

WHERE **SCIENCE****HISTORY****AND****ART** CONNECT

To: Raven Hill friends  
From: Cheri  
Date: November 11, 2023  
Re: *Bison, buffalo and alligators*

The spirit of the buffalo is alive at Raven Hill Discovery Center. In celebration of National Bison Day, which is celebrated annually in the United States on the first Saturday in November, the day “honors the historical, cultural, and ecological legacy of the American Bison”. While this is the second Saturday in November, we are honoring the American Bison a week after the fact.

The terms bison and buffalo are often used interchangeably, but the two are distinct animals. Old World “true” buffalo (Cape buffalo and water buffalo) are native to Africa and Asia. Bison are found in North America and Europe and are often referred to as American buffalo.



*Formed of paper, this sculpture aptly captures the shaggy fur of a real bison. From the Raven Hill Collection. Artist unknown*



*Buffalo chips were called “Kansas coal”, due to the lack of wood for cooking & heating in the western Great Plains of the United States. Public domain image*

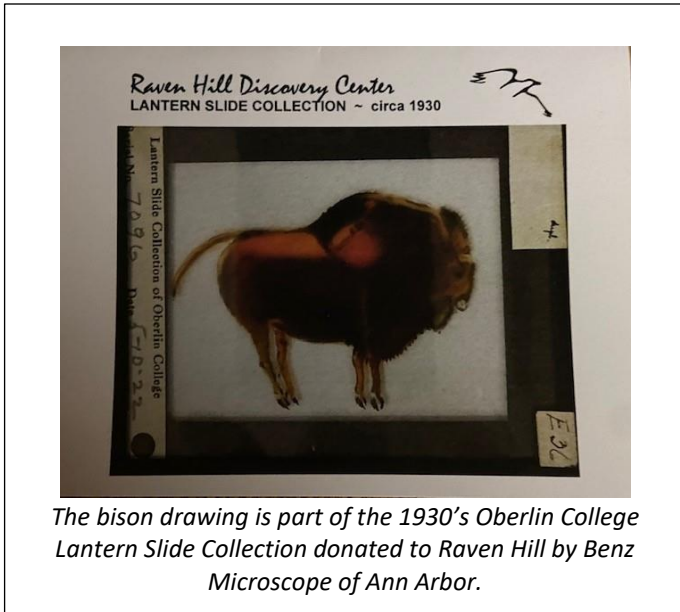
My first experience with buffalo came as a child. Ed Butters lived in our town and our families were friends. Eddie bought a herd of buffalo and brought them back to his farm south of Coldwater, Michigan. His adventures made for good reading in a 1945 Time Magazine article and in a 1947 Gourmet Magazine, since his whole idea for raising buffalo was to sell the meat, much as Oelson’s does today right here in northern Michigan.

Our national mammal, the American bison, is the largest land animal in North America. Their history is closely aligned with the Indigenous people of our country. The tribes honored these magnificent animals for the food, clothing, shelter and heat they provided to their people. At Raven Hill, visitors can feel a piece of buffalo fur and learn about buffalo chips, the dried buffalo dung, used for cooking and warmth.

Raven Hill also honors the American bison through artworks in its permanent collection. From cave paintings in the Evolving Technology Building to paper and ceramic sculptures to lantern slide pictures from the 1930's, the American buffalo exemplifies certain traits that we all can emulate: "stand your ground; have a tough hide; keep moving on; roam wild and free; have a strong spirit; and let the chips fall where they may!" (--From yourtruenature.com)



Cave paintings served as a form of communication during the Stone Age.  
Drawing by Gayle Levensgood

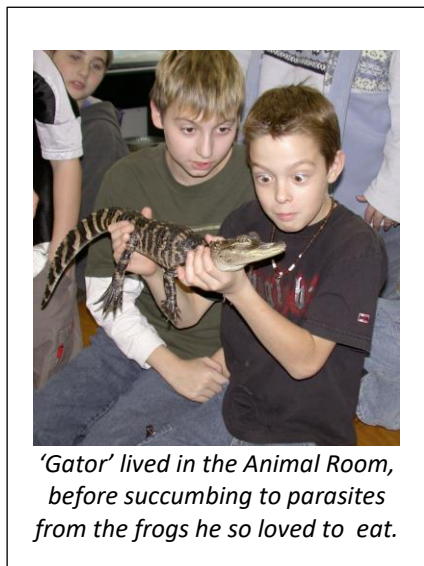


The bison drawing is part of the 1930's Oberlin College Lantern Slide Collection donated to Raven Hill by Benz Microscope of Ann Arbor.



A close-up of Big Eddie shows the detail put into this magnificent creature's face.

Big Eddie, the American bison sculpted by artist Todd Warner reminds us that you can always make connections, if only tenuous ones. It was buffalo rancher, Eddie Butters, who (illegally) brought a live alligator to Raven Hill from his winter home in Florida. The alligator survived here for several years and its skeleton remains for visitors to see.



'Gator' lived in the Animal Room, before succumbing to parasites from the frogs he so loved to eat.



'Gator' was an unsolicited donation to Raven Hill's Animal Room.

Just as we honor the buffalo on National Bison Day, November 4, 2023, we pay tribute to all veterans on Veterans Day, November 11, 2023. Please know that we appreciate your service and your sacrifice for us.

Cheri