

The buffalo harvest

[History](#)



The Buffalo Harvest, by Frank H. Mayer and Charles B. Roth is an interesting story on 'Buffalo runners', who obliterated the entire breed of buffaloes from America. The narrative is about how Mayer went about his buffalo hunting expeditions during the late 1800s in America. The story not only provides insights about how the buffalo became extinct and how the 'buffalo runners' went about hunting them, but it also provides interesting details about the life, such as the weapons used, the hide trade and even the attitude of the Government.

Buffaloes are described as 'walking' gold pieces, since the hide was worth a lot of money (Mayer, and Roth, 1958). Young men such as Mayer had the skills to shoot and were craving for adventure and thus, they set out on the mission to kill the buffaloes and sell their hide to not only make money, but also to fulfill their adventurous side. This provides us information about a class of young men who needed both money and adventure to get satisfied in the late 19th century America. Post the civil war, there was a generation of 'restless young men' who longed for outdoor experience (Gilbert et al, 2003). According to Mayer, Buffalo was probably the stupidest animal and coupled with the herd instinct that they had, it was easy to hunt them down. Mayer goes into detail to describe the various geographic locations where 'buffalo ranges' were located (Mayer, and Roth, 1958). He also adds that by 1872, the entire Western part of America became obsessed with buffalo hunting, as many men left their jobs and families to pursue it and also invested whatever they had to buy weapons and ammunition. Buffalo hides fetched them around \$2-\$3, which was huge money back then. Mayer describes that most boys during that era were crazy behind weapons and owned rifles and also mentions specific rifles such as 0. 50-70 carbines which

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they used.

Mayer recollects his initiation into buffalo hunting by talking about the two men who took him along for an adventure where they skinned 198 hides and made money out of it. This provides information that the hide industry was booming at that time. According to Scott Taylor, there were many key innovations in tanning and the global prices for hide remained constant, thus pushing more people towards hunting the animal (Taylor 2008). As Buffalo hunting became popular ten thousands of people joined it and hence, the buffalo got obliterated in a matter of few years (Hanner, 1981). Mayer feels that wiping out the buffalo was a 'historical necessity' because it had no place in the 'white man's encroaching civilization' as it was a misfit because it could not be tamed (Mayer, and Roth, 1958). Also, even the army officers around the areas encouraged the killing of buffaloes, by even providing them with ammunition. Mayer says that the reason behind it is that only when the buffaloes become extinct, the Indians would become dependent on them for the needs, whereas the Indians are independent with the buffaloes.

Mayer also describes the situation in Dodge City, Kansas, which was popularly called the Buffalo city as most of the hides and meat was shipped from there. He also describes the number of buffaloes killed to highlight how big a business it became. According to him, they were wasteful in their initial years, but when they perfected their profession, there were no buffaloes left, and hence they did not have a chance to practice it.

Throughout these sections, there is no sense of remorse or regret, even though Mayer often provides the reason behind why they carried out the hunting.

After the buffalo became extinct, Mayer used the skills to become a market

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hunter and provided meat to the entire town of Lead Ville market and was financially successful. For the others, buffalo hunting soon gave way to wolf hunting and horse hunting for the hide and soon, some others also began to pick bones from the carcasses to ship it across to east. Buffalo ranges were soon plowed and many new farms were created or constructions were done. Mayer ends the book with the thought that whether it was justified to slaughter the buffaloes or not. He again reiterates the fact that it was a historical necessity and it needed to be carried out. According to him, the buffalo runners served their purpose in that regard. He also admits to the selfish motive behind it on how it helped them earn money. Overall, the book *The Buffalo Harvest* is a vivid and detailed description of how buffalo hunting took place in Western America.

References

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