The possibility of the buffalo, or bison, existing in Pennsylvania has long been one to intrigue natural historians, archaeologists, and historians. Natural historians have generally included western Pennsylvania when describing the regions inhabited by buffalo, basing their assumptions on accounts provided by either Thomas Ashe or Henry W. Shoemaker. John Guilday of the Carnegie Museum, in his article “Evidence for Buffalo in Prehistoric Pennsylvania,” has shown Ashe’s account to be highly improbable, and, in any case, not specifically located in Pennsylvania. Guilday also notes that Henry Shoemaker’s material may be authentic, but that historical evidence for it is definitely lacking. Archaeologists have been unable to find any reliable physical remains of the buffalo, as Guilday reports, and as John Witthoft, former state archaeologist and now a staff member of the University of Pennsylvania Museum, concludes in The American Indian as Hunter. Records of trade with the Indians and accounts of Indian life disclose no use of buffalo or buffalo products in Pennsylvania.

The members of Céloron’s expedition in 1749 were specifically looking for buffalo, which they had been told abounded near the Beautiful River, as they called the Ohio River and its tributary, the Allegheny. Yet, as they traveled through Pennsylvania from what is now Warren County to Pittsburgh, they did not sight the animal. Céloron tells of sending his men out to look for buffalo near Logstown (Ambridge) on August 12, but says they found only deer.\(^3\) And, as Father Bonnecamps notes at a later date,

> It was in the neighborhood of this river [probably the Kanawha of West Virginia] that we began to see the Illinois cattle; but, here and elsewhere, they were in such small numbers that our men could hardly kill a score of them. It was, besides, necessary to seek them far in the woods. We had been assured, however, at our departure, that at each point we should find them by hundreds, and that the tongues alone of those which we should kill would suffice to support the troops.\(^4\)

Among all this negative evidence, there is one area of investigation which has been neglected by historians. Given the number of “buffalo” place names which exist in Pennsylvania, it seems probable that a search for their earliest appearance in records would be profitable. Maps, deeds, and journals would be the logical source material for such a study, and might even indicate the origin of some of these names.

Reading Howell’s *A Map of the State of Pennsylvania* of 1792 provides a convenient list of buffalo place names to examine on earlier maps. It is a detailed map of the state, and yet is early enough not to include the buffalo names of obvious recent origin. On Howell’s map, Buffalo Creek in Washington County flows across the state line to join the Ohio River. In Allegheny County, presently Butler and Armstrong counties, a Buffalo Creek joins the Allegheny River at what is now Freeport. Northumberland County, present Union County, contains a “Buffalow Creek” which empties into the West Branch of the Susquehanna River near Lewisburg, and a Buffalo Township which apparently received its name from the creek. In Cumberland County, now Perry County, the “Big Buffaloe Creek”


\(^4\) “Journal of Father Bonnecamps,” in Galbreath, 88.
empties into the Juniata River; “Buffaloe Hill” is parallel to the creek on the south; and “Little Buffaloe Creek” is south of “Buffaloe Hill,” and also empties into the Juniata River. In Bedford County, “Buffaloe Run” flows into the Raystown Branch of the Juniata River near the town of Bedford, and in the portion of the county which later became Somerset County “Buffaloe Lick Creek” flows into the “Yoxhiogeni River,” today’s Casselman River, near Berlin. In Mifflin County, present Centre County, a “Buffaloe Run” empties into Bald Eagle Creek.

When do these names first appear on maps of Pennsylvania? The “Buffaloe Creek” in Washington County is shown on an Ohio Company map, drawn by George Mercer, of the forks of the Ohio, dated about 1752. This creek appears again in 1785, on John Fitch’s map of the “north west parts of the United States of America”; on a 1786 map of the western boundary of Pennsylvania by Benjamin Barton; and on a 1787 map of Pennsylvania which appeared in volume two, 1788, of the Columbian Magazine.

Buffalo Creek in present Butler and Armstrong counties acquired its name somewhat circuitously. The “trader’s map” by John Patten in 1752 shows a village, “Buffellors T.,” at the mouth of this creek. This is marked by four small triangles, evidently indicating Indian dwelling places, and hinting that the town itself received its name from an Indian named “Buffellor” or something similar in sound. The name becomes “Bufflers T.” on a 1754 “Map of the Western Parts . . . of Virginia” by Gibson printed for the London Magazine. John Mitchell, in his 1755 Map of the British and French Dominions in North America, gives the name of the town as “Buffalo T.” The Lewis Evans . . . map of the Middle British Colonies in America . . . of 1755 designates the creek as “Rufflers C.,” where the “R” is apparently a typographical error. The connection between town and creek is seen again on the 1756 . . . Map of the Province of Pennsylvania by Thomas Kitchin which gives the creek name as “Bufflers Creek,” and omits the town. Both Evans and Kitchin

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6 Penn’a Maps Accompanying the Report of the Secretary of Internal Affairs on the Boundaries of the Commonwealth 1857, Map Number 6, Western Boundary, 1786.

7 Howard N. Eavenson, Map Maker and Indian Trader (Pittsburgh, 1949), insert in back.
use “buffalo” for other place names, so that “Bufflers” appears to be a conscious distinction, and not merely a spelling peculiarity. 

A New map of North America from the latest discoveries 1763, printed in London, still shows “Bufflon T.” on the Allegheny River. By the time of the William Scull map of 1770 and its modification of 1775, however, the name has become “Buffaloe Creek,” and it is repeated in this fashion on several later maps, although the town disappears. It seems probable that this Buffalo Creek did not originate from references to the animal, but who or what the original “Buffellor” was has not been determined.

The Buffalo Creek near Lewisburg is mentioned as “Buffellow Creek” in “A Map of Part of the Province of Pennsylvania West of the River Susquehanna,” of approximately 1756.8 Nicholas Scull in 1759 notes it as “Buffalow Creek,” and William Scull calls it “Buffaloe Creek” in 1770 and 1775. “A New and Accurate Map of the Province of Pennsylvania” in the Universal Magazine of 1780, S. J. Neele in the 1786 “A Map of the country between Albemarle Sound, and Lake Erie . . .,” John Hills in the 1787 “Map of Pennsylvania . . .,” and the Columbian Magazine in 1788 include this creek on their maps of the Pennsylvania area.

The “Buffaloe Creek” in Perry County, which empties into the Juniata River, is shown on the Scull map of 1770, on the revised Scull map of 1775, and on the S. J. Neele map of 1786. The other buffalo names on Reading Howell’s map, in present Centre, Bedford, and Somerset counties, are not found on the earlier maps.

In addition to their appearance on maps, place names are recorded in the land records, where descriptions on land warrants often include the location of the desired land. Unfortunately, land north and west of the Blue Mountain, where the buffalo place names occur, was not purchased from the Indians until 1754 at the earliest. Thus, while the warrant register in the Bureau of Land Records does contain frequent references to the buffalo names, they are mostly from too late a period to add to the knowledge already taken from maps. For example, the Buffalo Creek in Washington County, which


is found on a 1752 map, cannot be clearly identified in the land records until Washington County was formed in 1781. The land which is now Butler and Armstrong counties was not purchased from the Indians until 1784-1785, so the land records are not of much help in solving the "Bufflers Town" mystery. The Buffalo Creek in Union County near Lewisburg, which was mentioned in 1756 on the map of "Pennsylvania west of the . . . Susquehanna," is located in an area which was not purchased from the Indians until 1768. The Buffalo Creek in Centre County, though it flows through land purchased in 1754, does not appear in any of the early land records, nor does the "Buffaloe Run" in Bedford County.

There are some instances, however, in which the land records establish an earlier date than the maps. The warrant records for Perry County, when it was a part of Cumberland County, do give an earlier date for Buffalo Creek than its appearance in the William Scull map of 1770. Buffalo Creek is found in the land records in 1755,¹⁰ and by 1762 there appear both a Big Buffalo Creek¹¹ and a Little Buffalo Creek.¹² In a similar fashion, the land records for Bedford County list the Buffalo Lick Creek in present Somerset County as early as 1773,¹³ yet it is not found on a map until the Reading Howell map of 1792.

There are two buffalo names which appear on the early maps, but which are no longer found in Pennsylvania. What is today known as "French Creek" was commonly called the "Rivière au Boeuf" by the French, beginning in about 1753, and was translated by English writers as: the "Beef R. or French Creek" in the 1754 map of the western parts of Virginia for the London Magazine; the "Buffaloe River" in a 1755 map of the Ohio country;¹⁴ "Buffalo R. lately call'd French Cr." in Mitchell's 1755 map; and the "Beef R." in Thomas Hutchins' 1765 map of the Ohio country.¹⁵ Yet

¹⁰ Warrant to Guyan Allison, Cumberland County A-41, Feb. 3, 1755, Bureau of Land Records, Pennsylvania Department of Community Affairs.
¹¹ Warrant to William Parkison, Cumberland County P-71, July 1, 1762, ibid.
¹² Warrant to William McCroskrey, Cumberland County M-138, June 2, 1762, ibid.
¹³ Warrant to John Adam Paulson, Bedford County P-20, Nov. 8, 1773, ibid.
¹⁵ William Smith, Historical Account of Bouquet's Expedition Against the Ohio Indians in 1764 (Cincinnati, 1907), facing xx.
the French word "boeuf" did not mean buffalo, and even when the term "vaches sauvages" (wild cattle) was used, it did not necessarily apply to buffalo. This can be seen in the journal of Simon le Moine during a trip to and from a council at Onondaga, New York, in 1654. On September 2, when on the St. Lawrence River, he wrote: "Le deuxiesme du mois, faisans chemin sur de grandes prairies, nous voyons en diuers endroits de grands troupeaux de bouefs & de vaches sauvages, leurs cornes sont en quelque façon approchantes des rameures d'vn cerf." The comparison of the horns to those of a "stag" suggests an elk more readily than a buffalo.

Another buffalo name which appears in the 1750's is the "Buffalo Swamp" in northwestern Pennsylvania, in the Elk County area. Lewis Evans in 1755, Thomas Kitchin in 1756, William Scull in 1770 and 1775, and Thomas Hutchins in A New Map of the Western Parts of Virginia, Pennsylvania . . . in 1778, mention, respectively, "Buffalo Swamp," "Buffalo Swamp," "Buffeloe Swamp," "Buffaloe Swamp," and the "Buffaloe Low Lands." William Cockburn, in the 1783 revision of his 1780 "map of the State of New York and Parts adjacent," includes a "Buffalo Low Land" northwest of Sunbury, Pennsylvania. Other maps of the 1780's based upon the above works show a "Buffalo Swamp" or "low lands," but map makers working from personal knowledge do not include it, and it does not appear on later maps. Guilday suggests that the swamp was invented as a space-filling device, but even if this is true, it is not an explanation for applying to it the name "Buffalo Swamp."

In addition to maps and land records, a few other historical references to buffalo are to be found. In the accounts of Thomas Penn, October 16, 1733, the proprietor is said to have paid £15 to "Wm Linvil for a Bull Buffello. . . ." There is no record here of where Linvil acquired this animal. In Hugh Gibson's report of his captivity among the Indians from 1756 to 1759, as told to Timothy Alden in 1826, Gibson says that one of the brothers or half-brothers of

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17 Manuscript at New York State Library. Photostat consulted at Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.
18 Guilday, 137.
Pisquitomen was known as Buffalo Horn. The fact of Gibson's captivity is well documented but this detail cannot be confirmed; and even if verified it is no proof of buffalo in Pennsylvania. The trader James Kenny, in his journal at Pittsburgh on July 18, 1761, mentions that there "Came an Indian call'd John & another Young fellow who had a Pair of little Buffelow Horns fix'd to his Cap." Kenny notes this as a curiosity, and does not say where the buffalo horns might have come from. None of these references establishes the presence of the buffalo in Pennsylvania.

The journals of early travelers in western Pennsylvania are disappointingly lacking in references to buffalo place names. George Croghan's entry for May 17, 1765, is perhaps the most enlightening. He speaks of the creek in Washington County as follows: "From thence we proceeded down the river . . . till we came to the Buffalo Creek, being about ten miles below the Seneca village [at a place called "Two Creeks"]). . . ." Other travelers, as published in Thwaites' Early Western Travels, include André Michaux (1793) and Fortescue Cuming (1807), who describe the same Buffalo Creek, and Thaddeus Harris (1803), who mentions the Buffalo Creek in Butler and Armstrong counties, but all three of these are relatively late references.

Publication in 1959 of the journal of an unidentified officer of Braddock's army provided a reference that came close to documenting the presence of buffalo in Pennsylvania. Under the date of July 3, 1755, the officer records that "We marched at 4, & got to Lick Creek, the ground in some parts a little uneven, but mostly very good. This Creek takes its Name from a lick being there, where Deer, Buffaloes & Bears come to lick ye Salt out of ye Swamp. . . ." The "Lick Creek" is "Lick Run" on today's United States Geo-

20 "An Account of the Captivity of Hugh Gibson among the Delaware Indians . . .," Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, VI (1837), 148.
logical Survey map, and is slightly southeast of Uniontown, near Hopwood. Unfortunately, this officer is not recording his own observations but repeating what had been told him in explanation of the place name. The explanation may be sound, but the officer himself saw no buffalo.

This reference finds unexpected support, however, from a previously unknown journal of Captain Harry Gordon, a British Army engineer. After the fall of Fort Duquesne in November, 1758, General John Forbes sent a detachment under Gordon to explore a route between Pittsburgh and Virginia. Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Shippen of Pennsylvania, who accompanied the party, drew a map of their route, which is now at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Bearing no date, the map could not be fully identified, but its relation to Gordon’s journal is obvious. The expedition made its way southeast from Pittsburgh to join Braddock’s Road, went up the Monongahela to Redstone (Brownsville), and then traveled approximately 12 3/4 miles southeast to Dunlap’s Plantation. There they rested on December 13, as Gordon states in his “Report of the Country between Pittsburg and the great Meadows . . .” for “the first Time since we left Pittsburgh, both to ease the men, and give Time to the Hunters to kill Game, which is exceeding Plenty of all Kinds hereabouts, consisting of Buffaloes, Elchs, Deer—Bear, and innumerable Quantity of wild Turkeys—of which last, we were so satiated that the Hunters would kill no more.”

Gordon was evidently describing animals that he had seen, or at least that his hunters had seen.

Shippen’s map and Gordon’s journal show the location of this resting place of the 13th to have been very near present Uniontown, near the “Lick Creek” of which Braddock’s officer wrote. Apparently game was plentiful in the area, and at times buffalo must have been one of the animals hunted there.

For the first time, it appears, we now have a contemporary, dependable account of buffalo in Pennsylvania. In addition to


28 A reference to the results of such a hunt in the same general area is found in a letter from Fort Cumberland reporting that a party of men under Capt. Luke Collins had followed some Indians to the Cheat River, a tributary of the Monongahela River, and had attacked them while “they were barbecuing a Buffaloe, not thinking of danger.” Pennsylvania Gazette, Sept. 15,
confirming the report of Braddock's officer, this evidence increases the probability that "buffalo" place names in southwestern Pennsylvania at least, derive from the actual presence of the animal in that area.

This information, however, cannot be said to strengthen the case for the "buffalo" place names in the rest of the state. Buffalo Swamp, the Rivière au Boeuf, and "Buffler's Town" are of little value as evidence, and the names in Centre, Union, and Mifflin counties, near the Susquehanna River, remain relatively unsupported by historical data. Nor does Gordon's report dispose of the impression received from the absence of the buffalo from accounts of Indian life and trade, and the lack of verified skeletal remains. On Gordon's evidence, supported by other data, buffalo were once found in southwestern Pennsylvania; place names suggest that they may have occurred more widely. They were apparently not numerous, and, as John Guilday suggests,\(^29\) may have been relatively late arrivals in Pennsylvania. The duration of their residence there was not long, as the rapid advance of settlement was too much of a threat to their existence. On December 7, 1780, Colonel Daniel Brodhead, commander at Fort Pitt, wrote to George Washington complaining of the shortage of food, and mentioning that "I am so well convinced that the inhabitants on this side the mountains cannot furnish half enough meat to supply the troops, that I have risked the sending of a party of hunters to kill buffalo at little Canhawa. . . ."\(^30\) By 1780, evidently, whatever buffalo had been in Pennsylvania had disappeared.

\[\begin{align*}
\text{*Pennsylvania Historical and} \\
\text{Museum Commission} \\
\text{GAIL M. GIBSON}
\end{align*}\]

1763, p. 2, col. 2. Another possible reference to buffalo in western Pennsylvania is found in Lewis Ourry's letter from Fort Bedford to Henry Bouquet on Feb. 21, 1760: "Yesterday I forwarded downwards the General's Baggage, consisting of 5 Waggons, each drawn by 6 Horses One Slope Wagon by 4, and a Chair by 1 & 5 Spare in all 40, and a Young Buffalo." The General was John Stanwix, who had been at Pittsburgh since August, 1759, supervising the construction of Fort Pitt. Since there was no British post beyond Fort Pitt at this time, the buffalo presumably came from somewhere not far remote. Bouquet Papers, British Museum, Additional Manuscript Series 21642, f. 110.

\(^29\) Guilday, 138.

\(^30\) "Correspondence of Colonel David Brodhead," in Neville B. Craig, ed., *The Olden Time* (Pittsburgh, 1848), II, 378.