

# SECRETS OF ROME

## buffalo bill in rome

a first-hand account of visit at the colosseum, and of a meeting with pope leo xiii

Few know that, in 1890, Rome hosted Buffalo Bill's "Wild West Circus". We actually have a detailed account of those days spent in the eternal cities. In a booklet entitled "Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World" published in 1893, it is given a detailed account of the two most important episodes occurred on that occasion: a controversial competition and a meeting with the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIII. This is how was described the "Eternal City": «Then the "famed of the famous cities" of the world, Rome, was next visited, to be conquered through the gentle power of intellectual interest in, and the reciprocal pleasure exchanged by, its unusual visitors, the honor being given to "the outfit" as an organization, of attending a dazzling fete given in the Vatican by His Holiness Pope Leo XIII and of receiving the exalted Pontiff's blessing. The company were photographed in the Colosseum, which stately ruin seemed to silently and solemnly regret that its famed ancient arena was too small for this modern exhibition of the mimic struggle between that civilization (born and emanating from 'neath its very walls) and a primitive people who were ne'er dreamed of in a Rome's world-conquering creators' wildest flights of vivid imaginings. Strolling through its arena, gazing at its lions' dens, or lolling lazily on its convenient ruins, hearing its interpreted history—of Romulus, of Caesar, of Nero—roamed this band of Wild West Sioux (a people whose history in barbaric deeds equals, if not excels, the ancient Romans), now hand in hand in peace and firmly cemented friendship with the American frontiersmen—once gladiatorial antagonists un the Western Plains. They, listening to the tale on the spot, of those whose "Morituri te Salutant" was the short prelude to a savage death, formed a novel picture in historic frame! The Wild West in the Colosseum!— A picture of Native Americans and their tents standing on the lower level at the centre of the Colosseum illustrates the unusual story. The other important event during his stay in Rome was his and his circus attendance for the Anniversary Ceremony of Pope Leo XIII. It was March 3, 1890. According to an article published on the New York Herald the next day, «One of the strangest spectacles ever seen within the venerable walls of the Vatican was the dramatic entry of "Buffalo Bill" at the head of his Indians and cow-boys this morning when the ecclesiastical and secular military court of the Holy See assembled to witness the twelfth annual thanksgiving of Leo XIII, for his coronation. In the midst of the splendid scene, crowded with the old Roman aristocracy, and surrounded by walls immortalized by Michael Angelo and Rafael, there suddenly appeared a host of savages in war paint, feathers and blankets, carrying tomahawks and knives. A vast multitude surged in the great square before St. Peter's early in the morning to witness the arrival of the Americans. Suddenly, a tall and chivalrous figure appeared at the entrance, and all eyes were turned toward him. It was Colonel W. F. Cody, "Buffalo Bill". With a sweep of his great sombrero, he saluted the chamberlains, and then strode between the guards with his partner, Mr. Nate Salsbury, by his side. "Rocky Bear" led the Sioux warriors, who brought up the rear. They were painted in every color that Indian imagination could devise. Every man carried something with which to make big medicine in the presence of the great medicine man sent by the Great Spirit. The Indians and cowboys were ranged in the south corners of the Ducal Hall. Colonel Cody and Mr. Salsbury were escorted into the Sistine Chapel by chamberlains, where they were greeted by Miss Sherman, daughter of General Sherman. A Princess invited Colonel Cody to a place in the tribune of the Roman nobles. When the Pope appeared in the sedia gestatoria, carried above the heads of his guards, preceded by the Knights of Malta and a procession of cardinals and archbishops, the cowboys bowed and so did the Indians. "Rocky Bear" knelt and made the sign of cross. The Pontiff leaned affectionately toward the rude groups and blessed them. He seemed to be touched by the sight. As the Papal train swept on, the Indians became excited, and a squaw fainted. They had been warned not to utter a sound, and were with difficulty restrained from whooping. The Pope looked at Colonel Cody intently as he passed, and the great scout and Indian fighter bent low as he received the Pontifical benediction». The tone of the article well capture the exceptionality of this meeting, and one cannot avoid to smile and be almost moved by looking at the picture showing St. Peter's Square crowded with Native Americans and Cowboys!