The following text is from a CU Heritage Museum exhibit with captions provided by Ms. Allyson Smith. Also included are the comments of Mr. McKinney about the first "live" mascot, Mr. Chips.

THE CU MASCOT / MASCOTS

A dog, goat, donkey and buffalo were all informal CU mascots in the university’s early history. In 1888, silver and gold were chosen as the university’s colors, but no mascot was formally selected. During this period, CU athletic teams were often called the Silver and Gold.

CU students jumped into the breach and adopted live, unofficial mascots prior to the 1930s. In the 1890s, Engineering students loaned their dog mascot to various CU sports teams. The CU baseball team borrowed the same dog for their team picture. In 1912 university men presented a young goat as mascot for the football game against the Colorado School of Mines. Mines beat CU and kidnapped the goat. After an early death, the goat's stuffed body became a symbol of the two schools’ rivalry. The goat was stored in the Registrar’s Office in Macky Auditorium. Following a home game vs. University of Denver, the trophy goat disappeared and was never seen again.

A donkey replaced the goat during the Roaring ‘20s. On Oct. 30, 1923, a donkey named Clancy led a pre-game parade through the streets of Boulder. When Clancy vanished, a search party looked for him at the Colorado School of Mines, while others speculated that he wandered into the foothills. By mid-November, another donkey, Lady Nicotine, took Clancy’s place.

Finally, more than 50 years after the university opened, the CU students selected one of the most unforgettable college mascots in the country - the buffalo. In 1934, the student newspaper, Silver and Gold, decided CU needed an official mascot and sponsored a contest to select one. It offered the winner a $5 prize. More than 1,000 entries arrived from across the nation.

Local newspapers reported Claude Bates of Missouri and James Proffitt of Ohio as the dual winners for the entry “buffaloes.” Ten days later, the newspaper declared Boulder resident Andrew Dickson the winner when a follow-up revealed that his “buffalo” suggestion arrived earliest.

Weeks later a group of students paid $25 to rent a live buffalo calf and a cowboy handler to appear at the final game of the football season. The buffalo brought good fortune, and CU beat the University of Denver 7-0. School spirit reached new heights during the 1941 season. Mayor Benjamin Stapleton donated one of the first buffaloes to CU in 1941.

Mister Chips made his debut at the 1957 CU Days kickoff rally. Mahlon White donated him to the university and Phi Epsilon Phi, a sophomore men’s honorary, was responsible for his care. A series of buffaloes stampeded on and off Folsom Field through the early 1960s, establishing a path for Ralphie. Ralphie charged through two turbulent decades in United States history, the 1960s and 1970s. She arrived on campus from Sedgewick, Colorado, in 1966 as a $150 gift from John Lowery, father of CU freshman Bill Lowery. The student body named her “Rraalph” after the sounds she made as she ran. When an observant fan noticed the bison was a female, she became Ralphie. A giant rubber tractor tire served as a food dish for Ralphie. Bison eat only plant material, including alfalfa, oats and grass. The “men in Ralphie’s life,” as her early handlers were known, guided the buffalo out of her trailer. Runners were convinced that she was eager to seize the spotlight and enjoyed performing at football games.
Ralphie achieved national celebrity status. In 1970 Air Force Academy cadets kidnapped her, sandwiched her between two giant buns and paraded her around Falcon Stadium with a six-foot bottle of catsup. Nevertheless, the CU football team beat the Falcons 49-19. A student body favorite, Ralphie was voted Homecoming Queen in 1971. During her coronation as Homecoming Queen in 1971 Ralphie dumped her crown on Folsom Field. Ralphie gave birth to four calves but only one survived to adulthood. Born in 1975 and named in honor of the university’s forthcoming centennial year, Spirit was introduced to the public with her mom at Homecoming. She was far too aggressive to become mascot-in-waiting.

The legendary Ralphie attended every home game and CU bowl appearance for 13 years until her retirement. She died in the spring of 1982 at age 17, a grandmother by buffalo standards.

Ralphie II served from 1978-87. Nicknamed Moon or Moonshine, she was raised and trained by Gregg Mackenzie and was cared for during final days by Johnnie and Shaaron Parker.

CU’s second Ralphie had big hooves to fill. The Bank of Boulder donated her to CU, after buying her for $1,000 from her caretaker, Gregg Mackenzie. Some said Moon, her nickname, was short for Moonshine, while others claimed she was born under a full moon. The name Ralphie was so popular that she and all future buffalo mascots would be called Ralphie.

At the last home game of the 1978 season when Ralphie II made her debut, CU lost to Iowa State 20-16. A collegiate favorite, her fans chose “Ralphie Goes to Hollywood” as their Homecoming theme in 1985. A year later, Oklahoma State pranksters sneaked into their college’s veterinary clinic and spray painted “OSU” on her back in orange letters.

Ralphie II died unexpectedly at age 12 after a 31-17 CU win over Stanford. Some speculated that she died of a broken heart, having suffered through six out of eight losing seasons.

In June 1985 a bison calf was orphaned at birth on a Wyoming prairie. Chuck Brackenbury brought the calf back to his ranch where she was bottle-fed and raised with horses and a goat. Johnnie (Hist ‘62) and Shaaron Parker (Bus ‘61) bought the 2-year-old buffalo and donated her to CU. Ralphie III served from 1987-97, was named “Buffy” at birth and nicknamed “Tequila” later for her fiery disposition. Ralphie III’s speed was clocked at 25 miles per hour. She was trained by Johnnie and Shaaron Parker.

A popular guest, Ralphie III received about 500 invitations for room and board during her road trips. En route to the Orange Bowl, she stayed at the New Orleans police horse stables. Living up to her reputation she and a handful of horses escaped into a downtown park during the night. In 1988, Ralphie III ran for student body president with the slogan “What’s It To You?” While Ralphie may have been the meanest-looking candidate, she lost the election.

She died at age 13 at the Parker’s ranch in Hudson, Colorado. Johnnie Parker, who cared for three Ralphies, claimed that by attending nine bowl games, including the 1991 national championship game, Ralphie III had no equal.

Ralphie IV has served from 1998 until recently. Named "Rowdy" at birth, she was trained by Johnnie Parker. She is now cared for by alumni, Kevin Priola and Ben Frei. Ralphie IV was born in 1997 on the Flying D Ranch in Montana. When she was a month old Rowdy, as she was
known, was rescued from the jaws of a coyote and bottle-fed by ranch hands. The owner of the ranch, media mogul Ted Turner, agreed to donate the baby bison to CU after ranch hands read an article in *Bison World* magazine citing CU’s need for a new mascot.

Ralphie received a clean bill of health when she arrived in Colorado. By law, bison must be vaccinated against a host of diseases, including brucellosis and tuberculosis. Brucellosis, also called undulant fever, causes miscarriages in cattle.

Ralphie IV captured the hearts of CU fans as a 400-pound calf at the Colorado State University game when CU won 42-14. Four years later, she made national headlines when Violet Stromberg, age 96, bequeathed $40,730 for the care of Ralphie IV and future Ralphies. Others have donated to support Ralphie.

The Ralphies have been "handled" by a series of student handlers. Originally called "the men in Ralphie’s life," handlers, who were sophomore class officers, appeared in 1966 with six-month old Ralphie. When this same group returned from summer break to find her a much heavier buffalo, they threatened mutiny. The Ralphie Handler Program has evolved into a structured athletic program. Like other athletes, handlers must maintain an overall GPA of 2.0, while attending 85 percent of all practices and games. Handlers earn varsity letters.

The legendary Ralphie is one of the nation’s most demanding mascots. Handlers must be able to run 13 miles per hour alongside a 1,300-pound animal. More mundane responsibilities include cleaning and washing her before games and picking up dung (chips).

At games today five of the ten handlers race with Ralphie. One runner follows behind carrying an over-sized CU flag. The other handlers do crowd control, open the gates of the trailer, capture Ralphie if she gets loose and serve as backups in case of injury.

Young Ralphie IV proved a challenge for both male and female runners, in training and on game days. In spite of their bulk, bison are both agile and fast.

In the early days of the program, the all-male runners initiated the tradition of wearing western-style attire.

Chip is CU's costumed buffalo. This human mascot was a finalist in 2003 in the National Mascot of the Year contest. For the 1991 season, Chip found a partner in Chipette. Theirs, alas, was a one-season relationship. *CU Athletics Media Relations*

Dubbed Ralphie’s big brother, Alfie is an inflatable balloon that stands two stories high. He arrived on the scene at a rally before the CU vs. Colorado State University football game in August 2002. Alfie appears at CU-Boulder Alumni Association pre-game parties and other events. Coloradan, August 2002.

I received the following additional information from William P. McKinney, BS Business 1959, confirmed by a 1957 CU Days photograph in the Colorado Daily. We continue to look for the articles he mentioned so that he can prove it to his unbelieving children.

Recently, Ralphie V, I believe, took over.
WILLIAM P. MCKINNEY RECALLS

As the Buffalo project is brought to mind tid-bits come back to me: The Dean was Carlson I believe. After he told me this long soulful story about what had happened in 1920 he never said no or don't get the Buffalo but I remember when I came back to report to him he was very surprised that I had continued. But again he never said no except to worry aloud how we could ever protect the crowd if the Buffalo got loose. We thought about shooting him but that wouldn't work the crowd was in the background, then we thought about bring him in a cage or truck but that wouldn't be very impressive, we had to find a way to bring him in alive and "kicking" as it were thus the idea of 5 guys on each side.

I remember how excited I was when Butch told me they had Buffalo down on their ranch in Pueblo.

So he goes home one weekend and comes back with this Buffalo. The Buffalo is 6 months old says Butch and I contemplate that we can handle a buffalo this size -- there's just one problem says Butch, he's wild, untamed and he is as fast as a horse and much stronger. He's never been handled. Well I said we've got some cowboys around here, they'll find a way to handle him I said confidently they'll love the project. But how will he handle the crowd noise and all the activity. That's when I got the idea of the CU Days parade. I then set out and contacted veterinarians in and around the area and none of them knew how to handle such a large and wild animal. So I went to the head of the Denver Zoo and that turned out badly because he just gave the newspapers a negative story about how "you'll never train that buffalo they're too wild.

That's when I got the idea of tranquilizing him. So I then went to several vets and asked how much tranquilizer should we give him -- we didn't want him to pass out and look dead in the truck. Nobody knew the answer to that either until one vet said start out giving him 5cc's and keep giving him 5 cc until he lies down. So we started early in the morning and started giving him 5 cc every half hour. He never did lie down or seemed to be fazed by the tranquilizer at all so we started the parade after giving him a final 7 cc and, as I said before, he laid down half way thru but was up on his feet by the end of the parade. I think that was what satisfied the Dean when he saw him in the parade and he wasn't creating a fuss but I had "forgotten" to tell the Dean about the tranquilizer and that one vet said it was enough to kill 10 men. No wonder he was laying down.