

# Buffalo a 'small town with a big history'

By Andrea Winkjer Collin, Editor

The buffalo that roamed the Northern Plains are remembered across North Dakota in a number of ways. They include a lake, butte, creek, state historic site, and two towns that bear the name of the venerable animal.

Buffalo Lodge Lake and the 1,591-foot-high Buffalo Lodge Butte are in McHenry County, just off Highway 2 between the towns of Granville and Denbigh. Buffalo Springs is an unincorporated community in Bowman County nearly eight miles east of the town Bowman. The others are located in Cass County – Buffalo Creek, Buffalo Creek State Historic Site and the town of Buffalo.

The Buffalo Creek State Historic Site is one-eighth mile east of the Maple River and about two miles northwest of the town of Buffalo on Buffalo Creek. It commemorates a point crossed on August 15, 1863, by the expedition led by General Henry H. Sibley on its way to Fort Abercrombie during the historic Sibley-Sully campaign. A plaque at the site notes the expedition's crossing, which tells of the 3,400 soldiers that crossed Buffalo Creek that day and continued another three and a-half miles to Camp Stevens, where they stayed the night. The expedition was about to leave Dakota Territory, after marching nearly 1,000 miles, fighting three major battles and several skirmishes, and losing nine soldiers, and killing approximately 300 Indians.

Much more of the history of early Cass County is found in the town of Buffalo, located three miles north of Interstate 94, 38 miles west of Fargo. With an official population of 188, the residents of this self-proclaimed "small town with a big history" have been devoted to community vitality and historic preservation that far outshines many larger towns.

## A railroad town

Although a miniature bison welcome sign greets visitors, the name of this early railroad village was derived from another "Buffalo." It was originally called "New Buffalo" in the late 1870s, a nod to Buffalo, New York, the birthplace of Samuel Wilkeson, then a surveyor and the secretary of the Northern Pacific Railroad. An early postmaster is credited with shortening it to the more expeditious name of "Buffalo" by the time the town incorporated in 1884.

"We are small but mighty," says Liane Stout, one of Buffalo's civic leaders. The coordinator for the City of Buffalo Historic Preservation Commission, Stout is passionate about the town's past, present and future projects.



On Memorial Day, Buffalo dedicated a new 6-foot by 10-foot black \$60,000 granite memorial to its veterans. Also this spring, 15 markers were placed at sites throughout the town that tell the history of some of its points of greatest interest and pride. In addition to eight homes, the sites include the 1916 Buffalo High School, two original downtown retail sites, Bateman Drugstore and Quirk Lumber Office; and four church sites – the Old Stone Church, Calvary Episcopal Church Rectory, the First Presbyterian Church and the St. Thomas Church, Grotto and Crucifix Shrine.

The Old Stone Church, built in 1885, and the 1916 Buffalo High School are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The town has hosted state conferences, most recently the 2011 State Certified Local Government Conference, and last spring a Community Connect Forum sponsored by the University of North Dakota's Center for Community Engagement.

## High school restoration

Renovating the high school has been Buffalo's current major restoration project. When the school closed in 1978, it fell into disrepair until the community came together to restore it. Stout is the event coordinator for the high school, as well as chairman of the capital campaign to raise funds for the ongoing restoration.

The main floor is completed and has a meeting room with a kitchen, as well as a gift shop stocked with donations that help fund projects. Another fundraiser is a raffle of a buffalo quilt that was made and donated by Jim and Mary Anne Snyder, of Camdenton, Missouri. Jim is a 1963 Buffalo High alumnus.



Buffalo-themed items, above left, support restoration efforts at the 1916 Buffalo High School. Also above are the Old Stone Church and Peterson House, among the 15 sites interpreted with historic markers.

Work has begun on the school's third-floor "study hall" which, when completed, will provide the community a larger event center. The first step is installing new electrical wiring and ventilation into this new level, says Stout, who is a member of the Rakow and Alinder families, among Buffalo's early settlers, and whose mother played basketball in that area, prior to it becoming a study hall. "Visitors to town appreciate the building's enhanced facilities," she says. "Our goal is to have the high school completed restored in time for its centennial celebration in 2016."

The high school is the centerpiece of what has become one of Buffalo's annual summer events. On July 19 it will hold its fourth annual All-School High School Homecoming, followed the next day by the community "Shuffle off to Buffalo" celebration. The July 20 events will include a kiddie tractor pull, mid volleyball, bingo, a car show, horseshoe tournament and community supper.

## Buffalo today

The Buffalo of today has agriculture, auction, auto and motorcycle repair, insurance sales, beauty salons, furniture restoration and home repair businesses, as well as a grocery store and restaurants and lounge.

Outside of town is the Section 17 Hunting Preserve, with a lodge, bird cleaning, hunting dogs and shooting practice for hunters. Learn more at [www.gamebirdhunts.com](http://www.gamebirdhunts.com).


Also nearby is Red Trail Vineyard, which grows a variety of grapes and produces several wines. It is open from Memorial Day through September to visitors from 1 to 6 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays, and weekdays by appointment. This year's North Dakota Grape Harvest Festival and Grape Stomp, is scheduled for August 17. Learn more at [www.redtrailvineyards.com](http://www.redtrailvineyards.com).

*To learn more about Buffalo, visit [www.buffalond.com](http://www.buffalond.com).*

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