THE OVERLAND CATTLE TRADE

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the North Texas State College in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

By

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Elsa, Texas

August, 1952
One of the most fascinating subjects in all American history is the story of the great cow country. Its heyday was the twenty-year period from 1868 to 1888. It extended from below the Rio Grande on the south to well up in Saskatchewan in western Canada on the north. East and west it reached from the Rocky Mountains to about the Missouri-Arkansas border. It occupied a region nearly 2,000 miles long and from 200 to 700 miles wide—almost a million square miles in one vast open range. For countless years this region had been the home of millions of wild buffaloes, but in a very short time after 1868 it was transformed into a gigantic cattle kingdom. After two decades of spectacular existence, it just as suddenly passed away, and the cattle industry entered a new and in many ways an entirely different era.

Texas cattle and Texas cattlemen played leading roles in this great drama of the West. The warm southern plains of Texas were the breeding place—the "incubator"—for thousands of longhorn cattle, the broad prairies to the north were their feeding grounds, and the newly established railroad towns in Kansas and other states were the shipping points.
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CHAPTER I

THE COW COUNTRY

The cattle kingdom had its origin in Texas before the Civil War. After the war it expanded over all the plains area. The physical foundation of the cattle kingdom was grass, and it extended over all the grasslands not occupied by farms. The boundaries of the kingdom tended to follow very closely the semi-arid portions of the Great Plains Country.

The cattle business in America had its birth in Mexico. Cortes brought cattle to Mexico from Spain approximately four hundred years ago. He also introduced the branding iron. The industry gradually expanded and extended northward. However, almost two centuries passed before the cattle business crossed the Rio Grande.¹

The first cattle in Texas were brought into the country by the Spaniards. There were probably a few cattle with the expedition which established the Mission San Francisco de las Tejas in 1690, but relatively few were left as a result of that enterprise. The expedition under Ramon, which planted the first permanent settlement in Texas in 1716, brought into the region about one thousand head of livestock consisting of cattle, sheep, and goats.²

The first cattle brought in by the Anglo-Americans were chiefly milch cows. The Kuykendalls drove several head of cows to the Colorado River from Natchitoches in 1821. In 1823 a man named Jones purchased sixty head of cattle in Louisiana and drove them to his farm on the Brazos without losing a single head. By 1830 there were about 100,000 cattle in Texas, of which the Spanish breed numbered about four fifths.

The number of cattle in Texas was greatly reduced during the Revolution, an enormous amount being necessary to supply the Texas and Mexican armies. It was the cattle left between the Nueces and the Rio Grande by the fleeing Mexicans that became the wild cattle of a later date.

Practically all of these early cattle were longhorns. Much has been said and written about them. A history of longhorn cattle is vitally connected with the history of Texas. Texans never grow tired of hearing about their peculiar characteristics, although over half a century has passed since they have been of any economic value.

The original cattle kingdom of Texas was a diamond-shaped region just south of San Antonio. It extended west to Laredo on the

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3 Ibid., p. 138.

Rio Grande, south to the edge of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, east to the Nueces River, and north to San Antonio.  

The diamond offered almost ideal conditions for raising cattle because grass was plentiful. In some sections the grass remained green throughout the year. The country was mostly an open range but had some timber for shade and protection. Since the climate was mild, the ranchers had no fear of snow and blizzards, though an occasional norther swept down. Wild horses roamed the plains for anyone who could catch and ride them. The region was fairly well supplied with water.

Thousands of wild longhorns were found wandering over the country when the early ranchers came to the diamond-shaped region. In order to start a herd, many of the ranchers put their cowboys to work capturing these wild cattle. This was no small job, as most of the cattle remained hidden in the brush during the daytime, venturing out on the prairie only at night. Most of the work had to be done early in the morning, commencing an hour or two before daylight.

It was in the cattle country that men first began to manage cattle on horseback. It was chiefly the use of the horse that distinguished ranching in the West from stock raising in the East.

Buffaloes and deer could have been no wilder than the early longhorns and they would fight like grizzly bears. Longhorns always cared for their young with the ferocity of wild animals. They had sensitive ears, eyes, and noses as aids to protection. Calves were identified more by smell than by sight.

Next to maternal affection, the longhorns' attachment to their native soil was a predominant trait. After the cattle kingdom extended over most of the Great Plains area, this peculiarity was noticeable. Steers that grazed on the ranges of Montana hankered to return to the sunny Nueces country. The cattle escaping along the trails back-tracked to their original stamping grounds like lost kittens.

During the decade and a half following the Civil War, longhorn cattle were the economic salvation of Texas. Since they were a product of the wilderness, they did well where blooded cattle would have perished of thirst and travel. They were more easily handled than blooded stock, both in the roundup and upon the trail. The breadth of their horns proved to be a great asset because it spaced them better, giving plenty of room so they could travel easier and avoided the danger of getting over-heated. Their hoofs were tougher and their legs longer than those of ordinary cattle. They ranged a much wider scope of country, went longer without water, and survived more hardships than blooded cattle could have. Old age did not find them toothless, as was often the case with improved cattle.
The Texas longhorn made more history than any other breed of cattle the world has ever known. The driving of millions of cattle over the Chisholm Trail and other trails northward after the Civil War did much to unite the North and South. Particularly did it unite Texas with the West. Where buffaloes by the millions had grazed over Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, Wyoming, Montana, South Dakota, and North Dakota, the longhorns came to occupy the land. 6

These pioneer cattle have now been supplanted to such an extent by Herefords and other highgrade cattle that they have almost vanished. It is good to know that the United States Government is attempting to preserve this breed from extinction. A small herd of longhorns, which many people travel a long way to see, is now grazed in the Wichita National Forest Reserve near Lawton, Oklahoma. 7

Cattlemen who owned their land were few, indeed. They might own around one hundred thousand head of cattle and not have a legal title to a single square foot of land. The land was a part of the public domain. The grass was one of the basic resources of the frontier. The ranchers were always ready to defend their rights to the free grass.

The cattlemen of the West have been noted for their independence but practically every great cattle fortune of the early days, say to about 1885, was founded on direct government relief. The beginners did not own a foot of land, a sprig of grass, or enough water to fill a stetson hat. The government furnished land, grass, and water. It is true that the ranchman had the same right to appropriate

6 J. Frank Dobie, On the Open Range, p. 82.
7 Ibid., p. 83.
a homestead that the farmers had and according to reports the wise ones made good use of this right by having a dozen of their cowboys homestead, establish "residence," and transfer the title to them. 8

The nucleus of a herd was easy to obtain, for cattle were reasonably cheap and wild ones were to be had for the taking. Since the grass was free and plentiful, and the climate mild, little tending was necessary. Cattlemen rushed into cattle raising for profit. Northerners, Easterners, and even Englishmen entered the cow business. The area of the cattle kingdom within a decade after its beginning was more than twice that of the cotton kingdom during the 1850's. 9 While prices fluctuated somewhat, relatively they were good, and fortunes awaited the cowmen who would manage well, work hard, and fight sometimes.

Ranchers had no trouble getting rich on paper. Their theory of one-fourth calves and one-twelfth steers was not far wrong, granted there was grass enough. A bunch of 1200 ordinary stock cattle will produce 300 calves and 100 steers in a year. The sale of steers will yield an easy income and the excess calves over steers will produce a net increase of one-sixth of the bunch. The number of cattle in Texas more than doubled between 1875 and 1885. The number nearly doubled between 1880 and 1890. 10

In the almost total absence of private ownership of land, there was much discussion of grass and water rights. Custom eventually built up unwritten laws regarding range rights, and as the cowmen

8Walter Prescott Webb, Divided We Stand, p. 173.
9Holden, op. cit., p. 20.
increased in number, there were not so many conflicts as might have been expected. Fights and ill-feelings were much more common between cattlemen and sheepmen than between cattlemen and cattlemen.

The cattlemen prospered as the years passed, many of them becoming fabulously wealthy. The more prosperous ones were known as cattle barons. The wealthy cattle barons would place thousands of cattle on the open ranges; some of the ranges contained from three thousand to ten thousand acres. Line camps were established on the outer edge of the range where the cowhands rode line everyday and always tried to drift the cattle off the lines toward the center.

Many of the richer cattle barons did not live on the ranges; instead, they lived in neighboring towns. Each of them had range bosses to look after his interests. The cattle baron in many respects was a more lordly person than the cotton planter. The loyalty of his cowboys to his interests was like that of a vassal to the feudal lord.

The cattle barons sometimes lived like princes, their wealth pouring down to them from the North in exchange for the great herds that went up the trails. Most of them lived expensively. Their wives wore diamonds and rode in carriages imported from London. They traveled in Europe and were among the first Americans to create the impression in Europe that this was a country of boundless wealth.  

11William M. Raine and Will C. Barnes, Cattle, p. 22.
It would be a mistake to assume that all cattlemen were of the class just described. A majority of them were not as fortunate in a financial respect as were the cattle barons. They lived on their own ranches, taking a keen interest in everything concerned with the cattle business.

These old ranchers were typical of the cattle frontier that is so well known in American history. They believed in simple, quick justice without the technicalities of law. Anyone who would forsake a friend or go back on his word did not have the right to live. When anyone was killed in a gunbattle a cowman would ask whether there had been a grudge between the fighters. If there had been a fair fight, they could not understand why the state wanted to prosecute the survivor. If they happened to be on a jury they would not convict a man under these circumstances.

The cattle kingdom was largely a world within itself, with a culture all its own, complete and self-satisfying. The cattle kingdom worked out its own problems; it formulated its own law, and did it chiefly upon extra-legal grounds.

Practically all ranchers were noted for their generosity and warm-heartedness. One of the unwritten laws of the range was that when a party of cowboys rode up to a house and asked the women to cook them something to eat, the women would do it, no matter what
time of day it happened to be or what they were doing. Hospitality was an outstanding characteristic. Not only would the early ranchers help their neighbors, but a stranger was never turned away from their doors. If the stranger happened to be sick, he was cared for and nursed back to health, if possible.

Most counties in the cow country were sparsely settled. The largest and likely the only town in the county was the county seat. The ordinary towns consisted of two or three general merchandise stores, a saloon, a jail, and sometimes a church and school.

Few towns boasted of a bank. Money was usually kept at home, either hid or buried around the house. If cattle were bought on a neighboring range, money was carried in gold or silver and the debt was paid dollar for dollar. Sometimes gold was placed in a money belt strapped around the waist. Silver, which was more bulky, would be put in ducking sacks and thrown on pack horses.

Ranching, like any other business, had its vexations; prairie fires were always a constant dread. Dry weather increased the danger of fire. If a fire started the only thing to do was to try to stop it. All efforts were practically useless if the grass was tall and the wind high. The fire would last until it reached a creek, canyon, or a river wide enough to stop it. If the grass was short and the wind was not so high, the cowboys would kill a large beef, skin the animal, and tie two lariat
ropes to the flesh side. Then, two cowboys, one riding behind the blaze and the other riding before it, would ride at full speed dragging the hide, flesh side down, between them, along the burning edge of the grass and snuff out the blaze. This was hard on horses and dangerous to men.

Later fire guards were used by plowing a series of furrows across the range. When a fire started it would burn to one of these guards and stop. 12

Predatory animals were also a nuisance. Coyotes and panthers took their toll of calves. Cattlemen lobbied in the state legislature year after year for a law granting bounties for scalps of these animals, but representatives from East Texas usually voted the measure down.

In the absence of fences the cattle of different owners naturally intermingled a great deal. Moreover, the winter northers caused the cattle to drift south in large numbers for many miles. In the smooth open country the drift was greater than in the breaks of the hilly and timbered country. Therefore, the cattle of various owners were mixed and those of a single owner were often scattered over hundreds of square miles. This brought about the necessity of branding cattle with marks of ownership.

Choosing a brand was a matter of great importance to the cowmen of the days of the open range. The cattleman's brand had to be individual

12 Holden, op. cit., p. 46.
and distinctive. Properly registered and applied, it became his stamp of ownership. Many famous old cattle brands are being registered in the United States today as trademarks. 13

At the various county seats brands were recorded in brand books to avoid duplication. Since some of the ranches were so large, the same brand was often recorded by the same owner in several counties. Every cattleman owned a brand book which gave the home, location, owners, and brands of every other cattleman. A cow was often passed from roundup to roundup back to her owner's ranch without the owner ever seeing her until she got home.

Various and sundry brands and earmarks were inflicted upon the cattle. Branding was more popular than earmarking because more variety was made possible through the use of brands. Each cow carried its own life history in signs burned deep into its hide. If a cow passed its days uneventfully on one ranch until it was driven to a northern market or died of old age, it bore only one brand, the mark of its owner. But cattle that passed from ranchman to ranchman were scarred with many branding irons, until there was a confusion of letters and figures. These cows often presented a highly literary appearance. 14

Altering brands was one of the methods of the cattle thief, commonly known as rustlers. This practice was never very successful.

The most skilled rustler could not ordinarily cover up his work of blotting out old brands. However, some brands could be slightly enlarged and added to without detection. Hence greater care was taken in brand selection. Cattle rustling was never practiced as extensively and successfully as "dime" novels and "wild West" motion pictures of today would have us to believe.

Humane societies have crusaded against using the branding iron for many years, but despite many experiments nothing has been found to take its place. Branding by the use of some kind of fluid has been tried repeatedly without a very high degree of success. Branding is not unduly cruel and the pain caused by it lasts only a short time. It would be safe to say that as long as there are ranches there will be cattle brands.

The brands even invaded the realm of the ranch women. House furnishings were at times decorated with the proud coat of arms of the family, the cattle brand. The rancher's wife in some instances possessed a priceless quilt consisting of blocks upon which the brands of her friends and neighbors, perhaps for hundreds of miles around, had been embroidered.  

Each ranchman had a personal interest in his neighbors' roundup. There was usually a general roundup in which all the cattlemen whose

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free range overlapped participated. It was the custom to send one or two cowboys to attend the various ranch roundups so that the straying calves might be branded with the symbols of the cows they followed. Then they could all be returned to their respective owners.

There was a fall as well as a spring roundup, its chief object being to brand summer calves and the spring calves overlooked in the earlier roundups. If a calf was not branded before it quit following its mother, it became a "maverick" and was likely to acquire an owner other than its mothers.

Webster's dictionary defines the word "maverick" as an unbranded animal, referring especially to a motherless calf. The men of the cow country used the same definition except they considered such an animal a "maverick" if it was over a year old. The explanation of the origin of the term "maverick" has become a part of the folklore of the range. The legend concerning the word is told with many variations.

One story commonly related regarding the term is that in the '40's or '50's an enterprising cattleman by the name of Maverick made a business of running his own brand on every stray cow or steer he found roaming from its home pastures. In time all unbranded cattle came to be known as "mavericks."

16Ibid.
The story is told of another Mr. Maverick, a man not interested in the cattle business, who was given several hundred cattle on an old debt. Mr. Maverick placed the cattle on an island near the coast of Texas, where they increased in numbers and eventually wandered to the mainland. The Negro who had been in charge was negligent and many of his neighbors threw an acquisitive lariat over the Maverick cattle, branding them whenever they found them.  

Another version of the tale came from Kansas. A Mr. Maverick is said to have moved to the Republic of Texas where he was surprised to find everyone's stock branded. This practice had not been introduced in his native state. The chicken-hearted Mr. Maverick thought it cruel to brand cattle and therefore left his unbranded. His cattle were known as "mavericks" because they bore no brands; but, needless to say, the cattle were soon wearing brands of the cattle owners of the vicinity.  

What appears to be the most authentic and generally accepted account of this story is that a man named M. A. Maverick of San Antonio, Texas, left his herd of cattle on the open range for another man to attend. No roundup was ever held, and his cattle were scattered far and wide. When the cowboys of the region found an unbranded animal, they concluded that they had found a "maverick" and settled the question of

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17Ibid., p. 3.  
18Ibid.
ownership then and there. A descendant of the Maverick in question has given his sanction to this version of the tale. 19

After the cattle had been rounded up, they were often crowded together at the roundup ground, which presented a scene of great activity. The rising dust could be seen for miles, much of it getting into the cowpunchers' noses and throats. The roundup always led to other jobs; the first being the process of "cutting out." Before the days of pens to hold the cattle, the roping and branding of calves and the "cutting out" took place on the open prairie. A number of men were then needed to keep the cattle from scattering.

A "roping" and "cutting" horse was very valuable in this kind of work. It was unbelievable the way a six-hundred-pound horse could "hold" and "throw" a twelve-hundred-pound steer. 20 Almost equally wonderful was the pursuit by the "cutting horse" of a particular steer or cow until the latter was driven panting from the herd.

In the days of the free range it was a common joke that an outfit never ate its own beef during a roundup or any other time, for that matter. The killing of another rancher's steer or heifer was generally winked at and excused by the knowledge that matters would be evened up by the owner in the same manner. It was an unwritten law that

19 Ibid.

20 Benedict and Lomax, op. cit., p. 175.
cattle killed for beef should not be accounted for at the stock meetings where ranchers gathered.

The rounding up of cattle, branding calves, watching for screw-worms and fever ticks, killing coyotes, and riding lines all made up a part of the routine of ranch life. The cowboys carried out these routine duties, supervised by the owner or boss. An almost perfect democracy prevailed between the boss and the cowboys except where Negroes and Mexicans were involved.

"The American cowboy was a kind of offshoot of the Mexican vaquero, and a distant relative of the South American gaucho." He was indispensable to the rancher and has become a romantic figure in Western history. However, the early Texas cowboy was far from being a romantic character. He lived hard and worked hard; he was uneducated, knowing little about anything but cattle and cow ponies, having little, if any, taste for reading, but he enjoyed a practical joke or a smutty story. He loved danger but would rather fight with his pistols than his fists; his loves also included tobacco, liquor, and women. He had no knowledge nor respect for law, religion, or God, making profanity and slang his language. He smoked, chewed, drank, shot, and knifed pretty well. The cowboys, looking lean and hungry, were likely to be in bad health in later years because they usually had unbalanced

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21 Wortham, op. cit., V, 135.
diets in cattle camps and on the ranches, and their conceptions of sanitation were vague.

Not all cowboys were drunkards. Some of them did not drink at all and others only drank on certain occasions. When they drank they gulped their liquor straight. This added to their fierceness of temper and promptness to quarrel. The cowboy was no man to argue with when he was drinking, always ready to settle disputes by a revolver shot. But he was a good partner, ready to help a friend at the risk of his own life. "Brave and reckless, he held his life cheaper than that of his pony or a steer."22

No better rider than the cowboy ever lived. He rode close to the saddle, as his seat was easy. His leather chaps, flannel shirt, and bandanna fitted loosely, but not his high-heel boots. The boots were tight and so high-heeled that he toddled when he walked. Since he lived in the saddle, he detested walking, even for a short distance, partly because his boots were not made for that purpose.

When it came to hard work the men of those days have never been equalled. Day or night, rain or shine, in the deepest snow of the winter or the blistering heat of the summer, they never shirked or held back. Probably there never was a class of working men who had such long hours, suffered more hardships, and put up with more privations

than the old-time cowboy. No insurance company would in those days insure the life of a cowboy. His life was filled with too many dangers. Prairie fires, swollen rivers, stampedes, storms, freezing blizzards, fighting cattle, man-killing horses, holes for horses to step into and trees for them to run against, desperate men and savage Indians all made up the dangers which threatened a cowboy.

In spite of all these hardships and dangers the cowboys seldom complained to their fellow workers, and never to an outsider. In fact, they were very distant and reserved with strangers and outsiders. They usually were courteous and polite but did not encourage familiarity. Few cowboys would wail about having more than their share of work, nor would they voice any irritation about something that all cowboys in the outfit suffered in common. The hardships needed no advertising. Cheerfulness had to be maintained; or if not cheerfulness, silence.

Usually cowboys talked as little as possible on the job. Instructions were given in short snappy sentences and obeyed without comment if they had been made clear. Talking at night around the campfire on the open range was not uncommon. One of the subjects the cowboys frequently discussed at night was the stars and the moon. Two once had an argument over whether the person burning brush on the moon was a man or a woman. 23 The stars were also used as time pieces,

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23 J. Frank Dobie, A Vaquero of the Brush Country, p. 98.
since the cowboys seldom had watches. Money invested in watches was seldom profitable as the watches usually got wet in crossing rivers and would not run any more.

Most cowboys knew nothing, and cared less, about the correct use of English. They developed a lingo all their own. In a cattle outfit the owner was called the "big boss," whereas the foreman of any particular bunch of men was called the "straw boss." The leader of any group of line riders was the "line boss." Ordinarily the cowboy was known as a "waddy" or "screw" or "buckaroo." A green or new cowhand was called a "lent."24

Cowboys never asked personal questions, or any questions concerning the past life of one of their group. When a new man joined the outfit, he was taken into the group without a thought of where his past life had been spent or what he had done in previous years. Unless he volunteered the information himself, his past was a closed book.

Few of the old-time cowboys had more than a hazy idea of the value of money, except that with it they could purchase high-heeled boots, Stetson hats, fancy silk handkerchiefs, pearl-handled six-shooters, cartridges, and drinks. Hence, the cowboy was as free with his money as with his oaths.

It would cost around $500.00 for a stylish and serviceable outfit. A saddle with silver inlaid and filigreed might cost $300.00, yet serviceable saddles could be

24 J. Marvin Hunter, The Trail Drivers of Texas, p. 331.
bought for $100.00 plus another hundred for a silver mounted bridle and spurs to match. Fifty dollars for a gold mounted sombrero, another fifty for a saddle blanket, and $25.00 for a quirt and lariat helped to make the five hundred vanish. A Colt "45" would cost $50.00 if it were pearl-handled and gold mounted. A Winchester rifle would take $75.00 more and a pair of chaps would leave $25.00. This would buy a cow pony. If the cowboy intended to make a trip up the trail, he added a raincoat. 25

Cowboys did not often wear coats, but they always wore vests. Its main asset was the storage room the vest provided. Tobacco was always carried in the pockets of the vest.

One of the most useful articles of cowboy attire was a large handkerchief worn around the neck. He knotted the handkerchief at the back of his neck instead of in front, and pulled it over his mouth and nose for protection against smoke and dust while branding and driving cattle. When the range rider got up in the morning and went down to the water hole to wash his face, he used his bandana for a towel. After he roped his bronco he usually had to blindfold the animal before he could get a bridle on it. The bandana was used again. If he saw a calf that needed branding while he was working, he would use the bandana to tie the animal's feet provided he did not have a short rope.

A cowboy often spread his bandana over dirty, muddy water and used it as a strainer to drink through. If the bandana was dirty, it probably was not as dirty as the other apparel of the cowboy. The

25 Branch, op. cit., p. 18.
American cowboy borrowed much of his dress from the Mexican vaquero.

A few cowboys carried two guns, but that was usually for show. It was seldom that two guns ever had the advantage over one. Men who could really use one were scarce. Many men who carried guns let them rust and get out of order. If, with guns in such condition, the cowboy got into fast company, he was just out of luck.

Cowboys had fighting courage, but usually courage behind a six-shooter, as they knew little about fist fighting. Many of them planned to get the "drop" and did not mind shooting a man through the window or in his back. Because of this fear most gunmen sat with their backs to the wall.

During the winter occasional dances were held at larger ranches and in the frontier towns. Formal dress included the cowboy's guns. The rest was left to his personal taste. Many cowboys wore broad-brimmed hats, jingling spurs, and chaps on the dance floor.

Cowboys, usually in poor physical condition, often had running sores as a result of kicks of calves; fingers cut to the bone by hot ropes slipping through their hands. Most outfits had a man or two suffering from boils and carbuncles. First-aid kits were unheard of, but powdered alum, patent medicines, in the form of pills and powders advertised to do anything, could often be found around the chuck wagon. A chew of tobacco tied with a strip from one of the cook's dish towels
was the common dressing for boils. A bad cut was usually smeared with axle grease.

The cowboy was by no means the only important personage on the ranch. There was the cook, autocrat of the chuck wagon, guardian of pots and pans. He exercised a tyranny over food. No one dared to incur his ill will, for he had ways of getting even. He was not the butt of jokes or the object of pranks. "As techy as a cook" is still a ranch byword. 26

A cook took great pride in his work, adoring compliments and detesting complaints. Beans and bacon, with canned tomatoes or some other canned vegetable by way of variety, were his staples. A stray yearling furnished fresh meat. Pie, always of dried or canned apples, was sometimes served. Coffee, usually without cream or sugar, was the universal drink.

Cooks ordinarily were paid $15.00 to $25.00 a month more than riders. Long before the wagon crew was gathered for the spring work, the wagon boss had his cook hired, frequently paying him wages for a month or two before he was needed, just to hold him.

The cook never took part in the management of the cattle, unless he was allowed to swap places with one of the cowboys as a rare diversion. He was seldom a good rider.

The cowboys often nicknamed the cook. Some of the more common nicknames were "sheffi," "dough roller," "coocy," and "biscuit shooter." His cry when calling the men to a meal was, "Come and get it!" \[27\]

The Civil War naturally retarded the growth of the cattle kingdom; however, after 1875, the expansion of the cattle industry was phenomenal. As early as 1851 David S. Files moved the first herd into Hill County; the next year, Robert K. Wylie drove a few cattle into Erath County; and 1857 was the year in which Charles Goodnight drove a herd to Palo Pinto County. \[28\]

One factor which tended to promote the rapid expansion of the cattle industry about 1875 was the discovery of a process of refrigeration which made it possible to send dressed beef to all parts of the United States and even across the ocean.

In 1876 cattle roamed over the major portion of the Plains area. Even the High Plains or Panhandle of Texas was partially stocked. In November, 1877, Charles Goodnight entered the Panhandle from southern Colorado and located a herd of 2,200 head at the source of the Red River. The stocking continued and by 1880 reports showed 225,857 head of cattle located there, in spite of losses due to spring storms and black wolves. \[29\]

\[27\] Hunter, op. cit., p. 332.  
\[28\] Holden, op. cit., p. 31.  
As a part of the expansion of the cattle industry of Texas, Wyoming and Montana were stocked in the later seventies and early eighties. The severe climate in winter proved to be a great hindrance. Thus these states were used more for the fattening of Texas animals than as breeding states.

One of the largest ranches in Texas, and doubtless in the United States as well, was the X I T ranch, originally owned by the Farwell Brothers of Chicago. These men undertook the contract to erect the state capitol building in Austin, and received their compensation in land. The state granted to them a little more than five counties in the northwest part of the Panhandle, amounting to about 3,000,000 acres in all.

This ranch or brand, X I T, is said by many to have meant "Ten in Texas," because it reached into ten counties in Texas; but this is a mistake, for it did not cover so many. Old-timers say the owners had no such thought in mind. They just wanted a brand that would give the rustlers trouble, and was easy to burn with a five-inch bar.

Members of the Farwell family have kept the ranch intact up to the present time. Although many blocks of considerable size have been disposed of to settlers of that area, the ranch is still vast in scope.

After the extension of the cattle kingdom to the Texas Panhandle, there was a need for a town or trading center to furnish supplies for

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30 Nevin O. Winter, Texas, the Marvelous, p. 313.
the cattle companies occupying that vast region. Because of this need the town of Tascosa came into existence. It was located on the Atascosa Creek, with the Cap Rock on one side and the Canadian River on the other. As far back as the Civil War traders from New Mexico came to this same site to barter with the Indians for stolen cattle and horses.

The town was born about 1877, and enjoyed a rapid growth and thriving trade for almost two decades. Long freight trains of mules, horses, or ox-drawn wagons came from Dodge City, Kansas, two hundred miles away, bringing groceries, dry goods, drugs, liquors, pianos, and other frontier necessities and luxuries. Gamblers and dance-hall girls came, a newspaper man came, a preacher or two, and school teachers.

Tascosa was a wide-open town with unrestricted drinking and gambling. It reminded many of the cattlemen of the Kansas cow towns. The saloons did a fine business and the earnings of the cowboys frequently changed pockets on the turn of a card at monte or poker. A little woman called "Frenchy" from the Creole section of New Orleans sat before the table and dealt the games with graceful efficiency. Horse racing and cock fighting were two popular sports, with bets being made freely on the side.

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It is believed that as many as two score men died in Tascosa with their boots on. However, it was not such a mean town. During all the time it was a frontier town a man was never robbed. Cowboys could come into town with their pockets full of money, and get as drunk as they pleased and never have any of it touched.

Scotty Wilson was the Justice of the Peace in Tascosa. "Frontier historians say very little about him although he seems to have been about as famous in his part of the country as Roy Bean was in the Pecos region." After Wilson was elected once, no one ran against him, and neither did he run again. He held the office by right of priority and because of the fact that no one else seemed to want it.

Tascosa is now a ghost town with a few old deserted adobe houses that have fallen in. The town was founded, boomed, and passed out of existence in about eighteen years. The Fort Worth and Denver railway was built and missed the town, and then Amarillo sprang up to become the metropolis of the Panhandle.

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32 Ibid., p. 201.

33 Harry Williams, Legends of the Great Southwest, p. 164.

34 Ibid., p. 165.
CHAPTER II

CATTLE TRAILS OF THE SOUTHWEST

There has been a great amount of controversy and argument over the locations of the various cattle trails used to transport Texas cattle to the northern markets. Historians as well as cattlemen have brought forth a variety of opinions on the subject. The Chisholm Trail has caused more argumentation than any of the other numerous minor trails, as it has always been considered the main thoroughfare for Texas cattle. The exact location and origin of the Chisholm Trail has been a perplexing question in frontier history for many years and has never been definitely settled for the satisfaction of all concerned.

Numerous authorities on western history agree that the Chisholm Trail was blazed by Jesse Chisholm, a half-breed Cherokee Indian trader. They contend that Chisholm did not lay out the trail for a cattle route and was only interested in transporting his freight wagons through Indian Territory.

Jesse Chisholm was a very interesting character and did some good work in the development of the Oklahoma Territory. He had lived in the Arkansas Territory before it became a state. It was there that he came to know Sam Houston, when Houston was living with the
Cherokee Indians, after his resignation as governor of the state of Tennessee. Houston married an Indian woman who was Chisholm's aunt. Chisholm was a noted trader, scout, and interpreter, speaking about twelve Indian languages fluently. Because of these abilities he was in demand as a scout and interpreter for the United States Army. He served through some of the Civil War in that capacity.

Jesse Chisholm was known as a kind-hearted man. On one occasion he paid an Indian tribe a ransom for some white children whom they had captured. He adopted these children and reared them with his own.

Chisholm died in 1868 at the age of sixty-two.

Chisholm was a great man; he had the traits of Daniel Boone as a pioneer, Henry Clay as a peacemaker, and Kit Carson as a pathfinder. He was an honest trader and had a great influence among the Indians. At one time, he was adopted into almost a dozen Indian tribes in Oklahoma. On his trading trips, he would carry the Indians things they liked; red calico, beads, and paints, but he never took them whiskey.  

After the war was over in 1865, Jesse Chisholm and J. R. Mead organized a trading expedition to the Indian tribes near the Wichita Mountains. Trading with the Indians had been abandoned for four years and this was the first trading expedition to the southwest after the Civil War. The trail marked by the wagon wheels and pack animals of Jesse Chisholm started at Wichita and took a southwest course through the towns of Wellington, Caldwell, Pond Creek, Enid, Buffalo Springs, Dover, Kingfisher, Concho, just east

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1 Frontier Times, August, 1936.
of Fort Rence, and on to the Wichita Valley, a distance of 220 miles.\(^2\)

George W. Saunders, an old trail driver and former president of the Texas Trail Drivers Association, took the position that Joseph G. McCoy, a cattle buyer of Abilene, Kansas, hired Jesse Chisholm to blaze the trail in the spring of 1867 in time to catch the cattle drive.\(^3\) Saunders thought that the trail should have been named the McCoy trail for this reason. Of course, this version conflicts with the theory that Chisholm laid out the trail for a wagon route.

There has been a great deal of controversy over whether the Chisholm cattle trail was named after Jesse Chisholm, the noted Indian trader, or John Chisum, a Texas cattle rancher.

John Chisum established a ranch in Denton County near Bolivar, between Slidell and Sanger, in the 1850's. Chisum was a native of Tennessee, coming to Texas as a young man. He settled originally at Paris, Texas. He always had a talent for raising and bargaining in cattle. He had the reputation of being one of the best cattle traders in the West.

Chisum's ranch near Bolivar was known far and wide for its "southern hospitality," and as a social center. Strangers and drifters were always welcome at the ranch; they were never charged for a

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\(^3\) T. U. Taylor, *Jesse Chisholm*, p. 89.
night's lodging. Many dances and other frolics were held on Saturday nights.

Chisum never owned a large acreage at his Bolivar ranch for grazing, but his cattle range extended over parts of four counties. 4

As Denton County became more thickly populated, Chisum decided to move on to the Concho River, where he started a ranch near the present town of San Angelo, Texas. While he was engaged in the ranching business there, he entered into a partnership with Charles Goodnight, in trail driving and marketing cattle. Goodnight was a rancher in Palo Pinto County at that time. All of their cattle were driven up the Goodnight-Loving Trail along the Pecos River into New Mexico. This trail had been laid out a few years before by Goodnight and Oliver Loving. Loving was one of Goodnight's neighboring ranchers. The Goodnight-Chisum partnership lasted for several years and was quite successful from a financial standpoint. This partnership furnished Chisum with the money to start his vast and famous ranch on the Pecos River in New Mexico.

John Chisum's New Mexico ranch on the Pecos became one of the largest and best known ranches in the country, and he became known as the Cattle King of New Mexico. It was said that he could fill an order for 50,000 beeves in ten days. This ranch embraced more than a

4Ibid., p. 172.
million acres and was over two hundred miles long and thirty miles wide. Chisum employed over one hundred cowboys. 5

Chisum sold most of his property in 1879 for about a third of a million dollars. He died in 1884, leaving approximately $500,000. 6

Many people today maintain that the cattle trail from Texas to Kansas was laid out by John Chisum. A few years ago a statue of John Chisum was erected at Paris, Texas, in honor of the founder of the Chisum Trail. Chisum lived at Paris when he first moved to Texas.

Miss Clara M. Love stated in her article, "History of the Cattle Industry in the Southwest," published in the Southwestern Historical Quarterly:

... The Chisholm trail was named for John Chisholm, an eccentric old bachelor who resided near Paris, Texas, and engaged extensively in the cattle business. He accumulated much wealth and left his name on the trail over which he first led large herds of cattle. 7

However, the Texas rancher spelled his name Chisum and not Chisholm. This one fact should be an important consideration in determining the establishment and the naming of the Chisholm Trail.

The trail has always been known and designated as "The Chisholm Trail" and not "The Chisum Trail." Thus the spelling of the name alone

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5 Minnie T. Harper, Old Ranches, p. 64. 6 Ibid.

should be adequate proof as to the individual for whom the trail was
named.

John Chisum drove a few herds to Shreveport, Louisiana, and to
Little Rock, Arkansas. In going to Little Rock he crossed the Red
River northwest of Sherman into the Indian Territory. He never laid
claim to the proprietorship of the Chisholm Trail and distinctly told
Charles Goodnight that the trail was not named for him. 8

There is still another point that supports the theory that the
Chisholm Trail was not named after John Chisum. In 1866, the date
the trail was blazed, John Chisum was not living in North Texas. At
that time he was located in Concho County, Texas, driving cattle up the
Goodnight-Loving Trail to Basque Grande on the Pecos River near Fort
Summer, New Mexico. 9 Concho County was about as far from the
Chisholm Trail as he could get and still remain in Texas. He would at
this time have had little interest in opening a trail to Kansas.

In view of the theories on both sides of the question, it can prob-
ably be safely assumed that the cattle trail was named after trader
Chisholm and not after rancher Chisum.

One peculiar thing in regard to the Chisholm Trail is that while
Jesse Chisholm was one of the prominent and noted characters of the
frontier, he was not a cowboy or a cattleman. It has truthfully been

8 T. U. Taylor, Jesse Chisholm, p. 171. 9 Ibid., p. 175.
said that the only cattle he ever drove were those that were yoked to his wagons. 10

Another peculiar thing about the Chisholm Trail is that Chisholm himself never traveled this trail except from Wichita, Kansas, to the present city of Dover, Oklahoma, on the Cimarron River, a distance of less than 150 miles. 11 Chisholm spent his life without having any idea that he would ever become known as a historical character. He died without considering that he was, or ever would be, known other than as an ordinary trader and trapper.

In the spring of 1867 Tim F. Hersey marked the trail from Abilene to Wichita, a distance of about ninety miles, to join the Chisholm Trail. 12 The portion of the route from Abilene to Wichita probably should be called the Hersey or the McCoy Trail. Joseph G. McCoy, the cattle buyer, hired Hersey to work the trail. Jesse Chisholm never blazed the trail north of Wichita.

There has always been a greater dispute over the exact location of the Chisholm Trail than there has over the founding of the trail. The northern part of the trail is fairly well agreed upon; that is, the Oklahoma and Kansas end. Most of the differences in opinion have arisen over the southern part or the Texas end. Just where the trail

\[ 10 \text{Ibid., p. 108.} \]
\[ 11 \text{Ibid., p. 109.} \]
\[ 12 \text{T. U. Taylor, The Chisholm Trail and Other Routes, p. 86.} \]
crossed Red River and came into Texas is still in doubt. Some old-
timers and historians say that the trail crossed Red River at Red River
Station in the northern part of Montague County. Others think that the
crossing was just north of Gainesville, Texas. Still others think that
the trail entered Oklahoma Territory at Doan's Crossing about eighteen
miles north of Vernon, Texas.

There were several cattle trails in Texas that eventually led into
the Chisholm Trail somewhere between Red River and Abilene, Kansas.
Naturally, there were many branch trails as cattle were driven from so
many different points in Texas. All of these trails, whether main
thoroughfares or short offshoots, adopted the name "Chisholm Trail." At the present time people living near Vernon, Texas, and Doan's
Crossing boast about the Chisholm Trail passing through their locality.
A motorist can travel Highway Number 81 from San Antonio to Fort
Worth, Texas, and see Texas steer head insignias along the way desig-
nating the route of the Chisholm Trail.

If Jesse Chisholm had blazed the trail farther south into Texas,
there would not be so much basis for dispute, but there is rather defi-
nite evidence that Chisholm did not come as far south as the Red River.
A Texas cowboy always said that he was going up the Chisholm Trail
if he made the trip up the trail to Kansas, regardless of what route
his outfit followed. There were many bitter arguments over this
question in latter years at the conventions of the Texas Trail Drivers Association.

C. H. Rust of San Angelo, Texas, stated in an article written for the book, *The Trail Drivers of Texas*, by J. Marvin Hunter, that he thought the Chisholm Trail started at San Antonio, Texas, and ended at Abilene, Kansas, a distance of about 650 miles.13

The old Chisholm Trail started at San Antonio, Texas, and ended at Abilene, Kansas. From San Antonio it went to New Braunfels, thence to San Marcos, crossing the San Marcos River about four miles below town, thence to Austin, crossing the Colorado River about three miles below Austin. Leaving Austin the trail wound its way on to the right of Round Rock, thence to the right of Georgetown, to the right of Belton, to old Fort Graham, crossing the Brazos River to the left of Cleburne, then to Fort Worth, winding its way to the right of Fort Worth, crossing the Trinity River just below town. From Fort Worth the next town was Elizabeth, and from there to Bolivar; here the old Trail forked but the main trail went up to St. Jo and north to Red River Station.14

Another writer has said:

The Chisholm Trail was not just one trail as is commonly spoken of. One trail started in South Texas, near the Rio Grande River, passing almost due north by way of San Antonio and Fort Worth and from there northwest by Forrestburg in Montague County to Red River Station where it crossed Red River and almost due north through Indian Territory to Caldwell, Kansas. Here it separated, one branch going north to Abilene, Kansas, the other going farther to the northwest to Montana and the Dakotas.15

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14Ibid., p. 38.
The Texas Trail Drivers Association tried to determine where the Chisholm Trail ran in their meeting at San Antonio in 1910. There was so much argument that a year passed before the question was settled. Even then it was not settled definitely. Most of the members agreed that the trail crossed Red River in Montague County, entered Indian Territory at the present site of Terrell, Oklahoma, and ran due north. They also agreed that the Rock Island Railroad practically parallels the original Chisholm Trail. The trail entered Kansas at Caldwell and then extended north to Abilene.16 This was approximately the first route of the original Chisholm Trail, but there were many angles to it. Herds were driven into the main trail from many points along the 650 miles. The trail was bound to have shifted somewhat because no one line could be traveled by Texas cowmen for twenty years without ruining the supply of grass.17

Walter Prescott Webb, professor of history at the University of Texas, has said: "The Chisholm Trail was unique because there was no such trail—there were trails, continually shifting."18 However, Professor Webb has been severely criticized for making that statement.

George W. Saunders, an old trail driver and for many years a president of the Old Trail Drivers Association, summed up the Chisholm

16 Frontier Times, December, 1934.  
17 Ibid., p. 122.  
Trail controversy in a speech before that group at their convention in Houston in 1916: "Now this Chisholm Trail, where it started and where it ended and when it was blazed, we're not plum sure of it and I'd like to find someone that is." 19

The Chisholm Trail became the Santa Fe Trail of the Southwest. For about twenty years longhorn cattle made the trip up the trail to the railroad terminals of Kansas. When the railroads finally built from Kansas to North Texas, they almost paralleled the Chisholm Trail. This fact brings out the superiority of the Chisholm Trail over the other Texas cattle trails.

The Chisholm Trail is more direct, has more prairie, less timber, more small streams and less large ones, and altogether better grass and fewer fires. No wilder Indian disturbances than any other route yet driven over and is also much shorter in distance because it is direct from Red River to Kansas. 20

The trail for most of its length was composed of from twelve to twenty single smooth paths, side by side, so that the stock could be conveniently driven along without the damage to hoofs that raw prairies might cause. The paths developed into grooves a foot or two deep. The trail varied considerably in width. At rivers or streams it narrowed down to fifty or one hundred yards. On flat prairie it might be

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19 Hunter, op. cit., p. 553.

20 Joseph G. McCoy, Historic Sketches of the Cattle Trade of the West and Southwest, p. 93.
a mile wide. This old trail was hard to obliterate by time and weather. Even thirty years after the date of its last use, signs of it were still plain. The trail was usually a little lower than adjacent fields. Weary animals often died on the way, leaving their bones to decorate the route. Here and there could be seen a broken-down wagon and a cowboy's grave:

Individual drivers varied their courses somewhat from the main trail. They had to deviate frequently to avoid plowed ground and fences. But for the most part they stayed relatively near the main trail, just as the bulk of the commercial shipments of today are made over a few prominent railroads. 21

There were a number of minor trails west of the Chisholm Trail. Of course, most of these trails were often referred to as the Chisholm Trail. Charles Goodnight and Oliver Loving, the neighboring ranchers in Palo Pinto County, played a prominent part in blazing some of these western trails.

Oliver Loving was undoubtedly the first white man who ever trailed cattle from Texas. His earliest effort was in 1858 when he took a herd across the frontier of the Indian Nation or "No Man's Land," through eastern Kansas and northwestern Missouri into Illinois. 22

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22 Hunter, op. cit., p. 903.
After the Civil War Loving and Goodnight blazed the Goodnight-Loving Trail from Palo Pinto County southwest to the Concho River, then due west to the Pecos River. It followed the Pecos River up to about the New Mexico line, where it turned due north to Fort Summer, New Mexico. This was the trail used by Goodnight and John Chisum that has already been referred to earlier in this chapter.

There were several branches of the Goodnight-Loving Trail. One branch blazed by Goodnight, left the Goodnight-Loving Trail and went direct to Cheyenne, Wyoming. This trail was known as the Goodnight Trail. Another branch of the main trail was blazed by Oliver Loving and bears the name of the Loving Trail. This trail left Fort Summer, New Mexico, going north to Las Vegas, then on through Raton Pass, and along the base of the Rockies to Pueblo and Denan, Colorado. 23

A new trail was made in 1875, called the New Goodnight Trail. This trail was from Fort Summer to Granado, Colorado, a town in southwestern Colorado, near the Kansas line. 24

Goodnight, Loving, and Chisum drove a great many cattle over these various trails in the years after 1866. Loving was wounded by the Indians on one of these drives. He was carried on to New Mexico, where he later died. Goodnight brought his body back home and gave


24 Ibid.
Loving's widow half of the profits made from their cattle drive on which Loving had received his fatal wound.

A few years later Goodnight sold his ranch in Palo Pinto County and moved to Colorado and entered business, which later resulted in bankruptcy for him. However, it proved to be a good thing for him in the long run. If he had not lost all of his money in Colorado, he probably would never have entered the ranching business in Palo Duro Canyon, which brought him fame and fortune.

Goodnight's J. A. ranch in Palo Duro Canyon became one of the best known ranches in the West. There was trouble for awhile with the Indians, but it was ironed out after Goodnight and the Indian leader, Quanah Parker, came to terms. These two men were fast friends for the remainder of their lives. The J. A. ranch was noted for its roundups, rodeos, barbecues, and in later years for a great herd of the famous American buffaloes that were rapidly becoming extinct.

Charles Goodnight was a leading pioneer, rancher, and trail driver of the frontier for many years. He served through most of the Civil War in the Confederate Army. In later years Goodnight was considered an authority on frontier history and contributed many articles to historical magazines and books. Goodnight died in 1929 when he was about ninety-one years old.

Goodnight's wife, Mary Dyer Goodnight, was about as well known in the Panhandle as her husband. She was usually referred to as the
"mother of the plains," a term of affection and respect which indicates something of the esteem in which she was generally held.

After Goodnight established his ranch in the Palo Duro Canyon, he blazed another cattle trail. This was after the Kansas cattle markets had shifted to Dodge City. This new trail was direct from the J. A. ranch to Dodge City and was called the Palo Duro-Dodge City Trail.

About 1875 the cattle drives shifted to trails west of the Chisholm Trail. The Santa Fe Railroad had built out as far as Dodge City, Kansas, and the town had been established as a shipping point. The original Chisholm Trail was partially abandoned for two reasons: first, the country along the trail both in Texas and Kansas was being settled by nesters, which fact seriously handicapped trail driving; and, second, by establishing a trail direct from San Antonio to Dodge City the drive would be shortened by at least two weeks.

According to George W. Saunders, this trail left San Antonio and went up by Kerrville and Junction City, crossing the Brazos River near Seymour and the Red River at Doan's Crossing north of Vernon, then on to Dodge City. Cowboys going up this trail often spoke of going up the Chisholm Trail. C. F. Doan, who operated a store at Doan's Crossing with his brother, G. Doan, for many years, stated

that he had lived most of his life on the old Chisholm Trail. However, George W. Saunders took the position that any cattle which crossed the Red River at Doan's Crossing never touched the Chisholm Trail, as Red River Station was over one hundred miles east of Doan's Crossing and Abilene, Kansas, was over one hundred miles east of Dodge City.

This trail has been called many other names besides the Chisholm Trail. It has been referred to as the Texas Trail, the Western Trail, the Western Chisholm Trail, the Longhorn Chisholm Trail, the Jingle Bob Trail, and the Dodge City-Kansas Trail. This trail, like the Chisholm Trail, had many branches running into it all along the way from San Antonio to Dodge City. Some of the cattlemen thought that more cattle went up this western trail than were driven over the Chisholm Trail.

No record of the cattle trails of the Southwest would be complete without a reference to the Baxter Springs Trail. This trail changed its name later to the Shawnee Trail because it passed through the Indian country. Baxter Springs was located in the southeastern corner of Kansas and was the terminus of the Fort Scott and Gulf Railroad. It was opened up as a cowtown about the same time as Abilene, Kansas, or possibly a little before. This trail left Red River near Sivells' Bend,

26 Ibid., p. 772.

27 T. U. Taylor, Jesse Chisholm, p. 89.
about forty miles east of the start of the Chisholm Trail, and ran nearly parallel with its rival for almost one hundred miles, then it turned slightly and ran in a northeastern direction on to Baxter Springs. It was joined by a cross trail connecting with the Chisholm Trail at Elm Spring. 28

There was also a West Shawnee Trail that lay between the Chisholm Trail and the Shawnee Trail. It branched off the Shawnee Trail near the Canadian River, going nearly due north until it reached the Arkansas River, which it followed into Kansas, then it went on to Junction City, about twenty-five miles east of Abilene. 29

These two cattle trails are somewhat overshadowed by the more famous Chisholm Trail; however, thousands of cattle passed up these two trails during the few years that they were used. The Shawnee Trail and the West Shawnee Trail did not enjoy a very long life due to the hostility of the farmers of southwestern Kansas. The farmers deeply resented the coming of the Texas cattle because they were carriers of the dreaded Texas fever that infected the native Kansas cattle.

One special trail known by all the old-timers was the Roth Trail. Like the Chisholm Trail, its origin was not based on the cattle business.

28 Louis J. Wortham, A History of Texas, V, 162.
29 Ibid., p. 163.
Charlie Roth, a buffalo hunter, started from Double Mountain Fork of the Brazos, went to Fort Griffin and Sherman, crossed the Red River at Fields' Crossing, went on to Fort Elliott, and there connected with the Jones and Plummer Trail and then went on to Dodge City.  

Originally the Roth Trail was a trail for hauling buffalo hides, but later it became a freight trail for bringing supplies in from the south.

The Jones and Plummer Trail had about the same history as the Roth Trail. It was used to transport buffalo hides to the north and freight goods to the south. This trail was possibly in existence before Fort Elliott was established. Fort Elliott was established on Sweetwater Creek, in what is now Wheeler County, in 1875. Adjacent to Fort Elliott there grew up a town first known as Hidetown, then Sweetwater, and later Mobeetie. The men who founded the trail, Jones and Plummer, were buffalo hunters who ventured south of the Canadian River about 1874. They were the first buffalo hunters to come that far south.

A few years later, after the cattle kingdom had expanded into the Panhandle region of Texas, both the Roth Trail and the Jones and Plummer Trail were used by cattlemen of that section who wanted to keep their cattle free from the Texas fever that was found on other

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31 Ibid.
trails in the vicinity. The Western Trail coming up from Doan's Crossing so nearly approached the Jones and Plummer Trail that these cattlemen grew alarmed for fear that the southern fever-bearing herds would be thrown on the trail that they had kept free from infection.

Dodge City, the last great Kansas market for Texas cattle, was closed in 1885. The quarantine line had been extended against the fever-bearing Texas cattle. The entire trail movement entered upon its declining decade. Most of the herds trailed to northern ranges by a course that left Kansas to the east. In spite of the fact that Dodge City had been closed as a market, hundreds of cattle were driven farther north into Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana. Some were even driven into Canada. Ogallala, Nebraska; Cheyenne, Wyoming; and Glendive and Miles City, Montana, replaced the Kansas cattle markets. Quite often the Texas cattle would be left on the rich range lands of these northern states to mature before they were sold. These regions were stocked as an extension of the cattle industry in Texas.

The cattle routes that were used to transport Texas cattle to these northern markets or watering ranges were usually referred to as the Northern Trail, and more specifically the name of the state or territory to which they led might be used, as the Wyoming or Montana or Colorado Trail. There was another trail known as the Yellowstone Trail that led into the feeding and watering ranges of Wyoming and
Montana. It took five and one-half months, starting the middle of March, traveling less than fifteen miles per day, to make the trip from South Texas to the end of the Yellowstone Trail.  

So important did the cattle trails seem to the Texas cowmen that at the Cattlemen's Convention at St. Louis in 1884, one of the chief issues was that of petitioning Congress to establish a National Trail to extend from Texas to the Canadian border. It would facilitate the moving of cattle from the splendid breeding land of Texas to the grass country of Kansas, Wyoming, Colorado, Nebraska, and Montana. Northern cattlemen opposed this proposed trail vigorously, for two reasons. In the first place, they were afraid that such a trail would spread the Texas fever. They also feared that the yearly drivers of Texas cattle would overstock their ranges and injure, if not destroy, their own cattle business. Eventually the extensive development of the railroads annulled the demand for such a trail.

It is interesting to note how the cattle kingdom had expanded over the open ranges. Starting in the diamond-shaped region in southern Texas, the kingdom had gradually spread over Central and North Texas, and on to the Texas Panhandle, then on to New Mexico, Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, and southern Canada—from the extreme southern part of the United States to the northern boundary.

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32 Ibid., p. 15.
CHAPTER III

LIFE ON THE TRAIL

The cattle trade has been referred to as the economic salvation of Texas after the Civil War. Texas, like most southern states, was financially impoverished by the time the conflict was over. The Cow Country had thousands of head of cattle but no market for them. Cattle prices were high on the Chicago market. New Yorkers were paying fancy prices for choice steaks. The ranchers thought there must be an answer. Cattle had been driven long distances before; they had been driven as far as the Mississippi River during the war. A few herds had been driven through West Texas and into New Mexico. The railroads were building out as far as south-central Kansas. Cattle traders had promised a market if the cattle could be brought to the railroads. The question uppermost in the minds of the ranchers was, could cattle be driven safely through Indian country north of Red River? They also wondered whether cattle could be kept intact in herds all the way; could good grazing and adequate water be insured; would markets be high enough to pay them for their trip? Some said it could be done and some said it could not. Finally, it was proved that it could be done, and profitably.
The overland cattle trade from Texas to the North, most of it going to Kansas, involved more cattle, horses, men, and money than is generally realized. The cattle drives lasted for about twenty-five years. Most authorities agree that fully 10,000,000 head of cattle moved up the trail during these years. From the best information obtainable at least 9,800,000 cattle went over the northern trails on their way to Kansas, Wyoming, Montana, and Canada. This does not include the cattle that went over the Goodnight Trail, probably 250,000 head.¹

More cattle were driven during some years than during others, but on the average about 500,000 head per year went up the trail for twenty years. This half million per year were driven in about two hundred different herds. Usually there would be about 2,500 head in each herd. It took at least twelve men to handle this many cattle. Each man had to have from six to ten saddle horses. Think of the vast army it took to handle these drives! It took 2,400 men and 14,400 saddle horses per year to handle the drives. The 10,000,000 cattle that were moved from Texas were driven in some 4,000 different herds. It took 48,000 men to make all of these drives.² At least 300,000 horses were used. Some of the horses were sold in Kansas, but most of them were brought back to Texas.

¹Amarillo Sunday News-Globe, August 14, 1938.
²Louis J. Wortham, A History of Texas, V, 166.
The men who drove cattle up the trail to northern markets were originally called drovers, but later this name was changed to drivers. At times a drover carried only his own cattle up the trail, but usually several ranchers would go together and send their cattle in one large herd, if they did not have too many. Charles Goodnight usually took several herds belonging to his neighbors when he went up the trail. Goodnight said that his neighbors were so prompt in delivering cattle to him that he could assemble a herd of 3,000 in less than three days.  

The drovers were sometimes speculators who purchased large herds from the ranchmen and drove them to market. After the ranch-owner had "rounded up" the animals to be sold, he gave the drover a bill of sale which identified the ranch brand or ear marks of the animals. This was a safeguard against arrest for theft.

Many stories have been told and much has been written about the Texas drovers. The drover was usually not considered to be as romantic a figure as the cowboy. However, it was sometimes hard to draw a line of distinction between the two. Ordinarily the drover was older, not as wild, and possessed more dignity than the cowboy.

Some of the drovers, after a hard trip up the trail, would put up at the expensive Drover's Cottage at Abilene, Kansas. They might take to the night life of the cowtowns for a day or two, and encourage

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the cowboys in their rowdyism. However, they were usually quiet, not at all quarrelsome, and were considered to be kindly and square dealers. Their education and social breeding had been hindered by ranch life.

Joseph G. McCoy knew the Texas drovers as few other men did. He had the following to say about them:

The drovers were fond of a practical joke, always pleased with a good story, and not offended if it was of an immoral character; universal tipplers but seldom drunkards; always chivalrously courteous to a modest lady; a strong sense of right and wrong; a quick impulsive temper; great lovers of a horse, and always good riders and horsemen; always free to spend their money; quick to detect an injury or insult, and not slow to avenge it nor quick to forget it; always ready to help a comrade out of a scrape; full of life and fun; free and easy.  

For twenty years it was the ambition of every Texas cowboy to go up the trail. Wages were about $30.00 per month. Sometimes the cowboys were paid slightly more if they furnished their own horses. Trail life was hard. Cowboys usually had to work fifteen to eighteen hours a day; twenty-four hours if they had a bad night with restless cattle, and then they had to work the next day just as though they had slept all night. The trail boss took the position that they could sleep all next winter. The men would even put tobacco in their eyes to stay awake. A cowhand never thought of trying to collect overtime or calling

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4 Joseph G. McCoy, Historical Sketches of the Cattle Trade of the West and Southwest, p. 55.
for shorter hours and more pay. In view of all of the hardships and dangers of trail life, why did they want to go up the trail? A cowboy did not feel that he had graduated in his art until he had made a northern drive. Many of them went year after year.

Virtually all of the cowboy's wearing apparel had practical purposes. The wide-brimmed five- or ten-gallon hat not only protected his eyes from the sun and wind, but it was used for everything from a fly-swatter to a watering trough for his horse. Black hats were better for white sandy country as they absorbed more of the glare.

"Chaps," or chaparejos, as the Mexican ranchhands called them, were widely used on the range and cattle trails. They might be described as leather leggings that extended up to the hips, or, as someone expressed it, "the leather pants with no seat in them." The chaps protected the rider's legs from brush, cactus, weather, falls, and even snake bites.

A pair of boots with high heels was perhaps the most prized article of clothing owned by the cowboy. They, too, had many practical purposes. The rider of the range rode with his feet jammed through the stirrups as far as they would go and braced himself with the high heels. The heel also prevented the possibility of his foot slipping clear through the stirrup should he be thrown or his horse fall with

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5Lawrence Cardwell, Cowboy Gadgets—And Why: Round Up of Western Literature, p. 279.
him. In roping a bronc or a steer from the ground with no saddle horn to tie to, the cowboy could throw the end of his rope around his hips, digging his heels into the ground in front of him. With such a good brace, he was often able to handle the animal.

Almost forty years ago the survivors of the cattle driving days organized the Old Trail Drivers Association of Texas. All of the members are now in their eighties and nineties, and several have passed the one-hundred-year mark. When the association was organized, only 3,600 men who had driven cattle up the trail were still living. Today, only about fifty of the original drivers remain. 6

The association likes to call San Antonio home. Some ninety percent of all the herds that were sent north from South Texas either passed through San Antonio or the cowboys outfitted there. 7 For that reason the Alamo City was made their permanent headquarters.

The yearly convention of the association always meets at the Gunter Hotel, because Jot Gunter, the builder of the hotel, was a cattleman. The old trail drivers always wind up their meetings at Brackenridge Park before leaving San Antonio. The herds used to be watered and rested there where the river flows through the park.

Tales about the old West never seem to grow old, and the old-timers can find no greater pleasure than to swap stories about the

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6San Antonio Express, March 18, 1951. 7Ibid.
days when they were driving cattle for the Wests, Storeys, Klebergs, Driskells, and other great ranching families. The name Ab Blocker never fails to come up in stories about the trail. Blocker was probably the greatest trail driver of them all, making the cross-country journey more times than any other man. It has been said that he went up the trail twenty-two times. 8

After a rancher decided to take a herd up the trail, one of the first things he had to do was select a trail boss. The trail boss was sometimes called a straw boss. Of course, many of the ranchers drove their own herds and acted as their own trail bosses.

Another thing the rancher had to do was to get a good cook and chuck wagon for the trip. The amount of supplies needed was figured out and bought. A new chuck wagon was always furnished each outfit. It was drawn by four mules or two yoke of oxen, mules being preferable. At least thirty days of provisions could be handled in the wagon, in addition to the bedding, clothing, and other articles belonging to the men. A barrel of water was placed inside the wagon and could be made to last two days or more. The chuck box was made into compartments for holding cooking utensils and foodstuffs. The lid or covering of the box opened to form a table for the cook when it was let down upon its hinges. Cowhides were stretched under the wagon to hold wood for

8Ibid.
cooking. The cook was supplied with good provisions and all necessary utensils to make his work as easy as possible while on the trail. A trail boss thought that plenty of good chuck produced good work.

A very necessary step in preparing for a trip up the trail was the selection of seventy-five to one hundred horses, depending upon the number of cowboys in the outfit. Each cowboy used from six to ten horses; by the time the drive was over, perhaps none of them would be in good condition. The only feed available for them was wild grasses, and it was only by frequent changes of mounts and long rests that they stayed in riding condition.

The cowboy's best horse was selected as his night horse and was used for no other purpose. This horse had to be gentle, easily handled, sure-footed, have good sight, and possess all the qualities of a first-class cow horse. The other horses were used one-half day each until all had been used, then they started over again.

Texas cow ponies were remarkably tough, but generally small. A pony about fourteen hands high could carry a forty-pound saddle and a husky cowboy without any trouble. Cowboys preferred a pony that would buck occasionally, to show his spirit; however, the cowboy always liked to show his supremacy over the animal.

Some cow ponies sold for as little as $10.00. Some were higher, but a buyer usually could take his pick of a group for $18.00.  

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9Douglas Branch, *The Cowboy and His Interpreters*, p. 35.
A cow horse was so trained that he was usually "tied" when the reins were down. He might drift off, and when frightened would run, but stepping on the reins seemed to constrain him to stand, as a rule. It was necessary for a cow horse to be trained in this way for two reasons: first, the cowboy frequently had work to do where it was vital to leap from his horse and attend to the job quickly; and second, there was seldom anything to which the horse might be tied.

Each trail outfit had a remuda where all the extra horses were kept. Most outfits had two or three horse-wranglers to take care of the remuda. Where this was the case, one man always served as night-wrangler. The night-wrangler usually woke the cook. Some small outfits did not use wranglers at night; they simply hobbled the horses. Regardless of how the horses were handled, horse thieves usually managed to get away with some on dark nights. If the remuda contained a large number of horses, a few might be slipped out without the wranglers knowing it. If they were hobbled, the thieves could cut the hobbles and drive them off.

Horse thieves often caught up with a herd just before they got to a swollen stream or some other hard part of the trail, asked for a job, and were hired. After remaining with the outfit for a day or two, and becoming acquainted with the routine, they could steal a bunch of horses at night and be miles away by morning. At times they would
slip out at night and carry the horses out and conceal them. They would offer to find them the next morning, for a fancy price. This was a very dangerous practice. Horse stealing was worse in the Indian Territory than anywhere else. Horse stealing was never as general or as successful as cattle rustling. The interests of the cowboy were too directly affected by the loss of his horse for him to have any mercy on the thief if he was caught. Hanging a horse thief was very common practice in those days.

The men who went up the trail were selected with care. A "sissy" or "tenderfoot" had no business on one of these early drives. Trail life was sometimes wearisome, hard, and tedious. At times it became very monotonous; every day was too much like the day before. There were many hardships to endure, swollen streams to swim, stampedes, bandits, Indians, drives all day in rain and mud, sleeping on wet ground, and sore and useless horses. Trail life was also filled with many dangers. Some men never came back and were buried along the trail wrapped only in their blankets.

Trail drivers believed in good discipline. Most outfits did not tolerate drinking on duty, gambling, or lawlessness of any kind. If one man shot another, he was tried by the outfit and hanged on the spot, if found guilty. Fighting was forbidden. Charles Goodnight handled almost every type of man among the approximately 3,000
men whom he sent out on the trail during his years in the cattle business. Although many of these drivers were "bad" men, only two fist fights occurred in all that large number.  

Sometimes articles of agreement setting forth what each man should do were signed before starting a drive.

In getting a trail herd together in South Texas, the collection of them began about the middle of February. By the first of March the drive would be ready to start.

When a cowboy signed up for a long drive, one of his first duties was road-branding. A herd might contain cattle of several different brands; therefore, a road brand or common brand was needed.

On the trail the cattle did not move as a herd, but as a long line. A normal sized herd of about 2,500 cattle would string out for two or three miles. Ordinarily the line would not be over fifty to seventy-five feet wide. The trail hands could pretty well regulate the width. The foreman always told the men what width to make the herd. Narrowing the line was called "squeezing them."

The rank of the men could sometimes be determined by their position with the herd. The better men were known as pointers or corner men. They worked toward the head of the line on each side of the herd and kept them headed in the desired direction. Next came the

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swing, the flank, and the dragmen. The swing drivers kept the cattle pushed into line. The flank riders pushed in the flank until they were strung out for two or three miles. The drag drivers brought up the rear. The men worked in pairs, opposite each other, and the trail boss circled the herd, seeing after everything, laying out the trail if it was new, and choosing the campsites and bed grounds. The trail boss often rode several miles ahead of the herd. He always rode a good horse and explored both sides of the trail in his search for water holes. He preferred to find water holes twelve or fifteen miles apart, but he kept going until he did find water.

Three steady men were always selected for the rear. They were called "drag hands," and it was their duty to look after the weaker cattle. These three men had a very important job since the speed of the herd was determined by the progress made at the rear. It was the duty of the drag men to see that the stronger cattle were kept forward and out of the way, so that the weaker cattle would always have every advantage and not be unduly taxed or overcrowded.

Except for the corner men, those who rode on the sides changed places daily. By following this plan each man knew where he should report for duty each day. Since the work toward the front of the herd

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was easier for the side-lines than the rear, the men moved forward daily, changing sides so that the dust might be shared impartially.

In most herds the pointers guided the cattle over the trail that the trail boss had picked out. The chuck wagon came behind the long line of cattle and the extra horses and horse wranglers brought up the rear. However, this procedure was sometimes changed. The chuck wagon might take the lead to pick out a good camping ground for the night. The outfit generally pitched camp about five o'clock in the afternoon, giving the cattle time to graze around for an hour or two before they were bedded down for the night.

At an early date in the trail-driving era a system of trail signals came into general use. Trail hands were governed entirely by signals. They were usually too far from the leader to receive orders in any other way. These signals were borrowed largely from the plains Indians. They were usually made with the hat, held in the left hand, while the right hand held the bridle reins. The movement to break camp and move up the trail was a wave of the hat in the direction to be taken, made by the boss, then passed by the point men and line riders to all of the other hands. The signal to graze the cattle was made by a wave of the hat toward the side of the trail. 12

Trail drivers preferred old cattle to drive instead of young cattle. Young cattle were unable to stand the hardships of trail life. The

12Branch, op. cit., p. 76.
older cattle seemed to be made of sterner stuff. Texas drovers were fortunate in having such tough customers as the longhorns for such a perilous journey.

The first few days on the trail were always the hardest. The cattle were nervous and restless and there was always danger of their breaking away. There was a good deal of confusion at first, and the herd was driven twenty or twenty-five miles a day in order to trail-break the cattle. After traveling that far they were tired at night and ready to bed down. It did not require many days to accustom both men and cattle to the routine of the trail. After the cattle were trail broken, the drive was slowed down to ten or fifteen miles a day, depending upon the nature of the herd and the location of watering places. Steers moved faster than a mixed herd, and steers for the range moved faster than beeves.

By daylight every morning men and cattle would be up. All hands except the last guard would have eaten breakfast. Then, while the last guard ate breakfast, the rest of the men would begin to string the cattle out. By the time the cattle were in traveling formation, the men left behind would be up with the rest and in their places. Some trail bosses pushed their herds on as early as possible in the morning, letting them graze a little as they traveled. When this plan was followed, the herd was usually stopped by eleven o'clock and allowed to graze for about two hours. After the grazing at noon, the
cattle would not eat any more until they got to water, which they always tried to reach before sundown. Late in the afternoon, if there was no sign of water, the cattle would become restless and ill-tempered; but with the first smell of water the lead cattle would begin to bellow and walk much faster. After they got to water and grazed, they were bedded down for the night. The herd was usually put in a circle, with the cattle being a comfortable distance apart.

Most trail drivers liked to get their men and cattle out early in the morning, but usually they would let the cattle graze around the bedding ground as long as they would. When some of the herd began walking off and others began to lie down and chew their cuds, the boss knew that they had grazed enough and gave the signal to resume the drive. Generally this would happen by nine o'clock in the morning. When this plan was followed, the stop at noon was not as long.

Experienced cowmen did not like to rush their herds after the first few days. The movement of the herd was adapted as much as possible to the habit of the cattle running on the range. If cattle were driven slowly they would begin to put on flesh from the first of the drive.

From the beginning of the drive until the end, a guard always had to watch over the herd. Cattle on the trail were naturally nervous from continuous driving and they would stampede from the bedding ground at the
slightest provocation. When the drive was first started and the cattle were fresh, a double guard was used. Half of the men were out the first part of the night and the other half the latter part. If there was a stampede, or if the weather was bad or threatened to be bad, the boss had every man on duty. After the cattle were broken in, four men were sufficient to guard the herd. If the herd had been out for two or three months, two men on duty at a time were enough.

The outfit was divided into three guards. Each guard stayed out about three hours at a time or a little over three hours as they always stayed on a little overtime. The last guard of the night had the shortest hours. The time was divided by the stars. Few men had watches. A watch did not stand up too well to the hazards of trail life. The guards rode in opposite directions around and around the herd continuously during the entire night. The cattle were inclined to stray off the bed ground if this was not done. The men always talked or sang to the cattle, for it was very quieting to them.

After the first few days the herd would organize itself, with the stronger and more rangy cattle in the lead and the weaker ones bringing up the rear. Frequently, lead cattle became tender in their feet and would drop back to the rear. After a few days of walking behind the herd where the ground was soft and sandy, they would recover and resume their former position in the lead. At times five or ten per cent
of the entire herd might be affected in this way. In terms of the hardships of the long drives, however, the percentage of losses in cattle was surprisingly low.

Sometimes the line riders had trouble with unruly steers trying to break away from the herd. If this got to be too much of a problem, the steers' eyelids were sewed up to keep them from running out of line. It required about two weeks' time to rot the thread allowing the eyes to open. By this time the animals were broken in.

Steers that became trail leaders were very valuable to any trail outfit. Cattle soon learned to follow the leaders. Cattle, it seems, were about as quick to form habits as people. Bells were placed around the necks of trail leaders. They were arranged with a strap which would easily stop the clapper. When the signal to graze was given, the pointers would fasten down the clappers, and turn the steers off the trail. After the outfit had been out for awhile, should the clapper come loose at night, the whole herd would be on its feet in a few minutes. The lead steers were of great advantage in swimming rivers and in penning, for the cattle soon learned to go where the bell called them.

Perhaps the most famous lead steer in trail-driving history was Old Blue of Charles Goodnight's J. A. ranch in the Palo Duro Canyon.

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Old Blue was never sold when the herd was carried to market. He was always brought back in the remuda to be the leader of the next cattle drive to leave the Goodnight ranch.

For eight years Old Blue kept at his occupation of leading herds. Some years he went up the trail to Dodge City twice. After the shorthorn cattle were started up the trail instead of the longhorns, the cowboys had to shoe the shorthorns with sole leather, but never once did Blue limp. All told, 10,000 head or more of the J. A. cattle followed him and his bell from Palo Duro to the great "cowboy capital." When he was 20 years old he died. His horns may be seen today in the museum of the West Texas State Teachers College at Canyon. 14

After leading a large herd of steers all day, Blue believed in taking life easy. He considered himself a privileged character. He would stroll around the herd at will. Often he would walk right into camp among the pots and pans. He would eat bread, meat, prunes, or anything that the cook or cowboys would give him. He became a great pet. He did not like to bed down around the other cattle. Often he was staked out at the end of a long rope, or hobbled and left to graze with the horses.

After his first trip up the trail as bell ox, Blue's occupation for life was settled. Besides leading cattle to Dodge City, he was put to various uses. If an outlaw steer was roped out in the cedar brakes and had to be led in, he was necked to Old Blue, the pair were turned loose, and straight as a crow flies the bell ox would bring him to headquarters. If a wild herd of cattle was to be penned, Blue was put with them to show them the way in. Wild cattle upon approaching

14 J. Frank Dobie, On the Open Range, p. 82.
a corral often circle and try to break away; but the wild ones could not break ahead of Blue, and his course was straight for the gate. Once inside a pen gate, range cattle will often rush for the opposite side, pushing, hooking, milling. Blue never got into such jams. As soon as he had brought the cattle inside the pens, he would step aside and impatiently wait at the gate until the last animal was penned; then he would bolt out.  

Trail driving was filled with hardships and ordeals. In many respects the dry drive was the most terrible ordeal of all. A dry drive was crossing a wide stretch of country where there was no water, or where the water ordinarily to be found had disappeared because of a drought. There was a dry drive across the Staked Plains, from the headwaters of the South Concho River to the Pecos. The distance was one hundred miles.  

Cattle would become feverish and ungovernable after two or three days of a dry drive. It helped if it was cloudy. The lead cattle would turn around and wander in any direction. It was a hard job to hold the herd on the trail. The cattle in the rear would overtake the lead and all resemblance to a trail herd would be lost. Instinct told them where the last water hole was and sometimes they would turn around and start back to it. There was not much way to stop them if they really got started. Some went blind before they reached water, but after drinking and resting for several days their eyesight would be restored.

15 Ibid., p. 80.

16 Webb, The Great Plains, p. 266.
One peculiarity of the wild longhorns was that after moving a few days they learned to remain in the groups that the cowboys had gathered them into, and not to mix with other herds coming near them. This instinct in them made it possible to drive them without confusion with only a few hundred yards between the herds that dotted the country; that is, except when they took a notion to stampede. The cowboys feared and dreaded stampedes about as much as any hardship of the trail. A multitude of things could cause a stampede; the lighting of a cigarette, the snorting of a horse, a sneeze, unrolling a slicker, a bolt of lightning, a twig snapping loudly underfoot, and many other things. One stampede was caused by a steer stepping into an empty tin can. The rattling sound made when the steer walked scared the cattle.

A herd was more likely to run on a dark night than on a moonlit night. The remarkable thing was that the whole herd started at one time, jarring the earth with the impact. When this happened, all hands were immediately called out and were on duty until the stampede was over. It was of life-and-death importance that the men should keep out of the way. Trained horses knew what to do. Some of the horses knew their jobs so well that about all the men had to do was stay in the saddle. If the men and horses could keep the cattle from splitting up, and keep them milling—that is, constantly changing directions by turning them—in time they would tire, since running is not a natural gait.
The rear cattle could be depended upon to follow the leaders, even when they were going in circles.

Some cattlemen believed that stampedes were generally due to negligence in not having the herd full of grass and water on reaching the bed ground at night. They learned to prevent stampedes by letting the cattle eat and drink their fill and then walking them until they were fagged out before bedding them down for the night. It was only hungry, thirsty, or fresh cattle that were looking for an excuse to run.

Cattle were never taken back to the same bed ground after a stampede, for they would usually run again. As a rule it took several days to rid the herd of the effects of a stampede. Some trail drivers followed the practice of driving them all night.

At times cattle were lost as a result of stampedes but usually about the only harm done was running the tallow off. If another herd was in the vicinity the two might get mixed and require two or three days to get them separated.

In spite of every precaution some cattle were permanently lost from the rest of the herd. This often happened in a timbered section, if they once got scattered in the thick undergrowth. To prevent this from happening, the drovers would drive the herd all day or longer without stopping until they passed through the timber. It was customary for every drover to put into his herd any animal that he recognized as
lost and belonging to any other drover in front of him. Experienced cattlemen knew the majority of brands. Animals picked up in this way were either delivered to their owners in Kansas, or were sold and the money later delivered.

High water was a source of trouble to the cattlemen. If the rivers were on a rise, it was a hard matter to get the cattle across. The cowboys would plunge their horses into the water in front of the cattle. When they reached the opposite bank, any little thing might excite them and turn them back to the other side.

Red River was the worst to go on a rampage. Trail outfits sometimes had to wait for several days for it to go back within its banks. In the meantime other herds came up behind and had to take their places farther back. By the time the river ran down, thousands of cattle would be waiting to cross. The herds would have to cross the river in the order of their arrival. The first herds across would have to travel many miles before pitching camp, or there would be a mix-up on the cattle.

Sometimes cowboys lost their lives in these river crossings. "It can safely be asserted that at Doan's River Crossing and Power crossing on Red River the lives of more trail men were lost by drowning than on all the other rivers together."\(^{17}\)

\(^{17}\)Adams, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 121.
After the Chisholm Trail crossed Red River and entered Indian Territory, the terrain of the country changed somewhat. Most of the Texans had never seen such beautiful rolling hills, covered with rich prairie grasses. Many wild horses, deer, antelope, turkeys, prairie chickens, wolves, and buffaloes were seen along the trail. Some hunters and trappers were also in the Territory.

Many prairie dogs were found in this section of the country. Often the cowboys had never seen them before. They were a source of great amusement and helped to break the monotony of the long days. The men would listen to their chatter, talk back to them, and shoot at them. Caution had to be taken to keep horses from stepping into the prairie dog holes and crippling themselves.

Had these little trail animals been called something else instead of prairie dogs, trail men probably would have eaten them. Their flesh was as clean as that of squirrels, and their diet was about the same.

The Indians proved to be a menace to the trail drivers during the first few years. When not positively dangerous, they were a nuisance on account of their demands for beef, which they called wohow or wohan. An Indian tribe would catch up with a herd and ask the drovers for a certain number of cattle. They would threaten to start a stampede if their wish was not granted. Since stampedes were dreaded so much,
many of the drovers would give them a few head. Some of the tribes
levied a toll on all cattle driven through their territory. If the toll
was not paid, the outfit had trouble on its hands. Indians often put
signs up along the trail—One wohan, which meant that the Indians wanted
one steer to pay for grazing privileges. 18

The Indians were more troublesome on the Goodnight Trail than
anywhere else. Charles Goodnight said that he knew of five herds that
the Indians captured and sold to the New Mexico traders. This amounted
to around eight or ten thousand head of cattle. 19

As time passed, the drovers resisted the Indians so vigorously
that they almost completely gave up their efforts.

Storms and cyclones were feared by the men of the trail. Herds
would usually drift before a storm and might have to be followed for
miles. Electrical storms often killed cattle and caused stampedes.
Cyclones were more frequent on the Kansas end of the trail. The wind
would pick up big steers a few feet off the ground and toss them around
easily. These cyclones usually did not last over a few minutes.

The Texas cattlemen had still another enemy to contend with—
the Kansas farmers. Farmers resisted the cattle drives from the very
first. They were afraid the Texas cattle would spread the Texas or

18 J. Marvin Hunter, The Trail Drivers of Texas, p. 294.
Spanish fever among their own cattle. They also complained that the cattle sometimes stampeded and destroyed their crops and fences. Many prairie fires were started by the farmers who wanted to keep the strangers away. They would plow a safety boundary around their own farms and set fire to the grass outside. These fires were dreaded, as they robbed the cattle of lots of good grass. The opposition was worse among the farmers living near Abilene than anywhere else. A satisfactory agreement was worked out under the leadership of Joseph G. McCoy, a man very interested in the cattle trade, that lasted for a few years. Finally, the farmers, encouraged by some of the Abilene business men, practically wrecked the cattle drives to that point. The market moved to Ellsworth, Newton, and Dodge City.

A trip up the trail lasted anywhere from seventy days to four months. The outfit would average about 450 to 500 miles per month. Although trail life was boring, hard, and often dangerous, the men found various ways to amuse themselves. Most of their amusement came at night around the campfire. Cowboys would talk freely about things that they were familiar with. Of course, their conversational scope was rather limited. In most groups there would be someone who could play a musical instrument. They would play and sing old songs such as

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20 Branch, op. cit., p. 69.

"Sam Bass," "Mustang Grey," "When You and I Were Young, Maggie," and other favorites. 22

Life on the trail was not as hard after the cattle crossed the Kansas line. The weather usually was cooler and the herd was much easier to manage. When the first norther hit the Kansas range, they drew up, quieted down, and fed in one place and caused very little worry and anxiety on the part of the men.

The sorriest looking longhorns from Texas, which had never taken on any flesh, began to fatten as soon as they struck the Kansas country. The grass was nutritious, but the climate no doubt co-operated by making them hungrier.

If a drover could withstand the hardships of trail life, and reach the Kansas markets without losing a high percentage of cattle, the drive usually paid off. The cost of operating a trail unit was about $500.00 per month. It cost roughly sixty cents to transport a cow from southern Texas to the Kansas railroad stations. 23 In 1873 thousand-pound beeves sold in San Antonio for $8.00 per head and in Wichita, Kansas, for $23.80 per head. 24 Charles Goodnight stated that his drives averaged about $25.00 per head during the nine years that he

22 Floyd Benjamin Streeter, Prairie Trails and Cow Towns, p. 67.


24 Hunter, op. cit., p. 155.
was on the trail, since he handled mostly grown cattle. Goodnight figured that the northern drives averaged about $20.00 per head for the first ten years, and considerably more after that time.  

When the cattle were sold, all of the men were paid off. After a few days of celebration the outfit would head back to Texas. The trip home did not require so much time since the horses and chuck wagon were all the men had to worry with.

When a drover got back home he usually had debts to pay. It was not unusual for him to buy a large herd from his neighbor before a drive started without a penny in cash. The neighbor knew he needed all of his money for the drive. Promissory notes were never used in these transactions; honest men did not do business that way.

The first five years of the overland cattle trade were more or less of an experiment. After that time trail driving became a science, if not an art. The details were worked out by the trial and error method. Trails were beaten out, timber was avoided, the Indians were whipped, and the rivers were conquered. The drovers learned the number of cattle making the most manageable, and economical unit for trail driving, the number of cowboys necessary to manage it, the best way to handle a remuda, the kind of chuck wagon to use, and the types of food to carry.  

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26 Holden, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
CHAPTER IV

EARLY KANSAS CATTLE MARKETS

The marketing of cattle grown on the Texas plains was for years a matter of grave concern to the cattlemen. During the first year of the Civil War cattle were driven to the Mississippi River to supply the Confederate Armies, and for a time it looked as if a market had been found for the Texas surplus of beef. But the fall of Vicksburg and the capture of New Orleans cut off this outlet. Texas was bottled up, and the solution of marketing the cattle had to await the close of the war.

By 1865 there was a meat scarcity in the United States, but Texas was "cattle poor" due to high transportation charges. Chicago was already spoken of as the big cattle market, for the meat packing industry had reached its highest development there.

On Christmas Day, 1865, an event took place that marked a milestone in the cattle and packing industries; on that date the Union Stockyards were opened for business at Chicago. In future years it was to mean the economic salvation of the Texas cattlemen. At this time there was a limited access to the Chicago market by way of the Gulf of Mexico, New Orleans, and Cairo, Illinois, to Chicago. The cattle were loaded on steamers on the Texas coast and taken to New Orleans,
and from New Orleans they were shipped by steamboat to Cairo and from there transported by rail on to Chicago. A modification of this route was to drive the cattle to Red River and send them to New Orleans by steamboat instead of taking the Gulf route. But both of these routes were expensive and offered little future for the development of the Texas cattle industry.

The country was prosperous and people were demanding more beef. Canned meats and refrigerated half carcasses of dressed beef were appearing in the markets. Something had to be done. Some way had to be found to get the Texas cattle to the northern markets. Thus the idea of driving the cattle overland was born.

For about twenty or twenty-five years thousands of Texas cattle were driven up the trails to the Kansas markets. The railroads had just come into Kansas, making connections with the stockyards in Chicago and other cities. A number of cowtowns sprang up along the railroad lines as an outgrowth of the Texas cattle trade.

It is interesting to follow the price of cattle from the Texas ranch to the retailers' counter in New York. The drovers bought cattle on the ranch. If only beef cattle were purchased the price was $12.00 to $14.00 per head, but if he bought a miscellaneous drove, beeves cost $11.00, milch cows $6.00, three year olds $7.00 and yearlings $2.50. At Abilene, Kansas, the beeves sold for $20.00, milch cows for $12.00, three year olds for $10.00 and yearlings for $5.00. If the cattle had spent the summer on Kansas grass before the

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sale they were worth 20 to 25% more. Beeves cost the importer $31.00 in St. Louis and $55.00 in New York. The retailer paid about 8¢ per pound for the animal. Thus, a beef weighing 900 pounds cost the retailer about $72.00.²

The overland cattle industry was far larger than most people today realize. From 1868 to 1891 almost 10,000,000 cattle and more than 300,000 head of horses were driven from Texas and sold, bringing fully $240,000,000. In 1870 more than 300,000 head arrived in Abilene. In 1871 nearly 1,000,000 head were driven north, of which 600,000 went to Abilene while other cowtowns received 300,000 more.³

Several men of the West played a prominent role in developing the cattle trade: Wheeler, Goodnight, McCoy, and others. But Joseph G. McCoy did more than any other one man to bring Texas cattle to a Kansas market. It was through his work that the town of Abilene, Kansas, was born. All that had been in Abilene before McCoy came was a railroad station.

In 1866 Joseph G. McCoy was a young man, thirty years of age, living near Springfield, Illinois. He had been engaged in the cattle business with his two brothers for several years and had had considerable experience in buying, selling, and handling cattle. At this particular time, the Kansas Pacific Railway Company was building a line into the West. Young McCoy had the idea of establishing a great cattle


³Amarillo Sunday News-Globe, August 14, 1938.
market at some point on the railroad where connections could be made with the cattle drivers coming up from the South. With this thought in mind, McCoy conferred with the railway officials in St. Louis, Missouri. He laid before them his plans for building pens, yards, and equipment for handling the herds at some desirable location on their line. The railroad officials did not take him seriously and declared that his plans were fantastic.

McCoy did not give up so easily. After months of negotiations, a satisfactory deal was worked out between him and the railway company. After traveling over the line, Abilene, Kansas, was chosen by McCoy as the best point for making connections with the northern drives. It was located almost due north of the place where the cattle would leave Oklahoma.

During this time McCoy had succeeded in persuading his two brothers to join him in the venture. Much work had to be done by McCoy and his brothers before they were ready to receive the herds. Strong pens and other equipment were constructed to take care of the wild cattle of the plains. After everything was ready for the reception of the cattle, experienced plainsmen were hired to go south into the Indian Territory for the purpose of guiding the herds on to Abilene.

Only about 35,000 cattle were shipped from Abilene in that first year of 1867, but the McCoys were not discouraged. Of the 35,000

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cattle that arrived in Abilene that year, only about 3,000 head were bought and shipped to Chicago by the parties owning the stockyards. The cattle were thin and made only the lower grades of beef, for which there was but little demand. Another portion of the drive of 1867 went into winter quarters. Many of these animals were taken north to the Platte country, and quite a large number were packed at Junction City, where an enterprising firm had erected a temporary packing house. 5

In spite of the discouraging experiences in the summer of 1867, the founders of the enterprise at Abilene were determined to make a systematic effort to secure a larger drive of cattle from Texas in 1868. During the next year their facilities for handling cattle were enlarged and an advertising program was pursued without regard to expense. To every Texan whose address had been obtained the previous year, and to all whose addresses were subsequently obtained by other methods, a circular letter was sent pointing out the advantages of the Abilene market. These letters were also sent to all newspapers of the Lone Star State. The newspapers printed the letters and many gave them favorable editorial notices.

In addition to the circular letters, two men were sent to Texas to travel over the state and inform the drovers about the Abilene market.

5Joseph G. McCoy, *Historic Sketches of the Cattle Trade in the West and Southwest*, p. 106.
Since the drover was only one of the parties necessary to make a complete cattle market, it was necessary to do an equal amount of advertising in the North, since the buyer was just as important as the seller. Northern newspapers were full of Abilene advertising. Fully $5,000.00 was spent in this advertising scheme during the winter of 1867-1868.  

The season of 1868 was a live one for Abilene. Approximately 75,000 Texas cattle were driven up the trail that year. The town was full of cattle buyers awaiting the arrival of the cattle long before the first herd passed the southern boundary of Kansas. No sooner did the cattle begin to arrive than trade opened lively and at good prices. About one fourth of the cattle were bought by Illinois grazers and shipped to pastures. Ranchmen from Colorado, Montana, Utah, and other northern territories bought thousands. Cattle speculators from Nebraska and Iowa were there. Representatives from the packing houses bustled about, buying their share. 

The cattle trade amounted to more than $3,000,000.00 that year (1868), and increased annually for the next two or three years. There was also an immense trade in camp supplies. The number of cattle coming to Abilene each year doubled the amount of the previous year.

6 Ibid., p. 115.
7 Ibid., p. 124.
8 Ibid., p. 179.
9 Ibid., p. 204.
Perhaps no point or village of its size ever had been so thoroughly advertised, or had acquired such widespread fame. One would suppose from the many reports that it was a large town or city of many thousands of inhabitants, instead of a small village of a few hundred citizens. People were often disappointed when they saw the town for the first time.

The year 1871 was the peak year for Abilene. About 600,000 cattle arrived that season. For miles north, south, and west of the town one could scarcely get out of sight of a herd. On a hill one might be able to see thirty, forty, or even fifty thousand head of cattle grazing or herding. 10

Most citizens of Abilene thought that the Texas cattle trade would be a lasting institution. It was extremely profitable and they were enjoying it. The Texans were free with their money; a dollar to them looked small, while economy signified everything to the Yankee.

It was common practice in transacting livestock business to borrow large sums of money, usually for a short time, thirty to ninety days. Not one operator in a thousand, whether drover, feeder, or shipper, ever had money of his own sufficient to conduct all of his business operations. If he had that much money of his own, he would not need to operate at all. The banking institutions were the most

10 Ibid., p. 226.
common sources from which they obtained their loans. About the middle of September in 1873 the great panic began in the eastern cities and by October it had reached Kansas. Perhaps no business suffered more than the cattle trade. There were thousands of cattle awaiting the opening of the packing season. Their owners were usually in debt to the banks. Because of the banks' condition it was impossible to grant extensions on the loans. The only thing for the stockmen to do was to put their cattle on the market, because in most cases the stock was pledged to pay their debts. To make matters worse, the short corn crop had reduced the number of buyers by 50 per cent as compared with the previous year, while the number of cattle to sell was much larger than in the previous year. 11

Large numbers of cattle that were shipped East did not sell for much more than freight charges. A single firm lost $180,000, in three weeks' shipments. It is estimated that the panic lost Texas drovers fully $2,000,000. Many thousands of cattle were sold at from one to one and a quarter cents per pound gross weight, to be "tanked," that is, the hide, horns and hoofs taken off, and the balance of the carcass placed in a tank and rendered or steamed; the tallow obtained, the balance was thrown away. 12

The McCoys enjoyed a profitable business in 1868, 1869, 1870, and 1871, but after that things began to go wrong. Settlers living south of Abilene complained that the herds destroyed their property and crops. They were also afraid of the Spanish or Texas fever. Satisfactory

11 Ibid., p. 251. 12 Ibid.
agreements did not prove lasting. The McCoy brothers likewise had their troubles with the railroad company. In 1871 the two older brothers, being disgusted, sold out their interests to Joseph and left Abilene.

In the summer of 1870 Joseph McCoy decided to buy some cattle of his own, and winter them on the plains around Abilene. To be able to do this, McCoy was depending on a large sum of money that the railway company owed him. When the railway company refused to pay this money, and cancelled their contract with McCoy, the future looked dark, indeed. The contract between these two parties had not been in writing; very few agreements were reduced to writing in those early days; a man's word was considered his bond.

After exhausting all other efforts, McCoy brought suit against the railroad company. In 1871 he was granted judgment for the full amount of his claim. The case was appealed by the railroad company to the Supreme Court of Kansas and was finally decided by that tribunal in 1872. The opinion was written by Judge Brewer, is entitled Kansas Pacific Railway Company vs. Joseph G. McCoy, and is reported in Kansas Reports, Volume 8, page 538.\(^{13}\) The decision was in favor of McCoy.

McCoy won judgment from the railway company, but the relief had come too late to the promoter of the greatest cattle market in the

\(^{13}\)Riding, op. cit., p. 95.
world at that time. His creditors had closed in upon him and he had lost a fortune.

The town of Abilene, Kansas, was laid out in 1860. However, there was very little in the town before the coming of the Kansas Pacific Railroad and the Texas cattle in 1867.

When the cattle market was opened at Abilene, a decided change took place in the town. Hotels and boarding houses were erected; dry goods stores, saloons, gambling houses, and other business establishments were opened. A jail was finally built in 1870.

The wildest and roughest part of the town was Texas Street, south of the railroad. All of the saloons and some of the stores were located in this section. The Alamo Saloon, where Wild Bill Hickok made his headquarters when he was City Marshal, was located in this vicinity. For a man to be killed in a saloon only added to its notoriety and drew more business.

After Abilene became a cattle market, it was one of the liveliest towns in the West. Hundreds of cowboys, cattlemen, and speculators could always be found there. Many cut-throats, desperadoes, and gamblers flocked into town. Wes Hardin, a desperado who had killed about forty men, said, "I have seen many fast towns, but I think Abilene beats them all."14

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14Floyd Benjamin Streeter, *Prairie Trails and Cow Towns*, p. 84.
Very little attempt was made to enforce the law during the first two years after the cattle trade started. The town was wide open, with no city government, no police, and no jail. Pistol shots, drunkenness, and gambling kept decent people off of the streets and constantly in fear of their lives. However, very few people lost their lives during these two lawless years.

The town was incorporated in 1869. A city council and a mayor were elected and a city marshal was appointed. The city marshals failed to keep order and usually did not last long on the job. The drunken cowboys often took charge of the town, forcing the business houses to close by riding into the stores on horseback and shooting up the place. Two new marshals hired from St. Louis were run out of town the day they arrived.

Many prostitutes came to Abilene after the cattle boom started, increasing the town's wickedness. Contrary to common belief, they did not make the saloons their headquarters. Very few saloons allowed these women to enter their doors. They usually stayed in the hotels and boarding houses.

During this period of disorder a young man named Tom Smith applied for the job of city marshal and was hired. Little was known about his past life, except that he had served for a time on the New York police force. Smith started out quietly to defy rowdyism and to
subdue the town. His courage and bravery soon became widely known as rumors of it spread rapidly over the plains.

Smith always rode a big white horse down the middle of the street and went unarmed. The city ordinance against carrying a gun gave the young marshal the most concern, but after disarming some of the most notorious characters in Abilene, he had very little trouble in the future. Smith's policy of using his fists baffled the cowboys who had always depended on their guns.

Marshal Tom Smith met a tragic death when he attempted to arrest a man in a dugout several miles out in the country from Abilene. After shooting Smith in the chest and hitting him on the head with his gun, the man seized an axe and chopped Smith's head nearly off from his shoulders.

Another noted city marshal of Abilene was Wild Bill Hickok, a man who had gained fame throughout the West as a gunman. Hickok was hired as a successor to Smith, and established his headquarters in the Alamo Saloon. Hickok's method of keeping law and order differed greatly from Smith's. The new marshal never rode a horse and was always well armed, carrying a sawed-off shotgun and two pistols, never allowing anyone to get behind him. Wild Bill always sat with his back to the wall when he gambled at the Alamo. The marshal had two or three deputies to assist him; one of these deputies was Thomas Carson, nephew of the famous Kit Carson.
Perhaps the most exciting event that happened to Wild Bill while he was marshal of Abilene was the killing of Phil Coe and Mike Williams. Phil Coe was half owner of the Bull's Head Saloon and never was on very good terms with Wild Bill. Some reports stated that they were rivals over a beautiful woman, Jesse Hazel. They stated that the lady chose Coe, much to the disgust of Hickok, who vowed that he would put his rival out of the way. Others reported that Coe had threatened to put Wild Bill out of the way "before frost." In the gun battle that finally occurred between the two men, Coe was shot and killed by Hickok. Wild Bill also killed Mike Williams, one of his deputies, by mistake. Deeply regretting the killing of his friend, Mike Williams, Hickok paid all funeral expenses.

After the Abilene cattle market declined in importance, and the cattle trade shifted to other towns in Kansas, Wild Bill resigned his job. He was later killed in a gun fight at Deadwood, South Dakota.

When the season of 1871 closed, the cattle market at Abilene rapidly declined; it shifted to Ellsworth, Wichita, Newton, Dodge City, and other points in Kansas.

After the cattle trade had shifted to other towns the effects were easy to see in Abilene. Four-fifths of her business houses became vacant, rents fell, many of the leading hotels and business houses were closed and moved elsewhere. Property became unsalable. The whole village assumed a desolate,

forsaken and deserted appearance. Some of the best citizens became entirely bankrupt. 16

Abilene was very grateful to her fearless marshal, Tom Smith, who restored law and order to the town. After the cattle drives were over, Abilene became a quiet little city, but never forgot her glamorous history.

Ellsworth, Kansas, was another early cowtown. After the cattle drivers made Ellsworth a marketing place for their herds, the town prospered. New business men flocked to town and old business houses enlarged their stocks. Hitching posts were put up in front of the stores and benches were provided for the loafers. The saloons and gambling houses did a big business.

The people of Ellsworth did all in their power to make the town a great cattle shipping point; much advertising was done to show the superiority of the Ellsworth market over the Wichita market, which was giving serious competition. It was pointed out that Ellsworth had good railroad facilities, being located on the Kansas Pacific line just as Abilene was; their large cattle yards and hotel accommodations were also played up.

This little cowtown was not noted for its morals. It has been compared to an early California mining town, during the cattle season. Gambling and drinking were the chief vices of the dusty cowboys after a

16McCoy, op. cit., p. 231.
hard drive up the trail. Gambling was wide open without a thought of secrecy. With about seventy-five professional gamblers in town, every kind of gambling device known was in operation. Faro was a very popular game among the cowmen.

Perhaps the most notorious gamblers who drifted into town were from Texas, all originally from around Austin: Ben Thompson, Billy Thompson, Cad Pierce, and Neil Cain. Ben Thompson and his brother Billy were known as gunmen throughout the West. Both of them had spent some time in Abilene before coming to Ellsworth. While in Abilene, Ben was associated with Phil Coe, who was killed by Wild Bill Hickok. Ben was never on very good terms with Hickok, and it was reported that he offered Wes Hardin, a noted killer, a large sum of money to kill Hickok; however, Hardin refused.

Ben Thompson had come to Ellsworth with the intention of going into the saloon business, but finding it already overcrowded, he devoted most of his time to gambling.

During the shipping season of 1872, only one serious shooting occurred; luckily no one was killed. But the season of 1873 did not pass so quietly. With larger herds coming in, business increased and everything speeded up a bit. In spite of the increased activity, nothing serious happened until the latter part of the summer. Then a series of killings occurred.
Ben and Billy Thompson played a prominent role in this short "reign of terror." Ben had had trouble with a drunken gambler. Finally, the drunken man and his friends challenged the Texans to a fight. Whitney, the sheriff of Ellsworth County, and a highly respected man, tried to stop the trouble by talking things over with the Thompson brothers. He had talked them into putting their guns away when someone yelled to Ben that his enemies were coming after him. In the excitement that followed, Billy shot and killed Sheriff Whitney, who was standing just a few feet from him. The Texans claimed that his gun had discharged accidentally, but many of the townspeople believed that it was cold-blooded murder. Billy left town and escaped to Texas; three years later he was captured and returned to Kansas for trial. After his acquittal, he moved to Dodge City, a new cattle town.

The killing of Whitney aroused the entire community. Some of the citizens formed a vigilance organization for the purpose of ridding Ellsworth of undesirable Texans. This organization issued warnings to leave town called "white affidavits." These notices were served on the men from the Lone Star State by some member of the organization or by a policeman. Ben Thompson left town and told Cad Pierce about the organization, but Pierce decided to stay around a day or two and see what happened. During this time he was killed by a man named Crawford.

17 Streeter, op. cit., p. 126.
who was one of the vigilantes. This enraged the Texans who had thought a great deal of Pierce and led to more killings.

Today, no one would ever guess that the quiet little town of Ellsworth was ever such a wild place. No lawlessness exists now among the two thousand people. They have good schools, churches, and other civic improvements.

Newton did not enjoy as long a life as a cowboy capital as some of the other towns in Kansas. However, it was a leading cattle market for one season. The town sprang up almost over night. The first building, a blacksmith shop, was erected in the spring of 1871. The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad was completed into the town that summer; stockyards were also constructed, about a mile and a half from town. The stockyards had been built under the supervision of Joseph G. McCoy, who was the father of the Abilene cattle trade. The yards consisted of fifteen subdivisions, or separate compartments, six chutes, and a Fairbanks scale of a capacity of forty tons. 18

Newton was not any quieter than the average cattle town. When an old-timer was asked about conditions in Newton in 1871, his reply was: "The firing of guns in and around town was so continuous that it reminded one of a Fourth of July celebration from daylight until midnight. There was shooting when I got up and when I went to bed." 19

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18 Ibid., p. 145.  
19 Ibid., p. 143.
The dance halls did a good business with their small orchestras and dancing girls. These dance-hall girls were engaged to dance with and entertain the male customers. Naturally, these girls did not donate their services; they were hired by the men who owned the halls. The owners made their profit by charging high prices for each dance and sometimes having a rule that customers must buy a drink after each dance. Some of the girls occasionally got drunk with their partners.

In Newton, as in other cattle towns, the Texans were not always on good terms with the townspeople. With everything wide open, as it was in Newton, it was hard for several hundred cowboys, just finishing a long and hard cattle drive, to conform to all of the laws of the town. Citizens of the town formed organizations to aid in law enforcement. Although these organizations did some good work, they were often used for selfish purposes.

Tom Carson, a nephew of Kit Carson, was employed as city marshal of Newton. Carson had been a deputy in Abilene, under Wild Bill Hickok, and made a good officer in spite of the fact that he was disliked by the Texas cowboys who threatened to kill him.

Newton, like other wild towns, had her Boot Hill Cemetery. The cemetery was for men who died with their boots on. It is known that a number of such men were buried in Newton's Boot Hill, although the exact number has never been ascertained, estimates ranging from
fourteen to fifty men who lost their lives in some type of shooting scrape during the frontier days in Newton. 20

For about ten years Dodge City was the greatest cattle market in the world. The town of Dodge was laid out in July, 1872, and was situated 363 miles west of Kansas City, on the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad. 21

The first cattle drives to Dodge City were held in 1875. Prior to the beginning of the cattle drives, the town had enjoyed a good business due to the buffalo hunters. Many hunters came to kill the buffaloes for their hides, as these animals were still abundant on the surrounding plains.

Cattle buyers from every section of the country soon came to regard Dodge City as their meeting place. Often herds would sell at Dodge whose destination for delivery was beyond the Canadian border. Herds frequently changed owners without the buyers ever seeing the cattle. A yearling was a yearling and a two-year-old was a two-year-old, and the seller's word that they were as good as or better than the string he had brought up the previous year was sufficient. Cattle were classified as northern, central, and southern animals, and except in cases of severe drought in the preceding year were pretty nearly

20 Ibid., p. 160.
uniform in size throughout each respective section. The prairie section of the state left its indelible imprint on the cattle bred in the open country, while the coast as well as the piney woods and blackjack sections did the same, thus making classification easy.

The trail herds were so thick around Dodge that the Santa Fe trains were almost blocked in the daytime as there was a herd crossing the tracks every few hours. The railroad company finally built a large culvert so that the herds could pass under the tracks. It was one man's job to stay at the entrance of the culvert and inspect the herds going through. He had to check up on all stray road-branded cattle that had been picked up on the drive and to notify their owners as well as to cut out all strays not road-branded. Besides all of this work, he received several letters daily from Texas sheriffs asking about certain fugitives who had disappeared from that state at the beginning of the drive, and from mothers who had sons who had run away from home to join the Kansas drive.

Dodge City probably was no worse than the average cowtown, but it had a longer life than most of them. The railroad builders and buffalo hunters had started the town on its spree of wickedness. The town already had made a name for itself when the first herd came up the

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23 Ibid.
trail. "Dodge was one town where the average bad man of the West not only found his equal, but found himself badly handicapped."

The cowboys spent their money recklessly in the saloons, gambling houses, and on the painted women. But it is a mistake to think that all cowboys were like that. Some of them were sober and reliable, never taking a drink or going near the gambling halls. Many of them were later to become church workers and leading prohibitionists.

Dodge was a high-price town. Nothing could be bought for less than twenty-five cents. Business boomed. All of the hotels were always overflowing. Sometimes the accommodations in the hotels were not so good; ten men died during the first year of the existence of Dodge from the bites of skunks which attacked them while they were asleep in hotels or lodging houses.

Even the wildest cowboys did not fight, drink, and gamble all the time. Sometimes they attended church services. One of the first sermons ever preached in Dodge was by a Methodist minister who rented a hall and advertised the services. The building was filled to its capacity. After the services the minister invited all who wanted to take the Lord's Supper to come forward. One half-drunk cowboy took a square of bread and drank a whole glass of wine. When the collection

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24 Ibid., p. 191.

25 William MacLeod Raine and Will C. Barnes, Cattle, p. 132.
plate was passed around he emptied both trouser pockets of all the
money he had. "I never bum my drinks," he announced aloud.  

Many notorious gunmen of Dodge were quiet men, never looking
for trouble. Some of them even tried to sidestep trouble if they pos-
sibly could. They were always ready to take part in any practical
joke.

Dodge City society was divided into two distinct classes. It was
the aim of the rougher element to amuse the cowboys. Of course, it
was a business proposition with them. Their chief interest was separat-
ing the sucker from his money. Some of them did not care what methods
they used in doing this; however, there were some honest gamblers and
decent saloon owners.

But the other class of people in Dodge were there to make an
honest living. They were God-fearing business men who supported
law and righteousness. Their children saw very little of the wild night
life. A good woman was always treated with the highest of respect.
No man ever got drunk enough to insult a lady. Even the dance-hall
girls were shown a certain amount of consideration.

Actors and actresses came to town to amuse the cattlemen. One
of the best known comedians of the West was a young actor named Eddie
Foy. Because Foy had a Broadway manner, the cowboys thought he was

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26Raine and Barnes, op. cit., p. 136.
a tenderfoot and proceeded to duck him in a horse trough, but the actor took the prank so well that he became a great favorite.

Like the other cattle towns, Dodge City had its good years and bad years. When large herds came up the trail from the south, business was good; but when the herds quit coming, business was bad. By 1884 farmers were pushing into the Dodge area. Early the next year a quarantine law against Texas cattle was passed.\(^{27}\) Railroads were being built to the south to take care of the shipments of Texas cattle. The barbed wire had come and the days of the open range were coming to a close. However, the Texas drives continued to come northward until 1890 or 1891. The cattle market shifted from Dodge to Hunnewell, Arkansas City, Caldwell, and Kiowa. All of these towns were located on the state line between Kansas and the Indian Territory. Caldwell received large herds of cattle driven from the Texas Panhandle, which had been stocked by this time. Caldwell was also the home of the Cherokee Strip Live Stock Association. During the last few years of the trail industry cattle were also driven to Ogallala, Nebraska; Cheyenne, Wyoming; Miles City and Glendive, Montana; and points in Canada.

\(^{27}\) Pelzer, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 68.
CHAPTER V

THE END OF THE OPEN RANGE

The cattle kingdom had spread over most of the plains states by the early 1880's. Since most of the early cattle drives had been made to Kansas, that state naturally was one of the first to go into ranching on a big scale. In 1870 300,000 Texas cattle were driven up the trail; about half of these were stock cattle to sell to Kansas range men. ¹

In the fall of 1871 many newcomers, mostly easterners who knew nothing of the cattle business, had stocked the ranges around the cattle shipping centers. They had heard that a small herd started in this western country, where grass and water were as free as the air, would bring tremendous wealth in a few years. Practically all of these men who rode the Kansas plains that autumn believed that their fortunes were made. The Kansas winters were so mild, it was said, that there was hardly any need for coats. But when that terrible winter was over the owners rode out from their snowbound ranch houses and found a half, or perhaps only a fourth, of their cattle still alive. ²

In the early days very few men owned the land their cattle grazed upon, and the ranges were all unfenced. Therefore, the rancher's

¹Douglas Branch, The Cowboy and His Interpreters, p. 110.
²Ibid., p. 111.
investment was not so great. The price of cattle started gradually rising in 1875. By 1882 the increasing prosperity of the cattlemen was taking the form of a boom. "Grass-fed" steers were selling in Chicago at $6.80 per hundred pounds. ³ Old conservative cattlemen began to make financial plunges. The cattle industry reached its peak about 1885. After that year the price began to drop. The decline in price for the next ten years was about 7 per cent each year. ⁴

During the good years before 1885 many inexperienced and inefficient ranchers had managed to make money. The price drops eliminated this situation. Only the most capable and experienced cattlemen were able to survive. The cattlemen had other troubles besides lower prices. Many of them had made the mistake of overstocking their ranges. When this was the case, a hard winter followed by a dry summer did not leave enough grass for their herds.

The price decline of 1885 drastically changed the nature of cattle ranching. It converted ranching from an adventure into a business which is today carried on with as much system as manufacturing or mining.

By 1886 cattle had been driven up the trail for twenty years. However, trail driving was entering into its final phase. Each year

³William C. Holden, Alkali Trails, p. 44.

fewer and fewer cattle were driven overland to northern markets. The chief reasons for this decline were (1) stubborn opposition of the cattle-men and farmers of the North, and (2) the fact that railroads were replacing the trail as a means of cattle movement.

The antagonism of the Kansans against trail driving was nothing new—it had been going on for a long time. The chief complaint against the Texans was that their cattle were carriers of the dreaded "Texas fever." Cattle that had no indication of the disease in Texas, nor even in the northern climate, proved to be carriers of the malady. Enraged by their losses, the farmers made war on the intruding herds. Cattle were shot and men driving them sometimes barely escaped a similar fate. Some drovers and cowboys were tried and convicted with very little or no evidence. They were either heavily fined or put to death. In some sections of the country a toll was charged for the crossing of Texas cattle across a stream or a strip of land.

The earliest conflict between drovers and natives occurred near Abilene, Kansas. Of course, the drovers were partly at fault in the dispute. They had their own selfish interests in the matter. They knew that farming would injure, or destroy, the virgin prairies for grazing. Plowing and other improvements would encourage the growth of weeds and drive the herds directly from the free public range. A drover looked upon a farmer as a parasite. He considered the land around Abilene a desert and anyone crazy who tried to farm there.
He thought that the cattle trade furnished Abilene with business and that the town would be dead without it. The drovers regarded themselves as the only logical hope for the country; its use rightfully belonged to them. If the farmers did not like it, they could leave.

All of the cattle dealers took the cattlemen's viewpoint. However, many thinking citizens of Abilene took the farmers' side. They reasoned that the cattle trade, though great in volume, would never make the plains "bloom." Only a small local population would benefit from it. Towns and cities would never grow and thrive unless they were backed up by well-settled countrysides.

Cattle drivers did hurt the farmers. The steers raided gardens and spring crops, tore down fences, and chased women and children. If the farmer went to the drover for a settlement, the drover usually fought, bluffed, or bought his way out of the situation. The farmers were discouraged at times and felt that there was no use to plow or fence because the longhorns would wreck everything in the spring drives.

The drovers complained that driving cattle through fenced country was plain hell. A big herd needed a mile or more to bed down in at night. Some parts of the trail would be fenced on both sides. One herd would clean out the grass along such a trail for the season. If there were any calves in the herd, they would usually bed down on the fence rows, and always get up on the wrong side of the fence. Then there
would be cows bawling on the trail and calves bawling in the fields and pastures on both sides.

A compromise between the drovers and the farmers was finally worked out in the Abilene section of the state that lasted for a few years.

By the year 1884 all ranges in western Kansas were well stocked. The feelings against the Texas longhorns were still hostile. In that particular year thousands of cattle were on the Western Trail headed for Dodge City. Just as the lead cattle reached the Kansas line at the Longhorn Round-Up Saloon, Kansas passed a quarantine law against Texas cattle entering the state. Things looked dark until a compromise was reached with the state. Two leading citizens of Dodge City negotiated for the compromise. Dodge City had prepared for the biggest season in its history and the business men knew they would be ruined without the Texas cattle.

To relieve the quarantined cattlemen, two furrows were plowed, one on each side of the trail, the distance from the state line to Dodge City. Out on the open prairie it was several miles between furrows, but when there was a nester settlement it was necessary for the trail to narrow down to a few hundred yards in width. Notices were posted frequently stating the rules and regulations and all trail bosses were asked to observe them. There was a fine for anyone to be caught with his herd outside of these furrows.
About two years later the governor of Montana quarantined all cattle from Texas at the state line for ninety days. It was difficult to enforce the ruling justly and it was finally revoked. South Dakota also refused to admit cattle from Texas unless they had been driven all the way. It was the general belief in some sections that if cattle had been on the trail a sufficient length of time they would not carry the Texas fever. By this time most western states had livestock sanitary boards which effectively enforced regulations regarding protection from disease.

It was years before it was discovered that the infection came from ticks that the cattle dropped which carried the disease to northern cattle. The custom of dipping was finally substituted for quarantine. The federal government took a hand in the matter and established some sanitary regulations of its own. When the Texas cattlemen came to appreciate the situation, they adopted a policy of co-operation with federal authorities. State legislation was also provided and the process of ridding Texas of the dreaded ticks was begun. This process has been going on for many years, and at the present time there are few fever ticks left in the state.  

Many Texans thought that the quarantine laws were due more to the selfishness of northern cattlemen than to the fear of the cattle fever.

\[5\] Ibid., p. 173.
It was generally believed that interested persons in the North desired to keep Texas cattle off of their markets and their ranges.

Another barrier to trail driving was the opening of the Oklahoma Territory to settlement in 1889. This prevented driving across private lands. The year 1891 saw the last of the herds pass over the trail.\(^6\)

The coming of the railroads to the range country of Texas offered cattlemen a chance to market their cattle without driving them up the trail. However, trail driving was continued for several years after the railroads came. The X I T and other ranch outfits in the Panhandle could have shipped their herds by rail after 1887. There would have been no risks of stampedes, blizzards, swollen rivers, and so on. But driving was cheaper than shipping. The railroad charged about $1.50 to ship a steer from the Panhandle to Montana, but the cost was only about seventy-two cents a head when driven overland.\(^7\) The cattlemen continued to follow the trail after the railroads came because it was good business.

After twenty-five years, trail driving gave way to progress in a changing order. One of the most colorful periods of western history was closed. It would be difficult to estimate the impact of the cattle trade upon our civilization. Although sixty years have passed, modern

\(^6\)Amarillo Sunday News-Globe, August 14, 1938.

\(^7\)J. Evetts Haley, *The X I T Ranch of Texas*, p. 143.
literature and motion pictures have kept the subject before the public. Millions of Americans find this period of history more glamorous than any other.

The result of cattle driving indicates one of the tendencies of human nature. People always follow lines or traces. When adventurous persons saw a mark upon the prairie, they set foot upon it and followed it to the end. Thus settlers came, following the cattle. Many square miles of country have been given to settlement because of cattle trails.

In the early 1870's, about the time the cattle drives were getting well under way, a young hardware salesman named John W. Gates arrived in Texas. He brought with him something entirely new called "barbed wire." He proposed to induce the cattlemen to use this wire for fences. The cattlemen were not very much impressed by the new wire. They insisted that it would never hold herds of wild longhorns, although it might be all right for tame eastern cattle. Gates decided to hold a demonstration in San Antonio. A cattle pen was built and the ranchers were invited to bring in their wildest cattle. Much to the surprise of the ranchers, the fence kept the cattle enclosed. They had to give in that it worked.

Barbed wire has been widely used since that time. Perhaps nothing changed the cow country more drastically or brought on more controversy. The barbed wire fence became a political and economic
issue in most parts of the state. It meant transition from the old to the new. The end of the open range and free grass was in sight. It meant change and it is human nature to oppose change. Some could not and others would not adjust themselves to the change.

The homesteaders had a lot to do with the passing of the open range, just as they had with the passing of the cattle drives. The cattle barons had been upset over the settlement of Kansas by the small farmers, but they were much more concerned when their own ranges in Texas were threatened. Most cattlemen did not own any land but they had used the public lands so long for grazing that they thought the use of this vast domain was rightfully theirs. The cattle kings looked upon homesteading as something that corrupt politicians in Washington were sponsoring. They took the position that Texas was not a farming country and that farming would mean the ruination of the state.

Homesteaders were usually referred to as "nesters" or "squatters." However, they were sometimes called such things as "wretched nesters," "dead-beats," "ungrateful creatures," "thieves," and "land pirates." It was true that a few nesters had filed a claim for land near some big ranch for the purpose of rustling the rancher's cattle. This type of homesteading was done by cowboys who had "gone bad" from cowtown whiskey and dance-hall companions. They drifted into

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the dishonest type of life in their search for ready money. If one of
these so-called settlers could secure a legal right to settle inside a
ranchman's pasture, he could carry on his rustling business with some
security.

Most nesters were honest and hard-working people. They just
wanted a chance to get a farm of their own and earn a living for their
family. About all the nester had was a team, a wagon, a few farming
tools, and a rifle. Such equipment seemed small to compete with the
cattle kings. But the nester had a conviction as to what he called his
rights, and he had courage.

Most nesters lived in dugouts or one-room shacks. Each man
filed on about 160 acres of land. They had no fences at first, so they
marked the boundary of their homestead by plowing a furrow around it.
Ordinarily there was no timber around except a few cottonwoods that
grew around the streams. They had to use buffalo chips for fuel.

Regardless of whether the nesters were honest or dishonest, as
long as they were seeking homesteads in the "solid pastures" of the
ranchmen, they were unwelcome. Most cattlemen were determined to
stop nesting at any cost. The invention of barbed wire suddenly became
a blessing to them. They started enclosing immense areas with fences.
Sometimes they got a legal right to fence the land by leasing, but more
often they did not. Many sections of state-owned land were put under
fence. The men who had filed claims for land as nesters frequently
found that the road to town had been impeded by the construction of a fence, and they were lucky if their trip was made less than ten miles longer by the barrier. Again the nester might find even his homestead enclosed in some immense ranch. Sometimes the only water holes in extensive arid areas were fenced in. When a man found his existing supply of water fenced in, he was certainly in for trouble. At times the fence would be built just around the four sides of the nester's property. This was expensive, however, as it required four miles of fence to segregate one section of land. Then, too, if the ranchman was ever able to get possession of the land, he would not want the fence around it.

Despite the difficulty of getting fence posts, which were often hauled by oxen for two hundred miles or more, the country was rapidly fenced. The ranchers felt that fencing was forced upon them, and that the only alternative they had was to move on farther west. It was not long until every rancher had a pasture of from 1,000 to 50,000 acres. Since the cattlemen had fenced so much public land that very plainly belonged to the schools of Texas, the nesters and their supporters accused them of stealing the "children's grass." Most of the entire state was divided between the free-grass and the pasture men, the

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9 Ibid., p. 8.


former representing free grass for everyone and the latter free grass for a few. The state legislature finally realized that most of the public domain was under fence. Thereupon, it enacted a law requiring persons who had enclosed free school land to pay an annual rental of $25.00 per section. 12

The feeling of animosity between the big ranchers and the nesters finally resulted in the fence-cutting war. When a nester found a fence in his way, he cut the fence and went on. This was a declaration of war. The cattlemen stationed cowboys along the fences to protect them. The nesters hid in gullies to "get" these cowboys. The result was often determined by the one who was the surest shot. However, despite the shooting, fences continued to be cut.

One of the grievances of the fence cutters was that the wire fences closed up roads which formerly had been open. Often it was necessary to travel for miles out of the way due to the fact that big-pasture men would erect mile after mile of fencing without a gate. The fences were sometimes cut, however, even if gates were provided.

In one county in central West Texas it became a nightly occurrence for a fence cutter dressed in woman's clothes to "ply the nippers." More than one fence rider was on the verge of taking a shot, but could not bring himself to shoot a woman. This fence cutter

operated successfully for a time. One moonlit night a fence rider came suddenly upon the lone cutter in the act of slashing the wire between every two posts. In his attempt to escape, the cutter's dress was caught in the wire. The rider, seeing that it was no woman, took a shot, bringing the cutter down with a bullet in his leg. Divested of his feminine attire, the cutter proved to be one of the nesters.

Most fence cutting occurred at night, but on one occasion near Coleman, about sixty men blacked their faces to look like Negroes and did considerable fence cutting during the day.

In some sections of the state fencing and fence cutting worked in reverse. It was the nesters who fenced their homesteads, and the cattlemen who had their cowboys cut the fences. This was especially true when the nester fenced in the only existing water supply for miles around. In those days wells and windmills were practically non-existent. The cattlemen had always thought of water and grass being as free as air.

The fence-cutters' war increased to such proportions that the governor had to call a special session of the legislature in 1884. Feelings ran high on both sides of the question. One bill that was introduced made it justifiable homicide to shoot or kill a man caught in the act of fence cutting. Although this bill was not reported out of a committee, it led to some heated discussions among the legislators. The bill that was finally passed by the legislature and signed by the governor
made it a penitentiary offense to cut a wire fence, but it required that a gate should be built every three miles. 13

With the enactment of this law the fence-cutting epidemic was brought under control. Of course, there have been isolated cases since, but it was recognized that private property of all kinds had to be protected. Wire fencing prevailed, but it was limited to lands actually owned or legally leased. The barbed wire fence had come to stay.

This type of fencing is still widely used, although it has partially given way to more modern fencing materials. The construction of fences exerted a potent influence upon the development of the cattle business.

It marked the beginning of the end of a cattle empire dominated by the Texas longhorn.

The struggle between the ranchers and the nesters did not stop with the end of the fence-cutting war. Although some ranchmen used force, intimidation, and ruthlessness, the majority were more careful to stay within the letter of the law. Ranchers had the advantage there; for ranch owners, as a rule, were capable and intelligent and understood the law much better than did the average farmer.

One obstruction which the large cattlemen were able to use quite effectively against the nester was county governments, which they usually set up and controlled. When the settler arrived and inquired

from the county clerk or the county judge where he might find land to file on, he was tactfully informed that there was none in that part of the country. If he was faint-hearted, he moved on. But if he was not so easily dissuaded and could locate a tract of land that the cattlemen had no legal right to enclose or claim, and about half of the land came under this classification, all he had to do was move in and defend his pre-emption against his neighbors and natural forces. Sometimes both were equally unrelenting.

The state was finally compelled to give preference to the homesteader, who was granted from a quarter to an entire section, instead of leasing the public lands to the cattlemen. However, even after the legislature acted to protect the rights of the nester, the big cattlemen found ways to evade the letter of such laws.

A few of the more unscrupulous cattlemen and cattle corporations did not hesitate to use freebooting methods. Although the land laws expressly prohibited collusion, they relinquished their leases on the school lands and had their cowboys file on four sections each. Each cowboy designated one of his four sections as his homestead and built on it, a small, cheap shack, at the rancher's expense, in which he spent a few nights a year when it was convenient. At the end of three years the cowboys used each other "to prove up" on the land. As soon as they received titles from the state they transferred the lands to their employers. A ranchman with 25 or 50 cowboys in his employ stood a good chance of making considerable headway in acquiring school lands by this method.

Other ranchers with more ethics relied upon a less effective plan for securing the school lands in their pastures. They made no effort to obstruct settlers in homesteading land.
After the settlers had lived out their claims and secured titles, the ranchman would abide his time until a drouth caused the settlers to want to sell their places and leave the country. Sooner or later most of the settlers could be prevailed upon to sell. This method was slower, more expensive, and less efficient than the one above.¹⁴

Some of the cattlemen took the situation more calmly and got along with the settlers much better. They would often trade the nester sections of land out on their borders for land filed on in the heart of the big ranches. When this was done, it was the custom for the ranchers to give the settler the bargain in the trade. When such transactions were made, fences were usually erected in order to keep the poorer grade of stock of the nesters from mixing with the better stock of the ranchers. The nesters raised feed crops which were often contracted for by the ranch before they were harvested.

In parts of the country where ranchers and nesters got along amicably, and the country was not fenced, it was not unusual for cowboys and settlers to ride the range together during busy seasons. Of course, the settlers were looking to the interest of their own small herds. They had learned by experience that their mavericks, on the open range, sometimes turned up with a rancher's brand. The only thing to do was to ride with the cowboys, or go out and brand a few mavericks of their own.

The struggle between the ranchers and the settlers was not the only example of antagonism in the cow country. There was quite a conflict between sheep interests and cow interests. The differences in the nature of cattle and sheep caused this trouble. Sheep could live on less grass than cattle and utilize steep slopes that cattle could not graze upon. Sheep could thrive on pastures after they had become too poor to support cattle. Cattlemen complained that sheep nibbled the grass close to the earth and trampled the roots with their sharp hoofs. Cattle did not like to graze on land where sheep had been and they refused to drink water after sheep because of an offensive odor the sheep left around water holes.

The cowboys learned to despise the bleating of a sheep. A cowboy was more aggressive because of his occupation. He wore a gun as part of his attire. The shepherd was a calmer, quieter man, who carried a gun only when expecting trouble. Frequently, even his gun was rusty and useless.

Sheep men had a habit, when moving north, to pass through the big cattle ranches at an average rate of two or three miles a day. By using this method they fattened their herds on cattlemen's grass. The ranchers would usually send the sheep men word to keep their distance. If the message was not heeded, the advancing sheep would be met by a group of cowboys who would slaughter some of the flock and try to drive
the shepherd out of the country. However, the shepherds did not scare very easily. This struggle led to bloodshed over most of the grazing states. In the end, however, the cattlemen had to share the range with the sheep men just as they did with the settlers.

The conflict between the ranchers and the nesters did not come in the Panhandle as soon as it did in other sections of the state. Of course, the Panhandle was newer country. Even the cattlemen had not been there as long.

It has been said that any wagon headed for the Texas Plains in the early days with a plow tied onto it was the object of a fatal attack by the Comanche Indians. The Indians ruled the plains and they knew what the plow and settlements would do to their country. A few years later much the same feeling existed among a certain element of the cattle kings. Goodnight, who planted some cane and grew it successfully, warned his people to say nothing about it for fear the nesters would be attracted to that part of the country.

Until the 1890's the ranchmen had almost undisputed possession of the Panhandle. The land was checkerboarded, alternate sections being state lands subject to filing, and the railroad lands that could be bought for as little as fifty cents per acre. Many ranchers bought the railroad land and fenced in the state land.

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In most cases the nesters on the High Plains were former cowboys from the larger ranches. They were fired with ambition to achieve some small part of the wealth and grandeur that the cattle barons enjoyed. As soon as they acquired a small stake, they would get out on their own. But they were not impelled by that reason alone; as often as not they were moved by some deeper motive, such as establishing a home for a girl who did not want to marry a nomadic cowboy.

Barbed wire was the nester's salvation in the Panhandle. Without it the nester would never have been able to survive, because he had no chance on the unfenced range with his small herds.

The first nesters had to be wary, even watchful lest they be forever removed from their lands by one swift stroke. For them the contest was never an equal one until many years had passed and they were reinforced by numbers and growing sentiment for their cause.

The first nesters had to be courageous, too, for only the desperate courage of a man fighting with his back to the wall was all that saved them from utter annihilation. The Indian's blood was not all that was spilled on the High Plains. 16

In some sections of the "top of Texas" the ranchers and the nesters got along much better. Where this was the case, confidence reigned supreme between the cowboys and the settlers. Wives of these pioneer farmers, in their efforts to survive the hardships of the country, did the laundry for the cowboys. Often the cowboys gave the wives their old clothing for the children. "I've ridden up to a nester's house many a time, and had a bunch of young'uns come out to meet me with some of

16 Ibid.
my old pants on," remarked Jim Christian, one of the early cowboys on the J. A. ranch. 17

These women also gathered wild grapes and plums and sold jelly by the gallon to the ranch, keeping a goodly supply on their own pantry shelves. If a cowboy was in the locality at meal time, he usually dropped by and enjoyed a home-cooked meal and a hearty welcome. Reading material was exchanged between the families and the cowboys.

Social life was always welcome. A few of the settlers had parlor organs and would have Sunday evening singing. Sunday schools were sometimes organized. A little later preachers began to ride through the country holding services as they went.

The Capital Syndicate Company enjoyed a peculiar and happy situation in regard to the vexing settler problem. The company had originally obtained its land for the purpose of colonization. However, it went ahead and stocked its ranges with cattle until the time was ripe for settlement. Cattle raising with the company was always secondary. The X I T lands were solid and the ranch was never harassed by small armies of settlers running over the pastures inspecting every alternate section.

Before the end of the open range, cattlemen began to realize the value and necessity of organization. They organized for mutual protection.

17 Ibid.
On February 1, 1877, forty-five cattlemen of the northwestern section of the state met at Graham and formed an association which they called the Stock Raiser's Association of Northwestern Texas. This was the beginning of the Cattle Raiser's Association of Texas. Its chief object was to protect members against cattle thieves and to this end it employed its own detectives. A similar organization was launched in South Texas soon after this and in 1893 the two consolidated into the Cattle Raiser's Association. In the Panhandle another organization was formed to protect the cowmen. It was called the Southwestern Cattle Raiser's Association. It was merged with the Texas Cattle Raiser's Association in 1921 into the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raiser's Association, the present organization. Now the organization gives its chief attention to freight rates, tariff, and improved facilities for the financing and marketing of cattle.18

Eventually the cattle country was changed over from free grass to private control. The day of the open range had come to an end. Some ranchers were financially ruined during this transition, but as a whole it was good for the cattle industry.

The end of the open range brought about a general improvement in herds. As long as the grass was free and the range unfenced, the cattlemen had little overhead expense, and longhorns could be raised at a profit. After large sums had been invested in land and fences, the cowman raising the rangy longhorns found that he was running an uneconomical animal. With a limited amount of grass, and it at a premium, it was necessary to raise fewer and better cattle.

After the railroads came to the cow country, cattle buyers insisted upon paying for livestock by the pound instead of by the head. The time

18 Wortham, op. cit., V, 172.
had come when an earlier maturing animal was not only desirable but essential. The rancher realized that he could not afford to carry a steer until he was four, five, or six years old and then sell him by the pound. He needed a steer that would weigh a thousand pounds at two years of age instead of four.

The first efforts at herd improvement were made by mating Durham bulls of the Middle West to longhorn cows. This brought about a great improvement in the type and quality of steers but it sacrificed much of the longhorn hardiness. Hereford cattle that had been brought over originally from Herefordshire, England, became very popular. Shorthorn and Angus cattle also showed much promise. The longhorns gradually disappeared from the range. Today they are nearer extinction than the buffalo.

The passing of the open range brought about many changes in the old range system. Branding was not as important as it had been before. Smaller brands were used after a rancher's cattle all ranged in his own fenced-in pastures. However, branding is far from being obsolete. Big roundups except in individual pastures became a thing of the past. The cowboy's efforts to find mavericks and place his boss's brand on them became unnecessary. All the cattle enclosed within the rancher's fences, whether branded or unbranded, were his property. Cattle rustling became more unpopular and unsafe.
In the days of the open range no one fed cattle at any time during the year. After reaching the stage at which ranching became a more stabilized business, cattlemen instituted feeding programs which became an important part of the ranch operations. Sheds and barns were built to afford greater protection from the weather.

Some of the larger ranches were declared unprofitable and began to disintegrate. Section after section was sold off as a concession to changing conditions. The J. A. ranch trimmed its holdings down to around one hundred sections. The Matador and other big ranches reduced their acreage considerably. A few of the ranches even made farming a part of their operations.

The cattle kingdom, like the cotton kingdom, was forced to give way by the changing order of things. It required thousands of soldiers battling four years to shatter the cotton kingdom. It required an army of millions of settlers a much longer time to break the strength of a few hundred cattle barons and 75 to 100 thousand cowboy vassals.

The building of railroads and the improvement of gang plows, grain drills, and reapers would have caused, in time, the disappearance of the open range even if small farms had not come. 19

19 Holden, op. cit., p. 53.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

It is interesting to look back over the development of the vast overland cattle trade. From a small beginning in the diamond-shaped region of South Texas, the cow country quickly spread over the central part of the United States.

South Texas was a rancher's paradise. The region was blessed with plenty of grass, water, and longhorn cattle. The longhorns played a prominent part in the history and development of the Lone Star State. Texans never grew weary of hearing about the peculiar characteristics of these wild cattle of the plains.

Private ownership of land was almost an unheard-of thing in the cattle kingdom. Ranchers grazed their cattle on the public domain. After years of using the same land, they felt that it belonged to them. Unwritten laws regarding range rights were respected by the cowmen.

While some cattlemen grew fabulously wealthy as a result of the cattle trade, most of them had their ups and downs just as in any other business. When prices were high, the inexperienced and inefficient could prosper, but when prices fell only the most capable survived.
Since there were no fences in the early days of ranching, cattle naturally intermingled a great deal. Some mark of ownership had to be established for each cattleman. Branding was the most common method of marking cattle. Choosing a brand was a matter of great importance in the days of the open range. The brand had to be individual and distinctive. A brand that was hard to alter was a protection against cattle rustlers.

The Texas cowboys had a major role in the development of the cattle trade. Without their work on the ranches and on the trail, the cattle drives would never have been made. The old-time cowboys had very little knowledge or culture. Their chief interests were cattle and cow ponies. A cowboy's life was filled with hard work. Perhaps no other class of working men ever had such long hours, suffered more hardships, or put up with more privations. However, they never complained about their jobs. No insurance company would in those days insure the life of a cowboy. His life was filled with too many dangers. After a hard trip up the trail, most cowboys enjoyed a spree in the northern cattle towns.

Within a few short years after the first cattle drive was made, cattlemen moved into most of the plains section of the state and even into the Panhandle. Cattle from all of these different sections were driven to Kansas markets. Most of them went up the Chisholm Trail.
Just where the Chisholm Trail was located and the exact point that it crossed Red River and entered Indian Territory have always been debatable questions. Much of the confusion was caused by a number of branch trails leading into the main trail and adopting the name "Chisholm Trail." The exact location has never been definitely settled to the satisfaction of all old-time cattlemen.

There has also been a great deal of controversy over whether the Chisholm Trail was named after Jesse Chisholm, a noted Indian trader, or John Chisum, a Texas and New Mexico cattle rancher. However, it has been proven rather conclusively that the trail was named for the Indian trader Chisholm.

It is hard for us today to grasp the magnitude of the Texas cattle trade, or how much wealth it brought into the state. In twenty-five years of trail driving about 10,000,000 cattle were sent to the northern markets. The money received from these drives was a boon to the economy of the state. Approximately 48,000 men and 300,000 horses were used during the trail driving period.

Usually the ranchers would drive their own cattle to market. Sometimes each rancher would handle only his own individual herd, and sometimes several ranchers would pool their cattle into one big herd. It was not uncommon for the ranchers to sell their cattle to a speculator who would handle the drive. Any man who drove cattle to market was called a drover.
Practically every cowboy had an ambition to make a northern cattle drive. He did not feel that he had mastered his art until at least one trip up the trail had been made. Many made the trip year after year. The long drives were hard on men and horses alike. Cowboys usually had to work fifteen to eighteen hours a day while on the drives. The hours were longer if the cattle had a bad night. Many hardships were encountered along the trail. There was always danger of stampedes, flooded rivers, Indian attacks, storms, and cyclones.

A trip up the trail ordinarily took around three months. If the drovers could reach the Kansas markets without losing a high percentage of cattle, the profits were usually high. The cost of transporting a cow from South Texas to Kansas was roughly sixty cents. Most drives averaged about $20.00 profit per head.

Abilene, Kansas, became the first major market for Texas cattle. It was through the efforts of Joseph G. McCoy, a cattle trader, that this particular site along the Kansas Pacific Railroad was chosen. Large sums of money were spent for cattle pens, scales, and other equipment to take care of the cattle coming up the trail from Texas. An advertising campaign was carried on in Texas newspapers, pointing out the advantages of the Abilene market. An equal amount of advertising was done in the North to attract cattle buyers to Abilene to purchase the cattle. After a few years the markets shifted west to Ellsworth, Wichita, Newton, and Dodge City.
All of the Kansas cattle towns attracted saloon keepers, gamblers, desperadoes, and many other undesirable characters, who were interested in making all of the money they could off of the cattle trade. Law enforcement was difficult during the boom years. Many cowboys were killed in saloon gunfights, and were buried in the Boot Hill Cemeteries that were a part of every cowtown.

During the declining years of the trail industry, cattle were driven to Ogallala, Nebraska; Cheyenne, Wyoming; Miles City and Glendive, Montana; and points in Canada.

By 1886 the overland cattle trade was entering its final phase. The railroads were building their lines down into Texas and it was no longer necessary to drive cattle the long distances to market. However, some cattlemen continued the drives until about 1891 because driving cattle to market was cheaper than shipping them by rail.

Another reason for discontinuing the drives was the opposition of the northern cattlemen and farmers. They felt that the cattle from the South were competing with their markets. They also claimed that the Texas cattle were carriers of a disease called Texas fever, and they did not want their cattle infected. Many states passed quarantine laws against the Texas cattle. The homesteaders living near the cattle trails complained, also, that the cattle destroyed their crops and tore down their fences.
The days of the open range were also coming to an end. For many years the cattle kings had grazed their herds on public lands. After the invention of barbed wire they had even fenced in large tracts of government land. The coming of the homesteaders threatened the "solid pastures" of the cattlemen. The struggle between the homesteaders and the ranchers lasted for a number of years. The ranchers used every method known to stop the flow of homesteaders into their ranges. Sometimes open violence and gun battles would break out between the two groups. However, in the end the open range passed out of existence. The law was on the side of the homesteaders.

The end of the open range marked the close of the old phase of ranching. The ranching business entered a new era. After cattlemen had to buy their land and fence it, their overhead expenses increased considerably. They found that longhorns could no longer be raised at a profit. With a limited amount of grass, it was necessary to raise fewer and better cattle. Cattle buyers were insisting on buying livestock by the pound instead of by the head. An earlier maturing animal was essential. Herd improvement became a major challenge to the cattle business. The Durham, Shorthorn, Angus, and Hereford replaced the longhorn type of cattle.

Some ranchers could not accept the change, and were financially ruined during the transition from free grass to private control, but as a whole this change was good for the cattle industry.
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