

**William A. Richards,
Buffalo Bill Cody, and the
1898 Frontier Day**

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Red Bank Press

WilliamARichards.com

AS THE ROUGH REALITY of the Old West was slipping into luminous legend, one of its capital cities hosted at the same time two shows celebrating the good old days. The second Frontier Day was held in Cheyenne on September 5, 1898, and Buffalo Bill's world-famous show was in town as well. In an article about Frontier Day, the *Saratoga Sun* wrote on August 18:

an extraordinary and most peculiarly appropriate addition will be made to the program. It is no less than Colonel W. F. Cody's (Buffalo Bill) Wild West Congress of Rough Riders of the World. By a fortuitous circumstance one of the towns selected by Colonel Cody with which to break the jump of his exhibition between Omaha and Denver was Greeley, Colorado. Learning this the Frontier Day Carnival invited Colonel Cody to Cheyenne. The invitation was accepted, Greeley abandoned and so not only Buffalo Bill, but every man and horse of his vast exhibition will be at Cheyenne. It is doubtful if there is another man living, who has done more to make Wyoming famous than Colonel Cody. He has spent thousands of dollars in improving the Big Horn Basin and in inducing persons to take up their residence in the state. As for his great exhibition, it is not necessary to say anything. Everybody already knows it is the most famous exhibition of any sort in the world. The lowest excursion rates ever made by the railroads will be a further inducement to visit Cheyenne on Monday, September 5th; especially since it is not only Frontier Day, but also Buffalo Bill Day.

There of course was a parade. The day was cold and windy¹ but Alice Richards, the governor's daughter and private secretary, fondly remembered:²

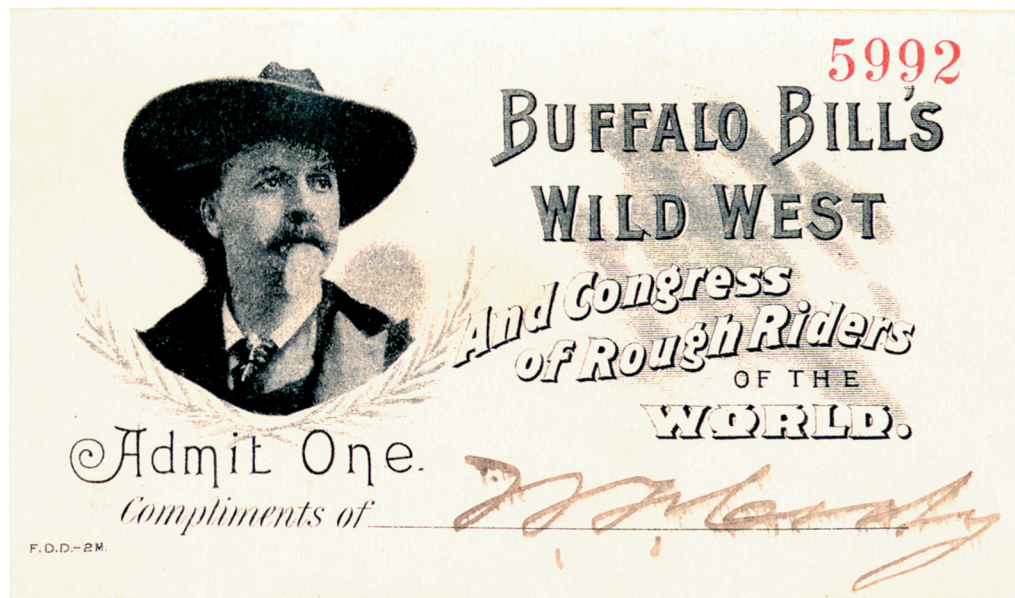
Colonel Cody rode in the parade with the governor in a pony carriage, presenting quite a sight with his cowboy outfit, long white hair and commanding presence. As the governor was also a large man and impressive that day in a Prince Albert, the people hailed them with delight.

The "pony carriage" was Buffalo Bill's white landau, and it was followed by the Wild West band in its "superb gilded chariot," according to *The Laramie Republican*.³ Next came forty or so Indians belonging to the Congress of Rough Riders, decorated, of course, with war paint and feathers. The Knights of Malta were followed by the "magnificent electric light plant" of Cody's show.

The company of Bedouin Arabs, in their native costumes, were sandwiched in between two more companies of Indians. A band of twenty Cossacks, genuine robbers of the steppes, followed, making as vivid a picture as ever served to make the blood run cold

Ticket signed by W. F. Cody. Governor Richards and his family attended as Mr. Cody's guests, and Alice saved her ticket.

Author's collection. Too bad she didn't keep the Frontier Day ribbon as well.



in picture prints. Next came the celebrated white horse band, followed by a detachment of twenty Cubans on horseback, with machetes. The troop of Mexican greasers was only distinguished from the Cubans by the difference in dress and arms.

[A] United States cavalry detachment, travel-stained, like the boys in the Spanish war, elicited the greatest enthusiasm from the assembled thousands reviewing the parade. They were followed by the Wild West Deadwood stage, with its guard of honor, fifty rough riders and cowboys.

The Wild West features closed with a company of Sioux, with their great war chief at the head, in most elaborate war paint and feathers.

"The parade in its entirety was pronounced the most unique and successful ever seen in the West." Near its close, "the big pioneer coach swerved from the line and at a full run came down Ferguson Street [now Carey Avenue] followed by the bands of Arapahoe and Shoshone Indians in full gallop, the scene being a representation of pursuit in the early days."¹ Who wouldn't have *killed* to have been there!

Following this spectacle was another: the Wild West show, at the state fair grounds. Despite the cold and wind, one paper reported:²

over 6,000 people witnessed the performance, which was a revelation to the westerners, who accustomed as they are to seeing exhibitions of fine horsemanship, were astonished and delighted at the magnificent riding of the cowboys, Indians, Arabs, Cossacks and cavalymen forming the world's congress of riders. The special features of the show, Custer's last fight, the buffalo hunt, the attack upon the stage coach and the fancy riding of the Sixth cavalry were especially noticeable.

Buffalo Bill's show also featured Indian riders chasing bison. How did they get these infamously unruly animals to cooperate and not take this opportunity to try to escape? Could any of them possibly have been trained to pretend to be shot?*

Hard on the heels came yet another spectacle: the Frontier Day show. This free exhibition of racing and pioneer events attracted a reportedly larger audience, 8,000.⁴ The climax was a pioneer wedding, with the departing bride and groom's coach pursued by Indians. Cowboys rode to the rescue, of course.

Buffalo Bill attended with the governor and his family. Alice Richards saved her ticket, on the previous page. "It was all so new to the Cheyenne folks that sometimes the events went on rather slowly," she recalled. "Mr. Cody was very restless and made many suggestions—not realizing that the new show could not put on the same kind of a show as his well trained, experienced people." Her father responded that they would improve.⁵

Mrs. Cody and daughter Irma dined at the Richards's house; Buffalo Bill and the governor were not able to attend. The young man house guest who served the meal said "his knees as well as his hands shook when he served such distinguished guests," Alice later wrote.⁶


Events on the second day were not as well attended because many from Denver and elsewhere went home.

ALICE DONATED A RIBBON from this Frontier Day to the Wyoming Historical Department,⁷ but now no record of it can be found.




Chief Lone Bear, 1898. His badge reads "Buffalo Bill's Police" and above it is an American flag in beadwork.³

*The answer may have died with the last member of Buffalo Bill's troupe. Newspapers in 1904, '05 and '07 ran stories about an old buffalo bull that was a thorn in the side of Cody and a rancher who acquired him and for breeding purposes. He escaped, and in 1907 stood in the path of a stagecoach, but eventually was captured and, alas, had to be put down due to a bad leg.⁸



GET THERE, ELI.

*Let's all be merry in many ways,
And celebrate old Frontier Days,
For when we die, as Bill Dye said,
"We'll be a very long time dead."*



THE OLDEST INHABITANT.

Wyoming "Frontier Day" Committee

WARREN RICHARDSON, JR., Chairman. JOHN A. MARTIN, Secretary.
E. W. STONE, J. H. ARP, Q. R. PALMER,
J. D. FREEBORN, D. H. HOLLIDAY.

FRONTIER DAY.

How the Idea Originated and Materialized.

At a meeting of the leading citizens and business men of Cheyenne on August 30, 1897, called by Hon. W. R. Schnitger, Mayor of the city, it was resolved to inaugurate the celebration of an Annual State Festival, to be called "Frontier Day." The idea met with a hearty response from all classes, and a committee as named above was elected to arrange for the first celebration, to take place Thursday, September 24.

The preparations have so far progressed as to assure its complete success. An attractive and novel programme will be given, including vivid representations of frontier scenes, Pony Express, Emigrant

Cheyenne, Wyo., September 13th 1897.

Gov. W. A. Richards
Cheyenne, Wyo.


Dear Sir,

I have the honor to inform you that the Com. of Arrangements for "Frontier Day," to be celebrated in this city Sept 23rd, have appointed you a member of the Reception Committee for that occasion.

We sincerely hope it will be your pleasure to serve in that capacity.

The Committee is constituted as follows:
Mayor W. R. Schnitger and City Council
Hon. F. E. Warren
Hon. J. M. Carey
Gov. W. A. Richards
Dr. G. P. Johnston.

Very respectfully yours,
John A. Martin
Secret.



Schooners, Vigilantes, Wild Broncho Riding, Roping, Throwing and other cow boy feats, Pony Races, Pioneer sports, etc.

The Committee earnestly invites the co-operation of the business men, ranchmen, cow boys and all old settlers throughout the state in this annual festival. Very low rates will be secured on all the railroads for all visitors, and special excursion trains will be run for the occasion. Announcements will be made from time to time as the details of the arrangements are perfected. Correspondence solicited from all interested and the Committee will thankfully receive any suggestions looking to an interesting event.

Text of the panel at left:

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One of the many logos Alice clipped from stationery when she was Gov. Richards' secretary.¹

Below, an envelope commemorating the 1903 Frontier Days. It probably was sent by Oscar McClellan to his wife, Ella, who was serving Harriet Richards as a nurse. Oscar was the brother of "Bear George" McClellan, Richards's partner in Red Bank Ranch. (See story, next page). Mrs. Richards died on October 27, 1903.²



BUFFALO BILL had contacted Governor Richards in June 1897 to enlist his aid for the Shoshone irrigation project in northwest Wyoming. Irrigation was a major concern of Richards: Soon after his inauguration as governor, he and State Engineer Elwood Mead urged the Legislature to accept the recently passed arid land act sponsored by Wyoming Senator Joseph M. Carey, and Wyoming became the first to do so.

Cody also hoped he and Richards might go hunting together, but that seems not to have happened. When Richards became assistant commissioner of the General Land Office, Cody continued to ask for help with the Shoshone project and other ventures. Below is an example:

From the *Cody Enterprise*, January 17, 1901

COL. CODY'S GIANTS.

Everybody Grows Out in Big Horn County, Wyoming.

(New York Sun special service)

Washington, Dec 20—Buffalo Bill has come to town with half a dozen Wyoming giants. The average weight is 209 pounds and they stand in their shoes an average of 6 feet, 2-1/2 inches. The party consisted of H. C. Alger, W. A. Richards, Mr. [George B.] McClellan, George T. Beck, Senator [Francis E.] Warren and Col. Cody. They came to urge Senator Warren to get an extension of time granted by congress to settlers on arid lands under the Carey act. This act granted each of the "arid states" 1,000,000 acres of land, provided settlers reclaimed it by irrigation within ten years, and this limit will expire in about three and a half years.

Cody's company, he says, has spent over \$300,000 in Big Horn county, Wyoming, building a ditch...which will irrigate 25,000 acres of land [and make the county] "a garden of Eden." He wants to irrigate 10,000 more acres. The Cody company, he says, was the first to take advantage of the privileges granted by the Carey act and now many settlers are taking advantage of it and it would be a great injustice to those recently settling in the arid country not to have the time limit of the act extended.

Colonel Cody and his party called first upon Assistant Land Commissioner Richards, formerly governor of Wyoming. They were all old friends and the conversation was reminiscent. Cody, however, never misses an opportunity to advertise the town in Big Horn county named after him. He said:

"When a man goes out to Big Horn county he grows two inches. It does not matter how old he is, he just sprouts two inches more. He gets wider and thicker and heavier. His lungs expand and he can shout louder. Out there he has no master except the Almighty. He is not frightened about trade fluctuations, strikes, or the action of any kind of bosses. He is absolutely his own master and in a few years, with any old kind of industry he'll be on the trail of prosperity and in a few years he will hit the round up with every comfort needed by himself and family. Why do you know that in ten years the increase of a single cow numbers forty-five? Positive fact. Everything and anything grows bountifully and rapidly in that healthy and bracing region. More and prettier children arrive at the houses of Big Horn Basin families than anywhere else, and it is one of the happiest places for newly married to select a home in. Oh, yes, that's the country for everything that is great, noble and desirable and the best of it is that a man's standing in that magnificent country is not controlled by rigidly drawn social lines, but a good character and industrious habits secure him association with the best people. The Colonel is thoroughly infatuated with this great land of promise and gives excellent reasons for believing that with its development will come the opening up of one of the greatest sections known to America."

Senator Warren entertained the Wyoming party at lunch at the Metropole, while Colonel Cody told again all about how fine Big Horn county is.

Sources and Notes

Page 1

1. *Cheyenne Daily Sun-Leader*, Sept. 6, 1898.
2. Undated letter to Wyoming Historical Dept., copy in author's collection.
3. Sept. 6.

Page 2

1. *Sun-Leader*, Sept. 6.
2. *Rawlins Semi-Weekly Republican*, Sept. 7.
3. Photo by Gertrude Käsebier in the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian. https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/object/nmah_1005406, accessed March 24, 2025.
4. *Rawlins Semi-Weekly Republican*, Sept. 7.
5. Letter to Wyoming Historical Dept. cited above.
6. *Ibid.* Her accounts vary: in one she says a maid prepared the meal, herself and friends in another.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Stories about the bull from Wyoming press, 1904–1907:

Gus Thompson, manager of Cody's Big Horn County ranch, is a broncho buster of wide repute, ...he and another cowpuncher, Roy Myers, were detailed to convey from Cody to Col. Cody's ranch two buffalo bulls recently purchased by the Colonel for breeding purposes, he desiring to inaugurate a hybrid herd, half buffalo, half Polled Angus.

The buffalo proved entirely docile...Thompson...climbed to the larger of the two's back and [spurred him]. Ten seconds later he wished himself safely on the back of the comparatively, gently agitated back of the worst outlaw that ever jumped between a Wyoming cowboy's knees. ... [Thompson hung on by the mane, the buffalo took off, ultimately charged into a clay bank and threw Thompson 47 feet.]—April 19, 1904, *Cheyenne Daily Leader*

Col. Cody presented the animal to Mr. A. A. Anderson..., For about a month past the buffalo has been confined in a tight shed at the Buffalo Bill Barn, and on Monday he was hog-tied and an effort made to load him into a heavy dray with the intention of carting him to Mr. Anderson's ranch. But when he was down he looked as large as an elephant, and all attempts to load him proved vain. He was again put in the stable and will be held subject to his owner's orders.

He is a fine specimen of his kind and has grown fat and sleek, but he is a misfit. Like the wild Indian, he is out of place in the midst of civilization—a melancholy example of savage strength, too old and stubborn to learn the ways of peace. A menace to life if turned loose, and a nuisance if confined. Before his onslaught strong fences are as useless as a child's play house. What to do with him is the burning question, which will probably be answered by converting him into beef.

—June 28, 1905, *Wyoming Stockgrower and Farmer* (Cody, WY)

PUGNACIOUS BIG BULL AT PALETTE RANCH

The big buffalo bull which terrorized Cody and vicinity on several occasions and which a few days ago was placed in a strong cage and started for the Palette ranch of A. A. Anderson, his owner, has reached its destination in safety. For 24 hours after the crate was opened at the ranch the bull sulked and refused to emerge from his prison. Hunger, however, finally drove him forth and he is now confined to a strong barn, where he will be kept until the fences of the pasture intended for his use can be rebuilt on a stronger plan.—Aug. 24, 1905, *Leader*

BUFFALO IS AT LIBERTY

A. A. Anderson's big bull holds up stage in Big Horn
Survivor of Once Kings of Prairie Excites Tenderfoot by Unexpected Appearance.
Special to the Leader from Meeteetse.

As he jogged along on the usually uneventful trip between this place and Cody a day or two ago, the driver of the daily stage was startled by the appearance of an enormous buffalo bull, which suddenly charged around the point of a hill and took a position in the road in front of the stage, his attitude indicating belligerency in every line....one tenderfoot dug out [guns]...with the intention of annexing the present day enviable record of having slain a buffalo, not being aware that to attack the rare animal would result in [prison]. Driver recognized the bull as a semi-domesticated attachment of the Palette ranch...and restrained the tenderfoot's hunting enthusiasm and relieved him of his artillery. After considerable maneuvering, the stage was gotten around the buffalo, who refused to abandon his position in the road, and the journey to Cody was resumed. Inquiry at the Palette ranch resulted in the information that the bull had broken from his corral and that a search for him was in progress when the stage encountered him. No trace of him has since been found, and he is supposed to have made his way into the fastnesses of the Yellowstone Forest Reserve. So far as is known he is the only buffalo in Wyoming outside of the national park.

—Oct. 3, 1907, *Leader*

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- Paul Frison, *Calendar of Change*, (Worland: privately published, 1975), 320.

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1. Author's collection.
2. Courtesy of George B. McClellan, Worland, Oscar's grandson.