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[First release announcing formation of the Papers of William F. Cody]

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Wyoming Legislature decision has broad potential for Buffalo Bill Historical Center*

The importance of the Wyoming Legislature's passage of a measure related to Buffalo Bill was not lost on Buffalo Bill Historical Center (BBHC) Executive Director Dr. Robert E. Shimp. "Learning that our legislators passed a bill—and decidedly, I might add—to provide the resources for the interpretation and organization of the wealth of material on Buffalo Bill is music to our ears," Shimp said on Thursday. "Naturally, we here at the BBHC have always known the magnitude of such a task; now the Wyoming Legislature's actions will help others recognize it, too."

The legislation, titled "Buffalo Bill Cody historical papers" had already passed unanimously in the Wyoming House, and on Thursday, February 22, the Senate passed the measure with only three dissenting votes. The bill now awaits the signature of Governor Dave Freudenthal.

The measure was sponsored by Representatives Colin Simpson (R-Cody), Rosie Berger (R-Big Horn), and Pete Illoway (R-Laramie) along with Senators Henry H.R. "Hank" Coe (R-Cody) and Ray Peterson (R-Cowley). The bill provides \$300,000 for the "collection, editing, and publishing of archival documents" of the Great Showman himself, William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody. The Wyoming Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources will be entrusted with determining recipients for the funds. Recipients must provide matching funds in order to obtain the grants.

"At the turn of the twentieth century, there were hardly any two more recognizable personalities on the face of the earth than Buffalo Bill and Mark Twain," Dr. Kurt Graham, curator of the BBHC's McCracken Research Library (MRL), said. "Today, one can find some wonderfully organized and accessible archival collections of Mark Twain's writings and images in several places throughout the country. Obviously, we, like the Wyoming Legislature, would like to see a similar effort to collect, edit, research, and catalog Buffalo Bill's papers—he merits that kind of attention."

Dr. Juti Winchester, curator of the BBHC's Buffalo Bill Museum concurs. She, like many academics before her, conducted a great deal of her dissertation research about Cody at the BBHC—even before she joined its staff. "A multitude of scholars have greatly valued the collection we have here. With the passage of this legislation, I'm hopeful we'll have the opportunity to make our treasures available to a broader audience," Winchester said.

The BBHC is continually researching and applying for grants for a variety of projects. As a result of a matching grant last fall from the Wyoming Community Foundation, for example, two of the MRL's most popular photography collections, the works of eminent Wyoming photographers Jack Richard and Charles Belden are now being digitally formatted.

"Knowing the Legislature has made these funds available will go a very long way toward our efforts to obtain other grants," Graham said. "We are in the midst of several grant applications and plan to note on each one, 'Take a look at what our legislators have done.'" Graham explained that many grantors require matching funds as a condition of their donation. The Wyoming Legislature's measure is the kind of action that can make a grantor more likely to provide funds for the requests made of them.

"As we begin to line up some possible sources of matching grants for our own Buffalo Bill Papers projects—which we're confident we can," Graham added, "you can bet we'll move quickly to apply for this new state funding as soon as we receive notice of Governor Freudenthal's signature."

For general information, visit www.bbhc.org or call 307.587.4771.

** The Buffalo Bill Historical Center is now the Buffalo Bill Center of the West; its website is centerofthewest.org. Graham, Winchester, and Shimp are no longer with the Center. House and Johnston are the current contacts, August 30, 2016.*