

# The Family Heritage Series

A weekly discussion of Americanist truths and traditions for those "heirs of all the ages" who will have to preserve that most important inheritance of all — freedom. Produced by the Movement To Restore Decency.



Volume II

Lesson Seventy-Seven

## Cattle Drives

### LESSON IDEA

To show the courage and determination required to drive a thousand herd of cattle from Texas, through badlands and Indian territory, to rail lines in the Kansas cowtowns.

### PREPARATION

We recommend obtaining a copy of *The Cowboys* (published by Time-Life Books, Inc.) from your local library, for an excellent pictorial history of the Texas cattle drives.

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**P**ITY POOR OLD Jesse Chisholm. He ate some bad bear grease in 1868 and died not long afterwards. He never knew that the trail he blazed from San Antonio, Texas to Abilene, Kansas would become one of the most famous cattle trails in American history. Or that between 1867 and 1884, millions of cattle would be prodded along his trail, destined for the slaughter houses of Kansas City and Chicago, to help feed a hungry and growing nation.

There were other trails leading from Texas to the cowtowns of the Great Plains: the Dodge City Trail, the Goodnight Trail, the Abilene Trail, and the Western Trail. Up these trails cowboys drove the longhorn steers to reach cattle pens squatting near newly laid railroad spurs. The completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 had opened up vast new opportunities for Texas cattlemen to get their meat to market quickly. From the cattleman's point of view, the longhorn steer was an ideal product. By the hundreds of thousands, these wild and woolly cattle roamed throughout Texas and Mexico. They were well-adapted to their sur-

roundings, feeding on the scrubby prairie grass, and capable of withstanding violent changes in temperature. What is more, they were free for the taking. Descendants of cattle that first arrived in Mexico on Spanish galleons, these longhorns had grown to be independent mavericks that became rip-snorting mad when corralled.

The first cattlemen acquired their herds by hiring some men to round up a few thousand strays then pushing them northward, letting them graze on the hundreds of miles of grasslands between Texas and Kansas. On a three-month drive up the Chisholm Trail, a steer would often gain as much as 400 pounds before it reached the railroad siding. What an ideal product for any businessman! The longhorn took care of itself, cost nothing to feed, and increased its weight along the trail — thereby increasing its selling price. At the start of the great cattle boom it cost little or nothing to get beef to market, but as open prairie land became more scarce, cattlemen were forced to both feed and breed cattle for market.

A cattleman usually had little difficulty finding enough men to drive a herd up north. Plenty of youngsters barely out of their teens willingly strapped on a six-gun and mounted a horse for a drive that would take them through badlands and Indian territory.

A typical drive would include at least ten men, including the trail boss and the cook. The cowboy's day began at 4 a.m., with the cook rousting them out of their bedrolls for a breakfast of steaming

