

## THE FAMOUS BUFFALO HUNT OF GRAND DUKE ALEXIS OF RUSSIA

(As given at the second annual picnic  
Held at Camp Duke Alexis  
Saturday Aug 13 1932  
By Judge Bayard H Paine)

In the early seventies buffalo hunting was the most famous sport in America. James Gordon Bennett bought a company of millionaires from New York City in 1871, and Buffalo Bill was in charge of the hunt, in which the party went from North Platte into Kansas.

Bennett's account of this hunt was published in his New York newspaper advertizing the excitement of this sport over the world, and several hunts by distinguished parties followed within a couple of years.

A most distinguished guest of the nation, Grand Duke Alexis, was entertained with a buffalo hunt under the direction of the War Department, with no expense spared. Richard J Walsh tells us in his book, "The Making Of Buffalo Bill", that in 17 months, while he was employed by the Kansas-Pacific Railroad to furnish meat for the construction gangs, he killed 4,280 buffaloes, and became so expert that toward the last he would maneuver the buffaloes until on some days he would drive a small herd through the camp and shoot them inside the camp, to the great joy of the workmen, and from this it has generally been considered that he received the name of Buffalo Bill because of this work.

Buffalo Bill had also shot buffaloes for the soldiers as a scout, and at Ft Wallace, Kansas, while so engaged, a match was arranged between Billy Comstock, a noted scout, and W F Cody as to which one could kill the most buffaloes in eight hours, to begin at eight oclock in the morning and close at four in the afternoon. The wager was for \$500 . The buffalo were plentiful. A number of ladies and gentlemen from St Louis who were taking a trip West, together with a lot of soldiers and scouts, formed a gallery and watched the battle. The first bunch of buffaloes they encountered that day were within three miles of the camp, and of these Cody got 56 and Comstock 37. After lunch they found another herd of buffaloes coming directly at the wagons, and from this Cody got his 59th buffalo when Comstock had his 46th, and as it was late in the afternoon Comstock and his backers gave up the fight. The referee declared W F Cody to be the champion buffalo hunter of the plains, and many contend that it was from this report that he won the name of Buffalo Bill, which name ran through hundreds of dime novels, and because of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show which was taken all over Europe and gave performances before many of the crowned heads and also at the Vatican before Pope Leo XIII, his became the best known name of any plainsman and scout of that period.

John W Cranmer is one of the few remaining professional buffalo hunters, and he followed that profession from 1871 to 1874. The Lincoln State Journal upon Sunday, February 21, 1932, gives a long article dictated by him. He says that along the Republican river was the favored grazing ground of the American Buffalo, and that the Arapaho Indians came in from the West, the Kiowas and Comanches came from the South and the Sioux came down from the North to the great hunting grounds along the Republican River, where thousands of buffaloes remained through the winter and went north in the summer.

The poor Pawnee Indians had little chance with these fiercer and more warlike tribes, and the massacre of 156 Pawnees by the Sioux in Massacre Canyon near Trenton was the last of many battles in which the Pawnees were killed for trying to get their share of the buffaloes in the rich feeding grounds.

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With the coming of the better rifles, the herds of buffalo were rapidly decimated, and with the winter of 1874 the big herds were a thing of the past, although stray buffaloes were killed as late as 1876; then followed several years when bone hunters made a good deal of money in hauling the buffalo bones to the railroad and shipping them back east.

In order that we may know something of the importance of the visit of Grand Duke Alexis to the United States, in the "History Of Russia" by Vernadsky, published by the Yale University Press, he shows us how Russia had slowly moved its flag toward the Pacific and south toward India in the period between 1840 and 1860, and that Great Britain was greatly annoyed by this, and Russian diplomats attempted to reach an understanding with the United States. During the Crimean War 1853-56, the United States government gave moral support to Russia, and during the Civil War, 1861-65, Russia gave similar support to the Union forces.

In 1866, when Alexander II barely escaped assassination the United States sent its assistant secretary of navy to Russia to personally extend congratulations upon his narrow escape from death. This social visit was much appreciated by Russia, and the next year, in 1867, Russia sold Alaska to the United States for the nominal sum of \$7,200,000. Serfdom had just been abolished in Russia, and slavery had been abolished in the United States. This fact also led to a better mutual understanding and sympathy between the two countries.

Alexander II was married April 16, 1841, and had six sons and two daughters. The oldest son, Nicholas, was expected to follow as Czar, but his unfortunate death before his marriage the second son, Alexander, succeeded to the throne upon the death of his father on March 13, 1881. In 1871, the fourth son, Grand Duke Alexis, made a visit of state to the United States.

Therefore, the United States turned the affair over to General Phil H Sheridan, who commissioned General George A Forsyth to take charge of all details, sending a letter to Buffalo Bill, in which he placed him in charge of the actual hunt. General Sheridan's plan called for a hunt by the distinguished visitor and the accompanying generals for the first day and then expressed the desire that the best Sioux hunters be summoned to give a great war dance and the second day they would show the Grand Duke how Indians hunted buffalo over the plains before the advent of the white man.

Grand Duke Alexis was the fourth child born to Alexander II, Czar of Russia and upon his death it was seen at once that there was much jealousy between the brothers, Grand Duke Vladimir and his wife, a German Princess, were the head of the opposition to Alexander III, according to the book by Count Vassili, entitled, "Behind the Veil at the Russian Court."

But the Grand Duke Alexis was a very different sort of person. He had been given the best of tutors and could speak English, French and German as well as other languages. He was impetuous in affairs of the heart and in his early youth had fallen desperately in love with the daughter of his father's tutor and married her in absolute defiance of his father's wishes and the Czar had promptly annulled the marriage. Because of this most unfortunate early experience in matrimony the Grand Duke Alexis never married again but ever after that carried on innumerable flirtations and became a man who was fond of wine, women and cards and while he was trained as a natural man he conducted the major part of such maneuvers at Paris and Monte Carlo.

Grand Duke Alexis was an extremely handsome man and his resemblance to his brother, Alexander III, was remarkable and on some occasions of parades and other events it is indicated that he doubled for him. He had great dignity and experience in social and diplomatic affairs and could represent his country with distinction when called upon to do so upon state occasions.

For this reason as well as because of the earnest desire of Russia to cement its friendship with the United States, Grand Duke Alexis was selected by the Czar to pay a visit of state to the United States in 1871-72 and doubtless as a result of the success of this trip he was given the post of Commander In

Chief of the Russian navy, of which position, it was said by one, he made an outstanding failure.

Most interesting sidelights are thrown on this great hunt by the sister of Buffalo Bill, Mrs Helen Cody Wetmore, in her book, "The Last Of The Great Scouts".

She had recently married and was living at Fort McPherson that winter. She says a most distinguished party visited the post that winter, nothing less than Grand Duke Alexis and his retinue. This nobleman's visit had aroused much enthusiasm in the United States and he had been wined and dined in a manner befitting his high station, but she adds, wined and dining are common to all nations and the Grand Duke expressed his wish to see the wild life of America including the Indians. As he had hunted big game in Asia and was hailed as a capital shot with rifle and revolver it was soon arranged that he would be taken to Nebraska on a buffalo hunt with trimmings. General Sheridan was in charge. Through his aides General Forsyth and Dr Asch as well as by a letter from General Sheridan, it was suggested that in addition to the hunt by the distinguished party that an Indian war dance as well as a buffalo hunt by the Indians themselves be provided for their entertainment. Buffalo Bill who had charge under General Phil Sheridan of the hunt of Grand Duke Alexis, was born in Scott county Iowa, Feby 26 1845 and died Jany 10 1917. His father was an unsuccessful farmer and in 1850 moved to the village of LeClaire Iowa, on the Mississippi river, where the son attended public school for some months, but developed a love for riding on the Mississippi more than for school. His father secured a job as stage driver on the stage line from Davenport to Chicago, and became such a popular man that he was elected to the legislature. In 1852 he sold the little farm and moved to Kansas, where he ate wheat bread for the first time, having always lived on corn dodger in Iowa. The father started a trading post near the Kickapoo Indian Agency in Leavenworth county, Kansas, and here the eight year old boy spent most of his time playing with the Indians and learning their sports. Whether Kansas would become a slave state was the exciting question. Many fights were held over the question, and when his father was making an address, saying that Iowa was a ~~white~~ white state and he would exert all his power to make Kansas a white state and keep slavery out, the crowd attacked him, calling him a black Abolitionist and he was stabbed, from which wounds he never recovered.

In 1855, when Buffalo Bill was in his eleventh year, he got a job herding cattle on a gray mule, and after two months he became a pony express rider and stage driver, attending school in the winter for a few months. When he was eleven years of age he took part in an Indian fight, and, although the youngest man in the party, killed the first Indian. He worked all over Kansas, Colorado, and Utah and southern Nebraska during his pony express days. He had a trip of 45 miles from the Julesburg ranch, with three changes of horses, and drove them 15 miles per hour. Many times he was in conflict with the Indians and had to race for his life.

When the Civil war broke out all of the stage and express drivers deserted and joined the army, and there he met Wild Bill, with whom a great friendship grew up. His service in the army was as a scout in carrying dispatches between Fort Dodge, Gibson and Leavenworth, finally getting as far as Tennessee. At the close of the war General George A Custer and General Hancock took charges of an Indian expedition from the forts in western Kansas, and for a time he became personal guide for these generals. On January 29, 1931, the Indianola Reporter published a letter written by Buffalo Bill to Mrs John Longnecker in June 1894, in answer to a letter, that they had been trying to locate the main camp prepared for Grand Duke Alexis, and the letter reads as follows:

Dear Madam- In reply to your letter of the 9th inst, aksing the whereabouts on the Red Willow that Camp Alexis was located. Will try to tell you. Do you know where the old government road running from Ft McPherson to the Republican crossed the Red Willow? Well, it was about one mile above where the road crossed the creek on the east side of the creek. The letter says (obliverated)but this was a mistake of the printers.

Yours very truly  
W F Cody.

"  
P.S. As I am going to visit the old camping grounds some day, if you will let me know where you live I would be pleased to call on you and I would like to know how you like the country, etc. W.F.C. "

In the "Story of the Wild West," by Hon W F Cody (Buffalo Bill) published in 1888 and afterwards reprinted as "Life and Adventures of Buffalo Bill" by Stanton and Van Vliet Co of Chicago (1917) he gave an account of the life of Kit Carson and of several other famous scouts and also an autobiography of his own life, and beginning on page 623, occurs the story of the hunt with Grand Duke Alexis. He says the preparations for the hunt were extensive, and were arranged under the direction of General Forsyth. Buffalo Bill had found that there were plenty of buffaloes upon Red Willow Creek, within 60 miles of Fort McPherson, which old fort was located some 20 miles southeast of the city of North Platte.

Spotted Tail was the Chief of the Sioux Indians and had been given permission by the Government to hunt buffalo that winter in the Republican River country, and Chief Spotted Tail's camp was then located on the Frenchman Fork, about 150 miles from Fort McPherson.

General Forsyth, directed Buffalo Bill to visit Chief Spotted Tail's camp and induce about 100 of the leading warriors and chiefs to come to the point where it should be decided to locate the Duke Alexis hunting camp and to arrive there by the time the Grand Duke should arrive in order that he might see a body of American Indians and also observe the manner in which they killed buffaloes. The Indians were also to put on a grand war dance.

General Forsyth arrived at North Platte with a couple of aides, one evening, and the next day this party, accompanied by Captain Hayes of the Fifty Cavalry, mounted horses and taking an ambulance and some light wagons, in which the provisions and tents were carried, they were escorted by Buffalo Bill to Red Willow Creek, and arrived there in the evening, and the next day selected the camping place, which is right over there, and the canyon running in to the creek has been called Alexis Canyon since that time. The following day General Forsyth and his party returned to Ft McPherson, leaving the job to be done by Buffalo Bill alone, which was one of the hardest assignments he ever carried out. That was to visit Chief Spotted Tail's camp and induce the Chief to bring over 100 of his best warriors and put on a great dance. Buffalo Bill thought that Chief Spotted Tail was friendly with him, but knew many of his young warriors would ~~kill~~ scalp him on sight. The weather was very cold and the journey an unpleasant one, for he was obliged to camp out with only his saddle blankets, and there was considerable danger from the Indians themselves. The first night Buffalo Bill camped on the Stinking Water, and although he built a fire it was too cold to sleep much. Following up the Frenchman creek and hiding his horse in a bush, he went on top of a high hill and saw a Sioux camp about four miles up the creek. He waited until night, when all the young bucks were back in camp, wrapped up in a blanket so they would not tell him from an Indian, and rode directly to the Chief's lodge. In the account written by Mrs Wetmore, she says her brother tied his horse in some brush and then when it was dark wrapped his blanket around him and marked very erect to the lodge of the Chief.

Inside he found the old frontiersman, Todd Randall, who was Spotted Tail's agent, and had lived with the Sioux for a great many years and understood their language perfectly, and was very friendly with Buffalo Bill, and he not only did the interpreting but urged the Chief to take part in the hunt. Chief Spotted Tail consented to go and agreed to call his people together the next morning and select 100 who should accompany him. The Chief insisted that Buffalo Bill spend the night in his lodge with him, and had his squaw bring in food for him to eat. The next morning when the braves were gathered some of the younger ones showed their anger at Buffalo Bill, but none of those selected to make the trip with the Chief, and it was all agreed that in ten sleeps, meaning nights, they would be at the place selected, above the crossing, or ford where the army road running from Fort McPherson crossed the Red willow.

In two days Buffalo Bill arrived back at the camp on the Red Willow, where a company of cavalry were putting up large wall tents for Grand Duke Alexis and his party, and others were for the General Sheridan and his staff, together with the invited guests. Returning to Fort McPherson, some 75 of the best horses were carefully selected out of the 600 army horses there and sent down to the Red Willow camp, in Hayes county for the use of the actual hunting party. A day or so later a large supply of provisions, liquor, bedding, camp

furniture, arrived from Chicago and all were sent over immediately to the Camp. After these preparations were all made, on Jan'y 12 1872, Grand Duke Alexis and his party with General Phil Sheridan and his aides, arrived in North Platte by a special train.

General Forsyth, and Dr Asch, also General Custer were with General Sheridan. This special train, furnished by the Pennsylvania Railroad, was in charge of Mr Thompson, afterwards president of the Pennsylvania Railroad system. Capt. Asch and Buffalo Bill, with five or six ambulances and wagons and fifteen or twenty saddle horses and a company of cavalry under Captain Eagan, were at the depot to receive them.

The Grand Duke Alexis was a fine looking man and eagerly anticipated the joy of the hunt ahead of him. In less than half an hour the whole party were dashing away to the south toward Medicine Creek, and upon reaching that point they halted for lunch and a change of horses, and then riding from the Medicine, they reached the camp on Red Willow by evening. They enjoyed watching an indian exhibition of horsemanship and their sham battle, and by the fire all of the Indians engaged in a grand war dance so realistic that it ran shivers down the spines of the scouts and soldiers present.

General Custer was the life of the party, and Buffalo Bill says in his account that General Custer carried on a mild flirtation with one of the daughters of Spotted Tail and the Duke paid no little attention to another beautiful Indian maiden, but I looked in vain in the life of General Custer, published by his widow, but found no mention there of his being present at the hunt.

The next morning all were filled with great expectations of a successful buffalo hunt, and Buffalo Bill took Duke Alexis under his personal charge and gave him all the information as to how to shoot buffaloes, and further, gave him his celebrated buffalo horse, Buckskin Joe, who had been trained to keep beside a buffalo until it was shot and then rush on beside the next without the rider urging or using the reins or paying any attention to the well trained horse.

They were off at nine o'clock and before they had gone three miles observed a herd some distance ahead, and as the buffaloes were coming in their direction the party kept out of sight until ready to make the final charge, gradually working around to the windward, where the buffaloes could not smell them and take fright.

When the time came to charge, Buffalo Bill and the Duke with their horses on the run, left the rest of the party far behind. The first shot the Duke missed, not being used to shooting from a running horse. They then followed and finally overtook a large bull, and the Duke waited until he could almost place his gun against the side of the animal, where he fired the fatal shot. He was very much elated, took off his cap and waved it to the party, who were perhaps a mile in the rear. His retinue and the other officers galloped up and the Duke received congratulations from everyone. Then everyone drank to the health of the Grand Duke with overflowing glasses of champagne. The hide of this large buffalo bull was carefully removed and dressed and the Duke took the same to Russia with him on his return. A temporary encampment was made close to where this buffalo was killed, and the evening was passed with story and song.

The second day of the hunt Chief Spotted Tail asked permission for one of his Chiefs, named Two Lance, to give the Duke an exhibition of how he could shoot an arrow entirely thru the body of one of the large buffalo, and to the profound astonishment of all, Chief Two Lance shot an arrow which passed entirely thru the body of the running buffalo, and the arrow was given to Duke

Alexis as a memento of Chief Two Lance's skill and power.

On this second days hunt the Grand Duke killed a buffalo at a distance of 100 yards with a heavy navy revolver, and Buffalo Bill adds that the shot was a marvelous "scratch". This ended the hunt as the Grand Duke was satisfied, and orders were given to return to the railroad.

Buffalo Bill's sister, Mrs Wetmore gives a few additional sidelights on the hunt. She says that the Duke shot eight buffaloes altogether, including the one that "he thought he shot" with a revolver at 100 yards. She also tells that in the list of distinguished guests for which saddle horses were provided to meet the train at North Platte, the name of Frank Thompson was not in the list and no horse was provided and he would not ride in the ambulance, that Buffalo Bill after starting the calvacade out of North Platte came back to see if everything was complete in every retail and found Mr Thompson without a mount. He gave orders at once that his most famous horse, "Buckskin Joe" should be saddled and brought up for Thompson. This was the horse which needed no guidance but would jump from beside one buffalo to the next without the use of reins and on which Buffalo Bill had escaped Indians on one occasion on Kansas riding 80 miles in one day.

The well trained horse was obtained in a trade with an Indian, and was the fastest horse Buffalo Bill ever had. On one ~~#####~~ occasion, in escaping from Indians on the warpath in Kansas, he had ridden Buckskin Joe eighty miles. For these reasons no one had ever been allowed to ride this horse/ Therefore, when Buffalo Bill and Francis Thompson overtook the party, all the teamsters and soldiers pointed at him and thought they were guying him, and asked what was the matter--didnt he ride his horse alright ?

It appears that the Grand Duke was dressed modestly in the plainest clothes, ~~###~~ they all supposed that Mr. Thompson was the Grand Duke because he was allowed to ride Buckskin Joe.

The most exciting thing that happened to the Duke was in driving back to North Platte. For his return a conveyance was provided which was a heavy double-duty (seated) open carriage, somewhat like an "rish dog-cart. This was drawn by six spirited cavalry horses, not much used to the harness.

The driver was Bill Reed, an overland stage driver, and when they had proceeded about half way back General Phil Sheridan asked Buffalo Bill to handle the reins himself, and when he got in Sheridan said to him. "Shake 'em up a little, Bill, and give us some old time stage driving." When they reached the valley of the Medicine, there was no brake on this cart and the horses had nothing to hold back, so that Buffalo Bill writes that all he could do was to keep them straight ahead, and for three miles they ran pell mell with one wheel and then another off the ground, and when they were checked going up the next hill the Grand Duke remonstrated and said he did not want any more of that kind of driving and preferred to go much slower.

After the three mile ride down the hill in the wagon with the running horses the "rand Duke said " I would not have missed that ride for a large sum of money, but rather than repeat it I would <sup>return</sup> ~~earn~~ to Russia by way of Alaska and swim the Behring Strait."

Upon arriving at the special train waiting for them, the Grand Duke invited Buffalo Bill into his car and gave him some valuable presents, and their train soon pulled out, and this closes Buffalo Bills account of the famous buffalo hunt of Grand Duke Alexis of Russia, the 12th, 13th and 14th of January 1872.

Mrs Wetmore's book is more specific about the presents, the Duke gave Buffalo Bill a greatcoat made of the finest Russian furs, a set of cuff links set with precious jewels, and a beautiful scarf pin.

The grand Duke himself was quietly dressed but that some of the members of his party were appparelled in gold and lace and all of the trappings of royalty/ The gorgeous uniforms greatly impressed the colored troopers .

When the calvacade moved south from North Platte at a rapid pace a colored sergeant Saluted Buffalo Bill and said. " Colonel, ah begs leave to report, sah, dat another of dem kings has done fallen off his horse."