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## GREAT AMERICAN SYMBOL LIVES ON IN GILFORD

A 1989 photo from the collection of Ernie Bolduc captures some of the buffalo that have lived over the years on the Bolduc Farm in Gilford.

As our country celebrates another birthday, familiar symbols of our heritage make an appearance, just as they do each Independence Day. One such symbol is that of the buffalo, an image we can easily recognize; yet, often take for granted. It is oftentimes forgotten that the buffalo even appears on some of our older currency, the Buffalo nickel, or as it is sometimes called, the Indian Head nickel.

These animals are our nation's oldest inhabitant, migrating to our continent from Asia when the Bering Strait was frozen solid. When Lewis and Clark were well into their famous expedition in the very beginning of the 1800's, they recorded in their journals the vast amount of buffalo roaming the open land. During a sighting, Lewis describes having seen an estimated 3,000 buffalo in one herd. He also wrote how the animals had no fear of man or of being approached.



By the 1830's, there was an astounding total of 50 to 60 million buffalo in our herds. Today, the number of buffalo hovers at around one million. The question that remains is: What happened to all those buffalo and why?

A conversation with Ernie Bolduc, one of the owners of Bolduc Farm in Gilford, proved he can recite the history of the buffalo as easily as he can tell the history of the bees he keeps.

"In 1830, buffalo were everywhere. Buffalo were north, south, east and west in this country," he said, debunking the common notion that buffalo lived only on the Plains. "Anywhere there were buffalo, there were Native Americans – think about how much these people relied on the buffalo for the many things they needed," he added.

With the tremendous westward movement across America in the 1800's, the buffalo became a major obstacle. Railroads were heading west; buffalo became so numerous that many times they ended up on the tracks in front of a train traveling too fast to stop in time.

"When a train hit a buffalo, the track was wrecked along with the train. This is how Buffalo Bill got his name. The government had him on the trains; he could shoot 500-600 buffalo per day, and they were left where they fell. By controlling the buffalo population, the government could also control the Native Americans because of their reliance on this animal," said Bolduc.

Within a 50-year period, the number of buffalo tumbled into the hundreds. Four very smart and very forward-thinking farmers in four separate western states secretly hid 529 buffalo on their farms. They were undaunted by the fact they faced certain arrest if discovered. From these buffalo came the amount we have today.

The adventure with buffalo on the Bolduc Farm began approximately two decades ago when one brother, Father Hector, obtained three buffalo, one male and two females, from a Native American in Wyoming.

From the original three animals, the buffalo herd at the Bolduc Farm is now comprised of thirty animals, including six new babies. They graze on 100 of the 300 acres that make up the farm.

The Bolduc's keep two kinds of buffalo on their property: the Asian and the Canadian Woods Buffalo. It is the Asian that is pictured on the Buffalo nickel. It should come as no surprise, considering the relationship between the two, that this version of the nickel pictures an Indian head on the opposite side.

Bolduc and his brothers have learned by trial and error how to care for their buffalo. Buffalo now have an understandable, inborn fear of man, and this apprehension can create challenges for the people who wish to keep them.

"They are docile, yet completely unpredictable. It's very difficult to find a vet who will work with buffalo, and when a vet makes a house call, it usually runs anywhere from \$300 to \$500 for the visit," he explained.

When asked which he likes better, the buffalo or his bees, he said, "I do like the buffalo, but they are a completely different adventure altogether than keeping bees. I'd have to say that I like my bees better, though."

Bolduc says that he and his brothers are so proud to have the buffalo living in Gilford. In his own words, he summarized just why they keep buffalo on their farm, "There is nothing more American than the buffalo!"

Gilford's Thompson-Ames Historical Society welcomes all stories of historical interest. If you would like to contact the Society, you may e-mail at: [www.thomames@worldpath.net](mailto:www.thomames@worldpath.net). Be sure to check our website for upcoming programs and events at: [www.gilfordhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.gilfordhistoricalsociety.org).