

History Lesson

Ancestors of the Texas Longhorn were first brought to the North American continent in 1521 by Gregoiro de villalobos, just six months prior to the subjugation of Mexico City and the establishment of New Spain for the crown of Emperor Charles V. The cattle originated around the salt marshes of the Guadaquivir River valley in the Andalusian Mountains of southwestern Spain. Transplanted to the New World, the estimated thirty heifers and three bull calves that landed on the banks of the Pánuco River near Tampico, on the eastern coast of Mexico, were to influence the history of North America no less profoundly than did the Industrial Revolution three centuries later.

Spanish explorers continued to bring cattle on subsequent trips to the New World, populating what is now southern Mexico, all of Central America and the northern Countries of South America. Beginning in 1682 and continuing through 1793, twenty-six Spanish Catholic Missions were established to spread their faith among the Native Americans and lay Spanish claim to the land. Shipped from ports in Sevilla and Cádiz, those Missions introduced cattle and livestock handling techniques from several regions in Spain to the territory now known as Texas. Andalusia (southern Spain including Sevilla, Córdoba, Jaen and Granada) was home to the solid red Retinto breed. Near Córdoba, there was a breed called Berrenda that was white with black points (ears, nose, legs and sometimes black markings around the neck). Extrema Dura (Estremadura) was home to the solid white Cacereño breed. The mountains of central Spain were home to solid black Andalusian cattle. As the Spanish abandoned the Missions or local Native people killed the Spanish, the livestock were left to fend for themselves.

Wild cattle roamed across Mexico and the southwestern United States unencumbered by mankind for more than two hundred years. Natural Selection created a hearty breed that was lean and able to travel long distances in search of forage and water. The breed had laterally twisting horns for fighting predators. With cunning and disease-resistance, the cattle thrived in the arid wilderness. Descendants of cattle from various regions in Spain commingled in the wild, creating offspring in a rainbow of colors. These animals possessed immunity to tick fever. Cattle brought by early settlers did not have this immunity and died from the disease, thus minimizing crossbreeding and preserving the Spanish ancestry of the Texas Longhorn.

The ranchers of Spain and Mexico provided the basis for most of our laws, equipment, procedures and terminology used in cattle ranching today. The 1529 Mesta (cattleman's organization) rules soon became laws that evolved to today's codes that are applied to the livestock industry in the U.S. The original Spanish military saddle lacked an effective saddle horn. The lasso (lariat) was put on the end of a lance or pole and dropped over the cow's horns, with the end usually tied to the horse's tail. The saddle horn was developed in the latter part of the 17th century and is similar to what is used today. The high-topped Spanish military boot was adapted to the cowboy boot of today. The wide brimmed

Mexican sombrero was suited to the Mexican climate and was the basis of the many styles of cowboy hats today. The vaquero's leather legging became the chaps and chinks now in use.

In 1821, Mexico won its independence from Spain and began colonizing the Texas region. Mexico offered land grants to US citizens. Moses Austin was awarded a land grant and entitled *Impresario*. He was assigned the task of settling three hundred families in his colony. Other *impresarios* were granted land in the same way and soon, thousands of US citizens flocked to Texas. Settling farmers domesticated the wild cattle in their areas, using them for draft animals and a source of beef. After his death, Moses Austin's son Stephen F. fulfilled his father's contract of introducing three hundred new settlers to his colony in San Antonio de Bexar. "According to the Mexican Constitution of 1824, these settlers were granted land, allowed to own slaves, and were to be free of taxes for seven years. The only requirements were that they become Mexican citizens, practice the Roman Catholic religion, and secure Texas for the Mexican government."¹ Mexico wanted Texas as a territory, not a state of Mexico with full representation, so settlers found themselves without a government or a militia to protect them from Indian raids. The state was ancestral home to near fifty Indian Nations, some quite hostile toward the newcomers. Another one of the many factors that contributed to the desire for Texas's independence from Mexico was a tax Mexico imposed on owners of cattle.

"Stephen F. Austin became the leading spokesperson for the "Texians" for all affairs with Mexico. Texas was a part of the territory known as Coahuila y Tejas. Many times Austin petitioned the government for separate statehood for Texas, all to no avail."¹ Formed to protect the colonies, Committees of Safety later became the Texas militia that took up battle with Mexico to gain independence. Austin traveled to Mexico in 1834 to petition the government once again. He was imprisoned there for three months. At home in Texas a revolution was being planned. In January 1835, the Mexican government ordered its citizenry be disarmed in Texas's neighboring state of Zacatecas, due to disturbances for reasons similarly experienced by Texans. Troops that were dispatched to expel dissidents by occupying Texas were recalled for use in Zacatecas. Later that year Mexico again assigned troops to Texas. "The Mexicans commenced their warlike movements at Goliad by jailing the Mexican Colonel Ugartachea assigned to oversee the territory, and extorting from the *administrador* the sum of five thousand dollars, under the penalty of being sent on foot a prisoner to Bexar in ten hours. Martial law was imposed; the town stripped of its arms, the people pressed into the ranks as soldiers, and given notice that the Mexican troops would be "quartered upon the citizens—five to a family — and should be supported by them."² Mexico intended to overrun and disarm all of Texas and drive out all Americans who had come into the territory since 1830.

The spring of 1836 witnessed Texas's bloodiest battles and the formation of the independent Republic of Texas. The new government of Texas voted to concede to annexation by the United States. Mexican dictator Antonio López de Santa Anna warned annexation would equal a declaration of war. In the following nine years before annexation by the United States, young Texas struggled as

an agricultural nation through savage battles between Texas Rangers, the Texas Army, and farming settlers against raiding native Indians determined to reclaim their ancestral lands. Political unrest continued between Texas and Mexico over boundary lines. Texas incurred huge debts, which the United States agreed to assume upon annexation. Annexation resulted in Mexico declaring war against the United States that was waged from 1846 until 1848 when the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed that allowed the U.S. to purchase California and other areas from Mexico on the condition that Americans would honor Mexican culture and values. The annexation of Texas was highly controversial amongst the states and contributed to widening American sectionalism leading up to the Civil War. In 1851, Federal frontier forts were established to assist pioneer farmer settlers from assaults by Indians and Mexicans. In 1852, in return for its assumption of Texas's debt, a large portion of Texas-claimed territory, now parts of Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Wyoming, was ceded to the Federal Government.³ Texas having joined the Union as a slave state, in 1861 seceded with ten other states from the Union to form the Confederacy. The War Between the States continued for four years, devastating the fragile Texas economy. Federal troops from forts were called away to fight for the Union Army, so Comanches and Kiowas reclaimed as much as one hundred miles of frontier. Many settlers left to fight the war and others fled from raiding Indians. Livestock again was left to roam wild on the open range. With few enterprises available in Texas's depressed economy after the war, and scarcity of supplies and hard currency, Texans were left to their own ingenuity. The one commodity they enjoyed in abundance was beef. From the brush country of South Texas to the grassy rolling plains of Northwest Texas, the lean, hardy breed of longhorn cattle proliferated. "Cow hunters," as the early-day cowboys called themselves, at last found a use for the land that Brig. Gen. Belknap had declared unfit to inhabit.⁴ The frontier shaped Texas history as well as the practicality, energy, and individualism of its people.

Thus began the legendary trail drives. The migration of Texas Longhorn cattle from south Texas to the northern plains and the Kansas railheads in the decade following the War Between the States was the largest movement of animals under the control of man in the history of the world. Some nine million head of Texas cattle were driven up the trails by men who, returning to Texas in 1865 after losing a war, found nothing in their new and vast state from which to make a living but millions of rangy, free-roaming and rancorous cattle hiding in the brush and the arroyos of the *brasada* country and the coastal plains of south Texas. The Texas Longhorn saved the Texas economy from imminent ruin. The money from the sale of the Texas Longhorn for the stocking of the northern plains and the feeding of the meat-hungry east was the foundation for the development of the Texas economy. An infrastructure of roads and railroads quickly developed to serve and cattle trade and enabled further economic development. The greatest and longest lasting impact of the Texas Longhorn was its cultural impact on the Wild West, which would not have existed without these cattle. The trail drives, cowboys and cow towns of the southwest expanded in legend first in the dime novel and later on the silver screen, changed us as a people.

Charles Goodnight was one of the brave men to blaze cattle trails and he established one of the most revered cattle ranches in Texas history--the JA Ranch in Palo Duro Canyon. Responsible for inventing the chuckwagon from an army surplus Studebaker wagon in 1866, he facilitated meal preparation for cowboys on cattle drives. Oxen or mules drew the chuckwagons. They are still used in varying forms today on large ranches.

Prior to the invention of the water-pumping windmill in 1854, human habitation, farming and livestock production were limited to areas in close proximity to a constant supply of flowing water. The advent of the windmill was a precursor to the ranching industry across the Southwest.

By the end of the 1870s, the national economic depression had mostly run its course, and the long-awaited southern transcontinental route soon became a reality. The Texas & Pacific Railroad that had stood frozen between Dallas and Fort Worth since 1873, suddenly burst across West Texas in 1880 and 1881. By the time it connected with the Southern Pacific near Sierra Blanca, any number of tent and clapboard railroad towns sprang up along the tracks. Abilene, planned by the T&P as its market hub, signaled the beginning of a new era.⁴ European livestock shipped on rail cars began to populate the lush farming communities in Texas. Gone now were the days of driving herds of cattle on horseback, walking hundreds of miles. Gone too, was the frontier.

The frontier did live on first in the Wild West shows and later in the rodeos of today. The term rodeo comes from the Spanish word *rodear*. The *rodear* started in the mid 16 century as a roundup of the wild cattle to get them used to humans and easier to handle. The *ranchero* was the center of social activity and probably the scene of many *vaquero* contests. Buffalo Bill Cody started the Wild West show in 1883 followed by Pawnee Bill in 1886. Bill Pickett was one of the early rodeo stars who invented bulldogging (steer wrestling). The Wild West shows spread the cowboy craft around the world, and the early *vaquero* contest was the first step toward the PCRA, the professional cowboy rodeo association of today. Rodeo is the official sport of the state of Texas.

Barbed wire became commercially available in the late 1870's. It was an inexpensive fence capable of restraining cattle. It became affordable to fence large areas. Massive ranches were established. The Texas Legislature, in 1879 appropriated three million acres to finance building a new state capitol building. The contract was awarded to the Farwell Brothers out of Chicago to build our red granite capitol in Austin, still the largest state capitol on the North American Continent. Their payment was the land that became the XIT Ranch. Over thirty miles wide and encompassing part of ten counties in the panhandle, the XIT range was the largest in the world under fence. Hundreds of miles of wire was stretched across Texas in the 1880's, forever halting roaming of wild herds of grazing animals and taming the West. Cattle became the backbone of the economy, supplying beef to the nation. Mining towns sprang up westward along the railroads, supplied with food by area ranches.

The growing urban population of the country realized the need to preserve scenic areas of the West. First Yellowstone National Park was established in 1872, then Yosemite in 1890. The Sierra Club was founded in 1892. Big Bend National Park was not established until 1933. It became a National Park ten years later. Prior to acquisition by the state, the land was used for ranching. Sheep and hearty Texas Longhorn cattle dotted the landscape.

By the end of the 1880's, all peaceful Indians had been relocated to Oklahoma Reservations. Federal troops and Texas Rangers had exterminated the last of the hostile Comanches. Cities were developing across the state with commerce of all kinds. Herds of cattle behind barbed wire fences replaced the once massive herds of roaming bison.

In 1901 the first oil well, Spindletop, gushed oil one hundred feet into the Texas sky, propelling the Texas economy from its agricultural roots and flung headlong into the petroleum and industrial age. Landowners across the state became wealthy over the next one hundred years by selling the mineral reserves under their ranches. Cattle were no longer the primary source of income for the state.

Importation of fat cattle from England and Bos Indicus cattle from India became commonplace by 1900. Consumers favored English cattle for their beef's fat content. Indian cattle, shipped into Texas ports, were better adapted to insect resistance so ranchers along the coast crossed them with their English cattle. The Texas Longhorn fell from favor of ranchers for several reasons: its horns made it difficult to pack tightly into rail cars, its meat was lean, its tall, slim athletic frame made it more difficult to contain in fences, and its independent nature did not conform to the organized group grazing habits of English cattle. Many ranchers "bred up" their herds of range cattle to fancy imported bulls. At the turn of the twentieth century, on the brink of extinction through crossbreeding, the U.S. Congress revived the Texas Longhorn in 1927 with the establishment of a national herd at the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge in Cache, Oklahoma. This herd endures today as a leading source of seedstock. Where the Texas Longhorn once carried the dreams of westward expansion into a new century, today the breed's future lies in redefining the beef industry as a source of naturally grown, high-quality, savory beef with the fat and cholesterol content of the leanest of seafood. The first cattle to set foot in North America and the only breed of cattle to evolve without human management, the Texas Longhorn can thrive in country where no other breed can live; subsist on weeds, cactus and brush; range days away from water; and stay fit and fertile whether it's living in the scorching, parasite-infested tropics or in the arid, subzero winters of Montana. As our society continues to multiply and the most desirable agricultural land is developed for human habitation, Texas Longhorn genetics are in greater demand for their qualities that enable them to live on marginal terrain with little maintenance from man. Their lean, healthful beef qualities are now in demand. The Texas Longhorn having evolved in this land is well adapted to grass finishing without grain supplementation making the breed environmentally sustainable and in high demand by educated, health-conscious consumers.

Thanks to:

Texas Heroes website is recommended for teaching aid ideas.

San Antonio Charro Association

Bozeman curriculum

1. Dallas Historical Society
2. Son of the South
3. Wikipedia
4. Texas Beyond History [|](#)
5. Dary David Cowboy Culture, A Saga of Five Centuries, University Press of Kansas 1981,1989
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9. Atherton Lewis The Cattle Kings University of Nebraska Press 1961