

Where The Buffalo Roamed

Thundering Herds Echo From Past

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the third in a series of four stories written by students in the Depth Reporting Class of the School of Journalism. This series represents an experiment at using the information in a new book to write a news story.

By Gary Lacey
Wood River Center, during 1860, was a community of buffalo as well as people.

The settlers were determined to make Wood River a decent place to live; the Buffalo were transients seeking only tranquility.

"Our beautiful townsite has been rudely trampled on by those ugly-looking beasts, known as Buffalo. . . . We intend to keep some weapons handy, so that, should they kick up too much dust around our office, or rob the porkers of their accustomed slop, we shall not be responsible for their safety," the WOOD RIVER ECHO reported in 1860. The Buffalo were on the run.

By the next year the Buffalo had been driven on, and Wood River had no problem.

The problem was this: the bulky plains animals had no place to go.

By 1926 there were 4,387 Buffalo remaining from the millions, indeed perhaps billions, which once had been there.

The fable saga of the American Buffalo, "THE HUNTING OF THE BUFFALO," is the subject of a book reprinted by the University of Nebraska Press. It was first released in 1929 by Appleton Co., as a revised doctorate thesis written by E. Douglas Branch, who at the time he wrote the tract was a recognized scholar and the time of his death—an alcoholic dishwasher on Chicago's skid row.

The plight of the American Buffalo paralleled that of E. Douglas Branch. Both were unable to adapt to changing conditions; both were tormented, and taken for granted.

The downfall of the Buffalo, as described by Branch, begins as early as 1800 when several fur companies were established in the eastern sector of the United States. General Ashley, head of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, became interested in Buffalo on an 1822 hunting expedition when, with the help of friendly Indians, he trapped the strange animal in a camouflaged pit. The animal from that time on served as the main food for hunters, most of whom were trapping beaver.

The hunters roasted the Buffalo meat over an open fire and enjoyed the steaks, but left the remains behind. On the other hand, the Indians used the animal for practically everything; the Buffalo entrails were the most esteemed



morsels (especially spiced with gall bladder juice); the fat was used as a substitute for bread, the meat was dried to make " pemmican " and the skins served as tepees and blankets. Some were sold to hunters.

Having been driven out of the area east of the Mississippi by 1810, the Buffalo now called the Great Plains his home. Still plentiful, they migrated as far north as Canada in the summer months and as far south as Northern Texas in the winter. Some severe winters caught them too far North and they became trapped in the drifts. One hunter recalled that one spring the dead Buffalo carcasses were so thick in the thaw-swollen river that he couldn't see the water. The odor was unbearable.

It was not until the 1830's, the book reports, that the Buffalo began to overshadow the fur trade. Buffalo fur sold for \$2 in Europe as a novelty, but the exotic venture fell through when the newness wore off.

Then as quickly as the market for Buffalo hide receded, a change in fashion

caused beaver to drop in sales and Buffalo regained demand. Pierre Chouteau of the American Fur Company in 1835 wrote: "The short crop of buffalo robes disappointed many dealers last year, and we have orders already for the whole of the next collection if it be 36,000 or more."

In 1843 an official of the American Fur Company quoted the following yearly Buffalo robe sales: American Fur Company . . . 70,000 hides; Hudson Bay Company . . . 10,000 hides; all other companies, approximately 10,000 hides. Over the ten year period from '33 to '43 this amounted to nearly one million hides.

Was the supply of Buffalo dwindling? The author compared the number of remaining animals to the number of remaining gallons of whisky or number of beads which were then paid to the Indians who had begun hunting Buffalo to sell to hunters.

Settlers began traversing the nation during the mid-1800's and with them

they brought first the covered wagon, then the train, and then more trains. All were enemies of the Buffalo.

The Oregon Trail severed the wandering Buffalo herds. The Transcontinental Railroad completely cut the mass of animals into northern and southern herds. Later railroad ventures in the Dakotas and in Kansas further divided the two resulting herds.

The coming of the white man brought the sport of Buffalo hunting.

Josiah Gregg, a member of a wagon train crossing the country in the 1840's wrote in his diary that "very few hunters appear able to refrain from shooting as long as the games remains within reach of their rifles; nor can they ever permit a fair shot to escape them."

Later in the trip he recalled: "Our horses were wild with excitement and fright; the balls flew at random—the flying animals (Buffalo), frantic with pain and rage, seemed imbued with many lives. One was brought to bay by whole volleys of shots; his eyeballs

glared; he bore his tufted tail aloft like a black flag; then shaking his vast and shaggy mane in impotent defiance, he sank majestically to the earth, under twenty bleeding shots."

The number of Buffalo shot for food, shot for sport, shot for hides, and shot by railroad hunters for pure folly produced by 1862 thousands of skeletons lining the westward routes. The traveler could no longer depend on the plains for food. Grocery stores sprang up to meet the demands of the travellers.

Herds that remained, and there still were quite a number, found refuge in western Nebraska, eastern Colorado, Wyoming and the western Dakotas—never close to the railroads. In this western herd there were 8,000,000 animals. When Cleveland took office there were 8.

In the late 1860's one authority estimates that more than 1,000,000 per year were shot for hides alone.

Buffalo were generally quite unintelligent animals. Their sense of motivation and direction usually was centered around the leader of the herd, a bull. Hunters amused themselves by participating in what they termed a "stand." To carry out a stand a hunter killed the leader of the herd. The other Buffalo, not knowing what to do, stood motionless to be killed. One hunter reported that he shot 158 animals in such a "stand."

With the Buffalo decreasing at an astounding rate every day, in 1869 Columbus Delano became secretary of the interior. He declared that in all relationships with the Indians the United States must remember that it was the strongest party and "should take the place of their barbarous habits by taking over the soil which they occupy."

Delano's plan of coercion was to eliminate the lifeblood of the Indian—his Buffalo. As the animal died off, Delano believed, so would the Indian populations, thus leaving 93,692,731 acres free for settlers to occupy.

All attempts to pass legislation to protect the Buffalo in Congress failed at the outset, but when one weak bill was approved, President Grant pigeonholed it.

As Buffalo became more scarce, Indians became more hostile. Delano's policy, according to Branch, resulted in the massacre of General Custer's men on the Little Big Horn and the many other tragedies of the Sioux War of 1876 and 1877. In the spring the first part of Delano's plan was realized. A New Jersey hide buyer collected enough Buffalo robes in Kansas to make a scant carload. It was the only carload to go east on the Northern Pacific Railroad that year.

Only the bones were to follow.



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mission increase. This in turn makes the selection of students harder yet at those colleges.

At the same time, the highly desired college finds it must work harder, in good conscience, to keep faith with its rising reputation. So it raises its fees further in order to put more money into the educational program. The impact of that is to convince the public even more that this college must be truly superior. Applicants flood in faster still, with no questions asked about cost.

Thus we come to a first conclusion, namely that public reputation in a college as in any business is not only the result of but, much more, the actual means to success and quality in the product.

There is anxiety along the road, however. For one thing the great admissions derby has placed considerable strain upon what used to be a rather quiet and private practice of a student's picking his college and the college's admitting the student. The judgments have become excruciating largely because they ask the impossible. Believe me when I say student abilities cannot be so finely predicted at age 17.

Second, with its passion for horse racing and totem-pole-building, the public has come to believe that only the most sought-after colleges can give a good education; other colleges are assumed to be relatively poor. It becomes almost a source of chagrin when it is admitted one's child is attending a nonprestige college. No one is more distressed to observe this than the sought-after colleges themselves.

Third, a college's public reputation typically lags behind its actual performance by from 5 to 10 years. Some colleges have become better than they are publicly known to be, while a few others, including some of the most sought-after, are coasting on their reputations while progress stagnates.

Fourth, we are not entirely certain that the combination of tight admission screening plus maximum dollars spent on academics is producing a superior educational result for every student.

Since I have come to the brink of a hearsay, let me stop long enough to qualify. There is clear evidence that for the top level of scholastic students the combination of tight academic screening and high dollar investment in specialties has produced superior results. It has speeded up progress into graduate school and thereafter into research production and other outstanding professional work.

The trouble is, we speak of such colleges as if they enrolled no students except potential scholars and researchers. Yet every college, even the most selective, has a lower level of student body. Most of these are highly educable but are not necessarily inclined toward a life of scholarship and research. What kind of education are the colleges presenting for their needs? We are less sure about this.

Genetically speaking, the human race does not change much; native intelligence from one decade to another. We tend to forget that. Our students in college today in the aggregate are no brainer than were students of 30 years ago. Our top scholars are not more gifted than they used to be. They are, to be sure, being better trained and more strongly challenged than most of us were in the '20s and '30s.

Thus what I should want to know before I judge the goodness of a college as a whole is this: What kind of permanent educational impact is it making on the lower half as well as the upper half of its student body? Colleges are being rated on the percentage of their seniors who go on to graduate school. That is very important to us all and to the future of technology. Still it would give a wider base for judgment to know also what percentage of the total freshman class that entered college four years ago is graduating this year, and what has happened to the others. In most colleges in the past five years, the drop-out rate has continued at about the same level. We have more work to do here.

Another criterion used for college superiority is the salary scale paid its faculty. I suppose in 16 years I have given more time toward improvement in that

category than to anything else. At the same time we face a curious problem: By and large, the highest-paid professor today is the professor who teaches least. That is not the result of academic dilettantism, I believe; rather it reflects the fact that the research products of more and more academicians have become highly marketable outside in industry and government. The scientist and the social scientist fly monthly to Washington or New York. Lately the humanities professor is being taken along on the family plan, because current conferences have a way of stating, just before adjournment, "And we must preserve the humanities."

At the same time there are thousands of college professors who are dedicated to the creative challenge of teaching. It takes a certain administrative resolution to sort out the most effective of these and reward them equally with the researchers and the junketeers.

Certainly it would be wrong to discourage in any way the heartening and belated rise in faculty salaries. It would not be wrong to include, in the matter of how good is a college, the question of how much attention are its senior professors giving to the personal instruction of students — and not merely of upper-a question, by the way, is answerable.

What lies just ahead is a flood of public light upon the whole spectrum of higher education. It will bring with it much of the same critical attention that has been given elementary and secondary education in preceding decades. I think the development will be good for the colleges. College education to some degree resembles a prospering small corporation whose need for expansion in capital and markets impels it to "go public." When college education goes on the Big Board (to continue the figure) the public may ask for closer measurements of its performance. . . . Let me try to suggest what some of these might be.

I propose in general an annual public reporting of colleges along the lines of Fortune's summer issues on the 500 largest industrial corporations, banks, etc. On the chart would appear such familiar terms as enrollment size, faculty size, degrees, endowment, library volumes per student, and numbers of graduates according to the different specialties. To these I would then add some

less familiar items, such as the following.

1. The percentage of entering freshmen four years ago who graduated this year.
 2. The percentage of the academic lower half of the freshman class three years ago who graduated this year.
 3. The percentage of the student body (a) from other counties, (b) from the different socio-economic brackets within our country.
 4. The percentage of this year's graduates who came from families below the national median income.
 5. The percentage of faculty who have contributed in fields of research, scholarship, or the creative arts in the past five years.
 6. The percentage of graduates from the college over the past 15 years who are now in academic life and who are making similar contributions to scholarship and art.
 7. The percentages of graduates in the various recognized professions.
 8. The percentage of graduates who are active in volunteer contributions to civic life in their respective communities.
 9. The number of graduates currently serving in public office — whether local, county, state, or Federal.
 10. The number of major departments offered at the college.
 11. The number among those departments which have brought significant changes into their programs during the past five years.
 12. The library circulation figures for the college, in books not assigned for class reading.
 13. The average student attendance at noncompulsory evening events such as lectures, forums, concerts, and plays.
 14. The most recent date on which the administration and faculty as a objectives of the college.
- Some of the tables I suggest are provocative rather than practicable. Still, in the computer age any such data-gathering would become child's play. What I have gone is to propose some analyses of a college's inner make-up and performance which have to do with quality in the total campus experience. The method of inquiry and report might or might not be a good idea. But each question raised in my list, has this to ask? Inside that college, what is happening to young people—all its young people

Rating The Colleges

Salaries + Research + Teaching = ?

—that becomes important and lasting?

How good, then, is a college? A college is as good as the permanent improvements it brings about in the largest majority of its students.

The responsibility to do this is not the college's alone. Admission to a selective college should bring no guarantee of results without student effort — we might say maximum effort. But neither is the college relieved of its responsibility for results among its students who are average or less.

Concerning the brilliant ones, we are honest in saying: Show them the doors get out of their way. For the others, I submit at the risk of quaintness in this year of 1964 my belief in the value of teaching. One might count that a vote on the side if the angels, like votes for motherhood. Yet currently the administrator's vote for the value of teaching is not being enough heard in the land.

We shall never be able to measure the goodness of a college as we can the performance of a business corporation. One good reason is that the results of education may not show up until years after college. I believe colleges may have overworked that reason. We in the colleges could look harder than we do to see the evidence that is available concerning the quality of what we are actually doing. At the least we can measure more closely the extent of our measures toward educating all our students. Honors programs for the gifted top ones should not exhaust our efforts. Too many lower-echelon graduates of today have a way of becoming the leaders of tomorrow. Maturity in people comes at different rates.

The great theologian Paul Tillich has said that at the heart of every real personal person, I have found the same thing to be true at the heart of every combined human endeavor, of which the American college is so notable an example. The demand to improve is indeed an inner demand but it does not necessarily operate best without outside prompting.

Most of our colleges are good now—better perhaps than the public knows or allows. Still, a discerning public can help them become better. And from this helpful public scrutiny I would except no college that we know.

—Louis T. Benezet