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Development of Cattle Raising in the Sandhills

W. D. Aeschbacher

One of the problems encountered by people running cattle on the open range is that of identification and establishment of ownership. The use of brands had become general in marking cattle many years before the sandhills became cattle country, and the use of brands in Nebraska was first regulated by law in 1877. This law made it illegal to duplicate a brand in the same county. However statewide registration of brands, giving each brand statewide protection, was not adopted until 1899.¹

The use of brands has met with resistance for many years. Humane societies have fought the use of hot irons and the burning of the animal.² The practice has also been attacked by tanners because the scar left by the brand renders a portion of the hide unusable. Various attempts have been made to circumvent the use of branding irons. Probably the most widely used has been the attempt to substitute an acid for fire heat in etching the brand on the skin. This expedient is tried periodically, but cattlemen have never been entirely satisfied with the practice. Their criticism usually concerns the brand itself. Too often the acid brand is applied too lightly and the animal's hair grows back over it. Sometimes it burns beyond the edges of the iron, blurring the brand until it is unreadable. Other criticisms of this method of branding include the expense and difficulty in handling the acid.

In working with animals raised for the show ring, purebred breeders, in recent years, have marked their an-

¹Nebraska Folklore Pamphlets, No. 17, *Nebraska Cattle Brands*, Robert E. Carson, editor, (1938), 1 & 2.

²*Idem.*

imals on the horns, in order to avoid marring the animal's hides. Quite often ranchers either do not brand horses or brand them on the jaw with a small iron for the same reason. The great bulk of sandhill cattle, however, are branded with a heated branding iron. Cattle in the lake country are branded in about the same way that cattle have been branded since 1879.

The brands used by the big ranches that first entered the lake country included Hunter and Evans' Z Bar and E. S. Newman's N Bar, on the Niobrara river; David Rankin's Bar Seven on the Middle Loup; W. A. Paxton's Keystone, the Ogallala Cattle Company's Figure Four,³ and John Bratt's Circle on the Platte.⁴ Probably the ranch that had the most influence on the sandhills before 1910 was the one operated by Bartlett Richards and always called by the name of its most famous brand, the Spade. An even better known brand nationally was found in the sandhills before 1900. It was the One Hundred and One, the Standard Cattle Company's brand. Their ranch in the sandhills, however, never rivaled the main ranch in Oklahoma in size and importance.

The Hyannis paper made a determined effort to get the local ranchers to advertize their brands, beginning with the new year in 1896. In the third issue of that year the paper published brands of twenty-three owners.⁵ Previously the paper had published only two or three brand advertisements including one from the Spade. At about the same time the short-lived *Whitman Sun* also began publishing brands. In its last issue it carried fourteen brands.⁶ The Hyannis paper kept adding to its advertising of brands until it carried a full page plus part of another column of brand advertisements during the early 1900's.⁷

The brand law of 1877 had placed the handling of brands in the hands of the separate counties. This law,

³*Idem.*

⁴John Bratt, *Trails of Yesterday*, (Chicago, 1921), 181.

⁵*Grant County Tribune*, January 16, 1896.

⁶*Whitman Sun*, August 23, 1901.

⁷In the August 11, 1904, issue there were 64 brands advertised.

amended in 1879, empowered the county commissioners to appoint a brand committee. This committee was to consist of the county clerk and two cattlemen. Its duties were to register brands, to go over the brands existing in the county, and to have the more recent comer change his brand if the committee thought that two brands were too nearly alike. It passed on new brands which came up for registration, and in this connection it was supposed to refuse any brand that added a common symbol to a previously registered brand.⁸ For example, a J Cross Half Diamond could not be registered in the county that already had a J Cross brand. Although the registration in the county was good only in that county, ranchers could register their brand in all counties into which their cattle were likely to stray.

The brand law of 1899 changed brand recording from a countywide to a statewide basis.⁹ This brand law placed a great deal of responsibility on the Nebraska Stock Growers Association. That organization was charged with inspecting brands when cattle were shipped. For this inspection the Association charged the owner of the cattle ten cents a head.¹⁰ A test case in the 1930's brought out a ruling that the state could not delegate the function of inspecting brands to a private organization. As a result the state had to take over this function.

Under state control the whole western two-thirds of the state has been designated as range area by the legislature. In this area the brand on cattle is legal proof of ownership. Cattle cannot be shipped from this area without having the brands inspected, unless they are shipped direct to certain approved meat packing centers. If the cattle are shipped direct, the brands can be inspected at the market rather than before shipment.¹¹

⁸Robert D. Burleigh, "Range Cattle Industry in Nebraska to 1890," MSS., University of Nebraska Library, 43-44.

⁹Nebraska Folklore Pamphlets, No. 17.

¹⁰"Pan Handle Gains Attention through Legislature Set-up of Nebraska Brand Committee," *Sunday Journal and Star*, Lincoln, August 17, 1941.

¹¹*Idem*.

In 1941 there were 18,548 brands registered in the state. The present state laws controlling brands provide that they be registered with the Secretary of State for a fee of \$2.00. Beginning in 1948 brand registrations will have to be renewed every five years at \$1.00 for each renewal.¹² Brands are subject to sale and transfer. For this reason some large ranches often register several brands. After they buy a herd of cattle, they find it more convenient to transfer the brand than to rebrand the cattle. The present law makes the branding of another's livestock or the defacing of a brand, a felony. These offenses are punishable by from two to five years imprisonment.

In the *Nebraska Brand Book* for 1940 there are approximately 400 brands registered by persons using Ashby, Hyannis, and Whitman as their postoffice.¹³ Probably 250 of these brands are used in Grant county, while the others belong for the most part to people in Cherry county.

Only two of the brands advertised in the *Grant County Tribune* for January 16, 1896, are still in common use in the territory. R. M. Moran's Three-Quarter Circle R is still used by the Moran Cattle Company, and Thomas Lynch's OH brand is now owned by George Manning. The Dumbell Bar brand that Plummer brothers advertised has become the Dumbell on the Dumbell ranch of today. J. P. Sibbett and Son still registered J. P. Sibbett's old brand in 1940, although they did not use it. All the other brands advertised in 1896 have disappeared as their owners left the area or changed to a different brand.

Although brands were used on all cattle in the area, cattle stealing was one of the major problems the early ranchers had to face. The lake area of the sandhills was settled later than the surrounding territory to the north, south, east, and west. As a result the relatively uninhabited and unknown sandhills made a perfect base of operations for cattle thieves. Mari Sandoz tells of cattle rustling during the winter of 1888-89 in Sheridan county:

¹²*Idem.*

¹³*Nebraska Brand Book*, 1940.

Cattle rustling, too, increased. The sandhills, now full of stock, were ideal for brand artistry, butchering, and stock smuggling. Small herds swelled. Many ambitious cows reared twins. One steer near the headwaters of Pine Creek was credited with mothering seventeen calves one summer. In the meantime not even a picketed milk cow unbranded was safe. But usually such rustling was penny ante for any but the smallest outfits.

Whole herds disappeared into the hills, their tracks lost after a few hours in the wind-shifted sand, and were probably shipped from the south road. General suspicion pointed to cowboys of the Hunter ranch on the Niobrara, but the officials did no investigating. A report from Chadron said that the Sheridan County sheriff had been up and captured the leaders of a gang of thieves estimated to have stolen a thousand head of cattle. He received five hundred dollars reward from the stockmen, and said the Pinkerton Detective Agency offered him five thousand dollars a year, but that his people could not afford to lose him.¹⁴

The ranchers protected themselves by organizing stockmen's associations. John Bratt tells of organizing in the Platte valley. He says that Lincoln county led in the forming of associations, and other counties and later the state developed organizations. The Associations published brand books and formed roundup districts. They had the date, place of starting, and rules for the roundup published in the stock papers. The Associations also appointed brand inspectors to watch the shipping points and to run down rustlers.¹⁵

These Associations were primarily for the purpose of protecting their members against their common enemies, cattle thieves. They were vitally necessary, however, to protect the ranchers against themselves. The roundup period is hard on cattle, causing them to lose weight and strength. Roundups, unnecessarily prolonged or badly mis-

¹⁴Mari Sandoz, *Old Jules*, Little Brown & Co., (Boston, 1935), 117.

¹⁵Bratt, *op. cit.*, 194.

managed, would result in the cattle entering the winter in such poor condition that many would not survive. Before the Associations were formed and roundup regulations set up the possibility existed that some ranch, dissatisfied with the date or conduct of a roundup, would have a private roundup of its own. Even after the Associations were formed disputes arose.¹⁶

Still the primary purpose of the Associations was to combat cattle stealing. By the fall of 1889 the need for an association in the lake country was felt so strongly that some of the sandhill ranchers met in Hyannis on November 14, to form such a group. They established a temporary organization and designated the third of December as the date for a permanent organization to be set up.¹⁷

The December 3 meeting secured thirty-three members for the organization. The combined membership owned over 5,000 head of cattle. They took "The Northwestern Nebraska Stock Growers Association" for a name, and elected the following officers: President, Dr. A. J. Plummer; Vice-President, James Forbes; Secretary, M. B. Ocumpaugh; Treasurer, Sidney Manning; Executive Committee, A. B. Stuckey, James Stansbie, P. A. Yeast, C. G. Abbott, George Haney, James Frimble, and W. L. B. Chamberlain. The purpose of the organization was stated in the by-laws:

The object of this Association is to advance the interests of the stock growers and dealers in live stock of all kinds within said territory, and for the protection of the same against frauds and swindlers and to

¹⁶John Bratt gives one example in his *Trails of Yesterday*, 236. He tells how cattlemen from near North Platte clashed with ranchers from further west in the panhandle, Wyoming, and Colorado. By this time the Associations had districts well defined and the roundups synchronized so that they went out together. The western ranchers ran mostly steers and they wanted to start the roundup early in May, before the cows and calves of the Lincoln county ranchers were able to stand handling. In order to convince the westerners that they did not propose to allow early roundup dates, the Lincoln county ranchers swore out warrants against all known members of the roundup, and had their cowboys deputized to serve the warrants if the roundup should enter Lincoln county.

¹⁷*Grant County Tribune*, November, 21, 1889.

prevent the stealing, disfiguring of brands, taking and driving away of horned cattle, horses, and other stock from the rightful owners thereof, and also for the protection of individual range.¹⁸

Membership was limited to stock growers and to individuals. No corporation or partnership could join as individuals. Members were to vote on accepting the application of new members, and fees and assessments were based on the number of horses and cattle owned by the members. The Association put a \$25.00 bounty on grey wolves, and a \$500.00 reward was offered anyone giving evidence or information leading to the arrest of rustlers. The Association also made its position clear on the important question of public land:

Whereas the use of public lands for the grazing of cattle is a question of the highest importance to this association, and

Whereas, Public opinion at the East is directed against this business, the two principal charges being: First, that we obstruct and prevent by violence or intimidation the settlement of these lands by farmers; Second, that we pay nothing for the lands over which our herds graze, and

Whereas, Settlers are to-day freely entering upon those sections which are suitable; Second we are unable to pay any compensation to the Government, because no law exists permitting the United States to either sell or lease their lands, and hence that both of the above charges are false and unjust, and

Whereas, We wish to place on record our position, that it may be properly understood by our friends in Congress and the public generally; therefore be it

Resolved, That this Association would welcome any legislation which would lead to fair and equitable adjustment of this question and which would secure to all stockmen a legal tenure of the lands they use and further,

Resolved, That the current reports in Eastern papers that settlers are obstructed in their acts or settlement are groundless and untrue, and that all

¹⁸*Ibid.*, December 5, 1889.

lands suitable for farming are being rapidly and peaceably occupied.¹⁹

Within two weeks the Association had grown to fifty members who owned a combined total of over 12,000 head of cattle.²⁰ This Association was short lived, however, and soon merged with the larger Nebraska Stock Growers Association.

To make the sandhills an even moderately successful cattle country, a market had to be provided. A market meant a railroad, a means of transporting the cattle to the already existing outlet in the feed lots of eastern Nebraska and Iowa. How the sandhills could acquire a railroad, and why any prospective railroad builder would lay tracks through the sandhills seems, to the present day observer, an unanswerable question. To the easterner, who in the 1870's and 1880's was the railroad builder, the sandhills were an uninhabitable, impenetrable waste. Even to the Nebraska ranchers the lake country was forbidden land until 1879. True, the transcontinental lines had crossed much longer stretches of desert land, but they had been heavily subsidized, and they had prospective markets on the west coast. The best terminal a sandhill line could possibly have was the Black Hills' gold fields, the Wyoming coal mines, or a connection with a trans-continental road in the north. To the present day observer the sandhills of 1880 did not appear to be a favorable site for a railroad.

In the 1870's and for the next twenty or thirty years, however, building railroads seemed to be the national occupation, especially in the West. Men with capital invested with reckless abandon. Towns and villages clamored for, and subsidized, railroads. If they were unsuccessful in getting a road to come to them, they often picked up bodily and moved to the railroad. Sometimes the town left its name out in the country-side; often it took even the name to the new town site, leaving the former location only a memory and a few buildings which soon disappeared be-

¹⁹*Idem.*

²⁰*Ibid.*, December 19, 1889.

fore the ravages of weather and salvaging visitors. In such an atmosphere of railroad building there were men who would build roads even in the sandhills.

The first railroad to serve the sandhill region was the Union Pacific. North Platte was usually the post office and freighting point for the earliest settlers who came into the lake country. It had been one of the shipping points used by the early ranchers, men like Bratt and Paxton. They also used shipping points farther west, such as Ogalala; however the Union Pacific followed the South Platte on toward the west. It did not penetrate the sandhills, and, as it progressed west of North Platte, the North Platte river prevented effective service to the sandhills further north.

The Chicago and Northwestern railroad through Valentine was the first line to penetrate the sandhills proper. Although it offered a route to market for the ranchers in the northern part of the sandhills, the lake country was still not served adequately. Cattle in the middle of the lake country near the present towns of Hyannis and Ashby were as much as a hundred miles from a shipping point. Too many pounds of beef were lost driving grass fat cattle three or four days to reach a railroad.

As early as 1872 the *Nebraska Chronicle* of Nebraska City proposed a road into the heart of the sandhills. At the time Nebraska City and other Nebraska towns were agitating for a trunk line along the west side of the Missouri river, which would connect them with Kansas City and St. Louis. This line was felt to be necessary to compete with Iowa's Burlington line on the east side of the river. The Nebraska City editor proposed the trunk line, but he also proposed other railroad extensions to benefit Nebraska City. These extensions included a road through Columbus, to the Niobrara river and on into the Pacific Northwest.²¹ There was to be a branch lead off this road

²¹Of course this was before the Chicago and Northwestern had built its line up through the northern sandhills from Omaha.

near Columbus. It would follow the Loup river to its source and then strike northwest into the Black Hills country.²²

It was another ten years before there was any real hope of action on a road to serve the lake country. By that time Nebraska City had ceased its attempts to challenge Omaha as the railroad center of Nebraska. In 1882 it was predicted that the Union Pacific would build two branch lines north of the Platte river to cut off the Burlington and keep that road permanently out of the Union Pacific's main line. One of these prospective branch lines was to follow the valley of the Middle Loup.²³

Actually this struggle between the Union Pacific and the Burlington for the new territory in which to lay tracks was instrumental in finally putting a road into the lake country. The Burlington decided to build a road through Nebraska between the Union Pacific line and the Union Pacific dominated Chicago and Northwestern. Such a line would necessarily pass near the lake country. In October, 1885, the Grand Island and Wyoming Central Railroad Company was incorporated at the instigation of the Burlington. This company was to build a road from Grand Island through Hall, Buffalo, Sherman, Custer, and Blaine counties, and on to the Nebraska-Wyoming line.²⁴ Besides forming the new company to work beyond Grand Island, the Burlington also formed a company to build a road into Grand Island from Lincoln, and work on both lines was started immediately.²⁵

The Union Pacific did not let the new road enter its territory without a struggle. It immediately decided to freeze out the Burlington by putting its own line into the area. As a result there was a contest to see which organization could get track laid first. The two companies had rival gangs working against each other all the way from

²²"Burlington Scrapbook," Nebraska State Historical Society, Vol. III, 18 & 19.

²³Thomas M. Davis, "George Ward Holdrege and the Burlington Lines West," MSS., University of Nebraska Library, Chapter 7.

²⁴W. W. Baldwin, *Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad Company, Documentary History*, (Chicago, 1929), 352-3.

²⁵Davis, *op. cit.*, Chapter 7.

Grand Island to Broken Bow. Nebraska had a state law to the effect that if 400 feet of track were laid by a company, the tracks should remain. The rival gangs took advantage of this law to hamper each other. The routes were surveyed to cross and recross, and the rails would be laid where the routes crossed.²⁶ This of course, would necessitate a resurvey by the other company. As a result of this struggle the track layers kept close behind the surveyors, and the route was never determined far in advance of the end of the rails. In spite of, or perhaps because of, the competition the Burlington built rapidly. In December, 1886, one year after the road was started, track was laid as far as Anselmo,²⁷ almost one hundred miles.

The fact that they were building a railroad, but did not know exactly where they were building it is verified by the following excerpt from some Burlington literature in 1886:

..... This railroad is already extended and in operation to Ravenna, a new town in the northern portion of Buffalo county, which is quite a prosperous place for a new one, and bids fair at no distant day to become quite a city, as it will be the division point for the railway and the probable county seat of a new county to be formed from slices taken from Sherman and Buffalo. From this point the line is built, but not in operation, north-west through Sherman and into Custer county, and surveyed (most of the contracts being let) through Custer county from southeast to northwest, touching the southwest corner of Blaine county, following the valley of the Middle Loup river as far as Soda Lake in Cherry county; from this point the route is merely surmised.

There is every probability of the line traversing the southern portion of the counties of Sioux, Dawes, and Sheridan, although they may veer to the north, passing up the Rush valley and striking for the Black Hills country; or, on the other hand, turn to the southwest, seeking the valley of the North Platte,

²⁶*Idem.*

²⁷Baldwin, *op. cit.*, 372.

and running along in its proximity until the coal fields of Wyoming are reached.²⁸

The company knew it wanted to beat the Union Pacific beyond Broken Bow and into the sandhills. Then its officials were not sure whether to survey down to the North Platte, entering into direct competition with the Union Pacific; to go on west through territory which was not served by a railroad but looked unpromising as railroad territory; or to angle north to the Black Hills, meeting competition from the Chicago and Northwestern line. The railroad was finally extended westward, and a new market outlet cut through the center of the lake country.

After the first road arrived, the sandhills joined the rest of the nation in beating the drum for more railroads. Several lines were projected, but none of them were ever completed far enough to give the lake country another market outlet. Among these lines was the Pacific Short Line which was scheduled to run westward from O'Neill south of the Northwestern.²⁹ The *Grant County Tribune* was less than two months old, when it told its readers that surveyors for this road were in the country north of Hyannis.³⁰ The next spring another road was in prospect, and Hyannis citizens were again excited. The Kearney and Black Hills railroad was to reach Calloway that summer, and to build on northwest into the Black Hills. The town of Rushville was attempting to have the road routed through that place, and Hyannis people were telling one another that Hyannis lay on a direct line between Calloway and Rushville.³¹

These routes were both good possibilities less than two years after the Burlington railroad had reached Hyannis.³²

²⁸*The Broken Bow Country*, (Burlington Route, 1886) 3.

²⁹Sandoz, *op. cit.*, 348.

³⁰*Grant County Tribune*, June 20, 1889.

³¹*Ibid.*, April 3, 1890.

³²There seems to be some doubt as to the year the railroad had a completed line, running trains to Hyannis. The Burlington's official history would indicate early spring (February) of 1887. Davis' story of Holdrege and the Burlington says that some track was laid but all gaps were not filled in, and trains running before 1889 or '90. However the year 1888 seems to be correct. It is the date upon which persons living in the sandhills at the time agree. They further

This makes it easy to understand why the newspaper editor would be susceptible to railroad fever. The editor was not immune to relapses as late as 1906, when a road was suggested from Valentine to Denver, cutting through Hyannis, Oshkosh, and Sidney.³³ This was the last time lake country residents believed a new road would be built through the heart of the sandhills. However, there has been continuous agitation by interested ranchers for two other roads. One of these is a road on the route of the above mentioned Pacific Short Line. This would cut the maximum distance to shipping pens from between forty and fifty miles to less than thirty miles for the ranchers north of the Burlington. Similar feeling has persisted to the south of the line. It has shown itself in attempts to get a railroad built through the county seats of McPherson and Arthur counties. The last time this road was actively supported, the support expressed itself in committees and delegations asking for a rerouting of the northern branch of the Union Pacific to include these towns at the time the road had to be moved because its old bed was flooded by the Keystone dam in the late 1930's.

From 1888 until the present the Burlington railroad east of Alliance has been the principal market outlet of the lake country. Some cattle from the southern part of the lake country do go out on the Union Pacific, and a few are driven north to the Chicago and Northwestern from the extreme northern part of the area. In the last twenty years a few cattle have been trucked out of the area. This method of shipping has been most popular in the Arthur neighborhood in the last ten years. There a hard surface road gives the surrounding ranchers a truck shipping point at Arthur about thirty miles closer than the nearest railroad shipping yards. Nevertheless the vast majority of sandhill cattle still go to market on the Burlington.

The Burlington line into the sandhills actually reduc-

agree that Whitman had been the winter camp of the track layers the winter before the road reached Hyannis. This must have been the winter of 1887-8, as the road reached only to Ravenna in December, 1886, and it had its terminus at Alliance by 1889.

³³*Grant County Tribune*, Feb. 16, 1906.

ed by more than half the driving distance to a shipping point for the inhabitants of the lake country. Whereas the lake country ranchers had drives of from thirty to one hundred miles before the new road came in, the new market outlet put most of the area within thirty miles of a shipping point.

The railroad was the biggest single agency encouraging people to settle in the new area. When the Burlington first entered the state, the policy of the railroad was to promote the state, and especially to sell the land the government had granted the company for building the road from Plattsmouth to Kearney. The emphasis of the Burlington's sales campaign soon changed, and the railroad was attempting to attract settlers to land near the Burlington regardless of who owned it. By 1882 its land commissioners started to hand over the functions of advertising and community developing to the traffic department.³⁴ By the time the railroad reached the sandhills, the job of promoting the territory which the railroad intended to serve had been assigned definitely to the traffic division. By that time the railroad realized that traffic would be increased and freight receipts grow, only in a country that was developed, a country with inhabitants who produced things to be shipped on the railroad. One method the Burlington used to attract prospective settlers to the country was its harvest excursions. These excursions were advertised both in eastern papers and in the territory through which the excursion ran.

B. & M. HARVEST EXCURSIONS

Half-Rates to the Cheap Lands in Nebraska, Kansas and Colorado, September 10th and 24th and October 8th, 1889.

The Burlington Route will sell tickets for the above excursions at half rates, good for thirty days and stop-over allowed at points west of the Missouri river.

³⁴Richard C. Overton, *Burlington West*, (Cambridge, Mass. 1941), 469.

One million acres of free government land suitable for general farming, and four million acres more admirably adapted to the requirements of the small stock farmer and dairyman, are still subject to entry along the line of the Burlington & Missouri River R. R. in northwestern and southwestern Nebraska.

For the last five years the corn crop of Nebraska has averaged a larger yield per acre, a larger number of bushels per capita and a larger percentage of merchantable standard than those of any other state. The corn crop of 1888 was 144,217,000 bushels, or more than twice the size of the combined corn crops of New York and Pennsylvania, with the whole of the New England states thrown in.

Nebraska is the finest country in the world for mixed farming. Dairying is highly profitable. Fruit raising is carried on with equal success and every other brand of agriculture practiced in the northern states flourishes.

Improved land in Nebraska, northwestern Kansas or eastern Colorado from \$5.00 per acre upward, according to improvements.

For pamphlets descriptive of lands reached by the Burlington Route, address

J. Francis, G. P. A.

Omaha, Nebraska.³⁵

Another type of advertising the Burlington used is shown in this excerpt:

There is, however, one section of the state that has hitherto attracted but little attention, owing to its having, until the last few months, been entirely destitute of railroad facilities. The region referred to lies in the north central and northwestern portions of the state, and is traversed by a recent important extension of the lines of the Burlington Route; an extension which has for its present terminus the flourishing town of Alliance, in Box Butte county, but is rapidly being continued towards the oil and coal fields of Wyoming. Between Box Butte and Blaine counties there are four counties all named in honor of illustrious soldiers of the U. S. army—Grant, Sheridan, Hooker, and Thomas. Grant county has

³⁵*Grant County Tribune*, August 22, 1889.

the centrally-situated town of Hyannis for its county seat, the rival settlement of Whitman on the east and Ashby, as yet only a flag-station, nine miles west. The amount of settlement in this county is not quite so great as in Hooker and Thomas counties. While all kinds of cereals do well, the county is undoubtedly better adapted to small stock-farming than to general agriculture. Grant county is, in fact, already acknowledged to be one of the best stock counties in the entire state. It contains a large number of lakes; grass grows in the valleys to the height of six feet, yielding from three to four tons to the acre and an abundance of pure and wholesome water can be found at a depth of from twenty to thirty feet, while the hills also afford all the shelter that is necessary to enable stock to winter out of doors, with scarcely any loss or suffering.

The reader will scarcely need to be told that the importance of the various new settlements of this region is to be measured rather by the amount of business they do as shipping or distributive points, than by the number or elegance of their buildings. True to its old-time policy of representing the country, into which it is seeking to attract settlers, **EXACTLY AS IT IS**, that there may be no room for disappointment, or for any charge of misrepresentation, the Burlington Route would have it distinctly understood by the intending settler that the settlements west of Mullen, until you come to Alliance, are as yet only the nuclei of coming towns, and are not, at the present writing, even provided with regular hotel accommodations. Hyannis, in Grant County, and Lakeside in Sheridan County, are, in fact, only just starting up. At each of these points however, there is a commodious, clean and comfortable boarding house, conducted by an employe of the company, where accommodations can usually be had. Hyannis, in its lack of a hotel, offers one of those many excellent openings for business men, which in one form or another, are to be found in all the towns of this new country. If these towns are small and, to visitors who go with great expectations, necessarily disappointing, their residents are law abiding and self respecting; saloons are unknown; there is no rough element whatever, and it will be but a few years before some of them, at least will become large and prosperous cities. Like

its sister cities, already mentioned, Hyannis has its weekly newspaper *The Grant County Tribune*, published by Messrs. Gerard & Cushman.³⁶

The number of people the railroad encouraged to move into the new area by the use of these advertising campaigns cannot be estimated accurately. The number of settlers who were able to move their household and farming goods to the sandhills only because of the railroad's reduced rates for new settlers through the use of immigrant cars is also unknown. Still one can safely say that the railroad was the major factor in increasing the population of the lake country after 1888.

The railroad also played an important role in determining the kind of cattle which would stock the hills after the herds of the early ranchers moved out. Those early ranchers had stocked nothing but Texas cattle. Texas cattle were also the dominant strains in the herds driven into the sandhills by the settlers in the 1880's. These cattle remained in the hills and affected the strain for many years. The railroad, however, changed the source of supply. Before the railroad came Texas cattle driven up the long trail, or descendants of these cattle, were the easiest to get. After 1888 the easiest way to get cattle was to ship them in from the east. Better types of beef cattle were shipped in on the railroads. The long legged, sway-backed Texas Longhorn was replaced by blockier animals with Shorthorn blood, because the foundation herds in the east were mainly Shorthorn.

The first cattle in the sandhill area were Texas cattle, as Texas cattle were the first cattle brought into the great cattle producing region of western Nebraska and Kansas and eastern Colorado and Wyoming. Preceding the great Texas drives some cattle came out the Oregon trail, and were sold to the proprietors of road ranches, but the few cattle from this source were overwhelmed by the flood of cattle coming up the trails from Texas. By 1880 the cattle on all the big ranches along the Platte and Niobrara were

³⁶*Grant County Tribune*, August 1, 1889.

typical Texas Longhorns. The bad winter of 1880-81 caused some change in the characteristics of the cattle in the sandhills. Ranchers headquartering in the Platte valley suffered extensive losses that winter. More of the cattle that wintered in the sandhills survived than did those that wintered in the Platte valley. However, the stock on the range was so depleted that it had to be replenished from some other source, and this source was eastern farms. The number of eastern cattle used to restock the country was large enough to affect the breed of cattle. About 185,000 head were shipped to the western ranches from the east in 1883, and most of these were one and two year old heifers.³⁷ Although this influx of new blood modified the Texas strain, the native cattle, cattle in the country when new settlers arrived, continued to be known as Texas cattle. Even as late as the coming of the "Kinkaiders" in 1905 the dominant strains were known as Shorthorns and Texas Longhorns.³⁸

As the settlers moved into the sandhills and started ranching in the 1880's the type of cattle changed from the Texas cattle that ranged the hills after the winter of 1880-81.³⁹ Relatively few of the first settlers brought cattle when they came into the lake country. Among the ones who did were the Haney brothers, "Dad" Abbott, and James Forbes.⁴⁰ These men had been in the cattle business on the Republican river before they moved to the sandhills, and their herds were like the Texas cattle already in the

³⁶J. W. Shackelford, letter to author, November 10, 1845.

³⁷E. S. Osgood, *The Day of the Cattleman*, (Minneapolis, 1929), 93.

³⁹Texas Longhorns have never been a well defined breed, and the name is used to mean different types of cattle at different times. The Texas Longhorns brought up the trail from Texas were modified on the northern plains by the mixing of better beef types into the herds. In this way the Texas cattle, so called, of 1900 had become a shorter-legged, blockier, better beef animal. In the sandhills the term was used to describe cattle descended from Texas stock, which had never been strongly influenced by any one established breed. For example, a herd of Texas cows served by bulls of various breeds for ten years would still be called Texas cattle. If the cows were served by bulls of only one breed, however, the next generation would be called by the breed name of the paternal line. Cattle referred to as Texas Longhorns or Texas cattle in this paper were of mixed breed after 1881.

⁴⁰F. L. Perrett, interview, August 10, 1945.

lake country. Thomas Lynch had been a cattleman a little farther east, and it is probable that Lynch already had a relatively well improved herd of cattle.⁴¹ Other men brought in herds of varying types. For example, Sidney Manning, who had been ranching in Colorado, was driving a herd of cattle to Colorado from the east when he came to the sandhills. A few more herds, ranging from typical Texas to well bred eastern stock, were brought into the country before the railroad came. None of these first herds, however, were of a recognizable modern breed of beef cattle. Even the best of the eastern cattle were of mixed breed, although they were predominantly Shorthorn.

Until the middle of the 1890's the big ranches dominated the type of cattle found in the lake country. The John Bratt & Co. roundup worked west from the Dismal, up through the lake country south of Hyannis, then back south to the Birdwood, and on down it to the Platte.⁴² The Bratt roundup, as it swung south of Hyannis, met the roundup outfits of the other big ranches in the Split Lake valley. About 1890 the other three big roundup outfits in the area were the Spade from the northwest, the Bar 7 from the northeast and east, and the Figure 4 from the southwest.⁴³ In this valley the different roundups cut out their own cattle, and started them back toward their own home ranges. The big roundups came to an end in the 1890's;⁴⁴ thereafter the breed of cattle improved much

⁴¹At any rate Lynch was the first man in Grant county to pay a great deal of attention to improving cattle breeds.

⁴²Bratt, *op. cit.*, 197.

⁴³Mrs. R. M. Moran, interview, August 8, 1945.

⁴⁴The exact date for the disappearance of the big roundups is hard to place. Grant Shumway says 1895 in his *History of Western Nebraska*, 247. Mari Sandoz does not quote an exact date for the last of the big roundups in the sandhills in *Old Jules*, but she leaves the impression that it was about 1900. Mrs. R. M. Moran inclined toward a date around 1900 in an interview. There is much talk of a roundup in the country north of Hyannis in the spring of 1906. However, this roundup was evidently necessitated by the removal of the illegal fences in the fall of 1905, and it was a different and noteworthy experience for the people of the area. Shumway's date of 1895 is certainly correct as far as the coordinated roundup districts covering the whole western part of the state are concerned. Probably there were a few local roundups of considerable size, conducted for the most part by the big ranches like the Spade after this date. Even these had ceased to be annual affairs before 1900, however.

faster. The practice of turning cattle out on the open range and of subjecting them to the rigors of a week or more of handling in the semiannual roundups was not conducive to the rapid improvement of cattle types. At least not to the ranchers of the period before 1900. After the big roundup ceased to be an annual affair, and each rancher had his own herd segregated to some extent by the use of the drift fence and of enclosed pastures, the situation changed. Then ranchers began to see the advantage of using high class pure bred bulls, and began to improve the marketable characteristics of their herds as rapidly as possible.

The improvement of the quality of cattle in the sandhills can be attributed to the use of three breeds of beef Herefords, Polled-Angus, and Shorthorns. The Shorthorns or Durhams, were the first breed to improve the quality of sandhill cattle. They were by far the most popular beef breed in the nation before 1900, and as a natural result, they were brought to the western range land in large numbers to improve the breed of range cattle. The outstanding characteristic of the Durham is its size. Purebred Shorthorns are the heaviest of our beef cattle. It seemed to the early ranchers that the quickest way to improve their cattle would be to bring in Durham bulls to cross with their Texas cows. The main advantage was that this practice would increase the size of the individual animals in their herds materially.

All of the early ranchers seem to have used Shorthorns. R. M. "Bud" Moran's first cows were Durhams, which he bought for \$10.00 per head from Thomas Lynch.⁴⁵ These two men were among the first ranchers to change to the Hereford breed at a little later date. The use of Durhams was so well established by 1898 that a carload of bull calves was shipped to Whitman for public sale.⁴⁶ A Broken Bow Shorthorn breeder, Dr. J. G. Brenzier, felt that it paid him to advertise his purebred Durham stock in almost every issue of the *Grant County Tribune* from

⁴⁵Mrs. R. M. Moran, interview, August 8, 1945.

⁴⁶*Whitman Sun*, April 16, 1898.

1900 to 1912. Although the emphasis on the use of the Shorthorn breed had subsided by 1910, it was still used to some extent for several years.

In 1904, Professor E. A. Burnett of the University of Nebraska Agricultural College addressed a meeting of the Nebraska Stockgrower's Association. He told them that their range cattle were too small and matured too late. He advised them to concentrate on heavy-boned, low-built cattle.⁴⁷ This advice seemed good to the ranchers, and they have attempted to follow it as much as possible for over forty years. They have found, however, that all the features Doctor Burnett wanted could not be found in a single breed. While the Shorthorn was the largest and heaviest, it had to yield to other breeds in qualities of early maturing and low blocky build. The Durhams demonstrated one other weakness that made them poor cattle for the sandhills. They were not good at finding their own food or "rustling" in the winter, and they could not stand the sandhill climate. Old time cattlemen tell in disgust how, once a little snow fell the Durhams would come shivering up to the ranch buildings expecting to be fed and put in the barns, while hardier breeds did not mind the weather and kept busy finding plenty to eat under the snow.⁴⁸ One Kinkaid writes that he started with Shorthorns and used them until 1913. After he lost a third of his herd in the blizzard of that year, he changed to Herefords.⁴⁹ Because of its shortcomings the Shorthorn breed steadily lost ground in the sandhills after 1900. It completely disappeared after World War I, when uniformity began to be emphasized and mixed herds gave way to herds of one breed. There have been no Shorthorn herds, or Shorthorn bulls, used for over twenty years in the sandhills.

Little emphasis was put on uniformity or purity of breed in the period before World War I. Cattlemen often used purebred bulls of different breeds in the same herd. Both Hereford and Shorthorn bulls were used in W. H.

⁴⁷*Grant County Tribune*, June 9, 1904.

⁴⁸George Manning, interview, August 6, 1945.

⁴⁹L. C. Carpenter, letter to author, November 3, 1945.

Rothwell's herds until he turned the management of his ranch over to his sons about 1920.⁵⁰ The same procedure was used by August Brenneman until he turned his ranch over to his boys about the same time.⁵¹ These ranchers were following the common practice of the time, hoping to combine the size of the Shorthorn with the good qualities of the Hereford, not worrying much about uniformity in color and build.

A second breed that has played a constant, although minor, part in sandhill history is the Polled-Angus or black cattle.⁵² The number of Angus owners in the lake 1890. Judge Stilson was one of the first men to use the black cattle.⁵² The number of Angus owners in the lake country has never been large. At present, John and Felix Becker and F. B. Sterns use the breed north of Ashby. A fairly recent addition to the ranks of Polled-Angus raisers is Clark Jary, northwest of Hyannis. Further east, north of Whitman, George Downing, Ray Cole, and Bill Marshall have black cattle. South of the railroad, Dean Cullom is about the only Angus raiser in the lake country.

It is interesting to note how tenaciously black cattle raisers stick with their breed. Dr. Merrihew, south of Ashby, is one of the very few who have changed from Polled-Angus to Herefords. He made the change about 1920 because he was not satisfied with the fecundity of his black cattle. However, he afterward blamed the inability of black cattle to produce good calf crops in those years on factors other than the breed.⁵³

In answer to a query as to why Polled-Angus were not as popular as Herefords, one black cattle raiser gave these reasons: the Herefords got an earlier start; they are easier cattle to handle on the range and in the corrals; they are easier than Polled-Angus to breed up into a good type of cattle.⁵⁴ The last reason is an especially important

⁵⁰R. L. Rothwell, interview, December 14, 1945.

⁵¹K. W. Brenneman, letter to author, October 30, 1945.

⁵²*Grant County Tribune*, December 28, 1899.

⁵³Victor Merrihew, interview, November 10, 1945.

⁵⁴Felix Becker, letter to author, November 15, 1945.

factor. It is more difficult to get a uniform herd from range cattle with Angus bulls. Also, cattlemen like the ease with which the docile Herefords can be handled. The black cattle on the other hand are hard to handle on the range and are short-tempered and surly in the corral. To ranchers accustomed to working with the mild mannered red cattle, the wild black animals seem to be the devil incarnate.

If there had not been a Hereford breed, the lake country would probably have become a cattle country anyway. Other breeds of cattle would graze over the hills and be shipped out in the fall to feed yards and packing plants. Hereford cattle did come into the sandhills, however, and for the past forty years and more they have steadily increased in popularity. They have long been considered the best all round breed in the sandhills. Thomas Lynch was one of the first men to recognize the potential value of the white faces. Early in the 1890's he bought some Hereford bulls and put them in his herd to replace the Durham bulls he had been using.⁵⁵ In changing a herd to the Hereford breed, as in changing the breed of any range herd, the ranchers only changed their bulls. The cows were not changed, and the herd only gradually acquired the characteristics of the new breed through the influence of the paternal line. The herd was improved more rapidly than by natural selection through the careful judgment exercised by the rancher in deciding which of his cows to ship. He kept those showing the characteristics of the new type for breeding purposes.

The Herefords were a little later getting a start in the sandhills than were the Shorthorns. Not until 1905 was a carload of Herefords advertised for public sale in Hyannis.⁵⁶ However, by that time the white faced cattle were becoming well established. A list of early converts to the use of the breed would include nearly all of the prominent ranchers in the lake country today. Perhaps the most

⁵⁵Mrs. R. M. Moran, interview, August 8, 1945.

⁵⁶*Grant County Tribune*, May 4, 1905.

consistent champion of the white faces in Grant county was R. M. "Bud" Moran. He also changed from Short-horns to Herefords in the 1890's, shortly after his neighbor and former employer, Thomas Lynch, started using Hereford bulls. A few of the other men, whom old timers mention as early and consistent backers of the white faced cattle, include A. J. Abbott, J. H. Minor, and J. H. Monahan. The start these men made with Herefords has been carried on and furthered by their sons, Chris Abbott, Harry Minor, and Earl Monahan. The Hereford had become the common breed in the sandhills by the start of World War I. About the time the war started, more emphasis began to be placed upon uniformity and pureness of breed in a herd. As a result of this move, other breeds, especially the Durham, were eliminated. By 1930, with the exception of the Polled-Angus herds previously mentioned, it was a novelty to see any cattle other than Herefords in the lake country. By 1940 the transformation to a Hereford country was almost complete. By 1940 there probably were not as many as 1,000 cattle that were not of a predominant Hereford strain in the almost 60,000 cattle in Grant county.⁵⁷

⁵⁷The 1940 census gave Grant County 59,880 cattle, and there probably were not 1,000 head of non-Hereford cattle in the county at that time. The figure, 1,000, covers all milk breeds, and any Texas or other mixed breed cattle that had been shipped in to be allowed to grass fatten or to grow for one or more years on sandhill grass. The number of Texas or southern cattle in the country, although small, varies considerably from year to year. There were no Polled Angus herds in Grant County in 1940. Most of the black herds in the lake country are in southern Cherry county, and one herd is in Garden county.