

## Indigenous Ecology in the History of Bison Conservation

Keara Lightning

Lillian Agnes Jones Fellowship

Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies

Aug 31, 2023



Figure 1. An Indigenous woman harvests meat from a buffalo accidentally killed in the Ravalli corrals.

“The buffalo spirit comes to me when I sing and drum and smudge with sweetgrass. It says, ‘I ask the Creator to become many so that I can feed the people once again and meet their needs,’” he says slowly.

As he stares out the window and silence fills the space between us, I ponder what the buffalo spirit means in its communication with the old man. Finally, Albert gives me a clue.

“I believe the earth will renew herself and things will go back to the old way of the Indian. You will not see it. But I will.”<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> From an interview with Albert Lightning in Meili, *Those Who Know: Profiles of Alberta's Native Elders*, 84.

## Research Process

In my M.A. thesis, I analyze the history of environmental management at Elk Island National Park as a case study in Indigenous ecologies.

Research was carried out primarily between September 2022 and May 2023. I completed two trips to the archive between November 15-18, 2023, and February 14-17, 2023. I want to thank the Whyte Museum archives staff for their help accessing materials. This was my first time doing extended archival research, and everyone was incredibly supportive and patient with me as I learned how to work with the archives.

The original intention was to utilize materials concerning the early days of Elk Island National Park and reports of the Commissioner of Dominion Parks. I also looked at materials concerning the Pablo-Allard buffalo herd sale and round-up (1907-1912) for their relevance to the history of Elk Island National Park's buffalo herds.

As I delved into the correspondence exchanged between Howard Douglas, the superintendent of Banff National Park at that time, and the reminiscences of Norman Luxton's firsthand experience as part of the round-up, and even stumbled upon handwritten notes Luxton had taken from his conversations with Michel Pablo, the narrative surrounding the sale underwent a profound transformation. What was initially summarized in a few sentences ("In 1906... the Canadian government was attempting to purchase a herd of bison from a Montana rancher named Michel Pablo."<sup>2</sup>) morphed into a sprawling, intricate tale teeming with captivating characters. I've struggled to condense some of these fascinating stories into this report.

Crucially, it is a history fundamentally shaped by Indigenous people. Reading through the archival materials, I saw that the stories of the origins, the sale, and the herd's round-up exemplify ongoing Indigenous kinship relations with the buffalo in the face of colonial disruption to those relationships. Although many accounts of the Pablo-Allard herd's sale praised the Canadian government officials' foresight in preserving the largest buffalo herd of that time, the strategic actions of Indigenous people were instrumental in keeping the herd alive.

---

<sup>2</sup> Parks Canada, *Elk Island National Park*, 9.

## Research Context

### Indigenous Ecologies and Environmental Management

Environmental disciplines have much to do with envisioning the past and the future. They seek to understand a place's current and historical landscape and then to understand the impacts and outcomes of human activity on that landscape. Environmental science education might acknowledge the Indigenous presence in an area as a historical aside but then move on to discuss the ecology of a place as though it were naturally lacking any human influence. When discussing the future of the environment, the absence of Indigenous people and lifeways is an unspoken assumption taken for granted. John Law argues that such assumptions, which are not explicitly argued and so are beyond contestability, operate most powerfully to enact "collateral realities" and "turn what is being done in practice into what necessarily *has* to be."<sup>3</sup>

Environmental sciences are not just systems of knowledge; they inform systems of landscape governance: "Settler *ecologies* have to be inscribed so settlers can exercise their own governance systems," and so, "settlers systematically seek to erase the ecologies required for Indigenous governance systems."<sup>4</sup> Here, the word ecologies "denote[s] human agency within those ecosystems, whether that agency is the Indigenous knowledge of seasonal rounds... or the settler desires to shape the same lands and waters."<sup>5</sup> This use of 'ecologies' "suggests not only ecosystems but also the calculated stewardship of them."<sup>6</sup> *Indigenous ecologies* refer to the ecosystems co-created by Indigenous governance, while *settler ecologies* refer to ecosystems co-created by settler colonial governance.

Indigenous lifeways are not simply passive survival techniques but active systems of resource management, including nation-specific practices such as landscape burning, clearing and weeding, habitat creation, extension or alteration, tilling soil, propagation and dissemination, transplanting, pruning, selective or rotational harvesting, and fertilization and mulching.<sup>7</sup> The biodiverse and resource-rich landscapes encountered by settlers in North America were lush because of Indigenous peoples. When Menominee wild rice beds are cleared to make way for cottages on a lake, this is the enactment of settler ecology. The wild rice bed, perhaps a natural feature in the settler imagination, is part of a Menominee ecology governed through seasonal rice camps and community-distributed roles and responsibilities.<sup>8</sup> Clearing the wild rice bed removes more than a natural feature: "The lack of visibility of wild rice beds and the Indigenous communities who monitor and protect them, when settlers drive along highways, go on hikes, mine, or grow foods, among other activities, further solidifies the presumption that Indigenous peoples are absent."<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Law, "Collateral Realities," 174, emphasis in text.

<sup>4</sup> Whyte, Caldwell, and Schaefer, "Indigenous Lessons about Sustainability Are Not Just for 'All Humanity'," 158, emphasis in text.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>6</sup> Whyte, "Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice," 136.

<sup>7</sup> Turner, Deur, and Lepofsky, "Plant Management Systems of British Columbia's First Peoples."

<sup>8</sup> Whyte, Caldwell, and Schaefer, "Indigenous Lessons about Sustainability Are Not Just for 'All Humanity'."

<sup>9</sup> Whyte, "Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice," 14.

Settler ecologies are enacted and represented as an inevitable reality, anchored by the assumption that the natural, healthy state of the land is what it reaches without human influence.<sup>10</sup> Unsustainable lifestyles continue unabated while some privileged lands are set aside as wilderness because human presence inevitably contaminates natural places. Studying Indigenous ecologies illuminates how this reality can be done differently. If we understand that Indigenous peoples actually shaped these lands, which had been imagined as untouched wilderness, if humans are not inherently harmful, then we are responsible for how we live and the realities we choose to enact with our practices.

---

<sup>10</sup> Stoneberg Holt, "Reinterpreting the 1882 Bison Population Collapse" reflects on this: "I worry I may have subconsciously viewed the Leave-It-Alone assumption pervading our culture's foundations as my 'get out of jail free' card... deep inside a little voice whispers, 'If you really mess up and don't understand anything, step away and all-knowing Nature can heal it.'" (112).

## Research Results

### The Significance of the Pablo-Allard Buffalo Herd

The bison found in Elk Island National Park originated with the Pablo-Allard Buffalo herd, which Michel Pablo and Charles Allard raised. This herd was the largest known at the time of its acquisition by the Canadian government in 1907. Despite being privately owned by Pablo, the bison were free to roam across the Flathead Reservation. It took teams of 90 or more cowboys over five years to gather over 700 bison, then transported by train from Ravalli, Montana, to Canada between 1907 and 1912.<sup>11</sup>



Figure 2. Corrals for the arriving bison at Lamont, AB.

While the Canadian government created the Buffalo National Park specially to house these herds, the first shipments from Montana were temporarily held at Elk Island National Park. Although most buffalo were eventually moved to Wainwright, a 40-50 bison demonstration herd was left behind at Elk Island. The herd at Buffalo National Park grew rapidly, reaching a peak of 8,832 in 1921, which exceeded the estimated carrying capacity of 5,000.<sup>12</sup> As a result, the park's management struggled to control the population due to overgrazing and overcrowding, spreading disease and parasites. Eventually, Buffalo National Park was closed in 1939, and its remaining animals were either sold or killed. However, the small herd at Elk Island remained healthy and became the foundation for bison restorations that continue to this day.

---

<sup>11</sup> Coder, "George D. Coder Fonds."

<sup>12</sup> Markewicz, *Like Distant Thunder: Canada's Bison Conservation Story*.

## Indigenous Leadership



Figure 3. Michel Pablo and his team of cowboys.

Both Michel Pablo and Charles Allard were mixed-race Indigenous men who married into the Confederated Salish tribes and ranched on the Flathead reservation. Michel Pablo's mother was Blackfoot, and Charles Allard's mother was Cree from Fort Garry.<sup>13</sup> The two entered into business and purchased Latatitsa's herd of 13 bison from Samuel Walking Coyote. By Allard's death, they had raised the herd to at least 300 head, which was split between them. When Pablo sold his share in 1906, he estimated he had 400 bison, but in the end, he shipped more than 700 bison to Canada.

There are very few records naming the riders, termed "Buffalo Boys," to distinguish them from cowboys.<sup>14</sup> Pablo and Allard, Jr. each had their team of cowboys. Luxton describes the men he met upon first arriving at the Buffalo Camp: "There was not a full blood white cow boy in the bunch, and few of the men could have told who or what their grand parents might have been, but horse men [every] one of them."<sup>15</sup> A small number of the riders' names are remembered by older residents of the Flathead Valley interviewed 30 years later<sup>16</sup>: Billy Archibald<sup>17</sup> (no information), Tony Barnaby<sup>18</sup> (Spokane/Kalispel; Pablo's son-in-law), Zephyr "Swift" Courville<sup>19</sup> (Kootenai; Allard Sr.'s brother-in-law), Jim Grinder<sup>20</sup> (Nez Perce), Joseph Houle<sup>21</sup> (Pend d'Oreille), Billy Irvine<sup>22</sup> (Kootenai), Mrs. Emily Irvine<sup>23</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Coder, "George D. Coder Fonds."

<sup>14</sup> Bartlett, "The Pablo-Allard Herd: Origin." I'll still be referring to them as cowboys here.

<sup>15</sup> Luxton, "Reminiscences, Luxton Family Fonds," Buffalo 2-3.

<sup>16</sup> Whealdon, *I Will Be Meat for My Salish*. In this list I'll add references to related interviews with the rider or their family members, as well as additional information and background. As nearly all people mentioned are mixed nationalities, I am simplifying their tribal affiliations here.

<sup>17</sup> Mentioned in interviews but no other identifying information found. See Felsman and Bigart, "Biographical Glossary of Flathead Indian Reservation Names."

<sup>18</sup> Whealdon, "A Pack-Mare Saves One of Samuel's Calves [Interview with Tony Barnaby]."; Whealdon, "Pablo Loved His Herd [Interview with Tony Barnaby]."

<sup>19</sup> See Williams, "Finley Brings in Calves [Interviews with Dave Couture and Zephyr Courville]." See also Williams, "History of Buffalo [Interview with Zephyr Courville]" for more details on Courville. He ran for Allard, Jr.

<sup>20</sup> Williams, "History of Buffalo [Interview with Zephyr Courville]" Courville recounts Grinder as part of Allard Jr's riders.

<sup>21</sup> See Whealdon, "Attempt to Drive Pablo's Buffalo to Ravalli Not Successful [Interview with Joseph Houle]."

<sup>22</sup> See Whealdon, "Buffalo Gal Prevents a Stampede [Interview with Mrs. Mary Blood]," interview with sister of Billy Irvine.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 135 Mrs. Irvine's sister-in-law recounts her feats: "one hot day, when after continuous riding amounting to 100 miles, she was successful in sheering the herd unaided and thus preventing what would have been a most disastrous

(Pend d'Oreille), Bill Lewis<sup>24</sup> (white; married to a Flathead tribal member), Joseph McDonald<sup>25</sup> (Nez Perce/Iroquois), John McDonald (Nez Perce/Iroquois/Flathead), Frank McLeod<sup>26</sup> (Kootenai), Malcolm McLeod<sup>27</sup> (Kootenai), Antoine Morigeau<sup>28</sup> (Kootenai), Tom "Butch" O'Connell<sup>29</sup> (no information), James Peone<sup>30</sup> (Kootenai), and Arthur Ray (Colville). Alvin Peone (Kootenai), Moses Delaware (Salish), and Henry Moss (Kootenai/Peigan/Cherokee) tended the loading chutes leading to the railroad cars at Ravalli.<sup>31</sup>

Many riders' backgrounds are connected to non-Indigenous ranchers, traders, and businessmen who married into the Flathead reservation. Some are members of other tribes who lived and worked on the Flathead reservation for most of their lives. This list of participants shows the extent of Indigenous leadership in the round-up and the diverse networks of kinship that extend from Indigenous communities.



Figure 4. This photo is captioned in Luxton's *Last of the Buffalo* booklet: "The lady in the centre is Mrs. Irvine the heroine of the round up who rode 100 miles in one day and saved a stampede unaided, aged 60 years. The other ladies are Mrs. and the Misses Marion of Lethbridge."<sup>32</sup>

---

stampede." See Figure 4 below. Olson, "Buffalo in the Flathead [Interview with Mrs. Camille McGowan]" says Mrs. Bill Irvine nee Emily Brown worked as a housekeeper for Allard Sr. for a long time before the round-up.

<sup>24</sup> Williams, "History of Buffalo [Interview with Zephyr Courville]" Courville says Lewis was one of the few white men who rode for Allard Jr.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph says he and his son aided in the round-up, and that Joseph was also hired by Ayotte to travel with the first trainload to Canada. Whealdon, "Joe McDonald Recalls Samuel's Buffalo Calves [Interview with Joseph McDonald]."

<sup>26</sup> See Whealdon, "Ride of the Old Photographer [Interview with Frank McLeod]." See also Whealdon, "Buffalo's Horn, Defensive Weapons [Interview with Frank McLeod and Andrew Stinger]."

<sup>27</sup> See Whealdon, "Malcolm McCleod [McLeod] First to Ride a Buffalo [Interview with Alex McLeod and Robert McCrea]" where McLeod's nephews tell a story of Allard, Sr. hiring a young McLeod to ride a buffalo for spectators when Allard exhibited his herd at the Butte racetracks in 1893. See also Williams, "History of Buffalo [Interview with Zephyr Courville]" where McLeod is remembered by Courville as one of Allard Jr.'s riders.

<sup>28</sup> Whealdon, "Diminishing Herds in Judith Basin [Interview with Antoine Morigeau]."

<sup>29</sup> Mentioned in interviews but no other identifying information found. See Felsman and Bigart, "Biographical Glossary of Flathead Indian Reservation Names."

<sup>30</sup> See Whealdon, "Pablo Roundup [Interview with Mrs. Clara Poene Reed]," interview with Peone's daughter. See also Whealdon, "Teeth Knocked Out: Buffalo Bull Plays a Role as Dentist in Extracting Indian's Aching Teeth [Interview with Clara Peone Reed and Alvin Peone]," interview with Peone's daughter and son. Peone was given the name "Teeth Pulled by Bull" when his sore teeth were knocked out by an old bull trying to escape.

<sup>31</sup> Felsman and Bigart, "Biographical Glossary of Flathead Indian Reservation Names."

<sup>32</sup> Luxton, "The Last of the Buffalo."

## Buffalo/Human Ecology

Many round-up stories emphasize how difficult it was to round up the buffalo for transportation. Norman Luxton accounts quite a few stories about herds suddenly halting, turning and charging directly at the riders.<sup>33</sup> Luxton also complains, “It was a joke to get a buffalo any where to the place wanted.”<sup>34</sup> It was dangerous, too:

“While two cow punchers were trying to drive an old bull into the corral, he suddenly whirled and charged them at full speed. Sinking both horns into the side of a horse, he lifted it and the rider clear of the ground and carried them a hundred yards. When they fell to the ground, the rider escaped while the buffalo finished goring the injured horse to death. Five horses were killed during the roundup, alert cowboys were injured, and many fine horses were ridden so hard that they were thereafter useless.”<sup>35</sup>

Luxton tells only one fatal account of a Flathead cowboy who got caught between a buffalo herd and a steep riverbank, and when the herd changed direction, he and his pony were thrown down the bank, killing the rider.<sup>36</sup>

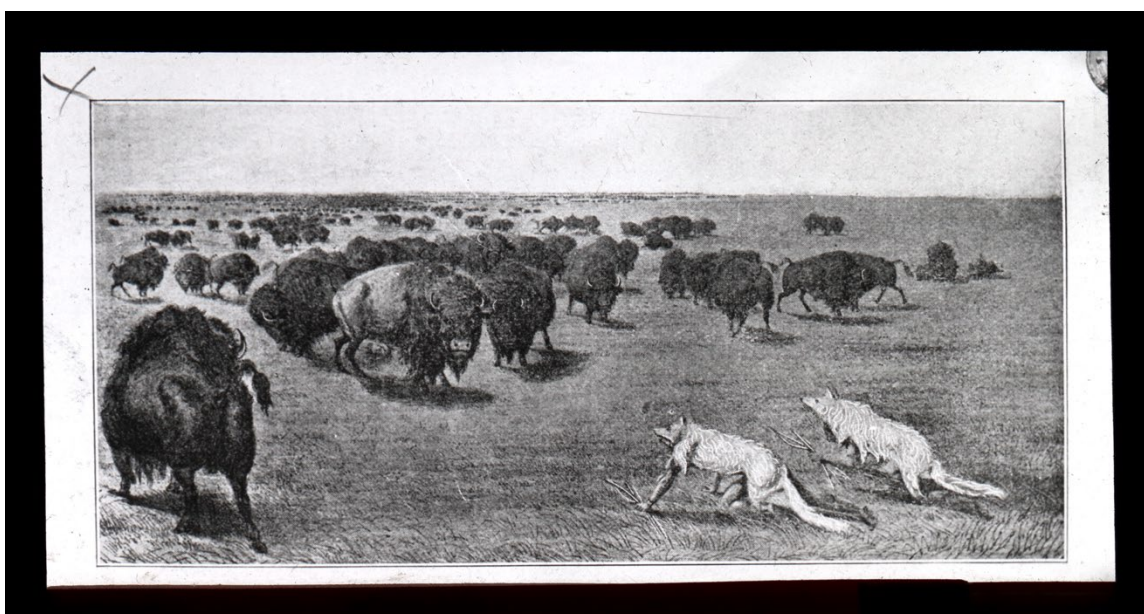


Figure 5. Illustration of hunters disguised as wolves.<sup>37</sup>

These buffalo riders were not the first to drive buffalo. Buffalo hunting nations have deep knowledge of buffalo psychology and behaviour. For example, buffalo have poor eyesight and respond vigorously to movement— movement in the distance may be seen as a threat.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Luxton, “Reminiscences, Luxton Family Fonds,” 5.

<sup>35</sup> Bartlett, “The Pablo-Allard Herd: Origin,” 93.

<sup>36</sup> Luxton, “Reminiscences, Luxton Family Fonds,” Buffalo 6-7.

<sup>37</sup> See Barsh and Marlor, “Driving Bison and Blackfoot Science” for relationship between wolves and bison hunting.

<sup>38</sup> Brink, *Imagining Head-Smashed-In*.



Runners, callers, and decoys use this knowledge to drive buffalo toward jumps or pounds. Robert McCrea's eyewitness account of Pablo's first buffalo drives has similarities to the methods used to drive buffalo to a pound:

"Mr. Pablo had a wing-fence erected, leading from the corrals westward across the prairie and low, rolling hills... nearly three miles in length. When he deemed that a sufficient number had been collected, he ordered the corral gates into a long, fenced-in lane to be thrown open. Buffalo, in a charging stream of huge, dark bodies literally poured southward along the lane. When the fences terminated, open plains invited the ruminants to make panicked attempts to escape toward the river. Mr. Pablo had guarded against that by having his buffalo boys stationed along that side. After they had traveled 7 or 8 miles, the buffalo ceased their desperate efforts to get away, although they kept on a swift run all the way to Ravalli... Groups of Indian women and children rich in barbaric colors of beaded garbs and blankets, dotted the sides of the old stage road, to madly cheer as the symbolic buffalo swept by."<sup>39</sup>

Buffalo won't move from an enclosed space if they can't see an escape.<sup>40</sup> Even if the enclosure is something they could feasibly break through, if they don't see any openings, they will think they are trapped and wander in circles, looking for a way out. This is how a buffalo pound works.



Figure 6. Illustration of Cree impounding buffalo.

<sup>39</sup> Whealdon, "Buffalo History [Interview with Robert A. McCrea]," 126-27. Whealdon, "Attempt to Drive Pablo's Buffalo to Ravalli Not Successful [Interview with Joseph Houle]" tells a similar story but adds the context that Pablo's plan was initially to round up the herd and then drive them in small bands to Ravalli, but upon rounding them up, decided to take them all at once. This change in plans was evidently a mistake, as little bands constantly broke away from the herd on the drive until "when we had reached the Ravalli yards, we had only 30 head remaining of what had been a large herd" (128).

<sup>40</sup> Brink, *Imagining Head-Smashed-In*.

Pablo may have been trying to take advantage of this when he created 'buffalo wagons' to load up the animals and wheel them off in individual boxcars pulled by horses. Luxton tells how this seemed to be going smoothly until, after the buffalo were almost all settled in the cages, "in seven minutes there was not a [wagon] on its four wheels, kindling wood was a chore that the buffalo made of every thing he came in contact with, and the odd cow boy who was left to drop the gates was scrambling for his very life."<sup>41</sup> Possibly, those buffalo wagons were not well and fully enclosed.

### The Contested Origins of the Herd

The origin of the Pablo-Allard herd is a mythology of its own, with many versions of the story circulating from different sources.

According to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes<sup>42</sup>, although a Pend d'Oreille man, named in different accounts as variations<sup>43</sup> of Samuel Welles, Indian Sam, Whista Sinchilape<sup>44</sup>, or Walking Coyote [footnote: I will refer to him as either Samuel Welles, Samuel, or Walking Coyote], is usually credited for raising and selling the herd to Pablo and Allard, it was actually his stepson, Latatitsa (Little Peregrine Falcon Robe)<sup>45</sup> who captured the herd and carried out the plans of his father Atatitsa (Peregrine Falcon Robe) who had years earlier proposed that the tribe save a herd of bison. Latitsa raised the small herd on the Flathead reservation, but while Latatitsa was away, Samuel sold the herd from under his stepson.<sup>46</sup>

It's possible that Samuel, as the patriarch of that household, was credited by default (and by his own stories) for the herd by people who encountered them, as several people remember meeting or hearing of Samuel and his herd. In a 1942 interview on the Flathead reservation<sup>47</sup>, Que-que-sah recounted being in the village of St. Ignatius in 1873 when Samuel Welles rode in with four buffalo calves. Que-que-sah remembers Samuel saying that he acquired the calves by trading with Peigans and that the youngest one had been too young to eat grass but was saved by being fed milk from a pack mare. Tony Barnaby, Pablo's son-in-law, corroborates this with a story that he says was told to Pablo by Samuel, in which a gentle, low-built mare suckled an orphan buffalo calf.<sup>48</sup>

The most extensive account of Samuel's story comes from Charles Aubrey, who operated a trading post on the Marias River. According to Aubrey<sup>49</sup>, Samuel Walking Coyote took a Blackfoot woman as his second wife while hunting with Blackfoot bands. His first wife,

<sup>41</sup> Luxton, "Reminiscences, Luxton Family Fonds," Buffalo 7.

<sup>42</sup> *In the Spirit of Atatitce? The Untold Story of the National Bison Range.*

<sup>43</sup> Williams, "Finley Brings in Calves [Interviews with Dave Couture and Zephyr Courville]" names him as Feenom Finley[Finlay]. This is possibly related to the fact that Samuel was known to graze his herd on the Finlay ranch, and that Samuel's wife Sabine is later said to have married Alex Finlay. In Whealdon, "Indians Have Several Names: Indian Samuel and Walking Coyote [Interview with Andrew Stinger]" Andrew Stinger, a business associate of Pablo's, recounts how many names a person may have from different Indigenous and European nations.

<sup>44</sup> Felsman and Bigart, "Biographical Glossary of Flathead Indian Reservation Names."

<sup>45</sup> Also referred to Joseph Attahe or Blanket Hawk in *ibid*.

<sup>46</sup> Locke, "Banff National Park and Plains Bison Conservation."

<sup>47</sup> Whealdon, "Samuel's Buffalo Calves [Interview with Que-Que-Sah]."

<sup>48</sup> Whealdon, "A Pack-Mare Saves One of Samuel's Calves [Interview with Tony Barnaby]."

<sup>49</sup> Bartlett, "The Pablo-Allard Herd: Origin," 71-75.

Pend d'Oreille Mary Sabine Walking Coyote<sup>50</sup>, was not happy with this arrangement, and the conflict escalated until Sam shot and wounded Sabine.<sup>51</sup> After the Blackfoot woman left with her people, Samuel was afraid to go back home to the Flathead reservation and face punishment for the crime of polygamy. Aubrey says that he advised Samuel to capture a few buffalo calves as a gift to appease the missionaries and chiefs.

We might need more evidence to prove how and why the original herd was captured conclusively. Still, it is possible that some versions of the story of Latatitsa and the stories of Samuel Walking Coyote may have happened simultaneously. I don't doubt the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe's account of Latatitsa and the meaning that story brings to the herd. Still, there are too many retellings of parts of Walking Coyote's story for me to accept that it's entirely a myth. Perhaps as Latatitsa planned to carry out his father's vision, Samuel and Sabine's marital troubles were also happening. Maybe Samuel decided to take advantage of Latatitsa's plan to help get himself back into good graces. Maybe Aubrey's account was materially accurate, but he took the credit for suggesting the plan in his retelling.

### Conservation and Captivity



*Figure 7. Buffalo bones piled along a railway at Gull Lake in 1894.*

“My friend, the buffalo now follows the Indian— into oblivion. Two fine types of early Americans exterminated by the damned greed of the whites. Here, while it is possible, I shall picture them both in their natural colors.”<sup>52</sup>

– Charles Russel, the famous painter, who took part in the round-up

<sup>50</sup> Also called Wuh-Wah. Felsman and Bigart, “Biographical Glossary of Flathead Indian Reservation Names.”

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. finds record that Sabine was shot in 1879, but it is not clear by whom.

<sup>52</sup> Whealdon, “Diminishing Herds in Judith Basin [Interview with Antoine Morigeau],” 113.

Intertwined with preserving the plains bison is the history of colonization. As stated by Tasha Hubbard, “What was once a symbiotic shared existence where the people offered prayers to the buffalo in exchange for livelihood, the relationship was altered by colonialism to one of mutual hardship.”<sup>53</sup> The approach of the non-Indigenous conservation movement towards the buffalo, for a considerable duration, rested upon the notion that the buffalo should be conserved solely as a symbol of a bygone era, a pre-colonial prairie life that could not withstand the challenges of the modern era.

In parallel to the forced removal of Indigenous peoples from the plains and their confinement to reserves, bison were also limited to captivity, where they were expected to survive solely as tourist attractions or livestock.<sup>54</sup> Indigenous peoples and bison were perceived as remnants of a lost past destined for either extinction or assimilation. However, the survival and resurgence of Indigenous peoples and the buffalo defy these expectations and embody the resilience of cultures and ecosystems in the face of adversity.



Figure 8. Pablo, overlooking the river valley, directs his team of cowboys.

With a keen sight to his animals’ welfare, he knew at all times just about where his buffalo were grazing. He soon realized that they were increasing at a rapid rate; and after he returned from each daily ride on the range, he would remark, “It is well.”<sup>55</sup>

– Tony Barnaby, Michel Pablo’s son-in-law<sup>56</sup> and participant in the round-up

According to Pablo’s son-in-law, Tony Barnaby, Pablo was not raising this herd to be so large just to profit. He saw them as “a symbol of the real soul of the Indians’ past... the buffalo had always been the greatest benefactor of the Indians” and so he would repay this debt and “would protect the mighty monarch and provide the remnant a secure paradise in

<sup>53</sup> Hubbard, “The Call of the Buffalo,” 84.

<sup>54</sup> Locke, “Banff National Park and Plains Bison Conservation.”

<sup>55</sup> Whealdon, “Pablo Loved His Herd [Interview with Tony Barnaby],” 120.

<sup>56</sup> Whealdon, “Horses [Interview with Henry Burland and Frank McLeod]” Burland and McLeod call Barnaby “Pablo’s favorite son-in-law.”

valley Sin-yel-e-min.”<sup>57</sup> Que-que-sah recalls that “Pablo was very generous to his friends. Often he would tell our Indians to butcher a fat buffalo. We all liked and respected Mr. Pablo, and no Indian would steal any of his herd.”<sup>58</sup>

The decision to sell the herd was not made willingly by Pablo. It was a consequence of the Flathead Allotment Act, which divided the reservation into smaller parcels of land, forcing Pablo to part ways with the bison. Before the Flathead Allotment Act was enacted, the herd enjoyed the unrestricted freedom to roam the Flathead reservation. It was only after it was clear that the US intended to turn the Flathead reservation into allotments, and the herds would no longer be able to freely range that he tried to sell them to the U.S. He hoped that the government would set aside a new refuge for them. When Congress refused, “he was moved to manly tears” and “only as a last resort did he sell them to the Canadian officials.”<sup>59</sup> Antoine Morgeau also said that when Pablo “realized that the days of free, open range for his buffalo were ending... He was heartbroken.”<sup>60</sup>

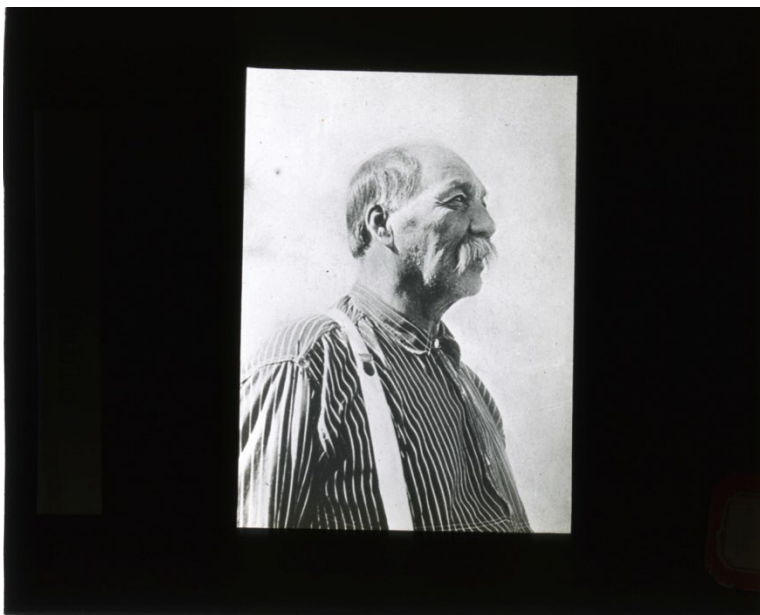


Figure 9. A portrait of Michel Pablo.

Michel Pablo’s perception of his role in protecting the bison herd extended far beyond financial gain. It represented a profound responsibility towards the buffalo, recognizing their pivotal role in sustaining Indigenous communities across countless generations. This deep-rooted sentiment likely drove his efforts to expand the herd from approximately 150

---

<sup>57</sup> Whealdon, “Pablo Loved His Herd [Interview with Tony Barnaby],” 119.

<sup>58</sup> Whealdon, “Samuel’s Buffalo Calves [Interview with Que-Que-Sah],” 108. See also Whealdon, “Buffalo Solve a Love Problem [Interview with Que-Que-Sah]” Que-que-sah also tells a story about his mother helping a young Coeur d’Alene man who wanted to marry a woman of his tribe but had to bring back four fresh buffalo hides to gain the approval of her father. To help the man, she went to Pablo: “Michel Pablo is Indian. He is man of good heart. He has many buffalo... To Pablo I shall give some cattle, some horses. To him I shall talk.”

<sup>59</sup> Coder, “George D. Coder Fonds,” folder 1, p. 6-7.

<sup>60</sup> Whealdon, “Diminishing Herds in Judith Basin [Interview with Antoine Morigeau],” 113.

bison, which constituted his share of the 300 remaining after Allard's demise in 1895, to a remarkable population of over 700 animals.

There's no way to know precisely what Pablo's wishes and intentions were, but although after the news about the sale came out, Pablo received many higher offers from Americans, he still held up the deal with Canada.<sup>61</sup> Some say this commitment to the agreement with Canada was motivated by spite towards the U.S. government, but I believe it's more likely that he sought a buyer he trusted to protect the whole herd. Histories of the buffalo herds under human management at the time are filled with lists of sales and transfers made between ranchers and parks.<sup>62</sup> Such a massive sale of a whole herd is unique in this history. He did not sell them off piecemeal and instead made the best choice he could to transfer them where they would continue to prosper for future generations.

### Conclusions

The last decade has marked a shift in bison management and conservation towards returning free-ranging bison to the landscape. During the early 2000s, there became a broader awareness of keystone species as drivers of ecosystem processes, and interest in returning bison to the wild grew.<sup>63</sup> In 2014, several tribes signed the Buffalo Treaty in a formal ceremony in Browning, Montana, calling for the return of bison.<sup>64</sup> Many more nations have become signatories in subsequent years. Indigenous peoples know that cultural resurgence goes hand in hand with restoring bison to the prairies. The history of the Pablo-Allard buffalo herd roots a significant part of bison conservation history in Indigenous relationships, showing that this relationship of reciprocity between Indigenous people and the bison has never been broken.

These stories of the Pablo-Allard buffalo herd exemplify layers of Indigenous ecologies. Plains Indigenous nations have shaped their landscapes through their relationships with the buffalo. Those relationships did not end when the buffalo herds began to disappear. Some representations of the round-up, such as Russel's above, saw this event as a last vestige of the Buffalo days. Such a view is shaped by the assumption that Indigenous people and buffalo were bound to disappear in the face of modernity. Looking closer, we can see the influence of traditional buffalo hunting techniques on the Indigenous cowboys and how those techniques have gone on to be used in bison herd management today.<sup>65</sup> We can see stories of diverse Indigenous people making the best choices they could for the survival of their relationships— their families, their people, their lands, and the buffalo. These actions have continued influencing the movements to bring back Indigenous management of herds

---

<sup>61</sup> Coder, "George D. Coder Fonds."

<sup>62</sup> See Coder, "The National Movement to Preserve the American Buffalo in the United States and Canada Between 1880-1920."

<sup>63</sup> Locke, "Banff National Park and Plains Bison Conservation."

<sup>64</sup> *Origins of the Buffalo Treaty*.

<sup>65</sup> Brink, *Imagining Head-Smashed-In*.

today<sup>66</sup> <sup>67</sup> and restore relationships so that the buffalo “can become many [to] feed the people once again and meet their needs.”<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> *In the Spirit of Atatíće? The Untold Story of the National Bison Range.*

<sup>67</sup> *Origins of the Buffalo Treaty.*

<sup>68</sup> From an interview with Albert Lightning in Meili, *Those Who Know: Profiles of Alberta's Native Elders*, 84.

## Expected Future Outcomes

### M.A. Thesis: “Enacting the Aspen Parkland”

My M.A. thesis is still in writing, to be completed by November 2023. The thesis is an environmental kin study<sup>69</sup> of Indigenous ecologies<sup>70</sup> in the Beaver Hills and Elk Island National Park, drawing on STS (Science and Technology Studies) and critical Indigenous theory. This research into the origins of the Pablo-Allard buffalo herd will be essential to the chapter on Bison.

### Interactive Project

To communicate this research to a broader audience, I am working on an interactive story of buffalo conservation. This is a ‘choose-your-own adventure’ style project created in the game engine Ren’Py. The story is told from the perspective of a buffalo. The player makes choices which determine which path the story will take. This will allow the player to explore and experience the branching stories of buffalo herds in the early 20th century. Archival photos will be used to illustrate the story. Particular words will be highlighted in the text so that when a player clicks on that word, a journal page will pop up to explain the person or event in more detail based on the archive. The player can click on a journal in the bottom left of the screen to review which pages they’ve found. The player is tasked to replay to collect all journal pages throughout the storylines. The top right corner of the screen displays which year the events took place. This project may be exhibited as the presentation portion of the fellowship.



Figure 10. Mock-up of interactive project format

<sup>69</sup> Kanngieser and Todd, “3. From Environmental Case Study to Environmental Kin Study.”

<sup>70</sup> Whyte, “Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice.”



### Teaching - "Introduction to Indigenous Ecologies"

During May 2023, I taught a three-week course for the Edmonton Lifelong Learners Association titled "Introduction to Indigenous Ecologies." This research informed part of 4 lectures on the history of bison management and conservation in the prairies. I will be teaching future semesters of this course in Winter 2024.

## Bibliography

Barsh, Russel Lawrence, and Chantelle Marlor. "Driving Bison and Blackfoot Science." *Human Ecology* 31, no. 4 (December 2003): 571–93. doi:[10.1023/B:HUEC.0000005514.93842.91](https://doi.org/10.1023/B:HUEC.0000005514.93842.91).

Bartlett, W. A. "The Pablo-Allard Herd: Origin." In *"I Will Be Meat for My Salish": The Buffalo and the Montana Writers Project Interviews on the Flathead Indian Reservation*, edited by Robert Bigart, 69–101. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2001.

Brink, Jack. *Imagining Head-Smashed-In: Aboriginal Buffalo Hunting on the Northern Plains*. Edmonton: AU Press, 2008.

Coder, George D. "George D. Coder Fonds," Copies made ca. 1973. M288. Archives and Library, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies.

Coder, George David. "The National Movement to Preserve the American Buffalo in the United States and Canada Between 1880-1920." Ann Arbor (MI): Xerox University Microfilms, 1975. Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies. <https://archives.whyte.org/en/permalink/catalogue6758>.

Felsman, Eugene Mark, and Robert Bigart. "Biographical Glossary of Flathead Indian Reservation Names." In *"I Will Be Meat for My Salish": The Buffalo and the Montana Writers Project Interviews on the Flathead Indian Reservation*, edited by Robert Bigart, 234–66. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2001. Interview in 1941.

Hubbard, Tasha. "The Call of the Buffalo: Exploring Kinship with the Buffalo in Indigenous Creative Expression." Graduate Studies, 2016. <https://prism.ucalgary.ca/handle/11023/3272>.

*In the Spirit of ?Atatíce? The Untold Story of the National Bison Range*, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1K2NQV3WyU>.

Kanngieser, Anja, and Zoe Todd. "3. From Environmental Case Study to Environmental Kin Study." *History and Theory* 59, no. 3 (2020): 385–93. doi:[10.1111/hith.12166](https://doi.org/10.1111/hith.12166).

Law, John. "Collateral Realities." In *The Politics of Knowledge*, edited by Fernando Domínguez Rubio and Patrick Baert, 156–78. London: Routledge, 2011.

Locke, Harvey. "Banff National Park and Plains Bison Conservation." In *The Last of the Buffalo: Return to the Wild*, 8–51. Banff, AB: Summerthought Publishing, 2016.

Luxton, Norman. "Reminiscences, Luxton Family Fonds," [before 1950]. LUX / I / D4 - 3, 4. Archives and Library, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies.

———. "The Last of the Buffalo," 1908–1909. Luxton family fonds, LUX / II / F1 / 14. Archives and Library, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies.

Markewicz, Lauren. *Like Distant Thunder: Canada's Bison Conservation Story*. Gatineau, QC: Parks Canada, 2017.

Meili, Diane. *Those Who Know: Profiles of Alberta's Native Elders*. Edmonton: NeWest Publishers Limited, 1991.

Olson, Mabel C. "Buffalo in the Flathead [Interview with Mrs. Camille McGowan]." In *"I Will Be Meat for My Salish": The Buffalo and the Montana Writers Project Interviews on the Flathead Indian Reservation*, edited by Robert Bigart, 115–16. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2001. Interview in 1941.

*Origins of the Buffalo Treaty*, 2020. <https://vimeo.com/461642011>.

Parks Canada. *Elk Island National Park: Management Plan*. Parks Canada, Western Region, 1978.

Stoneberg Holt, Sierra Dawn. "Reinterpreting the 1882 Bison Population Collapse." *Rangelands* 40, no. 4 (August 1, 2018): 106–14. doi:[10.1016/j.rala.2018.05.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rala.2018.05.004).

Turner, Nancy J, Douglas Deur, and Dana Lepofsky. "Plant Management Systems of British Columbia's First Peoples." *BC Studies* 179 (2013): 107–33.

Whealdon, Bon Isaac. "A Pack-Mare Saves One of Samuel's Calves [Interview with Tony Barnaby]." In *"I Will Be Meat for My Salish": The Buffalo and the Montana Writers Project Interviews on the Flathead Indian Reservation*, edited by Robert Bigart, 108–9. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2001. Interview in 1941.

———. "Attempt to Drive Pablo's Buffalo to Ravalli Not Successful [Interview with Joseph Houle]." In *"I Will Be Meat for My Salish": The Buffalo and the Montana Writers Project Interviews on the Flathead Indian Reservation*, edited by Robert Bigart, 127–28. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2001. Interview in 1941.

———. "Buffalo Gal Prevents a Stampede [Interview with Mrs. Mary Blood]." In *"I Will Be Meat for My Salish": The Buffalo and the Montana Writers Project Interviews on the Flathead Indian Reservation*, edited by Robert Bigart, 135. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2001. Interview in 1941.

———. "Buffalo History [Interview with Robert A. McCrea]." In *"I Will Be Meat for My Salish": The Buffalo and the Montana Writers Project Interviews on the Flathead Indian Reservation*, edited by Robert Bigart, 126–27. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2001. Interview in 1941.

———. "Buffalo's Horn, Defensive Weapons [Interview with Frank McLeod and Andrew Stinger]." In *"I Will Be Meat for My Salish": The Buffalo and the Montana Writers Project Interviews on the Flathead Indian Reservation*, edited by Robert Bigart, 134–35. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2001. Interview in 1941.

———. "Buffalo Solve a Love Problem [Interview with Que-Que-Sah]." In *"I Will Be Meat for My Salish": The Buffalo and the Montana Writers Project Interviews on the Flathead Indian Reservation*, edited by Robert Bigart, 120–22. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2001. Interview in 1941.

———. "Diminishing Herds in Judith Basin [Interview with Antoine Morigeau]." In *"I Will Be Meat for My Salish": The Buffalo and the Montana Writers Project Interviews on the Flathead Indian Reservation*, edited by Robert Bigart, 111–13. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2001. Interview in 1941.

———. "Horses [Interview with Henry Burland and Frank McLeod]." In *"I Will Be Meat for My Salish": The Buffalo and the Montana Writers Project Interviews on the Flathead Indian Reservation*, edited by Robert Bigart, 185–86. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2001. Interview in 1941.

———. *"I Will Be Meat for My Salish": The Buffalo and the Montana Writers Project Interviews on the Flathead Indian Reservation*. Edited by Robert Bigart. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2001.

———. "Indians Have Several Names: Indian Samuel and Walking Coyote [Interview with Andrew Stinger]." In *"I Will Be Meat for My Salish": The Buffalo and the Montana Writers Project Interviews on the Flathead Indian Reservation*, edited by Robert Bigart, 109–10. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2001. Interviews in 1941.

———. "Joe McDonald Recalls Samuel's Buffalo Calves [Interview with Joseph McDonald]." In *"I Will Be Meat for My Salish": The Buffalo and the Montana Writers Project Interviews on the Flathead Indian*

*Reservation*, edited by Robert Bigart, 103–6. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2001. Interview in 1941.

———. “Malcolm McCleod [McLeod] First to Ride a Buffalo [Interview with Alex McLeod and Robert McCrea].” In *“I Will Be Meat for My Salish”: The Buffalo and the Montana Writers Project Interviews on the Flathead Indian Reservation*, edited by Robert Bigart, 116–17. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2001. Interview in 1941.

———. “Pablo Loved His Herd [Interview with Tony Barnaby].” In *“I Will Be Meat for My Salish”: The Buffalo and the Montana Writers Project Interviews on the Flathead Indian Reservation*, edited by Robert Bigart, 119–20. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2001. Interview in 1941.

———. “Pablo Roundup [Interview with Mrs. Clara Poene Reed].” In *“I Will Be Meat for My Salish”: The Buffalo and the Montana Writers Project Interviews on the Flathead Indian Reservation*, edited by Robert Bigart, 132–33. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2001. Interview in 1941.

———. “Ride of the Old Photographer [Interview with Frank McLeod].” In *“I Will Be Meat for My Salish”: The Buffalo and the Montana Writers Project Interviews on the Flathead Indian Reservation*, edited by Robert Bigart, 133–34. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2001. Interview in 1941.

———. “Samuel’s Buffalo Calves [Interview with Que-Que-Sah].” In *“I Will Be Meat for My Salish”: The Buffalo and the Montana Writers Project Interviews on the Flathead Indian Reservation*, edited by Robert Bigart, 107–8. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2001. Interview in 1942.

———. “Teeth Knocked Out: Buffalo Bull Plays a Role as Dentist in Extracting Indian’s Aching Teeth [Interview with Clara Poene Reed and Alvin Peone].” In *“I Will Be Meat for My Salish”: The Buffalo and the Montana Writers Project Interviews on the Flathead Indian Reservation*, edited by Robert Bigart, 136. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2001. Interview in 1941.

Whyte, Kyle. “Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice.” *Environment and Society* 9, no. 1 (September 1, 2018): 125–44. doi:[10.3167/ares.2018.090109](https://doi.org/10.3167/ares.2018.090109).

Whyte, Kyle, Chris Caldwell, and Marie Schaefer. “Indigenous Lessons about Sustainability Are Not Just for ‘All Humanity’.” In *Sustainability*, 149–79. NYU Press, 2018. doi:[10.18574/nyu/9781479894567.003.0007](https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9781479894567.003.0007).

Williams, Griffith A. “Finley Brings in Calves [Interviews with Dave Couture and Zephyr Courville].” In *“I Will Be Meat for My Salish”: The Buffalo and the Montana Writers Project Interviews on the Flathead Indian Reservation*, edited by Robert Bigart, 110–11. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2001. Interviews in 1941.

———. “History of Buffalo [Interview with Zephyr Courville].” In *“I Will Be Meat for My Salish”: The Buffalo and the Montana Writers Project Interviews on the Flathead Indian Reservation*, edited by Robert Bigart, 128–32. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2001. Interview in 1941

## Figures

Figure 1: [untitled]. [1907 - 1908]. [Images attributed to Norman Luxton]. Luxton family fonds. LUX / I / D2 / 4 / 32. Archives and Library, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies.

Figure 2: [untitled]. [1907 - 1908]. [Images attributed to Norman Luxton]. Luxton family fonds. LUX / I / D2 / 4 / 20. Archives and Library, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies.

Figure 3: [untitled]. [1907 - 1908]. [Images attributed to Norman Luxton]. Luxton family fonds. LUX / I / D2 / 4 / 12. Archives and Library, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies.

Figure 4: [untitled]. [1907 - 1908]. [Images attributed to Norman Luxton]. Luxton family fonds. LUX / I / D2 / 4 / 4. Archives and Library, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies.

Figure 5: [Illustration] Hunters disguised as wolves. [ca. 1910]. Mary Schaffer fonds. V527 / PS 1 - 666. Archives and Library, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies

Figure 6: [Illustration] Cree First Nations impounding the buffalo. [ca. 1910]. Mary Schaffer fonds. V527 / PS 1 - 647. Archives and Library, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies.

Figure 7: Buffalo bones at Gull Lake (No.6). 6/30/94. 1894. Vaux family (Philadelphia USA). Vaux family fonds. V653 / NA - 17. Archives and Library, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies.

Figure 8: [untitled]. [1907 - 1908]. [Images attributed to Norman Luxton]. Luxton family fonds. LUX / I / D2 / 4 / 1. Archives and Library, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies.

Figure 9: Michel Pablo - Bison. [ca.1925]. Malcolm Geddes fonds. V756 / III / A / PS - 295. Archives and Library, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies.

## Appendix: Materials Utilized

- Archival materials accessed:
  - Archives General File Collection
    - V8 / accn. 274
  - Bow Valley Naturalists fonds
    - M186 / 76 - 3
  - Bruno Engler fonds
    - V190 / II.A.v - 2
  - Dorothy Wardle fonds
    - M521 / I / A / 3-4
  - Douglas family fonds
    - M246
    - V178 / PA240
  - George D. Coder fonds
    - M288 accn. 1903 (1-6)
  - Luxton family fonds
    - LUX / I / D2 - 9 to 11
    - LUX / I / D4 - 3, 4
    - LUX / II / C4 / 18
    - LUX / I / D4 / 14
    - LUX / II / F2 / PG - 1
  - Malcolm Geddes fonds
    - V756 / III / A / PS - 295
- Library materials accessed:
  - A. H. Lang, *Guide to the geology of Elk Island National Park : the origin of its hills and other scenery*, 03.1 L25g
  - Canada. Department of the Interior, *Report of the Commissioner of Dominion Parks for the year ending March 31, 1913 : Part V Annual Report 1913*, 02.4 C16i Part V 1913
  - Canadian Wildlife Service, *History of the buffalo of Buffalo National Park, Wainwright, Alberta*, 04.2 C16b Pam
  - Charles M Russel, *Paper Talk : illustrated letters of Charles M. Russel*, 06.1 R91
  - Department of the Interior: Dominion of Canada, *Report of the commissioner of Dominion Parks : for the year ending in March 31, 1914*, 13.116 In8r 1914
  - Department of the Interior: Dominion of Canada, *Report of the commissioner of Dominion Parks : for the year ending in March 31, 1913*, 13.116 In8r 1913
  - George David Coder, *The national movement to preserve the American buffalo in the United States and Canada between 1880-1920*, 04.2 C64
  - J.B. Harkin [commissioner], *Report of the commissioner of Canadian National Parks : for the year ending in March 31, 1923*, 13.116 In8r 1923

- J.B. Harkin [commissioner], *Report of the commissioner of Canadian National Parks : for the year ending in March 31, 1925*, 13.116 In8r 1923
- J.B. Harkin [commissioner], *Report of the commissioner of Canadian National Parks : for the year ending March 31, 1925*, 13.116 In8r 1925
- Jennifer Lynn Brower, *Buffalo National Park and the second demise of the plains bison in Canada, 1909-1940*, 13.117 B81b
- Robert C Scafe, *An initial bibliography of the Elk Island National Park area*, R 13.119 Sca1