

Chancellor Robert R Livingston Masonic Library of Grand Lodge

Artifacts Of The Corridor: The Buffalo Bill Cane

by Catherine Walter, Curator

This cane belonged to Colonel William Frederick Cody (Buffalo Bill) and was acquired in 2000 by the Chancellor Robert R Livingston Masonic Library of Grand Lodge. The cane is of wood, with a silver-covered handle that is decorated with a cross-hatch pattern, and a silver plate attached near the top that has the same cross-hatch pattern, as well as a square and compasses and William F. Cody's initials.

A letter of authentication that was acquired along with the cane reads as follows:

The attached walking cane was given to me by the famous American showman Mr. William "Buffalo Bill" Cody when he visited the shop James Payne & Sons, Ltd. for which I was the Manager in charge in 1892. He purchased a new cane, this one being broken. Mr. Robert N. Ruffin, London 26th July, 1910.

William F. Cody began service to his country early in his life, working as a Pony Express rider in 1860 at the age of fifteen. The very next year, he joined the Union Army as a scout and guide, stationed with the 7th Kansas Cavalry. When the war ended he was hired by the Kansas Pacific Railroad to feed their workers by killing buffalo. It was while



doing this work that he earned the nickname Buffalo Bill. He killed 4,280 buffalo during the eighteen months he worked at this job in 1866 and 1867, or about twelve buffalo a day.

During the four years between 1868 and 1872 he returned to work as a guide and a scout, fighting against the Sioux and Cheyenne Indian tribes. It was during this period that he became a Freemason, Initiated in 1870 and Raised in 1871 in Platte Valley Lodge No. 32 in Nebraska. This Lodge was started by army officers and was warranted on January 15, 1870. When Bill Cody joined at the age of twenty-five, it was at the Lodge's third meeting. He remained involved in Masonry his whole life, joining Euphrates Chapter No. 15 in 1888 and Palestine Commandery No. 13 in 1889, both in Nebraska. In 1894 he joined the Scottish Rite, Northern Jurisdiction, Valley of New York City.

The year 1872 was eventful for Buffalo Bill, then twenty-seven years old. He was elected to the Nebraska legislature but he declined to serve. However, he did serve briefly as a general in the Nebraska National Guard. He was also awarded the Medal of Honor by Congress, an award that would later be recalled and



still later re-awarded. Also in 1872, Buffalo Bill began his performing career, producing and starring in the play *Scouts of the Prairie*, which he would continue staging until called back to duty for the Sioux War in 1876. During this war he famously garnered "the first scalp for Custer," by killing and scalping an Indian named Yellow Hair in revenge for the death of Custer. He would later reenact this killing in his Wild West Show. In 1879, at the age of thirty-four, Buffalo Bill was well enough known that the publication of his autobiography was a big success. In 1882 he organized the first rodeo in America; and in 1883, after years of performing in smaller theatrical productions, he began producing his Wild West Show, which continued for thirty-two years until 1915. The show featured horses, buffalo, Indians, female sharpshooters and amazing tricks on horseback, as it recreated the frontier atmosphere in an entertainment format. The show toured Europe as well as the United States, and Buffalo Bill became one of the most easily recognizable figures in history.

At one of the Madison Square Garden Shows, it was reported that two thousand Mystic Shriners were in the audience, and because of their presence, Buffalo Bill added a few Masonic touches to the show. The Livingston Masonic Library has in its holdings an ashtray commemorating a visit by Mecca Temple to the Wild West Show.

Buffalo Bill's funeral on Lookout Mountain in Colorado in 1917 was one of the largest ever, with thousands attending and thousands more viewing his body. His Masonic funeral service was officiated by Golden City Lodge No. 1 at the request of Platte Valley Lodge No. 32 in Nebraska. ■

