

Buffalo

Did you know that the buffalo used to be the 'unofficial mascot' for Bella Vista? Here's the story of how that came to be...

The barn that has been the home of the Wishing Spring Gallery since 1984 was formerly a dairy barn, converted to that use by C.A. Linebarger in 1941. When John Cooper Sr. bought the property in the early 1960's, a friend of his decided it was the perfect spot for a herd of buffalo.

Prior to the construction of Walgreens and the other businesses along that stretch of Highway 71, the property had not been raised in elevation (that happened during the last dredging of Lake Bella Vista in the 2000-2003 timeframe), so the land was level from the dairy barn over to the highway, a fitting spot for buffalo to roam.

According to the January 26, 1982, Weekly Vista, the buffalo herd started with two buffalo in 1968 brought from the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma as a gift to Mr. Cooper by his friend Whit Stephens, an Arkansas industrialist and owner of the Arkla Village frontier town in southwest Arkansas. The buffalo were soon at home with reinforced fencing installed to provide a grazing pasture along Highway 71.

In August 1970, the monthly Village Vista had announced a nationwide property-owner contest to name the first addition to the herd, a female born August 7. The newspaper received 132 names among 500 entries, and the October issue announced a winner – Ron Whitely of Hemple, Mo. The winning name was Sugar Creek Sue.

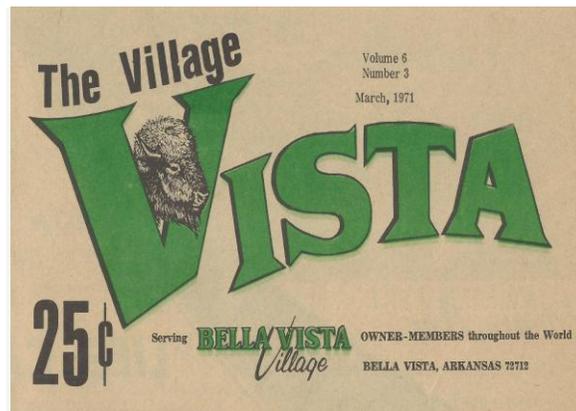
In May 1972, there was another addition to the herd. The Pioneer Club named this one...Sugar Creek Sue's brother became Pinion Pete. Then in June 1973, the Vista reported Sugar Creek Sue had just given birth to her first offspring.

The Benton County Democrat on June 4, 1975, referred to the buffalo as the "Unofficial Mascot" of Bella Vista, saying there were by then eight buffalo in the herd. Haden Evans, an employee of Cooper's construction department and the buffalo caretaker from the beginning, said they ate 15 gallons of dry feed every day, in addition to pasture grazing. They were a big attraction for the tourists but

Evans cautioned against approaching the fence if there were new calves in the herd as they were extremely protective of their newborn.

By July 1976, the Vista reported the herd was up to 10, and by July 1980, the report was 13 buffalo with 10 adults and 3 calves. As the herd grew, the feed bill grew, so Cooper decided it was time to sell them. By January, 1982, they were all dispersed, with two going to a private rancher and the rest to the Holiday Island Exotic Animal Park, located at that time near Eureka Springs.

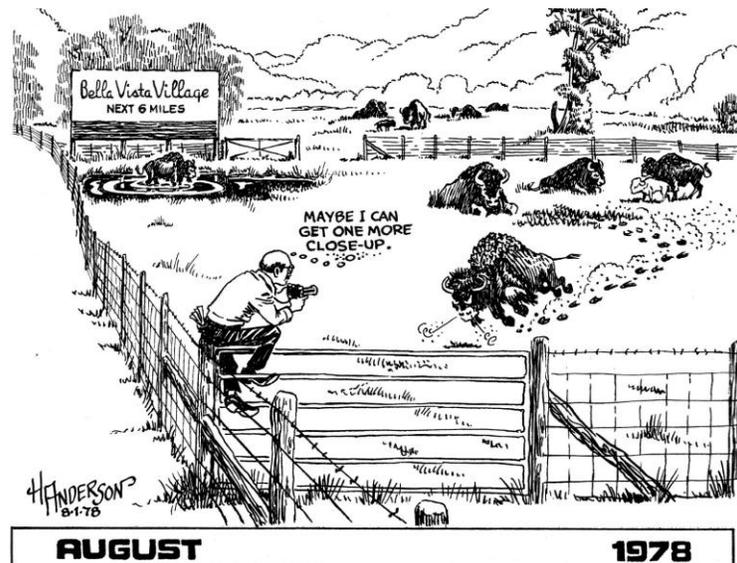
A DVD called *The Nature of Beautiful Bella Vista* is available for purchase at the Bella Vista Historical Museum. Featuring a variety of local animals and birds, it was compiled by resident Dustie Meads a few years ago, but unfortunately by then the buffalo of Bella Vista were already past history.



The buffalo became Bella Vista's unofficial mascot. When the monthly Village Vista (predecessor to the Weekly Vista) adopted a new format in March 1971, a buffalo head was incorporated into its masthead. It remained there until editorial cartoonist Henry Anderson designed a new masthead in March 1977.



Linebarger converted this barn to a dairy barn in 1941 and named it Wishing Spring for the spring across Highway 71 up on the hill that supplied water to the barn. The pasture filled the entire area between the highway and the barn, giving the buffalo, when they arrived in the late 1960's, plenty of room to graze.



Henry Anderson was a popular editorial cartoonist for the Vista and the Daily Record in the late 1970's. Over 300 of his cartoons are available for viewing at the Bella Vista Historical Museum, which also offers a book for sale of some of his best ones.



This picture of the buffalo was taken in 1970 right after the first baby, Sugar Creek Sue, was born.



Village Hall (formerly known as the Sunset Hotel) stands up on the hill in the background of this 1970 picture taken of the new baby, Sugar Creek Sue, and her mother.



Gloria Bennett Howell, whose journalism career is represented by an exhibit this month at the Bella Vista Historical Museum, took this picture while working for the Weekly Vista in the late 1970's.