The Passing of the Buffalo
* The cover and title page images from the book "The passing of the Buffalo" are tri-colour embossed and silk-screened (respectively). Beautiful design and shown throughout the zine for your enjoyment.

The artist is uncredited and, like most of the details of this story, presumably lost in time.
Finding this book felt destined. I probably would have gone into the bookstore anyway (I spend a lot of time in used bookstores when I travel) but that day I had a sense that something was calling me. I slipped its tiny unassuming spine from the stacks and immediately felt a giddy excitement when I saw the embossed Buffalo on the cover. It consumed me with its prologue of ornate poetry, 5 acts, and epilogue woven with detailed landscapes and precise timelines. It proclaimed the splendor of the wild Buffalo herds and the sickening progress of their demise. It was the perfect metaphor for our era of a declining environment. Why did I find this book now? Where would we be if this had been required reading for the last hundred years instead of collecting dust?

Since the day I picked up "The Passing of the Buffalo" by Buckskin I’ve been filled with questions and inspiration. I believe that it is now my responsibility to pass it and its message on to as many people as possible. This zine and its accompanying audio project are my first steps on my journey. Thank you for reading/listening.
After doing some basic research, I realized there was no information online, and except for one university library catalogue, the internet didn't know this book ever existed. This was uncharted territory. Who is Buckskin? How was this amazing work of Art forgotten and lost?

I emailed a specialist on Western Canadian literature.

The Passing of the Buffalo by Buckskin- Vancouver 1917, Selkirk Press

D.M.R. Bentley
To: Andrew Sisk

29 April 2011 18:09

Dear Andrew Sisk,

I think the author may be Francis Joseph Dickie (1890-1976). Best,
db

[Quoted text hidden]

D.M.R. Bentley, PhD, FRSC, FRSA,
Distinguished University Professor and
Carl F. Klinck Professor in Canadian Literature,
Department of English,
University of Western Ontario,
London, ON, N6A 3K7,
Canada.

OK. So, who is Francis Joseph Dickie?

Google Search results:

Francis Dickie was born in Carberry, Manitoba, on July 31, 1890. He began his writing career at an early age, selling his first short story when he was 16 years old. In 1906 he joined a Canadian Pacific Railway survey party but his desire to continue writing remained strong. Three years later he had left the survey party and set out across Alberta and British Columbia, riding trains through Washington, Oregon and California. From these experiences Dickie's first book, Strange Souls' Journeying, was published. In 1911 he joined the Calgary Herald as a reporter and a year later moved to the Edmonton Capital where he held various positions including dramatic editor. 1914 saw his marriage in Edmonton to Suzanne Garnier of Paris, after which they moved to Toronto. Dickie returned to B.C. shortly thereafter, working as a freelance writer in Vancouver, composing minor radio scripts and magazine articles.

1916 was a long time ago. I would be chasing ghosts and sitting through dead ends for months. Francis Joseph Dickie passed away in 1976.
The question: Is "Buckskin" Francis Joseph Dickie? His brief biography provides some clues that match the background and writing style profile of "Buckskin". For your consideration:

a) Francis Joseph Dickie had worked as a Canadian Pacific Railroad surveyor for 3 years, as well as, rode the rail cars along the Pacific coast and therefore had experience with the landscape that is so prominently featured in the book.

b) "The passing of the buffalo" is laid out like a play (prologue, 5 acts, and an Epilogue) and Dickie worked as a dramatic editor for an Edmonton newspaper, as well as, a writer of minor radio scripts for the CBC.

c) F.J.D. lived most of his life in British Columbia (with periods in Edmonton, Toronto, Paris, and eventually settling in Heriot Bay) and the publishing company, the Selkirk Press, was based in Vancouver around a time when Dickie would have had connections there.

F.J.D. = Buckskin?
The Recording -

So, what to do? The only thing I could do was write music on a guitar so that had to be the way to go. I decided I would write and record a soundtrack and use excerpts from the book to capture its essence as best as I could.

On a rainy spring night in my Montreal apt. I feverishly wrote and recorded a 10 minute demo which became the template for the final recording. A year later I was in Andy Magoffin's studio, The House of Miracles, with Pete Hall (a Northern Chorus, Blackhawk) recording the completed arrangements for lapsteel, guitar, Banjo, and Drums. Meanwhile, via correspondence, I had asked country singer, Ryan Cook, to record himself reading the passages from the book. After I had edited his spoken-word recordings for timing we rehearsed and recorded with the words as our only guide. It felt magical to record live off the floor to a spoken word track.

The interplay between the words and music seemed to vibrate in the same way. It felt complete.
My hope is that you will read "The Passing of the Buffalo", or at least listen to my interpretation, and tell others about it. I think there is much to be learned.

Listen: www.backwardmusic.com
Read: peel.library.valberta.ca/bibliography/4188.html
Collaborate: sisk.andrew@gmail.com