeches and introductions were complete and on this calm, sunny summer afternoon we filed in behind the Governor of Montana, Marc Racicot, as he crossed the football field to the Montana Agricultural Center and cut the ribbon. This officially opened the Hornaday Buffalo Group again to public viewing.

There are only six life-size mounted buffalo situated in a natural setting. Are they worth seeing? You must be the judge. But when you read and learn the story and think about the meaning of these special buffalo, where they came from, why they were killed, who killed them, and what they represent both in the past and present and now for the future, then you will come also. You will come to try and reach back to a part of our history that we cannot return to but you will come to see these special animals. And when you learn more about their story, like myself you will return to look at them again.

As my wife and I walked along Front Street, away from the Museum and toward the Grand Union Hotel, I couldn't help but wonder just how William T.

**Little did he know
that his efforts
would pay off.
Wildlife populations
have made an
excellent recovery.**



Photograph courtesy of Montana Historical Society

**HORNADAY'S BUFFALO,
CLEANED UP AND
RESTORED ARE NOW ON
DISPLAY EXACTLY AS
THEY WERE IN THE
SMITHSONIAN IN
WASHINGTON, D.C.**



IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN READING MORE OF THE DETAILS OF THE 1886 BUFFALO HUNT OF WILLIAM T. HORNADAY, THE FOLLOWING REFERENCES ARE SUGGESTED: MONTANA MAGAZINE #105 JANUARY-FEBRUARY, 1991; PAGES 58-71; THE VANISHING WEST, PUB 817, THE RIVERS AND PLAINS SOCIETY, P.O. BOX 262, FORT BENTON, MT 59442; HEADS, HIDES AND HORNS, LARRY BARSNESS, AUTHOR, 1985; AND FINALLY, A WILD ANIMAL ROUNDUP, BY WILLIAM T. HORNADAY, 1924, PAGES 5-53, THIS IS HORNADAY'S DESCRIPTION OF THE HUNT IN MONTANA FOR THESE BUFFALO. THIS BOOK MAY BE HARD TO FIND SINCE IT HAS BEEN OUT OF PRINT FOR SOME TIME.

Hornaday felt about today's dedication of his buffalo. Of course, Hornaday was not there. He had passed away in 1937. When he died, wildlife populations in North America were at an all time low. He went to his death frustrated that more was not being done for the future of wildlife in the United States. He did not know that his efforts would pay off and wildlife populations would make an excellent recovery. Nor did he know that his note sealed in a metal box and hidden in the base of his original diorama would be discovered and his request for protection of these six buffalo would be finally honored

today. To put it mildly, I had to feel that William T. Hornaday has to be proud. Proud not only that his buffalo are again on public display, but also proud and grateful to the people who gave so freely of their time and resources to honor a request of a man they never met. These bison will now serve to unite the generations of the past, the present and the future around a moment in time and remind us all not only of the success and failures that we have had in the past but the positive influence that we can have in the future.

While the success of bringing the Hornaday buffalo to a perma-

nent home in Fort Benton is shared by many people, there is one individual who stands out in this effort. Doug Coffman, a freelance writer from Eugene, Oregon, not only served as a detective to initially seek out the location of the Hornaday buffalo but also acted as a catalyst to involve the right people and rekindle their interest in bringing the Hornaday buffalo group back for public display.

Now it is up to you to do some of your own detective work and follow this story to the banks of the Missouri River at the town of Fort Benton. Here a crossroads of history will open up for you to explore- have fun! ▲▲▲



ABOUT THE AUTHOR...

PICTURED AT LEFT, THE AUTHOR WHILE AT ATCHESON'S TAXIDERMERY WHERE THE RESTORATION WAS TAKING PLACE ON HORNADAY'S BUFFALO.

FREDERICK J. KING OF BOZEMAN, MONTANA, JOINED THE BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB AS A PROFESSIONAL MEMBER IN 1994. HE IS CURRENTLY AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF THE RECORDS COMMITTEE AND CHAIR OF THE CLUB'S MUSEUM COMMITTEE. FRED HAS BEEN AN OFFICIAL MEASURER SINCE 1984, AND ALSO MEASURES FOR THE POPE & YOUNG CLUB AND THE LONGHUNTER SOCIETY. HE IS A WILDLIFE AREA MANAGER IN SOUTHWEST MONTANA FOR MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS, A POSITION HE HAS HELD SINCE 1975. FRED IS ALSO A MEMBER OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN ELK FOUNDATION, AMATEUR TRAPSHOOTING ASSOCIATION AND THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY.