

The RANCHERS: Rise of the Cattle Industry

What is the CATTLE INDUSTRY?

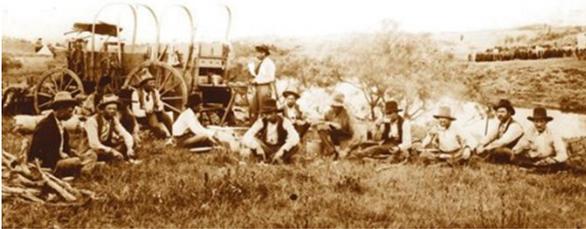
With the coming of the railroads on the Great Plains demand for beef soared in the rapidly growing cities of the East. Cattle purchased for \$3 to \$5 a head in Texas could be sold at a railhead, or shipping point, for \$30 to \$50 each.

What are the characteristics of THE LONG DRIVE?

The closest railheads to Texas were more than 1,000 miles to the north. Texans took their cattle on "long drives" across prairie country. As a result, new cattle towns sprang up in places such as Abilene and Dodge City, Kansas. The cattle boom was on.



Every spring, cattle ranchers would select the crews for the long drive. A rancher with 3,000 cattle would need about 18 men, a chuck wagon with a cook and a wrangler to look after extra horses. The long drive took two or three months to complete. Cattle moved at a pace of 20 to 25 miles a day.



What contributed to the CATTLE BOOM?

Railheads became busy cities. Before long, cattle ranchers expanded their grazing range. As the buffalo vanished, ranchers began grazing their cattle on the Great Plains. They allowed their cattle to run wild, identifying them with a distinctive brand. By 1880, nearly 5 million cattle grazed the Great Plains. The cattle business was the latest bonanza, the newest way to get rich quick. But not for long.

Where there CONFLICTS OVER LAND USE

As cattle multiplied, the plains became overgrazed and the grasses died. Ranchers quarreled over land and water rights, often violently, and cattle rustlers or thieves stole cows from the open herds. Conflict also arose between cattle and sheep ranchers. Cattlemen complained that sheep cropped the grass too close to the ground. With coming of barbed wire, ranchers and farmers began to string up fences.

What dame did NATURAL DISASTERS Cause?

The weather delivered the cruelest blow to ranchers. Two terrible winters whipped the plains and cattle froze to death. During the summer between these two winters, drought wiped out the prairie grasses. At least 80-90 % of the cattle died by the spring of 1887 and many ranchers were ruined.

How did the CATTLE INDUSTRY CHANGES?

Those ranchers that survived the natural disasters quickly realized the business had changed. With barbed wire, animals no longer roamed free. Ranchers bought and fenced land, drilled wells to guard against dry weather, and provided hay for cattle during tough winter months. One by one, small ranches were taken over by large corporations. Ranching remained an important activity in the West, but was now one more big business.

