Coming of the Buffalo to the Reservation

by Pete Beaverhead

You have read how the Flatheads moved into the plains in the summer looking for buffalo.

Once they were near a place where the town of Shelby, Montana is now located. They found a large herd and set up camp. When the buffalo hunt began, a lot of the calves were orphaned because their mothers were killed.
A man named Samwell Hawk gathered a small herd of buffalo calves. When the tribe decided to move home he had the calves gathered together. Samwell and his herd would always be the last one in line as they moved home.

In the evening when camps were put up, Samwell would let his little herd graze and eat. As it got dark he would stake each one to the ground with ropes. Several of the calves died during the trip. By the time they reached Missoula ten calves had survived.
He moved them near Moiese where he had a log cabin. He had a pasture by the river for his buffalo.

They were in good shape by then and they grew well. In a year or two they started having calves and the herd began increasing in numbers.
One day Michel Pablo told him, "I want to buy your buffalo from you. Will you sell them to me?"
Samwell said, "Yes, if you pay me well, I'll sell."
So Michel bought Samwell's buffalo and moved them to Pablo. He made a pasture for them and built a high fence. The herd grew larger.

When the grass started growing in the spring, he moved the buffalo in wagons to a pasture along the Flathead River. He built high racks on the wagons and loaded two or three buffalo into a wagon. A lot of wagons were made for this purpose.

The buffalo stayed there until fall. Then they were hauled back to the winter pasture.
The buffalo herd grew so large that they ran out of pasture land. The pasture along the river had been eaten down to the ground. The fence had been built on three sides. The side toward the river was left unfenced so the buffalo could have water.

Some of the buffalo crossed the river at times.
That fall when Michel Pablo went back with his men to get his buffalo, he couldn’t get the ones that had crossed the river. They became wild.

A lot of Indians went across the river to hunt the stray buffalo, but they didn’t get all of them. There were two that were seen at times but were never killed.

That is how the buffalo got to the Flathead reservation.