

**Cattle Trails – Statement of Significance**  
following academic peer review/SHPO review  
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**INTRODUCTION:**

In the 1968 National Trails System Act (P.L. 90-543), Section 5(c) called for various trails to be studied for possible inclusion as national trails. Clause 3 within that section called for a study of the "Old Cattle Trails of the Southwest from the vicinity of San Antonio, Texas, approximately eight hundred miles through Oklahoma via Baxter Springs and Chetopa, Kansas, to Fort Scott, Kansas, including the Chisholm Trail, from the vicinity of San Antonio or Cuero, Texas, approximately eight hundred miles north through Oklahoma to Abilene, Kansas."

Based on that act, and on resolutions by various state legislatures, the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (BOR) studied three trails for addition to the National Trails System: the Shawnee Trail (from Belton, Texas to Baxter Springs, Kansas), the Chisholm Trail (from San Antonio, Texas to Abilene, Kansas), and the Western Trail (from San Antonio, Texas, to Dodge City, Kansas). At that time, the only two trails in the system were two so-called "scenic trails" – the Appalachian Trail and the Pacific Crest Trail – and all trails were evaluated according to scenic trails criteria. The "Old Cattle Trails of the Southwest" study, completed by the BOR's Albuquerque office in April 1975, concluded that the Shawnee, Chisholm, and Western trails

do not meet the qualifying criteria for inclusion in the National Trails System as National Scenic Trails. In essence, the corridor through which the three trails pass do not provide for maximum outdoor recreation potential and for the conservation and enjoyment of nationally significant scenic, historic, natural, or cultural qualities.

The BOR did, however, feel that these three trails possessed "characteristics of State or regional importance." The study evaluated the four "qualities" noted above - and as for historic qualities, it noted that

The historical integrity and appearance of the study corridors have been almost completely altered by man's activities. Preservation and historical interpretation has been accomplished in only a few museums, forts, buildings, parks site markings [sic], and civic celebrations. It is unlikely that these historic qualities would exert a substantial nationwide attraction.

For the next 15 years, neither the Interior Department nor Congress made any further attempt to study or evaluate the historic cattle trails. Congress, however, breathed new life into historic trails when, in 1978, it created a new category for national historic trails within the National Trails System Act; this provision allowed historic trails to be based on a different, more appropriate set of criteria than national scenic trails.

In May 1991, Sen. Nancy Kassebaum (R-KS) introduced “The Old West Trails Act of 1991” (S. 1115), which would have established 1) The Chisholm Cattle Drive Trail, beginning in Texas and running through Oklahoma and ending, respectively, in Abilene, Newton, Wichita, and Caldwell, Kansas, 2) The Ellsworth Cattle Drive Trail, beginning in Texas and running through Oklahoma; Kingman, Kansas; Ellingwood [sic], Kansas; and ending in Ellsworth, Kansas; 3) The Dodge City or Western Cattle Drive Trail, beginning in Texas and running through Oklahoma; Dodge City, Kansas; and ending in Nebraska; and 4) the Smoky Hill/David Butterfield Overland Dispatch Stage Trail, beginning in Atchison and Leavenworth, Kansas and ending in Denver, Colorado. The bill did not pass.

In June 2005, Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK) introduced the Chisholm and Great Western Cattle Trails Act of 2005 (H.R. 2964) which would have designated the Chisholm Trail, from the vicinity of Brownsville, Texas northward to Abilene, Kansas “and the segments running to alternative Kansas destinations that were commonly used,” along with the Great Western Trail, from the vicinity of San Antonio, Texas, northward through Oklahoma and Kansas to Dodge City. The bill did not pass.

In June 2007, Rep. Cole re-introduced his bill as H.R. 2849. Four months later, Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) introduced S. 2255, which similarly called for studies of the Chisholm Trail and the Great Western Trail. Neither bill passed during the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress. However, S. 2255 was reported by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee in September 2008.

By the beginning of the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, both the Senate and the House had included the provisions of the cattle-trails study bill in similar versions of a longer bill, entitled the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009. The House bill (H.R. 146) was introduced on January 6, 2009, while the Senate bill (S. 22) was introduced one day later. H.R. 146 passed the House on March 3, while S. 22 passed the Senate on March 15. A conference committee resolved the differences between the two bills on March 25, and President Obama signed H.R. 146 on March 30, 2009. The bill called for the Secretary of the Interior to conduct the study of these two trails. In response, that responsibility was delegated to the National Park Service, which in turn assigned the project to the National Trails office in the Intermountain Region (NTIR). The National Trails office is therefore undertaking this study.

## **CRITERIA FOR NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE AND THE THEMATIC FRAMEWORK**

Section 5(b)(11) of the 1968 National Trails Study Act (P.L. 90-543) states that “To qualify for designation as a national historic trail, a trail must meet all three of the following criteria that were established in 1978, as noted above:

- *A) It must be a trail or route established by historic use and must be historically significant as a result of that use. The route need not currently exist as a discernible trail to qualify, but its location must be sufficiently known to permit evaluation of public recreation and historical interest potential.*

- *B) It must be nationally significant. To qualify as nationally significant historic use of the trail must have had a far reaching effect on broad patterns of American culture. Trails significant in the history of Native Americans may be included.*
- *C) It must have significant potential for public recreational use or historical interest based on historic interpretation and appreciation.*

In order to attain national significance (item B, above), proposed national historic trails – just as proposed, historically-themed national park units – must qualify under at least one of six criteria that pertain to National Historic Landmarks (NHL), in accordance to regulations issued subsequent to the National Historic Sites Act of 1935. A National Park Service (NPS) bulletin that pertains to the National Register of Historic Places, entitled “How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation,” states that “The quality of national significance [when considering potential National Historic Landmarks] is ascribed to districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the heritage of the United States in history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture and that possess a high degree of integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

1. *That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to, and are identified with, or that outstandingly represent, the broad national patterns of United States history and from which an understanding and appreciation of those patterns may be gained; or*
2. *That are associated importantly with the lives of persons nationally significant in the history of the United States; or*
3. *That represent some great idea or ideal of the American people; or*
4. *That embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen exceptionally valuable for a study of a period, style or method of construction, or that represent a significant, distinctive and exceptional entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or*
5. *That are composed of integral parts of the environment not sufficiently significant by reason of historical association or artistic merit to warrant individual recognition but collectively compose an entity of exceptional historical or artistic significance, or outstandingly commemorate or illustrate a way of life or culture; or*
6. *That have yielded or may be likely to yield 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 yielded, or which may reasonably be expected to yield, data affecting theories, concepts and ideas to a major degree.*

Another key topic in the selection and appropriateness of historic trails as being part of the National Trails System is whether they are part of broad, recognized themes in American history. The NPS has long operated under one of a series of thematic frameworks, and because of a

widespread perception that the practice of history had changed dramatically over the years, Congress passed a bill in 1991 (Public Law 101-628) which included a provision (Section 1209) directing the NPS to revise its thematic framework for history and prehistory to reflect current scholarship and represent the full diversity of America's past. That law, in turn, brought forth a convocation of historians and other scholars that met at a June 1993 workshop in Washington, D.C. That meeting was evenly divided between NPS professionals and the academic community, with participants from the Organization of American Historians, the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History, and the American Historical Association. Emanating from that workshop was the publication and distribution of the NPS Revised Thematic Framework, which was issued in 1994 and still serves in that capacity. That document envisions American history as being a complex interrelationship of people, time, and place that are manifested in eight broad themes: 1) Peopling Places, 2) Creating Social Institutions and Movements, 3) Expressing Cultural Values, 4) Shaping the Political Landscape, 5) Developing the American Economy, 6) Expanding Science and Technology, 7) Transforming the Environment, and 8) Changing Role of the United States in the World Community. Within each theme, the document also provides a list of subsidiary topics that further define and describe that theme.

As noted below, this document recommends that the proposed Cattle Trails National Historic Trail, which incorporates the Chisholm Trail and the Great Western Trail (as signified in Sec. 5303 in the 2009 omnibus parks bill) is nationally significant under four separate themes. Each of these themes describes an overall theme, and subsidiary topic as delineated under the NPS's 1994 Revised Thematic Framework. In addition, it describes for each theme, one of thirty Areas of Significance, each of which is also listed in the NPS bulletin entitled "How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation" (see above). Finally, it describes the NHL criterion associated with each theme.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The National Trails Intermountain Region planning team makes the following findings regarding national significance:

The Cattle Trails National Historic Trail is of national significance for its association with the following four themes:

- 1) Theme = Developing the American Economy: exchange and trade; Area of Significance = Commerce; NHL Criterion #1 = an association with events that have made a significant contribution to, and are identified with, or that outstandingly represent, the broad national patterns of United States history.**

**The widespread popularity of the cattle trails, more than any other factor, was responsible for re-integrating Texas into the national economy following the Civil War. Texas during the mid-1860s was in a severe postwar economic depression; it was cash-poor but rich in cattle. The Chisholm Trail and, later, the Western Trail brought Texas out of its isolation and tied it into a large national and international trading network, and the state rebounded economically as a result. Due to the newfound availability of**

**inexpensive beef, millions of Americans shifted from a pork-based diet to one based increasingly on beef.**

- 2) Theme = Developing the American Economy: distribution and consumption, plus transportation and communication; Area of Significance = Transportation, plus Exploration/Settlement; NHL Criterion #1 = an association with events that have made a significant contribution to, and are identified with, or that outstandingly represent, the broad national patterns of United States history**

**The success of the cattle trail migrations was an economic windfall to cities and towns between southern Texas and western Nebraska, but it had more far-reaching impacts as well. Because of these trails, cattle were driven to locations throughout the Great Plains and the Mountain West.**

- 3) Themes = Peopling Places: encounters, conflicts, and colonization, plus Expressing Cultural Values: popular and traditional culture, plus Developing the American Economy: workers and work culture; Area of Significance = Agriculture or Social History; NHL Criterion #1 = an association with events that have made a significant contribution to, and are identified with, or that outstandingly represent, the broad national patterns of United States history**

**The cattle trails, which were located just west of the homesteader's frontier, forced farmers and cowmen to live and work in close proximity to one another. The wild, transient habits and lifestyle of Texas cowmen was a stark contrast to the Midwestern farmers, who focused their livelihood on a designated plot of land. As a result, the cattle trails brought a well-publicized – and predictable – conflict whenever and wherever these frontiers collided with each other.**

- 4) Theme = Expressing Cultural Values: literature, mass media, and popular and traditional culture; Area of Significance = Entertainment/Recreation or Literature; NHL Criterion #3 = a theme that represents some great idea or ideal of the American people**

**The cattle drives had an enormous impact on popular culture. The reality of a cowboy's lifestyle on a trail drive was anything but romantic; it meant long hours, exposure to weather extremes, dust clouds, swollen rivers, stampedes and other dangers, a minimum of comforts, and low pay, much of which might be spent at an end-of-trail cowtown. Writers and other observers, however, quickly made the cowboy a uniquely American icon: tough, individualistic, hard-working, and self-sufficient. The image of the cowboy was one that came to be widely admired and imitated, first in "dime novels" and other books, and later in motion pictures and television shows. This image, in time, spread out beyond the Great Plains to the remainder of the United States and to foreign lands as well.**

**PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE – 1867 to 1884**

## **STUDY LEGISLATION, PURPOSE, AND TASKS**

### **○ Legislation**

This determination of significance is necessitated by the passage of P.L. 111-11, signed by President Obama on March 30, 2009. Section 5303 of that bill called for the Secretary of the Interior to study both the Chisholm Trail and the Great Western Trail for their feasibility as national historic trails. More specifically, this public law calls for an amendment to Sec. 5(c) of the National Trails System Act, or NTSA (P.L. 90-543) to study “The Chisholm Trail (also known as the ‘Abilene Trail’), from the vicinity of San Antonio, Texas . . . to Enid, Oklahoma, Caldwell, Kansas, Wichita, Kansas, Abilene, Kansas, and commonly used segments running to alternative Kansas destinations” as well as “The Great Western Trail (also known as the ‘Dodge City Trail’), from the vicinity of San Antonio, Texas, north-by-northwest [to] Oklahoma, north through Kansas to Dodge City, and north through Nebraska to Ogallala.” Congress included the following proviso which pertained to both trails; namely, “In conducting the study required under this paragraph, the Secretary of the Interior shall identify the point at which the trail originated south of San Antonio, Texas.”

In compliance with P.L. 111-11, National Trails Intermountain Region (NTIR) of the National Park Service is conducting a feasibility study for the proposed Chisholm and Great Western National Historic Trail.

Section 5(b) of NTSA directs that “the feasibility of designating a trail shall be determined on the basis of evaluation of whether or not it is physically possible to develop a trail along a route being studied, and whether the development of a trail would be financially feasible.” Feasibility studies should include a number of evaluation methods, one of the most critical of which pertains to its significance. Specifically, Section 5(b)(11) states that “To qualify for designation a national historic trail, a trail must meet all three of the following criteria:

- A) It must be a trail or route established by historic use and must be historically significant as a result of that use. The route need not currently exist as a discernible trail to qualify, but its location must be sufficiently known to permit evaluation of public recreation and historical interest potential.
- B) It must be nationally significant. To qualify as nationally significant historic use of the trail must have had a far reaching effect on broad patterns of American culture. Trails significant in the history of Native Americans may be included.
- C) It must have significant potential for public recreational use or historical interest based on historic interpretation and appreciation.

### **○ Purpose of Feasibility Study**

The purpose of the study is to determine whether the designation of the Chisholm Trail and/or

the Great Western Trail as a national historic trail is feasible. Designation would serve as a reminder that the cattle trails, more than any other factor, were responsible for binding at least a portion of the nation's wounds following the Civil War by re-integrating Texas into the national economy. Cattle trail migrations, moreover, were an economic windfall to cities and towns throughout the Great Plains states, and played a major role in changing Americans' dietary preferences from pork to beef. In addition, cattle trailing (that is, an organized drive to move cattle to market) ushered in an almost inevitable period of conflict between wild, reckless Texas cowmen and conservative, cautious Midwestern farmers and their supporters. Finally, the cattle drives transformed popular culture by spotlighting the cowboy – whose day-to-day lifestyle was anything but romantic – as an adventurous, enduring American hero.

- **Tasks**

The tasks which will help determine whether the Chisholm Trail and/or the Great Western Trail should be considered feasible as national historic trails include 1) historical research, which will consist of a historical narrative and a bibliographic essay, and 2) a discussion of significance themes, which will explain and justify the trails' national significance.

## **HISTORICAL NARRATIVE**

### **Foreword**

The Chisholm Trail and the Great Western Trail were the two most heavily used of a network of trails that Texas ranchers and contractors used to move cattle, from the early 1850s through the late 1880s, from Texas to various Midwestern and Great Plains states. Historians have identified more than a score of trails that emerged, witnessed the passage of cattle herds, and faded during that time. Four of the best known of those northbound trails (listed from east to west) were the Shawnee Trail, the Chisholm Trail, the Western Trail, and the Goodnight-Loving Trail.

These cattle trails made their mark on the landscape because of an ever-changing series of economic, political, and demographic circumstances. The context of the trail driving period was an America that was dynamic, sometimes to the point of turbulence; it was growing both demographically and geographically, but was witnessing both internecine warfare and ugly, often violent clashes between longstanding cultural and racial groups. During this roughly thirty-five-year period, the ragged edge of homesteading settlement, both in Texas and elsewhere in the Great Plains, marched westward, often at a dramatic pace. New railroad routes were being surveyed and constructed, both to the west and southwest; American Indian settlement was undergoing a rapid change, both in Indian Territory and elsewhere; and the beef packing industry was undergoing rapid change, both in its geography and technology.

For all of these reasons, the various cattle trails that were such a prominent part of the life and economy of the northern and southern Great Plains during this period were rarely static. Between the 1850s and the late 1880s, the four trails noted above, plus a number of others, rose to prominence and then disappeared. During their relatively brief lifespan, most of these trails were called by a variety of names, and the trails' origin points, routes, and destination points were

forever in a state of flux. What is constant, however – particularly between 1867 and 1884 – was the large-scale northbound seasonal movement of cattle, horses, and cowhands from Texas, with the vast majority of herds headed toward either Kansas or Nebraska. This annual migration served as a major economic stimulus to the Texas economy, and in so doing it likewise created if not dominated the economic fortunes of various railhead “cow towns.” These migrations, in turn, enriched the bottom lines of a number of westward-moving railroads as well as packing houses in Kansas City, St. Louis, Chicago, and elsewhere. Finally, at the far end of the supply chain, the huge new abundance of inexpensive beef that saturated eastern and Midwestern markets played a significant role in revolutionizing American diets, converting them from a dependence on pork to more of a beef-based diet.

### **Early Cattle Trading**

Long distance cattle trailing is an age-old activity. As historian Wayne Gard has noted, two brothers in 1655 trailed a herd from Springfield to Boston, Massachusetts, and during the 1820s, “many took herds from Ohio and even Indiana to Baltimore.” In 1845, 250 Illinois cattle were trailed to Albany and on to Boston. In these and other cases, the impetus for cattle trailing was simple: they were sent from agricultural areas – where there was a high supply of cattle and relatively low demand – to urban areas, where demand was high and there were relatively few available cattle. The hope and expectation was that if herds could be driven to places of relatively low supply and high demand, the costs of the cattle drive could be more than compensated by the profits to be realized at the trail’s destination. The history of this activity – in early days as well as later on – underscores the fact that cattle trailing in many instances was a high-stakes gamble; some drovers made handsome profits while others, for a wide variety of reasons, had a hard time breaking even.

Prior to the 1840s, the raising of stock, by and large, was a localized activity, there being a widespread expectation that cattle raised in a given area would be slaughtered and consumed in that same area. The decade of the 1840s, however, brought variations to those expectations. America’s railroads, a relative novelty during the 1830s, began to spread west across the Appalachian Mountains, and by the mid-1850s railroads reached from the East Coast as far west as Chicago and St. Louis. During that same period, the nation’s eyes were being increasingly drawn to Texas, which had been part of Mexico until 1836 and a state only since 1845.

Given the nation’s expanding transportation infrastructure and its geographical expansion, Americans increasingly recognized that Texas – particularly present-day central and southern Texas – was prime cattle country. Cattle thrived there because the climate was mild and sunny, grazing land was available on a year-round basis, and the land was sufficiently well-watered (either by rainfall or via rivers and springs) to support herd growth. Given the increasing population of the country’s eastern and Midwestern states, and given the concomitant growth in industrialization in the larger cities in those states, there was an increasing – but as yet unmet – demand for beef skyrocketed.

Texas, with its well-stocked herds, had a ready supply – but only if ways could be devised to get the cattle to market. Ranchers, as a result, began looking for markets. Some of the first growth



opportunities had emerged during the late 1840s, when some Texas ranchers responded to the California gold rush by driving cattle more than a thousand miles across the southwestern deserts. Additional herds, on a sporadic basis, were driven to California in succeeding years. Cattle trails were also newly opened from Texas to Louisiana; some were driven overland, while other herds were loaded on to coastwise steamers and shipped east. By the late 1850s, in response to the Pike's Peak gold rush, cattle by the thousands were being driven from Texas to the newly-established gold camps in Colorado.

### **The Shawnee and Goodnight-Loving Trails**

What soon emerged as the primary cattle route, however, was the so-called Shawnee Trail. This cattle route headed north-northeast from southern Texas to Austin and Dallas, Texas; to Fort Gibson, Indian Territory; and from there on to a number of towns (St. Joseph, Kansas City, Sedalia, and St. Louis, Missouri, plus Quincy, Illinois), all of which were major railheads or steamboat ports. The Shawnee Trail, in all of its geographical variations, began during the 1840s and was a well-established outlet for Texas beef by the mid-1850s. During the early years of this trail, most of those who trailed cattle over it successfully reached their intended markets. Within just a few years of its establishment, however, herders using this trail began to experience problems in getting their herds to their intended destination. The first of these problems was encroaching settlement, because the number of farms in both southern Missouri and eastern Kansas was quickly expanding during this period. New farms sprang up on land that had not been settled a year or two earlier, and all too often, Texas herds broke free from the trail corridor and trampled farms and fields. A second problem was the presence of "Jayhawkers" and other border ruffians who occasionally shot at drovers and forced them to take a circuitous detour. The third problem – which would prove challenging throughout the cattle driving era – was a tick that the Texas longhorn herds brought north with them. This disease-bearing tick caused the Texas cattle no harm, but when Texas herds reached Midwestern farms, the ticks hopped off the Texas cattle, attached themselves to Midwestern cattle, and within a few days of contact, death resulted because they had no immunity to this disease, which was variously known as Texas fever, Spanish fever, or "tick fever." This scourge killed Midwestern cattle by the hundreds. Because of these problems, new settlers hated the Texas cattlemen, and – particularly because of their fear of "tick fever," the Missouri legislature quickly passed a quarantine law that prohibited Texas cattle herds from entering the state.

In April 1861, Confederate cannons fired on Fort Sumter, and for the next four years the nation was embroiled in the Civil War. Two months earlier, Texas had seceded from the union, and given the prevailing sentiment, a large percentage of the state's able-bodied men left Texas and joined the Confederate army. Historian Wayne Gard noted that as a result of the war, "the cattle industry on the frontier fell into neglect. Calves were left unbranded, and herds strayed far across the prairies or into the brush. ... In some sections, steers were almost given away, despite the high prices prevailing in the North."

At war's end, thousands of war-weary veterans returned to their Texas ranches, only to find that "uncounted Longhorns were scattered over the prairies and plains," at least some of which were grazing, unbranded, on unfenced land. These half-wild "mavericks" were freely available to

whoever could rope and brand them. In many other cases, ranches were still intact, but ranchers were in desperate straits because the pre-war Texas economy had collapsed and because cattle prices were at record lows. The returning Texans, therefore, were land-rich and cattle-rich, but they were cash-poor. They once again faced the same problem that had existed before the war; namely, that there was no easy way to connect supply and demand by moving cattle from Texas to either Midwestern or eastern markets. When the Civil War ended in April 1865, Texas's railroad system consisted of just eleven short lines; these lines were unconnected with one another, and all of these lines were located hundreds of miles away from the contiguous rail network located east of the Mississippi River. To the north, conditions were no better: there were no long-distance railroad lines in Indian Territory, the Union Pacific Eastern Division (UPED) in Kansas reached only 40 miles west of the Missouri border, to Lawrence; and in Nebraska, the Union Pacific had not yet laid its first rail west from Omaha.

Given the prevailing conditions, some ranchers tried to revive prewar trailing patterns and move herds to the east or northeast. Renewed attempts were made to move herds up one or more branches of the Shawnee Trail, but ever-greater agricultural settlement, a revival of banditry, and continued fears about "tick fever" in southeastern Kansas and southwestern Missouri forced some herders to turn back or find alternate routes. Seeking a new market, cowmen Charles Goodnight and Oliver Loving successfully sent herds from the Fort Belknap area (80 miles west of Fort Worth) west and north to Fort Sumner, New Mexico Territory, where the government had recently resettled thousands of Navajos and Apaches. The two men also pushed herds on to the Denver, Colorado area and sold others to Santa Fe-based government contractors. But the limited size of the New Mexico and Colorado markets discouraged a widespread use of what was generally known as the Goodnight-Loving Trail.

### **Joseph McCoy Envisions a New Cattle Trail**

A new alternative for getting Texas cattle to market emerged in the late spring of 1867. Joseph G. McCoy, the youngest of three brothers in a family of cattle marketers, "developed a strong interest in the possibility of setting up a new market for Texas longhorns." By this time, the Union Pacific Eastern Division railroad had laid its tracks another 150 miles west beyond Lawrence to Salina, Kansas, and McCoy felt that if he could build cattle yards and loading facilities toward the western end of that line – which was well west of the line of settlement at the time – that would be sufficient to attract Texas cattlemen who, up to this time, did not have a safe, predictable, and inexpensive way to get their cattle to a railhead. As with others before him, McCoy was simply looking for a more efficient way – to paraphrase Texas historian Jimmy Skaggs – to ease the transition between supply and demand.

In order to test his idea in the marketplace, he spoke to Union Pacific Eastern Division (UPED) railroad officials in St Louis. They were skeptical of his plan, both because it was unproven and because the railroad was staking its financial future on the Kansas's farming possibilities. The carrier agreed, however, if he would underwrite most of the improvements himself. The carrier further agreed to pay McCoy \$5 per carload, and he similarly worked out a viable financial arrangement with the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad to haul cattle from the Kansas City area

to Chicago, where already a number of packing houses were in operation. All that remained to do was to find a location for his proposed stockyards.

In search of site-development possibilities, McCoy visited the Kansas City area and started heading west into Kansas along the UPED. Most cities and towns along the line showed little interest in his scheme or had no viable land to sell to him, but Abilene – at that time a rude assemblage of cabins and businesses, all of log construction – offered 250 acres for a cattle yard on the eastern edge of town. He then went to work building stock yards. McCoy, wasting no time, then met with Kansas Governor Samuel J. Crawford, and even though Abilene was perhaps 20 miles east of a quarantine line that the legislature had imposed that year, McCoy received assurances that cattle herds would be able to legally access the town. At the same time, he dispatched a brother and a colleague to head south from town with a stack of printed circulars, telling them to look for Texas cattle herds and to urge them north to Abilene. He hired a few townspeople to similarly head south across the prairie and to mark the trail by piling up earthen mounds at regular intervals as far as the confluence of the Arkansas and Little Arkansas rivers. At this river junction, in the shadows of present-day downtown Wichita, was the northern terminus of a wagon road that a well-known Indian trader, Jesse Chisholm, had used for the last several years to haul goods back and forth to his camp along the Canadian River (located just north of present-day Oklahoma City, Oklahoma).

Before long, cattle herds that were being held in many areas of eastern Indian Territory were heading up Chisholm’s wagon road on their way to Abilene. In all, some 35,000 cattle were driven to Abilene in 1867, many of which were loaded—20 to 25 at a time—onto cattle cars and hauled off to distant packing houses. The growing popularity of the trail resulted, in time, in this route being named the Chisholm Trail. (The trail was named for trader Jesse Chisholm, who had helped blaze the route between the Wichita and Oklahoma City areas, even though Chisholm played no part in the cattle drives.) During the trail’s heyday, to be sure, this route was known by a variety of names – the Abilene Trail, McCoy’s Trail, the Eastern Trail, or the Texas Cattle Trail. A number of historical purists, primarily in Texas, remain insistent – due to both historical and geographical factors – that the Chisholm Trail did not exist in Texas and should instead be called the Eastern Trail. Most observers, however, recognize the need to call the trail by a single name. Because of the high iconic value that the Chisholm Trail name has gained over the years, and perhaps in honor of the well-respected Indian trader, twentieth-century historians have referred to this trail, almost universally, as the Chisholm Trail.

### **The Chisholm Trail’s Heyday**

McCoy’s efforts had an important, immediate impact, and as a result, Abilene quickly grew into a cattle town that rivaled the “hell on wheels” towns that were characteristic of the transient railhead camps that cropped up along the Union Pacific and other western railroads. But the 35,000 cattle that arrived in Abilene in 1867 was by no means a majority of the total number of cattle that year that had been driven from Texas. Indeed, many other destinations—in the southeastern corner of Kansas, Missouri, New Mexico, Colorado, and elsewhere—attracted Texas herds as well. (Several communities in both Kansas and Missouri were behind quarantine lines, but cattlemen sometimes skirted around these laws if the opportunity presented itself.)

By 1869, however, cattlemen throughout Texas had learned about the new destination, and Abilene was the goal of the large majority of cattle-trailing outfits. The number of cattle headed for Kansas doubled each year: to 75,000 in 1868, to 150,000 in 1869, and to 300,000 in 1870. Throughout this period, there was strong competition for the trade and the economic benefits it brought; that competition came from rival Kansas rail towns such as Junction City, Salina, Ellsworth, and Wichita. All, however, captured only a small portion of the trade, and by 1870, Texas cattlemen drove their cattle to Kansas to the virtual exclusion of other destinations, and Abilene was far and away the pre-eminent Kansas cattle town. The cattle trailing season began in April or May, when the spring grass became available, and it lasted until September or October; the various cowtowns, as a result, were most active from June to October and lapsed into lethargy between late fall and early spring.

The year 1871 was the biggest year in the entire history of Texas cattle trailing, as at least 600,000 cattle – perhaps as many as 700,000 – were driven north to Kansas. The huge number swamped Abilene, and given the overwhelming number of cattle, drovers were forced to go elsewhere. Competition quickly emerged from three new sites: Newton, a rowdy town that had welcomed a new Santa Fe Railroad spur that spring; Wichita, not far south of Newton; and Ellsworth, a new Kansas Pacific (formerly UPED) destination 60 miles west of Abilene and reached by the Ellsworth Trail (also called Cox’s Cutoff). A few herds even continued north from Abilene into Nebraska, and the Union Pacific depots of Kearney and Schuyler received a smattering of cattle traffic. Despite the broadening competition, Abilene enjoyed its fifth successive boom year as a destination for Texas cattle, and the town was known far and wide as a rowdy, lawless cowtown. Abilene, however, was quickly changing; farmers were moving in, schools and churches were being built, and the local population was growing increasingly weary of the impact of the rough Texas element on public safety. By the winter of 1871-72, representatives of the local Farmers’ Protective Association had had enough; they prepared a circular requesting “all who have contemplated driving Texas cattle to Abilene to seek some other point for shipment, as the [local] inhabitants . . . will no longer submit to the evils of the trade.” That circular was distributed in newspapers throughout Texas, and by the spring of 1872, according to historian Stewart Verckler, “Abilene was free of the Texans, but it was quiet, painfully quiet.”

The years 1872 to 1875 constituted a key transition period in the cattle trailing business. Into the vacuum created by Abilene’s withdrawal stepped rivals Newton, Ellsworth, and Wichita. Newton’s reign proved brief, given the extension of the Santa Fe tracks to Wichita in May 1872, and for the next four years Wichita and Ellsworth seesawed back and forth as the pre-eminent Kansas cattle town. This same period, however, witnessed the westward march of the settlement frontier across central Kansas, and one and all recognized that neither Wichita nor Ellsworth could be sustained as a trailing destination for very long.

### **Rise of the Western Trail**

Perhaps in anticipation of that change, drovers began seeking out routes farther west. In 1873, a San Antonio cattleman named L.B. Harris pioneered a new route from Texas to Fort Reno,

Indian Territory, then northwest to Camp Supply, before continuing north to Fort Dodge, Kansas and the Kansas Pacific loading facilities at Ellis, and the following year, John T. Lytle moved even farther westward as he took his herd to the newly-established cattle pens at Dodge City. By the following year (1875), Dodge City cattle loadings had increased to about 5,800 – not large, but a portent of future growth. Other Kansas towns challenged for a share of the lucrative cattle trade during this four-year period, including Baxter Springs, Brookville, Coffeyville, Great Bend, Hutchinson, Russell, Solomon, and Waterville, but none served more than minor players in the larger drama unfolding elsewhere.

Throughout the period between the mid-1860 and the early 1870s, Texas cattlemen were continually dogged by the “tick fever” that the herds brought north, and given the rapid growth of Kansas’ population and the line of agricultural settlement – which often moved westward 25 miles or more each year – the Kansas legislature in 1872 moved its quarantine line farther west, usually just ahead of the settlement line. This trend continued into the mid-1870s, and by 1876 the Kansas legislature, echoing the farmers’ concerns, quarantined the entire trail corridor (including the Cox Cutoff) in that state. Local business interests and residents, for their part, were not sad to see the cattle herds go elsewhere. By the mid-1870s, cattlemen all along the Chisholm Trail corridor were finding themselves increasingly unwelcome. Local “sodbusters” were antagonistic to cattle herds because they had little tolerance for herds trampling their crops (as well as endangering their herds with tick fever), and in addition, business interests in the cowtowns—despite the obvious profits to be made—often pulled up the municipal welcome mat after enduring a few years of riotous, violent behavior at the hands of Texas cowhands.

Given the 1876 closure of the Chisholm Trail in Kansas to northbound cattle herds, cattlemen had little choice but to seek routes farther west. The route that John Lytle had used in 1874 – which went by way of a series of Texas forts, due to a fear of Indian depredations – was modified and streamlined the following year, largely because Indians on the southern plains were reluctantly accepting life on various reservations, primarily in Indian Territory. This trail was apparently first known as the Lone Star Trail, and in the years since it has been referred to as the Fort Griffin-Fort Dodge Trail, the Dodge-Ogallala Trail, the Texas-Montana Trail. The most common historical references note the Dodge City Trail or the Western Trail. (Beginning in the 1960s, a Texas historian dubbed it the Great Western Trail, and trail advocates since 2000 have used this term to an increasing degree.)

By 1876, the vast majority of northbound cattle were heading toward Kansas on the Western Trail, which headed north from the San Antonio area. Many ranchers and contractors, however – particularly those from areas south and southeast of Austin – continued to drive their herds up the old Chisholm route. They did so until they reached various trail junctions (Belton and Fort Worth, in Texas; and Rock Crossing on the Washita, Fort Reno, and the Red Fork Ranch area in Indian Territory), after which they used connecting trails to traverse west to the Western Trail right-of-way. This pattern continued for the remainder of the decade. The Chisholm Trail in Texas and Indian Territory did not, by any means, become obsolete; indeed, the completion of a Santa Fe railroad spur to Caldwell, Kansas (just north of the Indian Territory border) resulted in a resurgence of traffic to Caldwell, and for the next few years, Caldwell proved so attractive that many herders starting north along the Western Trail chose to veer northeast at the Washita River

crossing until they reached the Chisholm Trail corridor. Even though several railroads, by the late 1870s, had been completed to Fort Worth and other trail towns, drovers continued to use the Chisholm and Western Trail corridors into Indian Territory and Kansas; this was primarily because the railroads that served Texas (such as the Texas and Pacific, the Missouri-Kansas-Texas, and other lines) offered rates that were so high that Texas cattlemen found it less expensive to continue on to Dodge City, Caldwell, and other northern points.

As a result of these route changes, Dodge City by 1876 (and Caldwell, to a lesser extent, beginning in 1880) were major destinations for Texas cowhands, and they soon gained well-deserved, notorious reputations as devil-may-care, violent cowtowns. (Minor destinations during this period included Ellis, Buffalo Park, Hays, Grinnell, and WaKeeney, all located in Kansas along the Kansas Pacific Railroad.) Dodge City, however, does not entirely live up to its mythic status because it was primarily a supply center and recreational venue rather than a trailing destination, and the number of cattle loaded onto railcars there was far less than at Abilene. Instead, Dodge City's primary role was to serve as a supply point and way station for herds (and cowboys) headed for more northern climes. Many of the Texas cattle driven toward Dodge City circled around the western end of town and eventually made their way to Ogallala, in southwestern Nebraska, where the Union Pacific had a large acreage devoted to cattle loading bins. Here, too, life was lived riotously for a decade or more. Cowboys, here as in other cowtowns, emptied their wallets as they filled the saloons and brothels, and otherwise refreshed themselves from months on the dusty trail. Then these cowhands, many of whom had not strayed far from home prior to their jobs as trail hands, headed back to Texas, perhaps no wealthier but far richer in the ways of the wider world.

### **Trailing North to a Diversity of Markets**

The fact that Dodge City's primary role was not that of a cattle-loading venue flies in the face of popular culture. This is because the Western and Chisholm cattle trails were not simply vehicles by which cattle were taken from Texas to Kansas and Nebraska railheads prior to being shipped to Midwestern and eastern packing houses. Instead, the reality of the cattle trails was more complex. Millions of Texas cattle were in fact shipped east on the Kansas Pacific, Santa Fe, Texas and Pacific, Missouri Pacific, and other railroads, and as a result, Americans living in the industrializing centers of the nation were able to obtain relatively inexpensive beef; this easy availability, in turn, allowed millions of Americans to shift from a pork-based diet to one based increasingly on beef.

Other factors were at work as well. The time in which the cattle trails were most active was largely synonymous with the final days of free-roaming American Indians in the northern and southern Great Plains. In a series of actions largely carried out by Indian agents and the U.S. Army, many Great Plains tribes were either encouraged or forced onto reservations. These reservations, in most if not all cases, were insufficient in size to allow American Indian tribes to continue their self-sufficient ways. The alternative – a poor if necessary substitute – was a promise from the government to supply foodstuffs to the new reservation residents, for either the short or long term. Beef was, to some extent, the chosen vehicle to supply those residents, and as a result, many Texas herds were driven north to Kansas, Nebraska, and other destinations, only

to be sold to Indian agents and distributed to tribes on newly-established reservations in Nebraska, Dakota Territory, and elsewhere.

There was a third major sphere in which Texas cattle, if driven northward, were in high demand. In the post-Civil War era, the United States was booming both demographically and geographically. The success of the Chisholm and Western cattle trails between the mid-1860s and the mid-1880s was based on open, unfenced land. In short order, however, the subjugation of the various Indian tribes and their removal to reservations brought forth a void that was quickly filled by westward-moving settlers, who settled on those lands primarily for purposes of farming (where the availability of water allowed it) or ranching (farther to the west, where water supplies were unable to sustain farms). Many farmers needed cattle for either milk production or for meat, and ranchers needed cattle – large numbers of them – as a basis for their newly-established herds.

### **The Demise of Cattle Trailing**

The success of the western settlement boom was a major factor that led to the end of the cattle drive era. The Western Trail remained popular throughout the decade between 1875 and 1884, but it then quickly collapsed due to a variety of factors. A major reason for the trails' demise was the ongoing surge of development, particularly in Kansas, and in the late summer of 1884, the state's legislators had let it be known that – because western Kansas was quickly being homesteaded – the quarantine line would be extended west the following year to include the entire state. (This legislative action, signed by Kansas Governor G.W. Glick, would have a crippling effect on Caldwell as well as Dodge City.) But other factors were at work as well. In Texas, long-distance railroad lines had reached Fort Worth in 1876 and San Antonio by 1880. Most of those carriers, however, were slow to respond to the economic possibilities of cattle hauling because their primary thrust was the construction of new track. By the early 1880s, however, Texas carriers were encouraging cattle-hauling traffic by offering attractive freight rates. Texas towns, such as Fort Worth, also realized that they could capture portions of the cattle-trailing market by building their own packing plants. A few packing plants were indeed built, but the volume of meat processed, at least initially, did little to divert ranchers from their most established trailing patterns.

Because northward cattle trailing, despite the obstacles, remained a relatively inexpensive and profitable way of broaching supply and demand, some cattlemen demanded that the practice be continued. One loophole in the 1884 Kansas quarantine law (which went into effect in 1885) gave some reason for optimism. Although the law proscribed the in-migration of cattle from central and southern Texas, it did nothing to prevent the cattle from entering the state that had been stocked in cool-winter areas (which was fatal to the ticks that carried Spanish fever) such as the Texas Panhandle and the “Cherokee Strip” section of Indian Territory. Because the major cattle interests in central and southern Texas were now shut out of the Kansas market, the volume of cattle heading north dropped dramatically. Such cattle depots as Dodge City and Caldwell, however, continued to receive and ship cattle for the remainder of the 1880s.

In an attempt to circumvent Kansas's new quarantine law and keep up the trailing business, the major Texas cattle-trailing interests pinned their future hopes on a "National Trail," a congressionally-designated corridor that would begin in the Texas panhandle and move north along the eastern boundary of Colorado to various northern markets. As a legislative concept, the trail was considered for awhile but made little headway; as an economic, on-the-ground reality, however, some cattlemen used this route in 1885, and to some extent in 1886 as well. Trail City, located along the Santa Fe Railroad at the Colorado-Kansas border, erupted almost overnight out of the high-plains sagebrush during the winter of 1884-85 in anticipation of this trade; it thrived for a year or two but was abandoned soon afterward, and the severe winters of 1886-87 and 1887-88 played havoc on cattle that remained on the open range. Although there are scattered references to long-distance cattle trailing during the 1890s – and a few even in the early twentieth century – a combination of legislative action, economic evolution, the filling up of the open ranges, and a series of disastrous weather events brought an effective end to cattle trailing during the late 1880s.

Based on the discussion above, it appears that while cattle trailing had taken place to some extent beginning in the seventeenth century, and although it was an increasingly popular activity during the 1850s and the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, cattle trailing along the routes of either the Chisholm Trail or the Western Trail (which are the legislative basis for this study) did not begin until the Chisholm Trail was opened between Texas and Abilene, Kansas in 1867. Beginning at that time, cattle trailing remained a highly significant activity until 1884. But because of the quarantine laws that were imposed throughout Kansas during the winter of 1884-85, cattle trailing beginning in 1885 was a more fragmented, marginal activity than before, and what trailing took place after the winter of 1884-85 diverged from the traditional routes that had previously characterized the cattle trailing industry. **The period of significance for the Chisholm and Western cattle trails, therefore, is from 1867 to 1884.**

### **Cowboys and Popular Culture**

North Americans have been taking care of cattle for hundreds of years. Given the fact that cattle ranging was a well-developed activity in both Andalucia (Spain) and the British Isles prior to the various voyages of discovery, cattle ranching soon took hold in the New World – shortly after 1500 on Hispaniola and then, beginning the 1520s, on the mainland (in present-day eastern Mexico). In areas that later became the English colonies, cattle ranching in many areas remained a subsistence occupation, primarily on small land parcels; in New Spain, however, the extensive grasslands and large estates resulted in the development of the vaquero, the antecedent to nineteenth-century cowboy culture. Geographer Terry Jordan has argued that ranching, as practiced in Texas, is a mixture of practices acquired in Spanish Florida, French Louisiana, British Carolina and Jamaica, and Spanish Mexico. In his *North American Cattle Ranching Frontiers*, Jordan suggested that Mexican influence might have been greater, except that "a virulent and enduring prejudice against Mexicans prevailed among Anglo-Texans beginning in the 1830s, serving to retard additional and more pervasive borrowing of Hispanic traits and personnel," which he had initially advanced in *Trails to Texas; Southern Roots of Western Cattle Ranching*. Jordan, however, has also noted that nineteenth century Texas ranchers – particularly those in west Texas – borrowed heavily from Spanish practices.



Cattle trailing, during the 1850s through the 1880s, was practiced primarily by young Anglo Texans; the age of the cowboys themselves was usually in their twenties, and sometimes as young as 15, while cooks, trail bosses, and contractors were typically older Anglo men. Despite the prevailing prejudice, however, approximately one-third of the estimated 35,000 men who trailed Texas cattle were either Mexicans or recently-freed African-Americans. In a handful of instances, young women were part of the trail crews. Given the long tradition of cattle ranching and cattle trailing that had preceded the post-Civil War cattle-drive era, these cowboys had all the equipment and knew all of the techniques necessary to successfully undertake a long distance cattle drive. Due to this history, cowboys also were a well-established aspect of the ranching economy, both in Texas and elsewhere. What is significant about the cattle-drive era, however, is that the cattle drives (and the writers that wrote so profusely about them) transformed the public's perception of the cowboy from an obscure occupational category to a highly visible, often heroic American icon.

Virtually all of those involved in the cattle trailing business were Texans. These relatively unsophisticated trail hands carried an often intense pride in being Texans, and southerners. The residents of the various Kansas and Nebraska cowtowns, by contrast, were typically farmers and small business owners; they tended to live and work in a relatively confined area; they were relatively conservative and religious; and they placed a high value on public order and safety. Given the post-Civil War tensions, in all portions of the country, in trying to re-integrate northerners and southerners into a broad national fabric, it was inevitable that Texas cattle drovers' values (and their free-ranging lifestyle) would strongly clash with those with whom they came in contact in the various Kansas and Nebraska cowtowns. The result of that clash was often an extended period of tension and violence – a situation that (as noted above as applied to Abilene) was endured by local residents in the short term but resulted in increased resentment – and, despite the obvious economic benefits, in campaigns to expel the dubious assemblage that invaded from Texas each spring.

For all that took part, the job of a trail hand was anything but romantic; by contrast, it was hard, dirty, uncomfortable work. Trail hands carried virtually no personal items with them on their journey north, and for two months or more, their blanket was their bed and their meals were whatever basic fare was dispensed from the “chuck wagon” (the latter a wagon, maintained by the cook, where food was kept and meals were prepared). Trail hands had to contend with drenching rain, howling winds, thunderstorms, blistering heat, long days without a break, stray and ornery cattle, potential threats from Indians, physical injuries (such as being thrown from their horse), stampedes, loss of sleep during night watch duties, and the hazards of crossing rivers at high water. They often had no contact with anyone outside of their trail outfit for weeks or months at a time. For their labors, cowboys were typically paid \$30 per month, the total amount of which was usually payable when the cattle herd was delivered and sold. Given the cowboys' isolation and their relative day-to-day deprivations, it was no wonder that they lost most of their hard-earned pay within a day or two after arriving at Abilene, Dodge City, or one of the other trail-end cowtowns.

Many of those who wrote about the cattle drives, however, drew entirely different notions about the qualities associated with the northward cattle trailing. As historian Kent Steckmesser has noted, “most of the legend makers were Easterners [who] gave Eastern readers narratives that were based upon Eastern preconceptions and expectations rather than the facts. They romanticized frontier characters in response to literary conventions and commercial requirements. In so doing, they erected a grand edifice of legend upon the slender foundation of fact.” Many of these authors recognized that the cowboy, for all his travails, was a heroic, iconic figure. These observers perceived that cowboys, particularly those cowboys that took part in long-distance trail drives, were daring, independent, masculine souls who risked their lives on an almost daily basis and led lives full of adventure and excitement.

The fame of the cowboy spread while the cattle trails were still active and increased in later years. Even before the cattle trail period, the first so-called “dime novels” had appeared, and such western characters as Wild Bill Hickok, Buffalo Bill Cody, Billy the Kid, and other western characters were staples of the genre. In 1902, Owen Wister’s publication of *The Virginian* brought increased fame to western novels, and the publication in 1912 of Zane Grey’s *Riders of the Purple Sage* – which prominently featured a series of cattle rustlers – added additional luster. Grey would go on to write more than thirty additional westerns, and in his wake would be Clarence Mulford (the Hopalong Cassidy series), Max Brand, Louis L’Amour, and others. Relatively few of these novels, notably, would focus specifically on cattle driving; many of them, however, dealt at length with the lifestyle and values of the cowboy, a figure that first came to national prominence during the cattle trailing era. During this same period, eastern painters came out west, and in search of interesting subject matter, discovered and romanticized the cowboy. Such artists as Charles Russell and Frederic Remington gained much of their fame by portraying western cowboys, many of them on horseback.

As the twentieth century dawned, a new art form emerged: motion pictures. One of the first commercially-successful productions was *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), starring Gilbert “Broncho Billy” Anderson. A short named “The Cowboy Millionaire” was released in 1909, and five years later, *The Spoilers* was released – a western so successful that it has been remade four times. Westerns, as silent films, were a cinema staple by the time of World War I, and they continued to be commonly produced as the industry converted to “talkies” during the late 1920s. Shortly after World War II, home televisions became increasingly popular, and westerns as a genre remained popular until the 1960s. As with western novels, relatively few western movies and television shows featured cattle drives as a major plot device; instead, they typically focus on the cowboys’ equestrian expertise, along with his ability to solve problems and either keep or disturb the peace. There are notable exceptions to this, however. Film historians have chronicled more than a score of movies in which cattle trails have placed a central role; perhaps the best known include *Far Country*, with James Stewart; *Red River* (1948), with John Wayne; *Cattle Drive* (1951), with Joel McCrea; the miniseries *Lonesome Dove* (1989), with Robert Duvall, and *Open Range* (2003), with Kevin Costner. Two television series related to cattle drives are of particular note: *Rawhide*, which ran from 1959 to 1966 and starred Eric Fleming and Clint Eastwood, focuses on a trail crew driving a herd on the “Sedalia Trail” from San Antonio, Texas to Sedalia, Missouri, while *Gunsmoke*, the longest-running Western in television history (it ran from 1955 to 1975 on television, which was preceded by a radio show of the same name that ran

from 1952 to 1961), which was set in and around Dodge City, Kansas during the trail drive days. In an ironic triumph of art over life, *Guns Smoke* – as a television series – lasted twice as long as Dodge City did as a frontier town during the cattle-drive period.

In more recent years, books about cattle drives have remained a staple in American literature – specifically in fiction aimed at both juvenile and adult audiences. One of the best-known Texas writers, folklorist J. Frank Dobie, made his career for his books depicting the richness and traditions of life in rural Texas during the days of the open range, and one of his best-known books is *Up the Trail from Texas* (1955). Ralph Compton (who died in 1999) and his posthumous coauthors have penned two dozen novels in a “Trail Driver Series” set on various western cattle trails. Today, major book distributors list hundreds of titles currently in print focusing on the historic trail drives.

One impact of popular culture on the cattle trails has dealt with the public perception of cattle trails today. After the cattle-drive era ended in the late nineteenth century, stories of cowboys and cattle drives (as noted above) remained as common themes in literature and, later, films and television shows. In almost all cases, however, those stories provided little if any information about the geographical and historical reality of the cattle trails. One byproduct of this period, perhaps unfortunate but also perhaps inevitable, is that the public was inadvertently led to believe there was little difference between the various cattle trails – and, in fact, there may have been just one extended cattle trail that began in Texas and eventually arrived in either Abilene or Dodge City. The specific routes and river crossing sites, for many years, were largely ignored in the public’s consciousness. Given that lack of specificity, the popular notion became prevalent that the name “Chisholm Trail” – which, admittedly, had more flair than “Western Trail” or the other available names – would become the symbolic name, by default, for all the various post-Civil War cattle trails.

The symbolic importance of the Chisholm Trail as a generic name for cattle trails – eventually became institutionalized at various locations along the cattle trail routes. As Gary and Margaret Kraisinger have adroitly noted in their 2004 *Western Trail* volume, many of the earliest and most prominent historical markers along the trail routes were funded and installed by a promoter named Peter P. Ackley, who had taken part, as a youngster, in a cattle drive on the Western Trail. Ackley had a passion about placing historical markers along the Western Trail. However, he insisted that his markers state that they were located on either the “Texas Chisholm Trail” or the “Longhorn Chisholm Trail.” Residents along the Western Trail, as well as the members of the Old Time Trail Drivers’ Association, were aghast at the erroneous nomenclature, which was applied to markers that stretched from the Rio Grande Valley to North Dakota. Ackley’s economic muscle, however, held sway until his death in 1940. The practice of applying the name “Chisholm Trail” to a panoply of Texas cattle trails has remained until the fairly recent past, when a combination of new scholarship and efforts by local historical societies have begun to correct some of these historical inaccuracies.

## **Where the Cattle Trails Were Located**

As noted in Section 5303 of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, signed into law on March 30, 2009, Congress has asked that two trails should be evaluated for their feasibility as designated trail routes. First, the Chisholm Trail (also known as the “Abilene Trail”) went, as stated in Section 5303, “from the vicinity of San Antonio, Texas, segments from the vicinity of Cuero, Texas, to Ft. Worth, Texas, Duncan, Oklahoma, alternate segments used through Oklahoma, to Enid, Oklahoma, Caldwell, Kansas, Wichita, Kansas, Abilene, Kansas, and commonly used segments running to alternative Kansas destinations.” Second, the Great Western Trail (also known as the Dodge City Trail) went “from the vicinity of San Antonio, Texas, north-by-northwest through the vicinities of Kerrville and Menard, Texas, north-by-northeast through the vicinities of Coleman and Albany, Texas, north through the vicinity of Vernon, Texas, to Doan’s Crossing, Texas, northward through or near the vicinities of Altus, Long Wolf, Canute, Vici, and May, Oklahoma, north through Kansas to Dodge City, and north through Nebraska to Ogallala.”

The trail routes as noted in the congressional legislation are generally accurate and conform to the notions that most historians ascribe to these two trails. These geographical descriptions, however, simplify what was a fairly complex historical reality, for several reasons. First, the descriptions above suggest that these two trails were single linear routes. In reality, historians recognize that these trails—unlike many trails and highway routes—were not narrowly-defined paths but instead were broad swaths of territory that were anywhere from 100 yards to perhaps ½ mile wide, and that in certain places (just south of river crossings, for example), herds could spread out for a mile or more in order to either bed down or seek a viable crossing site. As historian Don Worcester has noted, “when only a few herds were following a trail, they usually found adequate forage close by. But when many herds were on the move during any season, the later ones had to travel parallel to the tracks of the earlier ones to find grass. The drying up of streams and waterholes also caused variations in the route.”

Second, both the Chisholm Trail and the Western Trail split into more than one route in certain places. Specifically, as noted in the “alternate segments” language in Section 5303, the northbound Chisholm Trail route bifurcated near the site of Silver City, a long-abandoned trailside town on the banks of the South Canadian River in present-day Grady County, Oklahoma; the two trails stayed separate for the next fifty miles, then rejoined just south of the old Red Rock Ranch (in present-day Dover), just north of the Cimarron River crossing in Kingfisher County, Oklahoma. (Historical sources indicate that the eastern fork received a majority of the cattle herds and that the western fork was used as a stage route, but both routes witnessed the northward migration of substantial numbers of cattle.) And along the Western Trail, a single route seems to have predominated between the San Antonio, Texas area and Dodge City, Kansas (although there were some deviations in Callahan, Shackelford, and Baylor counties, Texas). Between Dodge City and Ogallala, however, cattle outfits—apparently in response to the ever-westward march of the agricultural frontier—used four different routes: an eastern fork from 1874 to 1877, a central fork from 1876 to 1882, a western fork from 1881 to 1884, and the Wallace Branch (even farther west), which was used from 1883 to 1886. (The central fork was probably the most popular of these three, but all four routes witnessed the passage of a large number of northbound cattle.)

As noted above, both the Chisholm Trail and the Western Trail served a variety of purposes: to access railheads for the Midwestern market, to supply the ever-increasing demand for cattle on newly-established ranches and farms (both in the Great Plains and farther west), and to supply beef for Indian reservations in Nebraska, Montana, Dakota Territory, and elsewhere. The routes described in the congressional legislation presume that the trails were primarily intended to serve the railheads.

By contrast, the fact that the trails served a diversity of purposes had a direct impact on the trails' route structure. As Wayne Gard noted in his study of the Chisholm Trail, "it was like a gigantic upside-down tree with many branches." He further noted that "many a Texan, on hearing the trail mentioned, recalls that it went right through his grandfather's ranch. These hazy recollections, added together, would put the trail in almost all of the 254 counties in Texas." T. C. Richardson, in his study of Texas cattle trails during the 1930s, agreed when he noted that "trails originated wherever a herd was shaped up and ended wherever a market was found. A thousand minor trails fed the main routes, and many an old-timer . . . lived with the firm conviction that the Dodge or Chisholm cattle trail passed right over yonder."

In reality, the network was more complex, simply because thousands of square miles in central and southern Texas were located in prime ranching country. It was inevitable, therefore (using the "upside-down tree" analogy noted above), that the southern end of the trail would consist of hundreds if not thousands of capillaries, funneled into a smaller number of major and minor branches, at the northern end of which there would be a very small number of trunk routes headed toward Kansas. Where exactly the trail began, therefore, is by necessity a matter of conjecture; some historians have claimed that the "main stem" of either the Western or Chisholm trail began in Brownsville (with the implication that Mexican cattle, located immediately south of the border, were functionally part of the trail system). Other texts and maps, however, conclude that one or both trails began in the San Antonio area; from that point, one source notes a "Matamoros Trail" heading south, while other sources showing an array of feeder trails spread out in several directions. Compounding the problem is that most trail histories provide only vague, sweeping descriptions and maps of where these routes – both feeder routes and trunk routes – were located. Fortunately, many of these research hurdles are well on the way toward being overcome. Specifically, Western Trail maps drawn by Gary and Margaret Kraisinger (based on research performed earlier by Jimmy Skaggs) are highly specific regarding the geographical right-of-way of that trail in Texas, and for the Chisholm Trail, a recently-completed study by Texas historian Armando Alonzo has provided considerable evidence for where the major feeder routes were located as well as for the specific location of the Chisholm's main stem within the boundaries of the Lone Star State. The data contained in those two reports (particularly from Dr. Alonzo), combined with ongoing correspondence with Gary and Margaret Kraisinger, has allowed NPS personnel to make well-justified recommendations regarding the level of significance of the various cattle trail routes in Texas.

Similar confusion reigns at the trails' northern end. While many traditional accounts suggest that these two trails terminated in Kansas at the cattle-loading facilities in Abilene and Dodge City, respectively, more comprehensive accounts conclude that Abilene (as noted above) was only one of a cluster of Kansas railheads; that some cattle continued past Abilene north to Kearney and

Schuyler, Nebraska; that the majority of Dodge City-bound cattle did not stop there but instead continued north to Ogallala, Nebraska; and that many Texas cattle were driven beyond Ogallala (or went well west of Ogallala) on their way to eventual destinations in Wyoming, Montana, and Dakota territories.

Between the southern and the northern ends of these trail systems, the route of these trails was delineated fairly well. There is a broad degree of recognition from historians that there were two major branches at the southern end of the Chisholm Trail: one beginning in the San Antonio area and heading northeast to Austin along a right-of-way that was located close to present-day Interstate 35, and another that began in cattle-rich Refugio, Goliad, and Dewitt counties and followed present-day highways from Cuero north to Gonzales, Lockhart, and Austin. From Austin, the trail's trunk route is similar to what is noted in the congressional legislation; it goes north to Belton, the Waco area, the Cleburne area, Fort Worth, and on to St. Jo (in Montague County) and Red River Station. In Oklahoma, the Chisholm Trail's right-of-way – well known due to a series 1873 General Land Office survey maps that demarcated the route with considerable specificity – went through, or adjacent to, Duncan, Chickasha, and Tuttle. North of this point, an eastern trail fork aims north to the Mustang and Yukon areas, while a more western variant heads through the Minco, El Reno, and Kingfisher areas. The two trails rejoin near Dover, then the combined trail goes north to Enid and on to the small community of Pond Creek.

At Pond Creek, the trail again diverges, with the (main) Chisholm Trail going north-northeast to Abilene and the Ellsworth Trail (Cox's Cutoff) heading north-northwest to Ellsworth. The Chisholm Trail crossed the Kansas line just before going through Caldwell, then continues to Clearwater, Wichita, Newton, and on to Abilene. The Ellsworth Trail crossed into Kansas just east of Bluff City, then angled northwest to Kingman and Ellinwood areas before veering northeast to Ellsworth.

The geographical corridor defining the Western Trail is also a fairly accurate reflection of the communities listed in the congressional legislation. It begins in the San Antonio, Texas area, then angles northwest to Boerne, Kerrville and Mountain Home before heading north to the Brady area, Coleman, Albany, Fort Griffin, Seymour, and Vernon. Crossing the Red River just north of Doan's Crossing, the trail continues north to Altus, Lone Wolf, the Elk City area, Vici, and Fort Supply. The route then crosses into Kansas and goes just west of both Ashland and Dodge City. Just north of Dodge City, the route splits repeatedly, the result being that four different Western Trail routes were used through western Kansas. Three of these routes follow a broad, approximate 30-mile-wide band that centers on Park, Hoxie, and Oberlin, while a fourth extends off to the west and goes near Russell Springs and Goodland. In Nebraska, most trails centered on the Trenton area, while the westernmost trail angled through the Imperial area, and all crossed over the South Platte River and entered Ogallala.

Although the congressional study language describes just a few cattle-trail destinations, it needs to be reiterated – based on the above historical narrative – that cattlemen heading north on both trails used cattle-loading facilities at many railheads other than Ogallala, Dodge City, Abilene, Newton, Wichita, and Ellsworth. Given the definitions of “national significance” promulgated in the National Historic Sites Act of 1935 (see the subheading “Criteria for National Significance

and the Thematic Framework, above), therefore, this study may choose to designate somewhat different routes and destinations than those that were noted in the congressional study proposal.

### **Questions of National Significance**

As has been noted in previous portions of the historical narrative (above), the various cattle trails – including the Chisholm and Western trails – were in a near-constant state of flux. And because of the highly dynamic nature of the trails, both historians and trail participants differ – often in highly contentious ways – on where each of these trails began and ended. (A comparison of even the most reputable historical sources shows little agreement on this subject.) Some claim that either or both trails began many miles south of San Antonio, perhaps as far south as Brownsville, Texas, or Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Mexico, and others argue just as vehemently that cattle were driven north to points that extended well beyond Abilene, Kansas; Ellsworth, Kansas; and Ogallala, Nebraska. Some advocates claim, with some justification, that many cattle herds were driven north all the way to the vicinity of Miles City-Fort Buford, Montana, and in some cases, herds continued on to points in either Alberta or Saskatchewan, Canada. In addition, many trail advocates claim that a broad array of routes in central and southern Texas were part of one or both trails, and there are also advocates for many of the trails that, during the cattle trail period, carried cattle back and forth between the Chisholm and Western trail corridors.

Those claims are all true – at least to the extent that there are known, historically-verifiable records showing cattle herds were driven to all of the above places. The “national significance” criteria noted in the National Historic Sites Act of 1935 (upon which eligibility requirements for national historic trails are based), however, demand that all trail routes that qualify for national significance must be routes that, through solid historical documentation, can be justified as having been major, high-volume cattle routes that witnessed traffic, during the period of significance (1867 to 1884), over a significant number of years. In addition, the physical locations of these trails must be known, at least within a fairly narrow corridor. As a result of this definition, all trails have been excluded that may have been used for just one or two years, or those for which their locations are only vaguely known. Routes that are likewise excluded are those that did not ever support a high volume of cattle traffic, as well as those routes that may have operated outside of the period of significance. Trails that were not historically part of either the Chisholm Trail or Western Trail systems have similarly been excluded. These criteria are a direct result of either verbiage in the congressional legislation or in language derived from the Historic Sites Act of 1935. These criteria specifically do not exclude trails that are popularly considered to be either “feeder trails” or “connecting trails,” simply because there is no broadly-consistent definition of these terms. By contrast, feeder trails and connecting trails may indeed qualify for status as a nationally significant trail; what is important is that any feeder trail or connecting trail that is deemed nationally significant – just as a trail’s “trunk route” – needs to be shown to have witnessed the passage of a large, significant number of cattle over a significant number of years. The definition of “a large, significant number of cattle” is by necessity an arbitrary concept; however, the increasing availability of relevant historical documentation helps shed light on the relative significance (local, regional, or national) of the various trail routes and segments.

In order to help answer questions related to the trails' national significance, traditional sources have provided a considerable amount of generalized data about the Chisholm and Western trails. But only during the past decade has research been conducted that sheds light on the physical location of individual trail routes and the level of historical significance attached to those routes.

As has been suggested by the four significance themes noted at the beginning of this study – categories to be explained in greater detail below – the planning team has determined that both the Chisholm Trail and the Western Trail are nationally significant trails. Given the multiplicity of routes that have been historically linked to these trails, however, these significance-related questions need to be answered on a trail-by-trail and a segment-by-segment basis. These answers are provided in the paragraphs below.

### **Analysis of Segment-by-Segment Significance**

Recently-completed research provided by Dr. Armando Alonzo, a history professor at Texas A&M University, provides a wealth of detail regarding the specific location of cattle trail segments in central and southern Texas and the relative level of significance for each trail. After receiving Alonzo's historical route data, analyzing that data, and comparing it to regulatory verbiage justifying the various significance levels, NPS trails staff concluded that the routes that were outlined in central and southern Texas were (not surprisingly) active as transport corridors throughout the 18-year period of significance, even though roughly the first half of that period was dominated by movements up the Chisholm Trail, while roughly the last half of that period was dominated by movements up the Western Trail. Therefore, most of the routes south of Austin, and all of the identified routes south of San Antonio, cannot be identified as belonging to either of these trails specifically.

Further analysis and evaluation of Alonzo's data show that while there are a number of large ranches that were historically located in the Lower Rio Grande valley, and while there are profuse records showing the northward migration of cattle from that area, the relatively moderate number of cattle, combined with the diversity of routes connecting this valley with the San Antonio or Austin areas, suggests that none of these routes, individually, are nationally significant.

North of the Lower Rio Grande valley, two major historic ranches were located near the Gulf of Mexico: the Kenedy Ranch, in Kenedy County, and the King Ranch, headquartered near Kingsville in Kleberg County. As noted in Alonzo's study, each of these ranches was responsible for trailing more than 10,000 cattle north each year. The annual volume of cattle from these two ranches, combined with the numerous herds generated in the lower valley, suggests that the trail north of the Kingsville area was nationally significant. This route continued north to the well-known Nueces River crossing at San Patricio.

North of San Patricio, vegetation and water availability combined to create a large area – perhaps 100 miles wide as far north as Austin or beyond – that during the period of significance had many ranches. Two major cattle trail routes ran through this area. Through the western portion of this ranching area, a route ran along the eastern margins of the Nueces River and continued in a



north-northwest direction to San Antonio, while through the eastern portion of this area ran another route connecting San Patricio with Refugio, Goliad, Cuero, Gonzales, Lockhart, and Austin. Both of these routes carried large volumes of cattle annually, over an extended period, and are therefore considered nationally significant. Other routes in this area are considered less significant. One regionally significant route led from Laredo to Pleasanton, in Atascosa County; however, the relatively short northern extension of this route (between Pleasanton and San Antonio) is considered to be nationally significant. Each of these segments are so-called “feeder routes” because of their locations south of either Austin or San Antonio, and they thus cannot be identified as belonging to either of these trails specifically.

From San Antonio the route that has historically been consistently known as the Chisholm Trail heads northeast to Austin, and from that point north there is a single main-stem route of this trail to the northern Texas border at Red River station, going through intermediate points as specified in the previous section. This trail is judged to be nationally significant. In Oklahoma, there is a single Chisholm Trail route in most of this state, the exception being a fifty-mile-long corridor in central Oklahoma (just west of Oklahoma City) where there were two routes. Historical documentation provides ample evidence of a large number of cattle herds heading north on both of these trail segments. Thus both of these trail variants, plus the main-stem route of this trail in the remainder of Oklahoma, are judged to be nationally significant.

In Kansas, the Chisholm Trail route between the Oklahoma border and Abilene is largely a single route corridor and, because large numbers of cattle traveled over this entire route for five years (and to the Wichita area for several years more), this route segment is judged to be nationally significant. To the west, the nearby Ellsworth Trail (Cox’s Cutoff) was a known cattle-trailing route for perhaps nine years, and during three of those years (1872-1874), Ellsworth vied with Wichita as the major Kansas destination for Texas cattle. For this reason, the Ellsworth Trail between Pond Creek, Oklahoma and Ellsworth, Kansas is judged to be nationally significant. As noted in the historical chronology above, several other Kansas railroad towns also received Texas cattle from time to time, but none received or shipped sufficient numbers of cattle to be considered nationally significant trail sites. Research has also shown that some cattle herds were driven north from Abilene and Ellsworth, Kansas to Schuyler and Kearny, Nebraska, respectively. The relatively small number of cattle and the relatively brief span of cattle-trail activity, however, precludes these routes from consideration as nationally significant routes.

Regarding the Western Trail, most of the trail route in Texas (as described in the section above) is a single corridor. Three exceptions to this rule exist, however. From Kerrville (in Kerr County), there is an additional route segment that drops down to Bandera; and in Callahan and Shackelford counties, various trail maps show the trail splitting into three separate routes for approximately 50 miles. The easternmost route, which goes east to Moran before rejoining the main route at Albany, is judged to have been used less frequently and is therefore regionally significant, but the two remaining routes in the Baird-Clyde area, both of which circumvented Pecan Bayou, sustained high cattle volumes and are thus nationally significant. Finally, trail maps show a short (perhaps 8-mile) route split just south of Seymour in Seymour County. Historical sources suggest that the western variant in this area (west of the Brazos River) was nationally significant, while the eastern variant, less used, was regionally significant.

In Oklahoma, the Western Trail was a single historical corridor and is also, therefore, considered to be nationally significant. In Kansas, the same corridor continued north to Dodge City; a trail spur entered the city from the south, while the main route circled west around the city. Perhaps 12 miles north of town, the route made the first of several bifurcations, which were primarily brought about by the expanding agricultural frontier and the consequent need for the trail to move west every few years. The first such route, therefore, was active from 1874 to 1877; the second, from 1876 to 1882; the third, from 1881 to 1884; and the fourth (much farther to the west) from 1883 to 1886. Due to the relatively high trail volumes that characterized the “middle period” of activity along the Western Trail, trail variants numbers 2 and 3 are judged to be nationally significant; variants 1 and 4, however, were not used nearly as much and are thus considered to be regionally significant. In southern Nebraska, these routes rejoin once again, and the remaining route north to Ogallala, Nebraska is considered to be nationally significant.

North of Ogallala, an entirely separate set of factors present themselves. As noted above, historical source materials are replete with references to cattle migrating into central and northern Nebraska and Colorado, as well as into Wyoming, Dakota, and Montana territories. Some state and regional histories, plus considerable anecdotal evidence, suggest that Texas was a primary source of the herds that populated these areas during the 1870s and 1880s. Additional research was needed, however, to discern the origin points of those cattle herds, and to learn whether these herds fit thematically into the same Texas-based trailing patterns that characterized the various cattle drives along either the Chisholm or Western Trails. National Trails Intermountain Region staff undertook this research, a report of which was completed in February 2011. This report analyzed, on a state-by-state basis the feasibility of nationally significant routes (the states of South Dakota and North Dakota having emerged from Dakota Territory).

The report concluded that none of the six states offered nationally significant cattle trail routes that were logical extensions of the trails as described in the congressional study proposal. Historical sources revealed that cattle trails emanated both west and north of Ogallala, and are thus possible extensions of the Western Trail: the more western variant headed into Wyoming Territory before turning north, and a northern trail headed directly toward the Black Hills of present-day South Dakota. Farther north, both of these trails headed into southeastern Montana, although variants of the eastern trail went north into present-day western North Dakota. Along these trails, towns as diverse as Julesburg, Colorado; Cheyenne, Wyoming; Miles City, Montana; and Medora, North Dakota, trump their historical connections to the cattle industry, and in some of those towns, historical sources note the presence of Texas-based cattle drives either passing through or terminating at these points.

The origin of the cattle herds in these northern states and territories is too complex to be related here. What emerged from a perusal of the historical source material, however, was a recognition that the cattle herds in these areas came from a variety of areas; they were brought by Oregon Trail migrants or by herds driven in from Oregon, Idaho, western Montana, Iowa, or Minnesota; most trailing activity took place during the period of significance (1867-1884), but many trail herds entered the area after 1884 and are thus irrelevant to this study. As a complement to the above retinue of origin points, some herds were driven north from Texas, but many of those

herds were overwintered in the Ogallala area before being driven farther north; or, in other cases, the Texas contractors who were in charge of those herds would sell their cattle to a Wyoming or Montana rancher before the cattle were driven to their final destination. There are, indeed, a number of documented cases where cattle were driven in a single season from Texas north to Wyoming, Montana, or other northern destinations. However, the number of these herds was relatively small – far smaller, to be sure, than the nationally significant number of cattle that were driven north to Ogallala. What emerges from this investigation is that data about cattle driving into these northern areas – either descriptive or statistical data – are, all too often, either difficult to find or are simply unavailable. More research is needed into this topic.

## **TIMELINE**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>
ca. 1500	The first cattle herds brought from Spain to the New World (Hispaniola).
1520s	The first cattle herds brought to the mainland of North America (present-day eastern Mexico).
1540-1542	Francisco Vásquez de Coronado expedition explores the present-day southwestern United States north from Mexico, bringing 1,500 horses and mules, plus many horses and sheep
1598	Don Juan de Oñate expedition enters present-day New Mexico; first example of working vaqueros (cowboys) in the present-day United States.
1655	Cattle herd driven from Springfield, Massachusetts to Boston; first known example of cattle trailing in the present-day United States.
1721	Spaniards introduce the first noteworthy cattle herds in Texas, more specifically at several early Franciscan missions.
1740s	Large, successful cattle ranches developed in present-day northeastern Mexico along the Gulf of Mexico.
1760s	Cattle ranching gains a foothold in Hispanic Texas outside of the mission environment.
1820s	Cattle trailing increases as “many took herds from Ohio and even Indiana to Baltimore.” Despite these and other documented examples, cattle trailing during this period was a rare activity or was primarily a localized (farm-to-market) activity.
1820s to 1840s	Americans invade Texas (then a part of Mexico) and later proclaim the Republic of Texas; cattle population in Texas booms.
1845	250 Illinois cattle trailed to Albany and on to Boston. Similar examples are noted with increasing frequency during this period.
Late-1840s	The first sizable cattle drives out of Texas; some to Louisiana (either by ship or on overland trails), some to the California gold fields.
Mid-1850s	Rise of the Shawnee Trail, for cattle driven from southern Texas to Missouri and southeastern Kansas, Texans only moderately successful.
Late-1850s	Cattle drives from Texas to Pike’s Peak (Denver-area) gold rush communities.
1861 to 1865	The U.S. Civil War brings cattle driving to a halt, except for occasional attempts to supply the Confederate Army; many cattle ranches leave Texas and take part in the military effort.
1865 to 1866	Renewal of cattle driving activities along the Shawnee Trail; progress blocked

	by bandits, “Jayhawkers,” and farmers irate at “tick fever” losses and trampled fields.
1867 (Spring)	Joseph G. McCoy speaks with railroad officials about rates for shipping cattle.
1867 (June)	McCoy travels west on the Union Pacific Eastern Division to its end of track (at Salina) scouting possible locations for a loading facility; he selects Abilene.
1867 (Summer)	McCoy constructs loading facility, hotel and other amenities in Abilene, he sends associates south to mark a route south to the northern terminus of Jesse Chisholm’s wagon road and others south, with fliers, to publicize the improvements at Abilene.
1867 (September)	The first load of cattle shipped east from Abilene; a total of 35,000 cattle shipped east from Kansas this year.
1868 to 1870	The so-called “Chisholm Trail” becomes increasingly popular as its existence spreads to ranchers throughout central and southern Texas; a few rivals to Abilene emerge, but none make significant inroads into Abilene’s growing fame and prosperity.
1871 (June)	Santa Fe (AT&SF) Railroad branch completed south to Newton, which becomes a wild, end-of-tracks rival to Abilene.
1872 (February)	Farming interests in Abilene, weary of five years of Texas cattlemen, distribute fliers urging ranchers to take their herds elsewhere.
1872 (May)	Santa Fe Railroad branch extended south to Wichita, which soon becomes a new rival for the cattle trade.
1873	L.B. Harris takes the first northbound cattle herd from Texas along a route west of the Chisholm Trail.
1874	John T. Lytle takes several herds of cattle north from Texas along a route farther west than Harris had gone a year previously; the first eastbound cattle are loaded at Dodge City.
1872 to 1875	Wichita and other Kansas railroad towns compete for the northbound cattle trade. Wichita’s major rival is Ellsworth, reached by the Ellsworth Trail (Cox’s Cutoff), which splinters away from the Chisholm Trail near the border between Kansas and Indian Territory.
1875	Most American Indians on the Southern Plains are moved onto reservations in Indian Territory. Perhaps as a result, increasing numbers of cattle veer away from the Chisholm Trail and move north along the so-called “Western Trail” to Dodge City and on to Ogallala, Nebraska.
1876	Quarantine laws in central Kansas (passed in 1875) close the Chisholm Trail.
1876 to 1879	Most Texas cattle that head northward follow the Western Trail. Some begin this trail in San Antonio, while others veer away from the Chisholm Trail in Belton, Fort Worth, or elsewhere.
1880	Santa Fe (AT&SF) completes a rail spur south to Caldwell, near the southern border of Kansas.
1880 to 1884	Most Texas cattle driven northward go up the Western Trail to Dodge City and Ogallala, although some take the Chisholm Trail or one of its connecting trails to Caldwell.
1885 (April)	Kansas legislature passes a quarantine law that encompasses the entire state; therefore, few if any cattle are driven to Dodge City and none to Ogallala.

1885 to 1886	Cattle industry leaders respond to quarantines by promoting the idea of a National Cattle Trail, which would drive cattle up a dedicated corridor in eastern Colorado to the northwestern territories. The National Trail is not implemented as a legislative concept, but some cattle herds are driven north along this pathway.
1887 to 1889	The last years of substantial (though minor) trail driving, primarily along relatively short-distance routes.

## SIGNIFICANCE THEMES

In reviewing the story of the post-Civil War cattle trails and the context in which they occurred, several historical themes emerged, including the importance of the vaquero tradition in the lifestyle and practices of the American cowboy, the strong (if largely unknown) role that Mexicans and African Americans played in moving the cattle herds north, the role of the railroad officials in both Kansas and Texas in the scope and success of the cattle trailing industry, and the role of technology (specifically related to refrigeration, the beef packing industry, and tick eradication) in cattle trailing. Four themes stand out, however, as most immediately related to the broad significance of the cattle trails in U.S. history: 1) the cattle trails' key role in bolstering the economy of Texas during the years following the post-Civil War era, 2) the economic impact that the cattle trails had outside of Texas (not only in the cattle towns themselves but in packing-house communities, and virtually anywhere that Texas beef was consumed, 3) the palpable cultural clash that ensued when thousands of free-living southern cattlemen invaded otherwise sedate, agricultural Midwestern communities, and 4) the larger cultural impact of the cattle trails in shaping American values and iconography. Each of these four principal themes was included within the historical narrative (above) and is discussed in more detail below.

**Area of Significance = Commerce; Theme = Developing the American Economy: exchange and trade**

**The widespread popularity of the cattle trails, more than any other factor, was responsible for re-integrating Texas into the national economy following the Civil War. Texas during the mid-1860s was in a severe postwar economic depression; it was cash-poor but rich in cattle. The Chisholm Trail and, later, the Western Trail brought Texas out of its isolation and tied it into a large national and international trading network, and the state rebounded economically as a result. Due to the newfound availability of inexpensive beef, Americans throughout the country converted from a pork-based to a beef-based diet.**

Soon after 1845, when Texas became part of the United States (and also became the 26<sup>th</sup> U.S. state), Americans recognized that Texas – particularly present-day central and southern Texas – was prime cattle country. Cattle thrived there because the climate was mild and sunny, grazing land was available on a year-round basis, and the land was sufficiently well-watered (either by rainfall or via rivers and springs) to support herd growth. Cattle herds there often grew ten percent or more each year.

Given the growing national demand for beef, Texas had an excess of supply, and thus prices for beef were so low that cattle were often worth more for their hides or for tallow than for beef. As a result, Texas cattlemen starting in the late 1840s embarked on a series of cattle drives, all of which had the purpose of getting the state's cattle to markets where demand – and thus prices – made the costs of the cattle drive financially worthwhile. The first attempts, made by a relative handful of Texas herders, involved overland drives west to the newly-populated California gold fields or by moving herds east – either by land or by coastal steamer – to Louisiana and other eastern markets.

These markets were insignificant, however, compared with the markets for beef in the Midwest and east, and by the mid-1850s, a number of Texas cattlemen were driving their herds to either Missouri or eastern Kansas along what came to be known as the Shawnee Trail. Trail drovers were a hardy lot, and in many instances they battled the odds and successfully reached their intended markets. Within just a few years of its establishment, however, herders using this trail began to experience problems getting their herds to their intended destination. The first of these problems was encroaching settlement, because the number of farms in both southern Missouri and eastern Kansas was quickly expanding during this period. New farms, therefore sprang up on land that had not been settled a year or two earlier, and all too often, northbound herds from Texas broke free from the trail corridor and trampled farms and fields. A second problem was the presence of “Jayhawkers” and other border ruffians who occasionally shot at drovers or forced them to take a circuitous detour. The third problem – which would prove challenging throughout the cattle driving era – was a disease-bearing tick that the Texas longhorn herds brought north with them. This tick caused the resilient Texas cattle no harm, but when Texas herds reached Midwestern farms, the ticks hopped off the Texas cattle, attached themselves to Midwestern cattle, and within a few days of contact, death resulted because they had no immunity to this disease, which was variously known as Texas fever, Spanish fever, or “tick fever.” This scourge killed Midwestern cattle by the hundreds. Because of these problems, new settlers hated the Texas cattlemen, and – particularly because of their fear of “tick fever.” Legislatures in both Missouri and in Kansas Territory quickly passed quarantine laws that prohibited Texas cattle herds from entering their jurisdictions.

In April 1861, Confederate cannons fired on Fort Sumter, and for the next four years the nation was embroiled in the Civil War. Two months earlier, Texas had seceded from the union, and a large percentage of the state's able-bodied men left Texas and joined the Confederate army. Historian Wayne Gard noted that as a result of the war, “the cattle industry on the frontier fell into neglect. Calves were left unbranded, and herds strayed far across the prairies or into the brush.”

At war's end in 1865, thousands of war-weary veterans returned to their Texas ranches, only to find that “uncounted Longhorns were scattered over the prairies and plains,” at least some of which were grazing, unbranded, on unfenced land. These half-wild “mavericks” were freely available to whoever could rope and brand them. In many other cases, ranches were still intact. For everyone, the cattlemen's major problem was that the Texas economy had collapsed, and as a consequence, cattle prices were at record lows. (Gard noted that “In some sections, steers were almost given away, despite the high prices prevailing in the North.”) The returning Texans,

therefore, were land-rich and cattle-rich, but they were cash-poor and were facing the same big problem that existed before the war; namely, that there was no easy way to connect supply and demand by moving cattle from Texas to either Midwestern or eastern markets. Texas's railroad system, in 1865, consisted of just eleven short lines, all of which were unconnected with one another and were hundreds of miles from the contiguous rail network located east of the Mississippi River. To the north, the transportation infrastructure was just as primitive; there were no long-distance railroad lines in Indian Territory, the Union Pacific Eastern Division in Kansas reached only 40 miles west of the Missouri border, to Lawrence; and in Nebraska, the Union Pacific had not yet laid its first rail west from Omaha.

Given the prevailing conditions, some ranchers tried to revive prewar trailing patterns and move herds to the east or northeast. Renewed attempts were made to move herds up one or more branches of the Shawnee Trail, but ever-greater agricultural settlement, a revival of banditry, and continued fears about "tick fever" in southeastern Kansas and southwestern Missouri forced some herders to turn back or find alternate routes. Seeking a new market, cowmen Charles Goodnight and Oliver Loving successfully sent herds from the Fort Belknap area (80 miles west of Fort Worth) west and north to Fort Sumner, New Mexico Territory, where the government had recently resettled thousands of Navajos and Apaches. The two men also pushed herds on to the Denver, Colorado area and sold others to Santa Fe-based government contractors. But the limited size of the New Mexico and Colorado markets discouraged a widespread use of what was generally known as the Goodnight-Loving Trail.

It was under these same desperate circumstances – high demand for beef in the Midwest and eastern states, a high supply of cattle in Texas, and rock-bottom prices for Texas cattle because of an inability to get them to outside markets – that Joseph McCoy in 1867 established stockyards and other improvements in Abilene, Kansas, marked a route south from there to the northern end of Jesse Chisholm's already-established wagon road, and printed hundreds of promotional fliers to be distributed to cattlemen in Indian Territory and Texas. By early September of that year, McCoy's efforts had already begun to pay dividends; the first herd of cattle was shipped on Union Pacific Eastern Division railroad cars east to market, and by the close of that season, 35,000 cattle had been shipped by rail east from Kansas.

McCoy's plan ultimately proved highly successful, but it was not an overnight success. In 1868, the number of cattle loaded onto railroad cars doubled to 70,000. Because McCoy had advertised Abilene in a large number of Texas newspapers, word of these facilities had spread among Texas cattlemen, but Midwestern buyers were slow to respond by coming to Abilene and arranging to purchase the arriving herds. By 1869, the cattle-trailing industry was booming; as historian Wayne Gard has noted, Abilene that year "received 150,000 head during the season – twice as many as in 1868. Prices there were good. Second-class beef steers, which included most of the Longhorns, brought \$22.60 to \$25 a head. Extra fine ones brought \$26 or more, sometimes as much as \$32." And by the following year, some 300,000 cattle were trailed from Texas to Kansas. As one historian noted, "Texas cowmen had no more doubts about the Chisholm Trail. Nearly all of them were infected with the Kansas fever. . . . The unfenced ranges still teemed with rough cattle. Yet, although they were cheap in Texas, there was good prospect for selling them at high prices in northern markets. A mature steer that cost \$11 in Texas might

bring \$31.50 in St. Louis or Chicago, \$55 in New York. ... Texas cowmen returned home [in 1870] with bulging money belts. This had been the most profitable year for the drovers. They were eager to gather more and bigger herds for the 1871 season.” In 1871, an astounding 600,000 cattle flooded into Abilene and well as to Newton and other rival cowtowns, but as Gard has noted, “no matter how large the drives to Kansas, they did not appear to lessen the supply of Longhorns on the Texas ranges.”

As a result of the huge number of cattle driven up the Chisholm Trail – an estimated 1.15 million head during the five years between 1867 and 1871, inclusively – the economy of Texas was able to climb out of its deep postwar depression. By 1873, according to one historian, “Texas was recovering at last from the devastating blows of the Civil War,” and the wealth brought back home by Texas cattlemen – both individual ranchers and cattle contractors – was a key part of that economic recovery. The wealth generated by the cattle drives continued to enrich the Texas economy throughout the cattle trail era – and, indeed, cattle has remained a staple of the Texas economy during the 125 years that have elapsed since the closure of the Chisholm and Western cattle trails.

The success of the cattle trails also had a profound effect on the American diet. Prior to the Civil War, pork products were a widely available food staple, primarily because pigs could be kept and raised on modest-sized farms. Beef, however, required more acreage and was thus less common. But as the U.S. population expanded into the Great Plains and Texas, larger holdings were required to maintain a viable agricultural operation, and – particularly in Texas, due to both historical and climatic factors – beef in large quantities was readily available. Texas beef, as noted elsewhere, was a marginal element of the American diet prior to the cattle trail period, but the success of the cattle drives lowered the price of Texas beef, and the dramatic industrialization of various U.S. cities offered a ready market for that beef.

**Area of Significance = Transportation, plus Exploration/Settlement; Theme = Developing the American Economy: distribution and consumption, plus transportation and communication**

**The success of the cattle trail migrations was an economic windfall to cities and towns between southern Texas and western Nebraska, but it had more far-reaching impacts as well. Because of these trails, cattle were driven to locations throughout the Great Plains and the Mountain West.**

Some of the most iconic, best-known stories related to the cattle trail era focus on the various end-of-trail “cowtowns” where, according to popular imagination, the cattle drives ended and where cattle were loaded onto cars headed for Midwestern and eastern cities. Many Americans, whether historians or not, are well aware of Abilene and Dodge City, Kansas; they are symbolic of the rugged frontier drama that was also played out in a number of other “end of trail” towns. These towns, however, were by no means the only communities to be affected by the prosperity engendered by the cattle trails. There were also a number of supply towns along the route northward. Added to that was a large number of cities and towns in central and southern Texas that enjoyed an extended and renewed period of prosperity because cattle were now being taken



to viable, profitable markets. Additional towns that benefited from the cattle trade included many towns (both in Texas and elsewhere) that built grazing pens, packing houses, and other facilities that catered to the northbound herds. Finally, cities and towns throughout the United States were affected by the cattle trails because the newly-available, high-volume source of beef transformed American dietary habits, and in so doing changed the eating habits of a wide variety of Americans from a diet based on pork to one based on beef.

The most famous towns affected by the cattle drives were the various end-of-trail “cowtowns.” These included the well-known Kansas towns of Abilene and Dodge City, but just as famous in their day were other communities such as Ellsworth, Wichita, Newton, and Caldwell – all in Kansas – and Ogallala, Nebraska. (As noted in the historical narrative above, there were at least a dozen other Kansas and Nebraska communities that served this role as well, though to a less significant degree.) The growth patterns of these communities followed a similar thread. All were established as stops along one of the major western railroads, either the Union Pacific Eastern Division (later the Kansas Pacific), the Santa Fe (Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe), or the Union Pacific. Most of these stops initially served functions unrelated to the cattle trade; Abilene, for example, was a small, struggling center for the surrounding homesteaders, Dodge City was a center for buffalo hunters, Ellsworth was located adjacent to two short-term military forts, and Ogallala consisted of little more than a general store. But due to factors of either accident or design – which were often guided by the boundaries of quarantine zones – these communities became major destinations for the cattle drovers.

The life of these communities as cowtowns likewise followed a predictable pattern. Located as they were beyond the edge of the western line of agricultural settlement, they grew in much the same manner as the various temporary “hell on wheels” towns that characterized end-of-track railroad construction camps. Entrepreneurs filtered into each community and soon established a coterie of hotels, saloons, supply stores, dance halls, and bagnios. Particularly during the trailing season – which often lasted from April or May until September or October – responding to the cowboys’ needs was the primary economic activity. But given the previous months of hard work and isolation, and pockets full of spending money, this economic activity was often wild – with aberrant behavior taking place at all hours of the day and night – with occasionally violent results. Most of these towns, moreover, were either too new or too unorganized to have a well-established constabulary; thus law enforcement was often the result of business owners banding together and hiring someone that could keep matters under a semblance of control. The residents and business owners who were not affiliated with the cattle trade typically tolerated the drovers’ behavior in the short term, because of the drovers provided a much-needed economic shot in the arm. But as the limits of the agricultural settlement edged westward, these new residents – typically Midwestern farmers – became increasingly impatient at the lawlessness (or at the losses of domestic cattle due to “tick fever”) and demanded change. Within a few years, therefore, these protests typically demanded the drovers’ ouster, either by issuing a public proclamation to that effect or, more often, by urging the state legislature to extend the quarantine laws west so as to prohibit the entry of Texas cattle to the towns in question.

Also significant, though less well known, are the numerous towns along the way that served as supply points and recreational venues. Diaries of some cattle drovers note few if any examples of

towns, villages, or even isolated roadhouses along either the Chisholm or Western trails. Such accounts, which probably took place early in each trail's history, stand in stark contrast to the stories of other cowboys and of newspapers, county histories, and other sources, because rare was the herd that did not receive periodic supplies as it moved up the trail. For those heading up the Chisholm Trail, Belton and Waco served as wayside supply points; farther north, Fort Worth and (to a lesser extent) Spanish Fort served a similar purpose. And for those that moved north up the Western Trail, the primary Texas supply point was the town of Fort Griffin, although Albany, Seymour and other county seats offered supplies to the cowboys during the waning days of the trail. Once into Indian Territory, supply opportunities were less easily available, although some items could be obtained from military installations such as Fort Reno (on the Chisholm Trail) and Fort Supply (on the Western Trail). In Kansas, most of the better-known end-of-trail towns (such as Caldwell and Dodge City) also served as wayside supply points; as historians Gary and Margaret Kraisinger have noted, Dodge City was less important as an end-of-trail rail town than as a mid-journey supply point. Ogallala, as noted in the historical narrative, served in a variety of roles, only one of which involved loading cattle onto eastbound rail cars; and even Abilene and Ellsworth served, to some extent, as a wayside supply point for cattle herds heading north to Nebraska.

In central and southern Texas, the economic boost brought about by cattle trailing proved critical in the preservation and prosperity of numerous cities and towns that were dependent upon cattle ranching. Both larger cities (such as Austin and San Antonio) and a panoply of county seats survived and thrived based on drovers' profits, and many of these places served as supply points for outfits preparing for their northward drive.

Communities in the northern plains and Midwest, well away from the main routes of the cattle trails, also benefited substantially from the annual northward migrations. Because the cattle trails served three main functions – of supplying beef to various Indian reservations and to the ever-expanding number of new farms and ranches, towns benefiting from the cattle trade ranged from Red Cloud, Nebraska, and Fort Belknap, Montana Territory, to Miles City, Montana Territory, Medora, Dakota Territory, Julesburg, Colorado, and Cheyenne, Wyoming Territory. A number of additional cities profited from the trade because they built stock yards and adjacent packing plants to process the incoming beef; these included Kansas City, St. Louis, Chicago, and Fort Worth. (The famous Union Stock Yards in Chicago were founded in 1865, just prior to the cattle-drive era; in 1870, the facility processed two million livestock, a number that more than quadrupled by 1890.) Rural areas in counties adjacent to the packing plants also profited because herds were often pastured and fattened there before being sent on for slaughtering.

**Area of Significance = Agriculture or Social History; Themes = Peopling Places: encounters, conflicts, and colonization, plus Expressing Cultural Values: popular and traditional culture, plus Developing the American Economy: workers and work culture**

**The cattle trails, which were located just west of the homesteader's frontier, forced farmers and cowmen to live and work in close proximity to one another. The wild, transient habits and lifestyle of Texas cowmen were a stark contrast to the conservative habits of**

**Midwestern farmers, and the cattle trails brought a well-publicized – and predictable – conflict whenever and wherever these frontiers collided with each other.**

The various end-of-trail cowtowns existed on the edges of society, both geographically and socially. Depending on one's point of view, they were either colorful, exciting, and adventurous, or they were dangerous, violent, and morally objectionable. Here in these cowtowns, a stark clash of cultures was easily witnessed. The basis for the conflict can be explained on two levels.

The first basis for the conflict was the dramatic contrast between the free-ranging cowboy and the farmer, whose energies were devoted to the development of a single agricultural plot. The cowboys that invaded the various cowtowns each spring and summer were ready to “let off some steam” in town after a demanding, isolated, and severe lifestyle that had lasted weeks if not months. Having just been paid by the drovers (or “trail bosses”), cowboys typically took a much-needed bath, purchased a new set of clothes, and took in the town's restaurants, saloons, and bawdy houses. Most were content to spend a few days there recuperating from the rigors of the trail before heading back home. A few, however, were wilder by nature; they raced down the main streets on horseback, fired aimlessly into the night air, and in other ways acted in ways that would not have been condoned anywhere else. These cowboys – the riotous ones as well as those more subdued – were tolerated because many of the business owners were similarly footloose souls that arrived in the cowtowns in search of quick profits. The cowboys' culture, however, clashed strongly with those of virtually all other nearby residents. A large number of early cowtown residents were similar to those who were settling a host of other towns in Kansas and Nebraska in that they were part of a Midwestern culture that was the diametrical opposite from that of the cowboys. Specifically, they were typically farmers and small business owners who hoped to settle in the area for the long haul. Many of these residents held in high esteem such virtues as hard work, thrift, faith, and deferred satisfaction – at least when compared to those exhibited by many trail hands while visiting the various cowtowns.

The second basis for conflict – a factor that considerably aggravated the first – was the clash between North and South. When the cattle-trail era began, the raging emotions and raw anger between these sections that characterized the Civil War years had cooled down little if at all. The people that took part in the cattle trail, moreover, revived these emotions because the ranchers were Southerners, who often displayed themselves in overtly tawdry ways in the Kansas cowtowns. And those who had to deal with the wild Southerners, by and large, were proud Northerners who were skeptical of Southerners and many of their attitudes and values.

To many, one of the major story lines of the cattle trail era were the hundreds of anecdotes related to the total breakdown in law and order due to the cowboys' activities, and the efforts by townspeople and businessmen – some successful, some less so – to institute peace and civilization in these otherwise-wild cowtowns. Given the striking contrasts between the Texas cowboys and the residents and business people they met in the various Kansas and Nebraska cowtowns, it is not at all surprising that this contrast was a dominant, long-running theme of the cattle-trail era.

**Area of Significance = Entertainment/Recreation or Literature; Theme = Expressing Cultural Values: literature, mass media, and popular and traditional culture**

**The cattle drives had an enormous impact on popular culture. The reality of a cowboy's lifestyle on a trail drive was anything but romantic; it meant long hours, exposure to weather extremes, dust clouds, swollen rivers, stampedes and other dangers, a minimum of comforts, and low pay, much of which might be spent at an end-of-trail cowtown. Writers and other observers, however, quickly made the cowboy a uniquely American icon: tough, individualistic, hard-working, and self-sufficient. The image of the cowboy was one that came to be widely admired and imitated, first in "dime novels" and other books, and later in motion pictures and television shows. This image, in time, spread out beyond the Great Plains to the remainder of the United States and to foreign lands as well.**

Cattle trailing, during the 1850s through the 1880s, was practiced primarily by young Anglo Texans; the age of the cowboys themselves was usually in their twenties, and sometimes as young as 15, while cooks, trail bosses, and contractors were typically older Anglo men. Despite the prevailing prejudice, approximately one-third of the estimated 35,000 men who trailed Texas cattle were either Mexicans or recently-freed African-Americans. In a handful of instances, young women were part of the trail crews. Given the long tradition of cattle ranching and cattle trailing that had preceded the post-Civil War cattle-drive era, these cowboys had all the equipment and knew all of the techniques necessary to successfully undertake long distance cattle drives. Due to this history, cowboys also were a well-established aspect of the ranching economy, both in Texas and elsewhere. What is significant about the cattle-drive era, however, is that the cattle drives (and the writers that wrote so profusely about them) transformed the public's perception of the cowboy from an obscure occupational category to a highly visible, often heroic American icon.

Virtually all of those involved in the cattle trailing business were Texans. These young, often poorly educated trail hands carried an intense pride in being southerners (in general) and Texans (more specifically). The residents of the various Kansas and Nebraska cowtowns, by contrast, were typically farmers and small business owners; they tended to be more settled than their Texas counterparts, they were conservative and religious, and they placed a high value on public order and safety. Given the post-Civil War tensions, in all portions of the country, in trying to re-integrate northerners and southerners into a broad national fabric, it was inevitable that Texas cattle drovers' values (and their free-ranging lifestyle) would strongly clash with those with whom they came in contact in the various Kansas and Nebraska cowtowns. The result of that clash was often an extended period of tension and violence – a situation that (as noted above as applied to Abilene) was endured by local residents in the short term but resulted in increased resentment – and, despite the obvious economic benefits, in campaigns to expel the dubious assemblage that invaded from Texas each spring.

For all that took part, the job of a trail hand was anything but romantic; by contrast, it was hard, dirty, uncomfortable work. Trail hands carried virtually no personal items with them on their journey north, and for two months or more, their blanket was their bed and their meals were whatever basic fare was dispensed from the chuck wagon. Trail hands had to contend with

drenching rain, howling winds, thunderstorms, blistering heat, long days without a break, stray and ornery cattle, potential threats from Indians (and from being thrown from their horse), stampedes, loss of sleep during nightwatch duties, and the hazards of crossing rivers at high water. They often had no contact with anyone outside of their trail outfit for weeks or even months. For their labors, cowboys were typically paid \$30 per month, usually payable when the cattle herd was delivered and sold. Given the isolation and the deprivations associated with life on the trail, the typical cowboy often lost most of his hard-earned pay within a day or two after arriving at Abilene, Dodge City, or one of the other trail-end cowtowns.

Many of those who wrote about the cattle drives, however, drew entirely different notions about the qualities associated with the northward cattle trailing. As historian Kent Steckmesser has noted, “most of the legend makers were Easterners [who] gave Eastern readers narratives that were based upon Eastern preconceptions and expectations rather than the facts. They romanticized frontier characters in response to literary conventions and commercial requirements. In so doing, they erected a grand edifice of legend upon the slender foundation of fact.” Many of these authors recognized that the cowboy, for all his travails, was a heroic, iconic figure. These observers perceived that cowboys, particularly those cowboys that took part in long-distance trail drives, were daring, independent, masculine souls who risked their lives on an almost daily basis and led lives full of adventure and excitement.

The fame of the cowboy spread while the cattle trails were still active and increased in later years. Even before the cattle trail period, the first so-called “dime novels” had appeared, and such western characters as Wild Bill Hickok, Buffalo Bill Cody, Billy and Kid, and other western characters were staples of the genre. In 1902, Owen Wister’s publication of *The Virginian* brought increased fame to western novels, and the publication in 1912 of Zane Grey’s *Riders of the Purple Sage* – which prominently featured a series of cattle rustlers – added additional luster. Grey would go on to write more than thirty additional westerns, and in his wake would be Clarence Mulford (the Hopalong Cassidy series), Max Brand, Louis L’Amour, and others. Relatively few of these novels, notably, would focus specifically on cattle driving; many of them, however, dealt at length with the lifestyle and values of the cowboy, a figure that first came to national prominence during the cattle trailing era. During this same period, eastern painters came out West, and in search of interesting subject matter, they discovered and romanticized the cowboy. Such artists as Charles Russell and Frederic Remington gained much of their fame by portraying western cowboys, many of them on horseback.

As the twentieth century dawned, a new art form emerged: motion pictures. One of the first commercially-successful productions was *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), starring Gilbert “Broncho Billy” Anderson. A short named “The Cowboy Millionaire” was released in 1909, and five years later, *The Spoilers* was released – a western so successful that it has been remade four times. Westerns, as silent films, were a cinema staple by the time of World War I, and they continued to be commonly produced as the industry converted to “talkies” during the late 1920s. Shortly after World War II, home televisions became increasingly popular, and westerns as a genre remained popular until the 1960s. As with western novels, relatively few western movies and television shows featured cattle drives as a major plot device; instead, they typically focus on the cowboys’ equestrian expertise, along with his ability to solve problems and either keep or

disturb the peace. There are notable exceptions to this, however. Film historians have chronicled more than a score of movies in which cattle trails have placed a central role; perhaps the best known include *Far Country*, with James Stewart; *Red River* (1948), with John Wayne; *Cattle Drive* (1951), with Joel McCrea; the miniseries *Lonesome Dove* (1989), with Robert Duvall, and *Open Range* (2003), with Kevin Costner. Two television series related to cattle drives are of particular note: *Rawhide*, which ran from 1959 to 1966 and starred Eric Fleming and Clint Eastwood, focuses on a trail crew driving a herd on the “Sedalia Trail” from San Antonio, Texas to Sedalia, Missouri, while *Gunsmoke*, the longest-running Western in television history (it ran from 1955 to 1975 on television, which was preceded by a radio show of the same name that ran from 1952 to 1961), which was set in and around Dodge City, Kansas during the trail drive days. In an ironic triumph of art over life, *Gunsmoke* – as a television series – lasted twice as long as Dodge City did as a frontier town during the cattle-drive period.

In more recent years, books about cattle drives have remained a staple in American literature – specifically in fiction aimed at both juvenile and adult audiences. One of the best-known Texas writers, folklorist J. Frank Dobie, made his career with his books depicting the richness and traditions of life in rural Texas during the days of the open rang. Among the best-known of his books is *Up the Trail from Texas* (1955). Today, major book distributors list hundreds of titles currently in print focusing on the historic trail drives.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY**

In the first stanza of the poem “Cattle” (1935), the Texas-born Berta Hart Nance penned, “Other states were carved or born, Texas grew from hide and horn.” With considerable justification, Texans over the years have taken great pride in their cattle trail heritage, and the iconography of the cattle trailing era is one with which many Texans still readily identify. Although some aspects of this iconography have doubtless become magnified and distorted over time, historians – perhaps based on this historical self-perception – are fortunate to have a rich bibliographic basis for determining the day-to-day realities of the cattle trail era.

Although many of those who were first-person eyewitnesses to the cattle-trail era were illiterate or had little interest in writing, a smattering of trail participants—despite the 18-hour days, weather extremes, and an almost complete lack of amenities—wrote diaries of their trail experiences, either as drovers, trail bosses, merchants, or cattle buyers. A few full-length accounts survive by cowhands who headed up both the Chisholm and the Western trail. And at the other end of the telescope, so to speak, is the highly descriptive account of Joseph G. McCoy, the self-professed “pioneer western cattle shipper” who, arguably, was the individual most responsible for the postwar cattle drives. (His *Historic Sketches of the Cattle Trade of the West and Southwest* was published in 1874.) In addition, many local newspapers, from Texas through Nebraska, recorded the economic benefits (and personal safety concerns) associated with the arrival of cattle and their herders in their areas. Some herders, later in their lives, penned reminiscences of their trail days; and one man, George W. Saunders, was so conscious of the historical importance of the cattle drive period that he went to great lengths to collect hundreds of such reminiscences, which were compiled and edited by J. Marvin Hunter and published in the substantial 1924 volume *The Trail Drivers of Texas*. Additional firsthand views can be

gleaned from the online *American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1940*, available through the Library of Congress web page.

In recent years, a number of excellent secondary-source histories of the cattle trails have been published. Wayne Gard led this effort with *The Chisholm Trail*, published in 1954. Almost twenty years later, Jimmy M. Skaggs published *The Cattle-Trailing Industry; Between Supply and Demand, 1866-1890*, and in 1980 Don Worcester wrote *The Chisholm Trail; High Road of the Cattle Kingdom*. In 1993, Terry Jordan wrote of the postwar cattle-trailing period in the context of a broader ranching overview in his *North American Cattle-Ranching Frontiers; Origins, Diffusion, and Differentiation*. And in 2004, Gary and Margaret Kraisinger wrote the first definitive treatment of the Western Trail, entitled *The Western: The Greatest Texas Cattle Trail, 1874-1886*. Others have added their own broad treatment of the cattle ranching empire, and to complement these efforts, historians throughout the Great Plains and southwestern states have written excellent volumes describing the impact of the cattle drives on specific cities and towns such as Caldwell, Ogallala, Dodge City, and elsewhere. (Books in this category include the following: Elaine Neilsen, *Ogallala, A Century on the Trail* (Ogallala?, Keith County Historical Society), 1984; Bill O'Neal, *Border Queen Caldwell, Toughest Town on the Chisholm Trail*, 2008; Stewart P. Verckler, *Cowtown Abilene; the Story of Abilene, Kansas, 1867-1875*, 2009; and Fredric R. Young, *Dodge City, Up Through a Century in Story and Pictures*, 1972.) Many of the volumes above, not surprisingly, focused on the rowdier, more lurid aspects of life in the various end-of-trail towns where cattle were loaded onto railcars and sent east.

Although the Chisholm, Western and other cattle trails were major, easily defined routes during the years in which they were active, these routes for the most part were no longer used after they were abandoned. Consequently, it has been a significant challenge to today's historians to locate the historical routes of these trails. To that end, many efforts have also been made to cartographically document the location of the major cattle trails. During the early 1870s, General Land Office surveyors, by good fortune, documented the length of the Chisholm Trail in Indian Territory (Oklahoma); no similar effort, however, took place in other states or territories or for other trails. The first latter-day effort to demarcate the trail locations took place in 1931, when the Oklahoma legislature tasked the state's highway commission to publish maps of both the Chisholm Trail and the "Texas Trail" (Western Cattle Trail). These maps were published in 1936.

Most of the trail histories noted above provided only general information about the trails; the maps included typically provided broad, sweeping lines to show the length and location of the various cattle trails. In recent years, however, several efforts have attempted to more specifically pin down the historical routes of the various trails; some of this information has been added to the historical literature, while other information has been more widely distributed so that it is now available to the traveling public. In 1990, a small group of historical enthusiasts headed by Robert Klemme – using information from the 1870s GLO maps – began placing concrete posts where the Chisholm Trail intersected various section-line roads in the so-called "Cherokee Strip" portion of Oklahoma. This project, before long, was expanded to include all of the Chisholm Trail in Oklahoma, and in 1997 Klemme and others successfully completed this effort. In response, a similar effort began in 2003 on the Western Trail. The Rotary Club in Vernon, Texas

began a massive project, the goal of which was to establish marked concrete posts along the Great Western Trail in each qualifying county in Texas and in other selected points all the way from Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Mexico all the way north to Valjean and Regina, both in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan. This ongoing project features marked posts that are located in commemorative locations such as city parks, near county courthouses, and in highway pullouts. The Kraisingers' 2004 publication (see above) featured large-scale maps that pinpointed the location of hundreds of miles of the Western Trail, from northern Oklahoma north to Ogallala, Nebraska. In addition, various historical groups in both Texas and Kansas have undertaken initiatives to research, and then mark on the ground, detailed geographical information about the Chisholm Trail in those states.