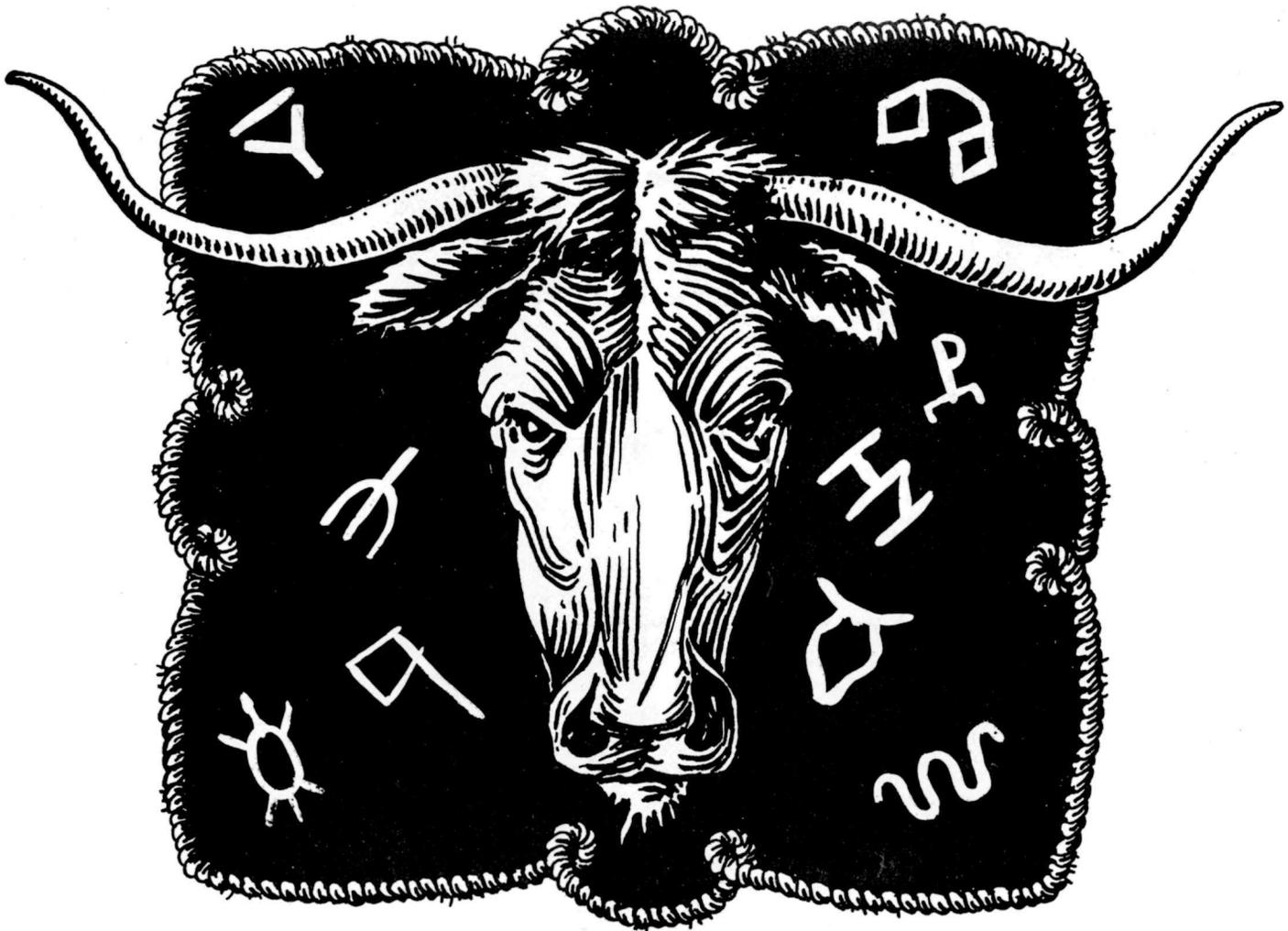


THE CATTLEMEN'S EMPIRE



THE NATIONAL SURVEY
OF HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS



Memorandum

To: Secretary of the Interior

From: Director, National Park Service

Subject: National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings: "The Cattlemen's Empire," Subtheme of Theme XV, "Westward Expansion and Extension of the National Boundaries to the Pacific, 1830-1898"

Problem: To determine which historic sites and buildings representing the Cattlemen's Empire possess exceptional value as commemorating or illustrating the history of the United States and which, if any, should be considered for inclusion in the National Park System.

Discussion: The National Park System now includes one area, Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park, North Dakota, whose major features represent this period of our history. In addition, in Jackson's Hole, Grand Teton National Park, some features also represent the story of the cattlemen.

From review and evaluation of this study, the Service recommends the following actions:

A. That the four sites listed below (page reference is to the study) be approved for classification as having exceptional value in commemorating or illustrating the history of the United States:

1. JA Ranch (Charles Goodnight - Adair Ranch), Texas, p. 76
2. Lincoln (Historic District), New Mexico, p. 80
3. Tom Sun Ranch, Wyoming, p. 83
4. Grant-Kohrs Ranch, Montana, p. 86.

B. That, upon application by the owners of any of the above four sites, or by other proper authorities, and their agreement to appropriate preservation conditions, involving no financial responsibility for preservation or maintenance

by the Federal Government, a certificate be issued by the Department of the Interior attesting to the exceptional value of the site, and that thereafter it be known as a Registered National Historic Landmark.

C. That further study be given to the King Ranch, Texas, to determine whether it should be listed as possessing exceptional value, making it eligible for Registered National Historic Landmark status.

D. That since conservation of a ranch presents unusual difficulties from the National Park Service's standpoint, no proposals for additions to the System be made at this time.

E. That the remaining 51 sites on the attached list be considered as possessing more than ordinary interest, but that in this subtheme they do not meet the criteria for "exceptional value" in accordance with the provisions of the Historic Sites Act of 1935.

Recommendation: That you approve these proposed actions.

Director

Attachment

Approved:

Secretary of the Interior

List of Other Sites Studied in "The Cattlemen's Empire."

1. Pete Kitchen Ranch, Arizona
2. San Bernardino Ranch, Arizona
3. Los Cerritos, California
4. Rancho Guajome, California
5. Rancho Las Flores, California
6. Rancho Santa Rita, California
7. Warner's Ranch, California
8. Santa Rosa Island (Vail and Co.), California
9. Sawday Ranch, California
10. Tejon Rancho, California
11. Rancho Petaluma, California
12. Marsh Ranch, California
13. William Dana Ranch, California
14. Iliff Cattle Ranch, Colorado
15. Sawtell Ranch Site, Idaho
16. 4 S Ranch, Idaho
17. Bliss Ranch, Idaho
18. Abilene, Kansas
19. Dodge City, Kansas
20. Newton, Kansas
21. Wichita, Kansas
22. Miles City, Montana
23. Site of W Bar (Wiboux) Ranch, Montana
24. DHS Ranch, Montana
25. Robert S. Ford Ranch, Montana
26. N-Bar Ranch, Montana
27. Site of Newman Brothers and Farr Ranch, Nebraska
28. Moorman Ranch, Nevada
29. 71 Ranch, Nevada
30. William Ranch, Nevada
31. Hay Ranch, Nevada
32. Cimarron, New Mexico
33. Oliver Lee Ranch, New Mexico
34. Medora, North Dakota
35. Pendleton, Oregon
36. John Devine Monument, Oregon
37. William Hanley Ranch Site, Oregon
38. Agency Ranch (Henry Miller), Oregon
39. Matador Ranch, Texas
40. Tascosa, Texas
41. XII Ranch, Texas
42. Clarendon, Texas
43. Mcbeetle, Texas
44. T Ranch Headquarters, Texas
45. Horse Heaven Hills, Washington

46. Ben Saipes Cabin, Washington
47. Cheyenne, Wyoming
48. Hutton and Alsop Ranch, Wyoming
49. TA Ranch, Wyoming
50. Swan Land and Cattle Company Ranch, Wyoming
51. Chester A. Williams Ranch, Wyoming

3/7/60

I believe I would know an old cowboy in hell with his hide burnt off. It's the way they stand and walk and talk.... Only a few of us are left now and they are scattered from Texas to Canada. The rest have left the wagon and gone ahead across the big divide, looking for a new range. I hope they find good water and plenty of grass. But wherever they are is where I want to go.

Teddy Blue Abbott

Erwin E. Smith photograph
Courtesy, Library of Congress

The National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings

Theme XV

Westward Expansion and the Extension of the
National Boundaries to the Pacific
1830-1898

THE CATTLEMEN'S EMPIRE

1959

United States Department of the Interior
Fred A. Seaton, Secretary

National Park Service
Conrad L. Wirth, Director

PREFACE

This study is one of a series being conducted by the National Park Service as a part of the National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings. Because sites associated with western history have generally received less attention than those in the East, the theme "Westward Expansion and the Extension of the National Boundaries to the Pacific, 1830-1898," has been divided into a number of subthemes, one of which is the present study.

The National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings is a resumption of the Historic Sites Survey, which was begun in 1937 under the authority of the Historic Sites Act of 1935. During World War II it was necessary to suspend these studies. The Survey has now been resumed as part of the National Park Service MISSION 66 program.

When the survey is completed, recommendations will be made to the Director of the National Park Service and to the Secretary of the Interior concerning sites which possess exceptional value in commemorating and illustrating the history of the United States. These evaluations will assist the National Park Service in preparing the National Recreation Plan, which will include sites that might be administered by the National Park Service in order to round out the historical and archeological interpretive program within the National Park System. The Survey will recommend and encourage programs of historical and archeological preservation within the National Park System and will recommend and encourage similar programs being carried out by state and local agencies.

This report is the product of three National Park Service historians: Ray H. Mattison, Region Two Office, Omaha; Robert M. Utley, Region Three Office, Santa Fe and William C. Everhart, Region Four Office, San Francisco.

Mr. Everhart coordinated the theme study and prepared the historical narrative.

After completion, the study was presented to the Consulting Committee for the National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings. The Committee consists of Dr. Waldo Leland, American Historical Association; Dr. S. K. Stevens, American Association for State and Local History; Dr. Louis Wright, Folger Library; Mr. Earl H. Reed, American Institute of Architects; Dr. Richard Howland, National Trust for Historical Preservation; Mr. Eric Gugler, American Scenic and Historical Preservation Society; Dr. J. O. Brew, Committee for the Recovery of Archeological Remains; and Mr. Frederick Johnson, Robert S. Peabody Foundation for American Archeology.

The overall Survey, as well as the theme study which follows, is under the general direction of John O. Littleton, Chief, National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings, who works under the general supervision of Herbert E. Kahler, Chief Historian, Branch of History, and of Ronald F. Lee, Chief, Division of Interpretation, of the National Park Service.

The work of the National Survey profits from the experience and knowledge of a considerable number of persons and organizations. Every effort is made to solicit the considered opinion of as many qualified people as possible in reaching final selection of the most significant sites. Assistance in the preparation of this study is acknowledged from the following:

Maurice Frink, Executive Secretary and Mrs. Agnes Wright Spring, Historian, The State Historical Society of Colorado, Denver; Will G. Robinson, Secretary, South Dakota State Historical Society, Pierre; Russell Reid, Superintendent, State Historical Society of North Dakota, Bismarck; Dr. K. Ross Toole, former Director, Historical Society of Montana, Helena;

Miss Lola Homsher, Executive Secretary, Wyoming State Historical Society, Cheyenne; Dr. James C. Olson, former Superintendent, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.

C. Boone McClure, Director, Panhandle-Plains Historical Society, Canyon, Texas; H. D. Bugbee, Clarendon; Robert C. Wells, King Ranch, Kingsville; Frank D. Reeve, Department of History, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque; Adlai Feather, Mesilla Park, New Mexico; Dr. Emil W. Haury and Dr. W. W. Wasley, Arizona State Museum, Tucson.

Miss Josephine Cobb, Photographic Section, The National Archives, Washington, D. C.; Albert Culverwell, Historian, Washington State Park Commission, Olympia; Miss Virginia Daiker, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; William S. Evans, Jr., Curator, Los Cerritos, Long Beach, California; Dr. Aubrey Neasham, State Historian, California Division of Beaches and Parks, Sacramento; Glenn W. Price, Executive Director, The Westerners Foundation, Stockton, California; Dr. Carl Russell, Orinda, California; Roscoe Sheller, Sunnyside, Washington; Thomas Vaughan, Director, Oregon Historical Society, Portland; Dr. Merle Wells, Historian, Idaho State Historical Society, Boise; Arthur Woodward, formerly of the Los Angeles Museum, Los Angeles, California

The National Park Service is particularly indebted to Mrs. L. M. Pettis, Washington, D. C., sister of the famous photographer of the Texas cowboy, for permission to reproduce a number of photographs from the Erwin E. Smith collection in the Library of Congress. Mr. Bernard Perry, of the National Park Service, did the cover illustration; Mr. Alfred W. La Riviere drew the maps.

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INTRODUCTION

The Great Plains was the last frontier region of the United States to be occupied. Many years after the agricultural frontier had jumped from the Mississippi Valley far beyond the Plains and established itself in the green valleys of the Pacific slope, and while the gold seekers were scattering their booming settlements indiscriminately across the Rocky Mountains, the Plains remained unsettled and undisturbed--a region larger than all the lands east of the Mississippi, stretching from Kansas to the Rockies, from the Rio Grande into Canada. The history of the open range is the story of a frontier enterprise--the range cattle industry--that led directly to the settlement of this vast geographic region.

For nearly half a century the frontier had remained stationary along the eastern edge of the Great Plains. To the American pioneer long accustomed to forests, streams, and rolling hills, the endless expanse of treeless flatland, seemingly devoid of moisture or familiar vegetation, was a wasteland unfit for settlement. It seemed improbable that man could ever be anything but a wayfarer in this great lonely solitude, bounded only by the horizon and the sky. For the pioneer settler, and for the early explorer, the region was truly the Great American Desert. It seemed to occur to no one that the grass which supported uncounted millions of buffalo might also provide ample food for cattle.

Then, in the years immediately following the Civil War, coinciding with the removal of the Plains Indians and the slaughter of the buffalo, the Texas cowboy--the last frontiersman--began trailing herds of longhorns into the unoccupied empire of grassland extending northward from the high plains of Texas. The country was big and new and open, and the cattleman

became the pioneer in the occupation of the grasslands of the West.

There were some 5,000,000 longhorn cattle in southern Texas at the close of the Civil War, a heritage of the Spanish occupation of the Southwest. With the blood of the fierce Moorish toro in his veins, tall, bony, coarse-haired and slab-sided, big-eared and sway-backed, his tail dragging the ground, the Texas longhorn was short on looks but long on endurance. Stretching his lean neck across a thousand miles of buffalo grass, he demolished forever the myth of the Great American Desert.

The twin discoveries that cattle, dirt cheap in Texas, could be sold for high profits at Kansas railheads, and that cattle could winter and fatten on the northern range, precipitated the boom. Railroads pushing westward into Kansas in the sixties found herds of cattle waiting in the pens of Abilene and Dodge for shipment to Midwest markets. Guided by Texas drovers, countless herds of longhorns were "pointed north," the weary cowboys hazing and night-herding the longhorns for more than a thousand miles along the now famous cattle trails. The spread of the cattle industry over the entire area of the Great Plains was complete in less than fifteen years. Millions of cattle driven north out of Texas were quietly grazing throughout the former haunts of the buffalo--in New Mexico, Arizona, Kansas and Nebraska, in Colorado, Nevada, and Utah, and in Wyoming, Montana and Dakota--and the question of the Indian wars was settled forever.

For a short time, the profits of the industry were enormous, the land was there for the taking, and the development of the refrigerator car simplified delivery of beef to the growing cities of the East. This was the cattlemen's empire, a time when grass was king, when a man could run ten thousand cattle but own no land, although he claimed "range rights" to

one hundred thousand acres and enforced his rights with the six gun. It was also the era of the American cowboy, who was in the days before barbed wire ruler of a princely domain--the short grass country--that broad sweep of grass and badlands from the Rio Grande del Norte of Mexico to the plains of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

But the cattleman was not without enemies. He was beset by rustlers, singly or in gangs, who slipped into his herds and appropriated calves with a quick stroke of the running iron; the hated farmer not only erected fences but brought women and children to the land; and the despised sheepmen brought to the range flocks of woolies which nibbled the prairie grass to the roots. And in the mad rush for easy profits, the cattleman eventually overstocked the range and proved to be his own worst enemy.

Nothing the cattleman could do seemed to stop for long the steady advance into the Great Plains of the farmer, who took advantage of the Homestead Act and barbed wire to enforce his claim to the land. Every homestead restricted the region of free grass, and the cow country could not survive the inexorable advance of the pioneer farmer. His entrance on the Great Plains wrote finis to unquestionably the most romantic chapter in the history of the American frontier.

In two short decades between the close of the Civil War and the completion of the continental railroad system, the railroads "brought the cow country into being and destroyed it forever."¹ It was the end of an era, marked by the passing of that unique frontier figure, the American

¹
Frederic L. Paxson, History of the American Frontier 1763-1893
(Cambridge, 1924), 533.

cowboy. The cattle industry of the open range was over and done. The roistering cow towns became mere station shipping points; the range was fenced into pasture lots. A new industry emerged, converting the free range into the big pasture country, and stock farming replaced unrestricted grazing on the Great Plains. The cowhand who had once known only the chuckwagon, the lariat, and the branding iron, glumly turned to a new routine--ditching tools, mowing machines and post hole digger.

In retrospect, it comes as something of a shock to learn that the West never did raise many cattle, proportionately. At the peak of the era, in 1880, the West could claim but twelve and one-half million of the forty million cattle in the United States. But in the fertile, much more densely populated East, the few cows raised on every farm were "incidents of agriculture;" in the West they constituted a way--for some a magnificent way--of life.²

For perhaps twenty-five years the cowboy had dominated the Great Plains "with a horse and a six-shooter in the interest of cattle," but his heritage was everlasting. The cattleman injected a vigorous, colorful strain into the character of the entire West, determining the economic basis of a dozen states, and creating enduring traditions which to this day have profoundly affected life in the cattle country. Credit is due the explorer, the fur trader, the prospector, the railroad builder, and the homesteader, but it was cattle and the cattleman which placed a unique and imperishable stamp on the American West.

2

Walter Prescott Webb, The Great Plains (New York, 1931), 226-7.

TRAIL WARNING

From the time the first cowboy donned his chaps, buckled on his gunbelt, and casually mounted his horse, sitting tall in the saddle, he has proved an enigma. Perhaps it was the dust kicked up by his horse which so obscured the vision of those who watched him ride away. But it is obvious from the literature that few men ever saw him clearly, giving due and careful consideration to the man and the myth.

If it were ever possible to portray the cowboy as he really was, Charlie Russell, a former cowpuncher himself, did it for all time and in mighty few words in his story of the eastern girl who saw a cowboy for the first time.

"Ma," says she, "do cowboys eat grass?"
"No, dear," says the old lady, "they're part human."¹

As the cowboy artist wryly admitted, the old gal had them sized up about right. And in a manner of speaking, there have been remarkably few people since the days of the first trail drive to Abilene, who have been certain whether or not the cowboy ate grass--or whether he was human.

It is a puzzling phenomenon of American literature that the tenaciously wholesome cowboy is the ultimate hero figure of the American frontier. Whether the humble cowboy rightfully earned his mesa top, or whether his unassailable reputation for derring-do is largely the product of the impecunious hack writer who gleefully discovered the cowboy theme to be a literary Mother Lode--this is the question. Regardless, for Americans today, a Western is a cowboy tale; the Winning of the West is a feat for which the cowboy generally receives the major credit. And the

¹ Charles M. Russell, Trails Ploughed Under (Garden City, 1927), 1.



End of the Trail. These thirsty hands, fogging in out of the alkali flats of the Texas Border country, make an unforgettable picture as they arrive in town.

Erwin F. Smith photograph
Courtesy, Library of Congress

American of today, when his thoughts turn to the West, perceives the unfenced range of the cattleman and the solitary cowboy loping across the enormous solitude of the short grass country. Driving along one of the historic macadam trails of westering, he half expects to see it as it was, and warily scans the horizon for the tell-tale smoke signal of the warring Sioux.

He finds instead the acrid smoke from the buffalo chip fire no longer rises beside the chuckwagon, the remarkably few scattered cows he encounters have short horns, and he is disappointed to learn the last great trail herd followed the Indian and buffalo across the horizon a half century and more ago. He is even more chagrined to find the freedom-loving waddy has been broken to the hayrake, to hear in Phoenix the talk is of cotton; in Cheyenne, of dude ranches.

Despite such disillusionment, the massive tide of Westerns, from paperback novels to back-to-back television programs, finds an insatiable audience among those who likely have given scant thought to the origin or the economics of the range cattle industry. And the cowpoke, that "ordinary bowlegged human," has been subjected to the ultimate ignominy from the esoteric school which alone has discovered the far-reaching symbolism of the cowboy's life, soberly advancing the theory that Billy the Kid is the American Faust, that the hero of the cowboy folk legend (one of the most simple plots ever devised) is in fact the American Beowulf, the New World's contribution to Old World mythology.²

2

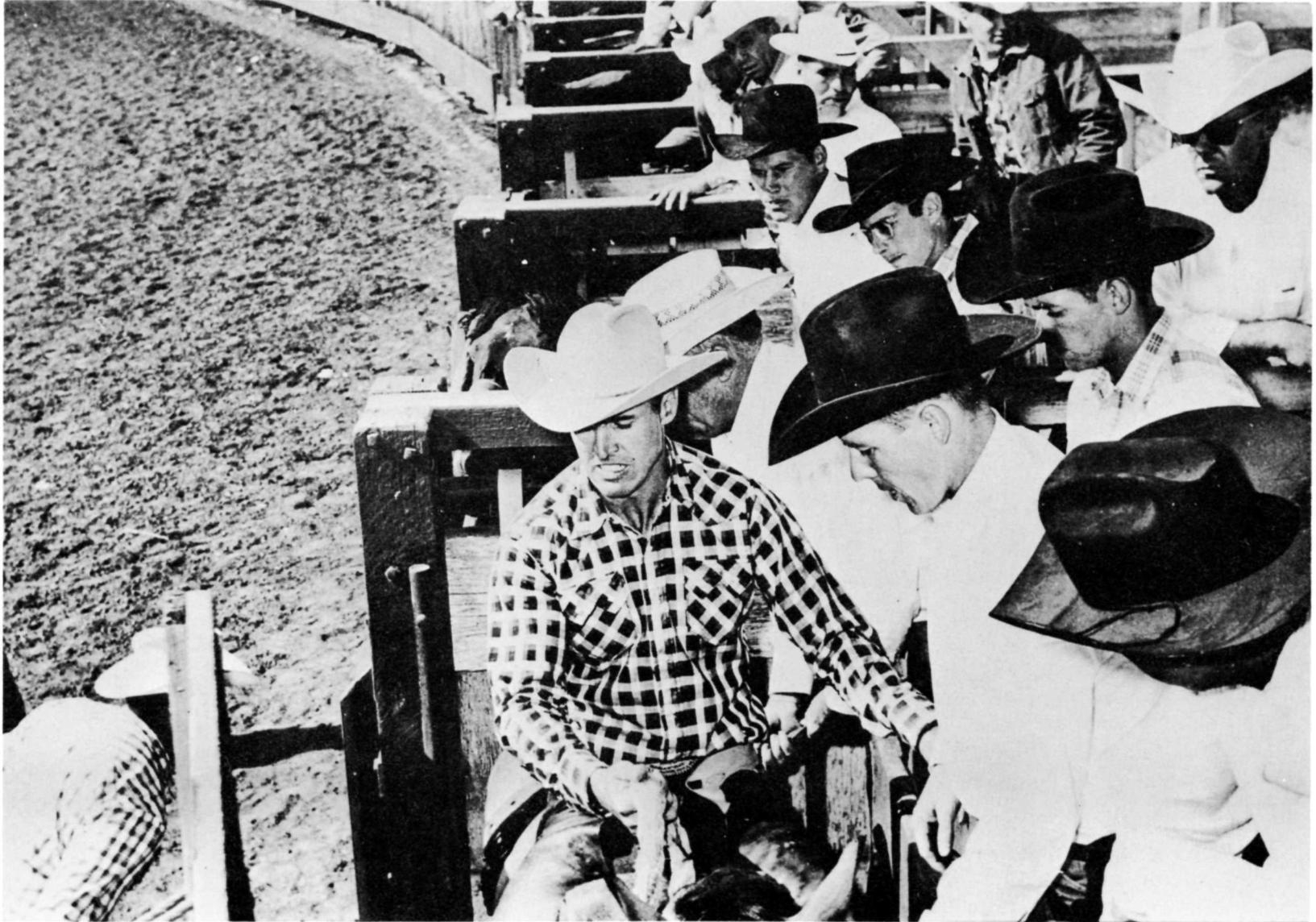
Marshall Fishwick, "Billy the Kid: Faust in America," in Saturday Review, XXV (October 11, 1952).

It was the cowboy's fortune, or misfortune, to have been the central figure of perhaps the most dramatic and colorful era of American history, always of course excepting the Civil War. Among all the frontier children of the Western movement the cowboy has emerged as the undisputed folk hero who, more than any other, has epitomized the Western frontier experience for succeeding generations.

The statistics alone tell the story, an almost unbelievable one of the popularity of the cowboy. In 1951 rodeos were staged in 500 towns throughout the United States; of the 2400 motion pictures issued by Hollywood that year, nearly 500 were Westerns; one-fifth of the phonograph records sold were classified as Western and folk types; and between 1947 and 1951 Bantam Books issued 25,000,000 Western titles.³ And this is not a phenomenon of recent origin. Owen Wister's The Virginian, written more than 50 years ago, went through 15 reprints in its first year.

The portrait of the cowboy which is being painted today is considerably hazed over by the sweet essence of gunsmoke. There was of course considerable violence; in the first year of Dodge City's history, it is claimed, 25 men died with their boots on, and Billy the Kid, a fourth-rate cowboy who became a first-rate killer, is too often pictured as a typical cowhand. Actually, it would be pretty safe to wager that the average cowboy never got into a shooting scrape and seldom witnessed one. There was such widespread sentiment against gunplay that by the eighties most territories had laws requiring every citizen to lay aside his arms upon reaching the settlements.

³ Joe B. Frantz and Julian Ernest Choate, Jr., The American Cowboy (Norman, 1955), 5.



“Turn him out!” Harley May, president of the Rodeo Cowboys Association, gives the signal for action in the chutes at the 1958 Salinas Rodeo.

Courtesy, California Rodeo
Horse Fair Stock Show

Most of the cowboy's days (and nights) were highly unromantic. Witness the tedium expressed by the cowboy who spent his evenings looking up at the bunkhouse ceiling, counting the bullet holes put there by equally bored cowhands shooting flies on the ceiling. He finally made it 3,620. In actuality, the cowboy's existence was a lifetime of hard work out in the open, under rugged, at times primitive conditions, far from the boisterous life in the cow towns.

A frontiersman magnificently equipped for his unique role in the conquest of the West, he was perfectly tuned to his environment. Were a cowboy casually to pass a group of riders on the trail, a week later he could describe with certainty the size, color, marking and brand of each animal, and the appearance and trappings of each rider. He had no peer when it came to handling cattle and horses, if a little clumsy with the womenfolk. And he had guts. A trail boss gave blunt warnings to a new hand, "If you got any rabbit in you you'd better go bury it before you draw your string in this cavvy."

Tough as rawhide, fiercely faithful to his trade, he put the welfare of the herd above his own personal comfort--and safety--and gave his employer a unique fidelity; perhaps faithfulness was his most distinguishing characteristic, although the cowboys as a class provided a discouraging field for a Methodist missionary. And he was supremely confident there was no life worth living other than the one he lived on horseback in the limitless reaches of the West. Little wonder the cowboy failed to recognize his most formidable enemy, the somewhat timid but stubborn sodbuster who advanced into the range country, trailed by his wife, his cow, and his towheaded kids.



Morning Calisthenics. If this Texas cowpony appreciated the expression "as techy as a cook," he would take his morning calisthenics a little farther from the chuckwagon.

Erwin E. Smith photograph
Courtesy, Library of Congress

It is indeed ironic that the cowboy receives homage not for what he was, but largely for what he most definitely was not--all due regards of course to the dramatic gifts of the likes of Zane Grey and Gary Cooper. In a recent study of the cowboy the conclusion was reached that

The range rider is a myth, but he is a myth possessing a living and present reality in the American folk mind. Condemn him, deprecate him, dismiss him, distort him, even set the dogged historian to work on him--and for all the disapproval which may be marshaled and for all the dead hands of fact which may be laid over his body, nothing shall avail to cancel half a line of what the American public is pleased to believe about him.⁴

Reader and dogged historian have been duly forewarned of the hazards of the trail ahead. But with minds open and vision unclouded, the followers of this trail shall withhold judgment until the evidence has been duly examined. And in this investigation of the empire of the cattlemen, the approach will be both objective and dispassionate--except of course to roundly damn those small-souled nesters who strung wire and grabbed off water which was obviously intended for the use of cattle, and ploughed up God's own grass that was right side up in the first place.

⁴
Ibid., 200-01.

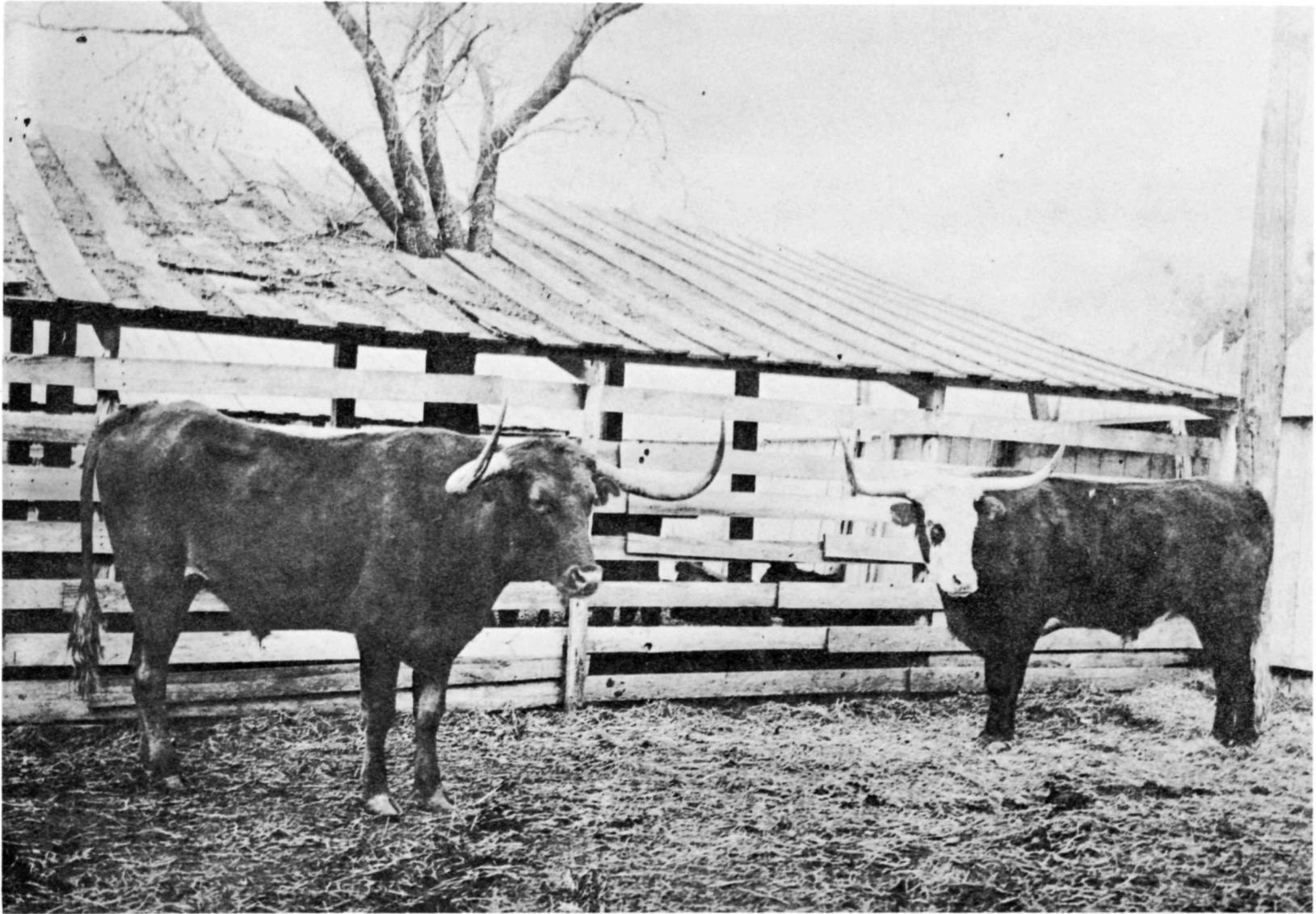
THE ORIGINS IN TEXAS

The empire of the cattlemen had its origins deep in southern Texas, in the period before the Civil War. The physical basis was grass and the foundation of this empire was the longhorn steer, the cow pony and the Texas cowboy. Beginning in the 1820's, with the establishment of Austin's colony in east Texas, American farmers and ranchers entered the triangle of southern Texas formed by the Rio Grande and the Gulf of Mexico. They found there all the elements necessary to the establishment of the range cattle industry.

The climate was mild, the country open, and here Mexican cattle thrived and multiplied. Here the first Texas cowboys began handling cattle on horseback, learning from the amazingly skilled Mexican vaqueros the techniques of riding, branding and herding. Wild horses roamed the plains, providing free mounts for those who could tame them. Northward for a thousand miles and more lay an expanse of grassland awaiting occupation, guarded only by the Indians, who in a sense were tending their herds--the buffalo.

Cattle which had been brought into America by the Spanish during the conquest found almost unequalled conditions for propagation. In 1540 Coronado gathered 500 head of cattle, apparently without difficulty, to supply his search for the Seven Cities of Cibola. An explorer twenty-five years later passing through Sinaloa found the descendants of a few animals left behind by Coronado were running wild by the thousands. Before 1600 a single rancher in the province of Jalisco was branding 30,000 calves a year.¹

¹ J. Frank Dobie, The Longhorns (Boston, 1941), 4.



Texas Longhorns. Cattle such as these, bred by the millions in Texas, were the foundation of the open range cattle industry. It is sometimes said, "Other states were carved or born; Texas grew from hide and horn."

Courtesy, National Archives

The establishment of the Texas missions, beginning in 1716, marked the first effort to raise cattle in Texas. By 1770 the ranches of Mission Espiritu Santo, near Goliad, claimed 40,000 head ranging between the Guadalupe and San Antonio Rivers.² Along the wild, subtropical valley of the Nueces River, where the climate was warm, the grass green the year round, and water plentiful, the cattle multiplied rapidly, and it became the center of the early Spanish cattle industry in Texas.³ Throughout the stretches between landholdings and in the unsettled lands farther north roamed uncounted cattle, strays from the ranches or descendants of strays, claimed by no man.

Despite his nondescript color, coarse and stringy meat, and wild nature, the Texas longhorn was of distinguished ancestry. "They are indeed," commented an early European observer, "nothing else than Spanish cattle, direct descendants of those unseemly, rough, lanky, long-horned animals, reared for so long and in such large herds by the Moors on the plains of Andalusia."⁴

Many early settlers considered the cattle to be indigenous wild animals like the buffalo; they called them "mustang cattle," or "Spanish cattle" or simply "wild cattle." A great many Spanish cattle did not run wild in the chaparral thickets, but occupied ranches established between the Nueces and the Rio Grande Rivers, where they encountered eastern cattle brought in by the American settlers. Into the stock that emerged went many

² Ibid., 8.

³ Although Spanish cattle were introduced early into Arizona and New Mexico, due to a less benign environment there was no significant development of the cattle industry until after the Civil War.

⁴ Ernest Staples Osgood, The Day of the Cattlemen (Minneapolis, 1929), 26-7.

strains. The horns grew longer, the bodies heavier and rangier, the variations in color unlimited. By the Civil War period they were known as "Texas cattle," which shortly came to mean the longhorn.⁵

Another important contribution of the Spanish occupation to the cattle industry was the Spanish mustang, which, like Spanish cattle, soon had a better hold on American soil than the Spaniard himself. The horse, like the longhorn, had strong bloodlines, descending from stock brought into Spain from North Africa by the Moors. Many horses strayed from control, rapidly increased into vast wild herds, eventually ranging north into the Great Plains. The revolution which these wild horses worked in the lives of the Plains Indians is well known, and anthropologists have termed the period from 1540 to 1880 the horse-culture period. Before 1700 the southern Plains tribes were mounted; by 1750 most of the northern Plains tribes had acquired horses. It was possession of the fleet "Indian pony" that made the Plains Indian the most formidable adversary met by the white man.

The early Texas cowboys found the Spanish mustang a natural-born cow horse. Of scrubby appearance, and not much larger than a pony, the mustang had undergone radical changes during his evolution in America. Losing beauty, he had gained wind and bottom; when the American cowboy met him he was a wiry, fleet, untamed little brute who could run all day long and kick his rider's hat off at night. Through selective breeding and the admixture of some imported blood, he became larger and somewhat more tractable; but like all horses born on Texas soil he would buck when he felt like it, which

⁵ For the emergence of the longhorn, see Dobie, The Longhorns, Chapter I.



Working the Roundup. Cutting out cattle without unduly disturbing the herd is known as working the roundup, which is just what this cowboy and his cutting horse are doing, although each seems to be watching a different calf.

Erwin F. Smith photograph
Courtesy, Library of Congress

was not infrequently. In short, he had plenty of sand.

Given a southerner with inbred equestrianism, a saddle a man could stick to, a lariat, and a double-cinched mustang who knew as much about a longhorn as his rider, and you had the tools for an industry, the tools to work and mold the resource, the Texas longhorn.⁶

Following the Texas revolution the new republic promptly declared all unbranded stock public property. Impoverished Texas pioneers who provided themselves with a goodly supply of branding irons which they wielded with commendable vigor among "wild" cattle and those not so wild, were well on the way to becoming cattle barons. Everything depended, however, upon finding a market for the lean and long-legged cattle which had no actual value. Although they were herded and sorted, after a fashion, neither they nor their increase could be converted into anything except more cattle.

Before the Civil War the largest single cattle market was in New Orleans, reached both by overland trails and by water. Throughout the 1850's steamers took aboard cattle, hides and tallow at Texas ports, although a greater number of stock was driven overland. In 1853 it was estimated 40,000 head crossed the Nueces River en route to New Orleans.⁷ The tremendous influx of gold seekers into California, beginning in 1849, provided for a time a ready market for California beef and cattle which could be trailed in from Texas.

In the early fifties thousands of longhorns, purchased in Texas at from five to fifteen dollars, were driven across the searing desert of

6

Frantz and Choate, The American Cowboy, 24.

7

Joseph G. McCoy, Historic Sketches of the Cattle Trade of the West and Southwest, edited by Ralph P. Bieber (Glendale, 1940), 23-5.

the Southwest and sold in California for up to one hundred and fifty dollars. Although the number of cattle driven to California was not great, "This journey of fifteen hundred or two thousand miles was the first really long drive of Texas cattle."⁸ But the trail to California was strewn with the carcasses of abandoned cattle, victims of the desert and poisoned by alkali water. The enormous difficulties encountered prevented development of California as a market for Texas longhorns.

A small but promising cattle trade was early developed with such frontier outposts as Independence and Westport, outfitting points for the Oregon Trail. Cattle driven from Texas were purchased by local butchers, by Chicago and Kansas City meat packers, and by the commissary department of the Army for military expeditions to the Far West. About 50,000 head of Texas cattle crossed the Red River in 1854, but this was a mere trickle, and in no way solved the problem of finding an adequate market for the longhorns.

Mid-Westerners, startled by the wild, unfamiliar look of the first Texas cattle trailed into their cities, were inclined to be uncomplimentary. "Bully chaps for glue" observed one spectator, while a St. Louis newspaper in 1854 declared: "An attempt was made to feed them with corn and provender at the stockyards, but they ran away from it. Texas cattle are about the nearest to 'wild animals' of any now driven to market. We have seen some Buffaloes that were more civilized."⁹

⁸ Ibid., 26-7.

⁹ Daily St. Louis Intelligencer, October 30, 1854, in Ibid., 31.

By the close of the Civil War some 5,000,000 longhorns roamed the grass and chaparral country of Texas. At the same time the cities of the North, rapidly expanding in the postwar boom, were a ready market for beef. Cattle worth a few dollars a head in Texas would bring forty dollars in northern markets. To launch the range cattle industry, it was necessary only to connect the four-dollar cow with the forty-dollar market.

In the spring of 1866 herds of longhorns were rounded up and "pointed north;" their principal objective was Sedalia, Missouri, which served as a shipping point to Eastern markets. But the first year of the Long Drive, a time of trial and error, was nearly disastrous. Not yet experienced in trail driving, the cowboys found it rough going with the half-wild cattle; armed mobs of angry Missouri farmers halted the cowboys at county lines and shot and stampeded the cattle, fearful that the herds would infect their own cows with the dread Texas fever. Drovers were forced to detour, many of them finally straggling into St. Joseph. Few of the cattle reached Sedalia, but they brought good prices.¹⁰

It was John G. McCoy who made perhaps the most important single contribution to the range cattle industry, for this young, audacious livestock shipper found the way to bring Texas cattle to market. Seeking a shipping point at the western terminus of the railroad, McCoy chose a miserable little hamlet in eastern Kansas consisting of about a dozen rude log huts; its saloonkeeper had so much free time he whiled away the hours selling prairie dogs to eastern tourists. This was Abilene, Kansas, the first of the cow towns. According to McCoy,

¹⁰ Edward Everett Dale, The Range Cattle Industry (Norman, 1930), 53.



Goodnight Home, Goodnight, Texas. Home of the legendary Texas cattleman from 1889 until his death at the age of 93.

N. P. S. photograph

Abilene was selected because the country was entirely unsettled, well watered, excellent grass, and nearly the entire area of country was adapted to holding cattle. And it was the farthest point east at which a good depot for cattle business could have been made.¹¹

During the summer of 1867 McCoy converted Abilene into a railhead for shipping cattle, bringing in lumber for stockyards, pens and loading chutes. Meanwhile his agents ranged into Kansas and Indian Territory to guide trail herds to Abilene. Only 35,000 head of cattle reached Abilene in 1867, but it was the beginning of an era. Returning drovers spread the word throughout Texas of the ease with which cattle could be driven to Abilene without encountering settlements, wooded areas or irate farmers. In the next four years 1,500,000 Texas cattle were loaded in the Abilene yards, before the advance of settlements in eastern Kansas shifted the Long Drive farther and farther westward.

¹¹ McCoy, Historic Sketches, 119.

THE LONG DRIVE

It lies like a long rope thrown idly on the ground, abandoned by the hand that used it. Its strands are unbraided and have fallen apart, lying loose and forgotten upon the sandy soil. The wind is blowing dust across these disconnected threads, and the grasses are seeking to cover them, and the waters have in places washed them quite away. The frayed ends are disappearing. Soon the entire cord will have disappeared. The Long Trail of the cattle range will then be but a memory.¹

The Long Drive of Texas cattle toward the polestar, which hung like a convenient lantern marking the direction of the northern range and the railheads, justly deserves the attention it has received. Ernest Osgood, one of the most brilliant students of the cattle industry, has concluded that the drive of the Texas men must be considered an American saga, and that throughout the history of the American frontier, "no single activity attracted more attention from contemporaries nor called forth a greater flood of reminiscence, story, and song after it had passed than did the Texas drive." Osgood's vivid description of the appearance of a trail herd is unforgettable:

To all those who saw that long line of Texas cattle come up over a rise in the prairie, nostrils wide for the smell of water, dust-caked and gaunt, so ready to break from the nervous control of the riders strung out along the flanks of the herd, there came the feeling that in this spectacle there was something elemental, something resistless, something perfectly in keeping with the unconquered land about them.²

There is a tendency to overlook the fact that the first trail drives of Texas cattle after the Civil War were not confined solely to Kansas and Missouri railheads. The majority of animals trailed north in

¹ Emerson Hough, The Story of a Cowboy (New York, 1898), 1.

² Osgood, Day of the Cattleman, 26.



Texas Trail Marker to the Long Drive. Near Moorecraft, Wyoming, is this monument to the cattle drives from Texas. The list of famous brands is headed by the XIT, "ten counties in Texas."

N. P. S. photograph

1866 were stocker cattle heading for new ranges being opened in New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Nebraska and Dakota.³ And in the next few years, as herds of longhorns were being trailed to Abilene, Ellsworth and Dodge City, other herds were being driven onto the northern range, to establish the great ranches of the period.

That cattle could survive the rigorous winters of the high plains had been proved long before. Mining communities which had sprung up in widely separated mountain districts of the West had drawn cattlemen and sheepmen to these regions to supply meat for the gold seekers. These were pioneer ranchers, mostly operating on a small scale, owning wild hay lands along river bottoms, sometimes near military posts, supplying a restricted market. Work animals of large-scale freighting companies which supplied the necessities of life for the miners and the United States cavalry and brought out the Indian annuity goods were wintered along the overland routes. During the winter of 1857-1858 Russell, Majors and Waddell wintered some 15,000 animals south of the Oregon Trail.⁴

Partly as a result of the widespread Pike's Peak mining boom, beginning in 1859, and partly as a result of the gradual extension northward and westward of the Texas cattle ranches, Colorado became an early center of the cattle industry. In 1866 Oliver Loving and Charles Goodnight, two drovers, trailed 2,000 cattle from Fort Belknap, Texas to Fort Sumner, New Mexico, establishing the Goodnight-Loving Trail. In 1868 Goodnight delivered a trail herd to Cheyenne, only the second Texas herd to arrive

³ Maurice Frink, W. Turrentine Jackson and Agnes Wright Spring, When Grass Was King (Boulder, 1956), 40.

⁴ Osgood, Day of the Cattleman, 16.

in Wyoming, but the Central Pacific was being constructed at that time and a small army of employees was bringing prosperity to the section. With the arrival of the railroad, Colorado cattle growers could ship Texas cattle to the eastern market or stock the ranges of Idaho, Montana and Wyoming. By 1869 a million cattle and two million sheep were grazing within the borders of Colorado Territory, and it was predicted the area would become "the cattle pasture of the world."⁵

It was found that steers which matured in the north, spread in loin and frame and grew to greater size than those which grazed in Texas. For this reason many of the bigger Texas spreads had breeding ranches in Texas and maintained finishing ranges in the northern territories. Texas cattle were trailed a thousand miles to "double-winter" on the Wyoming, Montana or Dakota pastures and then shipped, fat off grass, to the heavy beef market in Chicago. The XIT ranch drove as many as 20,000 cattle annually from Texas to their northern ranges.⁶

One is struck by the youthful exuberance and confidence with which so many of the cowboys rode out on the trail. They faced heat and thirst, stampedes and Indians, rustlers and armed homesteaders. They were the men who established the range cattle industry on the Great Plains and taught their trade to the cowboys of other regions. Resentful as one has such provocation to be toward today's professionally garrulous Texan, the word of such cattlemen as Teddy Blue Abbott, Granville Stuart and Joseph G. McCoy must regretfully be accepted, and they testified that the empire of the cattlemen was from first to last a Texas story, and in no other phase of

⁵ Ibid., 39.

⁶ J. Evetts Haley, The XIT Ranch of Texas (Norman, 1953), 126-28.



Chuckwagon on the Move. With the cowboys' bedrolls stacked to the wagon bows and dishpan banging behind, the lordly cook drives his chuckwagon to the next camp.

Erwin E. Smith photograph
Courtesy, Library of Congress

the business was the Texas flavor so evident as in the Long Drive.⁷

The organization and routine of the trail drive is by now an oft told tale. Cattle to the number of 2,500 were collected in Texas, consigned by the owner to the care and authority of the trail boss for delivery at a railhead or stocking ranch, which might be 1,500 miles or more distant. Ten or twelve hands were required to handle the herd, along with the cook, a man of considerable temper, if little imagination, and a youthful apprentice ("Little Joe, the wrangler") who cared for the remuda of a hundred or more horses. From the familiar "cowboy, roll out" long before the first light of morning, until the tongue of the chuckwagon was pointed toward the North Star to guide the morrow's journey, the cowboy spent eighteen hours in the saddle, and whether riding point, flank, swing, or eating dust with the "drags," his work was hard, lonely and monotonous.

The number of herds driven north each year was very large. Some 700,000 Texas cattle were driven to Abilene in a single year, 1871.⁸ In the level, open country for long periods of time drivers were seldom out of sight of other herds. From a hilltop in Nebraska one cowboy saw seven herds to the rear and eight in front, while the dust of thirteen more could be observed across the North Platte. "All the cattle in the world seemed to be coming up from Texas."⁹ When eleven trail herds, waiting to cross the Red River at Doan's Store in 1882, were stampeded by a thunderstorm, it

⁷ Probably the classic account of the Long Drive, by a former trail boss, is in Andy Adams, The Log of a Cowboy (New York, 1955); a collection of the reminiscences and diaries of cowboys who trailed the herds north is contained in J. Marvin Hunter, ed., The Trail Drivers of Texas (Nashville, 1925).

⁸ Webb, Great Plains, 223.

⁹ E. C. Abbott and Helena Huntington Smith, We Pointed Them North (New York, 1939), 76.

took 120 cowboys ten days to unscramble more than 30,000 longhorns.

The long, sinuous line of longhorns, stretching like a multi-colored ribbon for a mile along the journey, soon became broken to the trail, and the day's routine became automatic. The trail itself, with the passage of hundreds of thousands of cattle, became easily recognized. Depending in part upon grass available, the trail consisted of scores of irregular cowpaths forming a single passageway, widening and narrowing and twisting according to the terrain, yet leading ever northward. "After a few years of continued use, it became as well defined as the course of a river."¹⁰

The crossing of the Red River marked the entrance into Indian Territory, where the Five Civilized Tribes were on reservations in the valleys of the Red, Arkansas and the Cimarron, squarely across the trail of the Texas cattle. To protect their own pasturage and to raise revenue, the tribes levied tolls and defined trails which could be used. Conflict and friction were inevitable--and frequent.

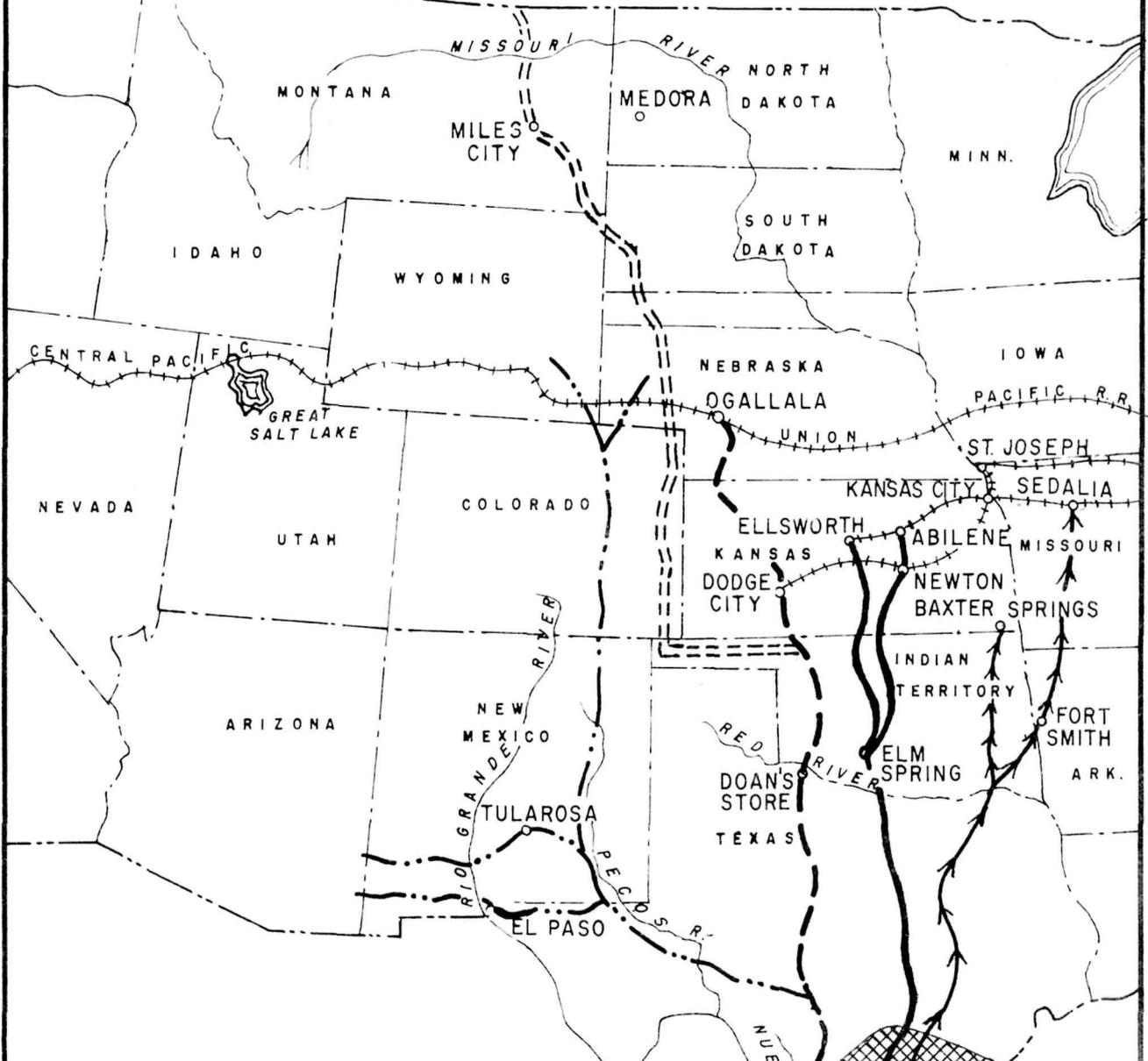
As the trail entered the arid, desolate plains of western Kansas, the cowboy undoubtedly was convinced the region was indeed an American desert. As the cattle plodded on, day after day, the incessant heat produced mirages on every side, in which "an antelope standing half a mile distant looked as tall as a giraffe."¹¹

The trail herders met some of the most bitter opposition from the farmers of Kansas and Missouri, whose small herds and milch cows were ravaged or wiped out by the Texas or Spanish fever. The longhorn seemed to be immune, but the fever tick which he carried north was a menace to all

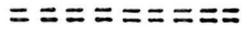
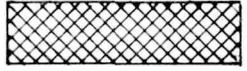
¹⁰Adams, Log of a Cowboy, 57.

¹¹Ibid., 211.

THE CATTLEMEN'S EMPIRE



LEGEND

-  Sedalia and Baxter Springs Trail.
-  Chisholm or Abilene Trail.
-  Western or Dodge City Trail.
-  Goodnight-Loving Trail.
-  Proposed Nation Cattle Trail.
-  Original Range of The Texas Cattle.

other cattle, and opposition to the passage of Texas cattle was widespread in Missouri as early as the fifties. To protect local herds, farmers organized vigilance committees to prevent passage of the Texas stock by force. In 1855 the Missouri legislature passed a bill making it unlawful to "drive any diseased or distempered cattle, affected with what is commonly known as Texas or Spanish fever, or any other infectious disease, into or through this state...."¹²

Quarantine lines, established by state legislatures, were an important factor over the years in forcing the Long Drive to move farther and farther westward to escape the restrictions. Laws against Texas cattle were also passed by Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado and Dakota. "During the whole period of the open range, the danger from this disease affected in a very marked degree the development of the business, as state and territorial quarantine laws became real barriers to the free movement of Texas stock both to the market and to the northern plains."¹³

The westward-tending Kansas farmers presented a further problem. Their small enclosed homesteads soon began to present an almost unbroken fenceline. They plowed furrows around their farms and claimed damages when the herds were driven over their "fences;" they also fenced off waterholes and charged a toll for the watering of the cattle. If alone, the farmer was helpless, but as agricultural settlements appeared on the trail, twenty farmers armed with shotguns were sufficient to force even the untamed Texas cowboy into paying up. The total result of the Indian reservation barrier,

¹² McCoy, Historic Sketches, 33.

¹³ Osgood, Day of the Cattleman, 36.

the quarantine laws and the advance of the farming frontier in Kansas steadily moved the trails westward, the Texas panhandle eventually becoming the road to the rail market, and eastern Colorado the pathway to the north ranges.

There were four principal trails used in driving Texas cattle northward--the Shawnee, the Chisholm, the Western, and the Goodnight-Loving--each with its feeder trails merging into the main trail from Texas, and branching again in the northern states. An estimated 10,000,000 cattle were driven to the railheads or the northern range during the era of trail driving.¹⁴

Before 1870 most of the drovers used the Eastern or Chisholm Trail, rather than the Shawnee Trail to Baxter Springs. Now firmly fixed in folklore, the Chisholm Trail has become the most famous of all the trails, celebrated in the somewhat jiggly cowboy ditty beginning, "Come along, boys, and listen to my tale; I'll tell you of my troubles on the old Chisholm Trail."¹⁵

Settlements, cabins, and wire fences gradually closed off the Chisholm Trail, and by 1876 the Western Trail, which crossed the Red River at Doan's Store, became the main pathway. The contribution of Charles Goodnight, one of the great figures of the West, in blazing the trail that bears his name, has been discussed. In 1884 a national convention of stockmen adopted a resolution urging Congress to establish a National Cattle

¹⁴ Charles Wayland Towne and Edward Norris Wentworth, Cattle and Men (Norman, 1955), 159.

¹⁵ For the long history of controversy over the origin, route, and naming of this trail, see Wayne Gard, The Chisholm Trail (Norman, 1954). The State of Oklahoma has officially marked the Chisholm Trail.

Trail, a permanent quarantine ground six miles wide extending from the Red River to Canada, but the rapid increase in railroads and the fear of overstocking the northern range helped defeat the proposal.

Cowboys declared the wiry longhorn steer, although perverse and independent, was the most likely animal for trail driving which nature had yet produced. It was claimed that the long-legged Texas cattle had tougher hoofs, more endurance, and could range farther without water than the cattle of improved blood--the "high grade stuff"--which were later developed. A natural-born "rustler," the longhorn seemed to thrive on the trail, as he walked tirelessly over great distances, seemingly unaffected by heat, hunger, or the unmelodious songs of the nightriders. These virtues compensated in part for the distressing inability of the breed to produce beef in quantity or quality. It was an established fact (or so the story goes) that all the roasting meat one could find on a longhorn could be packed into one of his horns, with no strain.

During the Civil War a band of Texas youths, too young for service, brought a herd across the Colorado, Brazos, Trinity, and Sabine Rivers to the Mississippi. Unable to find a ferry they performed an authentic miracle, swimming a thousand longhorns across the Lower Mississippi where it was a mile wide and forty feet deep. Such were the future trail drivers of Texas.

On a drive in the early seventies, before a strand of barbed wire had appeared between the Nueces River and the Canadian border, a young cowboy hired out to help trail a herd of 2,500 longhorns to Kansas. The trail boss wasted little time with polite amenities. "They tell us you can catch a cow, and can shoot a rabbit's eye out at every pop. Now if you can



In the Dust with the Drags. The weaker cattle that dropped behind on the drive were the "drags," and as the day lengthened, so did the thirst of the cowboys spitting mud and dreaming of cool water.

Erwin F. Smith photograph
Courtesy, Library of Congress

ride for the next four months without a whole night's sleep, and turn your gun loose on any damned Injun that tries to get our horses, well, get ready. We roll out tomorrow." These were not domestic cattle he was to drive, leisurely pausing on their knees to "pray" as they arose. The half-wild longhorns could be spooked by almost anything--the lighting of a match, thunder and lightning, or the snap of a twig--leaping instantly to their feet and be off running, the whole herd acting as one.

On this drive the fractious herd stampeded early and 500 head were lost. Bands of Indians and renegade whites often hung along all trails, riding off cattle. On this occasion, Indians tried a favorite trick, sneaking into the herd at night dragging a buffalo hide at the end of a rope. Cattle and horses broke and ran but the cowboys stayed with them. Failing again to stampede the cattle by slipping into the herd at night and wounding stock with arrows, the Comanches attacked, the young cowboy was wounded, the herd driven off with a loss of one-fourth of the remuda. Joining forces next day with buffalo hunters whose horses had also been lifted by the Indians, the cowboys attacked the Comanche camp and recovered their stock along with a string of Indian ponies. Such were the hazards--or was it the romance--of the Long Drive.¹⁶

Fifteen-year-old Teddy Blue Abbott was helping hold a herd on the Blue River in Nebraska in 1876 when it was stampeded by a storm, and the next day helped bury an unlucky cowboy run down by the herd, who was "mashed into the ground as flat as a pancake. The only thing you could recognize was the handle of his six-shooter."¹⁷

¹⁶ James H. Cook, Longhorn Cowboy (New York, 1942), 101 ff.

¹⁷ Abbott and Smith, We Pointed them North, 43-4.

Despite the hazards involved, Teddy Blue asserted the worst hardship of trail driving was loss of sleep, for which the favorite remedy was rubbing tobacco juice in the eyes.

In '79, when we hit the Platte River with that Olive herd, a strong north wind was blowing waves two feet high in their faces, and they bulled on us, which means they won't do nothing, only stand and look at you. So since they wouldn't take the water we had to hold them, and we had one of those bad electric storms and they run nearly all night. We got them across the river the next day and that night on guard my partner, Joe Buckner, says: "Teddy, I am going to Greenland where the nights are six months long, and I ain't agoing to get up until ten o'clock next day." 18

At the end of the Long Drive was the cow town, where the trail-weary cowboy might enjoy the stimulating companionship of the dancehall girls--many of whom had enlisted for frontier service only because of popular demand when their sporting talents and girlish wiles proved too rugged for the citizenry of St. Louis and Kansas City. In the saloons of Miles City and Ogallala, Tascosa and Lincoln, Dodge City and Ellsworth, tradition has it, the cowpunchers gambled away their money and shot away their lives.

For many people the cow town is a central feature of the cowboy story, evoking a familiar image of a wide, dusty street, flanked by false-fronted stores, loafers lounging around the hitching posts, ladies--if indeed they be ladies--picking their way daintly along the board sidewalk, meanwhile seeking to avoid the clientele passing through the bat-wing doors of the corner saloon. A wiry little cowpony squats and wheels under the spurs of his rider, who bursts down the straggling street, scattering the cowardly dogs and emptying his six shooter to the sky. From the dime novel Western to the film, "High Noon," the scene has seldom changed.

¹⁸
Ibid., 80.

Although the cow towns largely served the interests of the cattlemen, they were essentially frontier towns, counterparts of such similar frontier settlements as the terminal camps of the railroads and the outfitting centers for the overland trails. All of these places attracted the frontier element--cattlemen, miners, freighters, gamblers and buffalo hunters, as well as a class of women whose contribution to the opening of the frontier was unique. But the fact is the average cowboy seldom saw the bright lights of the cow town; his work tended to keep him somewhat far removed from urban contacts.

It is true, especially in the early days, the cow towns were pretty heavy on short, violent quarrels, generally followed by funerals. But as a more pious citizenry arrived, with property to protect, the climate quickly changed. They demanded, and paid for, law officers who would protect the person and the profits of the business community.

Abilene, which had enjoyed something of a reputation for lawlessness, in 1871 hired as a peace officer Wild Bill Hickok, he of the flowing mane and impeccable dress, who found time between his serious work at the card table in the Alamo Saloon to make effective if indiscriminate use of his two ivory-handled pistols. But times had changed, gunplay was no longer fashionable in Abilene; the citizenry refused to re-hire Hickok despite his exemplary marksmanship. That winter the cattlemen of Texas received a petition signed by eighty percent of the citizens of the county, notifying those contemplating driving herds to Abilene the following season to seek some other shipping point as the inhabitants would "no longer submit to the evils of the trade." 19

19

Frantz and Choate, American Cowboy, 91-2.

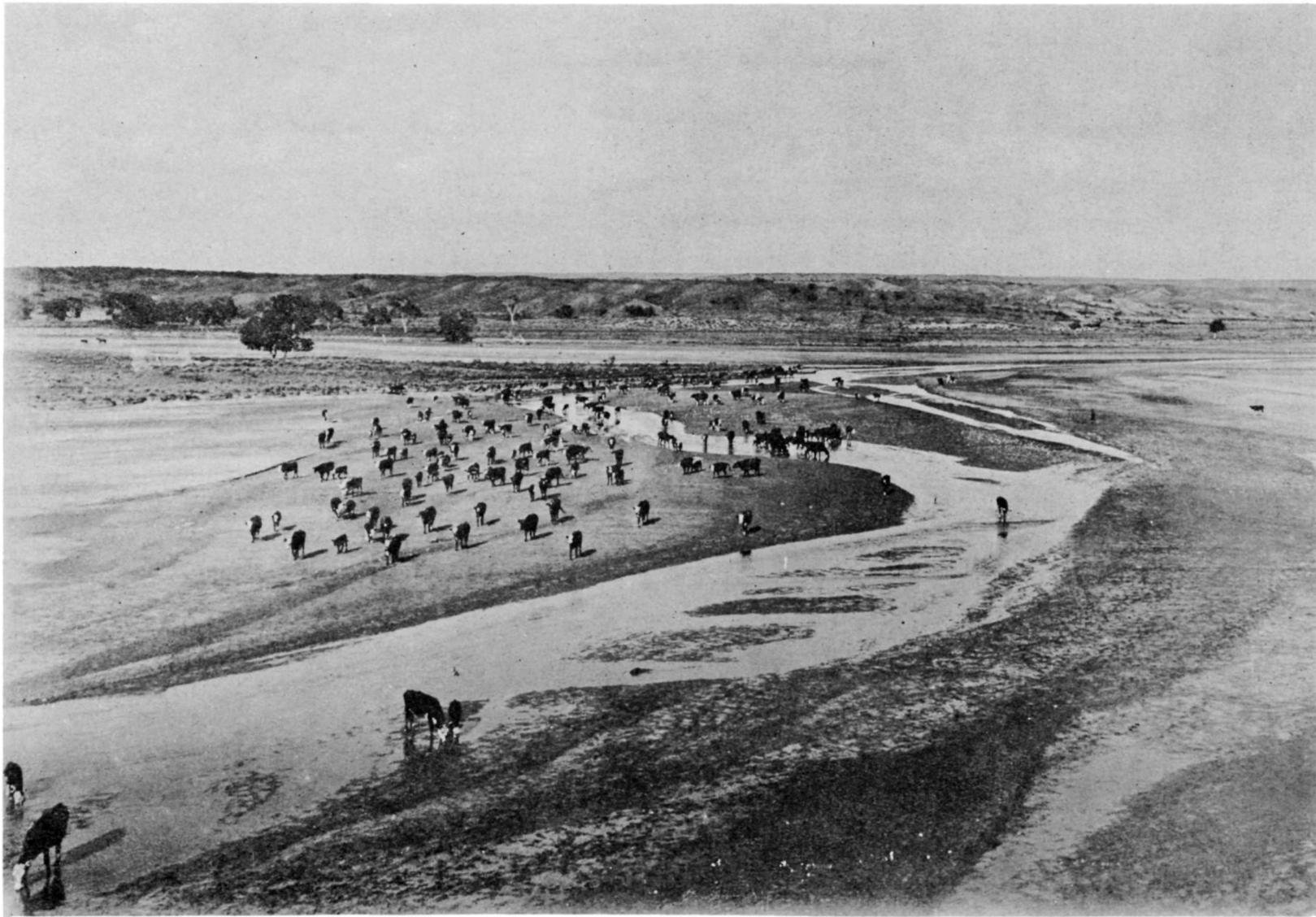
If we can take the word of Andy Adams, who rode trail himself, cowboys did not consider the cow town to provide an opportunity chiefly for girls and gunslinging. A bath, shave, and haircut, clean clothes, a good meal, a short stint at the poker table and a few snorts at the bar--this was heaven enough for the man who had spent four months on the trail. And after all, these were clean-cut American boys. The advice given in Log of a Cowboy to the Texas trail drivers about to enter Dodge City presents a somewhat different picture of that "Beautiful, Bibulous, Balyron of the Frontier."

"I can give you boys some points," said the old cowman who had been to Dodge every summer since '77:

Dodge is one town where the average bad man of the West not only finds his equal, but finds himself badly handicapped. The buffalo hunters and range men have protested against the iron rule of Dodge's peace officers, and nearly every protest has cost a human life. Don't ever get the impression that you can ride your horses into a saloon, or shoot out the lights in Dodge; it may go somewhere else, but it don't go there. So I want to warn you to behave yourself. You can wear your six-shooters into town, but you'd better leave them at the first place you stop, hotel, livery, or business house. And when you leave town, call for your pistols, but don't ride out shooting; omit that.²⁰

Despite this impressive evidence to the contrary, the traditional picture of the cow town lives on. Behold it, a scene of carnage--guns blazing, women shrieking, horses rearing, cowboys dying stoically in the arms of equally impassive comrades. Even so respected an authority as Professor Billington has apparently caught the fever from the blood and thunder school and has embraced the "he wore it low and pulled it smoking" theory of the cowboy at play.

²⁰ Adams, Log of a Cowboy, 178.



The Herd Reaches Water. Like most streams of the Plains, this one is too muddy to drink, too wet to plough.

Erwin E. Smith photograph
Courtesy, Library of Congress

...when each new band of cowboys "hit town" at the end of the Long Drive they [the cow towns] blossomed into tinsel paradises where the most discriminating tastes in debauchery could be satisfied. Mobs of mounted cowboys "took over" by day, their six-shooter roaring while respectable citizens cowered behind locked doors.... Seldom did a group of drovers leave without contributing to the population of "boot hill"-- the cemetery reserved for those who died with their boots on--for barroom brawls, drunken duels, and chance shootings were so common that no one bothered to punish the murders.²¹

²¹Ray Allen Billington, Westward Expansion (New York, 1949), 676.

CALIFORNIA AND THE NORTHWEST

Most accounts of the range cattle industry exclude the Pacific slope region, and many exclude the Great Basin; the "cow country" is generally limited to the area of the Great Plains. Paxson defines the cow country as extending "from central Kansas to the Rockies, and from the Rio Grande to Canada." In his map of the "Range and Ranch Cattle Area," Webb does not include California, but includes Washington and Oregon east of the Cascades.¹ The omission of the Pacific states is undoubtedly warranted, for although the cattle industry was of considerable extent, it did not have the enormous influence on the economy and the life of that region which it had on the Great Plains. It was not the instrument for opening the frontier of the Oregon country as it was on the Plains. Mining, farming, lumbering, and the commerce of the Pacific prevented the cattlemen from achieving the dominant position on the Pacific coast which they enjoyed on the Great Plains.²

The early history of the cattle industry in California was similar to that of Texas, also a Spanish province. Cattle accompanied the first Spanish colonists who arrived at San Diego in 1769, and before the end of the century nearly a million cattle roamed the hills of southern California. An authority on the Texas longhorn declares the California longhorn was "the same cow."³ The cattle were at first exclusively the property of the missions, as in Texas, but in the years following the secularization of the

¹ Paxson, American Frontier, 536; Webb, Great Plains, map following page 224.

² Charlie Russell thought there were also decided differences between the Texas and the California cowpuncher. The California hands "were sure fancy, and called themselves buccaroos," and as a result "were generally strong on pretty, usin' plenty of hoss jewelry." The Texas cowboy, on the other hand, "wasn't so much for pretty." Russell, Trails Ploughed Under, 2-3.

³ Dobie, The Longhorns, xiv.



Rancho Guajome. A fine example of the California rancho of the early American period, built by Cave Coutts in the 1850's.

N. P. S. photograph

California missions in 1834, ranching was almost the only economic activity. Californians found an earlier and different solution to the problem of bringing their great herds to market, through the hide and tallow trade, and before the gold rush some 5,000,000 hides were exported on "Boston ships."⁴ This era of the great ranchos is known as California's "golden age," when the cattleman was the all-powerful political figure, a quasi-feudal ruler whose life of ease resembled that of the ante-bellum planter of the South. The counties of southern California are still known as the "cow counties."

But unlike many states of the high Plains, California had other important resources, which when discovered and developed relegated the cattle industry to a minor position. The ranchers did, however, enjoy a short boom period, beginning in 1848 with the gold rush and lasting for less than ten years. The tremendous demand for food, rising from the explosive increase in California's population, resulted in the driving of tens of thousands of cattle a distance of 500 miles from the area of Los Angeles county to the San Francisco Bay region. Thus was established California's "Long Drive" north to the market.

During this period considerable numbers of cattle were being driven to the California market from the Middle West and from Texas, and McCoy remarks that the latter "was the first really long drive of Texas cattle."⁵

Governor Bigler estimated that 62,000 cattle arrived in California in 1853 by the major trails.⁶

⁴
Ibid., 6

⁵
McCoy, Historic Sketches, 26-7.

⁶
Robert Glass Cleland, Cattle on a Thousand Hills (San Marino, 1941), 144-45.

By the middle fifties, however, the large imports of sheep from the Southwest and the development of local cattle ranches for fattening and breeding broke the market. Cleland marks 1856 as the end of the short-lived cattle boom, and "the end of the golden age of the cattle industry in California."⁷ The great drought of the middle sixties, which killed off great numbers of cattle, in its way was as devastating as the winter of 1886-1887 on the Great Plains, and from that time the cattle industry in California was definitely subordinated to other agricultural pursuits.⁸

To provide pioneer stock in the Oregon country, some longhorn herds were trailed north from California. But for the most part the shorthorn cattle in the Oregon country were called "American" cattle; in California the longhorns were called "Spanish" cattle. The Oregon herds were built up largely from cattle which had accompanied emigrant trains on the Oregon Trail. One such expedition, in 1843, has been immortalized in Jesse Applegate's memorable account of his day with the "Cow Column," the column consisting of 5,000 head of eastern cattle.⁹ On the abundant bunchgrass in eastern Oregon and southwestern Idaho, the range cattle industry of the Northwest prospered simultaneously with that of the Plains. The ranches, however, were mostly of modest size and there were few herds of more than 5,000. Miller and Lux, one of the few large ranching operations, ran up to 100,000 head on a series of ranges in California, Nevada, and Oregon.¹⁰

⁷ Ibid., 147.

⁸ It is estimated the number of cattle in California in 1862 was about 3,000,000; by 1870 the number was down to 630,000. H. H. Bancroft, History of California (San Francisco, 1884-90), VIII, 54 n.

⁹ Jessie Applegate, "A Day With the Cow Column in 1843," Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society, I (1900).

¹⁰ Towne and Wentworth, Cattle and Men, 241.



Warner's Ranch, California. An important milestone on the overland route into southern California, this ranch was also an important cattle-raising center. A modern roof covers the original adobe walls of a ranch building.

N. P. S. photograph

After the treaty with the Sioux and Cheyenne in 1876, which opened the rich grasslands north of the Platte River and east of the Bozeman Trail, Texas longhorns on the northern range were joined by herds from Oregon, Washington, and Idaho, the descendants of family milch cows from the Corn Belt, which had been bred to quality Shorthorn or Devon stock. The rugged Oregon winters had produced a hardy animal of higher beef quality than the California "Spanish" cattle. Some of the great ranches of Montana--including those of Conrad Kohrs and Robert Ford--were started from foundation stock trailed over the mountains by Oregon cowboys.

Due to earlier settlement, the public lands of the Northwest came under Federal Government controls which limited the range cattle industry in that section before it declined on the high Plains. Figures are not available for the number of animals trailed from the Oregon country into the northern range, across the lava-strewn mountain and desert country, an adventure comparable with the Long Drive from Texas. One writer has complained,

of cowboys and longhorns leading northward from Texas, historians have told us much; but of cowboys and shorthorns on trails leading eastward through Idaho they have told us virtually nothing. Yet--the overflow of the cattle country of the Pacific Northwest was a phenomenon of no slight significance.¹¹

¹¹
Ibid., 246.

EMPIRE OF THE SHEPHERD

All day across the sagebrush flat
Beneath the sun of June,
My sheep they loaf and feed and blat
Their never changin' tune.
And then at night time, when they lay
As quiet as a stone,
I hear the gray wolf far away;
"Alo-one!" he says, "Alo-one!"¹

One hesitates to mention the word "sheep" in a discussion of the empire of the cattlemen, and yet the story of the woolies is both pertinent and enlightening. The economic importance of the sheep industry was considerable; the number of sheep grazed in the regions generally regarded as cow country compares favorably to the total number of cattle. Both cattle and sheep occupied the same general grazing lands at the same time, yet most accounts of the range cattle industry give short shrift, or no shrift at all, to the sheep phase of the open range.

The sheep industry used the cattlemen's range and in many ways operated on the same basic principles--utilizing the grass and water of the public domain and depending upon trail drives to reach the market. It is therefore an important phase of the range cattle industry, especially when the scope of the sheep industry is considered. Many regions of the West, where sheep were once driven out by angry cowmen, have turned out to be more suited to sheep than to cattle.

Sheep, of course, never did cut a very heroic figure, especially when compared to the longhorn steer. The longhorn in the wild was a mean, fearless animal, known to have fought and killed a grizzly. He might have been cursed by the cowboy for his wild, unpredictable character, but he was

¹Badger Clark, Sun and Saddle (Boston, 1922), 163.

also respected. The sheep, on the other hand, is a timid, if not cowardly, animal, helpless to fend for himself, an easy prey for coyotes, pests, and poisonous plants, and needing protection most of all against his own foolishness. Never highly regarded for intelligence, sheep invariably will follow their leader, whether he steps blithely into space from the top of a cliff or falls into a prospect hole. An entire herd will waste the better part of a day playing follow-the-leader, carefully jumping over a small harmless object lying in their path.

Sheep were introduced into both California and the Southwest by the Spanish, generally as a part of mission establishments, and they multiplied almost as rapidly as the cattle. Father Escalante estimated the Hopi pueblos grazed 30,000 sheep in 1779, and one of the California missions reported 100,000 sheep in its herd. The California gold rush supplied the first important market for sheep and led to the first great trailing of the herds. More than half a million sheep were trailed from New Mexico to the Mother Lode country between 1850 and 1860.²

In the eyes of the cowboy, the sheepmen were lowdown, miserable beings; furthermore, a person who stooped so low as to eat sheep meat was known to have degenerate tendencies. The fact that dogs were used to herd sheep, and that the herder walked, rather than riding a horse like a man, only added to the cowboy's scorn.

Notwithstanding this natural dislike the cowboy felt toward anyone or anything connected with sheep, the basic cause for hostilities between cattlemen and sheepmen was the everlasting fight for grass. The cattleman's

² Charles Wayland Towne and Edward Norris Wentworth, Shepherd's Empire (Norman, 1946), 39, 52, 87.



"Hoofed locusts" of the open range. More than one such herd was clubbed to death by cattlemen who believed sheep spoiled the range for cattle.

Courtesy, National Archiv

contempt for the lowly sheep and the humble herder only served to heighten his rage when he encountered the despised woolies contentedly grazing on the rich grass he claimed by right of prior use.

According to the cattleman, the gland between the two halves of the sheep's hoof secreted a foul-smelling fluid, and cattle would not graze on grass which contained this scent. Later developments indicated cattle were not quite this sensitive to disagreeable odors, as more and more cattlemen took to raising both sheep and cattle. Probably a more basic cause of the hostility was that as the grass became more scarce, sheep proved extremely destructive to the overstocked range. They industriously cropped the grass to the roots, their sharp little hoofs destroyed the roots, and the range was ruined for many years.

The effect of introducing sheep on the range has been graphically described by Ray Stannard Baker.

. . . Vast flocks appeared on the range, burning across it like so much live fire, the sheep eating out the vegetation to its very roots. And where sheep have fed, cattle will not, or cannot live. It became a common experience for a cattleman to be "sheeped," as he called it, and it was not surprising that he looked coldly on the sheepmen and their flocks. On the other hand, the sheepmen asserted, truly enough, that the land belonged to the government, not to the cattleman, that it was free range, that the sheep had as much right there as the cows. Result, six-shooters as usual.³

Attempts of sheepmen to find grazing lands were generally met with violence, the sheep driven from the range. Murder of shearers and their flocks was not uncommon. In the Tonto Basin of Arizona, a range war broke out when sheep were introduced on range claimed by cattlemen. During five years of hostilities, every law-abiding rancher had been driven from

³"The Tragedy of the Range," in Century Magazine, LXIV (August, 1902).

the region and more than thirty cattlemen and sheepmen had been killed. Along the Green River in Wyoming, an area into which sheep had been introduced, masked bands of cattlemen attacked four sheep camps during the night, tying the herders and clubbing to death nearly 8,000 sheep.

In a country ruled by the cattlemen, the sheepmen at first received little protection from the law. Recalling these days, a rancher told of a "sheep war" in which masked men clubbed to death some 2,500 sheep.

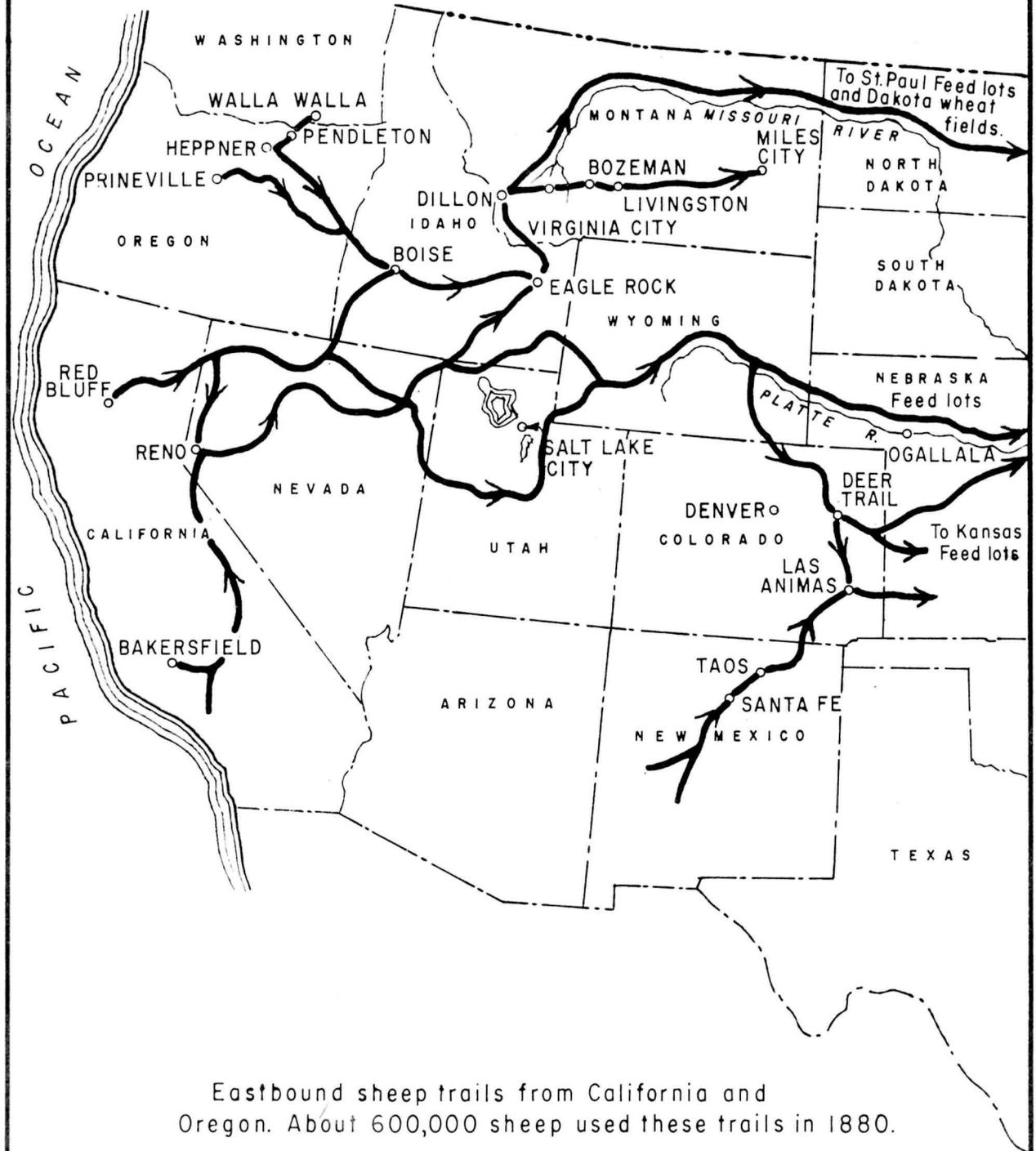
O. C. Cato, an old cattleman, was sheriff at the time. Selway, the owner of the sheep did not think Cato was trying to catch the cow men and told him so. Cato replied, "Just give me time. I have a scheme that will catch all of them. I went out to the corral, looked the situation over thoroughly, found all the clubs, and now have them in the office at the jail. And the very first man that comes in and claims one of those clubs I intend to arrest."⁴

The story of the great sheep trails is a little-known phase of range history. The sheep drives began, as did the cattle drives, shortly after the Civil War. For the most part, the sheep in herds up to 7,500, were trailed eastward from California and Oregon, some to the Rocky Mountain mining camps, most to the feed lots of the Middle West, a distance of 2,500 miles. It is estimated that some 15,000,000 sheep were trailed eastward during the period from 1865 to 1900, a remarkable figure that compares favorably with the number of longhorns trailed out of Texas.⁵ The difficulties involved in trailing sheep such great distances, over mountains and desert, through the domain of hostile cattlemen, may not add up to romance, but it was an extraordinary achievement. If the sheep drives did

⁴Mark H. Brown and W. R. Felton, Before Barbed Wire (New York, 1956), 93.

⁵Towne and Wentworth, Shepherd's Empire, 181.

SHEEP TRAILS



Eastbound sheep trails from California and Oregon. About 600,000 sheep used these trails in 1880.

(after Towne & Wentworth
Shepherd's Empire)

not catch the fancy of later generations, they did shift the dominant wool-producing area of the United States from eastern farms to the arid West, decisively influencing the economy of the latter region.

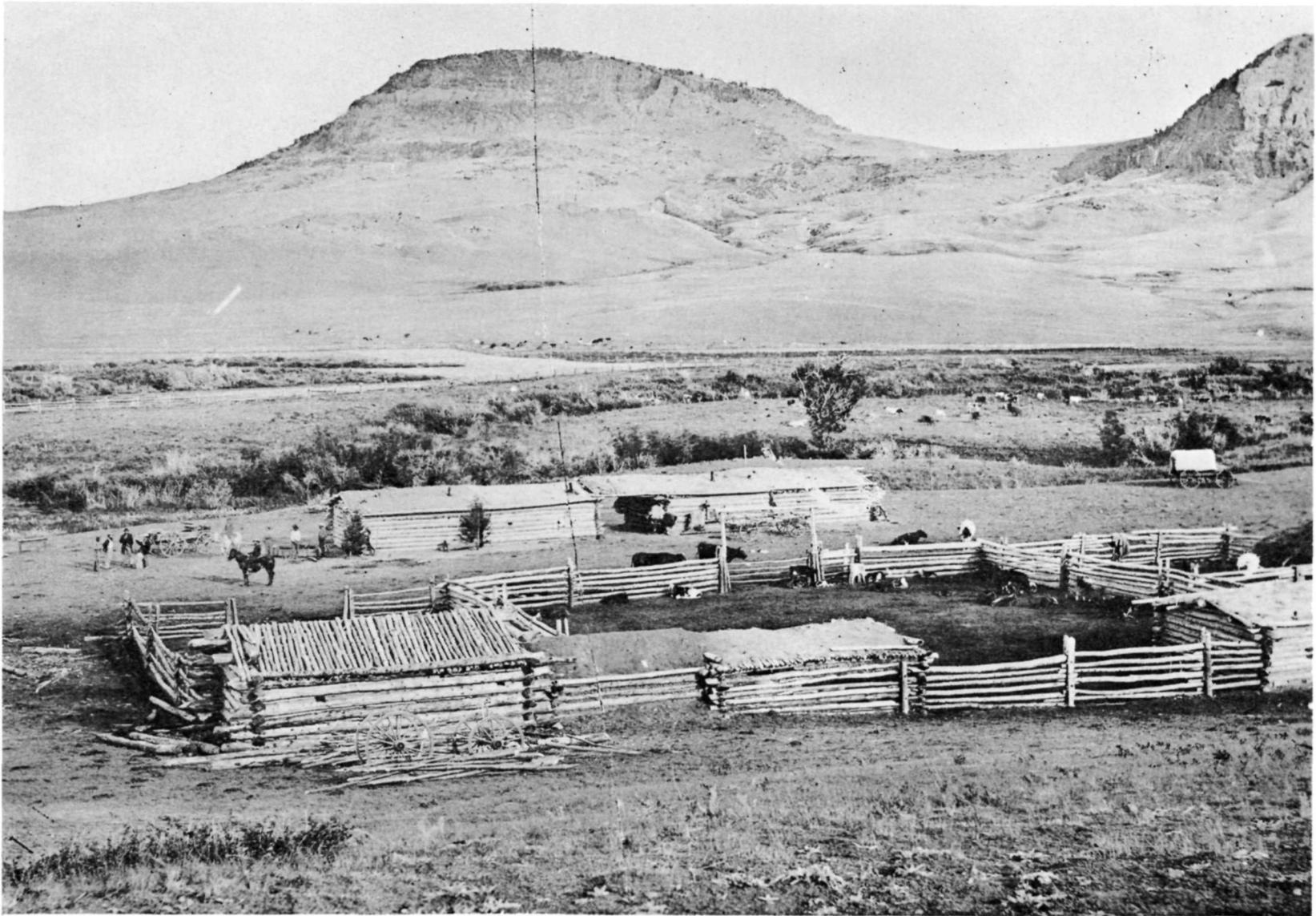
THE OPEN RANGE OF THE CATTLEMEN

The open range of the cattle industry was the public domain lands of the Great Plains and neighboring regions, including all or parts of seven states--California, Oregon, Nevada, Texas, Colorado, Nebraska and Kansas; eight territories--Washington, Idaho, Utah, Arizona, Montana, Wyoming, Dakota and New Mexico, and Indian territory, later to become Oklahoma. The land was "open," in the sense it was uncontrolled and unfenced. Although various land laws were passed in this era, intended to encourage orderly settlement of the public domain, the laws were either unenforced or evaded. The open range occupied about 44% of the total land area of the United States.¹

The heartland of the open range country was the Great Plains, an environment with three distinguishing characteristics: it was flat, dry, and without trees. For Webb, this constituted an institutional fault, comparable to a geologic fault, running from middle Texas to the Dakotas, roughly along the 98th meridian. Beyond it the way of life changed drastically.

Emerging from the familiar eastern woodlands onto the arid flatlands of the Great Plains, the settlers found a region wholly unsuited to their traditional agricultural pursuits. Believing it fit only for wild animals and the nomadic Indians, early land seekers did not tarry but pushed far beyond, beginning with the first migrations to Oregon in the 1830's. They departed from the Missouri settlements like ocean travelers leaving a home port. Beyond the narrow wagon track the monotony of grassland stretched on all sides to the horizon.

¹ Joseph Nimmo, Range and Ranch Cattle Traffic in the Western States and Territories (Washington, 1885), 48th Congress, 2nd Session, Senate Document 199.



Montana Ranch, 1872. A superb photograph of an authentic early ranch. The chinked logs and dirt roof of the bunkhouse, the nearby corrals, the mountains which formed a natural boundary—this was a typical scene of the open range days.

Courtesy, National Archives

The level, or gently rolling surface, of the eastern Plains was covered with tall grass; on the parched land of the high Plains to the west grew grama, bluestem, bunch, and buffalo grass, and a hundred other low-growing varieties. An occasional butte or flat-topped mesa, and the thin-line of cottonwoods which bordered the occasional stream, provided the only landmarks.

But the Plains region possessed many resources not immediately apparent. With the grass was sufficient water, sun, and the high dry air. These elements combined to cure the grass on the stalk, producing a nutritious food as satisfactory for cattle as it had long been for buffalo. Still, the land was brutal. The short summers were times of blistering heat, raging thunderstorms and frequent tornadoes, followed by long, hard winters of bitter northwest winds and frequent snows. From the first, the Great Plains was a man's country.

Over the area of the Great Plains roamed the Plains Indians, nomadic, warlike and non-agricultural--the Kansas, Pawnee, Sioux, Cheyenne, Blackfoot, Crow and Araphoe--perhaps the finest physical specimens of their race. They had long since domesticated the mustang and were marvelously skilled in horsemanship. Knowing little of pottery, basketry or weaving, the Plains Indian subsisted on the buffalo which supplied him with shelter, food, clothing and fuel, furnished amusement and entertainment and was involved in his religion. The Indians of the Plains each year danced the return of the buffalo herds just as other native peoples danced the return of the sun and the rain.

The story of the buffalo, and his slaughter by the hide men, is worthy of a separate study, but it is an important phase of the cattle story. In four great herds the bison had drifted like the stars across the prairie and it seemed no force other than the return of the Ice Age could break their numbers and destroy the pattern of life of the buffalo Indians.

Settlement of the Plains region was delayed by the presence of the formidable Plains tribes. North of the Missouri was the country of the Blackfeet, the Piegans, the Gros Ventres and the Assiniboines, and these mighty warriors had to be restrained before most ranchers would risk bringing cattle into the region. Repeating a familiar pattern cattlemen pushed steadily into the edge of the Indian country, making incessant demands to Congress and to territorial legislatures for reduction of the Indian lands.

The destruction of Indian power on the Plains coincided with the butchery of the great buffalo herds, on which the Indian economy depended. The vast herds of buffalo competed with the cattle for the available grass. Their uncontrollable movements were a threat to the rancher's herds which were likely to be "swallowed up" by the passing buffalo herd, with little chance for recovery. The hide men did their bloody work exceedingly well. The last buffalo herds were seen on the southern Plains about 1880, and in the north a few years later, but the buffalo had ceased to be an influencing factor after 1875.²

Neither Indian nor buffalo had many supporters among those who sought the grazing lands of the Plains. As a general rule the cattleman

² There is little agreement on the probable number of buffalo which once roamed the Plains. Estimates generally range from 25 to 50 million.

hated Indians, and although he contributed to the elimination of the Indian and the buffalo only in part, the cattleman strongly favored complete extermination of the buffalo, and advocated the killing off of the Indians "as if they were vermin."³ Because the buffalo was the keystone of the Indian's existence as a freeman, the Secretary of the Interior was quoted as saying he would "rejoice" so far as the Indian question was concerned when the last buffalo was slain.⁴

The subjugation of the Sioux in 1876-77 pretty well marked the end of Indian hostilities on the Plains, although the Utes in Colorado and the Apaches in New Mexico continued to run off cattle and lift an occasional scalp for another decade. The grasslands of the West were henceforth open to exploitation.

The Government had no immediate use for these public domain lands; they were appropriated by the man first to occupy them. This was the "free grass" and the "free water" of Western history, which were familiarly known in combination as "free air." To the "boundless, gateless, fenceless pastures" of the open range were trailed hundreds of thousands of cattle, almost all driven from Texas as yearlings and two-year-olds, there crossed with eastern cattle, fattened on the "free air" and sold for high prices

³ Frink, Jackson and Spring, When Grass Was King, 19. The New Mexico Stock Grower, commenting on a suggestion that the Indians would make good citizens if educated and humanely treated, declared, "These Indians are brutes.... And a grand sigh of relief would go up to heaven from thousands of pioneer homes...if every red-colored demon of creation was then taken out and shot." Ibid.

⁴ Osgood, Day of the Cattleman, 79 n.



Matador Line Camp. Cowboys of this famous Texas spread lived in a dugout decorated with a horseshoe, coyote hide and elk horn. Here a cowpuncher gets a going over with shears and curry comb.

Erwin E. Smith photograph
Courtesy, Library of Congress

at the nearest railhead. With little more than a few skilled cowhands and a branding iron, the leagues of grazing land could be converted into top steers. A poor man, it would seem, must grow rich.⁵

The system by which a man became a frontier rancher was not a complicated one, and in the early days there was room enough for all would-be stockmen who rode up the valleys of the West seeking grass and water. Finding a live stream and natural boundaries to hold his cattle, he established his ranch site and prepared to endure the brutal, racking life of the frontier which at times bordered on the savage.

Little time was wasted on housing. If a few straggly cottonwoods were available, a log cabin was thrown together, the logs chinked with mud and moss, the roof made of dirt and branches. The door might be made of a wolf skin, the bed of buffalo hides. The "house" might well be a dugout scooped from the riverbank, the roof covered with driftwood and an overlay of prairie sod.

For his range the cattleman claimed the land facing the stream for ten or fifteen miles, extending up from the stream to the water divide. He might well claim both sides of the stream, and both water divides. If a watering hole supplied the only water in the region, he would select his homestead around the water hole, effectively controlling all the surrounding ranges.

Proof of the rancher's ownership of his range, although vague, was generally uncontested until the arrival of the homesteaders. Reference might be made to one of the Federal laws for encouraging settlement, the Homestead Act or the Desert Land Act, by which the cowman might have secured

⁵P. A. Rollins, The Cowboy (New York, 1922), 16-8.

valid title to at least some acreage around his water. But generally those so inquisitive and foolish as to request proof were advised, if in Montana, that the grass was better in Arizona; more likely the grim-faced rancher ordered them to "vamoose the ranch" or "pull your freight, pronto."

The early laws of the territories recognized that by grazing a certain area, a stockman was well on the way to achieving a kind of prescriptive right against another who might seek to enter. This was the theory of the "accustomed range" upon which the cattleman rested his case. If a rancher were first to claim a scanty water supply, he might thereafter enjoy exclusive ownership of mile after mile of grass. If water was plentiful, herds of several ranchers might use it, but in case of shortage, according to western custom, the right of using water depended upon the chronological order in which the ranges involved were pre-empted.

The pioneer rancher subsisted on beans, bacon and coffee. He fought Indians, wolves, blizzards, rustlers--and his own kind. He watched his cattle fatten and multiply. He hired cowboys to watch his herds and ride sign around his ranch; for some hands it was a hundred mile ride from the bunkhouse to the front gate. Within a few years a ranch house and scattered outbuildings replaced the wickiup, and another "cattle king" was in the making.

The cattle kings were a breed apart--men such as John Chisum, Granville Stuart, Charley Goodnight and John Wesley Illiff. They were powerful figures in the opening of the West. What they accomplished was done literally with their bare hands, almost without help. They endured dangers and hardships the equal of those faced by any man on any frontier.



Branding Scene. After the ropers and heelers get the calf in position, the brander applies the iron and another puncher slits the calf's ears for identification. Despite Hollywood styles, these cowboys seem to find suspenders more helpful to their work than six guns.

Courtesy, National Archives

Perhaps benevolence and charity were not always among their virtues. But they left their brand on the West.

It is said of Goodnight,

He rode bareback from Illinois to Texas when he was nine years old. He was hunting with the Caddo Indians beyond the frontier at thirteen, launching into the cattle business at twenty, guiding Texas Rangers at twenty-four, blazing cattle trails two thousand miles in length at thirty, establishing a ranch three hundred miles beyond the frontier at forty, and at forty-five dominating nearly twenty million acres of range country in the interests of order.⁶

The cattlemen, for a time, ruled their empire absolutely, but there were those who challenged their rule, the sheepman, the granger, and the rustler, among others. The sanctity of the branded cow, the time-honored practice of the accustomed range, the tradition that the open range was destined to be cattle country; these customs which the cowman regarded as law, had little meaning for those who soon opposed the domination of the cattleman.

In 1881 the people of Miles City, a center soon to be famed as the capital of the eastern Montana cow country, watched more than 1,500 Indians under Rain-in-the-Face loaded on steamers for the Standing Rock Reservation in Dakota. As the steamers made their way down the Yellowstone River they passed the Northern Pacific railroad gangs at work. The Indian barrier had been destroyed, the railroads were approaching, and the empire of the cattleman was not far off.

⁶
J. Evetts Haley, Charles Goodnight, Cowman and Plainsman (Boston, 1936), x.

THE COW JUMPED OVER THE MOON

About 1880, the range cattle industry entered upon its boom period. The frontier barrier had been breached, the railroads had arrived, and Americans were feeling, probably for the last time, the exciting stimulus experienced by a society eager to exploit great regions of free land. "Cotton was once crowned king, but grass is now," declared an eastern livestock journal."¹

The rush to the cow country was in many ways a replica of the rush to the gold fields of the West; certainly the provocation was the same-- the lure of easy wealth in a new country, which seemed to offer unlimited opportunity for the ambitious. Optimism was the watchword.

The following statement which appeared in Breeder's Gazette, entitled "How Cattlemen Grow Rich," is typical of the boundless enthusiasm of the period.

A good sized steer when it is fit for the butcher market will bring from \$45.00 to \$60.00. The same animal at its birth was worth but \$5.00. He has run on the plains and cropped the grass from the public domain for four or five years, and now, with scarcely any expense to its owner, is worth forty dollars more than when he started on his pilgrimage. A thousand of these animals are kept nearly as cheaply as a single one, so with a thousand as a starter and an investment of but \$5,000 in the start, in four years the stock raiser has made from \$40,000 to \$50,000. Allow \$5,000 for his current expenses which he has been going on and he still has \$35,000 and even \$45,000 for a net profit. That is all there is to the problem and that is why our cattlemen grow rich.²

¹ Osgood, Day of the Cattleman, 83.

² Billington, Westward Expansion, 683.



Stock Certificate. During the boom period of the range cattle industry, stock certificates such as this \$100 share in the Ell Seven Cattle Company were a feature of the wildly speculative industry.

For some, whose talents seemed to have been inherited in part from the ancient alchemists, and who lacked even the required \$5,000, the results were even more spectacular. Bill Nye, the esteemed humorist of the Laramie Boomerang, described an oft-encountered phenomenon of the industry, in which the branding iron replaced the conventional shoestring. "Three years ago a guileless tenderfoot came into Wyoming, leading a single Texas steer and carrying a branding iron; now he is the opulent possessor of six hundred head of fine cattle--the ostensible progeny of that one steer."

The stampede to the cattlemen's frontier was literally world-wide, attracting boomers from the East, from Canada and Australia, and from the British Isles, as the western world turned its attention on the Cattle Kingdom. Trains were jampacked with youths from eastern farms and factories, savings strapped to their waists, eager for wealth and adventure. The mania spread to Europe, and when it was reported by a parliamentary committee that "the average profit of the stockowner has been for years fully 33 percent," the desire to participate in the profits of American ranching, either as a participant or as an investor, became a "craze" among the British.³

The flow of British capital to America during the nineteenth century, one of the major, if seldom discussed, factors in the development of the West, was a feature of the mining frontier, the expansion of the railroad system, and played an important part in the explosive growth of the range cattle industry. The largest cattle companies to operate in the United States were formed in England and Scotland British investors dropped

³ Frink, Jackson and Spring, When Grass Was King, 141-42.

some seventeen million dollars during the short-lived boom, and gouty squires who may or may not have known the difference between a steer and a heifer discussed the niceties of the spring roundup over port and nuts.⁴

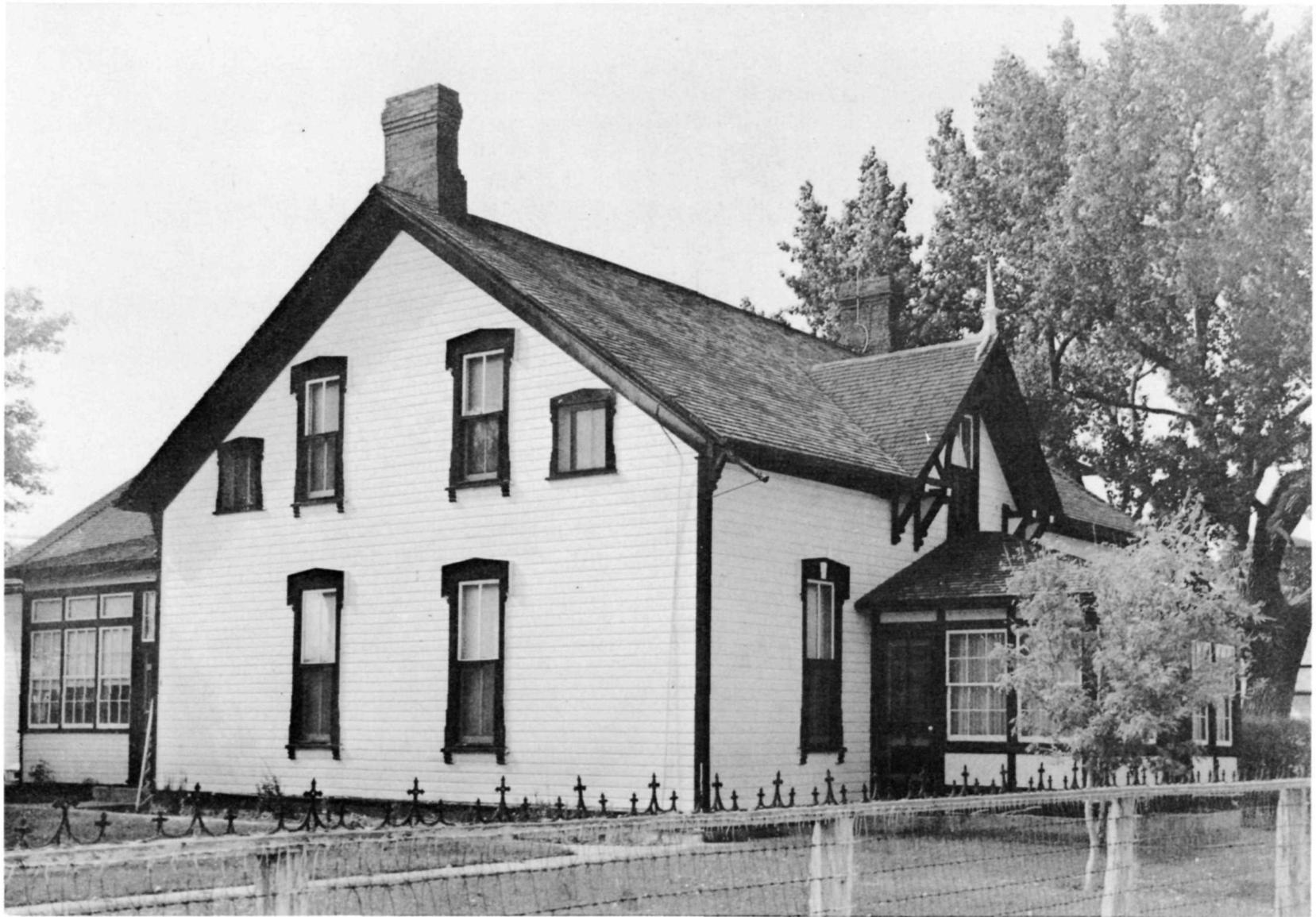
A pioneer Montana cattleman described the remarkable fashion in which the frontier gave way to the stockmen in that region. Observing that, "It would be impossible to make people not present on the Montana cattle ranges realize the rapid changes that took place on those ranges in two years," he noted that in 1880 the country was almost without inhabitants, except for the deer, the elk, the coyote and the wolf, and the buffalo which darkened the rolling plain. Then, only two years later,

...there was not a buffalo remaining on the range, and the antelope, elk, and deer were indeed scarce. In 1880, no one had heard tell of a cowboy in "this niche of the woods" and Charlie Russell had made no pictures of them; but in the fall of 1883, there were 600,000 head of cattle on the range. The cowboy... had become an institution.⁵

In a single year twenty corporations, capitalized at more than \$12,000,000, were organized under Wyoming laws. Transactions were made in which the buyer never saw a hoof of his purchase, nor possessed more than a fraction of the purchase money. Uncontrolled speculation ensued, swindlers flourished and paper companies without an acre of land or a single steer sold stock to a gullible and eager public.

⁴Ibid., 132, 142. One of the essays in this book is Jackson's "The British-American Cattle Boom," 135-330, which fully discusses the importance of large-scale British investments.

⁵Granville Stuart, Forty Years on the Frontier (Cleveland, 1925), II, 187-88.



Headquarters of Swan Land and Cattle Company, Chugwater, Wyoming. Capitalized in England, this giant cattle company ran 124,000 head of cattle in 1885.

N. P. S. photograph

Nor were the tally books of brokers always reliable. When large herds were sold, the transaction often represented little more than a rough estimate of the cattle involved, with a generous figure inserted for the year's calf crop and rarely any allowance for losses from severe winters, disease, or other causes. A story made the rounds in Cheyenne, that a group of cattlemen bellied up at a local bar during a long, hard winter, gloomily speculating on their probable losses. "Cheer up, boys," said the owner, setting up drinks for the house, "The books won't freeze."⁶

The cautious Finlay Dun, secretary of the giant Swan Land and Cattle Company which was originally capitalized at \$3,000,000, once demanded that he personally count 100,000 cattle purchased by his company. As each animal trotted down the chute, Dun daubed it with paint. Unfortunately by the time he had counted off 40,000, the paint had worn off the first animals, and even the frugal Scot was forced to give up and accept the tally.

After 1880, each year saw the demand for cattle to stock the northern ranges tax the available supply, and although the Texas ranchers increased the number of cattle sent northward year by year, the demand still was greater than the supply. "Cattle, cattle, more cattle," was the slogan of the grass country, from Texas to Canada. Answering this call, trail drivers pointed north 420,000 head of Texas cattle in 1884, the largest number since 1871.⁷ With an enormous supply of capital flowing into the cattle country, with high prices and spectacular profits, there could be but one result--the number of cattle would rapidly exceed the carrying capacity of the range. It was recorded later that before the range was

⁶Towne and Wentowrth, Cattle and Men, 261.

⁷Ibid., 263.

overstocked, a section (640 acres) of good grazing land in Texas would support 150 cattle; afterwards ten acres were required to pasture one animal.⁸

As herd after herd was trailed north across the Red River, every parcel of grassland, including the marginal range, was occupied. The insistent demand for more cattle reversed the usual flow of traffic and eastern cattle, or "pilgrims," were shipped west to take advantage of the high prices offered by Plains stockmen. Although the introduction of blooded stock from the East was a general practice to "breed up" the range herds, the less hardy "barnyard stock" was hardly suited to the rugged winters of the north.

Alarmed cattlemen began to fear for the future. There was no natural limit to the number of cattle which could be bred in Texas, but even the celebrated longhorn could not fatten on air alone. The pasturage was being overgrazed, there were no more new areas of grass to provide an escape valve, and an arid country with its winter blizzards could support the vast herds only under optimum weather conditions. Each spring cattlemen accepted their winter losses, thankful the toll was no greater.

⁸ William McLeod Raine and Will C. Barnes, Cattle, Cowboys and Rangers (New York, 1930), 239.

ORGANIZATION FOR DEFENSE

At the very time when the cattle boom reached its peak, the market began to sag, as cattlemen faced with the danger of crowded ranges and increasing expenses began to unload. Other problems now began to beset the stockman. The movement of the homesteaders into the Great Plains had begun almost as soon as the area was opened by cattlemen; unnoticed at first, the growing tide of pioneer farmers eventually became a formidable challenge.

Increasing steadily in numbers, the owners of small ranches and farms closed in about the large spreads, staking claims to prime grass and water. Finding a place along a stream where the cattleman had been unable to pre-empt every bit of adjacent land, the homesteader would lay his claim, digging an irrigation ditch to supply his fields. A second farmer would homestead at the rear of the first, and a ditch permitted by the first farmer would water the second farm--and so the farms multiplied. Trespassing cattle were shot; nor was it to be expected that the hungry farmer would fail to draw upon the great herds of the cattlemen for his beef supply--although such meat was soberly referred to as "slow elk." Even more dangerous to the cattlemen, the mounting population of the grangers enabled them to threaten control of the political machinery.

The cattle thief presented a special problem, for he was a serious menace to the prosperity of the stockgrowers. Millions of cattle, the total capital investment of the industry, grazed far and wide, seldom seen except at roundup time. The whole fabric of the range cattle industry rested upon the single proof of possession--the brand. A branded cow was considered as good as under lock and key. The rustler who tampered with the cattleman's brand might better tamper with his wife--if something

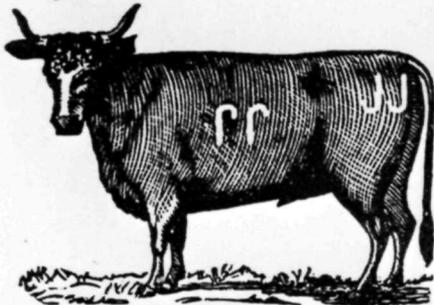
THE PRAIRIE CATTLE CO.

[LIMITED.]

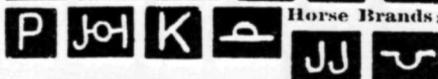
W J TOD, General Manager.
MURDO MACKENZIE, Sec. and Cashier.
Trinidad, Colorado.

ARKANSAS RIVER DIVISION,

Wm. WITHERS, Ranch Superintendent.
Ranch postoffice, West Las Animas, Colo.
Range, Bent and Las Animas Cos., Colorado

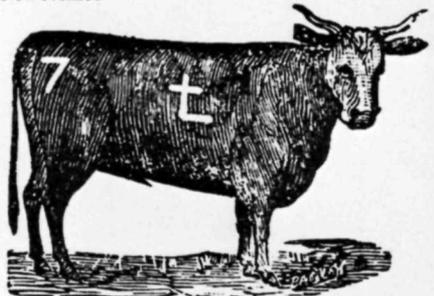


Other Prominent Brands:

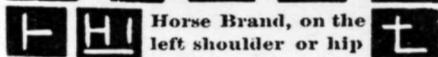
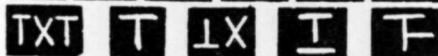


CIMARRON RIVER DIVISION.

W. J. CARTWRIGHT, Ranch Superintendent.
Ranch postoffice, Catalpa, Colfax county, N. M.
Range, Colfax, Mora and San Miguel counties,
New Mexico.

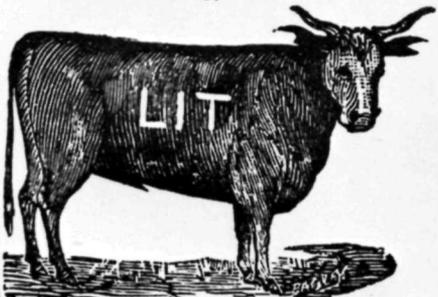


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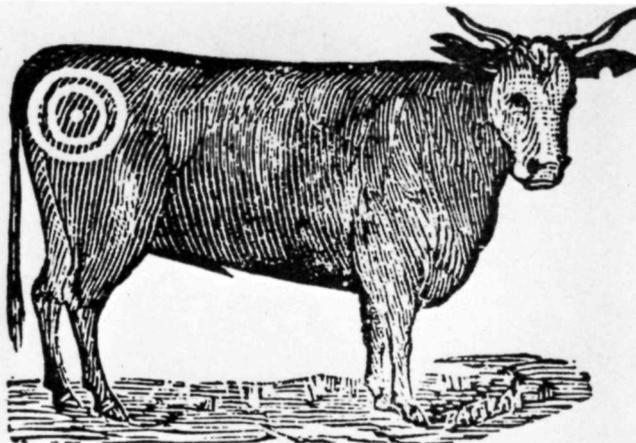


CANADIAN RIVER DIVISION.

A. F MITCHELL, Ranch Superintendent.
Ranch postoffice, Tascosa, Oldham Co., Texas.
Range, Oldham county, Texas



Other Prominent Brands:



J. W. Crawford,
"CAPTAIN JACK."

P. O.: Fort Craig, New Mexico. Range, Fort
Craig Military Reservation.

All increase branded and marked same as cut.
Horse brand, **MC** on left shoulder.



Pat Garrett.

P. O.: Roswell, Lin-
coln county, N. M.

Range, White mountains
Also all cattle with a
— butt brand.

Horses branded same as
cattle.

ARIZONA.

\$1,000 REWARD! I desire to call
attention to my marks and
brands for cattle, as shown in
cut. I sell no stock cattle, and
will pay \$1,000 reward for the
arrest and conviction of any
person or persons unlawfully handling cattle in
the following brand and marks.



J. H. Hampson.

P. O.: El Paso, Texas. Ranch P. O.:
Clifton, Arizona.

Range, on Eagle creek, Graham county,
Arizona.

Ear marks, crop and split left, crop right.
Horse brand, **H** on the left shoulder.

Brand advertisements from "The Stock Grower," Las
Vegas, New Mexico, September 4, 1886. Of the
paper's 42 pages on this date, 14 were given over to
brand and cattle advertising.

unfortunately went wrong, more mercy might be expected. The cattle thief was most often a former cowpuncher, who had the necessary experience for his trade, a skilled hand with horse, rope, running iron--or gun. At first he might be only "a little on the rustle," but the ease with which a hand could brand mavericks overlooked in the spring roundup, or alter the brands of a neighbor's cattle, was the cause of many a cowboy's descent, often halted abruptly by a rope. Cattle thieves banded together to form gangs whose activities were on a scale sufficient to bankrupt even the larger stockgrowers. The need for common protection against cattle thieves was primarily responsible for the formation of the cattlemen's associations, but their appearance was also due to the lack of adequate enforcement facilities to govern water rights, grazing rights, and cattle ownership.

The objective of the cattleman was to preserve the open range for his own use, and to achieve this goal and protect his investment; the fiercely individualistic stockman, who prided himself on his independence and isolation, succumbed to economic necessity and formed protective associations. Few frontier organizations ever achieved the power and efficiency of the livestock associations. The most influential and successful of these groups was the Wyoming Stock Growers Association, formed in 1873. From that moment, "the expansion of the range-cattle industry in Wyoming can be measured by the growth of the Association and the extension of its influence." By 1885 the Association had more than 350 members, owning two million head of cattle.¹

These associations in time came to be all-powerful combines. Operating on the theory that no one was above suspicion, the associations

1

Osgood, Day of the Cattleman, 120-1.

employed a large force of range detectives which kept an alert eye on everyone and everything in the cattle business. Members were furnished blacklists of all cowboys suspected of rustling. The associations organized and supervised roundups, administered grass and water rights, and investigated cattle diseases. Inspectors were hired to check brands of all animals being driven or shipped through the region and to authenticate sales. And one of the most important activities of the associations was to exert powerful influence on state and territorial legislatures to assure legislation favorable to the welfare of the cattlemen. By 1885 the stockmen's associations blanketed the Great Plains.²

The strength and efficiency of the stockgrowers' associations ultimately resulted in the development of a violent antagonism on the part of town dwellers, homesteaders, and small cattlemen who were fearful of an organization which worked solely for the advantage of the large cattle growers. There was widespread opposition also to the frequent use of vigilance committees by the associations to deal ruthlessly with cattle thieves, who had scant opportunity to plead innocence. The action of such a group in Montana, fittingly known as "the Stranglers," brought from Theodore Roosevelt the comment that "the vigilantes in eastern Montana shot and hung nearly sixty--not, however, with the best judgment in all cases."³

As the granger influence grew, the climate of opinion turned against the cattlemen and it became increasingly difficult to obtain convictions for violations of the stock laws. The "cattlemen's commonwealth" became for many the "cattlemen's oligarchy." In almost any dispute involving large

² Dale, Range Cattle Industry, 118.

³ Quoted in Brown and Felton, Before Barbed Wire, 119.



Fixing the Brand. It would seem a brand as clear as this one could not be altered, but an artist with a running iron or length of wire could do wondrous things with a brand.

Courtesy, National Archives

cattle growers, the owner of the small ranch, the farmer and the townsman lined up solidly against the rancher. In time even the brazen larcenies of cattle rustlers went unpunished, causing one stockman to complain, "Methodist, Grangers, and Anti-Stock, etc., were too many for us--they crept in on the Grand Jury and prevented any bill being brought against the accused parties."⁴

It was against this rising tide of popular sentiment that the Wyoming Stock Growers Association in 1892 made a last desperate bid to regain its former authority. The Johnson County War which followed, an attempt by the association to use imported gunmen for the purpose of eliminating opposition, was disastrous. Public opinion was inflamed against the members of the association, and for a time there was real danger every head of stock owned by the large companies would be slaughtered. Yet, an example of the influence of the cattlemen, four members of the Wyoming Stock Growers Association represented Wyoming in Congress from Territorial days until 1937, all four of whom also served terms as governor.

⁴Osgood, Day of the Cattleman, 242-3.

THE WINTER OF 1886-1887

It is now evident that by 1885 the frontier of the cattlemen was already disappearing, a victim of overexpansion. The danger, the hardship, the isolation, all these were still present. But the smaller outfits were disappearing, swallowed up by large companies capitalized in the East and in Britain. Despite the crowding of herd upon herd, despite absentee (and often inefficient) management and wholesale thievery, despite falling cattle prices, most of the larger outfits returned at least a paper profit until about 1885. But cattle raising had become an out and out gamble "with the trump cards in the hands of the elements."¹

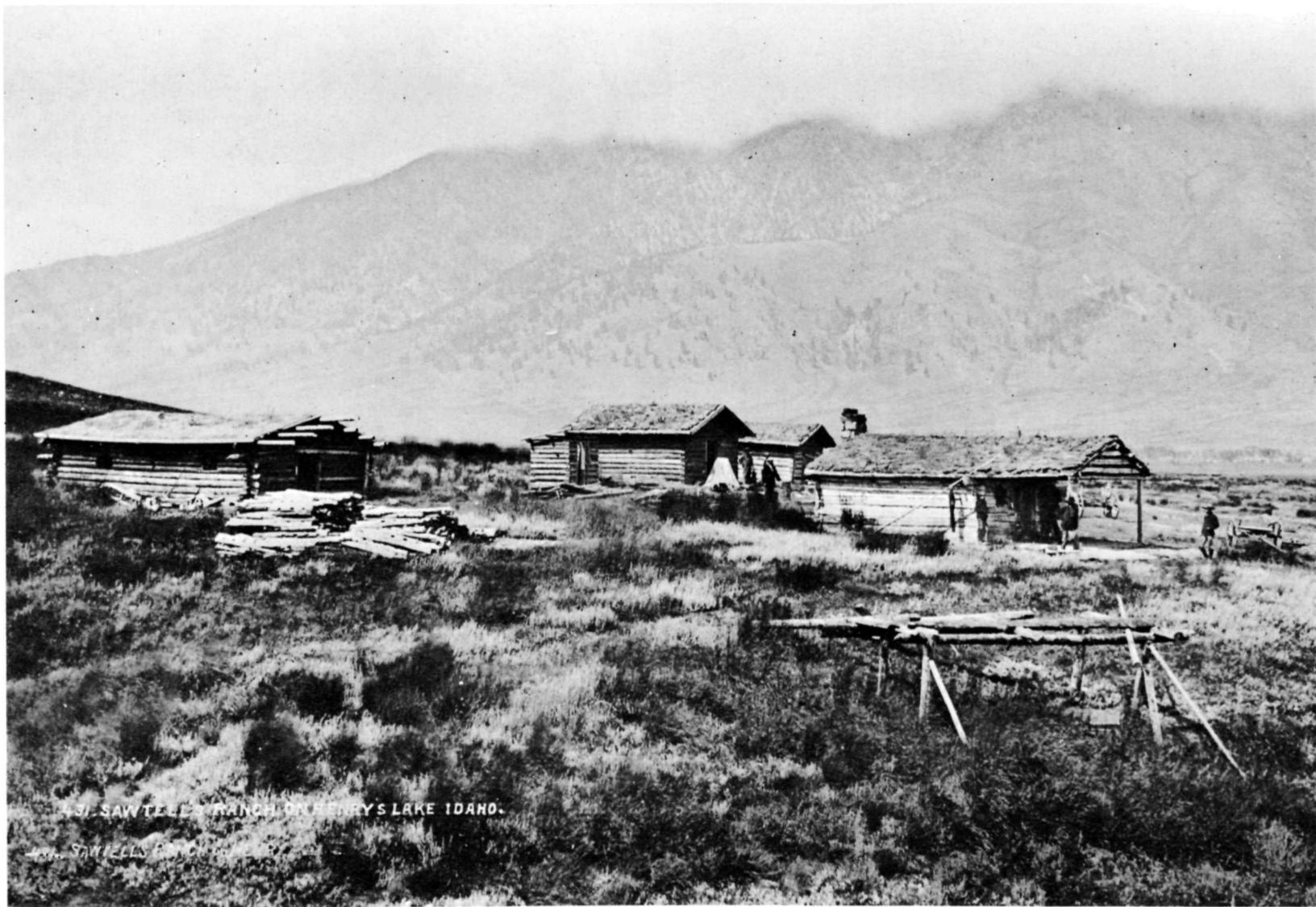
In 1885, the already crowded ranges of Kansas, Colorado and the panhandle were smothered by the arrival of 200,000 cattle from the Indian Territory, removed from the Cheyenne-Arapahoe reservation by proclamation of President Cleveland. As if the gods had finally turned against the cattlemen, the following winter was one of the most severe in the history of the area. The losses were severe--many ranchers found 85 percent of their herds piled up against the drift fences.

The year of 1886 was one of crisis. Suddenly there was no longer a demand for eastern or Texas stock cattle; cattlemen from the Southwest who had suffered extreme losses the previous winter, were unloading their surviving herds on an already falling market. A warning was broadcast by the editor of the Rocky Mountain Husbandman, who noted that the market was growing weaker by the day, but advised "it would be better to sell at a low figure, than to endanger the whole herd by having the range overstocked."²

The summer of 1886 was hot and dry. The grass withered and the

¹Stuart, Forty Years on the Frontier, II, 227.

²Osgood, Day of the Cattleman, 218.



1872. SAWTELL RANCH ON HENRY'S LAKE IDAHO.

SAWTELL

Idaho Ranch, 1872. The Sawtell Ranch on Henry's Lake, Idaho. For the period, these were almost palatial ranch quarters, just west of Yellowstone National Park.

Courtesy, National Archives

streams disappeared, and cattle faced the coming winter in exceptionally poor condition. Some ranchers were able to forestall disaster by driving their herds across the Canadian border and leasing new grazing lands; others shipped cattle for fattening to farmers in Iowa and Nebraska.

Then came the disastrous winter of 1886-87, probably the most severe ever experienced on the Plains. It effectively ended the era of the range cattle industry. The storms came early, and although a chinook blew up from the south in January, melting snow and bringing hope, it was immediately followed by a howling blizzard such as the range had never known. Cattle driven by a merciless wind piled up against fences and died by the thousands. The storm was followed by a numbing cold, the thermometer dropped out of sight. Cowboys imprisoned for weeks around bunkhouse stoves dared not think of the starving, freezing herds, helpless to find food or endure the cold.

When spring finally came cattlemen saw a sight they spent the rest of their lives trying to forget. Carcasses piled upon carcasses in every coulee, gaunt skeletons staggering about on frozen feet, rows of dead animals along the fences, trees stripped bare of their bark--these were left as monuments to the thoughtless greed of the stockmen. The disaster was complete.

Perhaps the most expressive description of the catastrophe was Charlie Russell's answer to a note from his boss in Helena asking how the herd was getting along. Russell's now celebrated drawing, "The Last of the 5,000," showed a single, starving cow in deep snow, with a coyote waiting hungrily nearby. The number of cattle which failed to survive the winter has been variously estimated. Stuart, who declared a business "that had

been fascinating to me before, suddenly became distasteful," reported his loss to be 66 percent of the herd; most stockmen had severe losses, others were practically wiped out.³

There were good reasons why the open range phase of the cattle industry ended with the destructive winter of 1886-87, despite the fact that the most important element--the range--still existed and with the great reduction in the size of the herds would soon recover. Perhaps most important, and a factor which eventually changed the character of every frontier activity, whether gold mining or cattle ranching, was the loss of confidence. The unshakable optimism, which had lured cattlemen into taking chances in the expectation of wealth, was gone. Outside capital, which had been readily available in the days of easy profits, low operating costs and rapidly expanding herds, was no longer available. In a period of general economic depression, and with continued low prices in the glutted cattle market, those cattlemen who remained in business did so by developing new methods. All realized that they had been mistaken in believing the grass of the open range was sufficient to build a lasting empire.

There was another, far-reaching effect of the disastrous winter. Bankruptcy broke up the great ranches and largely ended the period of absentee ownership, a time when most of the larger ranches were owned by companies or individuals far removed from the land. The Swan Land and Cattle Company, the largest of all the companies on the northern range, in May, 1887, went into receivership. For Peltzer, this was a gain, not a loss. The small

³Stuart, Forty Years on the Frontier, II, 236; Frink, Jackson and Wright, When Grass Was King, 99.



Dry Year. The caption for this picture tells a grim story of the dangers of cattle raising in an arid country. "Cattle bones, Roswell, New Mexico. Lack of water."

Courtesy, National Archives

pioneer operators remained, and these, "the thousands of plain settler folk constituted a greater asset than the non-resident shareholders of cattle companies."⁴ Even so enthusiastic a cattleman as Theodore Roosevelt, whose herds on the Little Missouri had suffered extreme losses in the winter of 1886-87, believed it "right and necessary" that the era of the open range should pass, and that the future of the country lay with the small homemaker.

...the homesteaders, the permanent settlers, the men who took up each his own farm on which he lived and brought up his family, these represented from the National standpoint the most desirable of all possible users of, and dwellers on, the soil. Their advent meant the breaking up of the big ranches; and the change was a National gain, although to some of us an individual loss.⁵

⁴Louis Peltzer, The Cattleman's Frontier (Glendale, 1936), 191.

⁵Theodore Roosevelt, Autobiography (New York, 1913), 94.

THE TRAIL PLOUGHED UNDER

It is Common Talk that the laying in of a line of baby carriages by our merchants is a pointer as to the gradually changing order of our population and indicates that it is generally understood whither we are drifting.

(Tascosa Pioneer, March 31, 1888)

It would not be accurate to say that the range cattle industry ended completely in 1887. What followed was a period of transition, in simplest terms, a changeover from free grass to the production of hay. The grasslands of the West continued to be occupied by cattle. But henceforth, the cattlemen realized the basic need for the industry was the production of sufficient forage to carry the herd through the winter, and through the frequent dry seasons.

This eventual transition was inevitable from the first day of the range cattle industry. As competition for grass and water became more severe, between cattleman and cattleman, between cattleman and sheepman, and between cattleman and granger, the competing interests sought to establish legal ownership of the land. There followed the concomitant joys of civilization--the ever higher costs of land ownership, taxes, interest and fencing. It was then apparent that the production of hay was a safer and more economical utilization of the land than the indiscriminate grazing of the open range. To keep cattle and grass in balance, the cattleman fenced his range and restricted his herds and acreage to a reasonable size.

The Plains stockgrower subsequently geared his operation to provide forage crops for his cattle. To increase crop yields in an arid



Wyoming Cow Town. The main street of Cheyenne, cattle center of the region, two years after the transcontinental railroad reached the town.

Courtesy, National Archives

country he irrigated his hay fields, and raised grain as well. Strict attention was paid to improving the blood of his herd, and following other husbandry practices which placed a premium on quality. The delivery of cattle by way of the Long Drive was no longer tolerated in a more carefully administered business. Cattle had arrived from the trail in less than pleasing condition; furthermore the ranges along the old trails were fully stocked, free grass was no longer available, and rail transport was more reliable--if more expensive. The routine of the cowboy was considerably changed. He now spent his day digging post holes, jacking up wagon wheels as fence tighteners, mowing hay and mourning the days when he didn't do a lick of work through the winter except to chop wood for the bunkhouse stove.

Of considerable importance to the transition was the introduction of barbed wire about 1874, and its acceptance both by the cattle raiser and the farmer. Without fences, the farmer could not protect his crops and property from cattle, and the traditional fencing materials--stone and timber--were unavailable on the Plains. In the decade 1870-1880, questions pertaining to fencing occupied more space in the newspapers of the region than any other topic.¹ Barbed wire helped to make farming possible on the Plains; the fences soon were snaking around water holes, isolating grazing areas from one another, and closing the trails.

Barbed wire was eventually accepted by the cattle companies; one (the Spur Ranch) strung a drift fence across the prairie for 57 miles, but fence cutting and range wars were an accompanying burden. Men cut fences because their cattle needed water or because they wanted the grass behind

¹ Webb, The Great Plains, 282.

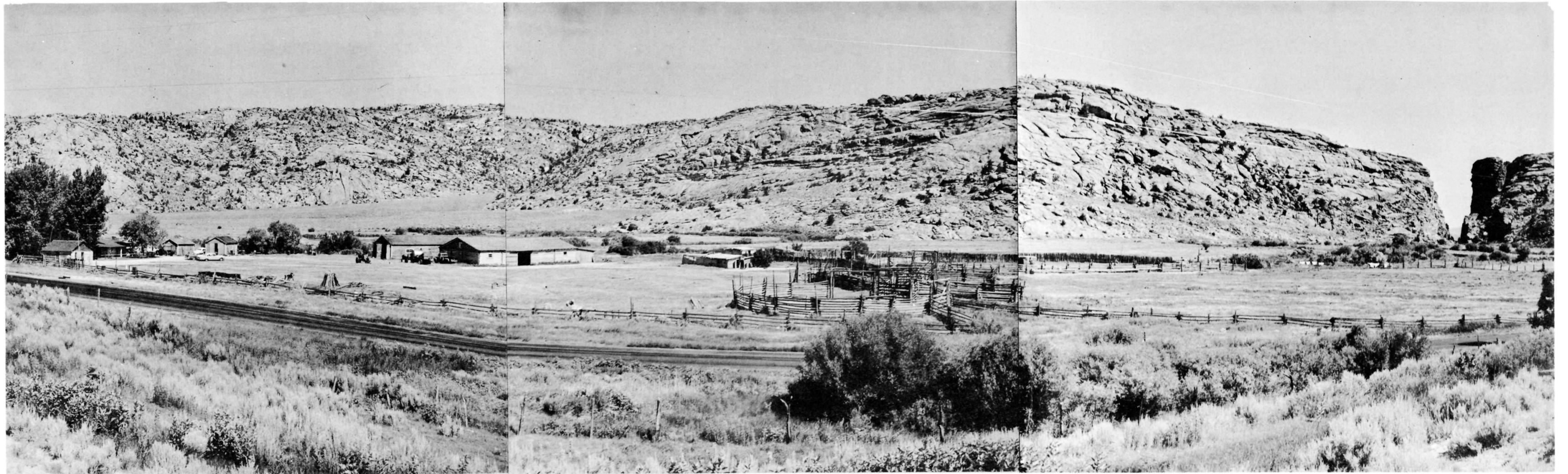
the fence. Barbed wire was brutal and unrefined, particularly well adapted for its purpose, and it "made stock-farming rather than ranching the dominant occupation on the Great Plains."²

The railroad, as has been previously discussed, both helped to establish the range cattle industry, and insured its extinction. Men like Jim Hill saw another and more profitable empire to be built on the Great Plains. As the roadbed for the Great Northern crept westward, a gigantic campaign was undertaken by railroad men to develop the country and to bring in immigrants from the East and from Europe. The settlers who swarmed into the Plains in the wake of the railroads inaugurated a new era on the Plains.³

They doomed the empire of the cattleman. Understandably, many cattlemen fought savagely against the tide. In the same fashion as the fur trapper, who took beaver from the virgin mountain streams, the cattleman was a firstcomer, discovering and utilizing the grasslands of the West. Having conquered the frontier, it was perhaps only human that he resented those who came later and relieved him of his land. Undoubtedly a part of the cattleman's motivation was a selfish one, but it should be added that he honestly believed the cow country was by nature intended--and suited--for the raising of cattle.

Perhaps the cattleman was not entirely the selfish, shortsighted tyrant which the farmer--and many writers since--believed him to be; nor was the entrance of the homesteader on the Great Plains an unmixed blessing. In some regions he prospered. In other sections the benchland dry farmer with his moldboard plow contributed heavily to the destruction

²Ibid., 313.



Ranch on the Sweetwater. The Tom Sun Ranch at Devils Gate, Wyoming. One of the best preserved ranches on the Plains, it has been continuously operated by the Sun family since the 1870's. In 1882 the ranch buildings were called "the finest in the country."

N. P. S. photograph

of the range, killing off the grass which anchored the light top soil and absorbed the precious moisture. When dry years came, those who had arrived with high hope abandoned their sod shanties and tar-papered shacks, and the tumbleweed and thistle took over the fields. "The history of the buffalo grass ended with that last humiliation, for to what the sheep had failed to conquer, the 'hone yokel' with the plough wrote finis."³

Has the Old West died? Following the later career of Teddy Blue Abbott, one is tempted to say if it didn't die, it certainly changed complexion. This cowpuncher, who was used to living in a line camp dugout a hundred miles from nowhere and who trailed many a herd out of Texas, got married, took a homestead, kept milk cows ("milk cows, by God!"), and raised vegetables which he sold to Montana coal miners. And his was a transformation of the spirit as well, for he "quit drinking, threw my chewing tobacco away, quit what little gambling I ever done and started to save money."⁴

There is no argument that the cattle industry has left an indelible imprint on life in the trans-Mississippi West. It can also be argued that cattle raising and cattlemen have changed very little, and that today's cowboy is a blood brother to the original. He rides much the same range, herding, branding, and rounding up cattle, and there are still nearly 300 ranches in the United States of more than 100,000 acres.⁵

³ John K. Rollinson, Wyoming Cattle Trails (Caldwell, Idaho, 1948), 9-10.

⁴ Abbott and Smith, We Pointed Them North, 220.

⁵ Frantz and Choate, The American Cowboy, 68-9.

But comparing the modern version of the cowboy with the ones he had known in Montana, Charlie Russell observed of his own kind, "They lived different, talked different, an' had different ways."⁶ Otherwise, one supposes, the two are somewhat similar.

It is difficult to assess the contribution of the cattlemen to Westward Expansion. The West of the cowboy has been victimized by the purveyors of tawdry stories about good cowboys, bad rustlers and saintly womenfolk. As Bernard De Voto declared with considerable heat, "thirty years of cheap fiction of the cattle kingdom about cowboys, rustlers, evil sheriffs, roundups, stampedes, six-guns, and branding irons have created an inertia which serious literature finds it hard to overcome."⁷ Perhaps even the reams of cheap fiction contain some clue to the significance of the cattle era.

The exaggerated emphasis suggests that for Americans today the Old West is the West of the cowboy. He has given them a legend of which they never tire, no matter how badly nor how often the tale is told. When the curtain fell on the drama of the open range, there was nothing like it to take its place. There were other acts, many of which proved colorful and exciting, but there was never another time when the waters ran clear, when free grass covered the earth, and the confident cowboy, booted and spurred, his six gun low on his hip, crossed every divide and nosed his cow pony into every draw from the Rio Grande del Norte to the Yellowstone.

But the cattlemen accomplished a great deal more than the creation of a legend. He was a frontiersman in the true sense of the word, and he

⁶ Russell, Trails Ploughed Under, 5.

⁷ "Horizon Land," in Saturday Review of Literature, XV (April 24, 1937).



The Lone Prairie. This calf was probably missed in the spring roundup and is about to get his vaccination just as soon as the cowboy can get a fire going in the rain.

Erwin E. Smith photograph
Courtesy, Library of Congress

was the first white man to occupy the Plains. To him must go the credit for the opening of the Great Plains to settlement. He used the most available natural resource of the region, the native grasses, to establish a great and profitable industry. Capital and men were attracted from the East and from Europe to aid in the development of a new economic region, and in a true sense the cattle kingdom was international in scope. The industry stimulated railroad construction in order to connect the range with the eastern market. And finally, the range cattle industry laid the economic foundations of more than one western commonwealth.⁸

Has the Old West died? Let L. A. Huffman, the matchless photographer of the cowboy, write his epitaph.

Then came the cattleman, the "trail boss" with his army of cowboys, and the great cattle roundups.... One looked about and said, "This is the last West." It was not so. There was no more West after that. It was a dream and a forgetting, a chapter forever closed.⁹

⁸Osgood, Day of the Cattleman, v.

⁹Brown and Felton, Before Barbed Wire, 12.

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The rollicking life and pungent comments of a real cowhand as recorded by his collaborator, who, Dobie complained, "instead of currying him down and putting a checkrein on him, spurred him in the flanks and told him to swaller his head. He did."

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A deceptively genial Texan with style, a former cowboy and sometime lecturer at Cambridge University, Dobie is the dean of present writers and critics on the cattle theme. Both Longhorns and The Mustangs (Boston, 1952) are likely to become classics; his Guide to Life and Literature of the Southwest (Dalles, 1952) is criticism straight from the hip.

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There are a number of histories of single ranches; this is one of the best by a Texan who knows whereof he speaks, and whose first edition of the book (Lakeside Press, 1929) had to be withdrawn to avoid a libel suit.

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Hunter collected the reminiscences and diaries of hundreds of cowboys who had made the Long Drive.

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Osgood, Ernest Staples, The Day of the Cattleman. Minneapolis, 1929.

Very close to being the outstanding work on the subject. Osgood used the sources; almost everyone else uses Osgood. When the book was reissued in 1954, it was not necessary to change a word, his analysis was unchallenged.

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There is no other book which so fully covers the story of sheep in the United States; Wentworth's America's Sheep Trails (Ames, 1948) exhaustively describes the trail driving of sheep.

Webb, Walter Prescott, The Great Plains. Boston, 1931.

A book which requires little comment. Undoubtedly everyone who studies or writes about the West has been influenced by this work.

PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTARY

There are a number of photographers who have given a more accurate account of life on the range than most writers, and the same could be said of artists such as Charles M. Russell and Frederic Remington.

Two photographers were outstanding, L. A. Huffman, who came to Miles City in 1878, and Erwin E. Smith, who operated in the Texas Panhandle after 1900. Huffman worked in Montana, "with the eye of an artist and the prospective of a historian;" his photographs are in Mark H. Brown and W. R. Felton, Before Barbed Wire (New York, 1956). Smith, who studied art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, recorded the daily activity of such Texas spreads as the JA and the Matador. A selection of his pictures, nearly 2,000 of which are in the Library of Congress, is in Erwin E. Smith and J. Evetts Haley, Life on the Texas Range (Austin, 1952).

A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE PRESENT CONDITION AND DISTRIBUTION
OF SITES ASSOCIATED WITH THE CATTLEMEN'S EMPIRE

The frontier of the cattlemen was not a phase of Westward Expansion which is represented by a considerable number of "sites," comparable to the mining frontier with its literally hundreds of well-preserved mines and towns. The pioneer ranchers built few structures; their investment was in cattle, their natural resources were grass and water. Much of their range land, now fenced, is little changed in appearance, although Herefords have replaced the distinctive longhorn.

Perhaps the best "site" to memorialize the cattlemen's empire would be to set aside a section of the short-grass country, that magnificent sweep of "cow country" west of the 98th meridian. A recent decision of the Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings and Monuments, favored establishment of a 34,000 acre section of tall grass near Manhattan, Kansas, as a "Prairie National Park," and further recommended that a short-grass area be similarly preserved.

An attempt has been made by the Federal Government to preserve a representative herd of Texas longhorns. The original longhorn was an early victim of inter-breeding to improve the quantity and quality of his beef, and eventually the blood existed only in crosses. In 1927 it was decided to establish two herds of longhorns, one at the Wichita Mountain Wild Life Refuge, Oklahoma, the other at the Niobrara Game Reserve in Nebraska.

The Texas border was combed for strays and outlaws which might have escaped the delights of acculturation, and the Wichita herd was started with twenty cows and three bulls. Some Brahman blood was evident in the cattle and Mexican bulls were imported to improve the strain. The two herds today contain about 500 animals, and although growing in a different

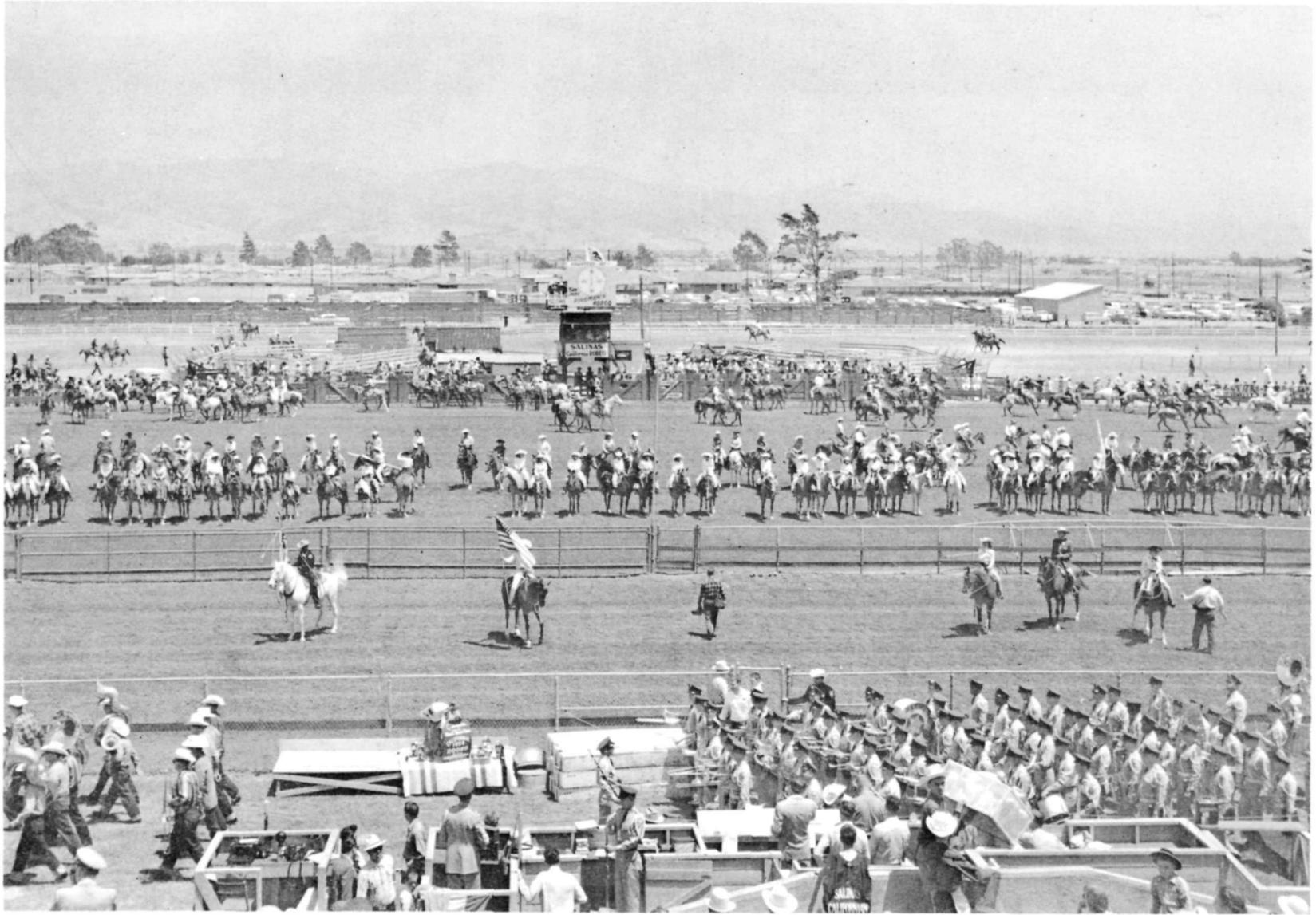
environment from the hot brush country of southern Texas, the cattle exhibit the characteristic appearance of the longhorn. Old timers, however, believe the well-fed cattle on the refuges lack something of the length of horn and wild "shelly" look of the original Texas longhorn.¹

In most cases, the original ranch headquarters of the great cattle spreads in Texas and in the northern range country have disappeared. The first ranch buildings, during the boom period, were rudimentary log shacks and corrals which probably did not outlast the era of the range cattle industry. As the vast landholdings of the cattlemen were reduced, the old ranch headquarters were often abandoned. Those which have survived have been modernized to provide somewhat more comfortable living quarters than the early cattlemen enjoyed. In Cheyenne several structures still stand, erected in the 1880's and 1890's as townhouses by English and Scotch cattle owners, who built in the English rural style with half-timbering.

Undoubtedly a great number of the early buildings, as well as the buildings of the cow towns, were destroyed by fire, which has probably been responsible for the disappearance of more historic structures than any other agent. The buildings which made up the "Old Home Ranch" of one of the great figures of the industry, Charles Goodnight, burned to the ground in 1904. A fire which swept through the headquarters area of the King Ranch in 1912 destroyed all but one of the original buildings.

The enormous ranches of the high plains region, including the vast spreads of a number of English corporations, are little more than a

¹Dobie, The Longhorns, 346 ff.; Sandoz, The Cattlemen, 487.



Modern Roundup. A parade opens one of the 500 rodeos which are held each year in the United States.

N. P. S. photograph

memory. Included in this category is the Swan Land and Cattle Company, Limited, a Scotch-owned firm which is believed to have run as many as 120,000 head of cattle on 600,000 acres of range in Wyoming and Nebraska. At the Niobrara Ranch headquarters, near Gordon, Nebraska, only one of the bunkhouses remains of the ranch which grazed more than 80,000 cattle on ranges extending from Texas to Montana.

A French cattleman, Pierre Wiboux, founded one of the largest and most famous of the Montana ranches, the W Bar, which was closed out by the arrival of the homesteaders. A stone barn is still standing, along with the ruins of the ranchhouse, known as the "White House," which was destroyed by fire many years ago. One of the best-preserved of the older ranches is the Tom Sun Ranch at Devil's Gate, Wyoming, which began operations during the days of the Oregon Trail.

Unlike the mining frontier, where "ghost towns" of the mining districts survive in considerable numbers, there are few cow towns today which give any indication they once welcomed the boisterous cowboy at the end of his Long Drive. Thrown up hurriedly, and largely jerry-built, the original structures of these towns have long since disappeared. Because they were railroad centers, most have grown and modernized, wiping out any trace of the early days.

The Kansas cow towns--Newton, Wichita, Hays, Abilene, Ellsworth, Dodge City--towns which instantly recall the trail-driving days of the seventies and eighties, have retained neither the atmosphere nor physical remains of their heyday. Although Dodge City, supposedly once the wildest of the wild, has reconstructed a section of Front Street, the renaming of two of its streets "Wyatt Earp" Avenue and "Gunsmoke" Avenue indicates the



Lincoln County Courthouse, Lincoln, New Mexico. Billy the Kid shot his way out of the jail on the second floor of this building in 1881. Now a State Monument.

N. P. S. photograph

contribution of modern television to the American heritage.

Cattle centers of the northern range country such as Cheyenne and Miles City, although still the cattle capitals of Wyoming and Montana, are now modern cities. Ogallala, end of the historic Western Trail, has long since lost the false-fronted stores which were the common mark of towns of the era.

Only in the Southwest have a few cow towns survived with something of their original character, although Clarendon has entirely disappeared and Mobeetie, except for the courthouse, has likewise vanished. Tascosa has fallen, if fallen is the fair term, upon gentler days; it is now a boys' ranch, with modern buildings surrounding the courthouse which has been remodeled since the 1880's. One assumes the lads draw considerable inspiration from residing in the former haunt of Billy the Kid. Cimarron, New Mexico, is one of the best-preserved of the cattle centers, perhaps because the "old town" is separated from the modern town by the Cimarron River. The old section contains a number of original buildings in good condition.

Probably the outstanding example of a surviving cattle center is Lincoln, New Mexico, like the others of its day a haven for cowboys, lawmen, gunslingers, rustlers and the elements, sordid and otherwise, always attracted to frontier towns by the opportunities for rapid advancement in their chosen professions. Almost the entire town of Lincoln, as it was during the famous Lincoln County War of 1878 has survived intact, retaining the flavor and the atmosphere of the frontier cow town.

The original cattle trails, the Chisholm, the Western, the Goodnight-Loving, were like the Oregon Trail and the Santa Fe Trail actual trails, dug out by the hoofs of literally millions of Texas cattle. Traces

of these trails have long since disappeared. Almost the only surviving physical evidence of the cattle trails are the remains of the forts which once protected the trail drivers and their herds. At Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, on the Shawnee Trail, there is a restoration of the original fort and several stone buildings surviving from the second fort. On the Western Trail, the ruins of Fort Griffin are now preserved as a state park, and several crumbling structures mark the nearby town of Fort Griffin on the Goodnight-Loving Trail, which began at Belknap, Texas, and ended at Sumner, New Mexico. Only one original building has survived at Fort Belknap, and there are no remains at Fort Sumner.

Neither California nor the Northwest is generally included in the range cattle story although cattle ranching, as well as sheep ranching, was at one time almost the only economic activity in California. The era of the open range in California, the so-called "golden age," occurred during the Spanish and early American period, when longhorns roamed the hills of southern California much as they did in southern Texas. Actually, almost every one of the twenty-one California missions could qualify as a ranching site, for the self-sustaining missions supported themselves almost entirely through the raising of cattle, some numbering more than 50,000 in their herds.

There are a considerable number of surviving Spanish-American ranchos, mostly adobe structures, mementos of the days when the California rancho was politically all-powerful, and lived a life of ease and luxury. Two of the best-preserved are Los Cerritos and Los Alamitos, near Los Angeles, both of which were part of the original Nieto land grant from the Mexican governor, and both of which were acquired through marriage by



Coming out of the Chute. "There never was a horse that couldn't be rode;
there never was a man that couldn't be thrown."

Courtesy, California Rodeo
Horse Fair Stock Show

New England Yankees. John Temple built Los Cerritos in 1844; it is today one of the largest and best-preserved Spanish adobe, situated in Long Beach. Abel Stearns came into possession of Los Alamitos through his marriage into a rich Spanish family. The well-preserved adobe ranchhouse is believed to have been built in the 1830's.

One of the outstanding historical societies devoted to the preservation of the heritage of the cattle industry is the Panhandle-Plains Historical Society. It maintains a large, complete, and well-organized museum at Canyon, Texas, plentifully supplied with artifacts, and has done commendable work in marking the historic sites of the panhandle region. The Arizona Pioneers Historical Museum at Tucson emphasizes the importance of the cattlemen in the history of Arizona. The California State Division of Beaches and Parks administers several areas associated with the cattle industry, and is presently restoring the Petaluma Adobe, General Vallejo's enormous adobe ranchhouse north of San Francisco. At Medora, North Dakota, the State Historical Society of North Dakota maintains the Marquis de Moeres chateau as a historic house museum. The Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park, at Medora, was established to commemorate Theodore Roosevelt's contribution to the range cattle industry during his years in South Dakota as a rancher before he too was wiped out in the disastrous winter of 1886-1887.

In surveying places which graphically recall the life of the cowboy, it is perhaps necessary to examine those which had no actual or direct association with the period, but which contributed significantly to the legend, certainly an integral feature of the story. The "ranch" of Will Rogers in Los Angeles, now a State Park, was the home of a unique



Cooperstown on the Plains. Architect's design of the National Cowboy Hall of Fame, now under construction at Oklahoma City. The tower will twang out cowboy songs.

Courtesy, National Cowboy
Hall of Fame and Museum

figure who epitomized the homespun virtues of the cowpuncher for a generation of Americans. The William S. Hart ranch at Newhall, California, is a public museum in memory of another figure who contributed to the public image of the cowboy.

A number of memorials, museums, and art galleries have been established to preserve various phases of the history of the cattle industry. At Cody, Wyoming, the Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Gallery contains one of the finest and most comprehensive collections of Western America paintings and sculpture which document life on the range, including works by Frederick Remington, George Catlin and Charles M. Russell. Also at Cody is the Buffalo Bill Museum and Cody's T E Ranch buildings--bunkhouses, barns and corrals--honoring the memory of one of the more flamboyant figures of the era who contributed significantly to the legend of the Wild West.

The log cabin studio of Charles M. Russell, the "cowboy artist" who was both painter and sculptor, has been preserved by the town of Great Falls as a memorial museum to the former cowpuncher whose last work, unfinished, sold for \$30,000.

One of the more enthusiastic efforts to commemorate the life of the cowboy is the establishment of a "Cowboy Hall of Fame" near Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The headquarters and museum buildings, estimated to cost \$5,000,000, will be completed in 1960. The construction plans include a 200-foot tower which will produce guitar-like sounds, "as a visual and audial reminder of the pioneer aspirations for which the cowboy fought."

SITES OF EXCEPTIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

J A RANCH

Location: Texas Panhandle, Armstrong County

Ownership: Mr. Monty Richie, descendant of the English partner,
John G. Adair

Historical Significance

Charles Goodnight (1836-1929), soldier, plainsman, and pioneer cattleman of the Staked Plains, dominates the history of the cattle frontier in Texas. He stood with two or three other men in decisively influencing the pattern by which, in the years after the Civil War, the industry developed. He blazed several of the important cattle trails of the West. The first rancher in the Texas panhandle, he guided the growth of the industry in that area. By the turn of the century, he had earned a reputation as possibly the greatest scientific breeder of range cattle in the West. By the time of his death, he was internationally recognized as an authority on the industry.

Goodnight came west with his family at the age of nine and settled in Milam County, Texas, where, during his early years, he laid the foundation for the vast knowledge of Indians and great skill at plainscraft for which he later became known. After serving with the Texas Frontier Regiment during the Civil War, he entered the cattle business. In the post-war years he made himself famous by laying out cattle trails and leading great herds to more profitable markets than Texas afforded. With Oliver Loving, he blazed the Goodnight-Loving Trail from Fort Belknap to Fort Sumner, New Mexico, in 1866, then pushed an extension--the Goodnight Trail--north through Colorado to Wyoming. In 1875 he marked out a trail from Alamogordo, New Mexico, to Granada, Colorado, and in 1877 a trail from the panhandle north to Dodge City, Kansas. From 1868 to 1876 he built



JA Ranch Headquarters, Paloduro, Texas. This house was built by Charles Goodnight, pioneer cattleman of the Staked Plains, and it is still the headquarters of the JA Ranch.

N. P. S. photograph

up a ranch in eastern Colorado, but in the latter year decided to relocate in the Texas panhandle.

This area, the Llano Estacado, had only the year before been wrested from the Kiowas and Comanches, and Goodnight was the first of many cattlemen to bring herds into the country. The first Goodnight spread-- the "Old Home Ranch"--was located in Palo Duro Canyon a few miles below the site of Mackenzie's battle with the Comanches, September 27, 1874. Established in the fall of 1876, it consisted of corrals and picket houses built from timber cut in the canyon. In 1877 Goodnight formed a partnership with John G. Adair, an Englishman who had become a prosperous New York broker. With Adair furnishing financial backing and Goodnight managing the spread, the J A began its long and profitable history. In 1879 Goodnight moved the ranch headquarters to Turkey Creek, farther east, in order to be closer to the railroad. Here new ranch and residence buildings were constructed of logs and, later, a stone house was built for the Adairs to live in when at the ranch. Under Goodnight's management, the J A Ranch grew to encompass 700,000 acres of grass land subsisting 40,000 head of cattle. An advocate of herd improvement, he developed outstanding cattle by mixing Hereford bulls with his Texas longhorns. He also built a large herd of domesticated buffalo. He helped to found, in 1880, the Panhandle Stockmen's Association. Foreseeing the end of the open range, he ended his association with Adair and the J A Ranch in 1889 and settled on a smaller ranch of his own with headquarters at the village of Goodnight. Here he lived out the remainder of his long life, vigorous and clearminded until his fatal heart attack in 1929.

Condition of Site

Of the three sites associated with Goodnight in the panhandle, the J A Ranch headquarters appears most fittingly to commemorate his activities and his contribution to the cattle industry. From here, between 1879 and 1889, he directed the J A enterprise during its most successful years. Located in a wide section of the Canyon at Paloduro, the ranch is still a large and active concern, owned by one of Adair's English descendants, Mr. Monty Ritchie. Some of the original buildings erected in 1879 are still standing, and the big house built for the Adairs, modernized and expanded, still dominates the cluster of buildings that make up ranch headquarters. Although the integrity of the site has been impaired by the addition of new buildings and the improvement of the old, the ranch still possesses the essential flavor of the original. The headquarters site is the original one selected by Goodnight in 1879, and the vast areas of surrounding range lands remain as they were in Goodnight's day.

Two related sites of importance should also be noted, The site of the original Goodnight ranch headquarters--the "Old Home Ranch"-- is at a location, difficult of access, farther up the canyon. These buildings burned in 1904, but the foundations are still visible, and the Panhandle-Plains Historical Society (Canyon, Texas) has marked the site. The frame house where Goodnight lived from 1889-1929 is still standing at the town of Goodnight, and is used as a private residence.

Site Documentation: Harley T. Burton, A History of the J A Ranch (Austin, 1928); Goodnight Papers, University of Texas; J. Evetts Haley, Charles Goodnight, Cowman and Plainsman (2nd ed., Norman, 1949); L. F. Sheffy, "The Old Home Ranch Site," Panhandle-Plains Historical Review, XIX (1946).

LINCOLN

Location: New Mexico, west of Roswell on U. S. 380

Ownership: Private, except for courthouse

Historical Significance

The story of Lincoln duplicates that of most of the cow towns that sprang up on the advancing cattlemen's frontier in the years following the Civil War. Like its counterparts throughout the West, it was a business and social community serving surrounding ranges. To it drifted cowboys, badmen, gunfighters, rustlers, soldiers, and famous lawmen. It was a scene of courtroom battles, public executions, and gunfights. As in other parts of the cattle country, conflict over water, government beef contracts, and grazing rights engendered bad feeling. At Lincoln one of the famous feuds for which the cattle frontier is noted reached its dramatic climax.

The Lincoln County War of 1878 brought the rival Murphy and Tunstall-McSween factions into armed conflict which lasted for five months. It ended in a three-day gun battle on the streets of Lincoln, and resulted in a half-dozen killings. A prominent figure in the war was William H. Bonney, "Billy the Kid." Three years later, in 1881, the Kid made a dramatic escape from the county jail at Lincoln, killing his two guards in the process. But he himself was shot and killed several months later at old Fort Sumner by Pat Garrett, Sheriff of Lincoln County.

Although Lincoln originated in the early 1850's as a Mexican village called La Placita del Rio Bonito, its significance as a cow town was achieved after the creation, in 1869, of Lincoln County. La Placita, renamed Lincoln, became the county seat. At this time, the cattle frontier



Tunstall Store, Lincoln, New Mexico. The store was headquarters of the Tunstall-McSween faction during the bloody Lincoln County War of 1878.

Courtesy, New Mexico State
Tourist Bureau

was advancing west from Texas to the rich grazing lands of Lincoln County, 270,000 square miles in area, where ready markets were to be found at military posts and Indian reservations. During the 1870's and 1880's Lincoln became the capital of a great cattle kingdom where over 300,000 cows grazed. The king was John Chisum, who alone owned 80,000 head. (Chisum joined the Tunstall-McSween faction in the Lincoln County War.) Lincoln continued to play an important role in the business and political life of southeastern New Mexico until 1913, when the county seat was moved to Carrizozo.

Condition of Site

Aside from its exciting and dramatic history and its importance to the development of the cattle industry of southeastern New Mexico, Lincoln's principal historical value lies in its state of preservation. It is probably the least spoiled surviving example of the frontier cow town. At Lincoln virtually the entire town of 1878 has survived comparatively untouched by modern additions and it has retained much of the historical setting and atmosphere of the cow town.

Focal point of interest is the old Lincoln County Courthouse. Built in 1874, this large two-story adobe structure was, until 1880, "the big store" of L. G. Murphy and Co. It housed, besides the store, offices, billard room, post office, living quarters, and bunkroom for visitors. Murphy went bankrupt as a result of the Lincoln County War, and the county in 1880 bought the building for a courthouse and jail. In his famous escape of 1881, Billy the Kid shot his way out of the jail on the second floor. Except for minor repairs, the building is entirely original construction. Now a State Monument, it is also headquarters of the Old Lincoln County Commission, and houses a historical museum of Lincoln County.

Another building of importance is the old Tunstall store, a long rambling adobe that figured prominently in the Lincoln County War. Numerous other business houses and residences dating from the 1870's and 1880's are also still standing. The Old Lincoln County Memorial Commission has placed cast aluminum markers, with informative and well-written texts, throughout the town to identify standing structures as well as sites of historic buildings no longer standing.

Lincoln is of exceptional importance both for its history and because it exemplifies the contribution of the frontier cow town to the range cattle industry. Because of its excellent state of preservation, and its important role as a cattle town, Lincoln provides one of the finest opportunities to interpret the story of the cattlemen's empire.

Site Documentation: Charles F. Coan, A History of New Mexico (3 vol., Chicago, 1925), I; Emerson Hough, The Story of the Cowboy (New York, 1924); William A. Keleher, Violence in Lincoln County, 1869-1881 (Albuquerque, 1957); Ralph E. Twitchell, The Leading Facts of New Mexican History (4 vol., Cedar Rapids, 1917), III.

TOM SUN RANCH

Location: On State Highway 230, six miles west of Independence Rock.

Ownership: The ranch is owned and operated by Bernard Sun, grandson of the original owner.

Historical Significance

The Tom Sun ranch is one of the best preserved ranches dating back to the period of the range cattle industry on the Plains. Perhaps because most of the early ranch buildings were hastily thrown together, and the officials of the larger cattle companies seldom lived on the ranch, few ranches have been preserved. During the seventies and eighties, the Sun ranch was typical of the medium-sized ranching operations in the cattle country. The Cheyenne Daily Leader remarked in 1882 that "the eastern person of inquiring turn of mind who writes to his friends out west to ask what a ranch is like would find his answer in a description of Tom Sun's." The site of the ranch is both historic and scenic, for Sun chose his range on the Oregon Trail, along the Sweetwater River near Devils Gate and Independence Rock, notable landmarks for emigrants on the famous overland trail.

Tom Sun was an excellent example of a frontiersman who became a pioneer cattleman. A French Canadian, who had been a mountain man and knew the Wyoming country thoroughly from his trapping days, Sun was highly respected in Wyoming, known for his integrity, as well as for his ability to use a gun. He had tried prospecting in the early 1870's, on the sodium deposits near Casper, but his cabin was burned by the Indians, and Sun turned to cattle.



Ranchhouse of the Tom Sun Ranch, Devils Gate, Wyoming. The owner was a trapper who established his ranch on the Oregon Trail in the early 1870's.

N. P. S. photograph

Shortly afterward, he established his ranch on the Sweetwater River a short distance above Devils Gate. The Sun ranch occupied about 14 square miles, not one of the largest spreads by any means, but Sun had acquired an excellent, well-watered range, and his herd generally numbered about 6,000 head. Like many cattlemen in Wyoming and Montana, Sun got his cattle from the Oregon country. His fine Durham stock, which bore the Hub-and-Spoke brand, had been trailed over the Cascades and Rocky Mountains through South Pass to the high Plains. One cowboy who accompanied Sun to Oregon, from which point they drove 2,500 head of Durham cattle to the Sun ranch, described the trail drive: "We followed the Oregon Trail, swam the rivers, climbed the mountains, and then followed the Indian river. We were five months making the return trip." He added that there were no women within a hundred miles of the Tom Sun ranch. Signs were posted, "No women or barbed wire allowed," but the former were as scarce as the latter-- "There was none of either."

The below description of the Sun ranch in 1882 indicates Sun was a prosperous cattleman. At that time the ranch was two days by horseback from Rawlins, the nearest settlement. A range of the Sweetwater mountains formed a ranch boundary. The Sweetwater River ran directly through the ranch lands, and although the meadow lands had a heavy growth of grass, if there was a tree on the ranch, "it is so small as to escape observation."

The buildings of Tom Sun's ranch are all situated at the eastern end, not far from the mountain side. They would not be spoken of as "palatial mansions," but are "the finest in the country" on the Sweetwater Range. The ordinary form of the log cabin has been followed in the main building, though planed boards, large windows, artistic effects in whitewash and deer-horn decorations have assisted in giving it a style

hardly to be expected in that far-off region. This larger building has in it five rooms-- large, cheery and comfortable. The furniture is of good, factory-made articles, and about the floor are strewn as rugs the skins of wild animals. The outhouses are quite numerous, there being stables, a meat house, an ice house, a smith's shop and a chicken house. The herd belonging to this ranch numbers about 5,000.

The Sun ranch is particularly significant because it was located on the Oregon Trail, the great overland road of the emigrants to Oregon and California. One of the great landmarks of the Oregon Trail, Independence Rock, adjoined the Sun ranch and Devils Gate, another notable milestone, was but a few miles away. Wagon trains were still using the trail when Sun established his ranch, and emigrants camped nearby.

Condition of Site

The Tom Sun ranch has been continuously in the Sun family, and the present owner, a grandson of Tom Sun, runs about 3,000 head of Hereford cattle on the ranch. A considerable number of the original buildings of the ranch have survived. The low-roofed ranchhouse is the original log structure built by Sun in 1872. Log additions have since been added to it. Several of what are believed to be original outbuildings and corrals are still standing. The setting of the ranch is almost unchanged from its appearance when Sun first staked his claim to the range.

Site Documentation: Robert H. Burns, et al., Wyoming Pioneer Ranches (Laramie, 1955); John K. Rollinson, Wyoming Cattle Trails (Caldwell, 1948), 61, 229-35, 343-45. (The above quotations are from Rollinson.)

GRANT-KOHR'S RANCH

Location: Adjoining the town of Deer Lodge, Montana

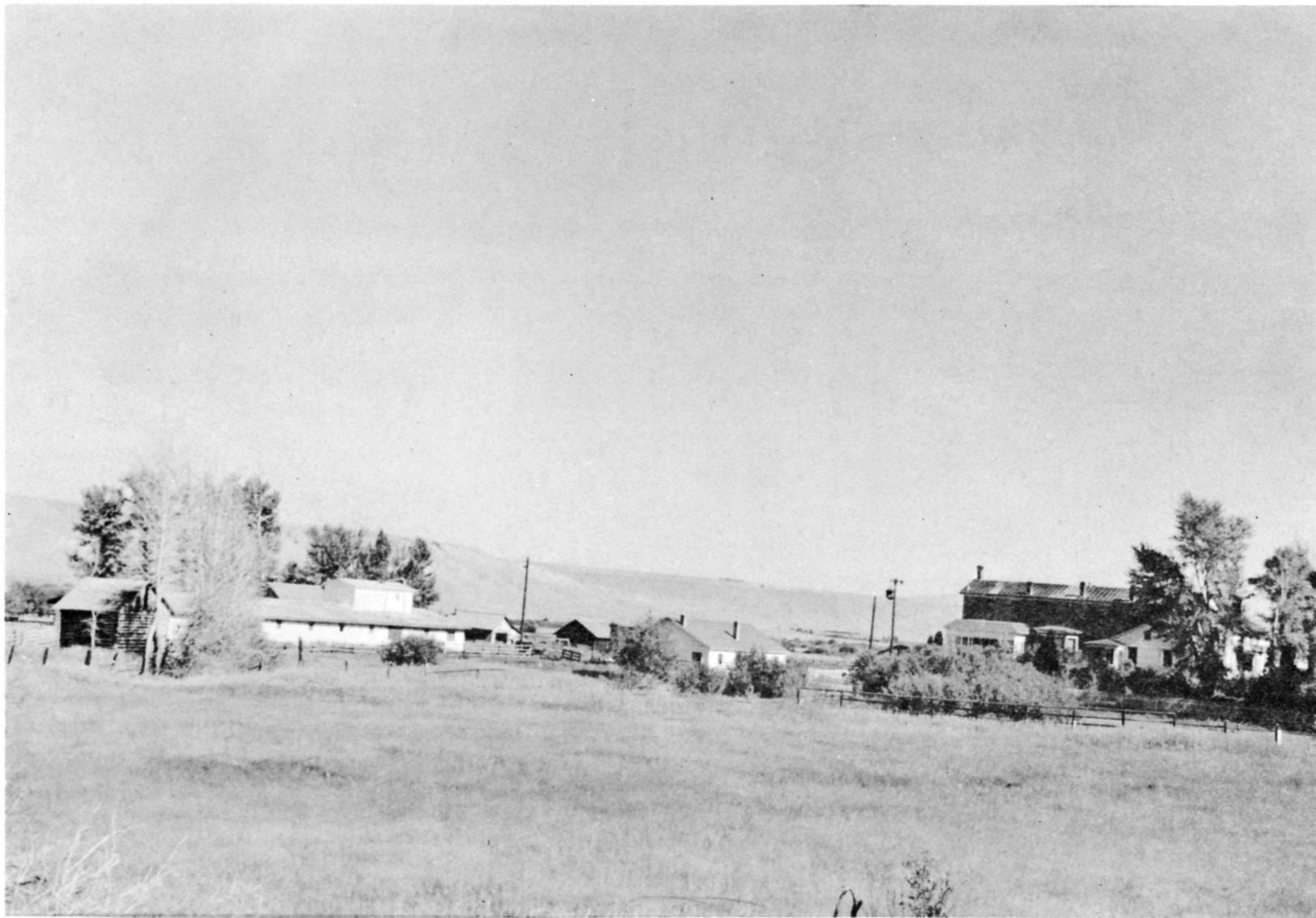
Ownership: The ranch is now known as the Warren ranch, and is owned by Conrad Warren, a grandson of Conrad Kohrs

Historical Significance

The Grant-Kohrs ranch is doubly significant in the history of the range cattle industry. John Grant, the original owner and the son of a Scottish employee of the Hudson Bay Company, is sometimes credited with being the founder of the industry in Montana. Conrad Kohrs, who purchased the ranch about 1866, was one of the foremost "cattle kings" of the era, termed by Pelzer, "the most famous cattleman of the Northwest."

In 1853 Grant began a successful career in Deer Lodge Valley, acquiring broken-down cattle in the vicinity of Fort Hall and after fattening them on local grass, sold the herd at a large profit. By 1863 Grant was running 4,000 head of cattle and nearly that many horses, and providing most of the beef for the miners of Bannack and Virginia City. For his time, far in advance of the period of the great cattle boom of the eighties, Grant was a large-scale operator.

Kohrs was an even larger operator and he purchased Grant's ranch about 1866. Kohrs had been employed in a butcher shop in Bannack in 1865; he borrowed money to buy cattle, made a profit and bought more, and was quickly on his way. Kohrs immediately stocked the ranch with shorthorn bulls, and his improving of the blood probably represented the first constructive cattle-breeding effort in Montana. His success on the Grant ranch launched him on his career as perhaps the greatest single figure in



Grant-Kohrs Ranch, Deer Lodge, Montana. Grant was one of the earliest ranchers in Montana, selling cattle to Oregon Trail emigrants in the 1850's; Kohrs has been called "the most famous cattleman of the Northwest."

N. P. S. photograph

the cattle industry of Montana. He also played an influential role in the organization of the Montana Stockgrowers Association.

Kohrs was a Dane by birth who went to sea when he was fifteen, prospected in California and Idaho, and came to Montana in 1862. Kohrs was immensely successful, largely because he knew cattle as well as the cowboys and knew the value of a dollar as well as the eastern bankers. In 1883 Kohrs, acting for himself and an associate, and Granville Stuart, another pioneer Montana cattleman, bought out the interests of the Davis brothers and Hauser in the DHS. The transaction, involving 12,000 cattle valued at \$400,000, launched the Pioneer Cattle Company, with Conrad Kohrs in control. The disastrous winter of 1886-87 nearly wiped out Kohrs; he salvaged only 3,000 head out of 35,000. By heavy borrowing, made possible on the strength of his reputation for integrity and successful cattle operations, Kohrs recovered and remained a leading cattleman until his death in this century.

Condition of Site

The Grant-Kohrs ranch is now owned and operated by Mr. Conrad Warren, a grandson of Kohrs. In the tradition of his grandfather, Warren is a breeder of thoroughbred cattle. The original frame ranchhouse, erected by Grant in 1862, is still standing. Kohrs made alterations in the 1890's, placing a large brick addition on the west side of the house. Other old structures on the property include several log cabins, believed to have been built in the late 1850's and 1860's, and old corrals.

Site Documentation: Merrill G. Burlingame, The Montana Frontier (Helena, 1942), 263-65; Louis Peltzer, The Cattleman's Frontier (Glendale, 1936), 81, 233-34; Larry Gill, "From Butcher Boy to Beef King: The Gold Camp Days of Conrad Kohrs," in Montana, The Magazine of Western History (Spring, 1958).

THEODORE ROOSEVELT NATIONAL MEMORIAL PARK, NORTH DAKOTA

Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park, containing about 70,000 acres, was established as a memorial to the enduring contributions of President Roosevelt in the conservation of the Nation's resources, and to mark the role of Roosevelt in the range cattle industry of the Dakota Badlands. It was his pioneering experience as a cattleman in North Dakota which developed Roosevelt's love of life in the open and ultimately committed him to a deep faith in the cause of conservation.

At the age of 25, Roosevelt first arrived in Dakota Territory in 1883. He had come to hunt buffalo, but less than three weeks later he bought the Maltese Cross cattle and brand. The following winter both his wife and mother died; terribly broken by the blow, Roosevelt turned to the West, and in the summer of 1884 established his Elkhorn Ranch on the bank of the Little Missouri. Active, if not extremely proficient, in the arts of the cowboy, Roosevelt was an influential cattleman and headed the local livestock association. At the same time he continued his study and writing. Much of his Life of Thomas Hart Benton was written at the Elkhorn ranch.

Along with most cattlemen, Roosevelt suffered severe losses in the disastrous winter of 1886-87, losing from 75 to 90 percent of his herd and most of his \$50,000 investment. Afterwards Roosevelt spent short periods in the Badlands, but his political success left him little time for ranching. He sold out his interests before leaving for Cuba with the Rough Riders in 1898.

Later Roosevelt was to write "I have always said I never would have been President if it had not been for my experience in North Dakota," and certainly his life on the range was always regarded by him as an idyllic



Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park. As a young cattleman in these Dakota Badlands, Roosevelt witnessed the passing of the open range era.

N. P. S. photograph

interlude, and as the place where "the romance of my life began." Admiring the rough virtues and the rugged integrity of the men with whom he rode, Roosevelt drew from them the inspiration which led to the organization of the Rough Riders during the Spanish-American War.

The park is located near Medora, one of the famous cattle centers of the region. One section of the park lies across the Little Missouri River, about 50 miles from the junction of the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers. A second section of the park adjoins the town of Medora, which contains the "Chateau" of the Marquis de Mores, eccentric French nobleman and colleague of Roosevelt. Between the two sections lies the Elkhorn ranch site. There are no remains of the original buildings.

OLIVER LEE RANCH (WHITE SANDS NATIONAL MONUMENT), NEW MEXICO

The Oliver Lee Ranch, known as the Dog Canyon Ranch, was a well-known landmark of New Mexico and was closely involved in a famous political feud. Lee was a suspect in the murder of a prominent New Mexico politician and lawyer who had defended Billy the Kid. Because of a long-standing feud between Lee and Sheriff Pat Barrett, Lee feared the possible fatal results of surrendering to the Sheriff, and instead took refuge in the Dog Canyon Ranch which he converted into a fortress. Later Lee was tried and found innocent in another county, the trial being fought on political grounds, with Albert E. Fall and Harry M. Dougherty, who went on to greater things, conducting the defense.

The Dog Canyon Ranch house, built of adobe and containing ten rooms, is still standing beneath a tin roof. The walls are beginning to show erosion, although the fireplaces and sections of the wallpaper are intact. A parcel of land, including the ranch house, was acquired by the National Park Service as a water source for White Sands National Monument.

OTHER SITES CONSIDERED IN THE SURVEY

(The list which follows includes sites which are of considerable interest but which do not meet the criteria for national significance.)

CALIFORNIA

Los Cerritos: Built by John Temple in 1844, Los Cerritos is generally considered to be the largest and one of the most impressive adobes of southern California. The ranch was later owned by J. Bixby and Co., and is now a City of Long Beach park.

Rancho Guajome: One of the best-preserved of the American period adobe ranch-houses, Rancho Guajome was built in 1856 by Colonel Cave Coutts, who received the land as a wedding present from Abel Stearns. The house, in fair condition, is built around a patio; corrals, barns and stables surround the courtyard, the old ranch chapel stands nearby.

Rancho Las Flores: Once one of the most princely estates in California, the ranch was established by M. A. Foster who purchased 90,000 acres from Andres and Pio Pico in 1864. A Monterey-type adobe, the ranchhouse is preserved on the grounds of Camp Pendleton, near San Diego.

Rancho Santa Rita: In 1866 Henry Miller acquired the old Rancho Sanjon de Santa Rita property and from that time his holdings steadily increased until the "Kingdom of Miller and Lux" included millions of acres in California, Oregon and Nevada, one section in the San Joaquin Valley extending for 68 miles. Santa Rita, the Miller and Lux headquarters, is now an agricultural operation and only one original building has survived.

Warner's Ranch: Jonathan Warner was one of the first large-scale American landowners in California, receiving in 1844 a vast grant of land formerly belonging to Missions San Diego and San Luis Rey. Although more famous as a way station for almost all pioneers entering California over the Emigrant Trail, its extensive ranching operations have continued and portions of the original adobe buildings have survived.

COLORADO

Iliff Cattle Ranch: Site near Iliff, of the principal ranchhouse of John W. Iliff, the "Great Cattle King of the Western Plains." Iliff's range stretched for nearly thirty miles along the South Fork of the Platte River, and he is generally considered to be among the two or three outstanding cattlemen of the period. The site of his headquarters is now a tilled field.



Rancho Santa Rita. Miller and Lux was probably the largest cattle operation in the Pacific West. This building, since altered, is the only original structure remaining at the Miller and Lux ranch headquarters.

N. P. S. photograph

KANSAS

Abilene: Establishment of this first cow town by Joseph G. McCoy at the western terminus of the Kansas Pacific Railroad and at the end of the Chisholm Trail marked the beginning of the range cattle industry, and nearly a million and one-half Texas longhorns were loaded in the Abilene yards between 1868 and 1871. Now a town of 6,000, Abilene bears little resemblance to the original town.

Dodge City: This self-billed "cowboy capital of the world," serving both the Chisholm and Western Trails from its location on the Santa Fe Railroad, was one of the leading cattle centers of the industry. Dodge rejoiced in its title "Queen of the Cownowns," placing its virtue in the hands of such celebrated peace officers as Bat Masterson, Wyatt Earp and Bill Tilghman. Perhaps the old frontier spirit is not yet dead; in addition to reconstructing a section of Front Street, Dodge has renamed two of its principal streets "Wyatt Earp" Avenue and "Gunsmoke" Avenue.

Newton: For the two years, 1871-1872, when Newton was the western terminus of the Santa Fe Railroad, on the eastern branch of the Chisholm Trail, it was a typical Kansas cow town. The present town of 12,000 contains no remains of the boom days.

Wichita: This modern city of 175,000 began its career in 1872 when the Santa Fe built a branch line from Newton and Wichita became the temporary "cow capital," retaining its position as the leading shipping point in Kansas until replaced in 1877 by Dodge City. There are no original remains.

MONTANA

Miles City: Located in the heart of the Montana range country, Miles City was a frontier town and center of the region's cattle industry. The Montana Stock Grower's Association was formed here in 1884. Although no original buildings remain, Miles City, now a town of 10,000, retains something of the old flavor as a result of its livestock industry.

Site of W Bar (Wiboux) Ranch: A wealthy Frenchman, Pierre Wiboux, established one of Montana's largest ranches in 1883, survived the winter of 1886-1887, and eventually ran about 65,000 head of stock on a range extending from eastern Montana into western North Dakota. The ruins of the ranchhouse, known as the "White House," and the stone barn of the ranch survive about 14 miles north of Wiboux.



The remains of the DHS. These log buildings near Lewiston, Montana, date to the early 1880's when the DHS was one of the biggest outfits on the northern range.

N. P. S. photograph

DHS Ranch: The Davis-Hauser-Stuart Ranch, known to cattlemen as the D-S and DHS, was one of the largest of the cattle spreads in Montana. Established by the Montana pioneer, Granville Stuart, who formed a partnership with the mining magnates, Andrew Davis and Samuel Hauser, the firm was later reorganized by Stuart and Conrad Kohrs as the Pioneer Cattle Company. A few of the buildings have survived, including the ranchhouse and several barns, at the headquarters near Lewiston.

Robert S. Ford Ranch: One of the first ranches to be established in Sun Valley, the ranch was founded in 1871 by Robert Ford, a pioneer cattleman and first president of the Montana Stockgrowers Association. Ford supplied beef to the Canadian Mounted Police and to the builders of the Canadian Pacific. The ranch is now owned by a son of Robert Ford; the remodeled ranchhouse survives, along with one of the original barns.

N-Bar Ranch: A typical cattle spread of east central Montana, the N-Bar has been in continuous operation under only two owners since its establishment in 1881. The present ranch contains about the same range as the original. At the headquarters, near Grassrange, the office, bunkhouse and barn date to the nineteenth century.

NEBRASKA

Site of Newman Brothers and Farr Ranch: This ranch served as headquarters of one of the famous cattle companies of the northern range, the Niobrara Cattle Company, which is believed to have run 86,000 head of cattle over the firm's ranges extending from Texas to Montana. One of the original bunkhouses remains at the site, about 11 miles south of Gordon.

NEW MEXICO

Cimarron: A frontier city in the center of the range lands of northeastern New Mexico, Cimarron was the agency for the Ute Indians and the outfitting point for prospectors, trappers and hunters, as well as being the headquarters for the far-flung ranching operations of Lucien B. Maxwell. A number of the original buildings, including the Don Diego Tavern, are preserved in the "old town" section of Cimarron.

NORTH DAKOTA

Medora: Best known for its association with two neighboring ranchers, Theodore Roosevelt and the erratic French nobleman Marquis de Mores, Medora is one of the best-preserved of the smaller cow towns. A number of the buildings erected in the 1880's have survived, and the rambling frame "Chateau" of de Mores is preserved as a State memorial.



Site of Illiff Ranch Headquarters, Colorado. John Wesley Illiff was known as the "Great Cattle King of the Western Plains."
N. P. S. photograph

TEXAS

King Ranch: One of the earliest of the Texas spreads, founded by Captain Richard King in 1852, the King Ranch ranks as one of the outstanding and certainly the best-known of all cattle enterprises in the history of the Southwest, with a range covering a million acres in southeast Texas. In more recent years the ranch has been famous for its experiments in breeding, especially for the development of the Santa Gertrudis, the first new breed developed in the United States. A fire in 1912 destroyed all but the commissary building of the original headquarters area near Kingsville. A twelve-mile loop tour keyed to a self-guiding leaflet accommodates visitors.

Matador Ranch: Among the British-owned ranches, the Matador Land and Cattle Company, Ltd., a Scottish firm, was one of the largest and most profitable. By 1910 the ranch owned and leased a million and one-half acres in Texas and the north. The old ranch headquarters, overlooking the town of Matador, has occupied the same site since 1879, although the ranch has been drastically reduced in size.

Tascosa: Once the roaring cowboy capital of the panhandle when such distinguished visitors as Billy the Kid gave the town its distinctive flavor, Tascosa has entered upon a more gentle era. On the site has been established the Texas Boys Ranch for underprivileged children, whose modern buildings surround the only two structures dating to the days of Old Tascosa, a frame church and the courthouse.

XIT Ranch: One of the most famous of the Texas brands, the XIT ("Ten Counties in Texas") embraced most of a tier of seven panhandle counties. It was founded in 1885 by the Capitol Syndicate of Chicago, which received its immense land grant of more than three million acres in return for constructing the Texas state capitol building. A frame building near Channing which once served as general ranch headquarters is still standing. The XIT was broken up and sold shortly after 1900.

WYOMING

Cheyenne: Once the booming center of a vast ranching region, where Wyoming-finished cattle were loaded for European markets and the powerful Wyoming Stock Growers Association ruled the territory, Cheyenne today has little of the atmosphere or physical evidence of the original cow town, except for a few of the mansions built by cattlemen.

Hutton and Alsop Ranch: One of the better preserved ranching operations, the Hutton and Alsop ranch was a ranch of considerable size, located on the Laramie Plains, near Laramie. Buildings which now serve as a blacksmith shop and a bunkhouse, were in use when the ranch was a stage stop on the Overland Stage route. The ranchhouse and barn are believed to date to the 1870's or 1880's.



Los Cerritos. Just outside Long Beach is located this Spanish rancho, the largest existing adobe in southern California.

N. P. S. photograph

TA Ranch: This ranch, south of Buffalo, was the scene of a dramatic incident of the open range era, during the climax of the Johnson County War. In this struggle between the large cattle interests and the grangers and townsmen, the Wyoming Stock Growers Association recruited a band of 25 gunmen, mostly Texas hands, and invaded Johnson County to punish the opposition. The countryside rose against the invaders who, badly outnumbered, took refuge in the TA ranch buildings. Federal cavalry finally rescued the besieged force. Several of the buildings which were standing at the time of the siege have survived. The portholes in the barn are still to be seen and the barn itself bears bullet holes.

Swan Ranch: The Swan Land and Cattle Company was probably the largest among the giant companies formed by British investors during the boom days of the range cattle industry. Registered in Edinburgh in 1883, with capital assets of \$3,000,000, the Swan Company claimed a range 130 miles long and up to 100 miles wide. Although driven to bankruptcy by the winter of 1886-87, the company was reorganized and survived, until liquidation began in 1945. Near Chugwater is a small parcel of land around the headquarters, which includes several fine buildings: the ranchose, built in 1876, and later a hotel, the store, and the brick Hiram Kelley House.

WASHINGTON

Ben Snipes Cabin: Ben Snipes may well have owned more cattle than any other single rancher in the Northwest, running more than 100,000 head in the bunchgrass valley of the Yakima in eastern Washington. Snipes trailed herds more than 800 miles north to the Fraser River and Cariboo Mines in British Columbia. The Snipes Cabin, built about 1860 by Snipes on his ranch just north of the Dalles of the Columbia, has been moved to Sunnyside City Park.

SITES ALSO NOTED

Arizona

Pete Kitchen Ranch
San Bernardino Ranch

California

Santa Rosa Island (Vail and Co.)
Sawday Ranch
Tejon Rancho
Rancho Petaluma
Marsh Ranch
William Dana Ranch

Idaho

Sawtell Ranch site
4 S Ranch
Bliss Ranch

Nevada

Moorman Ranch
71 Ranch
Williams Ranch
Hay Ranch

Oregon

Pendleton
John Devine Monument
William Hanley Ranch site
Agency Ranch (Henry Miller)

Texas

Clarendon
Mobeetie
T Ranch headquarters

Washington

Horse Heaven Hills

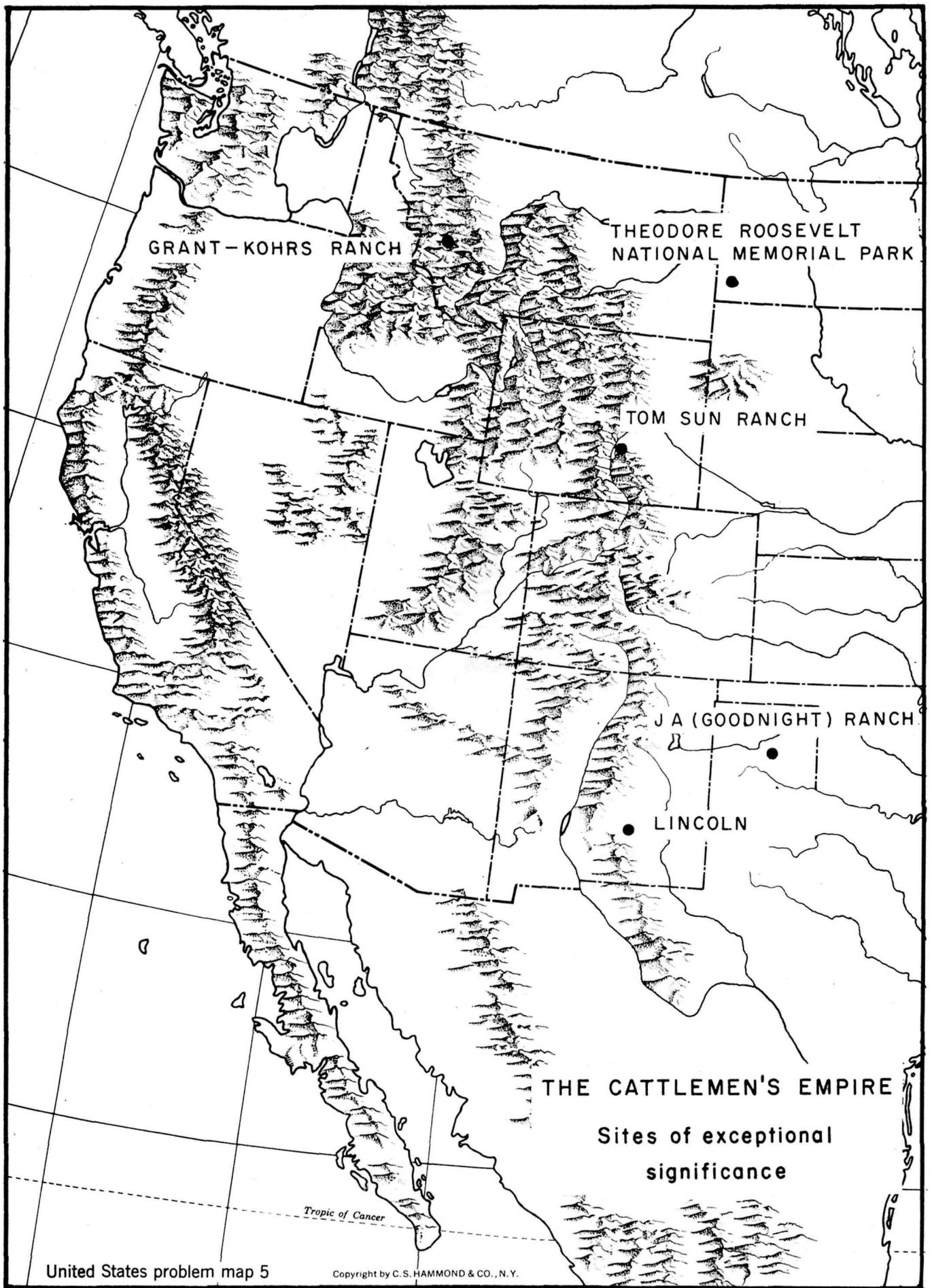
Wyoming

Chester A. Williams Ranch

CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF SITES

The National Park Service has adopted the following criteria for selection of sites of exceptional value:

1. Structures or sites in which the broad cultural, political, economic, military, or social history of the Nation is best exemplified, and from which the visitor may grasp the larger patterns of our American heritage. Such sites are naturally the points or bases from which the broad aspects of prehistoric and historic American life can best be presented.
2. Structures or sites associated importantly with the lives of outstanding historic personages.
3. Structures or sites associated with important events which are symbolic of some great idea or ideal of the American people.
4. Structures which embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type-specimen, exceptionally valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction; or a notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual genius reflected his age.
5. Archeological sites which have produced information of major scientific importance by revealing new cultures or by shedding light upon periods of occupation over large areas of the United States. Such sites are those which have produced or which may reasonably be expected to produce data which have affected theories, concepts, and ideas to a major degree.
6. All historical and archeological sites and structures in order to meet the standards of exceptional importance should have integrity, that is, there should not be doubts as to whether it is the original site or building, original material, or workmanship, and original location. Intangible elements of feeling and association, although difficult to describe, may also be factors in weighing the integrity of a site or structure.
7. Structures or sites of recent historical importance relating to events or persons within 50 years, will not, as a rule, be eligible for consideration.



GRANT-KOHR'S RANCH

THEODORE ROOSEVELT
NATIONAL MEMORIAL PARK

TOM SUN RANCH

J.A. (GOODNIGHT) RANCH

LINCOLN

THE CATTLEMEN'S EMPIRE
Sites of exceptional
significance

Tropic of Cancer

