While an undergraduate at the University of Kansas in 1886, William Harvey Brown hunted buffalo specimens in Montana with a party from the Smithsonian Institution. The buffalo bull and cow which K.U. acquired as a result of this expedition were the dominant figures in a panorama of North American mammals which was put together by L. L. Dyche, professor of zoology and taxidermy at the university. The K.U. display which was part of the Kansas exhibit at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 was widely praised and helped bring about the construction of a Museum of Natural History to house the university's collections. These photographs of the Chicago exhibit reproduced from Report of the Kansas Board of World's Fair Managers (Topeka, Press of the Hamilton Printing Company; Edwin H. Snow, State Printer, 1894).
THE MOST popular tourist attraction in Kansas, according to recent statistics, is the Dyche Museum of Natural History at the University of Kansas.1 Within Dyche the most admired exhibit probably is the panorama of North American animals. And, within the panorama, no visitor fails to note the group of buffaloes (American bison) which stands out in the High Plains section.

The visitor who admires this group might be surprised to learn that the magnificent bull and large cow which dominate it came to the museum largely through the efforts of a University of Kansas undergraduate, William Harvey Brown, who later helped to found the country of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). The viewer also might find of interest the fact that these two buffaloes were collected by an expedition sent out by the Smithsonian Institution to collect buffalo specimens when it was feared that the species might be on the verge of disappearing completely.

William Harvey Brown first came to Lawrence from Iowa in 1879 at the age of 17 as a student in the division of elementary instruction of the University of Kansas. In that division he and many other students took preparatory courses to qualify themselves for college work.2 Records for the next year, 1880-1881, do not list Brown as a student; it may be that he spent the year teaching school in Iowa to accumulate the funds needed to continue his education.3 He returned in the fall of 1881 and during the next two years completed the elementary instruction course.

During the summer of 1883 he had the good fortune to be selected as one of four students to accompany Prof. F. H. Snow and his family on a scientific collecting trip to New Mexico. On this expedition Brown became acquainted with Snow, the university’s senior professor in the biological sciences who a few years later was appointed chancellor, his son Will, 14, and his daughter Martha, or Mattie, 13. He also worked, camped, and hunted deer with L. L. Dyche, a gifted undergraduate who already held the position of instructor in natural history.4

In the fall of 1883 Brown enrolled as a freshman in the university, joined the Phi Gamma Delta fraternity, and, before long, was elected president of the freshman class. The following summer, when Snow and his collecting party returned to the Walnut Canyon area of New Mexico, Dyche and Brown went to the Harvey ranch area near Las Vegas, N.M., to collect mammals and other specimens for the university including, if possible, some bears. For several weeks the two young men camped in the high country, shot many deer, collected other specimens, and, near the end of their stay, were rewarded in their persistent search for bears by obtaining two grizzlies.5 Brown, as junior partner, got most of the mundane jobs such as managing their train of burros, going after supplies, and collecting rocks and insects, while Dyche occupied himself almost entirely with the pursuit of bears. They found hunting and collecting in this mountainous region to be hard work and were subjected to frequent thunderstorms and even a heavy hail storm. Comic relief was provided by their omnivorous mule, Reuben, an adept at escaping his halter, whereupon he ate everything in sight, including bacon, sugar, soap, dish clothes, and, they swore, even tin cans.6

Dyche undoubtedly gave Professor Snow a favorable report on Brown’s performance on the bear hunt as in his field notes he commented that his companion was “... a

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1. Based on a study of 81 tourist attractions by the Kansas Department of Economic Development.—See Kansas Alumni, Lawrence, v. 77, no. 3 (February, 1979), p. 5.
2. The preparatory courses were started when the first university faculty found that none of its prospective students was qualified for college-level courses.
3. Conversation with Robert H. Brown, Jr., June, 1981. Brown stated that he understood that W. H. Brown came to Lawrence to go to school because he had relatives in the town with whom he could live.
4. The University Courier, Lawrence, September 24, 1883.
student who displayed nerve, endurance, and tact—three indispensable attributes of a good camper and collector." In the spring of 1886 Brown, who had decided to major in natural history, found an old horse skeleton which he cleaned and mounted with only the help he could get from books. Professor Snow, while on a visit to Washington, D.C., mentioned this and Brown’s other achievements and experience to William T. Hornaday, the chief taxidermist at the National Museum. Shortly thereafter Hornaday invited Brown to spend the summer of 1886 in Washington as a volunteer assistant, primarily in the field of osteology, at the National Museum.

That fall, Hornaday selected Brown to accompany him on an expedition sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution, parent organization of the National Museum, to hunt buffalo in Montana. The purpose of this expedition was to obtain a number of buffalo skins, skeletons, and skulls for display and study in the National Museum and other museums in the country. Hornaday and other Smithsonian officials were convinced that the buffalo was doomed and that they had to act quickly before cowboys and hunters exterminated the few remaining individuals if they wished to augment the meager existing collections of buffalo specimens.

As evidenced by the scientific collecting trips previously mentioned, the University of Kansas, particularly Professor Snow, had devoted a good deal of time and effort to building up a natural history collection. A new natural sciences building which was nearing completion included in its design ample space for the display of those collections. The Smithsonian buffalo hunt presented a good opportunity to add some major specimens which the K.U. collections lacked. Harvey Brown helped arrange an agreement whereby the university, in return for a $100 contribution to the funds of the expedition, would receive a representative set of the specimens collected, including a buffalo skin, skeleton, and skull.

The Smithsonian expedition which was in the field from September 24 to December 20, 1886, took place in some of the roughest and most isolated terrain in Montana. Brown did some specimen hunting and shot game for the expedition’slarder but his primary job was to

9. Later designated as Snow Hall, this building was the predecessor of the existing Snow Hall.
10. As the university had no funds for such purposes, Snow sent his personal check.
assist Hornaday in preparing, preserving, and transporting the specimens collected. A blizzard in late November nearly brought disaster to the party, which included three cowboy hunter-guides and two volunteers from the U.S. army. Despite initial difficulty in finding buffalo and problems with the weather and water supply, the expedition exceeded its minimum goals of 20 buffalo skins and skeletons and 50 buffalo skulls and also brought back a considerable number of specimens of deer, antelope, coyote, grouse, and other species. To Brown the hunt was quite an adventure; to Hornaday it was a definite triumph.  

Harvey Brown earned high praise from the leader of the expedition for the efficiency and good spirits with which he carried out the rather boring, and at times disagreeable, tasks of driving the wagon, skinning and boning specimens, and salting down hides. Hornaday also recognized his potential as a leader of future collecting parties. Shortly after the Montana trip was completed, Hornaday wrote to Brown, referring to a plan to send an expedition to Alaska to obtain walrus and other northern species, that “There are only two men in the U.S. besides myself who could go after walrus skins (1 or 2) and get them in fine shape. These men are William Harvey Brown and Henry L. Ward. I could vouch for your ability to get them, and get them well—which has never been done before. . . . You, with your push and perseverance would make a bigger haul than any one man ever made in Alaska. I would like to see you go there. . . .”  

Although Brown never made the trip to Alaska, Hornaday was sincere in his praise and only two years later he was instrumental in obtaining for Brown a position which led to a complete change in his life and career. 

Despite this high praise, Hornaday approved of Brown’s plan, once the buffalo hunt was completed, to return to the University of Kansas to finish his course of study and obtain his degree. In January, 1887, Brown came back to Lawrence, enrolled for the spring semester, and obtained a job working in the natural history department in the afternoons. 


12. W. T. Hornaday to W. H. Brown, January 12, 1887. This letter and the Hornaday to Brown letters cited in footnotes 14, 16, 18, 31 have been made available by Robert H. Brown, Jr. Henry L. Ward (1863-1943) took part in many collecting expeditions and was associated with several museums. 

Meanwhile, W. T. Hornaday had received the shipment of buffalo and other specimens collected in Montana and was in the process of allocating them to the various recipients. On February 16 he informed Brown that Secretary Spencer F. Baird of the Smithsonian had authorized him to select the specimens that were to go to the University of Kansas museum and to Brown. He went on to say “I intend to give your institution old bull No. 1 and to you the second largest and finest cow.” Thus the bull was allocated to the University of Kansas museum but the cow was conveyed to Brown personally. Secretary Baird confirmed this arrangement in a letter to Professor Snow, saying that

by my direction Mr. Hornaday has picked out a complete duplicate series of skins and skeletons of Montana mammals for your establishment... In making the selection for you, I instructed Mr. Hornaday to take into account the valuable services rendered to the expedition by Mr. W. Harvey Brown, quite as much as the hundred dollars which you furnished towards the expenses of the expedition.

At Mr. Hornaday’s suggestion, I have enclosed with the specimens a fine skin of a cow buffalo for Mr. W. Harvey Brown, as a mark of our appreciation of his very faithful and efficient services in the field, which were rendered to us without salary. Previously Hornaday had told Brown that the Smithsonian was giving him the cow buffalo “... whether your museum will buy it of you or not, for you have earned it three times over.” Furthermore he advised Brown not to sell it to anyone for a penny less than $50. What financial arrangements Brown made with the museum have not been discovered but we do know that both specimens were soon added to the university collection.

On March 22 the Montana specimens arrived in Lawrence. Professor Dyche immediately began to preserve the skins and prepare them for mounting. As he had never mounted anything larger than a bear previously, he realized that he needed help in preparing the buffalo specimens for exhibition. Brown, who had specialized in working with skeletons, could be of little assistance. Mr. Hornaday, probably the nation’s top taxidermist, was the logical source of help, particularly as he was just beginning work on mounting some of the Smithsonian’s buffaloes.

Brown, it appears, inquired of Hornaday whether or not he would give instructions in mounting buffalo skins. Hornaday replied in a letter dated March 16 that “... I am pretty certain no one would care to pay what I would consider it worth. I could not give anyone a thorough course in mammal mounting without taking a two weeks vacation without pay, and I am pretty certain no taxidermist could be willing to pay the $200 I would consider it worth. As to taking anyone in to work here with me in the regular course of my work I would not take anyone at any price.”

This condescending and discouraging letter did not dissuade L. L. Dyche. He drafted a letter to Hornaday pointing out that he was not a novice at taxidermy, having mounted hundreds of birds, eight deer, and two bears, and appealing to Hornaday’s vanity by quoting the high praise of his work heard from Harvey Brown and others. He also stated that he was willing to pay $200 for a short course in mammal mounting and that he “... would like very much to see you mount a buffalo and would be willing to pay reasonably for the privilege.”

We have no record of the precise agreement they made but Hornaday later reported that instruction in taxidermy had been given “... to Prof. L. L. Dyche, of the University of Kansas, who served as an unsalaried volunteer for the sake of the experience acquired.” Dyche arrived in Washington early in April and spent most of the summer working with Hornaday. Mrs. Dyche joined her husband in May and the Dyches and Hornadays spent much time together during the summer. After the completion of a mounted buffalo in early in June, Dyche worked on other specimens. Late in July he and his wife started on a month-long roundabout trip home.

Once Dyche returned to Lawrence in August, he began work on mounting the bull buffalo hide. Under the approach he had learned from Hornaday, this was a far from simple procedure. Rather than sewing up the
Prof. L. L. Dyche had never mounted specimens larger than a bear, and sought instruction in taxidermy from William T. Hornaday in Washington, D.C. After several months working with the National Museum taxidermist, he returned to K.U. in August, 1887, and began mounting the bull buffalo hide. The Hornaday procedure required the construction of a complete buffalo form from wood, iron, twine, jute, and clay over which the skin, which had been pickled for preservation, was stretched and sewn. The bull buffalo project took Dyche about four months. The top photograph shows the basic wood and metal form. The second shows the form nearly completed, and the bottom photograph shows the mounting completed. Photographs reproduced courtesy Museum of Natural History, University of Kansas, Lawrence.
prepared skin and stuffing it with some sort of soft material to produce the semblance of a buffalo, Hornaday’s procedure required the construction of a complete buffalo form from wood, iron, twine, jute, and clay over which the skin, which had been pickled for preservation, was stretched and sewn. Great care was given to anatomical details and to appearance. On December 20 Dyche and his helpers placed the skin on the form. After that six days were devoted to sewing it up, six more days to finishing the head, and five more to modeling the eyes and nose.

Shortly after the buffalo bull was mounted, Dyche began work on the cow. Having some experience, this one went considerably faster and was completed by April 15. The two mounted buffaloes brought extravagant praise from the Kansas press. The use of such phrases as “the finest in the world,” when they came to the attention of W. T. Hornaday, upset him a little but, when he was sent a stereoptical slide of the two specimens, he expressed “... great satisfaction to see—pictorially—two of the trophies of our hunt so handsomely preserved.” Even so, he couldn’t resist some criticism of the bull and suggested to Dyche that the “iliac region” be redone to correct a fault he detected.

We do not know whether or not Harvey Brown assisted in mounting the two K. U. buffalo specimens. There is evidence, though, that, in addition to completing his work toward the B.S. degree which he received in June, 1888, he mounted at least one of the buffalo skeletons. After graduation he was hired by the National Museum as an exhibit preparator under the curator of mammals.

FOR THE next several years the two mounted buffalo hides were the major attractions in the University of Kansas Museum of Natural History in old Snow Hall. During

21. Hornaday in one of his more exubertant moods wrote of the buffalo bull he was mounting: “He will make a noble specimen, and I am putting him up (as all the rest, for that matter) to last a thousand years. He will stand until the Great Republic falls into decay, and the soil becomes too poor to raise a disturbance on. Who says that taxidermy is not a great art?”—W. T. Hornaday to W. H. Brown, March 16, 1887.
24. Kansas City (Mo.) Journal, January 20, 1889. Brown is credited with preparing many mammal skeletons including one of a large buffalo.
25. St. Joseph Weekly Herald, June 18, 1891. A description of the University of Kansas scientific collections lists two large mounted buffalo and the skeletons of both, “highly polished and snow white,” standing nearby. The newspaper erroneously assumed the skins and skeletons were from the same animals.

Francis H. Snow (1840-1908) was one of three original University of Kansas faculty members appointed in 1866, and was later chancellor of the university from 1890 to 1901. William Harvey Brown was selected in 1883 to accompany Snow and his family on a scientific collecting trip to New Mexico. On this expedition Brown became acquainted with the professor’s daughter, Martha, who later became his wife.
On an expedition to New Mexico in the summer of 1884 Lewis L. Dyche (1857-1915) and William Harvey Brown collected mammals and other specimens for the University of Kansas. Later Dyche, who was professor of zoology and curator of birds and mammals at the university from 1890-1900, made more than a score of scientific expeditions covering North America from Mexico to Alaska, including Greenland and the Arctic regions.

these years L. L. Dyche was feverishly working at collecting and mounting specimens of other North American mammals. By the time exhibits were being gathered for the World’s Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893, he was able to put together a major display. In a specially designed and arranged annex of the Kansas building, semicircular in form, 60 feet deep and 88 feet across, he and his assistants installed 121 specimens of North American mammals. This exhibit attracted much attention and favorable comment. One of the major groups within the exhibit was a small herd of six buffalo dominated by the two impressive specimens collected by W. T. Hornaday and Harvey Brown. The Kansas Board of World’s Fair Managers reported that “No group in the entire exhibit excited more general interest than this one. . . . The leader of this herd is a splendid bull, with grand proportions of body and limb. He was the king bison at the fair, as he had no equal there in size or appearance.” 26

After the Columbian Exposition closed in October, 1893, it was recognized by Kansas officials that the Kansas exhibit could not be adequately housed in Snow Hall. The need for a new, tailor-made exhibition hall helped stimulate the construction of the University of Kansas Museum of Natural History, which was dedicated in 1903. The buffalo group exhibited at Chicago became part of the panorama of North American mammals installed in a specially designed hall facing the entrance. The two buffaloes that Harvey Brown’s efforts brought to K.U. still may be seen there today, continuing their long careers as impressive representatives of what was once the dominant mammal in Kansas. 27

L. L. Dyche, whose name later was attached to the University of Kansas Museum of Natural History, continued to teach at the university until his death in 1915. He became widely known as a polar explorer, as well as a collector of fossils, birds, and mammals. W. T. Hornaday, after a disagreement with his superiors at the National Museum, went into the real estate business in 1890 in Buffalo, N.Y. In 1896 he was appointed director of the New York City Zoological Park and in the next 30 years built the Bronx Zoo into one of the nation’s foremost museums.


27. Tom Swearingen, staff artist and chief taxidermist at Dyche Museum, has confirmed that the buffaloes now on display include the two collected by Hornaday.
collections of animals. He also became a leader in the effort to preserve the buffalo and to conserve other animal species in danger of extinction.

William Harvey Brown, on the basis of a recommendation from W. T. Hornaday, obtained the position of the chief naturalist and specimen collector with a Smithsonian expedition sent to South Africa in 1889. While there he decided to accompany the first expedition sent by the British South Africa Company into the lands to the north which later became part of southern Rhodesia. He soon threw in his lot with this newly developing area where he did much hunting and scouting and continued for several years to collect various kinds of natural history specimens for the Smithsonian, thereby earning his local nickname of “Curiosity,” or “Curio” Brown. In 1894 he turned his attention to farming and accumulated a large estate which he called Arlington Heights.28

In 1899 while on a visit to the United States he married Martha Snow, whom he had first met as Mattie on the K.U. collecting trip to New Mexico in 1883. The Browns returned to Rhodesia and there raised a family of three children. Brown became active in politics and served in a number of elective offices, including the Rhodesian executive council, or senate, and as mayor of Salisbury. After his rather sudden death in April, 1913, his family returned to the United States to live.

28. Now the site of the Salisbury airport according to a plaque which is, or was, mounted on one of the buildings. Photograph in possession of Robert H. Brown, Jr.