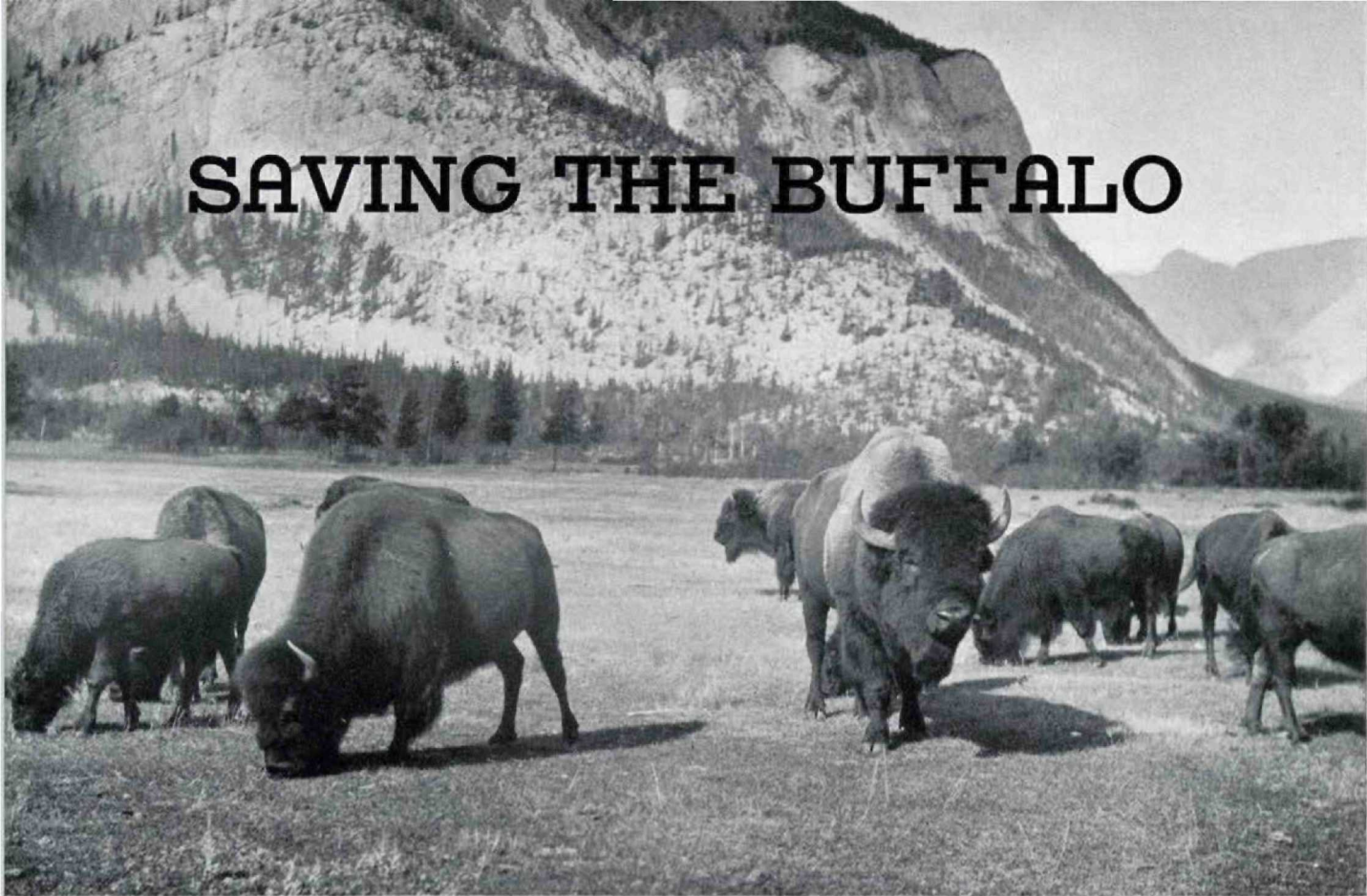


SAVING THE BUFFALO



Buffalo in Banff National Park, Alberta. Some of these may be descendants of the animals sent there by Sir Donald Smith.

W. F. Montgomery.

The following article has been written from various sources. Two of them are interviews with the late Charles V. Alloway of Winnipeg—one given by him to the Winnipeg Tribune in 1925 and the other to the late Thomas W. Leslie in 1920. A third is the booklet, The Last of the Buffalo, written by a Winnipeg newspaperman who watched the last round-up, published in 1909 and illustrated with photos by Norman Luxton of Banff, who has also supplied some of the data.

Hon. James McKay, speaker of the first Manitoba legislature, and later Minister of Agriculture, who with the Alloway brothers began the saving of the buffalo seventy-five years ago.



THE Alloway brothers, William and Charles, came to Fort Garry with the troops in 1870-71; but after affairs military petered out, they went into the freighting business with Hon. James McKay of Deer Lodge, speaker of the first Manitoba legislature. They had over four hundred horses and several hundred oxen, and used to team-freight with Red River carts from Winnipeg to St. Paul and Winnipeg to Edmonton. Also, every spring, they went out on the big spring buffalo hunt to get hides which they sold to the H B C at Fort Garry.

As an illustration of how numerous the buffalo were in those days, Charles Alloway told the *Tribune*: "One day we were camping in the Qu'Appelle valley. We heard the steady tramp, tramp, tramp of their stampeding feet coming towards us. This was at ten o'clock in the morning. They were racing for the ford of the river there. The Indians advised that we move our camp into the nearby bush. We did so just in time. For twenty-four hours and longer they were coming in long, loping columns, passing at the rate of about ten a second. I think I err on the side of conservatism when I say that nearly one million animals crossed that ford in slightly more than twenty-four hours."

It was in 1873 that Mr. Alloway and his partners realized the day might soon dawn when the vast bison herds would be no more. They had bought as many as 21,000 hides from a brigade of hunters, paying \$3 for the average and \$4 for the large ones. That rate of killing them off, they knew, could not go on for ever, especially when there were dozens of brigades out hunting at one time. So that year they decided to try and raise some calves in captivity. "First we got hold of a domestic cow to feed the calves," Mr.

Alloway told his interviewer. "Then we joined Pierre la Vaillie's brigade with an ox cart. That cow got pretty tired at times before we were through with her! We didn't come up with a large herd until we were southwest of Battleford on the Battle River. After the slaughter was over, some motherless calves came up to our campfire and hung around looking pathetic. We went after three of them—two bulls and a heifer—and brought them back to Deer Lodge. Once they got used to our cow, they did well, and she raised the three of them.

"The following April, that of 1874, we struck west again with a large brigade of hunters. These brigades were really migratory tribes of Indians or half-breeds, having 80 to 100 hunters, their wives and families, ox-carts and horses, in all perhaps 2,000 human souls. We did not come up with the buffaloes until some time in May, and then they were west of Milk River, halfway between Regina and Moose Jaw and near the international border. This time we also got three calves—one bull and two heifers—all our cow could raise. But in spite of all we could do, one of the three, the bull, sickened and died. It is exceedingly difficult to make the calves take to a domestic cow.

"Thus, with two bulls and three heifers, the foundation for our buffalo herd was laid. In 1877 there was a pronounced shortage of buffaloes. But a hunter we sent out got thirty head quite close to Winnipeg, south of Pembina mountains. Fires, or predators and hunters had driven them down there. In 1878 and 1879 they began to go away again and from then on they were practically unknown.

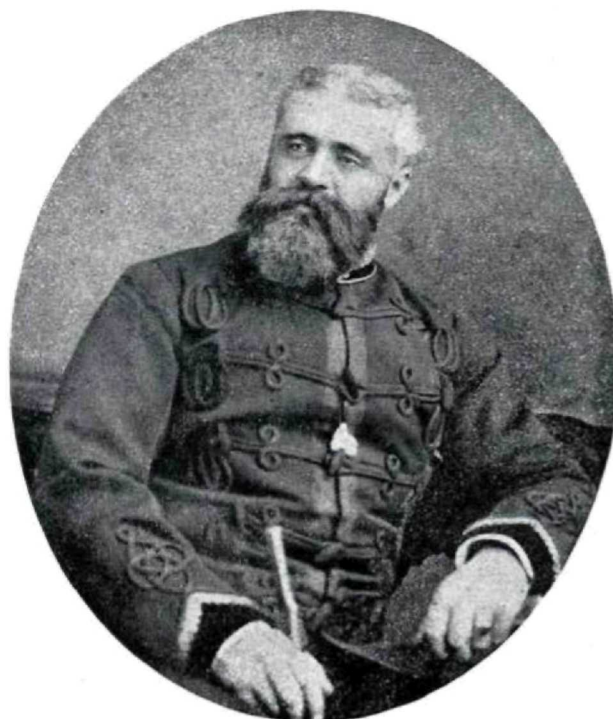
"In the spring of 1878 our little herd had grown from five calves to thirteen animals purebred and three cross-bred to domestic cattle. By this time we realized something of the value of the few we had, although we did not know that the prairie buffalo was practically extinct. We kept them at Deer Lodge in summer and Baie St. Paul in winter. We fed them hay and tended them in shelters much the same as domestic cattle."

Early in 1878, the Alloway brothers decided to leave the freighting business and go into banking. In February, the partners held an auction sale, and sold their herd for \$1000 to Col. Sam Bedson, governor of Stony Mountain Penitentiary, who the year before had bought from them a bull, four heifers, and five calves.

"The morning after Governor Bedson bought our buffaloes," Mr. Alloway told the reporter, "A cow dropped a calf. That same day the herd was moved 22 miles by road from Deer Lodge to Stony Mountain, round by Winnipeg. The same night they came back, 18 miles in a bee line, to Deer Lodge, the one-day-old calf with its mother tramping through the deep snow. The third day they were moved back to Stony Mountain—a total distance of 62 miles covered by a three day old buffalo. No domestic calf could do one quarter of that at the same age."

Col. Bedson cross-bred the buffalo with domestic cattle, and obtained some interesting results. Dr. W. T. Hornaday, of the New York Zoological Society, quotes a letter from Bedson, written in 1888¹:

"The half-breed resulting from two crosses as above mentioned has been again crossed with the thoroughbred buffalo bull, producing a three-quarter breed animal closely resembling the buffalo, the head and robe being quite equal, if not superior. The half breeds are very prolific. The cows drop a calf annually. They are also very hardy indeed, as



Lt.-Col. Samuel Bedson, governor of Stony Mountain penitentiary, Manitoba, who was largely responsible for saving the buffalo by breeding them in captivity. He also obtained some interesting results with hybrids.

they take the instinct of the buffalo during blizzards and storms, and do not drift like native cattle. They remain in our open prairies while the thermometer ranges from 30 to 40 degrees below zero, with little or no food except what they rustle on the prairie and no shelter at all. . . . I consider the meat of the half breed much preferable to domestic animals, while the robe is very fine indeed, the fur being evened up on the hind parts, the same as on the shoulders."

This however, was by no means the first time that cross breeding had been tried. Humboldt in his *Aspects of Nature* quotes Albert Gallatin, the distinguished diplomat, as saying that "The mixed breed was quite common . . . in some of the northwestern counties of Virginia [where he lived before 1795]; and the cows, the issue of that mixture, propagated like all others." Humboldt adds: "According to the statement of Gomara, there was still living in the northwest of Mexico, in latitude 40°, an Indian tribe whose principal riches consisted in herds of tame bisons or buffalo."²

The Hudson's Bay Company had tried domesticating the buffalo at least as early as 1842. In the year Col. Bedson wrote the above remarks, the Senate in Ottawa held an enquiry into the resources of the Mackenzie River basin. At one point in the proceedings the chairman asked Hon. William Christie, an ex-Hudson's Bay man, "Is it your opinion that the wood buffalo could be crossed with the domestic animal?" Mr. Christie replied: "As far back as 1842, the Hudson's Bay Company had at Fort Edmonton a herd of buffalo. They began by taking come calves, and from these the herd increased until they had some thirty altogether. These used to herd out with the other cattle and come in with them. All at once the [wild] buffalo came near Edmonton and this herd

1. Hewitt, C. Gordon, *The Conservation of the Wild Life of Canada*, N.Y., 1921, p. 139.

2. Hind, Henry Y., *Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition of 1857*, Vol. II, p. 112-3.



The buffalo heifer presented by the Company to the London Zoo about 1830.

went off with the others. It was the impression then, from their mixing with the other cattle, that they would not cross, because there were not any signs of it, and I was not aware that they would until I saw that it had proved successful with Bedson's herd."

Tame buffalo were also kept for a while at York Factory in 1840. Letitia Hargrave, writing to her father on September 2nd of that year, reports:

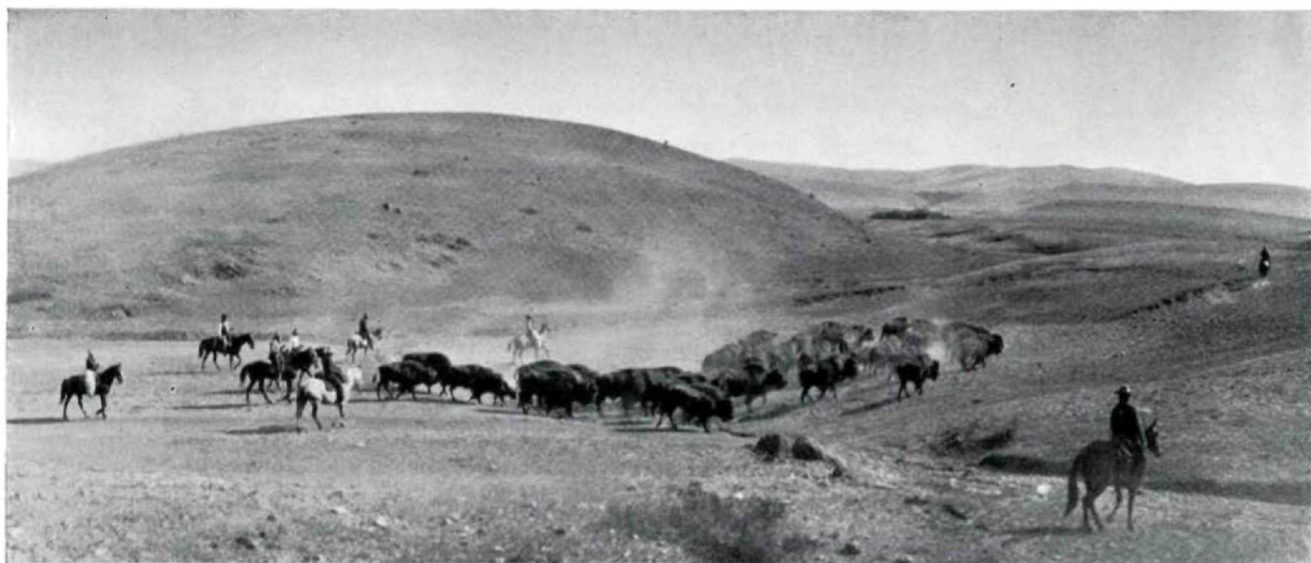
"There are 2 young buffaloes feeding before our house previous to being sent home [i.e., to England—probably for the London Zoo]. . . . The animals are tame & will eat salt out of the hand." Three years later she wrote: "There are two unfortunate Buffaloes on their way to the ship, where as usual they will meet their doom. Two years ago there were 3, all of them were literally hunted to death. Wilson sent all the Indians & Orkney men to catch & put them on board the Schooner. Instead of enclosing them in a circle, the whole party chased them through the Fort till the poor creatures lay down. . . . One died before it got on board the ship, the others immediately after."³

Before this, however, the Company had successfully transferred buffalo to England, for in a book published in 1831, *The Gardens and Menagerie of the Zoological Society*, there is an illustration (reproduced here) of a heifer presented by them to the London Zoo.

At Stony Mountain, Col. Bedson was so successful that in ten years after purchasing the Deer Lodge buffalo, his herd had increased to 110 head, consisting of 85 thoroughbred bulls and cows, 8 half-breed cows and bulls, and 17 calves, mixed and pure. In 1888 he

3. *Letters of Letitia Hargrave*, Champlain Society, Toronto, 1947.

Part of the Flathead Reservation herd in Montana being rounded up for shipment to Canada. This is all that was left of 350 after a hard day's ride. Norman Luxton.



disposed of the entire herd, selling 27 thoroughbreds to Sir Donald A. Smith (later Lord Strathcona) for his farm at Silver Heights, west of Winnipeg, and the remainder to C. J. "Buffalo" Jones of Garden City, Kansas, who paid him \$50,000. Sir Donald gave the City of Winnipeg five head, sent thirteen to Banff National Park, and kept the rest at Silver Heights. But later, when he left the West, he gave these also to Banff Park.

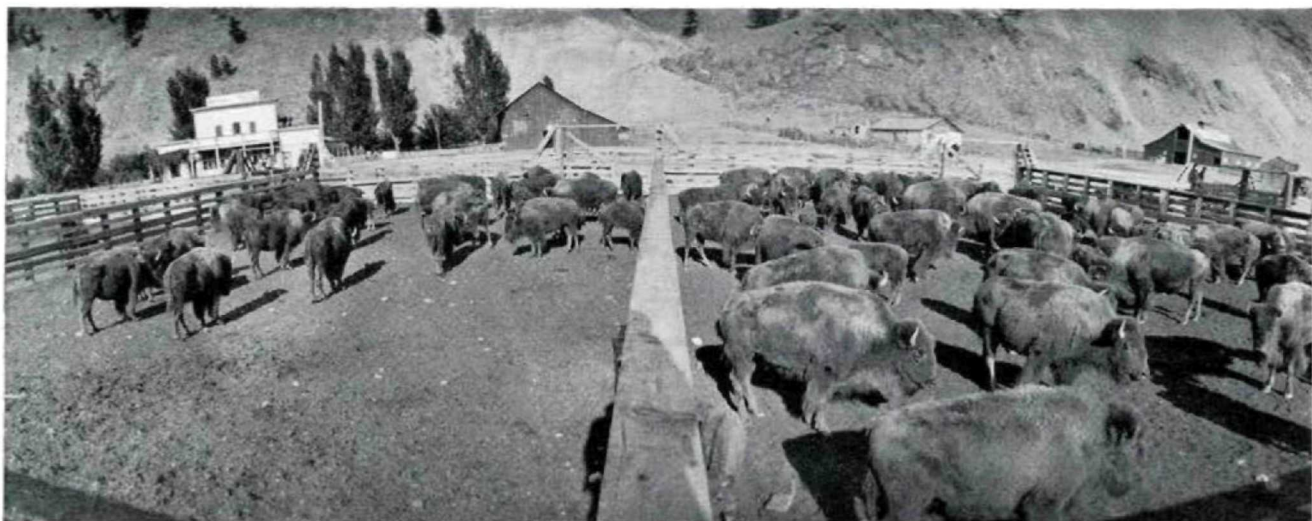
Buffalo Jones took his animals to Texas, where, according to Mr. Alloway, "He had visions of big game hunters coming to his ranch and paying important money to ride and shoot in a buffalo hunt. Theodore Roosevelt was going on a big game hunt to Africa and took Jones along, as he was an expert with the lasso, and Roosevelt had an idea that lions and other big game could be lassoed instead of shot.

"After a while Jones's buffalo in Texas became infested with ticks, and he was advised that he would have to move them to Montana, or they would all die. It was too hot for them down there. He had a very strenuous time getting them moved, and when he arrived in Montana he was a very sick man. He therefore sold what remained of his herd to Charles Allard, who with his partner, Michel Pablo, had a ranch in that state."

Allard and Pablo already had some buffalo on their ranch, whose origins were extraordinarily similar to those they had just bought from Jones.

In the same year (1873) as Mr. Alloway collected his first buffalo calves, a Pend d'Oreille Indian named Walking Coyote was doing exactly the same thing in Montana, and for the same reason. He captured four calves near the Milk River in what is now southern Alberta—two bulls and two heifers—and took them to St. Ignatius Mission, in the Flathead Reservation. In 1884, when these four had increased to thirteen, Allard, then ranching on the reservation, entered into partnership with his boyhood friend, Pablo, and bought ten of them at \$250 each.

Nine years later, however, when Jones brought the remnants of his Texas herd to Montana, they still had no more than ten. Jones sold them twenty-six pure bred and eighteen hybrids, and with these their herd soon began to increase steadily.



Buffalo in the corrals at Ravalli, Montana, ready to be shipped to Wainwright, Alberta.

Norman Luxton.

Allard died in 1896, at which time the herd numbered about three hundred. Half of this number belonged to Pablo; the rest went to the Allard estate, and were divided as follows: Mrs. Allard sold her share to Charles Konrad of Kalispell, Montana; Howard Eaton bought the share of Allard's son Charles, and of his sisters; and Judge Woodrow of Missoula purchased those owned by Joseph Allard. Besides these, 250-300 were sold by Pablo in small lots.

Despite this distribution, the Pablo herd had increased to approximately eight hundred by 1906. About this time, he was notified by the U.S. government that he would have to remove his herd from the Flathead Reservation. Alexander Ayotte, Canadian government immigration agent in Montana, heard of this, and got in touch with Howard Douglas, superintendent of Banff National Park. Douglas and Ayotte then approached Hon. Frank Oliver, Minister of the Interior, and Mr. Oliver—who had known the West in the days of the great buffalo herds—obtained an option on the Pablo herd. The result was its purchase by the Dominion of Canada.

Pablo agreed to deliver the first shipment at Elk Island Park, northeast of Edmonton, for \$190 a head. About three hundred arrived there in 1907, but the job was such an expensive one, that Pablo lost money, and raised his price to \$245. The transfer, which lasted for three years, was superintended by Douglas and Ayotte. Wainwright Park was set aside in 1908 to accommodate the new herd, and the later shipments from Montana were sent there.

The last round-up took about two months. Some seventy-five Mexican cowboys were employed, and yet in six weeks of daily drives, they succeeded only three times in getting any buffalo into the corrals at Ravalli, Montana. Time and again the infuriated beasts would turn and charge the line of riders, scattering them to all points of the compass. The wear and tear on both men and horses was considerable. Finally, a fence twenty-six miles long was built from the pastures to Ravalli, and along this fence the buffalo were driven to the corrals.

In all, 716 animals were transferred by rail to the Canadian parks, with a loss of only three or four. Most of those shipped to Elk Island Park were later

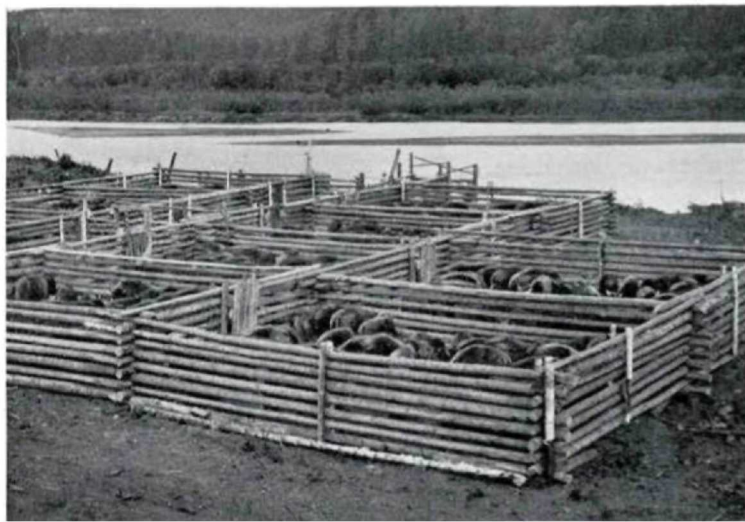
sent to Wainwright, where until recently the largest herd was kept. In 1914, the Wainwright herd numbered 750, of which 630 had originated on Pablo's ranch, 90 had come from Banff, and 30 from the Konrad ranch at Kalispell.

From 1925 to 1928, 6,673 animals were transferred by railway and river barge to Wood Buffalo National Park, partly in Alberta and partly in the Northwest territories, south of Great Slave Lake;⁴ but there were still thousands at Wainwright, and 4,000 had been sent to other parks and zoos. So numerous had the buffalo become, in fact, that the parks were no longer able to support them, and hundreds had to be periodically slaughtered.

Early in the recent war, Wainwright Park was taken over by the Department of National Defence as an artillery range, and as Elk Island Park had all the buffalo it could handle (about two thousand) those at Wainwright were killed off.

There are still plenty left, however, in various parts of Canada and the United States, to assure the future of these noble animals. Never again will they be seen roaming the western prairies in their illimitable multitudes. Great herds of pure bred cattle, vast wheat lands, farms and towns and thronging cities have usurped their ancient domain. But at least they have not entirely perished, and these living symbols of the old West will be saved for posterity—thanks to the efforts of those farsighted men who began the preservation of them, just seventy-five years ago.

Young buffalo in corrals at Waterways, Alberta, on their way from Wainwright to Wood Buffalo Park in 1925. C. R. Hird.



4. This difficult undertaking was planned and supervised by Col. J. K. ("Peace River Jim") Cornwall.