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## Article Title: Early Nebraska Markets for Texas Cattle (Part I)

Full Citation: Norbert R Mahnken, "Early Nebraska Markets for Texas Cattle (Part I)," *Nebraska History* 26 (1945): 3-25

URL of article: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1945TXCattleONE.pdf>

Date: 7/18/2017

Article Summary: Longhorn cattle driven north from Texas on their way to feeders in Iowa and Illinois led to the short-term creation of Nebraska "cowtowns." This cattle industry based on the transfer of imported stock flourished, then collapsed. Eventually cattle ranching became a basis of the state's economy.

See also the second part of this article:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1945TXCattleTWO.pdf>

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### Cataloging Information:

Names: J P Williams, William N Fant, J T Clarkson, Edward Creighton

Place Names: Nebraska City, Omaha, Brownville, Plattsmouth, Schuyler, and Columbus, Nebraska; Sedalia, Missouri; Abilene, Kansas; Chicago, Illinois

Keywords: longhorns, Civil War, Bushwhackers, Jayhawkers, Texas fever, Indians, oxen, Blue Valley Trail, Union Pacific Railroad, Burlington Railroad

Photographs / Images: a drove of Texas longhorns

# Early Nebraska Markets for Texas Cattle\*

NORBERT R. MAHNKEN

Immediately following the Civil War Texas longhorn cattle, colorful and cantankerous, began arriving in Nebraska. From 1866 onward herds of these wild, long-legged, long-bodied cattle arrived in ever-increasing numbers, giving brief and fleeting prominence to a number of Nebraska towns which could correctly be called "cowtowns." Before yielding the field to their blooded successors the longhorns had laid the foundation of an industry which grew in the 1870's, boomed in the 1880's, collapsed in 1886-1887, and subsequently re-emerged in modified form as an integral part of the state's economic life.

The first noteworthy appearance in Nebraska of the multi-colored longhorn herds from Texas was made in 1866. The herds which arrived in Nebraska, usually while on their way to feeders in Iowa and Illinois, were part of the 260,000 longhorns which Texas drovers had headed northward that year in hope of recouping fortunes lost during the years of the Civil War.

To the Texan interested in northern markets for cattle, conditions seemed favorable indeed. The supply of cattle in Texas was plentiful, so plentiful that in some areas many a returning Confederate veteran found himself "cattle poor." At the same time the demand for cattle and for beef in the northern states had reached a new high after four years of war. Military needs for beef had made heavy inroads on the number of cattle still on the farms in the north. A scarcity of agricultural labor and the general adoption of labor-

\* The second half of this article will appear in our next issue.

saving machinery which led many farmers in the states of the Old Northwest to center their attention on grain-growing had also contributed to an acute shortage of cattle in northern feedlots.

Contemplating these facts the Texas cattlemen hardly could escape drawing the conclusion that it would be a highly profitable venture to gather a herd of several hundred cattle at the prevailing prices of \$3 to \$5 per head and dispose of them "up north" at prices rumored to reach \$30 or \$40 per head in greenbacks, slightly less in cold cash. The trail to Missouri was one which was relatively well defined, as numerous Texans had driven herds to Missouri and Illinois during the pre-war years. So plans were carefully drawn up to deliver the longhorns in Missouri, particularly in Sedalia, which was believed to be the most accessible point on the Missouri Pacific Railroad. In the spring of 1866 many a drover began the long drive, firmly convinced that the undertaking would prove profitable and not too arduous.

But the Texans had not reckoned all, and their plans to deliver cattle in Missouri in great numbers were due for a sudden change, a change which brought them and their wild Texas cattle into Nebraska territory in 1866. The drives through Missouri and southeastern Kansas had proven unprofitable and dangerous due to the combined hostility of embattled farmers and renegade Kansas Jayhawkers and Missouri Bushwhackers.

The opposition of the farmers in the Tri-State area was well justified. It arose out of fear, based on previous experience, that after the herds of longhorns had passed there would remain only trampled crops and the dreaded Texas fever which lingered to weaken and kill off the native cattle. Accordingly, with threats, readied guns, and inspection laws adopted by the state legislatures, the farmers of this area sought to bar the passage and turn back the invading herds.

Discouraging as it was, the hostile attitude of the farmer troubled the trail drivers far less than the thieving and

murderous activity of Bushwhackers and Jayhawkers. These undisciplined guerrillas, after the close of the Civil War, had found themselves without any easy means of self-support until the cattle herds from Texas began to arrive in the summer of 1866. Expediently assuming the guise of pious and peaceful farmers, these lawless elements harassed the Texans by ordering them to change their course, and by stampeding the herds and driving off sizable numbers of choice beeves.<sup>1</sup> Many a trail boss upon reaching the border of southeastern Kansas found himself accosted by such a group of hard-eyed riders who sternly warned against attempting to pass that way—all the while punctuating their remarks with flourishes of rifles and revolvers. At times tempers flared, revolvers barked, and cowboy and outlaw alike were left in nameless graves, but the Texans, outnumbered and knowing the consequences of hasty action for themselves and their charges, generally turned aside and sought another route to the markets. Cattle by the thousands could be found grazing on the plains and hills south of Baxter Springs, Kansas, during the summer months of 1866. While sitting around the chuckwagon here many a restless and worried trail boss decided that rather than fight through to Sedalia he would blaze an alternative route northward along the western fringe of settlement in Kansas, and hope to find more hospitable markets farther north. Eventually many of these drovers found themselves moving eastward across Nebraska and northern Kansas and crossing the Missouri River at St. Joseph, Nebraska City, or Brownville before delivering their herds to new owners.

One of the earliest accounts of the long drive northward still extant is the diary of George Duffield. In 1866 he drove a herd of cattle from central Texas to Ottumwa, Iowa.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Hunter, *Trail Drivers of Texas*, Vol. II, 38, & 138 gives experiences of drivers passing through this area.

<sup>2</sup> Diary published in *Annals of Iowa*, Third Series, XIV, 246-262.

experiences and tribulations of this trail outfit were typical of many during that season—a succession of storms, stampedes, chuckwagons damaged, swollen rivers to be crossed, hands falling ill, and trouble with settlers in Kansas and Nebraska. Driven off the Shawnee Indian reservation and fearing the troubled conditions in Southwestern Missouri, Duffield and his associates turned their cattle westward and skirted the western fringe of the Kansas settlements. After crossing the Kaw River near St. Mary's, the drovers passed near the northern Kansas villages of America and Seneca and then continued due north into Nebraska, past Table Rock, and on to Nebraska City. Here men and cattle were rested, then ferried across the river into Iowa. Other outfits preceded and followed that of Duffield along the same long trail. The river town of Nebraska City, at that time a bustling point of departure for the many wagon trains headed westward, took on added life whenever a group of Texas cowboys spent an evening in town. Occasionally, pent up exuberance found an outlet in "shooting up the town" and led to vigorous complaint on the part of the more sedate citizens. The editor of the Nebraska City *Statesman*, noting that there had "been a good deal of it (shooting in the streets) lately, more than usual" reminded his readers that the city ordinance forbade the practice, and that it would be "easier and cheaper to keep firearms quiet and out of sight than to pay a heavy fine."<sup>3</sup> No lives appear to have been lost as a result of this gunplay, however, and after the last drives of that autumn and the decline of the overland freighting business the town quickly settled down to a more peaceful existence.

From several other points along the Missouri River Texas cattle were also ferried to Iowa in considerable numbers. At Brownville a new steam ferry, the *Idona*, was put into operation early in August, 1866. Several weeks later the local editor, with justifiable civic pride, announced that upwards of 4000

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<sup>3</sup> Nebraska City *Statesman*, July 21, 1866.

cattle had been ferried across the river.<sup>4</sup> Part of these were native stock while the remainder were Texas cattle driven up through Kansas. Throughout September and October additional herds crossed the river at this point before an early winter forced the ferry to cease operating.

No exact estimate is available of the number of Texas cattle which passed through Nebraska territory in 1866. Considering the cattle driven through the state to Iowa and Illinois as well as those few sold to Nebraska feeders and those delivered to the various Indian agencies, one can say that a conservative estimate would place the total number at approximately 15,000 head.

The appearance of these longhorn cattle was certain to cause apprehension among the settlers. Nebraska's frontier farmers, whose life was a constant struggle against threatening starvation, could not afford to have their small acreage of crops trampled, or to lose either work oxen or milk cows to diseases introduced by the Texas cattle. As it happened, the dreaded Texas fever broke out in several localities and the fear that the disease might spread and reach epidemic proportions led to a demand that the importation of Texas cattle be restricted. When Governor David Butler called a special session of the Nebraska Legislature to meet in May, 1867, he took cognizance of this demand and included in his legislative program a request for a law to provide for "the regulation of the transit of Texas or other foreign cattle over the state."<sup>5</sup> The lawmakers proved amenable to the suggestion and a law was adopted which provided that "no person . . . shall drive any diseased . . . cattle affected with any contagious or infectious disease through this state."<sup>6</sup> In addition to this restrictive legislation, other laws were adopted at the same time which prohibited the running at large of stock in certain

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<sup>4</sup> Brownville, *Advertiser*, September 13, 1866.

<sup>5</sup> Nebraska *Laws*, 1867, p. 33.

<sup>6</sup> Nebraska *Laws*, 1867, p. 74.

of the more populous communities,<sup>7</sup> measures which were directed not only against the Texans, but against careless settlers as well. This series of laws of 1867, if enforced, might have prevented any future drives of Texas cattle through Nebraska and certainly would have eliminated the state as a major market for the Texas cattle. The future was to reveal, however, that the laws would not be too vigorously enforced, the drives into the state would continue, and at a later date additional restrictive measures would be demanded by the Nebraska frontier settlers.

When winter fell in 1866 the Texas drovers discovered upon summing up their efforts for the summer that the drives of that year had been generally unprofitable and discouraging. Losses to Indians and thieves had been heavy, prices were poor and buyers were reluctant to purchase poor grade Texas cattle and risk the possible loss of their native stock due to Texas fever.

The failure of the drives of 1866 is most convincingly attested to by the fact that the number of cattle driven northward from Texas fell from 260,000 in 1866 to a mere 35,000 in 1867, even though shipping facilities were constructed during the latter year on the Kansas Pacific Railroad at Abilene. Only 75,000 cattle reached northern markets in 1868 in spite of widespread and noisy publicity throughout Texas by Joseph McCoy and his associates at Abilene. In the next year, 1869, some 150,000 longhorns made their way to Abilene and other northern markets, ample evidence that the drives of the previous season had once again proven profitable and that the Texas drovers had become convinced that the Chisholm Trail through the heart of the Indian territory and central Kansas was less arduous than the earlier Baxter Springs route.

The number of Texas cattle driven through Nebraska from 1867 to 1869 reflected the general decline in the number of herds on the trail during those years. During these seasons

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 138-142.

virtually all of the longhorns were marketed at Abilene, where the drovers knew that both shipping facilities and buyers were to be found. Still the frontier newspapers, such as the *Nebraska City News* during these years did chronicle the passage of herds of Texas cattle from time to time.<sup>8</sup> During 1867 most of these cattle still were destined for feeders in Iowa or Illinois. Several hundred head, however, after being fed and rested near Nebraska City were driven westward to Salt Lake City and other points along the overland trail. Here they were used both for food and as draft oxen. Bold indeed was the soul that would ornament these wild critters with a yoke. Out of the clash of wills of the wild and intransigent bullwhacker and the equally wild longhorn was certain to emerge that collection of sulphurous oaths which made the driver on the wagon trains of that day the most thoroughly profane individual on the frontier.

From 1867 to 1869 sale of Texas cattle to government contractors for distribution to the Indians along the Missouri River constituted the most important single market for such cattle in Nebraska. Though the volume of cattle sales for this market never reached gigantic proportions, the trade was extremely profitable and government contracts were eagerly sought. Several thousand Texas cattle were driven through Nebraska's eastern counties during the summer and fall of 1867 destined for the Winnebago and Omaha Indians on their reservations along the Missouri. One widely-known figure of those early days on the trail, R. D. Hunter, drove twelve hundred head of cattle from Texas to Omaha, where he sold them to government contractors at a "snug profit."<sup>9</sup> During June, 1867, J. P. Williams of Topeka, Kansas, was awarded a contract to furnish 1,030 cattle, at \$33.33 per head, for the various Indian tribes.<sup>10</sup> This price, at a time when choice

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<sup>8</sup> *Nebraska City News*, July 19, September 6, 1867.

<sup>9</sup> McCoy, *Cattle Trade of West and Southwest*, 34.

<sup>10</sup> *Nebraska City News*, June 5, 1867.



beeves of their kind could still be purchased in Texas at \$5 to \$7 per head, and when the top price for choice 1000 lb. animals at Abilene was \$28, indicated just how much profit there was in supplying government contractors.

Much interest was centered on the Williams contract. It stipulated that of the cattle to be furnished 1000 were to be "milk cows of good quality" and "30 bulls." These were to be used for stocking the various reservations, it being the fond hope of well-meaning Indian Bureau officials that with these cattle as a nucleus, sizable herds could be built up on each reservation. The fervent hope of these planners was that the reservations would thereby become self-sufficient in food, and that the interest of the Indians would be directed to productive agricultural pursuits.

It was with considerable anticipation, therefore, that the various agents of the tribes located on the Missouri awaited the delivery by Williams of these stock cattle. Ultimately the Winnebago and the Santee Sioux each received 300 head, approximately the same number was delivered to the Yankton Sioux Agency in Dakota Territory, while the remaining 100 head were turned over to the Omaha tribe. The agents of these respective tribes reported that the cattle were delivered late in 1867, noted that they appeared to be "of good stock"<sup>11</sup> (actually they were Texas cattle in poor flesh after the long drive up the trail) and expressed the belief that barring the unforeseen the tribes within a year or two should be able to supply all the cattle they needed both for work oxen and for meat.

When these same agents submitted their reports the following summer it was clearly revealed how visionary these idealistic plans drawn up in Washington had been. Every agent expressed disappointment at the results of the project and reported "great losses" among the agency cattle. It could

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<sup>11</sup> Report of Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1867, p. 261.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

hardly have been otherwise. The Texas cattle, delivered foot-sore and in poor condition,<sup>13</sup> had succumbed in droves to the rigors of a harsh winter to which they were not accustomed. Supplies of hay and feed had proved inadequate, at times inaccessible, and hunger as well as cold took its toll of longhorns. Hungry Indians killed many more. At the end of the long winter, losses among the cattle averaged 40% to 50% of the original number.<sup>14</sup> Thus ended in despair and disappointment one of the earliest ventures in cattle raising within Nebraska. The Indian agents and farmers learned those basic prerequisites for successful range operation which many another Nebraska pioneer cattlemen was to discover after similar bitter experiences.

In addition to the longhorns furnished by Williams, Texas cattle in smaller numbers were also turned over to the Indian agents as "work oxen"—to the intense disgust of the harried agents who damned them as "wild, unmanageable, and dangerous to have on the agency."<sup>15</sup> Far more cattle were delivered for the "beef kills" at the various agencies, for treaties as well as moral obligations required that beef in varying amounts be furnished to the tribes located in Nebraska. Almost without exception Texas cattle were used to fill the contracts for subsistence for the Indians and these contracts created the only noteworthy demand in Nebraska for Texas cattle during the years 1867-1869.

The number of cattle required to fill these contracts varied from year to year. Factors such as the weather, the amount of corn harvested on each reservation, the success of the buffalo hunts, and the interest and energy of the individual Indian agent determined the total annual issue. The basic allowance of fresh beef for each Indian was about one-half pound per day. The Winnebago were issued this amount

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 647.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 1869, p. 309.

during 1867-1868 and it seems likely that the other Nebraska tribes, except for the Pawnee whose buffalo hunts were unusually successful that year, received about the same rations. The other tribes located in Nebraska were not so fortunate as the Pawnee. The crops of the Santee Sioux had vanished with the swarms of grasshoppers that swept down on the reservation in August of that year. The Otoe, numerically small and weak, had been frightened from their hunting grounds on the Republican by hostile Sioux and had returned empty-handed and destitute. The other tribes, the Winnebago, the Omaha, and the Sac and Fox of the Nemaha agency likewise were in need of assistance. All in all, approximately 875,000 pounds of fresh beef were used to furnish subsistence to the 4850<sup>16</sup> tribesmen on Nebraska reservations during 1867. Virtually the same amount of beef, requiring some 1000 head of longhorns, was provided in 1868, when drought and grasshoppers had again sharply reduced the grain harvest.

There was a sharp increase in the subsistence furnished the tribes in Nebraska during 1869. Wearily the Indian agents again reported the monotonous tale of unfavorable growing season and inadequate crops. Nor did the advent of winter find the usual supply of buffalo meat in the lodges and tepees. Troublesome Sioux tribesmen were responsible. Up and down the Republican and Platte valleys, the favorite hunting grounds of the Nebraska tribes, U. S. troops were in constant pursuit of one band or another of plundering Sioux. Because of the unsettled conditions in the area, Maj. Gen. C. C. Augur, military commandant of the district, forbade the Indians to leave their reservations for the buffalo hunts. Immediately thereafter it was necessary to increase the rations on every reservation, and even the Pawnee, now numbering about 2500, were furnished subsistence. Nearly 1,200,000 pounds of beef were issued during 1869, requiring some 1500 Texas longhorns averaging about 800 pounds per head. Thus, during the years

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<sup>16</sup> This figure does not include the 3000 Pawnee.

1867 to 1869 between 2000 and 2500 head of cattle were furnished annually by contractors for distribution to Nebraska Indians for food, for stock cattle, or at times for work oxen. The number gradually declined after 1870 when once the tribal lands of the Omaha, Winnebago, and Santee Sioux were divided, and the Pawnee removed in a body to Indian territory. The preeminent position of the Indian trade as the chief market in Nebraska for Texas cattle was gradually being lost.

During 1868 Texas fever again made its appearance in several areas in Nebraska, and an insistent demand arose for revision of the laws regulating the passage of Texas cattle. The earlier law which forbade the driving through of diseased cattle had proven inadequate. Texas cattle, themselves in good health and seemingly immune from the disease, none-the-less could and did spread the fever among native stock. It seemed that some measure prohibiting the entry of Texas cattle during those summer months in which the disease spread most rapidly was needed. This was the intent of legislation enacted by the state legislature in February, 1869. Thereafter it was unlawful to bring Texas or Cherokee cattle into the state during July and August.<sup>17</sup> This short-lived law (it was repealed in 1871)<sup>18</sup> was in most areas enforced with indifferent success. Yet there were some trail drivers who found that county officials enforcing the law stopped the herds at the Kansas-Nebraska border. In those cases there was no alternative left the drovers but to graze the cattle on the lush prairie grasses until the September deadline was past. The most far-reaching effect of the legislation was to shift the drives through Nebraska two tiers of counties farther west. As was to be expected, this prohibitory legislation was most vigorously enforced in the more heavily populated eastern counties through which the Texans had driven their herds in 1866 and 1867.

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<sup>17</sup> Nebraska *Laws*, 1869, p. 249.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 1871, p. 129.

Another route over which to deliver the longhorns to Nebraska, Iowa, and Minnesota buyers had to be sought and found in 1869. That route, which during 1870 was to become a major cattle highway, led from Abilene north and slightly east, striking the Blue River just below the forks. From here the trail followed the fertile valleys of the Big Blue through Gage, Saline, and Seward counties. Several drovers crossed the Platte, turned to the east, and marketed their herds in Omaha, or crossed over into Iowa. Others continued northward and delivered their cattle to contractors near the Indian agencies. For drovers supplying the northern markets, the Blue Valley Trail was an ideal route, leading as it did almost straight north and furnishing ample supplies of vegetation and water unaccompanied by the hazards of broken country or densely wooded tracts which at times discouraged drovers from following a river route. Early pioneers of Seward county agree that it was during 1869 that this route came into general use,<sup>19</sup> and that it was in this year when first they made their acquaintance with that wondrous "critter," the Texas longhorn. By the end of the year trail drivers as well as Nebraska pioneers were convinced that in the future the Blue Valley Trail would be trod by cattlemen who had purchased their stock in Abilene, or by those drovers who were dissatisfied with current prices in the Kansas cowtown.

The success of the drives up the Blue Valley in 1869 was carefully noted by one group of interested spectators, the agents of the Union Pacific railroad. Joseph McCoy, the director of the stock yards at Abilene and the guiding genius of the Abilene trade, reported the presence of Union Pacific officials in the Kansas cowboy capital in 1868. There is little likelihood, however, that the Union Pacific agents reported lolling in the frontier luxury of Abilene's Drovers Cottage were there for the purpose of diverting a portion of that season's traffic to their lines through Nebraska, for as yet no adequate facilities

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<sup>19</sup> *Nebraska History*, XIX, No. 3, p. 254.

existed at any point on the Union Pacific for shipping cattle in large numbers. Yet one cannot doubt that the keen eyes of the visitors took in every detail of the actual mechanics of the business which made Abilene hum with activity, and noted the profits in the trade for everyone concerned.

It was during the winter of 1869-1870 that the Union Pacific officials became greatly interested in the possibility of shipping Texas cattle from some point along their line through Nebraska. As it happened, a movement aimed at the same objective, that of improving marketing and shipping facilities for the longhorns, was also gathering momentum at the other end of the trail, in Texas. A group of Texas drovers, dissatisfied with the manner in which the trade had been conducted at Abilene during 1869, had banded together and elected as their representative Judge William N. Fant of Goliad County, a leading figure in the trail driving business, and had authorized him to take any steps necessary to improve the services offered the drovers at the northern end of the trail. Fant left Texas in November, 1869, hoping to secure two concessions from the Kansas Pacific railway.<sup>20</sup> These were: first, a reduction in the freight rate of \$135 per car from Abilene to Chicago, and second, a promise of speedier transit over this route, with fewer delays and changing of cars at junction points.<sup>21</sup> The drovers insisted that due to unnecessary delays in shipment the cattle suffered greatly on the journey to Chicago and arrived in poor condition.

The earnest petitions of the cattlemen received no sympathetic answer from officials of the Kansas Pacific, who apparently believed themselves secure in the possession of a good thing and in no way felt it necessary to improve the services they offered. The failure of this part of his mission discouraged Fant only slightly, for already he was planning the details of another program of relief. His son, Dillard R. Fant, had

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<sup>20</sup> Omaha *Herald*, May 18, 1870.

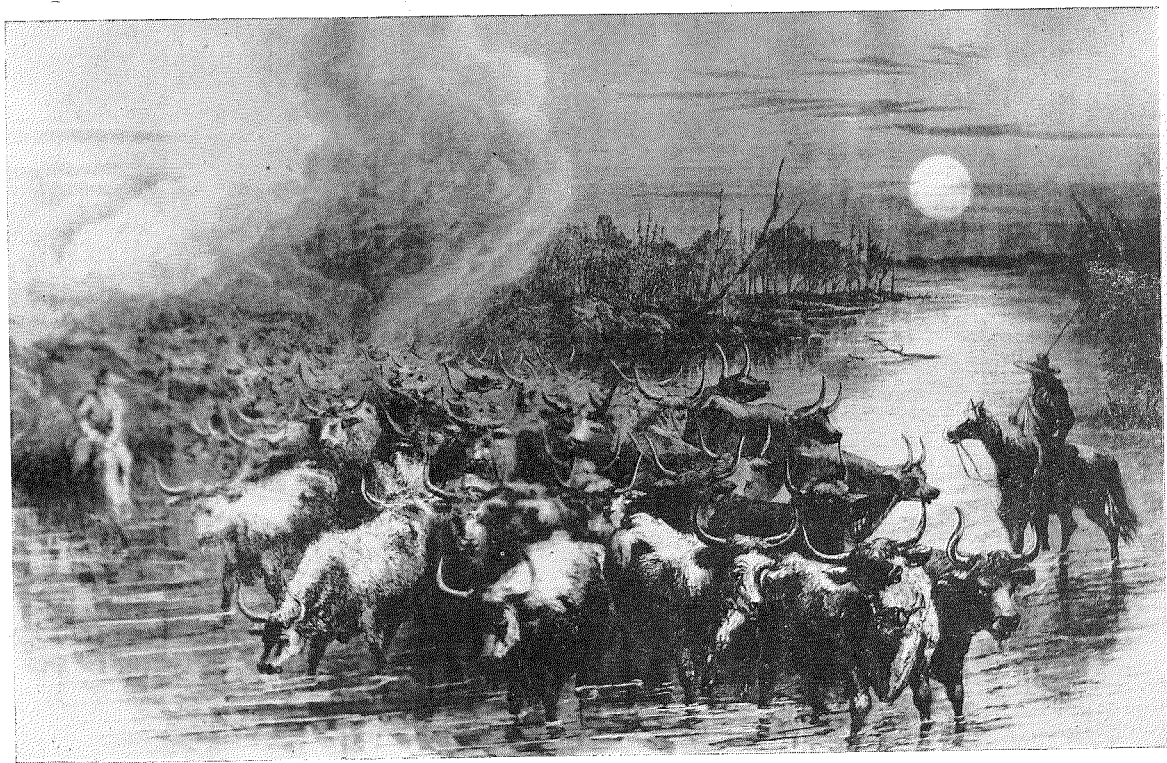
<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, March 2, 1870.

driven 650 head of mixed cattle to Omaha in 1869, sold them at a good price, and reported favorably on the longer drive. The possibility of setting up another important shipping point to serve the southern drovers, preferably near Omaha, was intriguing to the elder Fant. In February, 1870, he arrived in Omaha to discuss with C. G. Hammond, General Superintendent of the Union Pacific lines, the possibility of shipping Texas cattle to eastern points over the Union Pacific and its connecting lines.<sup>22</sup> The proposal was warmly received by the Union Pacific people, especially after Fant expressed his conviction that the group which he represented might market as many as 100,000 cattle at some point in Nebraska if satisfactory facilities were provided. The editors of the Omaha papers were called in for a press conference and the proposed undertaking carefully explained to them. Thereafter the Omaha *Herald* in particular never tired of pointing out how the diversion of the Texas cattle trade to Nebraska points would prove a financial boom for the Union Pacific, for the town of Omaha, and for Nebraska cattle feeders. By the end of February Fant and the Union Pacific representatives had reached agreement on the general details of the plan to build yards on the U. P. lines, and a tentative rate schedule had been drawn up.

Yet at this point negotiations almost broke down, due to the interference of those interests controlling the trade at Abilene. A necessary prerequisite for any agreement which the Texans might make with the Union Pacific was assurance of cooperation on the part of the connecting lines from Omaha to Chicago, the Northwestern, the Rock Island, and the Burlington routes. The Burlington people could not be expected to be enthusiastic about Fant's proposal, since their lines already monopolized the business of hauling Texas cattle from Kansas City to Chicago. In fact, when the other lines indicated their interest in the traffic, the Burlington representatives solemnly warned that any action or rate agreement which was not unani-

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, February 23, 1870.



A DROVE OF TEXAS LONGHORNS

From Harper's Weekly, 1867



mous might upset the delicately balanced financial status of the western roads. The threat of a rate war such as had almost bankrupted the Erie and New York Central was made rather guardedly by the Burlington, and brought a howl of protest from the Omaha press.<sup>23</sup>

After several weeks of verbal sparring the three roads agreed upon a uniform rate for the haul from Omaha to Chicago. This rate, which was satisfactory to all the roads and to the cattlemen as well, followed the schedule suggested by the Burlington, and was about 25% less than the rate from Abilene to Chicago, for a haul which was some 150 miles shorter. The news that a rate of approximately \$100 per car had been agreed upon, thus opening the door for further action by Fant and the Union Pacific, was received by the Omahans with satisfaction tempered with resentment at the alleged "monopolistic" views of the Burlington agents.

A greater interest in the proposed industry was displayed by two towns, Schuyler and Columbus. Supporters of Schuyler insisted that it was the ideal site for the yards because of its location at the upper end of the Blue River Trail, because of the rich pastures to be found south of the town, and because land for the yards could still be purchased reasonably in the town. The proponents of Columbus were equally vigorous in advancing the cause of their town. So bitter became the contest between the supporters of the two towns that the *Omaha Republican* announced that it would no longer publish in its columns letters from the advocates of the respective towns inasmuch as the controversy had become too heated and the correspondents too violent even for the rugged frontier editor of that day.<sup>24</sup> The "war" between the two towns ended with Schuyler the ultimate victor. During the first week of June, when several herds from Texas were already grazing in the Platte valley, it was announced that shipping facilities

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, March 2, March 9, 1870.

<sup>24</sup> *Omaha Republican*, June 8, June 15, 1870.

would be constructed at once in the Colfax county town.<sup>25</sup> Its ideal location was the single most important factor in making Schuyler the final choice, although the fact that Fant and his friends found a kindred spirit in J. T. Clarkson, agent in Schuyler for the Union Pacific lands, also influenced the decision.

The sleepy village of Schuyler buzzed with unaccustomed activity during June, 1870. Carloads of lumber arrived, followed by engineers and carpenters who forthwith started construction. Within a remarkably short time the clatter of hammers was stilled and before the eyes of the astounded settlers there stood completed a spur track, three loading chutes, and stock yards more extensive than anything the inhabitants of the struggling frontier community had visualized.

After the yards had been completed, the next step was to acquaint the Texas drovers with the facilities at Schuyler. Judge Fant, his role as promoter ended, now emerged as the representative of the Union Pacific lines, and became, along with Clarkson, the leading publicist for the Schuyler market. Both Fant and Clarkson soon appeared in Kansas, first in Abilene, and then at other points along the trail, meeting the drovers and encouraging them to drive their cattle to the new market in Nebraska. A circular was printed over Fant's name and sent to all of the best known Texas cattlemen. Therein the Texan related his efforts to obtain improved service from the Kansas Pacific and how, after his failure at Abilene, he had secured the full cooperation of the Union Pacific. A comprehensive list of reasons for driving the longhorns to the new market was also included. Chief of these were:

- a. The distance to Chicago from Schuyler was some 150 miles shorter than from Abilene. The through freight rate was about 25% less over the northern route.

- b. Cattle would reach the Chicago market from Ne-

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<sup>25</sup> Omaha *Herald*, June 1, 1870.

braska in three days, with but one change of cars at junctions and for feed and water, while the haul from Abilene to Illinois required five days and three changes in transit.

c. Pasturage in the Platte Valley was unusually good, much better than around Abilene.

d. Contractors would eagerly buy Texas cattle in the market at Schuyler to supply the Indian agencies.

e. Prices at Schuyler for longhorns, whether stock cattle or beeves were uniformly higher than those quoted in Abilene.

f. The presence of three lines from Omaha to Chicago made unlikely any repetition of the traffic jams and delays which had been so irksome in 1869.<sup>26</sup>

Drovers interested in the new market were instructed to follow the old Chisholm Trail into southern Kansas. There, Fant promised, he or some of his agents would meet them and map the new route into Nebraska.

The result of all these efforts was the emergence of the first of the cowtowns of Nebraska, the first of a series of towns whose early history and development were closely tied to the Texas cattle trade. The trail from Abilene north and into the Blue Valley to Schuyler became a well-beaten cattle highway during the summer of 1870. On July 8 the first shipment of cattle to Chicago was loaded.<sup>27</sup> Eleven carloads of choice four-year-old Texas beeves averaging 1100 pounds that had been pastured for six weeks along the Platte made up the shipment. A total of 800 head were sold during July, and at the end of the month an additional 17,000 were reported in the immediate vicinity.<sup>28</sup> Thereafter the trade continued to be

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, May 18, 1870.

<sup>27</sup> *Omaha Republican*, July 13, 1870.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, July 20, 1870.

brisk at Nebraska's "Bull's Head." Between 40,000 and 50,000 Texas cattle were sold at Schuyler during the season.<sup>29</sup> Thus, one out of every six longhorns pointed up the trail from the southern plains during the season of 1870 was finally sold in the Nebraska market. Buyers were active in Schuyler and the supply failed to meet the demand—it was estimated that stockmen from Nebraska, Minnesota, Iowa and other points would have snapped up an additional 40,000 head if they had been available.<sup>30</sup>

The brisk business at Schuyler was characteristic of the entire cattle trade that year. Prices at Abilene as well as other points remained at a high level, and cattle of every type and grade were eagerly purchased. A vicious rate war between the rail lines from Chicago to New York had reduced the freight charges for the haul to less than \$5 per car for that entire distance. This unexpected boon was passed on to rancher and stockman and was reflected in a gradual rise in prices everywhere during the spring months. Consequently, in spite of the great increase in the number of cattle driven to the northern markets, prices held firm. The promises of the publicists active on Schuyler's behalf that better prices could be obtained at the Union Pacific yards seem to have been fulfilled, at least in part. At the beginning of the season's business, good cattle of about 1000 lbs. brought 3c per pound at Schuyler. During the first two weeks of August the rush of cattle to market was temporarily in excess of the demand, and prices sagged slightly. Yet the bulk of Texas beeves brought to Nebraska were sold at prices about 10% higher than those quoted in Abilene, the average price being about \$25 to \$30 per head, while some choice beeves sold for \$35.<sup>31</sup> Yearlings could be purchased for

<sup>29</sup> Contemporary press reports estimated the total would be 60,000, *Omaha Herald*, August 24, 1870.

<sup>30</sup> Fourth Annual Report, Nebraska State Board of Agriculture, 1873, p. 58.

<sup>31</sup> *Omaha Republican*, August 31, 1870, also *Omaha Herald*, same date, and L. Burnham, *Guide to the Lands of the Union Pacific*, 1870, p. 23.

\$7 and \$8, two-year-olds at \$12 to \$14, and since there were no outbreaks of Texas fever during the season some of the prejudice against Texas cattle was dissipated and mid-western feeders, among them Governor Saunders of Nebraska, bought the stock cattle eagerly.

Most of the herds brought up the trail that season were mixed cattle—the longhorns sold at Schuyler by a Captain Kelley were probably typical. Among his 1360 head there were 500 beeves (four-year-olds), 300 three-year-olds, 300 cows, 200 two-year-olds, and 60 yearlings.<sup>32</sup> The proportion of each type found in the other herds that year probably was much the same. Except for a few sold to Omaha butchers and to contractors for the Indian agencies, most of the four-year-olds were sold to Nebraska and Iowa feeders, and in some cases were wintered in Colfax, Burt, and Washington counties by the Texans themselves while waiting for the rise in price expected the following spring. The younger stock was sold without difficulty either in small lots to Nebraska farmers or in larger numbers to ranchers. Nebraska's pioneer millionaire, Edward Creighton, bought heavily of all types of stock at Schuyler. Together with Edwin Loveland, associated with him in this venture, Creighton purchased over 16,000 head, of which 9000 were beeves and 7000 stock cattle. Part of the young stock was again sold to other buyers, while 3000 head were driven into the western part of the state.<sup>33</sup> One of the largest transactions at Schuyler involved the sale of some 3200 head of Bennett cattle to a Sioux City contractor for government beef. In every instance it was agreed that buyer and seller, drover and contractor were agreeably pleased with the business as conducted at the Union Pacific's mart that season.

For the town of Schuyler the decision of the Union Pacific to build yards there and make it a shipping point for Texas cattle was a godsend. During 1869 the future of the village

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<sup>32</sup> Omaha *Herald*, July 13, 1870.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, September 7, 1870.

had appeared none too bright except to a few of the more optimistic residents. Schuyler itself was then described as a cluster of about twenty buildings, a few homes, the railroad depot, the section house, a blacksmith shop, and three small general stores.<sup>34</sup> Only those with unbounded faith in the future of the village believed it was destined to grow with any rapidity.

After Schuyler had been fitted out as a shipping point the arrival of drovers, buyers, railroad men and others who followed the trade breathed new life into the town. New general merchandise stores, at least in part aimed at gaining the business of those connected with the cattle trade, sprang up overnight. The Upton House, Schuyler's first hotel, now enlarged and refurnished, became the headquarters of the cattlemen, and its 24 rooms providing accommodations for 40 guests were oftentimes filled to capacity. Several business establishments of special interest to thirsty and fun-seeking cattlemen were opened, a livery stable, saloons, a small brewery, and a photographer's shop.

At the same time settlers began to move into the territory from the east in considerable numbers. By early fall the face of the community had changed entirely. Instead of the small group of 20 structures clustered around the railroad station during 1869 the traveller arriving in Schuyler in October, 1870, would have seen well over a hundred homes and stores of varying degrees of pretentiousness. The population within a single year had increased from less than a hundred to approximately 600 inhabitants.<sup>35</sup>

As the herds were brought in, many of them after having been grazed in the valleys and hills along the Platte, business in the town became particularly lively. Money passed freely from buyer to drover, from drover to cowboy, and from cowboy to merchant. Lively and booming though it was, Schuyler

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<sup>34</sup> Andreas, *History of Nebraska*, pp. 590-594.

<sup>35</sup> Burnham, *Guide to the Lands of the Union Pacific*, 1870, p. 32.

never became a boisterous and lawless cowtown. It had no "Boot Hill," no murders during 1870, and his official duties did not prevent Sheriff Adolph Ernst, an old settler, from devoting most of his time to his own affairs.

The most noticeable effect of the cattle trade on the town was the financial boon which it brought to everyone. The presence of open-handed and free-spending cattlemen enabled Schuyler to become a well-established community without passing through the years of poverty and uncertainty experienced by many another frontier community. To the railroad too the trade brought sizable profits. Revenues for freight shipped from Schuyler rose sharply. Banks in Omaha were active in the trade, and it was estimated that transactions through the First National Bank alone amounted to approximately \$500,000.<sup>36</sup>

At the end of the season of 1870 everyone could look back with satisfaction. Schuyler had become a well-established frontier town. The Union Pacific officials observed with satisfaction the increase in freight carried to Omaha and points east. The cattlemen in most instances agreed that the higher prices obtained in Schuyler had compensated for the longer drive up the Blue Valley, and noted that buyers from the east would have purchased many more longhorns had they been available. Everyone nodded in agreement when Fant predicted that perhaps 100,000 cattle would reach Schuyler the next year.<sup>37</sup>

The prosperity experienced by Schuyler did not go unnoticed. At least one other Nebraska town aggressively put forward its claims as a cattle market. This was Plattsmouth, then a wide-open, booming terminal town for the Burlington railroad. Those who sought to develop Plattsmouth as a leading cattle market pointed out that the drive to that point rather

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<sup>36</sup> *Fourth Annual Report, Nebraska State Board of Agriculture, 1873, p. 58.*

<sup>37</sup> *Third Annual Report, Nebraska State Board of Agriculture, 1871, p. 232.*

than to Schuyler made unnecessary a dangerous and difficult crossing of the Platte river, and that the Burlington's direct route to Chicago would deliver cattle there more rapidly than the connecting lines of the Union Pacific.<sup>38</sup>

These arguments had some appeal, for nearly every issue of the Plattsmouth *Nebraska Herald* during the summer of 1870 refers to the arrival of one or more herds of Texas cattle for shipment eastward over the Burlington. Other longhorns undoubtedly found their way into the menu served the "gandy-dancers" laying the line of track from Plattsmouth to Lincoln. At summer's end the editor of the *Herald* "opined" that more Texas cattle had been shipped from Plattsmouth than from any other Nebraska town,<sup>39</sup> but he was more enthusiastic than veracious. Plattsmouth never approached Schuyler in importance as a shipping point, and it is doubtful whether more than 5000 longhorns were shipped from the Missouri river town in 1870. All the herds reported in that town were small, numbering from 250 to 500 head, and the town's location was not such as to appeal to the drovers.

There was also much local opposition to the Texans. In Cass county, then one of the leading stock-growing counties in the state, there was considerable worry that the Texas fever might yet be spread among the high-grade shorthorns. Then too, the Texas steer did not prove himself entirely tractable. One herd of semi-tame longhorns while being driven to the loading chutes suddenly stampeded out of control through the streets of Plattsmouth, tore up fences, trampled gardens, sent frightened citizens scurrying for safety.<sup>40</sup> Another stray Texas steer, displaying the animosity which all longhorns manifested toward man when separated from his horse, attacked and severely injured a pedestrian farmer.<sup>41</sup> Many peace-loving

<sup>38</sup> Plattsmouth *Nebraska Herald*, June 30, 1870.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, July 28, 1870.

<sup>40</sup> Plattsmouth *Journal*, Sept. 27, 1937.

<sup>41</sup> Plattsmouth *Nebraska Herald*, August 18, 1870.



settlers hoped that the Texans and their cattle would go elsewhere.

The cowboy who looked forward to a "spree" at the end of the long trail preferred Plattsmouth, a boom town of some 2000 population, to Schuyler as a shipping point. To cater to Plattsmouth's restless and free-spending railroad workers there had sprung up a number of shops carrying a wide variety of merchandise, leather, cloth, and liquid. Here the cowboy could outfit himself in the best of style. Should he seek entertainment, he could find it in such varied forms as church-sponsored ice-cream socials, Irish dances, a multitude of saloons, or in "cribs" whose painted ladies made life a constant trial for the city fathers. Many a trail driver probably looked forward to a return trip to Plattsmouth in 1871, while at the same time he must have realized that the heavy flow of immigration into the lower reaches of the Platte valley would prevent easy access to this market in the future.