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### Last Stand: George Bird Grinnell, The Battle to Save the Buffalo, and the Birth of the New West

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*Last Stand: George Bird Grinnell, The Battle to Save the Buffalo, and the Birth of the New West*, by Michael Punke. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009. xvi, 304 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, index. \$18.95 paper.

Reviewer Gregory J. Dehler is an instructor at Front Range Community College in Westminster, Colorado. His dissertation (Lehigh University, 2002) was "William Temple Hornaday and Wildlife Protection."

Michael Punke opens *Last Stand* with the story of Vic Smith, who killed 4,500 buffalo in 1881, as an example of the scope of exploitation typical in the Old West. Smith was not unique. He was just one of thousands of hunters who killed millions of buffalo in the 1870s and 1880s. By 1885, only 300 buffalo were left from a herd that had once exceeded 30 million. Most of this remnant herd sought refuge inside Yellowstone National Park. Thus, Yellowstone became a battleground between those, like Smith, who saw the buffalo as a resource to be exploited to the point of extermination, and George Bird Grinnell, a well-to-do easterner who wanted to save the buffalo from extinction and preserve the sanctity of the national park. Businessmen and self-interested politicians offered to protect Yellowstone's wildlife only at the cost of privatization and commercial concessions. Grinnell refused this bargain. Instead, he used his personal friendships with influential politicians, the Boone and Crockett Club (which he co-founded with Theodore Roosevelt), and his editorial position at *Forest & Stream* magazine to demand protection for Yellowstone's wildlife and maintenance of its boundaries. Grinnell was, of course, not the only one involved in saving the buffalo and Yellowstone, but his role was critical. He kept the public informed with stories of poachers, corruption, and Congress's failure to act decisively. When Edgar Howell slaughtered five buffalo inside Yellowstone in 1894, one of Grinnell's reporters, Iowan Emerson Hough, was on hand to break the story. Howell's brazen act finally convinced Congress to pass the Park Protection Act, legislation that established punishments for those who shot wildlife in Yellowstone National Park. A new West was born, with Grinnell serving as midwife. Preservation replaced exploitation. In the years after the Park Protection Act, forest reserves would be vastly expanded, additional national parks created, and big-game refuges established.

Punke devotes considerable space to the central character, Grinnell, and the development of his conservation ethic. Punke roots Grinnell's commitment to conservation in two areas. As a paleontologist first drawn to the West in pursuit of science, Grinnell observed that species, even those as vigorous and numerous as the dinosaurs, lived a tenuous existence. In addition to the influence of paleontology, Punke credits an ethic of self-denial that "Grandma" Lucy Audubon instilled in

Grinnell during his youth as a critical component of his conservation philosophy. This put Grinnell at odds with the consumptive ethos of the Gilded Age, which, among other things, led to the slaughter of buffalo by the millions. For Grinnell, self-denial and restraint remained at the heart of the sportsman's ethic.

Punke's sources include government reports, Grinnell's private papers, and numerous editorials and articles from *Forest & Stream* and other magazines. The secondary sources, however, are dated. This is not a major detraction, but *Last Stand* might have benefited from recent works, such as those by Karl Jacoby and Louis Warren just to name two, that offer insights into the mind of the poacher and the significant friction between the goals of the elite eastern sportsmen and the needs of the local economy. This minor weakness, however, does not overshadow the fact that Michael Punke has written an engaging and, at times, exciting story for both a popular and academic audience.

*A Colossal Hoax: The Giant from Cardiff that Fooled America*, by Scott Tribble. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009. xiv, 311 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$42.95 cloth.

Reviewer Chris Rasmussen is associate professor of history at Fairleigh Dickinson University. He is the author of " 'Fairs Here Have Become a Sort of Holiday': Agriculture and Amusements at Iowa's County Fairs, 1838-1925" in the *Annals of Iowa* (1999).

In October 1869, while digging a well on Stub Newell's farm near Cardiff, New York, workers uncovered a ten-foot, three-ton human figure carved from gypsum. Dubbed the Cardiff Giant, the figure soon became a nationwide sensation, as Americans debated whether the giant was a petrified human or humanoid fossil, an ancient sculpture, or perhaps an outright fraud.

Over the next five months the giant was revealed as a hoax perpetrated by George Hull, a two-bit con man, serial arsonist, and incorrigible huckster. A get-rich-quick schemer, Hull aimed to reap a windfall by exhibiting or selling the giant. Yet, as Scott Tribble's deeply researched, perceptive history makes clear, Tribble was also motivated by a deep-seated contempt for revealed religion and a desire to discredit the biblical account of creation. Hull shamelessly defrauded the public but considered revealed religion an even grosser fraud.

Hull was clever, but not quite clever enough to cover his tracks, keep his co-conspirators quiet, and pull off his audacious hoax. Tribble's detailed account of Hull's machinations reads like a whodunit, recounting every twist and turn in Hull's scheme. In 1868 Hull had