

The Buffalo Bill Museum

On Decoration Day of 1915 an idea was born. My uncle, Colonel William F. Cody, spent the day with me in Seattle, Washington. With many old friends gathered around the hearth we lived again in song and story those colorful days

of the old West. An old army comrade asked the Colonel in what way he would like his memory kept fresh for posterity. Like a flash came Uncle Will's reply, "teaching the youth by seeing history." Those present pledged to carry out the plans. None of us ever expected to see the Colonel again, few of us ever did; then came the war; the Colonel rode for the last time, death depleted our first little group; finally we were ready to commence our plans with a national group of men and women behind us.

I was in New York when I received a frantic call to come to Cody, Wyoming—the state appropriation for a memorial to Colonel Cody must be used at once or it would return to the state—could I do something? Finally I interviewed Mrs. Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney about a statue; Mrs. Whitney knew the Colonel and greatly admired him, and she was delighted to sculpture the memorial statue. I scarcely knew the little town of Cody, but mother lived there and there was the namesake and the place that mother and Uncle Will had struggled so to create. We decided to have the statue done first, then thought to build rooms in the base of the statue for the museum and house the relics there; these plans did not work out very well. The statue went up after two years of the hardest work I ever did in my life; I look back on that strenuous time with all its side lights and shadows, and wonder how I lived through the trips, the goings and comings, the varied ideas and what-nots. The statue to Uncle Will was finally dedicated on July 4th, 1924; we had kept our word, done our work well and now were free to carry out the Colonel's wish of "teaching the youth by seeing history."

By that time the Cody Family as an organization was a reality; at our first meeting in Chicago in October of 1925 we discussed the Museum as a memorial, to the Cody Family and to our famous kinsman Buffalo Bill. The idea was endorsed at that meeting and a committee was appointed of which I was chairman; leaders on this committee were Francis A. Cody, of Vernon, N.Y.; Hiram S. Cody, of Chicago, and Harry B. Cody, of Cleveland, Ohio. This committee later looked over locations and finally we settled on Cody, Wyoming. Hiram S. Cody went to Cody and with the leading business men of that town arranged for the financing of the building of the Museum by a bond selling plan. In this plan the Cody Family undertook to subscribe six thousand dollars in bonds and the town of Cody four thousand. For the Cody Family Hiram and Francis Cody each took a thousand, our good friend J. C. Nichols a thousand, and I took three thousand. It was further arranged that the deed of the land be given to the Cody Family and that Hiram, Francis, Harry and myself be appointed life trustees and myself as life Director of the Museum. Construction got under way and soon the Museum took shape as a replica of Colonel Cody's old T.E. ranch home, with its many rooms, halls, porches and fireplaces and spacious grounds and gardens. On July 4th, 1927, the Museum was dedicated at sunset by President Calvin Coolidge, and Francis A. Cody, then President of the Cody Family, speaking for us.

The location of the Museum is ideal; it is situated near the Shoshone Canyon at the beginning of the Cody Road to Yellowstone National Park; its site typifies the ideal Western landscape. The Museum was a real success from the day of opening. At first we were handicapped by the lack of relics. Outside of the collection sent out by Hiram S. Cody, who took things from his own walls, and the many relics owned by my mother, my daughter Cody and myself, no member of the Cody Family had a single relic in the Museum when it was dedi-

cated. The family should hold in deep gratitude therefore the fine and generous spirit shown by William Cody Bradford, Aunt May's son, and Louis Decker, her husband, who rushed their splendid collection into the Museum within a few days of the dedication. Of that magnificent act all Codys should approve; it saved the day for us and made it possible to hold our own against other competition. At once far away relatives began searching and forwarding relics and for this I am deeply grateful; every relic helped in the start. Thus commenced our Cody Family exhibition, and now I hope that soon we can have a Cody Family house in conjunction with the Museum, perhaps the old Iowa home built by my grandfather, Isaac Cody, in 1840, and in which home Colonel Cody was born, and which building has been moved to Cody by the Burlington Railway. The Museum now houses thousands of relics of Colonel Cody, and of Indian and pioneer days of the West.

There was much discouragement to face; we started handicapped with tremendous debt and an eight per cent interest on our building bonds; the first summer I wondered if we could hold out. I stood from five in the morning until after midnight every day that entire season, talking, telling our story, making friends, trying to gain interest, making the display of personal interest to every visitor. It was hard work and I feel that the dear God must have thought it what we strived to make it, a living vital story of American pioneer history, of magnificent bravery and unselfish devotion to the freedom and safety of the West. My daughter and I gave our time and energy gratis. Finally the bills were paid, every penny going into that. People liked us, they always have, we hold a record for repeat visitors, some people coming every year for thirteen years and making detours just to put their name on the register once again. By the utmost hard work, long hours, no help save a gardener and a caretaker, the Museum has been kept up, has grown, thousands of relics shown, and thousands and thousands of visitors delighted and made lasting friends. The fearful load of indebtedness has been lifted until now there remains but one thousand dollars worth of bonds, held by my daughter and myself. We can never over-estimate nor fully appreciate the magnificent work and financial aid rendered by Hiram S. Cody and Francis A. Cody.

A few years ago the Town of Cody sent me to New York to ascertain what Mrs. Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney could do about the statue and her holdings of land at Cody. After over five months of working and waiting we received a free deed to the statue and land to add to the Museum, and at the same time the Cody Family deeded back the Museum itself to the Memorial Association, chartered by the State of Wyoming, so that all could be under the one deed and direction. The deeds make clear that it is all for a perpetual memorial to Colonel Cody and all pioneers of the winning of the West. Hiram S. Cody and myself are to represent the Cody Family always on the Board of Directors and I am designated always to be the director in charge of buildings and land holdings.

The Buffalo Bill Memorial Museum at Cody, Wyoming, ranks above anything of its kind in America; we are a member of the American Association of Museums. The Cody Family can be proud of its work well done; we have done our part in carrying out Colonel Cody's wish of "teaching the youth by seeing history." You should have more than a passing interest in this Museum; you should be impressed with your share and interest in it; we all have a share in it, and by our support in giving it more relics, family and otherwise, giving it

desirable publicity, and going to visit it, we can help each in our individual way to "see history."