

The Cattle Trails

Lesson Plan for 4th -7th Grades - Social Science and History

OBJECTIVES

The students will trace the development of the Texas cattle industry, beginning with the first trail drives of the 1850s, and the importance of cattle to Texas during and after the Civil War.

TEKS Requirements: 1 - A identify major era in Texas History; 6 A & B - identify significant events from Reconstruction through the 20th century; 13B - impact of free enterprise and supply & demand on Texas economy. 6 A& B- development of the cattle industry ; political, economic, and social impact of the cattle industry



OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

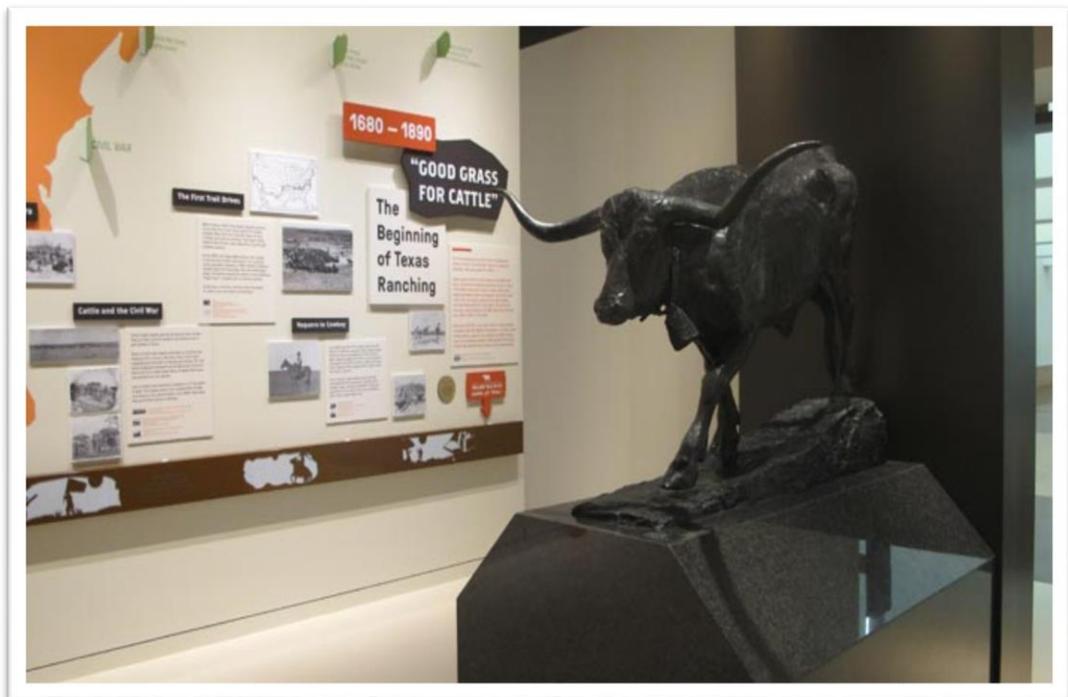
With the era of trail drives, beef was introduced to new markets across the country. A brief overview of how the Civil War affected ranchers and cattle; particularly how the longhorn roamed freely on the range and how this helped their population growth during the Civil War. After the war, *The Great Trail Driving Era* began, and the need for beef in the East caused the boom of the cattle industry.

Building Background

Ask the students if they can imagine taking a thousand cows up the highway, all the way from South Texas to Kansas. There are no cars and no actual roads - just dirt trails, the cows and horses.

VERIFICATION AND INTRODUCTION

How did Texans in the 1800's do this? Why was it done? And who did it? In the days before barbed wire fences, cattle roamed freely on the open range. Ranchers used specific routes, known as cattle trails, to move their animals from grazing lands to market. The most famous trails of the Great Plains ran from Texas northward to Kansas cowtowns or railheads.

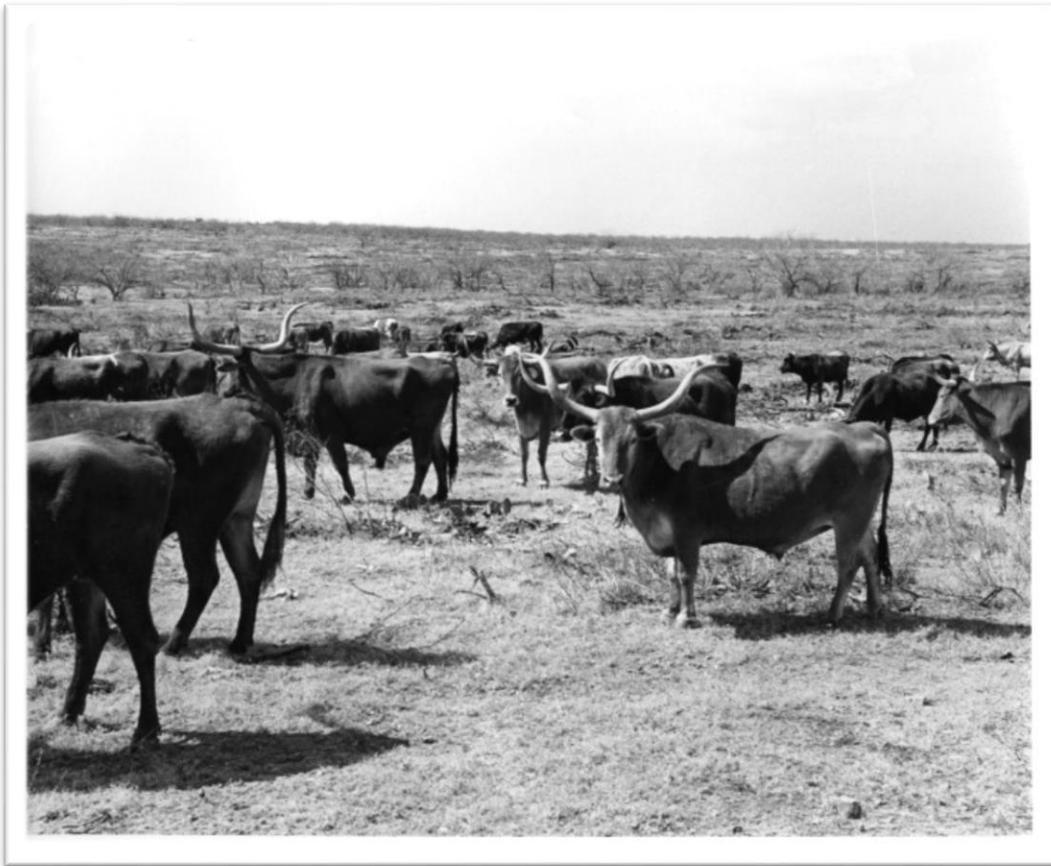


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Good Grass for Cattle: The Beginning of Texas Ranching

In the early 1530s, Cabeza de Vaca became the first European to see the interior of Texas. He wrote that

“All over the land are vast and handsome pastures, with good grass for cattle . . .”



Cattle came to Texas in the 1690s from Spain. By the 1730s, the south Texas missions owned large herds. There was vast open land and cattle had plenty of grass for grazing, which made Texas a great place to raise cattle. By the time American colonists arrived in Texas in the 1820s, there were large *ranchos* (Spanish for ranches), which hired expert horsemen, known as *vaqueros* to herd the wild cattle. The new Texans captured the native cattle and bred them with their own cattle. This produced the rangy, hardy longhorn. By 1860, there were almost four million cattle in the state.

Activity 1. Why was Texas a good place for Cattle?

Before famous cattle trails existed, Spanish ranchers drove cattle from south Texas overland to distant markets. In the late 1770s, Texas cattle were driven, or trailed, to places below the Rio Grande River and east to New Orleans.

In 1821, American colonists began arriving in Texas. Many of these pioneers took up ranching. In the 1850s, the Texas cattle industry did very well. They had new markets in frontier forts, Indian reservations, and a growing population. However, in 1853, farmers in Missouri blocked trails from Texas after their own cattle began dying. The farmers blamed the deaths on the mysterious “Texas Fever,” a disease with an unknown source.

As the years continued, ranchers drove two or three thousand cattle a year over trails in all directions.

Cattle and the Civil War

With the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, ranchers provided beef to Confederate armies in the East. However, in the summer of 1863, the Federal troops closed the Mississippi River to traffic and blocked cattle from crossing the river.



Texas ranches were left unattended as ranchers and cowboys left to serve in the army. As a result, many herds were neglected and attacked by thieves and Native American raids. Yet, the longhorns increased and by War’s end, Texas had over four million head. Many of these cattle were not branded and not claimed.

Cattle helped Texans survive during and after the War. They provided meat for soldiers and civilians both in and outside of Texas. Additionally, Union soldiers, who generally dined on pork before the War, developed a preference for the taste of the beef. This helped create new markets for beef after the War and drove up the price of cattle.

After the War, cattle saved many people in Texas from bankruptcy. A four -dollar Texas steer was worth forty dollars in Chicago. The challenge now was: **How to get them there?**

The Great Trail Driving Era

After the Civil War, some ranchers in Texas immediately drove cattle to nearby markets. Markets in Mexico and Louisiana were popular and the ranchers made good profits. Others tried the Shawnee Trail to reach the railroad in Sedalia, Missouri. This journey was difficult because the Missouri farmers did not want the cattle damaging their land or crops as they traveled. The farmers would make it difficult for the drovers to continue their drive. Still,

more than 200,000 head left Texas in 1866, the most ever.



In 1867, Illinois cattle buyer Joseph G. McCoy encouraged Texas cattlemen to drive north up the Chisholm Trail to a new railhead at Abilene, Kansas. He also was able to get Illinois to reduce its restriction on Texas cattle due to Texas Fever. Because of this, more than 1.5 million head of cattle were driven to Abilene, Kansas, or other Kansas cowtowns.

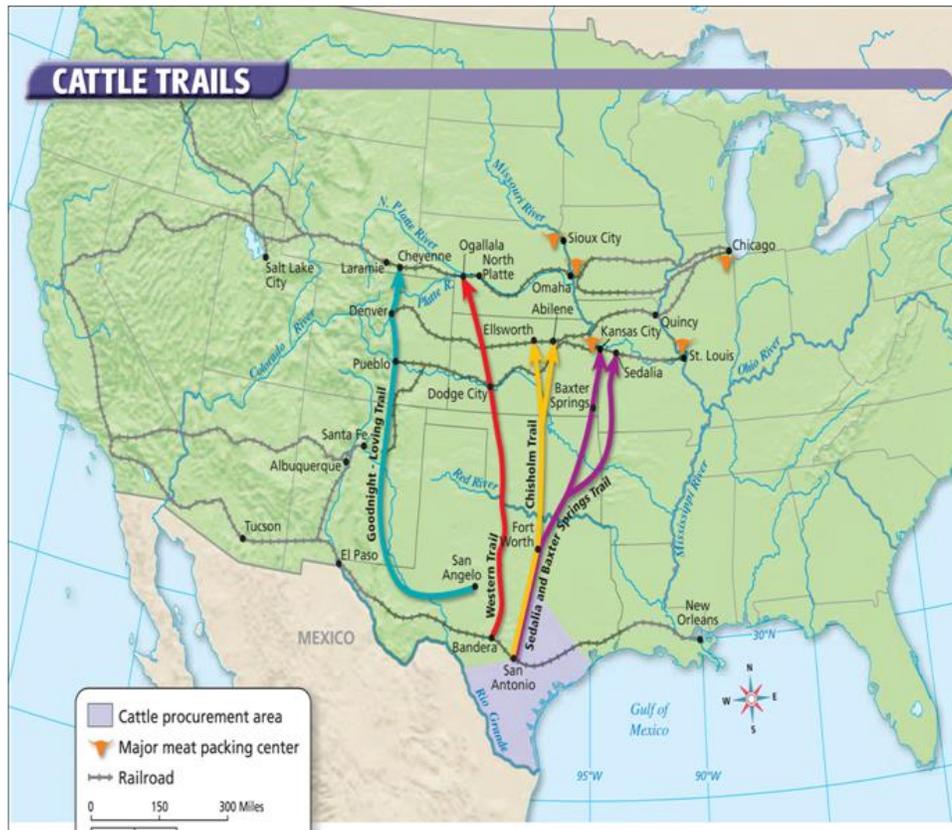
There were renewed quarantines on Texas cattle in eastern Kansas in 1873. So, many Texas cattle drovers used the new Western Trail to Dodge City, Kansas, or farther north. However, when the railroad arrived in Texas in 1873, cattle trailing began to decline. When ranchers in West Texas

began to enclose their ranges, trailing declined even more because cattle could not travel as freely.

Activity 2. Name two states that had cattle transported to the railroads:

1. _____
2. _____

Although there were several trails that ranchers followed, these four became the major routes to cattle markets before and after the Civil War.



1. **The Shawnee Trail** : One of the oldest trails, the Shawnee, or Sedalia Trail, saw drives as early as 1840. From south Texas, it followed an ancient bison migration route along modern Interstate 35 through Austin, Waco, and Dallas. This trail was closed to cattle in 1867 to prevent the spread of Texas Fever.
2. **The Chisholm Trail**: Active between 1864 and 1884, Chisholm was the most traveled trail. Its branches stretched from south Texas through Fort Worth to rail yards in Abilene, Ellsworth, and Wichita, Kansas. Texas “Cattle Queen” Lizzie Johnson drove her herd of cattle along this trail in 1871.
3. **The Goodnight-Loving Trail**: The most dangerous of the routes, this trail was named for ranchers Charles Goodnight and Oliver Loving. In 1866 they drove their first herd more than 700 miles through unsettled country over the Butterfield Trail

through Castle Gap to the Pecos River, then north into New Mexico. On their second drive, in 1867, Loving was wounded by Comanches. He made it to Fort Sumner, where he died. After delivering the cattle, Loving's body was returned to Texas, a tale that inspired Larry McMurtry's book, *Lonesome Dove*.

4. **The Western Trail:** The Western Trail was used from 1874 to 1893. It ran from south Texas as far north as Montana and the Dakota Territories. Fort Worth resident Captain John T. Lytle blazed the trail in 1874. Lytle was also an important and active member of the organization that became the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association (TSCRA).

The herders, or drovers, were former slaves, vaqueros, ex-soldiers and other young men and sometimes women. These people would begin to form the identity known today as the Texas cowboy. By 1890, much of the land in Texas was being used for ranching and it was the leading industry in the state. Please see our Lesson Plan: *Life on the Trail* to learn more about Cowboys.

“Protecting the Interest of All Concerned:” The Cattle Raisers Organize

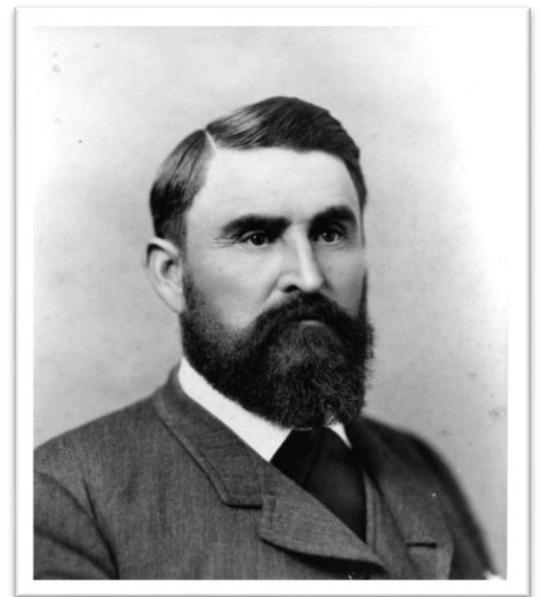
In 1876, when cattle prices were rising, **there was theft, known as *rustling***, especially in North Texas. In December of 1876, ranchers C.C. Slaughter, C.L. “Kit” Carter, and J.C. Loving met at Slaughter's ranch at Dillingham Prairie in Jack County. They decided to issue a call for cattlemen to gather at Graham, Texas in February 1877.

The group called itself the Northwest Texas Cattle Raisers Association. The organization soon created a special division of law enforcement and later, brand inspectors. These men protected members from theft. In 1892, it changed its name to the Cattle Raisers Association of Texas.

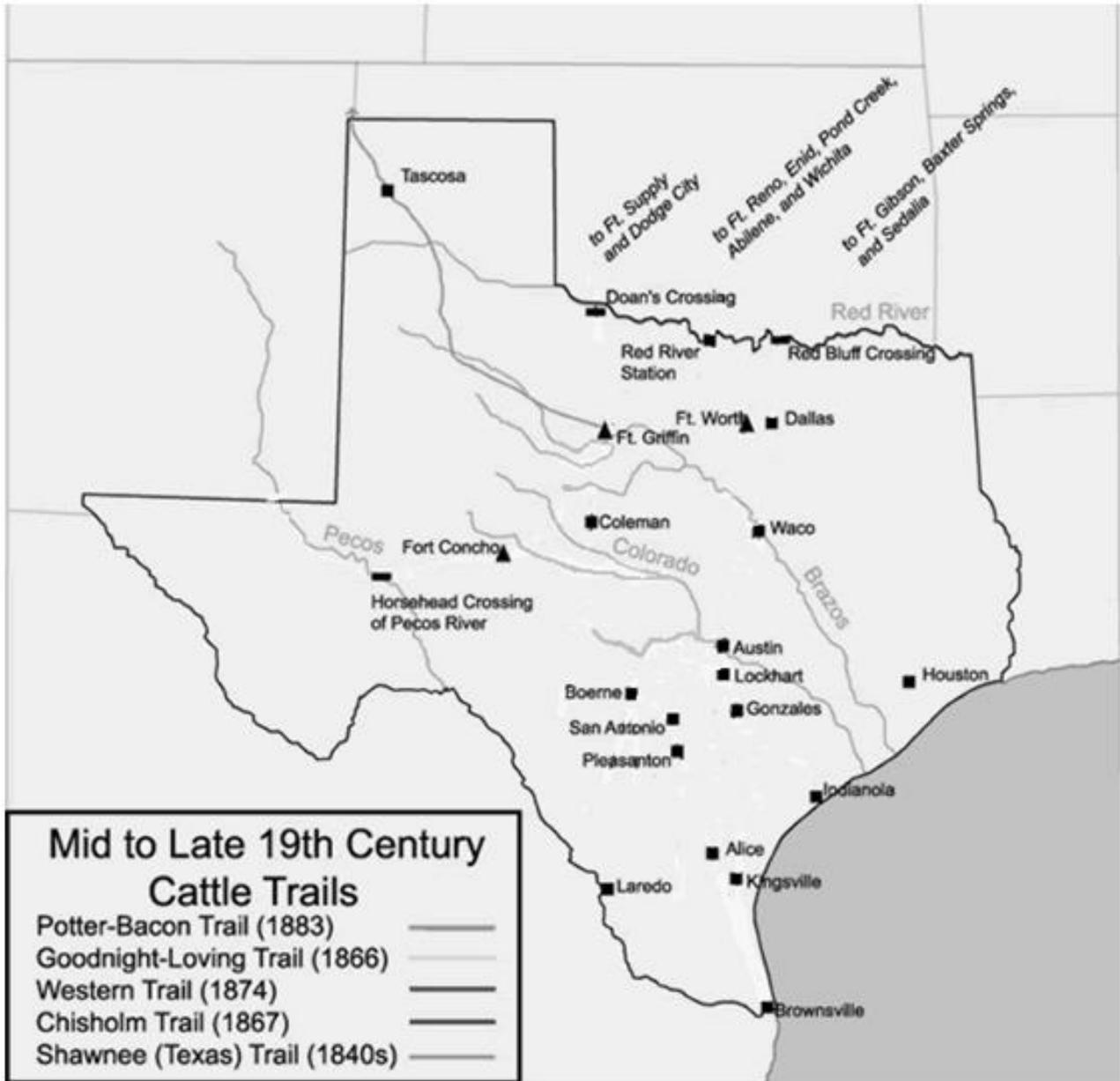
Charles Goodnight (*seen in the picture*) led the creation of a similar organization, the Panhandle Stockmen's Association in 1880. They formed in Mobeetie, Texas, and changed their name to the Panhandle and Southwestern Stockmen's Association in 1912. However, in 1921, the Panhandle and Southwestern



group merged with the Texas Cattle Raisers, becoming the present-day **Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association (TSCRA)**.



Activity 3 .Use different colored pencils to show each trail on the given blank map (Chisholm, Shawnee, Western and Goodnight-loving).



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