

CHAPTER VIII

THE CATTLE INDUSTRY.

(Again addressing the mythical character supposed to have lived on the site of the Weld County Court House since 1492)

Many times along in the 1850s and '60s, from your tent on the site of the Weld County Court House, you noticed that the animals that roamed the prairies were changing shape; the heavy-fronted forms that had always been here were giving way to animals of another shape, more symmetrical in form though still far from graceful, indicating that wide-spreading, sharp-pointed horns were coming into fashion.

However, this was not simply a change in fashion, nor yet the work of evolution; but it was because a change of conditions was taking place and the animals suited to the new conditions were coming on while those of the old were passing away. To the Indian who was passing belonged the buffalo, to the white man who was coming, the cattle. The buffalo furnished the Indian food, clothing and shelter; but the white man slew the buffalo as one means of getting rid of the Indian. Then the Indian, still believing he had a right to live and some kind of a claim to the land of his birth, resented this and the conflict was on. Year by year the Indian and his buffalo lost ground and the white man and his long-horned ranger gained, until by the end of the 1860s you hardly ever saw a buffalo, but the Texas ranger swarmed all over the prairie.

The cattle industry had not the distinction, as had agriculture later, of making two blades of grass to grow where but one had grown before, but it did produce vast fortunes as measured in money; much more, it is claimed, than has ever been produced since. A well known Greeley cattle-man who was in the game in the late '60s is authority for the astounding statement that during the heyday of the industry more money passed through the money-changing channels in Cheyenne, the financial center of this region, than through any town *in the world* except the great gambling capitol, Monte Carlo.

However, not all that great wealth belonged to the people

of this region, nor was it all spent here; on the contrary most of it left this country altogether and found its way into the coffers of big foreign stockholders. It is true that a number of our own citizens built up great fortunes from the cattle business, but it is also true that the stock-holders of some of the biggest companies operating here lived in England, France, Germany, Ireland and Scotland and had never set foot on American soil.

It is impossible at this late date to give definite figures as to the actual vastness of even the American fortunes produced, but there are still some sign-boards to be found that point back to big things. For instance:

From the fortune of John W. Iliff, who did not live to carry on the business many years, the great Iliff Theological School in Denver was built and endowed; the Ernst & Cranmer Building on Seventeenth street, whose massive granite walls defy the hand of time, and many others owe their origin to the cattle industry. And it is probably not too much to say that in its first up-building Denver owed more to the cattle business than to mining or any other industry. It can also be said that many of the finest residences that have ever graced the town of Greeley were built by the cattlemen. So it is a pretty safe statement to make, that, considering the length of time it held sway, the amount of capital invested and the labor involved, the cattle industry holds the record as a money maker.

The area over which the cattle of the early day ranged embraced not only Weld county, though Weld was then the entire northeast corner of the state, but swept on north and south and east, crossing the Arkansas River south and the Platte north and reaching eastward into Nebraska as far as Sidney.

From Eugene Williams, W. H. Delbridge and S. N. Moses the following information was obtained pertaining to the cattlemen and the brands used to designate their herds:

John W. Iliff, generally conceded the leader, with a herd never below 50,000 and often reaching above 60,000, had for his brand a combination of the letters "L" and "F", almost forming the name of Iliff.

J. L. Brush used a combination of "J" and "B".

THE CATTLE INDUSTRY

Bruce F. Johnson had the number "22".

Wyatt Brothers that of "33".

Asa Sterling called his brand "The Half Circle Six"; it was formed by the figure "6" with a half circle above it.

W. H. Delbridge had a combination of "P V P", the three letters being joined together in one with "V" in the center and the "P" on one side turned left instead of right.

Williams & Macrum had the figure "70".

The Igo Brothers had a different arrangement of the same figures, a "7" with a circle "0" beneath.

The East Hampton Stock Co. had "131".

The Ernst & Cranmer was the picture of a mill iron.

The Gale Brothers, J. O., Ed, Dave and Jesse, had "P.O."

These brands were copied from the Official Register of the Cattlemen's Association in the possession of W. H. Delbridge.

WHAT THE CATTLE WERE AS TO BREED, AND WHERE THEY CAME FROM

Almost all cattle forming these vast herds were the Texas longhorns and came from Texas. They were generally delivered by their original owners to their Colorado owners at Ogalalla, a small town on the Union Pacific railroad in western Nebraska just over the Colorado line. The average price paid was \$6 a head. The most profitable system was to buy yearlings at that price, hold them on the open range at almost no cost for one or two years, then ship to Chicago where the average selling price would be about \$30. It was not unusual for a shipper to return from Chicago with a roll of \$30,000.

True there were some losses. "Cattle-rustling" was an illegitimate branch of the industry that owners were never fully able to control. Brands sometimes grew dim and could be changed, and the rustling fraternity had no conscientious scruples against so doing, boldly claiming the cattle. Also cattle sometimes wandered so far away that they were never found, or, if found, not identified. Severe storms and short food of hard winters also took a toll. But all in all, losses were small in comparison with profits.

One big loss which had a tremendous effect upon the business and is still vividly remembered by descendants of the cattlemen, occurred during the closing years of the business and doubtless had much to do with its closing. It is spoken of now as the "trimming" the cattlemen received at the hands of what would today be called a band of gangsters, but then went under the respectable and safe sounding name of "The American Beef & Cattle Company."

This shrewd gang played a game worthy of the shrewdest gangsters of today, and stripped the Colorado cattlemen so skillfully that no recourse to law was left to them. This was the trouble that, added to the many other troubles by that time accumulated, led to a general migration of the herds into Wyoming, northwestern Nebraska, the Dakotas and Montana. Agriculture which began in the late '60s and early '70s as a small annoyance, assumed such proportions by the end of the '70s that it would have driven out the cattle business even without the "trimming"; and so, as a great wealth producer, the cattle industry, at this point passes from the history of Weld county. But in the interesting story of Gene Williams, under the title of "The Cowboy", found among the Pioneer stories in Vol. II, will be revealed a more intimate "close-up" of the business and the lives of those connected with it.

THE CATTLE INDUSTRY IN ITS LATER PHASES.

It would not be correct to leave the industry here, as though it ended in the late '70s, leaving no trace to carry over into later years. In truth it is still in existence, though changed. Changing conditions and developments have acted upon it and it has responded with change.

The coming of agriculture with its fences and ditches effected its decline more than any other one cause, but, transversely, also brought about its re-establishment in a changed form. In the course of time—in the 1900s—sugar beets became a prominent agricultural development, and it was soon found that the pulp of the beets and other by-products were good for cattle, especially in the production of milk. Now the great herd has

THE CATTLE INDUSTRY

given way to the small herd, the Texas long-horn to the Jersey, the Holstein and the Guernsey, and again the Cattle Industry, changed to the Dairy Business, takes first rank among the industries of the state.

But not only as dairying but also as beef is the industry still important in Weld, and what used to be Weld county. The T. C. Harris Co., over in Logan, is said to have fed as high as 5,000 cattle in one year. (This from the History of Logan County.) And the Great Western Sugar Company in almost any year is said, by the same authority, to feed as many as 500 on their own lots.

This change, in turn, effects agriculture. It makes fertilizer more easily available and creates a steady market for corn. One feeder in Logan is reported as using 5,000 bushels in a single year.

Thus the cattle industry in its changed form is, according to the best statistics, one of the three industries that holds Weld at the head of the counties of Colorado. But—here is—

A PROPHECY OF THE FUTURE:

In view of the development of national measures now on the way as this History goes to press, early in 1938, it is not hard to envision the opening of the prairies of Weld again to the cattlemen. Already is under way the purchasing by the government of many acres of dry farming lands in the eastern and northeastern parts of the county, classified as unprofitable for agriculture, and it seems a good safe prophecy that the picturesque longhorned Texan or his descendants may soon be invited to return. It is a little too early to make sure of that point, but all indications point that way. However, with the Grand Lake-Big Thompson Diversion waters also looming for a certainty, there will still be enough rich farming lands to continue to hold Weld county at the head of the state agriculturally.