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Review of *The Buffalo Hunters* By Charles M. Robinson III

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The Buffalo Hunters. By Charles M. Robinson III. Austin: State House Press, 1995. Illustrations, footnotes, bibliography, index. xiv + 162 pp. \$29.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

Bison history captures the American imagination. Robinson capitalizes on this interest here with an entertaining narrative about buffalo hunters. The book begins with a synopsis of Native American bison hunting practices both before and after the acquisition of the horse, an animal whose impact dramatically

transformed and increased indigenous dependence on the buffalo. The author moves on to address the role Native Americans played in supplying bison beef to British-Canadian fur companies and buffalo robes to their American counterparts. The story then quickly moves on to Euro-American sport hunting which reached its heyday with the completion of the transcontinental railroad. Buffalo Bill Cody and his associates such as Grand Duke Alexis and George Armstrong Custer dominate this discussion which initiates the book's primary focus: white hunters.

Robinson notes that bison hunting became exceptionally lucrative after the discovery of a process to convert buffalo hides into industrial grade leather in 1870. He provides anecdotes about various hide hunters, most notably J. Wright Mooar, and a few statistics of reported bison kills and hide shipments to document the extermination of the southern herd. He then moves on to describe Native American resistance to commercial buffalo-hide hunters and the growth of hide towns like Dodge City, Kansas, and Fort Griffin, Texas. The final chapter compares the extermination of the northern herd in the 1880s with that of the southern herd. The author justifies the brevity of his attention to the northern situation by explaining that the area contained fewer bison and these more quickly vanished.

Three themes pervade this work. First, buffalo hunters—both native and white—did both “great and terrible deeds” ranging from courageous work to over-harvesting. Second, economics dictated the importance of bison hunting. Native Americans wasted bison products until they witnessed a scarcity and then fought to preserve their resource base. White hunters flocked to the Plains only after increasing hide prices lured them. Robinson explains, “With the development of industrial-grade buffalo leather, the fate of the animal was sealed.” Third, the army supported buffalo hunting “in an effort to control the Indians.” Military outposts even supplied free ammunition and powder to the Indians for this purpose.

Buffalo Hunters may disappoint some bison history researchers due to its brevity, scant original research, cursory discussion of bison hunting during the fur trade era, and insufficient use of statistics. However, the colorful narrative and numerous uncommon supporting illustrations make this book a delightful read. Many academics could add to their library with this balanced anecdotal interpretation. Moreover, Robinson gives the general readership valuable insight into human ecology and the development of the United States. This book enhances western Americana literature.

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