

## How did the cattle industry develop? 1860s - 1870s

### Beginnings in Texas

Cattle, just like horses, were first brought to America by the European invaders. By the 1850s, southern Texas was the major centre for cattle farming. The Texas longhorns were a breed that had developed from the original Spanish imports. They were very hardy and could survive on the open range in Texas. Their one drawback was the relatively poor quality of their meat. In the 1850s beef became a popular food, and the Texan cattle ranchers became prosperous. Then came the American Civil War. Texas fought on the losing Confederate side. At the end of the war the Texans returned to their ranches to find their cattle herds had grown dramatically. It is estimated that in 1865 there were roughly five million cattle in Texas. Therefore, supply was totally outstripping demand in Texas and beef prices fell dramatically.



### The need for cattle drives.

Cattle were not worth much unless they could be sold. The only way to do this was to drive them to the markets in the eastern states. (The Eastern states had the biggest populations - here a cow could be sold for \$40+, back in Texas they were only worth \$5). In this regard, the Texans faced a major problem. Their Texas longhorns carried a disease called Texas fever, which was spread by the ticks that lived on cattle. Whenever they came into contact with other cattle, those cattle sickened and died. So if the Texans tried to drive their cattle north, they would be turned back by homesteaders afraid of the disease spreading to their animals.



## **Solution 1 - Find a New Market to sell Cattle to in the West - The Goodnight-Loving Trail**

One solution to this problem was pioneered by **Charles Goodnight**. In 1860 he had a herd of 180 cattle based in Texas. In 1865, when he returned from the Civil War, his herd had grown to 5000 cattle. In 1866 he and his partner, **Oliver Loving**, drive a herd to Fort Sumner, New Mexico. There the cattle were sold to feed the army in their forts and the Indians on their reservations. They could sell the cattle for four times as much as they would get in Texas. This began Goodnight's profitable career in the cattle industry. He establishes a trail to herd the cattle along. It later extends to meet up with the Union Pacific railway line

Therefore, the West rather than the East with the US army, the Indians on the reservations, and groups like the miners and the railroad builders, provided a good market for cattle. By 1870 the US government was buying 50-60,000 head of cattle a year to distribute as rations on the various Indian reservations.

## **Solution 2 - Development of Cow Towns by the railways**

The major market, however, was the millions of people who lived in the populous eastern states. So the problem remained: how could the Texans reach this market? The solution was provided by the railroads.

One man who saw how to exploit this development was a Chicago cattle dealer, **Joseph McCoy**. He was the man who created the cow town of **Abilene** in 1867. He bought land, built stock pens (places to keep the cattle until they were transported by train East) and advertised the town as a shipping point to all cattle breeders. The cattle were driven from Texas to Abilene and then shipped east on the railroad for slaughter and sale. There were great profits to be made from this. An animal worth \$5 in Texas could be sold for ten times that amount in Abilene. As the railroad moved further west across the Great Plains new cow towns, such as Dodge City and Newton, developed, and new trails were followed. In the peak years of cattle drives, 1867-95, near four million cattle passed through the cow towns. He became enormously rich. 3 million cattle were driven to Abilene to be loaded onto the railways and Abilene expanded rapidly.



Joseph McCoy (born in 1837 in Illinois, died 1915), the enterprising cattle dealer who developed Abilene.

How Do move herds of Cattle long distances across open ground to these new markets?

You need Cowboys!



Tasks:

- 1) Explain why after the Civil War the Texas cattle farmers (ranchers) needed to find new markets (customers) for their animals.
- 2) Why were the homesteaders on the Plains hostile to Texas Cattle being moved to market near their farms?
- 3) What solution did **Charles Goodnight and Oliver Loving** find to the problem of selling their cattle? Give a detailed answer to this question.
- 4) How was **Joseph McCoy's** solution different? What new innovation was he able to take advantage of?
- 5) Create a fact file on the life of a cowboy who worked on these cattle drives. Include:
  - Types of people who became cowboys
  - Dangers of the job
  - Roles of the different cowboys
  - Their clothing and equipment (and their purpose)
  - What happened at the end of a long cattle drive in the cow towns like Abilene.