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HUNT, CAPTURE, RAISE, INCREASE

THE PEOPLE WHO SAVED THE BISON

KEN ZONTEK

Charles and Mollie Goodnight, C. J. “Buffalo” Jones, Frederick and Mary Dupuis, and Samuel Walking Coyote and his wife Sabine saved the bison.¹ They hunted, caught, and raised bison calves that increased buffalo numbers at a time when the Great Plains monarchs clung desperately to a tenuous existence. Their remarkable stories, deserving of reiteration, cast light on four themes of Western history: proper recognition for front-line conservationists, the role of women, hunters as conservationists, and the profitability of species preservation.

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Western bison conservation was not a matter of eastern politicians and scientists, such as Theodore Roosevelt and William Hornaday, legislating and instructing ignorant country folk about their resources. Eastern efforts helped by setting aside habitat and mandating protection, as exemplified, for instance, by the establishment of the National Bison Range and the anti-poaching patrols of the U.S. Army in Yellowstone National Park. Such environmentalism, however, was only worthwhile because a few westerners insured that some bison survived in captive breeding programs. Several western women played key roles in guaranteeing the survival of the bison by instigating “calfnapping” expeditions, helping raise young orphans, and, in the case of Sabine Walking Coyote, even physically capturing the bison.

The four households—those of the Goodnights, Jones, Dupuis, and Walking Coyote and Sabine—acted as saviors of the bison even though they had previously contributed to their demise. All four families participated in bison destruction through hunting, robe trading, and ranching, but unlike their peers, and like other hunter-conservationists, they



FIG. 1. *Captive Bison, early days, Furnas County, Nebraska.* Courtesy of the Nebraska State Historical Society.

acted just in time to reverse the damage. Conservation was good business. Frequently the reward was intangible, such as the feeling of satisfaction that they had performed a good deed, but tangible rewards consisted of modest income from the sale of live animals and commodities including beef, hides, skulls, and horns.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR SAVING THE BUFFALO

Before describing and analyzing the stories of the bison saviors, we need to set them in context. Today, most students of the American West can give a rough synopsis of the bison's plight. The Indians and the buffalo coexisted in relative harmony. Then, Euro-Americans arrived on the Plains and brought

firearms, livestock that spread disease and competed for resources, horses that enhanced Native American hunting, and trade goods that encouraged Indians and buffalo hunters to harvest unnecessary numbers of buffalo.² These factors combined nearly to wipe out the buffalo. At the end of the slaughter, some bison were saved when conservationists set aside habitat on federal land with the protection of government forces, the U.S. Army in the United States and the Royal North-West Mounted Police in Canada. Bison eventually prospered and their progeny can be seen across the United States and Canada in parks, zoos, refuges, and on private ranches.

This brief version of the buffalo's predicament satisfies general knowledge, but it fails to detail the precise nadir of bison population. Also, it does not mention the numerous

attempts at raising bison prior to near extinction, nor does it give credit to those front-line conservationists who were successful. Filling in these gaps begins with the portrayal of the bison during the nineteenth century.

By 1804 few Euro-Americans or Europeans had journeyed onto the Great Plains. In that year, when Lewis and Clark made their epic crossing of the Plains, they described a land filled with wildlife, especially buffalo. Upon observing one of many herds, Clark marveled about "buffalo in such multitudes that we can not exaggerate in saying in a single glance we saw three thousand of them."³ As the nineteenth century wore on, other travelers on the Plains encountered similar multitudes of these large, awesome creatures. Over a half century later in 1859, during his cross-country stagecoach trip, Horace Greeley offered his incredulous assessment, "I know a million is a great many, but I am confident we saw that number yesterday."⁴ Probably Greeley overestimated the number of bison, but even after a half century of exploitation by fur traders, sport and trophy hunters, pioneers, and the Indians, multitudes of buffalo still existed.

The primary exploiters who depleted the already diminishing buffalo herds, and hence the Plains tribes that depended on them, were the hide hunters. These raw, determined men arrived on the Great Plains following the Civil War. As the country moved west by covered wagon and train, the eastern markets became more accessible. Buffalo leather served a variety of functions in an industrializing country, including use as machine buffers and belts, clothing, and furniture coverings.⁵ Buffalo group together, and once the hide hunters figured out their habits they destroyed the bison. Buffalo Bill alone claimed to have killed 4280 buffalo.⁶ Another horrific indicator of the slaughter can be found in the 26 December 1872, *Newton Kansan*, where a reporter "estimated that there are about two thousand buffalo hunters now pursuing game in western Kansas, and that they average bringing down about fifteen buffalo daily."⁷ Simple arithmetic reveals that possibly as many as thirty

thousand buffalo were dying each day in that region of the Plains alone.

The vast buffalo herds were destroyed in the South Plains by 1880. One father who promised his children a hunt found "the end came so suddenly he had no time to act."⁸ The early 1880s saw the end of the great northern herd. In 1883 one Montana fur trader lamented, "I was born in the buffalo trade: I expected to die in it. The buffalo are gone: I don't know what to do."⁹ Another stated that "the buffalo were practically exterminated."¹⁰

By 1886 William T. Hornaday, the famous hunter-naturalist, found it difficult to locate any buffalo for his Smithsonian Collection.¹¹ Three years later, when he created a map showing the numbers and locations of wild bison, Hornaday believed there were approximately 830 bison running wild in North America. The largest herd numbered 550 and roamed the Peace River country of Canada. The second largest herd, of 200, was located in Yellowstone National Park. Smaller herds included 25 in the panhandles of Texas and Oklahoma, 25 in south-central Wyoming, 20 in eastern Colorado, and 10 in east-central Montana.¹² Hornaday's figures probably were inaccurate, slightly underestimating bison numbers and locations, and not taking into account the few captive herds of buffalo. Even so, he did illustrate the extraordinarily tenuous position of the once prolific bison.

Sadly, the bison that may have numbered as many as seventy million at one time, thirty million by 1830, and seven million by 1870, had been reduced to a few wandering bands with possible extinction looming large.¹³ Their reduction illustrated human arrogance, wastefulness, and lack of insight. The bison perched delicately on the edge of disappearance. Threats to the very survival of the species, particularly from hunters but also from disease, lurked everywhere.

People continued to kill bison even after the end of the great herds. For example, when hunters found a "hidden" herd of 165 animals near Jackson Hole, Wyoming, during the winter of 1884-85, they annihilated the entire



FIG. 2. A team of buffalos near Juniata, Nebraska. Courtesy of the Nebraska State Historical Society.

herd.¹⁴ Two years later, Texas cowboys killed 52 bison they had discovered and sold the heads and hides for taxidermy.¹⁵ Even Hornaday's 1886 expedition to collect specimens for the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History killed thirty buffalo.¹⁶ In 1897 hunters discovered and eliminated four isolated bison in Lost Park, Colorado. Worse yet, poaching plagued the herd in Yellowstone National Park through the 1890s and into the first decade of the twentieth century. By the summer of 1902 the Yellowstone herd numbered fewer than thirty animals and needed to be supplemented with captive bison.¹⁷ Even as the herd increased they remained in danger, losing forty members in 1925 when they wandered out of the park and into Montana's Gallatin Valley where hunters quickly slaughtered them.¹⁸ Even the apparently isolated wood bison ranging Can-

ada's Peace River country dwindled to fewer than three hundred near the turn of the century.¹⁹ Given such low numbers of animals, disease posed a threat to the extinction. For example, twenty-two Yellowstone bison perished in 1912 because of *hemorrhagic septicemia*.²⁰ With the limited population of bison, hunters and disease could easily have eliminated the entire species, but fortunately this did not happen.

THOSE WHO SAVED THE BISON

While most Americans remain keenly aware of the existence and near extinction of the bison, most people do not know that the survival of the species was guaranteed by the efforts of just a few people. In 1924 the eminent naturalist George Grinnell wrote a survey and

brief history of the bison titled "The American Bison in 1924."²¹ As a member of the American Bison Society, publisher of *Forest and Stream*, and former frontiersman, Grinnell possessed a keen interest in conveying to the public accurate information about bison. His survey of the herds in 1924 revealed that virtually all the bison alive in the United States, with the exception of the few wild Yellowstone buffalo, were descended from bison caught and saved in captive breeding programs by just four households. Thus, the efforts of the Yellowstone Park administration and personnel combined with the work of the Goodnights, Buffalo Jones, Dupuis, and Walking Coyote and Sabine to save the beleaguered bison in America.²² As noted above, the wild remnants of the bison potentially could have been wiped out at any time, even in Yellowstone Park. After all, the health of the Yellowstone herd required bolstering by captive animals. Moreover, Canada's bison situation was as desperate as that of the United States. The Canadians ultimately depended on the purchase of American buffalo to insure survival of their herds.²³ Only by taking bison off the range, protecting them, and allowing them to procreate was the species saved from extinction. The people that performed this feat insured the future of the bison.

The idea of a captive breeding program had not originated with them. Undoubtedly, countless others tried to raise buffalo before them, though historians have documented only a few earlier attempts. In the late sixteenth century, the first Spanish governor of New Mexico, Don Juan de Oñate, ordered an unsuccessful capture of bison for domestication. In 1701 Huguenot settlers in Virginia tried to raise buffalo. Robert Wickliffe raised buffalo for thirty years in Kentucky beginning in 1815. The captives' ferocity ended his experiment. Artist George Catlin raised several calves. Fur trapper and trader Dick Wootton took care of buffalo calves for several years in southeastern Colorado. Eventually, he tired of the enterprise and drove the buffalo with milk cows across the plains to market in Independence,

Missouri.²⁴ None of these ventures led to bison increases and dissemination through captive breeding.²⁵ Only the Goodnights, Jones, Dupuis, and Walking Coyotes made this happen. Their success separates them from all others.

THE GOODNIGHTS

By the time his biographers caught up with him, Charles Goodnight was a Texas frontier legend. He had served as a scout for the Texas Rangers and was renowned for pushing cattle across and establishing ranches on the South Plains. He was also quite cantankerous. His biographer, J. Evetts Haley, recollected, "I hesitatingly crossed his ranch-house yard to face the flow of tobacco juice and profanity."²⁶ Laura Hamner, another biographer, chose to soften Goodnight by accompanying him on rides and visiting with him in his den.²⁷ In the end, both Haley and Hamner were able to break the tough veneer and convey the story of Charles Goodnight.

On the Plains of Texas in 1866, Goodnight decided to capture some bison calves. He used an old stockman's trick of chasing a herd until the calves tired and could be separated from their mothers and led along. When one unwilling mother charged Goodnight, he defended himself and his horse by shooting her. Sixty-two years later, he wrote, "The older I get the worse I feel about having to kill that cow."²⁸ Goodnight's first capture of bison calves ended like those of so many others. He agreed to let a friend raise them on half shares but the friend tired of the enterprise and sold the captives. At that point, they vanished from record.²⁹

It took the intervention of Mollie Goodnight to guarantee the successful establishment of a Goodnight captive breeding program for the beleaguered bison. In 1878, during the horrendous slaughter by the hide hunters, Mrs. Goodnight took charge. At this critical point, she explained to her husband "the advisability of preserving to Texas and the nation a few of the buffalo."³⁰ She abhorred the suffering



FIG. 3. *Buffalo on the Goodnight Ranch.* Courtesy of the Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University.

and hated to think of the “certain extermination of this race of animals.”³¹ Acting on her suggestion, Charles and Mollie’s brother roped four calves. The calves were each given a milk cow to suck. They adopted their new mothers and new range and went on to become the beginning of the Goodnights’ permanent herd. Their progeny spread all over the country, including Yellowstone, to enhance the existence of their once near-extinct species.³² Mollie Goodnight insured that the calf captures of 1878 did not end like those of 1866.

The Goodnight story blends front-line conservation and women’s involvement. The Goodnights were the consummate western ranchers, living and working on the southern

Plains. Their conservation effort took place at their home. Mollie inspired the enterprise and persevered until it succeeded. Perhaps it was her good will that made the Goodnight story synonymous with the theme of hunter-conservation or developer conservation.

Charles Goodnight, like other plainsmen, was a product of his time and environment. He hunted and killed buffalo. When he established his ranch in the Palo Duro region of the Texas panhandle, he stationed camps of cowboys to drive the bison away from available grass and water so that his cattle could feed at will.³³ Goodnight claimed that civilization necessitated the buffalo slaughter and that the buffalo hunters were a “fearless body of men . . .



FIG. 4A. *Mary Ann Goodnight*. Courtesy of the Panhandle-Plains Museum, Canyon, Texas.



FIG. 4B. *Charles Goodnight*. Courtesy of the Panhandle-Plains Museum, Canyon, Texas.

who by killing out the buffalo stopped forever the terror of the settlers, the depredatory tribes of the plains Indians.”³⁴ Clearly, he was not an environmentalist concerned that nature reign supreme and unchecked.

Still, Charles Goodnight studied nature. According to J. Evetts Haley, their conversations were always laced with Goodnight’s “observations upon the growth of the land . . . with particular attention to varying forms for latitude and altitude, humidity and aridity.”³⁵ Haley said that Goodnight believed “Everything in nature is useful.”³⁶ According to Laura Hamner, Goodnight’s “books were woods and streams . . . by day and stars by night.”³⁷ As a ten-year-old boy new to Texas, Goodnight told

Hamner, he saw his first buffalo. He “felt a pull that something in the beasts had for a responsive element in him . . . his spirit was roaming the prairie with that animal, powerful, alone, free.”³⁸ Maybe Goodnight’s spiritual empathy with the nomads prompted his efforts. Although he helped destroy the buffalo, his wife’s influence and his love for nature combined to mitigate the destruction.

The Goodnights reaped both intangible and tangible rewards of conservation. Visitors frequented their ranch to see the living symbol of the Western frontier. They invited a band of Kiowas to stage a buffalo hunt.³⁹ Eating buffalo meat held special significance for them. One of Charles’ last meals was a Thanksgiving



FIG. 5. *Buffalo herd, Goodnight Ranch near Clarendon, Texas.* Courtesy of the Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University.

buffalo roast in 1929.⁴⁰ Bison were an elemental part of Goodnight's past. More tangibly, buffalo did bring considerable income and the Goodnights had battled to earn a decent living. Charles' entrepreneurship showed when he established new ranches on virgin soil in west Texas, when he forged the Goodnight-Loving cattle trail, and when he developed the catalo, a hybrid cross between cattle and buffalo. Perhaps the Goodnights anticipated the future value of buffalo when they began their captive breeding program. Bison hide value increased from \$2.50 in the 1870s to more than \$100.00 a few years later. Mounted heads and horn products also commanded top dollar. Buffalo meat was a relatively high-priced luxury food. The catalo, a project which was later dropped due to a lack of fertility in the hybrids, brought higher prices than cattle.

Indeed, the Goodnights made good money from their buffalo.⁴¹ Conservation proved profitable.

C. J. BUFFALO JONES

"A colorful character" would be a fair description of Charles Jesse "Buffalo" Jones. A resident of the southern Great Plains like the Goodnights, his adventures took him from his home in Kansas to the frozen Canadian North and the steaming jungles of Africa. His exploits varied from farming, buffalo hunting, and serving as superintendent of Yellowstone National Park to lecturing on his experiences in Africa. Actually, these listed exploits comprise only a small portion of his accomplishments. His greatest contribution to posterity, however, was preserving the buffalo.



FIG. 6. *Buffalo Jones and his herd of buffalo north of McCook, Nebraska.* Courtesy of the Nebraska State Historical Society.

Jones claimed that he conceived his rescue idea in 1872. He still hunted buffalo for a living, but he sought to atone for his slaughter.⁴² To this end between 1886 and 1889, he and his staff embarked on four rescue missions ranging from Garden City, Kansas down into the Texas panhandle and catching approximately sixty buffalo calves.⁴³ These provided the start for a domestic herd that served as the foundation of other private and public herds throughout the United States, including one herd used by journalist Ernest Harold Baynes to promote the American Bison Society.⁴⁴

Jones' entertaining tales of his expeditions detail roping calves, grabbing their tails, and hand-throwing them. He explained to his biographer, Henry Inman, that on his first calf-catching expedition he had to protect his charges from wolves that closed in on the

thrown and tied calves. Jones could not stop while he labored to catch as many calves as possible, so he left an article of clothing with each calf to deter the hungry wolves. Half-naked and burdened by a calf under each arm, Jones rode back to aid his captives. Finally, his support wagon, furnished with pails of milk, arrived and saved the day.⁴⁵

Correspondent Emerson Hough, accompanying Jones' second expedition, provided a near magical description of one Jones capture. "Up came his hand, circling the wide coil of the rope. We could almost hear it whistle through the air. . . . In a flash the dust was gone, and there was Colonel Jones kneeling on top of a struggling tawny object."⁴⁶ Later on the expedition, Jones, like Goodnight, was "compelled to kill [a ferocious mother buffalo] with his revolver." Hough related that this



FIG. 7. Charles J. "Buffalo" Jones. Courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.

was "an unwished result, and was much deplored, for we came, not to slay, but to rescue."⁴⁷ Nonetheless, Jones successfully captured his calves and fostered them on milk cows, usually involving an initial brawl until the calf and cow became accustomed to each other on the long drive from Texas back to Kansas.⁴⁸

Buffalo Jones' last two "calfnapping" expeditions in 1888 and 1889 proved noteworthy for a couple of reasons. First, Jones tried but failed to catch and drive adult bison. Jones explained that the adults "took fits, stiffened themselves, then dropped dead, apparently preferring death to captivity."⁴⁹ Second, it was on this expedition that the last wild buffalo calf of the southern range was caught. Jones described the moment, "I whirled the lasso in

the air . . . I laid the golden wreath around the neck of the last buffalo calf ever captured."⁵⁰

With the exception of the involvement of women, Jones' story conforms to that of other bison savers. Jones was a westerner, saving buffalo where he worked and lived. Jones' hunter-conservationism was motivated by guilt. In the 1870s he had been one of the foremost buffalo hunters; he, himself, claimed to have killed "thousands" of the large creatures, even though many times he had sought to break his rifle over the wagon-wheel and quit the killing business. Then hearing the boom of other hunters' rifles, he rationalized that with or without his presence, the bison were doomed. He would shoulder his rifle and head off for another day's shooting. Later he said, "I am positive it was the wickedness committed in killing so many that impelled me to take measures for perpetuating the race which I had helped almost destroy."⁵¹

Love for nature and a drive to control it motivated Jones. He wanted to "be by himself in the timber or fields where he could indulge in his love of nature untrammelled by any uncongenial companions."⁵² Jones saw nature as something beautiful, but something created to serve humankind. As a child he would catch little animals and "tame them in his own peculiar way."⁵³ In fact, he made his first money by capturing and selling a squirrel, a "transaction" Jones said, that "fixed upon me the ruling passion that has adhered so closely through [my] life."⁵⁴ He compared the nearly-extinct buffalo to the "stone which the builders rejected." He insisted that the domesticated buffalo would become the chief of all ruminants, as the rejected stone became the cornerstone. Jones claimed he would "chain" and "dominate" the buffalo.⁵⁵ He spoke of "dominion" over the creature.⁵⁶

Jones' comments suggest that he hoped for economic benefit while he exercised his dominion over the bison. Like other buffalo savers, Jones battled most of his life to make a respectable living. He prospered and suffered as a farmer, buffalo hunter, town developer, and rancher. Jones believed that one

day buffalo would supplant cattle as the lords of the domestic range.⁵⁷ He spent a great deal of money on his expeditions and undoubtedly hoped for a return on his investment. After setbacks in his catalo business, which ultimately failed because of fertility and calving problems, he sold many buffalo, grossing tens of thousands of dollars.⁵⁸ Conservation, whether motivated by guilt, love for nature, or capitalistic fervor, proved profitable to Buffalo Jones, and his income grew with the success of the repropagation of the species.

THE DUPUIS

The Dupuis, also known as the Dupres, Duprees, or Dupris, received far less notoriety than the Goodnights or Buffalo Jones. Nonetheless, their life stories are comparable. Frederick Dupuis, a French-Canadian, arrived at Fort Pierre in present-day South Dakota in 1838.⁵⁹ A fur trader, he first worked for Pierre Chouteau's American Fur Company then traded independently. Seven of his letters from 1860 and 1861 show that he was concerned with Indian activity, trade goods, and the whereabouts of the buffalo.⁶⁰ Eventually, Dupuis left the fur trade and became a rancher until his death in 1898.⁶¹

Dupuis lived in South Dakota for sixty years, witnessing the Plains Indian horse culture at its prime, the steady resource exploitation by fur trappers and traders, the Black Hills gold rush, the domination by the blue-coated federal soldiers, the destruction of the buffalo, the establishment of towns, farms, and ranches, and the massacre of the Sioux at Wounded Knee. Dupuis married a Minniconjou Sioux named Good Elk Woman who took the name Mary Ann Dupuis. They had nine children. The Dupuis established a large ranch on the Cheyenne River that served as a camp and hub for Indian activity with at least fifty people being served supper daily.⁶²

The Dupuis household served as a bridge between two cultures. It also linked the old wild herds of bison and the captive herds that insured survival after the slaughter. A Dupuis

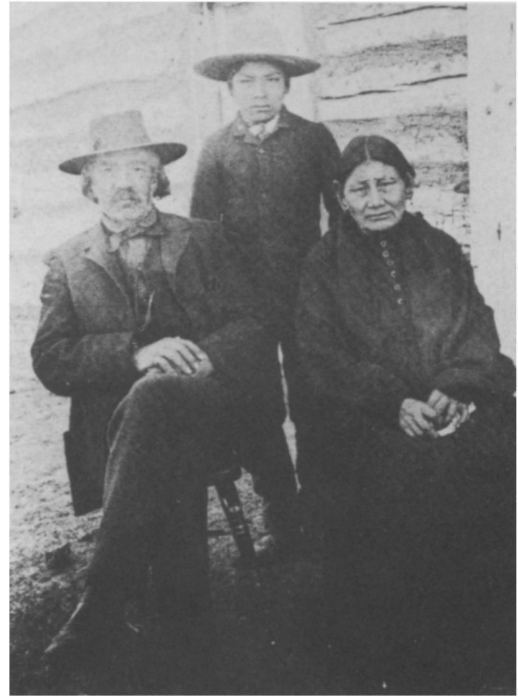


FIG. 8. *Frederick Dupuis, his wife, Mary Ann (Good Elk Woman), and one of their sons.* Courtesy of the South Dakota State Historical Society.

expedition to save the buffalo occurred during one of the winters between 1880 and 1884, different reports giving different dates. At the invitation of a Dupuis son-in-law, Clarence Ward, the Reverend Thomas Lawrence Riggs accompanied the Dupuis family on what he labeled the last winter buffalo hunt of the Dakotas. After seeking permission from the family for Riggs to accompany the hunt, Ward announced to the clergyman that the Dupuis boys and Mary were excited about his presence and wished him to share their tent. Frederick did not go along on the hunt.⁶³

Riggs described a communal Indian hunt with horses, travois, and dogs. The Dupuis family took a buckboard and tents. About half the hunting party consisted of women.⁶⁴ The hunters were successful, and the Dupuis family took



FIG. 9. *Frederick Dupuis*. Courtesy of the South Dakota State Historical Society.

care of Riggs during the hardships of the hunt. He concluded that Indians were industrious, good-natured people who knew the business of buffalo hunting.⁶⁵ Riggs never mentioned that the Dupuis boys captured live calves on this hunt although it seems certain his detailed account would have recorded such an event. Curiously, George Philip, a close relative of Scotty Philip, who eventually purchased the Dupuis bison herd, insisted that it was during an 1880-81 hunt that Pete Dupuis, Frederick and Mary's son, caught the live calves.⁶⁶ The two stories seem to conflict.

Fortunately, another primary account exists concerning the capture of the calves. Basil Clement, a companion of Frederick Dupuis, related his version of the story to Circuit Judge John F. Hughes of Fort Pierre who years later told Clement's story. Clement maintained that

he, Frederick Dupuis, and one Dupuis son headed west toward Montana to capture buffalo calves. When they found a herd, they stayed downwind and watched the animals graze until the calves bedded down and the mothers wandered off feeding. Then the hunters stole the little creatures that instinctively remained motionless. The hunters loaded the orphans on the buckboard and took them back to the Dupuis ranch. Charles Deland, the recorder of Hughes' story, noted that contemporary eyewitnesses confirmed that four young bison were living on Dupuis land in the fall of 1883. Apparently, these animals had been taken the previous spring and summer.⁶⁷

Regardless of when or how the bison were taken, the Dupuis family helped save buffalo. Their story shares the common themes found throughout all the Goodnight and most of the Jones endeavors. Front-line conservationists, these people lived and worked on the northern Plains. Mary, a full-blood Minneconjou experienced in the buffalo culture, proved instrumental in the effort. Riggs' account of the 1880-81 buffalo hunt suggests that she administered the Dupuis hunting party, and she clearly helped guide the family. Frederick Dupuis told the *Pierre Free Press* in 1890, "Many years ago, I married a good Indian woman." When asked about taking land in severalty, he deferred, "My old woman can take land if she wants to."⁶⁸ Frederick honored his wife's wishes. One observer of the French-Canadian fur trappers and traders noted that the "only authority [they] acknowledged was that of [their] Indian spouses."⁶⁹ Quite probably, Mary influenced Frederick to save a few of the remaining buffalo.

The Dupuis characterize the saviors of the bison as hunter-conservationists and beneficiaries of preservation. Although there appears to be no direct evidence that Frederick Dupuis hunted buffalo except to capture calves, one can safely assume that the patriarch of a family who hunted bison for much of its livelihood had himself pursued bison for beef. Mary certainly participated in buffalo hunts. Their four young bison went on to produce a herd of

both bison and catalo, but the Dupuis did not pursue their bison enterprise on as large a scale as the Goodnights or Jones. They sold the herd to Scotty Philip, who dispersed these buffalo from Custer State Park, South Dakota, to a bullfighting arena in Mexico where the bison proved their physical superiority to domestic bulls.⁷⁰ Income from the sale most likely went into sharing the resources of the Dupuis ranch with the multitudes of visitors the family entertained. Their hospitality extended to both humans and bison.

SAMUEL WALKING COYOTE AND SABINE

Undoubtedly, the most enigmatic of the preservers of the bison must be Samuel Walking Coyote and his wife Sabine. They were Pend d'Oreille Indians from the area near Saint Ignatius Mission in Montana.⁷¹ Accounts of their story vary, but by the middle of the 1870s, conceivably 1877, they lived with a group of Blackfeet in northwestern Montana. Charles Aubrey, a trader living on the Marias River, discussed them in correspondence with George Bird Grinnell. Aubrey claimed Samuel Walking Coyote's friendship and described the Pend d'Oreille as an "ambitious, bright, middle-aged man."⁷² Perhaps this ambition, intelligence, and experience were the very characteristics that enabled Samuel and Sabine to save the buffalo.

Aubrey explained that the couple went on two buffalo-catching expeditions in the spring of 1878. Quite possibly, a son named Joseph accompanied them on their bison adventure.⁷³ Samuel's plan was to rope young buffalo and picket them at the capture spot, then place a blanket at the picket to habituate the calves to humans. Later they would return and lead the calves to Aubrey's property to be fostered on milk cows. The plan must have been successful because they returned to Aubrey's trading post with two young buffalo in April 1878. After a few days rest they set out again, promising to return in eight days unless the bison's northward drift took them into enemy territory. Luckily the second expedition met with

even more success than the first. The hunters returned after eight days bringing five young head-and-foot-hobbled buffalo. After resting a few days and running the calves with the milk cows, Samuel and Sabine left with their charges for their home to the west in the Mission Valley. They arrived with six calves, losing one disabled bull along the way.⁷⁴ By 1884 they had a herd of thirteen head that they sold to Charles Allard and Michel Pablo, who successfully increased the captive breeding program.⁷⁵ Many of these bison went to Canada to aid in that country's bison program, some went to private buyers, and several others formed the herd at the National Bison Range in Moiese, Montana.

The reason for Samuel Walking Coyote and Sabine's preservation effort definitely sets them apart from the other saviors of the bison. According to Aubrey, Samuel's attempted polygamy caused their conservation effort. Samuel had married Sabine in a Catholic ceremony but while they were encamped with the Blackfeet, the ambitious man paid a dowry for and married a Blackfoot woman. Sabine, greatly dissatisfied with the new marital situation, asked Aubrey to intercede on her behalf. Tempers flared and Samuel shot and slightly wounded Sabine. Aubrey explained the situation to the Blackfoot family who eventually left and took the second bride away from Samuel's lodge. Even with the exit of the second wife the situation was difficult and complicated by Samuel and Sabine's longing to return to their own people. Samuel grew distraught knowing his actions would invoke the wrath of the Jesuit priests at Saint Ignatius.

At this point, Aubrey suggested that Samuel appease the Jesuits with a gift of live bison. Bison no longer inhabited the Saint Ignatius area, and Aubrey guessed that the priests would be pleased with such a gift and accept them as atonement. Samuel agreed to the plan and confidently went on the two expeditions. He was set upon and flogged by orders of the soldier band of his own tribe for his actions and dejected, never did present his gifts to the missionaries. The bison eventually made it to

Saint Ignatius because his family raised them.⁷⁶ This story is unusual, but more important, Samuel Walking Coyote's monumental effort to atone for breaking the Christian rules of marriage resulted in the preservation of the American bison.

It would be misleading, however, to repeat the Walking Coyote story without emphasizing the role of Sabine. She was a remarkable woman to stay with her husband and play a physical role in the capture and movement of the calves. Of all the women involved in the bison-saving, she was the only one to participate in the capture. Bison are dangerous animals, yet Sabine persevered, leading the way on horseback to help move them hundreds of miles over broken plains, through swollen rivers and thick forests, and over the continental divide. She did this to help her husband correct an injustice done to her.

Even though the bison-saving efforts of Samuel Walking Coyote and Sabine differ markedly from others, there are similarities. The couple lived in buffalo range country. Sabine played a significant role in the entire event. Samuel Walking Coyote was a hunter-conservationist, and rewards for their efforts included more than just the proceeds from the sale of the bison, which may have totaled as much as two thousand dollars.⁷⁷ Their bison served as the pride of the community, with Sunday observers visiting after church at Saint Ignatius to view the icons of a bygone era.⁷⁸ The small herd wandered about the Flathead Reservation unmolested and caused much excitement during calving time.⁷⁹ Even today, their progeny can be seen in the valley, both triggering recollections of a romanticized past and constituting a modern growing buffalo industry.

CONCLUSION

"If nothing had been effected toward rescuing them, the buffalo would soon have been found mounted in museums only as mere specimens; a silent monument to the wantonness and cupidity of man," wrote Henry Inman.⁸⁰

Fortunately, bison can be found in places other than museums. Their shaggy forms still can be seen lumbering across the grasslands, albeit on a much smaller scale than before Europeans encroached upon the West. It was the work of four groups who made this view of the living symbol of the Great Plains possible. Yet, these preservers of bison occupy a relatively obscure niche in the annals of Western history. Almost any person can identify Buffalo Bill but would be unaware of the identity of Buffalo Jones. Museums of the Old West display the Sharps buffalo rifles and skinning knives of the slaughterers but not the lassos and milk pails of the preservers.

Nevertheless, the lives and examples of the preservers of the bison provide more than just a counterweight to the forces of bison destruction. Lessons can be garnered from their experiences. Front-line conservation by people intimately familiar with the indigenous flora and fauna, not enlightened progressive conservationists from the East, "saved" the West. The easterners' environmental work often capitalized on conservation steps already taken. Furthermore, the stories of the preservers of the bison challenge the traditional gender precept of frontier history that it was men whose actions shaped the history of the region. Women were crucial to successful domestic bison production, participating in every phase of these undertakings, encompassing planning, capture, transport, raising, and stewardship to increase the herds. Women turned hunters into hunter-conservationists, proving indispensable to preventing the bison's extinction.

Another myth focuses on the idea that developers and conservationists are necessarily antagonists. In fact, all the saviors of the bison were involved in the exploitation of their environment. The Goodnights hunted and ranched, and both activities excluded the bison from their uninhibited life on the range. Similarly, Jones had been a farmer and even a hide hunter. Frederick Dupuis traded buffalo robes and his family ranched. Samuel Walking Coyote and Sabine hunted buffalo for subsistence. What separated these people

from their peers was their timely recognition of when enough was enough and how saving the bison would help them to save themselves. They preserved the resource and received an income from their conservation work. Others, who continued indiscriminately to slay the buffalo, hunted themselves right out of a living.

NOTES

1. Mrs. Goodnight is referred to as Mary or Mollie depending on the author. She will be called Mollie in this manuscript. The terms bison and buffalo will be used interchangeably. In reality, North American bison, *Bison bison*, are not true buffalo. Still, people readily identify bison as buffalo.
2. Dan Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800 to 1850," *Journal of American History* 78 (September 1991): 465-86. Richard White, "It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A History of the American West (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), pp. 216-9. Both Flores and White offer insights into the decline of the bison population prior to the slaughter by Euro-American hunters. They emphasize earlier Euro-American induced factors such as disease, habitat destruction, and increased native hunting for trade.
3. Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 8 vols. (New York: Dodd and Mead Co., 1904), 1: 153.
4. Horace Greeley, *An Overland Journey from New York to San Francisco in the Summer of 1859*, ed. Charles Duncan (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), pp. 72-73, quoted in Larry Barsness, *Heads, Hides, and Horns* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1985), p. 21.
5. Barsness, *Heads, Hides, and Horns* (note 4 above), pp. 112-13.
6. Tom McHugh, *The Time of the Buffalo* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), p. 268.
7. David Dary, *The Buffalo Book: The Full Saga of the American Animal* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1974), p. 97.
8. Barsness, *Heads, Hides, and Horns* (note 4 above), p. 125.
9. James Willard Schultz, "Joseph Kipp," *Great Falls Daily Tribune*, July 5, 1914, p. 2.
10. Ibid.; *Why Gone Those Times?: Blackfoot Tales* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), p. 271.
11. William T. Hornaday, "Discovery and Extermination of the Bison," *Report of the Natural History Museum*, 1887 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1889) p. 502, quoted in Barsness, *Heads, Hides, and Horns* (note 4 above), p. 132.
12. William T. Hornaday, "Map Illustrating the Extermination of the American Bison, 1889," reproduced in Larry Barsness, *The Bison in Art: A Graphic Chronicle of the American Bison* (Flagstaff, Arizona: Northland Press, 1977), p. 121.
13. Barsness, *Heads, Hides, and Horns* (note 3 above), p. 125.
14. E. J. Clifford, "Bison Hunting," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 52 (December 1951): 261.
15. Hornaday, "Discovery and Extermination of the Bison," p. 502, quoted in Barsness, *Heads, Hides, and Horns* (note 4 above), p. 132.
16. Hornaday, "Discovery and Extermination of the Bison," pp. 367-548, quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 149-51.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 154-56.
18. Martin Garretson to Dick Adams, 1 July 1925, American Bison Society Files, Conservation Center Library, Denver, Colorado, in *ibid.*, p. 157.
19. Francis Harper, "Letter to the Canadian Field Naturalist," *Canadian Field Naturalist* 39 (1925): 45, in McHugh, *Time of the Buffalo* (note 6 above), p. 305. Wood bison, *Bison bison Athabascæ*, are considered a different subspecies from plains bison, *Bison bison bison*. For the purposes of this manuscript, with respect to preservation of bison as a species, wood bison numbers and plight are considered with those of the Plains bison unless otherwise distinguished.
20. George Bird Grinnell, "The American Bison in 1924," in *Hunting and Conservation: The Book of the Boone and Crockett Club*, ed. George Bird Grinnell and Charles Sheldon, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925), p. 399.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 393-411.
22. *Ibid.*
23. "Pablo Buffalo Sale," *Forest and Stream* 68 (8 June 1907): 893.
24. Dary, *The Buffalo Book* (note 7 above), pp. 241-44.
25. Aside from the Goodnights, Jones, the Dupuis, and the Walking Coyotes, two other groups played a role in the preservation of the bison. Their stories can be found in Dary's *The Buffalo Book* (note 7 above) pages 225-26, 233-34. The first story began in Manitoba in the 1870s when Indians captured some calves. They sold the calves to Jim McKay of Winnipeg who in turn sold them to Colonel Sam Bedson. Bedson established a breeding group from which progeny eventually spread to herds all over the United States and Canada. The second story occurred in 1883 on the southern Plains near Beaver, Oklahoma. In that year, the McKoy brothers caught two calves. Two years later, the brothers sold the calves to the city of Keokuk, Iowa. Eventually, the calves reproduced and offspring found themselves in locations all over the country.

Obviously, these people deserve some credit for saving the bison. However, they have been excluded from this manuscript because in neither case was a captive bison breeding and dissemination program established by the people who took the buffalo right off the range. The people who captured these bison did not insure the survival of the species by following through with a protected breeding program.

26. J. Evetts Haley, *Charles Goodnight: Cowman and Plainsman* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1936), p. ix.

27. Laura Hamner, *The No-Gun Man of Texas: A Century of Achievement, 1835-1929* (Amarillo: Hamner, 1935), p. 251.

28. Haley, *Charles Goodnight* (note 26 above), p. 438.

29. Dary, *Buffalo Book* (note 7 above), p. 229.

30. Charles Goodnight, Emanuel Dubbs, John Hart, et al., *Pioneer Days in the Southwest from 1850-1879* (Guthrie, Oklahoma: The State Capital Company, 1909), p. 28.

31. Dary, *Buffalo Book* (note 7 above), p. 29.

32. Ibid., p. 227.

33. Hamner, *No-Gun Man* (note 27 above), p. 133.

34. Goodnight, Dubbs, Hart, et al., *Pioneer Days* (note 30 above), p. 21.

35. Haley, *Charles Goodnight* (note 26 above), p. 422.

36. Ibid., p. 80.

37. Hamner, *No-Gun Man* (note 27 above), p. 11.

38. Ibid., pp. 4-5.

39. Ibid., p. 240.

40. Haley, *Charles Goodnight* (note 26 above), p. 464.

41. Hamner, *No-Gun Man* (note 27 above), p. 226.

42. Henry Inman, ed., *Buffalo Jones' Adventures on the Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), p. 37.

43. Barsness, *Heads, Hides, and Horns* (note 4 above), p. 143.

44. McHugh, *Time of the Buffalo* (note 6 above), pp. 298-99.

45. Inman, *Buffalo Jones* (note 42 above), pp. 58-65, 76-82.

46. Emerson Hough, "A Buffalo Hunt Indeed," in *ibid.*, p. 133.

47. Ibid., p. 135.

48. Barsness, *Heads, Hides, and Horns* (note 4 above), p. 145.

49. Inman, *Buffalo Jones* (note 42 above), pp. 222-23.

50. Ibid., p. 219.

51. Ibid., p. 235.

52. Ibid., p. 24.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid., p. 22.

55. Ibid., p. 50.

56. Ibid., p. 25.

57. Ibid., p. 49.

58. McHugh, *Time of the Buffalo* (note 6 above), p. 296.

59. Calvin Dupree, "The First Dupree into South Dakota," (unpublished paper in the Dupree Family File, South Dakota State Archives, Pierre, South Dakota), p. 1.

60. Frederick Dupuis, "The Dupuis Letters," Dupree Family File, South Dakota State Archives.

61. Dupree, "First Dupree" (note 59 above), p. 8.

62. Ibid., pp. 2-3.

63. Margaret Kellogg Howard as told by Rev. Thomas L. Riggs, "Sunset to Sunset: A Lifetime With My Brothers, the Dakotas," *South Dakota Historical Collections* (Stickney, SD: Argus Printers, 1958), 29: 228.

64. Ibid., 29: 229-30.

65. Ibid., 29: 240-41.

66. George Philip, "James (Scotty) Philip," *South Dakota Historical Collections* (Pierre: Hipple Printing Company, 1940), 20: 391, 393.

67. Charles E. Deland, "Basil Clement (Claymore): The Mountain Trappers," *South Dakota Historical Collections* (Pierre: Hipple Printing Company, 1922), 11: 384-85.

68. "Dupree Was No Dude," *Pierre Free Press*, 29 May 1890, p. 5c.

69. Deland, "Basil Clement" (note 67 above), p. 270.

70. Dary, *Buffalo Book* (note 7 above), p. 232.

71. Grinnell, "American Bison" (note 20 above), p. 383.

72. Ibid. p. 374. The letter from Charles Aubrey to George Grinnell initially was published as "Natural History: Montana's Buffalo," *Forest and Stream* 59 (5 July 1902): 6. Aubrey refers to Sam Walking Coyote by his Blackfoot name of Sam Short Coyote. They are the same person. Interested researchers should consult the following sources: Andrew Stinger, "Indians Have Several Names: Indian Samuel and Walking Coyote," interview by Bon I. Whealdon, 14 October 1941 W.P.A. Writers' Project File Number 910.039, Montana State University, Bozeman, p. 1; U.S. Department of Interior, *Flathead Reservation Indian Census Roll, 1887* (Washington: National Archives Microfilm Publications, 1965), Microcopy 595, Roll 107.

73. Duncan MacDonald, interview by Cora Van Deusen, undated, Duncan MacDonald File, Montana Historical Society Collections, Helena, Montana, pp. 2-3.

74. Ibid., pp. 379-82.

75. John Kidder, "Montana Miracle: It Saved the Buffalo," *Montana: Magazine of Western History* 15 (Spring 1965): 58.

76. Grinnell, "American Bison" (note 20 above), pp. 374-78, 383.

77. Van Deusen, "Duncan MacDonald" (note 73 above), pp. 2-3.

78. Que-que-sah, "Samuel's Buffalo Calves,"

interview by Bon I. Whealdon, 7 January 1942, W.P.A. Writers' Project File Number 910.040, Montana State University, Bozeman, pp. 1-2.

79. Joseph MacDonald, "Samuel's Buffalo Calves," interview by Bon I. Whealdon, 29 September 1941, W.P.A. Writer's Project File Number 910.00, Montana State University, Bozeman, p. 3.

80. Inman, *Buffalo Jones* (note 42 above), p. 1.