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The Cattle Drives of 1878

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THE CATTLE DRIVES OF 1878.

DODGE CITY, THE GREAT SHIPPING POINT.

A LIVELY PLACE ON THE PLAINS—AN ENORMOUS NUMBER OF CATTLE ON THE TRAIL—THE EXTENT OF THE WESTERN BEEF TRADE—RAILROAD RATES.

From Our Own Correspondent.
 DODGE CITY, Kansas,
 Monday, June 10, 1878.

The cattle men of the Plains are just getting through with their annual "round-ups." For the Arkansas Valley and the divide country West Las Animas was the rendezvous; and the scattered cattle for miles along the river and out on the buffalo ranges were gathered to that point. Camps were established, all the leading cattle men were on hand, and the "cow-boys" were in their glory. It was the work of only a few hours to "cut out" and separate the cattle, and start the herds back to their ranges again. Every animal is known by its brand, so that ownership is easily determined, and those that have drifted miles away during the winter storms and become a part of other herds, are picked out in a few moments, claimed by the owners, and started back to the range. It has been a good winter for stock in this valley; no bad storms and plenty of grass. The cattle are in prime condition, and beeves for the early Fall markets will sell better than the average. By comparing notes among the herders, it was found that the range between Fort Lyon and Bent's Fort—Kit Carson's old hunting-grounds—an uninviting and barren-looking section, contains more cattle than any other similar area on the Plains. Over 75,000 head are figured up.

As all the heavy stock men and shippers just now seem to be bound for one place—Dodge City—the point at which the "drives" of Texas cattle come up, your correspondent took a train on the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fé Railroad, and a seven hours' ride landed us at midnight in this noisy cattle mart. No one seemed to be asleep at that hour. The station was thronged with swaggering, swearing cowboys, and oily confidence men. With some difficulty we rubbed our way through the crowd, and followed the porter to the "Great Western" Hotel. Any of our companions that might be bent on sport could need no special beckoning, for at all the billiard halls, concert saloons, and keno dens the lamp still held out to burn.

Seen by daylight, Dodge City has a better look; though somehow, pretty much all the buildings, which are of frame, lurch to the west as if impatient to move on, the effect of high prairie winds. The population cannot be far from 1,000, though there is a large floating element, increasing rapidly, and a month later, when the cattle are swarming in and things are at high tide, there will be in the town and outskirts as many as 5,000 people. The cattle shipping season gathers traders, speculators, gamblers, and all sorts. Through June and July Dodge City will be the liveliest place in the West. The best trails from the Panhandle of Texas strike the railroad and river at this point; it is outside the "dead line" proscribed by Kansas laws, and offers every facility for large stock transactions. There are now in this vicinity about 20,000 head of Texas "beeves" already arrived and ready to be marketed. There are on the trail, between Dodge and the Cimarron, 50,000 more. The latest accounts from the south indicate that there are upward of 225,000 head of cattle moving northward from Red River, fully one-half of which will take the trail to Dodge City. About the 1st of July the larger share will have arrived here, and the shipping season will begin in earnest. There will probably be put on the cars at this station from 30,000 to 40,000 beeves for Kansas City, St. Louis, and Chicago. The greater share of the cattle that are driven to this point from Texas do not go into Eastern markets yet. They will be allowed to feed their way westward and northward, and two months later will appear at stations on the Kansas Pacific and Union Pacific Roads further east, some to be shipped to Kansas City and Omaha, but the great bulk to remain feeding on the plains until next spring. The cattle "drives" from Texas each year represent a good deal of money, and are in the hands of comparatively few men. A careful compilation of the owners, number of head, and destination of the Texas cattle in this northward drive for the season of 1878 will be of interest:

Owners.	No. of Head.	Destination.
J. F. Ellison.....	12,000....	Kan. and Neb.
Lytle & McDonald.....	10,000....	Kansas.
Bishop & Half.....	8,000....	Dodge City.
D. R. Fant.....	8,000....	Colorado.
Smith & Savage.....	8,000....	Dodge City.
Presvall & Mitchell.....	6,000....	Colorado.
Coleman & Stockley.....	2,000....	Colorado.
Millett Brothers.....	9,000....	Kansas.
Mabry & Co.....	7,000....	Kan. and Neb.
Quinlan & Co.....	6,000....	Dodge City.
Vaugh & Stephens.....	4,000....	Dodge City.
John Frazer.....	2,500....	Dodge City.
John Cramp.....	3,000....	Dodge City.
C. C. Lewis.....	6,000....	Kansas.
L. & Q. Johnson.....	2,000....	Dodge City.
Shiner Brothers.....	6,000....	Kansas.
Littlefield & Huston.....	15,000....	Kansas.
Coruthers & Co.....	6,000....	Colorado.
King & Kennedy.....	15,000....	Kansas.
Oge & Woodward.....	4,000....	Dodge City.
Joe Mathews.....	2,000....	Dodge City.
Reed & Rochal.....	5,000....	Kansas.
Chapman & Tuttle.....	3,000....	Dodge City.
W. G. Butler.....	6,000....	Colorado.
Moore & Allen.....	5,000....	Colorado.
W. B. Grimes.....	5,000....	Kansas.
J. L. Driskill.....	3,000....	Dodge City.
A. S. Simmons.....	2,000....	Dodge City.
Bennett & West.....	3,800....	Colorado.
Iliff & Snyder.....	25,000....	Colorado.
Total.....	199,300	

The above table takes in the largest herds. The several smaller "bunches" will swell the total to between 225,000 and 250,000. Some claim that the number will reach 300,000. The list we have given shows some 45,000 head destined for Dodge City, principally for Eastern shipment. While a large share of the others enumerated will come by the trail to Dodge City, they will be driven from this point up the Arkansas and Purgatoire, or into the parks, and over the divide into the Platte Valley. A good many will go to the ranges on the Republican. In the past three or four years not all the cattle that have come up from Texas have been marketed, but have been multiplying and increasing in the valleys and along the high ranges. By the introduction of the best blooded stock the quality of the increase has been greatly improved, so that Plains-fed beeves are getting the best prices in Eastern markets. Taking into account the large numbers of cattle annually driven into the Territories and new States of the West, and the natural increase of the herds, the cattle trade is, of course, growing into greater magnitude every year.

It is a noteworthy fact that the the cattle interests of the Rocky Mountain region and the Plains on the east are receiving large accessions from the west also. Buyers have been in Oregon and Washington Territory gathering up the best beeves, and some 25,000 head are now en route through Idaho Territory destined for the Laramie Plains. An Oregon paper before us contains the almost incredible statement that stock-men from the Delles of the Columbia have gathered herds of beef cattle aggregating 100,000 head from the bunch-grass region of Eastern Oregon and Washington Territory, and from Walla Walla and the Yakima and Snake River countries, which they will drive across the continent, many being held back on the Plains of Colorado, Wyoming, and Nebraska for good marketing, and others driven direct to Omaha.

It was considered something wonderful a few years ago when Texas was credited with 4,000,000 head of cattle. That State was looked upon as our beef supply for years to come; and the great Plains at that time counted as absolutely worthless for any purpose, were not looked upon as even the smallest factor in the matter of supplying the East and Europe with marketable cattle. But a great revolution has taken place even in a short time. The "long horns" still come up every season to be put into market, but the numbers arriving at Kansas City and Chicago from that source are decreasing year by year. The cattle grounds are being transferred to the great buffalo Plains, and the central portion of the continent, with the Pacific States, are becoming the leading producers of beef. An estimate derived from the assessment returns of this year gives Colorado, 550,000; Wyoming, 225,000; Utah, 350,000; Montana, 300,000; Washington, 200,000; Oregon, 175,000, and California, 650,000 cattle. This makes a

total of nearly 2,750,000 in herds, increasing rapidly, from which upward of 250,000 marketable beeves will be taken during the next three or four months into the markets east of the Missouri River.

But we have digressed from the main purpose of this letter, which was to give an account of this cattle-shipping point, Dodge City, and the interests which surround it. It is all bustling activity now, and a month hence it will be what the cow-boys call "red-hot" times. The place will be fairly hemmed in with herds, and the ample stock-yards provided by the railway company will scarcely answer the demands of shippers.

Somehow the agricultural interests seem always to be at enmity to the cattle business. The land in this vicinity has pretty much all been taken up for settlement during the past few years, and this Spring a very large area has been seeded down. Many farms are not fenced, and those that are can hardly withstand the determined assaults of the hungry Texas steer. So there is all the while a chance for quarrels between the farmer and herder. The farmers hereabout are complaining a good deal of the deprivations upon their crops made by the stock running at large; and at the next session of the Kansas Legislature a very strong petition will go in from Dodge City to have the "dead line" moved further west, at least as far as the State limits. Should such measure prevail, as seems highly probable, then another season may see West Los Animas the great shipping point. Hugo, on the Kansas Pacific, and Ogallala, on the Union Pacific, will be its prominent competitors for the cattle trade.

The cattle shippers complain a good deal of the high rates of transportation charged by railroad companies, and talk of driving their cattle to market if due concessions are not made. Last year the railroads got to "cutting," and that, of course, stopped all complaint. It was a good thing for the shippers. But the new combinations will serve the tariff pretty well up this season. In anticipation of it, stock-men are looking about to see what is best to be done. The local paper here, speaking on this subject, says:

"From a conversation with a leading stock man we learn that many of our larger owners of beef cattle are seriously considering the plan of driving instead of shipping to market this Fall. There are several considerations in favor of this method, the most important of which is the large saving made. A fair estimate of the freight, the shrinkage, and the bruised condition of beef delivered at Kansas City, is \$5 per head, and a liberal estimate of the expenses of driving to within 100 miles of Kansas City, places it at \$1 per head—and the cattle, if anything, in better condition than when they started. With such a difference as this it is to be wondered at that shipping is not altogether abandoned by those having large lots. Take 1,000 head as an example, two month's time for the drive, and 10 men to do the work. The cost of provisions, horse feed and the pay of the men will not exceed \$500 per month, or \$1,000 for the trip. Thus, counting all things, a saving of \$4,000 is effected, from which possible losses might be deducted and still a handsome balance remain. We are assured by the same authority that, though the high rates of transportation mainly force men to think of driving, yet it would be better for cattle producers to drive than ship, even if the railroads charged nothing. Looking at the matter from the producer's standpoint the cost of getting to market is everything, as while the market stands at a given figure, the transportation varies, and it goes into, or comes out of his pocket. For example, during the cutting last year all the saving on freight went to our people. The buyers came to our doors, and in their anxiety to take advantage of the low rates added somewhat of their gains to the prices. The issue promises to be either cut rates or a drive."