

# The Bandera PROPHEET

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*The Western Trail Brought Texas Cattle to Kansas*

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The Bandera Prophet

In the wake of the economic devastation brought upon Texas by the Civil War, Texans needed a boost to the economy. Luckily, it had one resource in abundance the northern states did not, and it wasn't black gold, Texas tea, oil. It was cattle. Texas cowboys drove their herds to Kansas where the cattle were then shipped to more northern markets. This connection between Texas and Kansas not only kept the country fed after the war, it helped to heal the divided nation by reuniting the south with the north.

In 1880, the venerable Harper's Magazine captured the importance of this connection, "Traveling through Kansas, one sees almost limitless fields of corn. Here is sufficiency to feed countless multitudes but not in its present shape that it is consumed. Through a process of Transmutation, we eventually eat it not as Indian corn but as beef. When poor thin Texas cattle are brought which have come over the trail for hundred of miles, they are put, footsore and weary, into corrals. Such corrals may be seen all over Kansas especially near railroad stations. Fed corn and prairie hay, the cattle gain strength and flesh rapidly. Men in the East later sit down to their dinners, eat juicy sirloin steaks and have little idea of the care and judgement necessary to produce them."

It was through happenstance Kansas became the end of the trail.

Construction of the Santa Fe Railroad main continental line came to a halt in Dodge City in 1873 due to a nationwide money panic. As a result,

Dodge City became the largest cattle shipping and delivering point in the world. Trail drivers began moving away from the more eastern Chisholm Trail and established a new trail direct from San Antonio to Dodge City which saved 20 to 30 days drive. By 1876, the trail was 1,000 miles in length and extend from Matamoros, Mexico to Dodge City and on to Nebraska. It was called the Western Trail.

The key meeting place was the San Antonio stockyards. From San Antonio, it went north through Kendall and Kerr Counties with a feeder trail funneling cattle from south Texas through Bandera Pass to join the trail. A log written by Frank Collinson in 1874, described the particulars of the trail, "In early spring, I left Medina County with John Lytle driving 1500 head of mature steers to Mason County. Here we received another bunch of steers sufficient to make a full herd. We then hit the trail north via Peg Leg Station on the San Saba River to Waldrips Bend on the Colorado, then to Fort Griffin (where) General Mackenzie furnished us with a guide. We traveled due north and crossed the Red River, traveling up the river (to cross) the Washita and Canadian Rivers to Dodge City at the end of the Santa Fe Railroads."

In 1885, the Kansas legislature outlawed Texas cattle due to Spanish fever and the dreaded hoof and mouth disease. The introduction of barbed wire closed off the open plains needed for the large drives. The days of the cattle drives that brought up to 5 million cattle from Texas to Kansas may have come to an end, but its legacy still lives on in our imagination.