

CATTLE START

- Cattle was available after the Mexican War (1848) and cowboys drove cattle to California, New Orleans and Chicago but Missouri and Nebraska was an issue as the farmers feared Texas Fever. Missouri passed a quarantine law (1855), Kansas 1859.
- After the Civil War 5m Cattle had become available thanks to uncontrolled breeding. Selling cattle to North could make 10x profit.

GOODNIGHT AND LOVING

- Goodnight and Loving sold beef to the army on reservations using their own trail from 1866, despite the perils of Comanche territory.
- They sold some of their cattle to John Iliff and Goodnight and secured a deal to sell beef direct to the Cheyenne and Union Pacific Railroad in 1868.
- Goodnight developed patch working claims to create a ranch of 1m acres

JOHN ILIFF

- John Iliff kept Longhorns on the Plains from 1859 after gold was discovered in Colorado in 1858 but bought his first herd of foot sore cattle for \$500 (1861)
- He sold cattle to the miners and railroad builders and bought foot sore cattle from Goodnight and Loving in 1866 after they established their trail up to Wyoming. He had a working ranch by 1867 with 26,000 cattle on it by 1870. He had proven ranching was possible and profitable on the Plains despite winters and Texas Fever!
- He bought a further 16,000 acres with patch-working extending ranching to Cheyenne. He later used refrigerated rail cars and selective breeding.

JOSEPH MCCOY AND CATTLE BARONS

- Abilene was set up by McCoy in 1867 to connect the Kansas Pacific Railroad with the trails further East so that beef could be shipped to the markets in Chicago.
- He picked the Chisholm Trail because it extended from Texas, through grass land, all the way to Kansas where, but West of the quarantine area.
- He bought 450 acres, spent 5,000 on advertising, built stockyards for 100 cattle at a time, restaurants and hotels and supplied the railroads with beef.
- 35,000 cattle had been driven along his well-marked trail by the end of 1867 and started the beef bonanza from 1867-1872 with 3 million cattle being shipped East.
- He started other cow towns like Wichita and Dodge City.
- Between 1880 and 1885 was the boom years for this open ranching with Cattle barons buying up huge areas of land to maximise profits by having huge herds in open ranches.
- The Cattle Barons came to dominate politics, business and the courts in places like Wyoming.

CATTLEMEN

THE GREAT DIE UP AND THE END OF THE OPEN RANGE AND POWER OF BARONS

- By 1882 however, the power of the Cattle Barons began to wane as the rise in the number of cattle in the ranches and the ease of moving them to the East using railways meant that prices fell and thus so did profits.
- Thus the cattlemen kept the cattle on the ranches for longer to try to reduce the amount of beef on the market to raise prices.
- However, this failed and it also put huge pressure on the grass stocks as the grass had less time to recover. By 1883 pressure on the grass stocks was starting to become critical because of drought and the cold winters if 1886 and 1887 finished off 15% of the Cattle on the Plains in the Great Die Up. Those that survived were in poor condition so prices fell further. This effectively made open ranching very difficult as rounding up a small amount of cattle over vast areas was not cost efficient and made the cattle thinner. This led to small ranching with fenced-off with barbed wire. This made cattle easier to round up, fatten up, protect and water with better beef through selective breeding of Herefords and Holsteins. However, this reduced the power of the Cattle Barons who felt their political power threatened by small ranchers and homesteaders moving onto the Plains and fought back e.g. Johnson County War

CONFLICT AND COWBOY LIFE ON THE RANCHES

- As Cowboys moved to live on the ranches they often had boring, lonely and dangerous jobs like riding the line, fixing fences, defending cattle from rustlers and Indians, branding the cattle, rescuing them if they got stuck in mud, rivers or snow or if they got injured. In the winter they would often live alone in sod houses.
- However, there was rivalry between the Cattle Barons, open ranchers, small ranchers, cowboys, homesteaders and sheep herders. Open ranges needed 2,000 acres and would often use public land mixed with a patchwork of homesteads. They thus intimidated the farming homesteaders into leaving and accused them of rustling when cattle wandered onto their land. The cattlemen would often win the cases if these problems came to court because they were influential in politics and the law Courts and could outspend the homesteaders. This often led to open conflicts between the ranchers, cowboys and homesteaders like the 'ranch wars.' Ranchers and cowboys also had to fight sheepherders who also wanted the use of the Public Land and fenced off their land. The sheep also competed with the cattle for grass and infected them with sheep scab. This led to open conflict when ranchers fenced off their land off from the sheep and the sheep herders would cut the fences.

COWBOY LIFE

- Cowboys stayed in ranches in Texas in the winter, working in bars etc. until Spring Round-up. Others would live in bunk houses on the ranches.
- At the Spring Round-up they would work under a trail boss, and then brand all the animals. Goodnight banned gambling and drinking.
- Drovers would then work on the trail for 3 – 6 months, with 12 cowboys moving 3,000 cattle. The trail boss would map out the journey and decide when to stop and was paid \$100 a month. Cowboys like the wranglers who looked after the horses, the swing, flank and point men would earn about \$30 and the drag about \$20 as they would be the dusty newcomers given the worst job. Life was hard. Most were under 30
- All cowboys would protect the cattle, especially at night with stampedes, and protect them from wild animals and Indians. They would walk 15-20 miles a day, sometimes on horses for 15 hours.
- They would reach the Cow towns or the ranches and put the cattle in stockyards before getting paid and spending their money on getting drunk, gambling and prostitutes. Many had to borrow money to get back to Texas. This tough life required specialist equipment like a lasso, Stetson, boots, scarves, chaps and most importantly a saddle.