

OPEN RANGE RANCHING IN NORTH DAKOTA
1870S-1910S

CONTEXT STUDY

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1996

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ABSTRACT

Open Range Ranching in North Dakota, 1870s-1910s, is a context study of an important aspect of agriculture in North Dakota. The study covers the circumstances behind the establishment, growth and evolution over time of ranching operations in western North Dakota. The principal defining features of open range ranching are neglect of livestock, the availability of an extensive free and open range, the presence of stockmen's associations who impose order, and the absence of land surveys. These practices could not have developed in North Dakota until the buffalo were slaughtered and the Native American occupants of the land removed to reservations. The construction of transcontinental railroad systems directly fostered the industry, for it provided the means for cattle to reach growing markets in Europe and eastern America.

Three types of open range ranching operations occurred. The first were the pre-railroad ranchers who supplied special markets, including mining camps in the Black Hills, Indian agencies, and military outposts. Developing in earnest between 1881 and 1886, bonanza ranching was ranching on a large scale; many participants brought stock in from Texas. Still other open range ranchers shipped in blooded stock, mostly Shorthorn and Hereford, from the Midwest and the west coast. Significant numbers of ranchers came to North Dakota from Texas, the East and Midwest, and foreign countries, including France, Canada, and Scotland.

The winter of 1886-87 was disastrous, following on the heels of a drought, and thousands of cattle perished. Coupled with falling prices, the winter marked a shift on the open range. Factors in the change included ignorance of the qualities of the semiarid Great Plains environment, onset of land surveys, and the arrival of many more homesteaders. The free range policy encouraged overstocking of the range as an international speculative fever brought on a fleeting cattle boom. Large numbers of cattle continued to be brought into western North Dakota, but in diminishing numbers. The definition of a "big rancher" changed over time, from between 10,000 and 25,000 in the 1880s to between 50 and 1000 head by 1904. By the 1910s, the open range ranching period had passed.

The context for this study was related to actual examples through the development of property types. Livestock Management Networks are properties associated with moving livestock into, within or out of the free range. Open Range Ranch Headquarters were constructed to accommodate personnel and livestock, such as saddle horses, at ranch headquarters. Research identified 145 ranches established some time between the late 1870s and the late 1890s in 19 counties. Significant concentrations were located in Billings, Dunn, McHenry, and Oliver counties.

The context study was prepared following National Register Bulletins 15, 16A and 16B, 24, 30, and 32, and state guidelines. All work was conducted in a manner consistent with the standards and guidelines published by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior and the State Historical Society of North Dakota.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Manuscript Data Record Form	i
Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
Research Design	1
Qualifications of Project Participant	2
SETTING THE STAGE	3
American Attitudes Toward Land Use	3
Western North Dakota	4
Political Conditions	5
BEGINNINGS, 1870S-1886	7
Development of the Open Range Ranching Industry	7
Definition of Open Range Ranching	7
International Influences	8
Types of Open Range Ranching	10
Pre-Railroad Specialized Suppliers	10
Bonanza Ranching	11
Blooded Stock	12
MONEY MATTERS	14
THE CATTLE BOOM	17
Just How Many Cattle Were There?	19
Bloom off the Boom	20
PARTICIPANTS	21
Serendipity	21
Allurement	21
European Ranchers	22
Continuance	22
DEMISE OF THE OPEN RANGE, 1886-c. 1910	23
The Winter	23
Demise of the Free Range	25
OPEN RANGE RANCH OPERATIONS	29
Trailing	29
Range Limits	29

Stockmen's Associations	30
Spring Round-up	30
Fall Round-up	31
Ranch Headquarters	32
Auxiliary Camps	32
PROPERTY TYPES	33
The Geography of the Open Range	33
Sheep Ranches	34
Property Types	34
Description	35
Livestock Management Networks	36
Open Range Ranch Headquarters	39
Fee Simple Ranch Facilities	43
EVALUATION CRITERIA	45
Criteria	45
Criterion A	45
Criterion B	45
Criterion C	46
Criterion D	47
Integrity	48
Period of Significance, 1870s-1910s	48
Landscape Issues	49
DATA GAPS	50
Information Sources	50
Specific Ranches and Their Locations	50
Statistical Data	50
History of Grazing Files	51
SHPO Studies	51
Published Accounts	51
Property Types	52
Landscape Issues	52
Research Questions	52
PRESERVATION STRATEGIES	54
END NOTES	56
BIBLIOGRAPHY	65

TABLES

Table 1. Initial Arrival of Texas Longhorns to the Plains	9
Table 2. Price of Best Steers Per Hundredweight, Chicago Market	20

FIGURES

1. The Great Plains Region, with Some Characteristics of its Eastern Limits.
2. Map Showing Topography of North Dakota.
3. Map with Ten Largest Open Range Ranch Operations in Region.
4. Map Showing Small-Large Scale Open Range Cattle Ranches, late 1870s-late 1890s.
5. Ranches in Vicinity Little Missouri River.
6. Map of the Origins and Spread of the Texas System of Cattle Ranching Including Major Trails.
7. The Outlying Camp.
8. Elk Horn Ranch Buildings, Billings County.
9. Sketch of Bellows Ranch in the 1890s.
10. Photograph of Unidentified Ranch, probably Slope County.
11. Photograph of HT Ranch, Slope County.
12. Coutts Marjoribanks' Horse-Shoe Ranch in Mouse River Region.
13. The Old-Time Cow Ranch.
14. Floor Plan, Pierre Wibaux W-Bar Ranch, Montana.
15. Photograph of Little Missouri Horse Company Headquarters, Slope County, 1892.

APPENDICES

- Appendix A. List of 145 North Dakota Ranches, 1870s-1890s. (See Figure 4.)
Appendix B. North Dakota Ranches, by County, 1870s-1890s. (See Figure 4.)
Appendix C. Examples Drawn from the Literature of the Open Range Property Type.

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The Archeology and Historic Preservation Division of the State Historical Society of North Dakota solicited proposals to develop a context pertaining to open range ranching in western North Dakota. The project consisted of performing historical and architectural research leading to preparation of a context statement. National Register Bulletins 15, 16A, 16B, 24, 30, and 32 were followed and applied to the project.

A considerable body of writings has developed on the topic of open range ranching in the Great Plains, which of course includes western North Dakota. In order to assess the applicability of the overall Great Plains experience to western North Dakota, it was necessary to consult a wide variety of valuable, though at times conflicting resources.

It was presumed that the experience of developing the open range ranching context could be applied to other agricultural studies in the state. Survey was not included in this project, and this was an appropriate decision. Relatively few extant examples are currently known--one study places the number at six. Now that the beginnings of a fully developed context and related property types are underway, it is possible to better define what resources are likely to be found and their location.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this planning project was to conduct sufficient research to prepare a fully developed historic context, including a written project report. The context development was prepared following Bulletins 15, 16A and 16B, and 24, and state guidelines. The contexts are tied to actual examples through the development of property types. All work was conducted in a manner consistent with the standards and guidelines published by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior and the State Historical Society of North Dakota.

Research moved in pyramidal fashion from the general to the specific. Works regarding American responses to the land, including the exploitation of natural resources, were reviewed and applied to the study. Sources relating to the topic were consulted as needed to provide a regional perspective. These included National Register nominations for ranch houses, the WPA History of Grazing Files in the State Archives, and the historical society's photographic collection.

The experiences of Theodore Roosevelt and the Marquis de Mores in western North Dakota are well known. We sought to go beyond these colorful accounts to explore more ordinary experiences and thereby gain a fuller understanding of the complex processes at work.

The context statement is intended to address how, when, and why open range ranching developed, who participated, and what occurred over time. The context statement or historical overview addressed the circumstances behind the establishment, growth and evolution over time of ranching operations in western North Dakota. Factors (political, economic, social), important participants, and the defining associative and physical characteristics of the open range ranching property type were identified and assessed. Comparisons with ranching in other Great Plains states was another fundamental component of the research.

The construction of railroads, such as the Northern Pacific, the disastrous winter of 1887-87 which decimated herds across the Northern Plains, and the arrival of more traditional settlers affected the future of open range ranching practices. The impact of these and other factors was considered. Comparisons were made with fee simple ranching practices, although a complete fee simple context was not developed. Ecozones 21, 22, and 23 constituted the minimum study area.

QUALIFICATIONS OF PROJECT PARTICIPANT

Barbara Beving Long, historian for Rivercrest Associates, Inc. was responsible for all aspects of the project. She meets the federal professional qualifications standards to conduct both architectural and historical projects. Over the past fifteen years she has accumulated extensive experience conducting context development projects, intensive level architectural and historical surveys, and writing National Register nominations, including a number of projects in North Dakota.

Long's experience ranges through all levels of the National Register process from initial surveys to completed and listed nominations in the Midwest and Plains states. National Register experience includes writing nominations for thirty-seven individual properties and five historic districts, evaluating more than 7,000 properties in Waterloo, Iowa for National Register eligibility, and serving as the public liaison on the Iowa State National Register Review Committee. She has prepared six multiple property nominations, which required context and property type statements. Long has also researched, written, or edited numerous cultural resource management reports.

SETTING THE STAGE

AMERICAN ATTITUDES TOWARD LAND USE

In the late 19th century, natural resources, whether gold, prairie chickens, or land, were viewed as items of consumption. They existed to be used, to be exploited for rapid economic gain. Scant thought was given to conservation of natural resources. Rather, areas not yet occupied by Euro-Americans were looked upon as wild frontiers which must be subdued, their riches extracted for economic advancement.¹

Before open range ranching could fully develop in Dakota Territory, two long time occupants of the land had to be removed: the buffalo and the Plains Indians. Railroad construction, federal policies, and Euro-American attitudes toward natural resources all played significant roles in changing the composition of the Plains. The change began in earnest in the early 1870s and extended into the early 1880s, depending on the area. By the early 1870s, the US military had established four forts along the Missouri River in present North Dakota (Rice, Abraham Lincoln, Stevenson, and Buford). By then, many Plains Indians lived on reservations or were attached to Indian agencies across Dakota Territory.²

A military expedition led by General George A. Custer in 1874 prompted changes in treaties between the Sioux Indians and the US government and contributed further to the displacement of the Plains Indians. After it became widely known that Custer had found gold in the Black Hills, a rush to mine the lode ensued. According to an Indian commissioner's report, some 11,000 prospectors populated the mining boomtown of Custer City by March of 1876. In clear contradiction to the Laramie Treaty of 1868, the Sioux were forced to cede the Black Hills--now considered valuable real estate--to the US government. The agreement was ratified in February of 1877, opening the way to legal Euro-American occupation of the northern Great Plains.³

With the Indians largely confined to reservations, it was possible to achieve the second step, wholesale removal of the buffalo. In a speed that was unseemly, sportsmen and professional hunters slaughtered the buffalo on the Plains. New tanning technology provided a commercial market for buffalo hides in America and abroad. The hides were used for belts in industrial machinery, for padding and covering furniture, and for the tops of carriages, sleighs, and hearses. Frazier Brothers were among those who sought to provide hides to the expanding market. In 1878-79, the company slaughtered some 5,000 buffalo in Montana. Usher Burdick, who worked for Frazier Brothers, estimated that in one season, 1879-80, 150,000 head were killed along the Yellowstone River from the Big Horn Mountains to the site of present Sidney, Montana.⁴ Burdick cast out on his own with John Herbert in 1880. In the winter season of 1880-81, their company alone killed 1,300 buffalo, but in 1881-82 the number was only 900. And in 1882-83 they found but 37 buffalo in Montana.⁵

Large scale slaughter on the Little Missouri River in present North Dakota commenced the fall of 1881. By the fall of 1883, the buffalo herds that had epitomized an important biological

adaptation to the Great Plains were all but gone. The last big hunt in North Dakota occurred in 1882. The buffalo were sought for their hides, meat, and, later, their bones. The latter were shipped east to make carbon black for refining sugar. It has been estimated that upwards of 10,000,000 buffalo were slaughtered on the northern and southern plains.⁶

Large scale buffalo hunting provided an unintentional by-product: sportsmen from the East and from Europe visited the Great Plains. While in pursuit of "good sport," they became aware of the unique qualities of the Plains. Notable examples, including Howard Eaton of Pittsburgh, A.C. Huidekoper of Pennsylvania, Theodore Roosevelt of New York, Gregor Lang of Scotland, and the Marquis de Mores of France, returned to establish ranches in present North Dakota.⁷

WESTERN NORTH DAKOTA

The Great Plains extend from Mexico to Canada and east-west between approximately the 98th-100th meridian and the Rocky Mountains. The vast region (1,300 miles long by 200 to 700 miles wide) sprawls across one-fifth of the land area of the United States. The Great Plains include parts of ten states: North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana. Some scholars offer the more westerly 100th meridian as the eastern boundary. A detailed study by Howard Ottoson and others of the soils and land use potential of the transition area between the 100th and 98th meridian and offers convincing evidence for extending the boundary. The 100th meridian was generally the boundary between tall grass and short grass. (Figure 1.) We found that cattle ranching took place in this transitional zone during the open range period.⁸

Western North Dakota is part of the northern extent American Great Plains. The dividing line is the Missouri Escarpment, a 300-400 foot high boundary which arcs from the Canadian border in the northwest part of the state to South Dakota. (Figure 2.) The Missouri Escarpment is a boundary for differences in soil, vegetation, and climate.⁹ North Dakota historian Elwyn Robinson admirably describes the plateau west of the Missouri River known as the Missouri Slope or the Slope:

The landscape of the Slope contrasts with that east of the Missouri. East of the river the Missouri Plateau has a youthful, rolling topography formed by glacial drift, but the Slope was carved by running water working on the soft, poorly cemented sands and clays of the exposed rocks. The Slope's scanty vegetation has done little to check this erosive work, whose most spectacular results are seen in the Badlands along the Little Missouri River. There streams have cut the land into innumerable canyons, gorges, and ravines and have produced an incredible waste of bluffs and pinnacles, often colored in shades of red from masses of scoria, the clinker of clays fused by burning lignite beds.¹⁰

In contrast with subhumid and humid areas to the east, the climate of the Great Plains is semiarid. Further west, the climate is arid. In western North Dakota, this translates to "cold winters and hot summers, warm days and cool nights, light rainfall, low humidity, and much

sunshine." Although few would contend that the climate of western North Dakota is for the faint of heart, it does enjoy lighter snowfall and a mean temperature that is approximately one degree higher than that of the eastern counties. Chinook winds temper the harshness of winter weather.¹¹

In response to the semiarid climate, the native prairie grasses are short rather than tall. They are well adapted to the environment: drought resistant, produce seed early, achieve dormancy during summer and fall drought, and winter hardy. The short grasses are nutritious and, it is amazing to note, cure on the stem. The grasses thus made for excellent feeding the year around. (For these reasons, the buffalo preferred short grasses over the seemingly more luxuriant tall grasses.) A semiarid climate was a necessity for proper short grass prairie, for heavy rainfall produces rank and watery grass and conditions whereby the grasses cannot dry sufficiently and with a high protein content.¹²

The semiarid portions of North Dakota offered qualities uniquely suited to open range cattle raising: prairie grasses that cured on the stem, relatively mild winters, sheltering valleys, and sparse population. Boosters, journalists, and government agents from the period touted these characteristics. W.P. Jenney, government geologist, wrote of the Black Hills in 1875. Noting that large areas "will afford fine grazing," he concluded that the stock-raising possibilities "constitute the real future wealth of this region and its value can hardly be over estimated." An oft-repeated quote from the same period by Dakota guide California Joe was more colorful: "There's gold from the grass roots down, but there's more gold from the grass roots up."¹³

Ranchers and investors in cattle ranching had no access to a study of tree rings published in 1943 which might have given them pause. By tracing the annual growth-ring of trees in western Nebraska, a scientist was able to show the cycle of five-year droughts between 1539 and 1939. During this 154-year period, there were 13 instances of at least five-year droughts. The average duration of the drought period was 12.85 years, with examples ranging from five to 26 years. Between 1565 and 1930, the periods between droughts averaged 20.58 years. Extended drought was inevitable if its timing was not entirely predictable.¹⁴

POLITICAL CONDITIONS

The vast openness of the Great Plains offered an arena for open range ranching, and the political setting further contributed to the viability of these large scale ranching enterprises. After the first of a series of forced Indian land cessions beginning in 1858, Congress established Dakota Territory in 1861. The organization followed on the heels of statehood for adjacent Iowa (1846) and Minnesota (1858) and was part of a pattern of westward agricultural settlement. In Dakota Territory, new arrivals streamed into the area of present South Dakota around Yankton, eventually occupying the fertile region of the Red River valley in present North Dakota. In the Great Plains portions of Dakota, however, settlement was minimal, save the Black Hills region after the discovery of gold in 1874. Awareness of the very different environment of the Great Plains was a factor in the paucity of settlement west of the 98th meridian.¹⁵

The wheels were in motion to populate Dakota Territory with agriculturalists. Federal land policies designed to foster settlement included the land ordinance of 1785, the Preemption Act of 1841 (repealed 1891), the Homestead Act of 1862 (1880, applied to unsurveyed land too), the Timber Culture Act of 1873 (repealed 1882 after cattlemen abuses) , and the Desert Land Act of 1887 (amended 1890), and, later, the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909, the Stock Raising Act of 1914, and the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934.

In a recent South Dakota context study of agriculture, it was stated that certain land legislation was of particular relevance to open range ranching: the land ordinance, Preemption Act, Homestead Act, and Timber Culture Act, and Desert Land Act of 1887 (amended 1890).¹⁶ This may be the case in North Dakota as well, especially after the peak period of the 1880s. However, it has been contended that cattle companies in the Great Plains abused these acts, and the Timber Culture Act was repealed after just a few years because of these abuses. The relationship between federal land policies and open range ranching may be characterized in general as a negative one, for the policies encouraged small-scale settlement on formerly open range.

BEGINNINGS, 1870S-1886

DEVELOPMENT OF THE OPEN RANGE RANCHING INDUSTRY

Definition of Open Range Ranching

The key components that characterize open range ranching are the following:

- ▶ Neglect of livestock
- ▶ Availability of free and open range
- ▶ Stockmen's associations impose order
- ▶ Absence of land surveys

Open range ranching as practiced in the Great Plains may be defined as raising livestock through neglect. Ranchers did not provide special shelter, supplementary feed, or water. No fencing of livestock pastures was necessary. And the range was not just open, use of the grass was free. (In some instances, especially later, a rancher--or, at his request, his employees--might squat on land or even homestead a small site near a good water source.) Sheltering valleys replaced the barn as the source of winter shelter. Grasses which cured on the stem provided the food source out on the open range. Natural water sources, creeks and rivers, afforded livestock a water supply. Open range ranching included the raising of smaller numbers of sheep and horses, but is mostly strongly associated with cattle.¹⁷

The approach derived from subtropical locales, especially the Carolina Gulf Coast. The Texas system of ranching (which evolved out of Carolina and Mexican methods) can be characterized by three qualities: equestrian skills (such as "cutting out" an animal from the herd), roping, and above all livestock neglect. Indeed, the term, *cowboy*, which also evolved from the Texas system, aptly marries the relationship of man on horseback with the cattle he tended.¹⁸

The term, *open range ranching*, refers to how the cattle were run, not their point of origin, their breed, or their number. While millions of Iberian longhorns were indeed sent north from Texas, an estimated four-fifths were steers bound for market, not bulls and cows intended to stock the ranges.¹⁹ Virtually from the start in North Dakota, and certainly by the early 1880s, sources of cattle from virtually every direction stocked western Dakota. Texas cattlemen drove longhorns up from north central Texas. Midwestern stockmen transported blooded stock, mostly Shorthorns and Herefords, from Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, and also from west coast areas, including Washington and Oregon. Midwestern, eastern and, sometimes, European cattle raisers also imported European stock.

While Texas-style open range ranching dominated the initial approach to tending livestock on the Great Plains including present western North Dakota, the practitioners, who were not all Texan, variously adopted and adapted Texan techniques. Representatives from three areas, Texas and the South, the Midwest and East, and Europe all participated in and enriched the

development of cattle ranching in North Dakota. The precise extent and impact of these influences remains to be explored.

While it appears that most open range participants felt that some or all their ranching practices were temporary phenomena, it is not clear that all felt they would soon leave Dakota Territory. The smaller scale stockmen may have felt in for the long (or longer) haul. Certainly, many wives and children accompanied the ranchers to ranches they established. The 1885 Territorial Census listed 36 ranchers, cattlemen, cowmen, stock raisers, or stockmen in nine northwestern Dakota counties. Of the 36, twenty brought along their families. In addition to cowboys, some also had other hired help. The Robert H. Gray Ranch in Renville County included wife Mary, daughter Jeannette, and three Gray brothers. There were also seven herders, the cook, and three "stock raisers" who were also Gray boarders, one of whom brought his wife. The Charles V. Basye Ranch in McIntosh County consisted of Charles' wife and father, a housekeeper (probably the sister of one of the cowboys), two cowboys (one age 14), and the "dairymaid."²⁰

Such retinues suggested at least the possibility that these arrivals intended to stay for an extended period. In various contemporary references, there seemed to be an expectation that open range ranching was a temporary phenomenon on the landscape. Contemporary accounts refer to both the inevitability of the onset of supplanting agricultural settlement and overstocking which would ruin the range. The large scale Texas outfits seemed to regard their stay in the Dakotas as very temporary.²¹ The completion of land surveys was often mentioned as a division point signaling the end of the free range era.

Perhaps the feeling of inevitability contributed to relatively benign relations between ranchers and homesteaders in North Dakota. Ranchers reportedly behaved as though they knew the time of the open range was temporary and limited. They seemed to feel that it was legal, inevitable, even proper, that permanent homesteaders would replace the open range approach to ranching. The ranchers would either move on or pare down their herds and engage in smaller scale ranching or combined ranching and crop raising. No violent range wars have been recorded in North Dakota.²²

International Influences

Open range ranching, also known as the Anglo-Texan ranching system, evolved from several cultural sources. The mixing of Carolina southern coastal prairies and Mexican coastal herding traditions occurred along the southwest coast of Louisiana and adjacent southeastern Texas in the period beginning 1780 and continuing to around 1820.²³

A basic contribution to open range ranching in Texas, longhorn cattle, came from Spain, by way of Mexico. The breed was well adapted to foraging in unattended herds in hot, dry climates. In addition, such "Old West" terms and practices as the emphasis on roping and equestrian skills, the horned saddle, and the words *lariat* and *corral*, derived from Mexico. The concept of "accustomed range," whereby unbranded stock was awarded to the user of the land where they were found, was also Mexican.²⁴

Carolina-derived cattle raisers who expanded into Louisiana adopted some Mexican herding practices, but also retained many traits from their own cattle culture. Vocabulary can be an important indicator of cultural influences. Carolinian (and Jamaican) influences provided the words *dogie* and *cowboy*. Herding practices from this culture included holding only two roundups (spring and fall), "riding line" around the edge of one's defined range, the use of whips, and the British brand approach combining block letters and numerals. (Mexican brands were curvilinear and displayed a much more decorative appearance.) The involvement of wealthy absentee owners was another Carolina or British trait, as was the emphasis on beef production rather than only hides and tallow, the trend in Mexico. The all-but-complete neglect of the livestock also derived from coastal Carolina customs, perhaps the salient quality of open range ranching in America. In Texas and later the Great Plains, this translated to no special effort to manage or provide special livestock pasturing, even during the winter.²⁵

In the early 1800s, the coastal method of ranching spread from Louisiana and southeastern Texas westward along the Gulf Coast. After around 1860, that area was saturated, even over-stocked, and the focus of ranching shifted. Geographic barriers, existing ranching in Mexico, and inappropriate adjacent territory caused a shift or jump in concentration to the north central part of Texas. This area contained rolling topography, tallgrass prairie, and oak and cedar copses. Coastal-derived Texas ranchers seem not to have moved to north central Texas, although their customs did migrate north, probably along the market trails and with the numerous itinerant cowboys seeking work. Many of the north central cattlemen were of upland, not coastal, southern stock, who had ventured to the area from points east.²⁶

Cattle ranching thrived in north central Texas during the 1860s. By 1863, three counties each contained more than 25,000 head of cattle. By the early 1870s, however, the over-grazed pastureland was depleted, and cattlemen again sought new ranges. No great herds were to be found in north central Texas by 1874, by which time the region served as the staging ground for the "spectacular diffusion through the Great Plains."²⁷

Table 1. Initial Arrival of Texas Longhorns to the Plains. Source: Jordan, *North American Cattle-Ranching Frontiers*

<i>Year of Arrival</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Local Market/Impetus</i>
1859	Colorado	mining towns
1866	E. Montana Idaho New Mexico	mining towns mining towns Indian agencies
1867	Kansas Dakota	railhead Indian agencies
1868	E. Wyoming	Indian treaties
1869	Nebraska Ft. Rice, Dakota Terr.	railhead military

1877	Dakota (Black Hills)	mining towns
1878	Montana	ranching
late 1870s	Alberta & Saskatchewan	ranching
early 1880s	Nevada	ranching?
1881	W. North Dakota	ranching

Types of Open Range Ranching

There were three basic types of open range ranching operations in North Dakota:

- ▶ Specialized relatively small scale ventures established early on to supply beef to Dakota consumers once the supply of buffalo was depleted (mining towns, military posts, railroad construction camps, Indian agencies)
- ▶ Large herds of longhorns trailed in from north central Texas to fatten and sell to eastern markets
- ▶ Small to large herds of blooded stock to breed and also to sell to eastern markets

Pre-Railroad Specialized Suppliers

Beginning in earnest in the early 1870s, cattle raisers in Iowa, Minnesota, and Texas received government contracts to supply forts and Indian agencies in Dakota Territory. In 1874 alone, Yankton newspapers reported on separate herds of 2,000, 3,000, and 4,000 head of Texas cattle bound, via Nebraska, for Indian reservations in Dakota.²⁸

As early as 1869, one contractor drove cattle from Sioux City, Iowa to Fort Rice on the Missouri River south of present Bismarck. In the late 1870s, Dan Manning and Hans Christensen came to Dakota Territory to furnish hay and butter to military outposts, Forts Lincoln and Rice.²⁹

Manning and Christensen remained, as did others, to operate ranches during the open range ranching period. For example, in 1870 Robert C. Matthews accompanied a beef herd driven from St. Paul to Fort Buford, with deliveries at Fort Abercrombie, Fort Wadsworth, Fort Totten, and Fort Stevenson. He remained at Fort Buford, found work with government contractors, and established a ranch (including grain production) on the Little Muddy sometime before 1880.³⁰

North Dakota ranching was an extension of cattle ranching in the Black Hills region of present South Dakota which arose due to extensive gold mining. The discovery of gold in the Black Hills in 1874 and related Indian treaties translated to the arrival of Euro-Americans in the Dakotas intent upon exploiting the area's abundant natural resources. While miners sought to strike it rich, Texas and other southern cattlemen brought beef on the hoof. These southerners employed the southern coastal tradition of allowing cattle and horses to range freely, even during the winter months.³¹

Armed with government contracts and aware of the miners' demand for beef, suppliers drove in herds to meet the needs of Dakota Territory occupants. The late 1870s and early 1880s constituted the boom period in southwestern Dakota. In 1876-77, the Dan and Erasmus Deffebach brought in cattle, then butchered them all to supply Black Hills mining camps. Bolstered by the experience, the following year they established perhaps the earliest ranch in the Black Hills. By the end of 1877, Black Hills newspapers were reporting that 100,000 head of cattle occupied the Black Hills, many of them driven up from Texas. Open range ranching developed rapidly in the Black Hills, so much so that ranchers felt the need to organize to control operations on the range. Established in 1880, the Black Hills Livestock Association had 52 members in 1881 and 60 ranchers or cattle companies with more than 264,000 head of cattle in 1882, a number that mushroomed to between 700,000 and 800,000 head in 1884.³²

Bonanza Ranching

Large scale open range ranching on the Great Plains arrived from north central Texas. The process was as incredibly rapid as it was fleeting. In the 15-year period following the Civil War, the Texas system of open range ranching could be found across the Great Plains, arcing from New Mexico up to Montana and into Canada. In the 18-year period between 1866 and 1884, it has been estimated that more than five million Texas cattle were driven north, the "largest short-term geographical shift of domestic herd animals in the history of the world."³³

Texas cattle companies and their European investors were the driving force behind this mobilization. Still, European investors and ranchers often favored the introduction of imported blooded stock to improve the quality of exported beef. In the Mouse River region of North Dakota, Coutts Marjoribanks, son of a Scottish baron, and E.H. Thurseley, English nephew of a baronet, emphasized the importance of thoroughbred stock.³⁴

Much has been written about the rigors of the trail drive. A typical herd, 3,000 head of cattle, took months to trail north. In the early 1880s, a large cattle company hired Wils Richards to trail 4,000 head from the Texas Panhandle to the Plains. With a crew of a dozen cowboys and perhaps 50 saddle horses, they set out in mid-May, bound for the Black Hills. Upon their arrival in mid-August, they heeded the advice of a trapper and instead continued another 150 miles north to the Killdeer Mountains. There, Richards established the Diamond C Ranch, turning the herd loose for the winter. The exercise was repeated countless times.³⁵

Aware of the time required and the toll on cattle from the trail drive, Texas cattlemen opted to use the railroads when possible. As soon as railroads were constructed into the West, cattle were shipped part way by rail, then trailed to their open range destination. In fact, the relative proximity to railroad shipping points was a key factor in determining the pace and timing of extension of the range. Faced with an over-stocked north central Texas range, cattlemen sought new shipping points on the advancing line of railroad construction. Ogallala, Nebraska, for example, became an important shipping point as the ranching frontier pushed northward. When the Union Pacific Railroad was constructed through central Nebraska and into southern Wyoming in 1868-69, these areas saw a notable influx of Texas cattle.³⁶

Farther north, preliminary surveying on the Northern Pacific line across present North Dakota began in 1871, and the line reached Bismarck two years later. The nationwide financial panic of 1873 stilled construction for a time, and it was not until 1880 that westward construction resumed. That same year, the military established Cantonment Bad Lands on the Little Missouri River near present Medora to protect railroad construction workers.³⁷

In 1880, "not a hoof of ranch cattle" was to be found between Bismarck and Bozeman, Montana, a more than 600 mile expanse. Although rail facilities were in place at Bismarck, large scale ranching did not develop in northwestern Dakota until after 1880-81 when Indian tribes were removed to reservations. The stage was set for an expansion that was as enormous as it was fleeting in the northern expanse of the Great Plains, Wyoming, Montana, and Dakota.³⁸

Resourceful cattlemen seized upon a variety of rail shipping points to bring in cattle from points south. In 1883, the large cattle outfits began using Dickinson over former favorites, Valentine, Nebraska and Pierre, South Dakota. In 1888, some North Dakota cattlemen used Orrin Junction, Wyoming as their shipping point, for the cattle only had a 400 mile walk to reach present North Dakota. In 1890 the 777 Ranch shipped 3,500 head to Lima, South Dakota, then drove them to North Dakota. In 1892 the Knife River Ranch obtained a mostly longhorn herd of 2,300 cattle in New Mexico, shipped them to Denver, then had them trailed to his ranch on the Knife River north of Dickinson.³⁹

Blooded Stock from the East and the West

The magnitude and lore of the Texas invasion of longhorns obscures the other avenues of ingress from the East and the West. Railroads carried out of the Dakotas livestock bound for slaughter in St. Paul and Chicago but also imported hundreds of thousands of head of cattle. According to an account reprinted from a St. Paul newspaper, the Northern Pacific Railroad shipped 100,000 yearlings and two-year-olds from points east into Montana and western Dakota in 1884.⁴⁰

The scale of operations was grand and railroad-dependent. A hundred carloads with 2,000 head of eastern stock for the open ranges passed through Little Missouri in just two days in April of 1884. The following month, it was reported that incoming livestock shipments over the Northern Pacific for the past two weeks were greater than any time ever. Between 1882 and 1884, it has been estimated that as many cattle were shipped west as were sent to eastern stockyards.⁴¹

Recollections compiled in the 1930s mention a number of ranches proudly stocked in the early 1880s with other than the fabled Texas longhorn. In 1881, Wadsworth and Hawley established the Maltese Cross Ranch at the mouth of the Little Cannonball River. Reportedly the first ranch in present North Dakota, it was stocked with cattle from Minnesota. In 1882, a rancher/homesteader in present Stark County maintained a herd of 250-400 Herefords.⁴² For the 1884 season, Howard Eaton was to receive a number of registered Holstein cattle which A.C. Huidekoper had purchased in Holland. The arrivals were considered the "most valuable lot of cattle ever brought into the country." Dave Clark imported 250 bulls from Iowa or Minnesota

that same season. In May of 1884, H.B. Wadsworth & Company brought in 1,333 yearling and two-year-old heifers from Minnesota. The new arrivals apparently joined 1,500 head already in place.⁴³

In June of 1884, four Pennsylvania investors including Julius Le Moyne visited the cowtown of Little Missouri, intent upon established a ranch on Tepee (or Tipi) Bottom. Le Moyne was described as a "prominent Shorthorn breeder and president of the Washington County [Pennsylvania] Thoroughbred Stock Association." Despite his interest in Shorthorns, the Dakota ranch was to be stocked with 600 graded cattle, which included Polled Herefords. It was the general consensus that Polled cattle were hardier than Shorthorns.⁴⁴

Not even the large, Texas-derived ranches were exclusively devoted to longhorns. The OX Ranch near Marmarth primarily raised Herefords driven from Colorado to Dakota Territory by way of Montana. The largest ranch of all in the region, the British-backed Swan Brothers planned to add 10,000 head of Oregon (presumably not Longhorn) cattle for the 1886 season.⁴⁵

Another early, large-scale Dakota Territory cattle raiser was Dorr Clark. In 1884 he became an "enthusiastic convert" to the thoroughbred bull question. With the arrival of 200 shorthorn bulls, he would have around 500 on two ranches. Clark also planned to drive up around 5,000 steers to fatten in the Badlands, so he represented both bonanza ranching and the use of blooded stock. The conversion may have been as pragmatic as anything. "There was an unwritten law that only purebred bulls could be turned loose on the range, and scrub bulls would soon disappear if they were turned loose."

MONEY MATTERS

The lure of potentially lucrative speculative opportunities fueled the cattle boom in the West. In common with many speculative ventures, profits were there to be made, but primarily to those who got in early during the initial windfall period. And, like other booms, activities included "exaggeration, gullibility, inadequate communications, dishonesty, and incompetence." British investors, many from Scotland, as well as eastern American capitalists participated in the early boom period and reaped reward. But others became involved too late, were ignorant of proper ranching and accounting standards, and lost money.⁴⁶

British investors became aware of investment opportunities in the West through published reports and also from visits while on hunting expeditions. Positive reports from the Royal Commission on Agriculture published in 1878 were a prominent factor in eliciting the cattle boom. Britishers had ample additional capital and actively sought investment opportunities in the last quarter of the 19th century. What more exciting prospect than to own an immense cattle ranch in the American West? A prominent example in Texas was John Adair, an Irishman who entered into partnership in 1877 with his hunting guide, Charles Goodnight, to form the successful JA Ranch. Published accounts portrayed life on the cattle ranch as a pleasant undertaking where the "ordinary work consists of riding through plains, parks, and valleys."⁴⁷

Profits were said to be substantial. According to an 1878 account, Texas cattle ranching readily yielded more than a 25 per cent annual return. An 1880 report stated that a £10,000 investment would bring £8,800 in profits within a three year period. Another 1880 British account was more conservative: only a 20 per cent profit should be expected, and that from a "well-managed station."⁴⁸

These claims aside, in the end, there were few profits to be had and virtually none after 1884. A writer in 1887 stated that "for the first year or two...big dividends are paid by the evergreen device of emptying one pocket in order to fill the other, which means in cattle enterprise by including in the original purchase a disproportionate number of steers to be re-sold for dividend purposes." While the claim was exaggerated, some experts state that, overall, English investors lost through temporary depreciation around \$10,000,000 and those from Scotland between \$7,000,000 and \$8,000,000. It is important to note, however, that many investors eventually regained all their investment capital when herds and land were eventually sold. However, the exchange rate may have been far less favorable when these later transactions occurred in the 20th century.⁴⁹

The seven leading British-Texan cattle companies showed profits in 1883 of between zero to £13,000 to a splendid £59,000. In sharp contrast, all but one (which showed no loss) had losses in 1887 of between £13,000 and £114,450. The per cent of dividends declared was similarly dismal. While a handful of the large companies which were studied continued dividends of between 1.667 per cent and three per cent between 1887 and 1893, most did not. The returns of between five and 17.625 per cent from 1882 to 1885 were but a fond memory.⁵⁰

These figures represented the larger operations in Texas, but there were smaller British ranches as well. One such venture had ranches in both Texas and present North Dakota. In 1883, Sir Dudley Coutts Marjoribanks, first Baron of Tweedmouth, became the principal owner of the Rocking Chair Rancho Company. Lord Tweedmouth bred Aberdeen Polled Angus in Scotland and was therefore not unnaturally attracted to investment opportunities in the West. In addition, the two ranches provided a pastime for his sons, Coutts and Archie. Archie Marjoribanks acted as assistant manager in Texas. The company paid him no salary, and his father provided him an annual allowance of £400.⁵¹

The Texas operation was extensive, occupying nearly 200,000 acres and reportedly capitalized at a million dollars. The Horse Shoe Ranch in the Mouse River region of Dakota was much smaller and was purchased for £6000. Brother Coutts was its manager but had the help of an expert foreman. Like his brother, Coutts received a £400 yearly stipend. Around 1890, Coutts left North Dakota and moved to a farm his father bought for him in Canada.⁵²

American boosters of the West were no less bullish (and unrealistic) on investment returns than their British counterparts. In an 1883 booklet promoting settlement along the Northern Pacific Railroad, Henry Winsor stated, "Taking into account the loss of interest on capital invested before returned are received, besides all expenses and ordinary losses, the average profit of stock raising in Montana during the last few years has been at least thirty per cent. per annum. Some well informed cattle men estimate it at 40 or 45 per cent." An 1883 account stated that a \$20,000 investment in a ranch stocked with 600 heifers could yield an annual income of \$10,000, which in ten years would result in holdings worth some \$300,000.⁵³

Dakota newspapers echoed this enthusiasm. In 1884, it was averred that "eastern capitalists are beginning to realize that there is no more profitable business than cattle raising and are investing largely." The following month, it was reported that incoming livestock shipments over the Northern Pacific for the past two weeks were greater than any time ever. During the peak period, the 1880s, hundreds of domestic cattle companies were established.⁵⁴

British and American individuals and companies sometimes invested together or sold one another ranches. Some, like John Adair mentioned above, joined with their "camp-fire companions" from hunting trips to establish ranches. Others, like Lord Tweedmouth, purchased ranch holdings from corporations. The rapidity of change underscored the speculative nature of these investments. The Rocking Chair Rancho Company was established some time before 1881. In that year, the Kansas City firm of Conkle and Lytle bought the herd and brand from the original owners. Two years later, Conkle and Lytle bought the land from the New York and Texas Land Company. Three months after the land purchase, they sold both land and herd to London promoters, Earl W. Spencer and John Drew. Lord Tweedmouth, in turn, obtained the herd from them the next month, and in July of 1883 the land.⁵⁵

The speculative and volatile nature of open range ranching may be illustrated by tracing changes in ownership of another ranch in northern Dakota Territory, which had four owners in 10 years. In 1881 Columbus, Ohio residents Col. W.B. McClung and his sons established a ranch at White

Earth (about 75 miles west of Minot). They sold it to the Mellon brothers of Pittsburgh who, in turn, conveyed it to Eustis & Johnson. The Mellons were likely part of the wealthy Pittsburgh iron industry, and the purchase was probably an investment. Eustis was the son of a senator from Louisiana who was, in 1897, minister to France. Thus, it is possible that the Eustis & Johnson purchase was also a speculative investment. In 1891, after the bloom was off the speculative rose, Major J.S. Murphy bought the ranch. Murphy knew of the place because he was Indian Agent at Fort Berthold. By 1897 Murphy had 600 horses, including six registered imported stallions and 20 registered mares, and about 500 head of cattle. His range extended nearly 400 square miles, of which 36 square miles were fenced.⁵⁶

Major English or Scottish ranch operations did not have their headquarters in present North Dakota, but there were some large scale concerns involved in North Dakota open range ranching. William Follis, employee of the Berry-Boice Cattle Company for at least 14 years (1884-1898), offered insight into the profitability of large scale open range ranching in North Dakota. In 1883, Mr. Boice invested \$8,000 in the 777 Ranch. Fifteen years later, in 1898, he sold his interest in the company for \$80,000.⁵⁷

In 1885 the Swan Brothers reportedly operated the largest ranch in the nation, with more than 600,000 acres in Wyoming and Dakota Territories. According to a contemporary news account, this ranch, with its herd of 150,000, returned company dividends of 9 and 10 per cent. This return represents only half of the annual herd increase, and only half of the annual herd increase was sold off.⁵⁸

Irrespective of who made or lost how much money, the value of livestock in Dakota increased dramatically in the 1880s. In 1880, livestock was reportedly valued at \$ 6,463,274. In 1888 the figure was placed at \$43,000,000.

THE CATTLE BOOM

A series of factors extended open range ranching into the Dakotas:

- ▶ Growing urban markets for beef in America and Europe
- ▶ Overstock of depleted ranges to the south
- ▶ Railroad construction which allowed beef to be shipped profitably
- ▶ Free land and grass
- ▶ Systematic destruction of buffalo herds
- ▶ Removal of Indians to reservations

Open range ranching in North Dakota initially developed in earnest around 1883 in the area west of the Missouri River. Large cattle companies occupied the range quickly, with herds of from 10,000 to 25,000 head of cattle. Within the next three years, numerous smaller outfits with 300 to 1,000 head of stock joined them.⁵⁹

The largest to operate entirely or in large part in present North Dakota were the following:

- ▶ Pierre Wibaux, W Bar Ranch
- ▶ Reynolds Brothers, Long X Ranch
- ▶ Berry-Boice Cattle Company, 777 Ranch
- ▶ Tower & Gudgell, OX Ranch
- ▶ A.C. Huidekoper, HT Ranch
- ▶ Theodore Roosevelt, Maltese Cross and Elk Horn Ranches
- ▶ Thomas & Arnett, AHA Ranch
- ▶ Crosby Cattle Company, Diamond C Ranch
- ▶ J.E. Phelan, 75 Ranch
- ▶ Hughes & Simpson, Hashknife Ranch⁶⁰

Texans/southwesterners, Europeans, and easterners were represented in the elite ten. Reynolds Brothers, Berry-Boice, Tower & Gudgell, Hughes & Simpson, and Crosby were from Texas or New Mexico. Wibaux was French. Huidekoper and Roosevelt were wealthy easterners. Despite the size of his operation, J.E. Phelan had no ranch headquarters, preferring to lease out his cattle with other outfits.

The development of ranching naturally required a suitable market demand for beef. With that in place, the ability to serve the market depended upon a reliable mode of transportation, the railroad. On September 14, 1883, the first shipment of cattle from present North Dakota left from the railhead of Dickinson. The race was on. For the 1884 spring season, at least four ranches--the Custer Trail Company, W.N. Thompson & Company, Wadsworth & Company, and Niemela Cattle Company--announced intentions to increase their herds by at least 1,000 head. Several new outfits were reported to be coming in with large herds as well.⁶¹

The shipping season began in August and extended into autumn. During just one week in the fall of 1884, 261 carloads of livestock (5,220 head of cattle) were shipped out of Dickinson alone. At the onset of the fall 1884 shipping season, 350 cattle cars capable of transporting 7,000 head were ordered for just two weeks worth of shipments out of Dakota and Montana to the market.⁶²

Shipments by rail out of the northern cattle country for the fall of 1884 were staggering. According to the Northern Pacific agent at Dickinson, the following carloads were sent from shipping points in Montana and North Dakota: 11 cars at Gallatin, 48 at Springdale, 426 from Billings, 30 from Livingston, 98 from Huntley, 49 from Custer, 263 from Miles City, 11 from Fallon, 891 from Mingusville (present Wibaux), and 1,001 from Dickinson.⁶³ Allowing 20 head of cattle for each car, the 2,828 carloads amounted to 56,560 head of cattle. Small wonder that in 1885 contemporary local estimates placed nearly 400,000 head of cattle in Dakota Territory and another head 800,000 in Montana. The Reynolds Brothers alone, one of the larger Texas outfits, reportedly moved 9,000 head of cattle onto the Dakota ranges the summer of 1886.⁶⁴

The livestock shipments continued apace during the 1886 shipping season. In the four months between August and November, the Northern Pacific moved out 3,743 carloads of cattle (approximately 75,000 head), 127 carloads of horses (2,300), and 391 double decker carloads of sheep (approximately 10,000). Local boosters seemed to delight in compiling different ways of counting the movement of cattle to eastern markets. In just 27 hours, between 5:00 p.m. Friday and 10:00 a.m. Saturday in September of 1886, 150 carloads of cattle passed through Bismarck. Observers estimated that 10,000 more head of cattle were shipped east in 1886 than in 1885, despite the general dryness of the season. Supremely confident, stockmen were "making preparations already for going into the business more largely the coming year."⁶⁵

By 1886 another region, Mouse River country in north central Dakota near the Canadian border, was touted as cattle country. The Great Northern Railroad arrived that year, while the Soo line was completed in 1893. By 1886 there were reportedly "several thousand" head of cattle in Mouse River country. "The lowlands on either side of the river, for many miles, north and south of the railroad track, are extremely rich in grasses of the best quality, while the extensive groves along the river and the picturesque sandhills, which are thick with trees and underbrush, must furnish the very best of winter's shelter."⁶⁶

The magnitude and number of cattle operations served to obscure the raising and movement of other livestock in North Dakota. Some ranchers combined cattle and sheep ranching. Although the practice was not widespread, it may have contributed to the congenial relations between cattle and sheep ranchers. Indeed, a Little Missouri newspaper contended that "good hardy sheep of the long woolled variety will do as well here as cattle." The only criticism was that some failed sheep ranchers had chosen the wrong breed. Howard Eaton, one of the earlier and more highly respected ranchers, drove 2,200 sheep and 300 cattle from Minnesota in the fall of 1883, passing through Dickinson on October 6. Donald Stevenson started out with both cattle and sheep in Burleigh County. By 1885 he had nearly a thousand head of cattle as well as a number of sheep and hogs. Stevenson was also among the apparently few early ranchers to put

up hay, including 600 tons in the drought year of 1886. Perhaps his early pre-railroad arrival as a supplier to forts placed him outside the umbrella of traditional open range ranching.⁶⁷

The rapid increase in the number of sheep in North Dakota paralleled that of cattle. According to state assessor returns, there were 43,644 sheep in the state in 1889. In just two years, the number had increased to 231,355 (although assessment numbers were reportedly highly inaccurate for the west part of the state).⁶⁸

Just How Many Cattle Were There?

Sources vary widely regarding the number of cattle in North Dakota during the early years, the 1880s. According to William Follis, an early ranch foreman who remained in North Dakota into the 1930s, all the really large outfits ran between 10,000 and 25,000 head of cattle during the 1880s. Other western North Dakota residents stated that the Wibaux ranch, an eastern Montana outfit that used North Dakota ranges, had as many as 35,000 head, although another source placed the all-time Wibaux high at 65,000. We are told the Berry-Boice Company's 777 Ranch, which was established in 1883, ran 30-35,000 head, and the OX had 20,000 head of cattle. The Reynolds Brothers' Long X Ranch reportedly ranged between 15,000 and 20,000 cattle and horses between the Big and Little Missouri Rivers. And the Diamond C had around 15,000 head of cattle.⁶⁹

"Official" numbers vary. The first annual report of the US Bureau of Animal Husbandry, dated 1884, gave the number as 344,720 cattle on the entire Dakota range. The Territorial Census of 1885 placed the number of cattle in the western third of present South Dakota at 233,000. Based on annual assessment returns, there were 250,000 head on the entire Dakota range in 1885. However, it was said to be very difficult to locate and count all the livestock out on the open range. It was not in the rancher's best economic interest to help with tax assessments on his holdings. One source told of the practice of moving herds to Montana when the Dakota assessment counts were made and reversing the procedure when Montana assessors arrived. The US Department of Agriculture placed the number at 350,937 in 1885, but the cattle count was made before the onset of the season's new arrivals.⁷⁰

According to an account published in *Harper's Magazine* in 1888, farmers and stock growers in Dakota together owned 710,934 head of cattle, a figure which did not include milch cows. The account noted that the livestock fed on native grasses. "They cover every acre of prairie, of couteau, of valley land, a generous gift...."⁷¹

North and South Dakota emerged as separate states in 1889 after having existed as Dakota Territory since 1861. Early records, including federal census reports, thus make little or no distinction between the north and south parts of Dakota Territory until 1890. An indication of the difficulty in answering that question: the 1885 census reportedly shows that the Berry Boice Cattle Company owned 5,000 cows and 9,700 calves. Since cows typically had but one calf a season, the numbers are problematical.⁷²

Bloom off the Boom

While open range livestock ranching continued for some time in northwestern Dakota, some experts contend that the venture, at least as a large scale, profit making business, had peaked by 1885 and that the boom had for all intents and purposes passed. Certainly the price of cattle had, for the time being, peaked from its early 1880s highs and fallen.

Table 2. Price of Best Steers Per Hundredweight, Chicago Market. Source: Briggs, "Open Range Ranching," p. 530.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Price</i>
May 1882	\$9.35
April 1883	\$4.25
Autumn 1886	\$1.00

PARTICIPANTS

Allowing for some overlap in intentions and individual circumstances, three categories of attraction to open range ranching Dakota may be identified. These categories are grounded in:

- ▶ Serendipity
- ▶ Allurement
- ▶ Continuance

Serendipity

Many men whose employment brought them to the Dakotas tarried to establish ranches. For example, Frank Roberts was a stage driver, then a trapper around the Cannonball River and Rainy Butte. Later he worked on Eaton and Huidekoper's Custer Trail Ranch before trying his hand at ranching. After enduring hardships to care for 60 cattle and 40 horses during the dry summer of 1882, he sold out and returned to work for Huidekoper, still later returning to ranching on his own.⁷³

Allurement

The lure of the exotic, coupled in various measures with the prospect of great profit, drew many a would-be rancher to the West. The attraction of the American frontier also beckoned to families from the Midwest, the East, Canada, and Europe.

In 1879, the military established Cantonment Bad Lands on the Little Missouri River near present Medora to protect construction workers. The cantonment also served as headquarters for eastern sportsmen eager to hunt wild game. In the fall of 1880, the first hunting parties arrived. Several notable 1880s arrivals, Howard Eaton, Theodore Roosevelt, Henry Boice, Scotsman Gregor Lang, the Marquis de Mores, and A.C. Huidekoper, came to hunt but returned to establish important cattle ranches.⁷⁴

Gregor Lang and his son Lincoln A. Lang left Dublin, Ireland in 1883 bound for Dakota Territory. They were sent to establish and operate a cattle ranch for Sir John Pender, a London capitalist. The rest of the Lang household arrived the following year at the Yule Ranch. Lured by the prospect of excellent hunting, sportsmen from the East came to North Dakota, like what they saw, and determined to go into the cattle business. A.C. Huidekoper of Meadville, Pennsylvania came to the Howard and Alden Eaton hunting camp near Medora, then decided to stay. The most well known example of the sportsmen-turned-cowboy was Theodore Roosevelt.⁷⁵

Three ranch owners, accompanied by their wives and daughters, visited their ranch south of Mandan the fall of 1886. There were from Wisconsin and apparently were small scale investors. They came to hunt and to "enjoy ranch life." (History of Grazing, Clipping File, *Bismarck Tribune*, September 5, 1886.) = end note

European Ranchers

Ranchers who came to Dakota from Europe formed an intriguing subset of those attracted by the allure of the open range. The two most notable examples, Pierre Wibaux and the Marque de Mores, happened to be Frenchmen.

The brothers Coutts and Archie Marjoribanks were remembered as "typical young remittance men; easily taken in, open-handed when installments of their allowances arrived, active in public affairs." Archie assisted at the family's ranch in Texas while Coutts ran the Horse Shoe Ranch in Dakota. They were sons of a baron and their Mouse River ranching neighbor, E.H. Thursby, was the nephew of a baronet. Coutts Marjoribanks was elected president of the Mouse River Live Stock Protective Association. The Europeans were among the leading proponents of pure bred stock and may have been the first to introduce them to the area. Be that as it may, within a year or two, the Horse Shoe Ranch was losing money, just like the Texas operation. As the brothers' mother wrote, "Coutts poor boy has had ill luck with his farming: Papa very angry." [Pentland, pp. 69-70.] = end note

Continuance

Texas ranch owners and their employees transferred operations from points south to North Dakota. This continuance formed an integral part of open range ranching. Many cowboys who came to North Dakota in the employ of others remained to establish their own small scale operations.

Slope Saga is replete with mention of many who worked as ranch hands before establishing a ranch of their own. John Leakey was a Texan who worked in New Mexico, then joined a trail herd bound for Montana and North Dakota. He worked for major ranches in these two states, including the OX, W Bar, and 777. In 1910 he married and by 1915 had about 5,000 head of cattle on 40,000 acres of land. One of the founder's of the North Dakota Stockman's Association, he served as its president for ten years.⁷⁶

At age 14, W. B. Galligan left his native Buffalo, New York in 1869 to seek his fortune. In the late 1860s and 1870s he hired on as a cowboy, serving on cattle drives from Texas along the Chisholm Trail. Eventually he worked on drives that brought him to North Dakota. In the late 1880s he settled on the Cannonball River 12 miles west of present New England in Slope County. Galligan ran a herd of cattle and horses, shipping his last load of cattle in 1920.⁷⁷

DEMISE OF THE OPEN RANGE, 1886-c. 1910

Factors which led to demise:

- ▶ Ignorance of semiarid Great Plains environment
- ▶ Free range policy encouraged over-stocking
- ▶ Speculation fueled a cattle boom, then bottom fell out of market
- ▶ Arrival of permanent settlers/farmers/ranchers

The factors point to why cattle became "king," but also provide insight into the process and the inevitability of brevity.

The Winter

The Texas system was based on the Carolina coastal tradition where the warm, wet conditions provided lush grasses and comfortable conditions. It was a fatal flaw. Texas ranching was completely unable to cope with the periodic extreme cold and drought of the semiarid environment of the Great Plains. The prudent might have heeded the lesson of the severe winter of 1871-72 which struck their first expansion beyond Texas.⁷⁸

The spectacular haste with which Texas ranching spread into the Great Plains also meant that the time to learn about the longer term conditions of a new environment was absent. Ranchers and their investors intent upon earning as much return on their investment as quickly as possible did not allow for a more prudent response.⁷⁹

Much has been written about the horrific winter of 1886-87 in North Dakota, where it is often portrayed as an avenging Mother Nature who struck savagely and without warning. However, certain events could have served as a warning. Prairie fires from the summer and fall of 1885 decimated the supply of grass on the range. Then the drought of 1886 meant that cattle were entering the winter without an adequate food supply. Severe winters and drought periods in other Great Plains states could have served to alert. Difficult winters occurred in Kansas and Nebraska in 1871, in eastern Colorado and Utah in 1879-80, in Colorado and Nebraska in 1880-81, and all across the Great Plains in 1884-85. Texan ranchers with extensive operations would have been in a position to know of these climatic problems.⁸⁰

Writing in the fall of 1886, Theodore Roosevelt was among the handful who felt "it is merely a question of time as to when a winter will come that will understock the ranges by the summary process of killing off about half of all the cattle throughout the North-west." Fear of overstocking, acute awareness of the dangerous climatic conditions, and a realization that cattle were bringing ever lower prices prompted Roosevelt to close out his Elkhorn Ranch just before the winter of 1886-87 and send his foremen back to Maine.⁸¹

Cattlemen compounded an already desperate situation. Faced with extremely droughty conditions farther south, ranchers drove more herds into the Dakota ranges. The Continental Cattle Company reportedly brought in an additional 32,000 head of steers. The Worthsham Cattle Company, previously not involved in Dakota ranching, let loose around 5,000 head.⁸²

Historian Lewis Crawford summarized the situation:

It seemed that in the winter of '86 and '87, there was a conjunction of all the factors that make for a big loss--overstocked range, thin young cattle, snow crust, extremely cold days and a long period of sub-normal temperature, no protection in the way of sheds, and above all no hay to tide the weaker cattle over.⁸³

Having enjoyed an extended period of good weather, cattlemen could not comprehend the magnitude of their losses. Thinking the cattle might have drifted into the Standing Rock Reservation, the Stockmen's Association sent 65-70 cowboys and four wagons to search. The first day they found three steers belonging to the Hashknife Ranch. But after two weeks of searching, they found no others, according to Bill Follis. Another, even larger attempted round-up involved several large cattle companies and employed eight wagons and 400-500 men. They found but a dozen live steers among the thousands of carcasses.⁸⁴

Accurate figures on the losses are difficult to obtain, but even if the claims were exaggerated, the loss was notable. The OX Ranch was said to have lost 7,000 head. The Hashknife Ranch may have lost 20,000 head in Texas, Colorado, and Dakota. The Eaton Brothers, Pierre Wibaux, and the Custer Trail Cattle Company each lost between 1,000 and 2,000 head of cattle. The experience was such that A.C. Huidekoper switched from cattle ranching to horse raising.⁸⁵

The winter of 1886-87 solved the obvious over-stocking of the Badlands in a dramatic and unfortunate manner. Some large cattle companies withdrew, ruined financially, but others persisted and re-stocked the area. Between 1888 and 1896, at least 10 cattle drives from Texas brought in new stock. It appears that the average herd was 3,000, translating to 30,000 longhorns added over eight years. Reynolds Brothers, the Converse Company, and the H.A. Ranch were among those sponsoring these drives.⁸⁶

After the winter of 1886-87 when herds were diminished, cautious ranchers realized the folly of relying completely on grass on the open range. Those who intended to remain for a time purchased hay lands and ranch sites at water sources. The cost of purchase, taxes, and added fencing increased the cost of doing business, which may have been another factor in the departure of the big outfits.⁸⁷

After 1886, herds became on the average much smaller and more manageable. Of a dozen ranchers located in present Dunn County around 1895, ranches having from 50-500 head averaged around 300 head of cattle and 150 horses. After 1900, the average herd in western North Dakota was from 300-600 head, with an occasional 1000-1200 head herd.⁸⁸

Demise of the Free Range

Under the 1904 headline, "Passing of the Cowboy," a writer from Medora discussed the reasons for the passing of the old range:

- ▶ Gradual arrival of "little stock men and settlers"
- ▶ Their occupation of the best water holes
- ▶ Decreasing area of good open grazing land
- ▶ Anticipated land surveys which would then place land on the market⁸⁹

The writer noted that as late as 1896 the big cattlemen, with their thousands of cattle, were "still here in force and effect," but that the last of the "big range men" left Billings County about 1900. Decrying the change, he concluded that "the romantic features have all disappeared." By 1904, the "big rancher" was one who ran from 500 to 1000 head--a far cry from the early days--and there were many "little ranchers" with but 50 head of cattle.

The end of 1897, the Bismarck Tribune concluded that the "big cattle outfits in the western part of the state will soon pull up stakes." The brief article is of interest for what it reveals of attitudes, expectations, and the events of 1897:

The bonanza cattle outfits that have held sway in the western part of the state for many years are destined to become things of the past, according to reports from the cattle ranges. In the past year hundreds of new settlers have taken land in the western part of the state, and the records of the local land office show many new filings in the cattle country. These settlers settle about the springs and watering places, fence in the land, build their shanties, and go into the business of cattle raising on a small scale. The pre-emption of the watering places is the worst disadvantage to the large holders of cattle who allow their enormous herds to run on the range and shift for themselves, for they are thus driven from place to place until there is nowhere left for them to go. Then the cutting of hay on the range decreased the supply of winter feed and affords a bad prospect for the large herds of cattle which must find their own sustenance on the ranges during the winter. It is reported that some of the large cattle companies have placed but few animals on the range the past season and that next season will see still fewer importations by the big outfits.⁹⁰

The coming of the settler was remarked upon even in the early 1880s. A guidebook published in 1883 promoting the Northern Pacific Railroad discussed the colonies of farmers established at Glenullen and Gladstone. Dickinson "promises to become a great shipping point for cattle and grain" (emphasis added). The writer placed concentrations of cattle production in the Badlands in North Dakota and in Montana.⁹¹

The US Bureau of Animal Industry also commented on the arrival of settlers in its report for 1886. Noting that open range livestock raising was at its peak in 1884, by 1886 large scale

efforts in some areas of the Great Plains were being "greatly curtailed by the inroads of farming settlers." The number of arrivals was not necessarily high compared to the amount of available land, but settlers were highly dispersed, "located here and there upon the streams, in the valleys, and wherever choice irrigable lands can be obtained." This pattern greatly limited the open range available for large scale ranching. Some ranchers responded by becoming settlers themselves while also curtailing their holdings.⁹²

Large scale ranch operators despaired of the coming of homesteaders. In many cases, once they realized the era of free grass, land and water was ending, they sold out and moved on. In present Slope County, the years of 1907-08 and 1909 saw notably increasing numbers of homesteaders. Feeling the handwriting was on the wall, for example, Wallis Huidekoper moved his operations to Montana.⁹³ Others remained, buying alternate sections of previously free land. They would then fence all the land, including the alternate sections they did not own.

As the large Texas companies disappeared from North Dakota, their neglectful ways of managing cattle also receded. Smaller scale herds increasingly occupied the range. Because each head of livestock represented a larger investment to them, smaller scale ranchers and farmers took more care of them. They put up hay, provided winter shelter (sheds), and installed wells and windmills to insure a constant water supply.⁹⁴ Midwestern ranching practices supplanted the Texan model.

Ranching also ceased to be an attractive investment for capitalists. The industry was no longer subsidized by free and unfettered use of the open range and its resources, especially water.⁹⁵

By 1896-97, the huge cattle companies appear to have been all but gone. According to a newspaper account, the extensive Minot land district contained 22 "noteworthy" cattle, sheep or horse operations north of the Missouri River, few of them familiar names, "and many having small herds." South of the Missouri River but still in the Minot land district in 1896-97 were the Reynolds Brothers, W.S. Richard, Chase & Frye, Hans Christianson, Dan Manning (15,000 sheep), and others.⁹⁶

Gone too was the autocratic and pervasive rule of the stockmen's associations. In the stead of self-regulation came county organization, the election of civil and law enforcement officers, and the establishment of courts of justice. Many ranchers actively opposed the organization of counties, feeling that it would be expensive for them and would hinder their freedom.⁹⁷

Federal regulation in the guise of the modest dipping tank on the formerly open range symbolized the transition. In the early 20th century, a federal program was established to ensure healthy cattle. Federal officials supervised all dipping, recorded data on all the animals, and issued receipts intended to prove livestock health upon sale in the fall. "Thus the man who holds a federal receipt for the dipping of cattle will have unrestricted shipping privileges--something that every owner must have to avoid trouble with Uncle Sam." In the summer of 1904, more than 64,000 cattle were dipped in a large dipping tank constructed in Section 20 of

Slope County alone.⁹⁸ What a change from the unfettered, self-regulated period of the open range.

The effect of the reduction of the open range changed over time. During the 1880s, there was little change or restriction even though homestead claims were filed in open range ranching areas. The filers were ranchers who wanted the range to remain open. In the 1890s, the number of homesteader farmers and small scale ranchers increased greatly. While the overall percentage of open range still available was relatively high, fencing--particularly of water sources--cut up the range and impeded free and efficient use of it. There was not considerably less range land available, but it was more restricted after the 1880s.⁹⁹

The completion of land surveys apparently had an effect on the demise of open range practices. Around 1895, a dozen ranchers still used the free open range in Dunn County. After the land was surveyed around 1899, the ranchers (and arriving farmers) filed on quarter sections containing a spring or creek.¹⁰⁰

Some large outfits from the open range period held on as long as possible. In 1904, it was reported that N.N. Jeffries and A.H. Arnett were bringing 6,000 head of cattle from Texas. They were to be transported in three batches because the feeding points along the way could not accommodate more than 2,000 cattle. As late as 1905 to 1910, the J.E. Phalen Cattle Company leased 218,000 acres of land on the Berthold Indian Reservation and grazed around 8,000 head of cattle and 800 horses.¹⁰¹

These large scale activities aside, the demise of the open range was apparent in the early years of the 20th century. Between 1901 and 1905, the H.A. and Long X ranches and other large operations closed. The Eaton Brothers, leading stockmen since the early 1880s, sold their Custer Trail Ranch early in 1904. The operation combined cattle raising with a dude ranch. In 1902 the Hackney-Boynton Land Company purchased "a great cattle ranch" in McKenzie County. They planned to continue to raise cattle, including dairy cattle for farmers in the James and Missouri river areas to purchase. They hoped that creameries would be opened, a concept as markedly in contrast with open range ranch as one can imagine.¹⁰²

After 1900, Emmons County residents felt that "stock growing with its unlimited ranges has become a thing of the past." Boosters in 1903 exhorted the settler to come to Emmons County where "the blood is darker, richer, warmer, the cheek of maiden rosier, her eye brighter and her step more elastic than in the malarial cursed countries further south."¹⁰³

By 1919, the transition in the scope of cattle ranching was complete. On their land north of Medora, Baker Brothers were ranching "on quite a large scale." To the author, "large scale" meant "running about 350 cattle and a few head of horses."¹⁰⁴

Whether or not open range ranching was by definition a temporary phenomenon on the landscape is debatable. Certainly, as it was practiced on the Great Plains with no shelter, supplemental feed or water--and limited land ownership--its life span was limited. Settlement

pressures forced the cattle off of formerly free land. Open range ranching was practiced as a speculative boom designed to use natural resources rapidly and with scant consideration of the effect. The advancing line of settlement "engulfed the cattlemen who had been but the spray thrown far in advance of the crest of these tides."¹⁰⁵

OPEN RANGE RANCH OPERATIONS

According to one student of the West, Louis Pelzer, who was Professor of History at the University of Iowa and served as president of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association in the 1930s, "the varied and changing aspects of the frontiers did not mature many current, classic accounts." "There is no Herodotus or Thucydides for the cattlemen's frontier or for the outposts of settlement and religion."¹⁰⁶ Still, contemporary portraits and subsequent accounts of cowboys and cattle kings, of life on the trail and range, do offer some insight into life on the range. The following discusses the types of activities that occurred with open range ranching.

Trailing

In the early years, most cattle trailed up from Texas were two-year-old steers. After some experimentation, ranchers learned that bringing in yearlings was better. They could be kept for two winters on the range and shipped to market the next fall where they brought a higher price.¹⁰⁷

"Trail herds" typically numbering from 2,000 to 3,000 head of "trailers" were driven (or "trailed") up from Texas. The trail boss was in charge of eight cowpunchers (or cowboys), the horse wrangler, and the cook. The day's drive usually extended for 10 to 15 miles, but sometimes was longer, lasting until they reached a water source for the cattle. The horse wrangler cared for about 65 head of horses (the cowboys traded in weary horses for fresh mounts). Cooking from his chuck wagon, cook served up beans, corn meal, molasses, and coffee. The cowboys spent hours and hours in the saddle. At night, they worked in shifts, watching over the cattle.¹⁰⁸

It was felt that, in order to be accustomed to a new range, cattle should arrive in the Badlands no later than August 1. That way, they would be well rested and "located on a new range," before winter.¹⁰⁹

Range Limits

Each ranch claimed certain more-or-less defined limits on the open range. In fact, brand registrations often mentioned the range limits. For example, in 1884 both Berry Boice & Company's 777 Ranch range and Towers & Gudgeon OX Ranch range were located south of the Northern Pacific Railroad on the Little Missouri River and Beaver Creek. And in 1890 the Reynolds Brothers range consisted of McKenzie, Billings and Dunn counties.¹¹⁰

In the early years, the area was truly an open range. Writing of the time prior to 1887, Theodore Roosevelt described it as "one gigantic, unbroken pasture, where cowboys and branding-irons take the place of fences." Save some mining, "the whole region is one vast stretch of grazing country."¹¹¹

With expanding herds, it sometimes became necessary to select new ranges. Where possible, a tract which included a good spring with suitable winter shelter was preferred. However, two separate tracts were often necessary, one for summer and another for winter.¹¹²

"Line-riders" did just that, patrolled the perimeter of a cattle company's range limit. The range, of course was not fenced during the open range era.¹¹³

Stockmen's Associations

Stockmen's associations were another Texas importation applied to the Plains. In the absence of organized government, some system was necessary to control and direct cattle raising operations. As the range became increasingly stocked, a means for separating stock ready for market, branding calves with owner's brand, and moving livestock became necessary.

On December 19, 1884, the Little Missouri Stockmen's Association was organized, and Theodore Roosevelt was elected its head. In a conscious effort to limit the power of the large companies, representation in the association by firm, and each firm had but one vote.¹¹⁴

In addition to the Little Missouri organization, two others were active in present North Dakota. Because cattle did not respect political boundaries, the Montana Stock Growers Association held round-ups in Dakota Territory. The Mouse River Live Stock Protective Association was formed prior to the winter of 1887-88, for in that year the vice president, Coutts Marjoribanks was elected president for the coming year. Among the pressing issues resolved was the decision to give members and distinguished visitors "an oyster supper at the expense of the association."¹¹⁵

Membership in associations reflected the scope of ranching on the Plains. In just two years, 1883-85, the Montana Stock Growers Association grew from three members to more than 150. In 1873, the Wyoming counterpart fielded 10 members having 20,000 head of cattle; in 1885 there were 435 members with 2,000,000 head.¹¹⁶

Spring Round-up

Some cattle inevitably strayed from the defined range limit during the winter, necessitating the spring round-up. The need to assemble, identify, and brand stock prompted the development of the cattlemen's associations to direct operations. Calves were branded with the same brand their mother carried. This needed to be done in the spring when the calves still remained by their mothers' sides. The associations determined when, where, and how the round-up would occur.¹¹⁷

In May of 1884, the Little Missouri Stockmen's Association held its first round-up, plans for which were described in the *Bad Lands Cow Boy* on May 15:

The cattlemen are all supposed to know that the round-up for this section of the Badlands begins May 25, at the Beaver Creek crossing of the N.P.R.R. Every stock owner will send enough cowboys to look after his interests, who will all be

under the orders of and subject to dismissal by the foreman, John Goodall. Each cattle owner will provide a mess wagon or make arrangements to mess with someone else. At least six good horses will be needed by every man. There will be day and night herding in which each man must take part. Branding will be done every day. Every man who wishes his cattle taken care of must be represented on the round-up. The time taken by the round-up will be from six weeks to two months, and the extent of the territory is about 100 by 50 miles. In this district there are about 40,000 cattle.¹¹⁸

"Cutting out" or separating the cattle by brand was a tedious process. Under the direction of the foreman (a prestigious and important position), the cowboys cut out those with a certain brand. Their calves were then branded in the branding corral. As a particular owner's cows accumulated into a herd, the herd was cut out and left in charge of the owners. The cowboys moved in a zig-zag pattern across the range, spreading out for many miles in their quest for cattle.¹¹⁹

Each cattle owner who participated in the 1885 round-up--and that was the only way to have one's cattle taken care of--was told to provide the following:

- ▶ A mess or chuck wagon (or make arrangements to share)
- ▶ A bedding wagon
- ▶ Minimum of six (preferably eight) good horses for every man
- ▶ Sufficient number of cowboys to adequately look after his interests¹²⁰

The hours were long, and the expertise necessary to cut out cattle was substantial. Theodore Roosevelt recalled the daunting schedule spent in the saddle during the 1886 spring round-up:

Yesterday I was in the saddle at 2 A.M., and except for two very hearty meals, after each of which I took a fresh horse, did not stop working until 8:15 P.M.; and was up at half-past three this morning.¹²¹

A fresh supply of horses were kept at the chuck wagon, so that after eating the cowboys could obtain new mounts. The saddle horses were kept in a rope corral affixed to the chuck wagon. The ropes formed a V-shape, with cowboys waiting at the open space at the large end of the V to rope and obtain their mounts.¹²²

Fall Round-up

The fall round-up was conducted to select out the fatted cattle to be shipped to market. It was also called the beef round-up.¹²³

After the cattle were driven to a cowtown and shipped out, the cowboys celebrated. "Every herd driven into the shipping-yards from one of the great ranches in the upper Little Missouri country brought with it a dozen or more parched cowboys hundering and thirsting for excitement...."¹²⁴

Many ranchers, especially the smaller outfits, sold their cattle at local markets which were located at the various shipping points along the railroad. Some ranchers, especially the larger ones, shipped their stock themselves to St. Paul and Chicago and sold them there. Still other ranchers sold their livestock at the ranch to cattle buyers. The cattle buyers then drove them to shipping points.¹²⁵

Ranch Headquarters

Most open range ranches maintained a ranch headquarters and also one or more auxiliary camps, especially a summer camp. The headquarters generally contained, at a minimum, a ranchhouse, pole corral, and outbuildings. There was often a blacksmith shop and horse barn. The headquarters were invariably located by a water source. Daily activities included barn chores associated with tending to the horses, rounding up or organizing the horses for the day's work on the range, and riding the range to see to the herd of cattle.¹²⁶

Auxiliary Camps

Also located by a creek or river, the summer camp apparently was located in or near upland prairies where the cattle were brought for summer grazing. According to William Follis, who was range foreman for the 777 Ranch from the 1880s to 1898, "We always used the uplands for prairies for summer grazing and saved the Badlands along the Little Missouri, with their natural shelters, for winter range." Shelter for the cowboys in outlying camps might be a tent or a dug-out.¹²⁷

PROPERTY TYPES

THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE OPEN RANGE

The focus of open range ranching has traditionally been considered to be the Badlands around the cow town of Medora. Significant representations were thought to be found primarily in present McKenzie, Billings, and Slope counties. As far as it goes, this image is correct. And, if discussion is limited to large scale Texas style ranching, these counties do seem to be the area of most intense concentration. However, cattle ranches in the late 1870s to late 1890s were not limited to the Badlands.

Sources listing specific examples of cattle ranches from the open range period mention approximately 145 operations in 19 present North Dakota counties. (Figure 4.) Four counties contained between 10 and 29 ranches. They are present Billings (29), Dunn (15), McHenry (13), and Oliver (10).¹²⁸ (See Appendices listing the ranches.)

Areas of concentration were strongly related to the presence of a water source and railroad connections. Significant concentrations of ranches were located along the Little Missouri, Upper Missouri, and Mouse rivers. The Black Hills of present South Dakota was another locus. But it was not until the railroad arrived that these concentrations developed. Virtually no ranches are known in the eastern portion of the state, which displays markedly different climate, vegetation, and topography.

The presence of a good river or creek was a critical factor in site selection. Geographer Harold Brown noted that, had there been water holes in the Great Plains, rather than rivers and creeks, cattle would have congregated quite differently. The definition and configuration of a particular outfit's range would have been different. A detailed map by Herman Hagedorn around 1920 (Figure 5.) illustrates this concept and the effect it had on ranch locations. The map depicts a tight grouping of ranches running along the Little Missouri as well as Big Beaver Creek, which extended into Montana. Numerous creeks, bearing such distinctive names as Mire, Skull, and Magpie, drain into the Little Missouri and created the distinctive couteau landscape of open range ranching in and around the Badlands.¹²⁹

The greater the number of water sources, the greater the number of potential ranch headquarters. Testifying before the Public Land Commission in 1879, a cattleman described the importance of water:

Wherever there is water there is a ranch. On my own ranch [320 acres] I have two miles of running water; that accounts for my ranch being where it is. The next water from me in one direction is twenty-three miles; now no man can have a ranch between these two places. I have control of the grass, the same as though I owned it....Six miles east of me, there is another ranch, for there is water at that

place....Water accounts for nine-tenths of the population in the West on ranches.¹³⁰

These ranch sites depicted on the Hagdron map generally refer to the headquarters for ranch operations, not the open range they used. Present South Dakota and Montana both contained larger ranch operations than did North Dakota. A number of these large scale outfits, including the E6, Hashknife, and VVV ranches, ran cattle in North Dakota while maintaining centers of operation elsewhere. These non-North Dakota ranches participated in North Dakota roundups and, in some cases, shipped their cattle from Dickinson. (Figure 3.)

In contrast to these large operations, other open range ranches were smaller scale family operations. For example, the 1885 Territorial Census lists William Taylor, his wife Susan, and children Mary, Fanny, and John, as ranchers in Wallace County (now part of McKenzie). Also in the county was "stock raiser" Heinrick Kale, his wife Francesca, and offspring Peter, Edward, and Annie. The Taylors were all born in Maine, while all the Kales were German-born.

Sheep Ranches

Three areas of the state saw concentrations of sheep raising over time. The holdings of the Marquis de Mores in Billings County were considerable from 1883 to 1886. Of more lasting imprint was sheep ranching in the vicinity of Dickinson, especially in present Hettinger County in the late 1880s and into the 1890s. Charlie Colgrove, the Dobson Brothers, Edson C. Dayton, and Charles H. Merry all had flocks of many thousands of sheep in the late 1880s. The canyons of the Heart, Cannonball, and Cedar rivers provided winter shelter, and the uplands between them afforded summer grazing. In the 1890s Brown Brothers, Redmond, and Fallin and Underhill ranged from 12,000 to 20,000 sheep in the Dickinson vicinity.¹³¹

When the large cattle companies abandoned the Badlands in the late 1890s, the region around Sentinel Butte west of Medora became sheep country, the third identified concentration. Large scale sheep ranching was of brief duration--about 1895 to 1905--for it was sandwiched between cattle ranching and the onset of homesteaders. Still, there were considerable numbers of sheep for this period. In 1902 the shearing plant at Sentinel Butte sheared 65,000 sheep, and many more were sheared by hand out in the countryside. A.L. Martin, J.B. Stoddard, Frank Stone, and Joe Burd had particularly large spreads. Sheep raising was also widespread in the eight counties of northwest North Dakota but not offering identifiable concentrations.¹³²

PROPERTY TYPES

Context: Open Range Ranching

Livestock Management Networks

Trails

Way stations

Trails and bridges

- Railroad systems
 - Loading facilities
 - Freight depot
 - Slaughterhouse
- Cowtowns
 - Cowboy entertainment facilities
 - Saloon, brothel, gambling house, pool room
 - Hotel and boarding house
- Round-up grounds
 - Round-up camp
 - Service wagons (chuck, bunk, ferrier, blacksmith, water)
- Auxiliary camp (summer, winter, line, hay camps)
 - Dugout shelter
 - Abandoned ranch house shelter

Open Range Ranch Headquarters

Ranch

- Homesteader shack
- Ranch house or headquarters
- Privy
- Spring house
- Ice house
- Fenced garden plot
- Bunkhouse
- Mess hall
- Windmill and well

Livestock-related facilities

- Barn
- Livestock shed
- Outbuilding
- Blacksmith shop
- Corral
- Hayrick
- Limited fencing
- Granary (for pre-railroad specialty ranchers and transitional examples)

Description

Open range ranching was, above all, an economic pursuit based on transitory use of free and open grasslands. Physical resources were constructed largely of locally available materials--sod, logs, (rarely) stone--and were, in general, intended to provide only the most rudimentary comforts and utility. The occupants did not own the land they used and had little apparent interest in making substantial improvements to government-owned land. While railroad service would have allowed the shipment of dimensioned lumber, ranchers chose not to use it.

Many cattlemen came to North Dakota from three source areas: Texas, Europe, and the East or Midwest. Their heritage, in varying degrees, may have affected how they chose to live and how they operated their ranches.

The very nature of open range ranching all but dictated that crude, temporary facilities would be the norm. Open range ranching was livestock management by neglect. Herds of cattle, horses, or sheep used the free and open government land to eat native grasses, drink from streams and rivers, and find shelter in valleys among the trees and brush. In the days before land surveys, government sale of land, and occupation by more permanent settlers, ranchers were able to openly and freely exploit the natural resources of the plains. It appears that even those who seemed to intend to remain (at least for a time) initially selected crude facilities constructed of locally available materials.

Spreading north from Texas in the decades after the Civil War, open range ranching practices were represented in western North Dakota from the early 1880s to about 1896, with the peak period from around 1884 to 1887.

Such a brief period, coupled with the expectation by some that land use and ranching practices would be more or less impermanent, translated to inexpensive rather than elaborate, physical manifestations. Those who did not regard their occupation as temporary were likely forced, by lack of financial resources, to construct modest buildings, with the expectation of replacing them later. It is possible that the very brevity of occupation of specific ranches might result in significant historic archeological sites capable of yielding important, otherwise unobtainable information. For example, while the highlights of daily life--round-ups, branding operations--have frequently been described, the details--including diet, leisure time pursuits, consumption practices, presence of women--are not. Accounts frequently state that a house and corrals were present. They do not commonly mention ancillary or small buildings, yet we know (from tantalizingly few references) that they were. Hagedorn mentions a "chicken-shed" in describing the Maltese Cross Ranch, but few other references to the presence of poultry at a very early ranch have come to light.

The property types for the open range ranching context can be placed into two broad categories. Livestock Management Networks are those properties which developed in association with moving livestock into, within or out of the free range. The second category, Open Range Ranch Facilities, were constructed to accommodate personnel and livestock at ranch headquarters. Because they are instructive in revealing qualities and characteristics of open range ranching, some suggested fee simple ranching properties which contrast with open range examples are offered below. However, it was beyond the scope of this project to fully investigate this property type.

Livestock Management Networks

Trails from distant points were the original means of arrival for cattle to the open range of western North Dakota. Writing in 1886, Theodore Roosevelt described the typical established

trail used by cattle as two wagon ruts with many deep paths on either side worn by cattle moving in single file. Texas cattle was moved north on a variety of trails, with the Chisolm, Western, and Goodnight-Loving trails predominating. An offshoot of the Western and Goodnight-Loving trails, which converged and diverged several times, served North and South Dakota. (Figure 6.) Known variously as the Dodge/Fort Griffin/Jones and Plummer Trail, this route commenced at Brownsville, Texas and entered present North Dakota near the Little Missouri River.

Way stations for the trails used by freight haulers and stage coach lines were established along routes. Established in 1876, the Fort A. Lincoln/Fort Keogh Trail linking Bismarck and Miles City, Montana had two stations in present North Dakota. (Figure 5.) One was Lake Station, which was about 1 1/2 miles east of Rocky Butte and another was located at Sand Creek in present Slope County. The stations were apparently of extremely modest construction. Even in 1883, "the ruins of the stage station" for the "old Fort Keogh trail" were mentioned. During this period, the Eaton brothers initially lived in an abandoned way station on the Lincoln/Keogh trail, a two-room shack of cottonwood logs and a dirt roof.¹³³

Scant mention was made of fording points and bridges in discussions of North Dakota open range ranches. However, it seems likely that certain fording points were identified and used repeatedly. The HT Ranch in Slope County once had two bridges connected the log ranch house with the rest of the ranch headquarters complex.¹³⁴

The construction of **railroad systems** allowed open range ranching to develop fully on the plains. Construction of the Northern Pacific, the Soo Line, and the Great Northern rail lines literally opened the areas they crossed for ranching activities. Subtypes of the railroad systems property type include **freight depots, loading facilities, and slaughterhouses**. The presence of adequate holding pens or cattle yards was a factor in selecting a shipping point. Medora suffered from insufficient fact "on the small bottoms near the railroad to hold herds of any size preparatory to shipping." Consequently, the big cattle companies used Mingusville (now Wibaux) in Montana.¹³⁵

Cowtowns were generally also railroad shipping points, and they developed because of the presence of open range ranching. Certain specialized facilities served the cowboys who brought in herds for shipment or collected livestock arriving by rail. Theodore Roosevelt described them as "flaunting saloons and gaudy hells of all kinds." Cowtowns in the region were Dickinson, Medora, Little Missouri, also Miles City and Mingusville (Wibaux), both located in Montana. Sully Springs, later only a siding was once a "flourishing frontier town with several saloons and long ricks of buffalo hides along the station platform." An 1896 map lists the following rail stops between Dickinson and the Montana line: Eland, South Heart, Belfield, Fryburg, Sully Springs, Scoria, Medora, Little Missouri, Andrews, Sentinel Butte, Chama, and Beach.¹³⁶

Saloons, gambling houses, brothels, and other **cowboy entertainment facilities** opened in the cowtowns to serve the male-dominated open range large-scale ranching culture. Cowboys and ranchers stayed in hotels and boarding houses when they went to town. There was no mention

of rodeos or rodeo grounds in the literature researched for this project. Perhaps the cowboys endured enough real range activities and preferred only to carouse in town.

Around 1883, the town of Little Missouri "consisted of a group of primitive buildings scattered about the shack which did duty as a railroad station." Among them were the two story, 14 bed Pyramid Park Hotel, a one-story "palace of sin," a store, boarding house, a handful of shacks, and a livery stable. Located just across the border in Montana, Mingusville in 1884 contained a railroad station, section house, and a 1 1/2 story hotel/saloon with shed behind for horses.¹³⁷

In order to bring the cattle to market, autumn round-ups were held. Spring round-ups were held to brand calves. Since the object was to find cattle which had strayed over the ranges, the process was by definition mobile. The **round-up grounds** consisted of the free range. Cattlemen's associations divided the territory into districts, generally based on river drainages. In 1886 the Montana Stockgrowers' Association determined that the valley of the Little Missouri River was to be District 6 for their spring round-up. Work began at the mouth of Big Beaver Creek, followed that creek to its head and crossed the Lincoln/Keogh trail. Round-up activities were then to continue down the Little Beaver to its mouth and proceed over to the Northern Hashknife Camp on the Little Missouri, and go down to Medora. [Hagedorn, pp. 399-400. The **chuck or other service wagons** and the **round-up camp** were the principal physical property types mentioned in the literature. Water courses dictated movement and camp selection.

In his diary, Theodore Roosevelt recorded in some detail progress for the 1886 spring round-up:

June 18.	Rode to Medora on Sorrel Joe.
June 19.	Out on round-up with Maltese Cross wagon.
June 20.	Worked down to South Heart.
June 21.	Worked up Rocky Ridge.
June 22.	Worked to Davis Creek.
June 23.	[Worked down to Andrews Creek.]
June 24.	To Gardiner Creek.
June 25.	To Bullion's Creek.
June 26.	Down Bullion's Creek.
June 27.	To Chimney Butte.
June 28.	Rode in to Medora.

To accommodate cowboys seeing to herds, ranchers established **auxiliary camps** away from the main ranch. Winter and summer camps provided housing for cowboys tending stock located out on the range. A well-watered tract was important for summer grazing, while a winter range affording good shelter was important for the winter. Hay camps were established when hay was being cut for use at the ranch. Although sources emphasize that no special feed was provided to most cattle, other livestock as well as cattle brought to the ranch required hay. Roosevelt mentioned hayricks at his ranches.

In some cases, ranchers purchased an existing vacant ranch headquarters to use as an auxiliary camp. They also constructed crude dug-outs of logs with sod roofs. (Figure 7.)

Open Range Ranch Headquarters

At the minimum level, the early ranch was "simplicity itself," consisting of little more than a log cabin or sod shanty, a corral, a chuckwagon piled with cowboys' bedrolls, and a branding iron.¹³⁸

The main **ranch** provided a home base or headquarters for open range ranching operations. The ranch was invariably located along a water source to accommodate livestock (and people) at the ranch. Buildings, especially housing, were often set into a hillside. The A.C. Huidekoper Logging Camp Ranch was reached by descending a "steep, long hill cut through solid pink scoria." From the ranch site could be enjoyed "to the fullest a winding creek, the Little Missouri River, pine trees, and alternately level and rugged lands." The house on the Mr. and Mrs. Joe Mattocks Ranch was located between the forks of Hay Creek and Sand Creek and "snuggled into the bank facing north." Theodore Roosevelt described the typical ranch as sometimes "situated right out in the treeless, nearly level open [area], but much more often...placed in the partly wooded bottom of a creek or river, sheltered by the usual background of somber brown hills."¹³⁹

Gregor Lang's early cabin was situated "in a cluster of hoary cottonwoods," 50 yards from the junction of the Little Cannonball Creek and the Little Missouri River. Built to accommodate his family in 1884, Gregor Lane's Yule Ranch "stood on an open flat, facing north, with a long butte behind it." To the front, beyond a broad curve of cottonwoods that signaled the river's presence, were low hills which stretched into the horizon.¹⁴⁰

Especially for the large-scale ranching operations, even the main ranch was intended to be rather temporary. Theodore Roosevelt described the "final camp," the ranch headquarters for outfits who had driven cattle north on a months' long journey to the Badlands:

At last, after days of excitement and danger and after months of weary, monotonous toil, the chosen ground is reached and the final camp pitched. The footsore animals are turned loose to shift for themselves, outlying camps of two or three men each being established to hem them in. Meanwhile the primitive ranch-house, out-buildings, and corrals are built, the unhewn cottonwood logs being chinked with moss and mud, while the roofs are of branches covered with dirt....Bunks, chairs, and tables are all home-made, and as rough as the houses they are in.¹⁴¹

According to Roosevelt, the ranch headquarters, a cluster of log buildings, also typically contained:

- ▶ Separate cabin for the foreman or ranchmen
- ▶ Mess hall for cooking and eating
- ▶ Bunk house

- ▶ Stables
- ▶ Sheds
- ▶ Blacksmith shop
- ▶ Corrals, stacks of hay, patches of fenced garden, a fenced horse pasture

Writing in 1921, Herman Hagedorn described the house Roosevelt had built at the Elkhorn Ranch as a spacious one story log building with a covered porch facing the river to the north. A hallway ran north-south and divided the house. Roosevelt's bedroom in the southeast corner opened onto a large study/living room which had a fireplace. The large fireplace was built by an itinerant Swedish mason. Corrals and stables were constructed a hundred yards or so west of the house.¹⁴² (Figure 8.)

The main ranch house on the Bellows Ranch had a large room which was used as a bunk room. (Figure 9.) It supplemented the bunk house located farther down the hill which was used for the regular hands. Also on the site were a "blacksmith shop, horse barns, chicken coops, cow barns, sheds, two wells, one windmill, and about five or six corrals." Landscape elements included a "big garden yard, a saddle horse pasture, a flower garden, and all fenced in with elk horns and buffalo heads." The fencing would have been a sight to behold; since the buffalo were all gone from the area by the early 1880s, it is unclear whether bison skulls would have been available. Perhaps skulls were not included in the bones which were sent East. The ranch was described as it was in the 1890s, probably representing a transition to fee simple ranching.¹⁴³

Sod was used to construct entire houses, barns, and line camp shacks. For example, when Wallis Huidekoper purchased Frank Towel's place round 1900, it contained a small (12' x 16') sod house and sod horse barn. A prairie fire in 1906 destroyed the horse barn, sheds, and corrals on William B. Galligan's WC Ranch, leaving only the sod house standing.¹⁴⁴ It appears that log construction with a sod roof was the preferred building type during the open range period, and that entirely sod buildings were not the norm.

Most buildings at the typical ranch headquarters were constructed of logs. Large ridge logs supported the roof, which was usually flat or very shallowly pitched and covered with sod. (Figures 8, 10, 11, 12, 13.) A rock chimney, if present, might be plastered with a mud and straw mixture. Sawed lumber was reserved for doors, window frames, and floors. Photographs or sketches of the HT Ranch, Circle M Ranch, Parkin's Ranch, and Elkhorn Ranch depict houses of logs laid horizontally with sod roofs.¹⁴⁵

Some buildings were constructed of logs laid vertically, or pallisade style. Wallis Huidekoper's T Cross Ranch included a stockaded building shown on a 1936 photograph. The Clarence Caudel Ranch also had a "stockade house." Ben Lamb built a vertical log barn in the 1880s on the Peaceful Valley Ranch.¹⁴⁶

Jack O'Bannon built a ranch house of hand-hewn cedar logs set stockade style. According to a 1935 newspaper article, O'Bannon was connected "with the Panhandle country in the old-time cow industry." Also from Texas, the Stroud Brothers had a house with vertical wood elements

on their Birdhead Ranch in McKenzie County. These Texans' choice of vertical logs may be associated with Mexican-inspired Texas building preferences. Two types of Spanish-Mexican construction involved vertical wood pieces. The *jacal* building employed wood poles or branches which were fastened to heavier sill and plates and all was covered with adobe plaster. Another method (also sometimes called *jacal*) was similar to French *poteaux-en-terre* construction. Light upright posts are fitted into a groove in a horizontal log, which functions as the building's plate.¹⁴⁷

Sylvan Ferris and A.W. Merrifield built their "dingy, one-room cabin of cottonwood logs, set on end" and having a dirt floor for their Maltese Cross Ranch in the early 1880s. The team set the logs "on end, stockade-fashion, packed the chinks, threw on a mud roof, and called it 'home'." Ferris and Merrifield were Canadian and may have learned vertical log construction techniques from French Canadians. When Theodore Roosevelt assumed ownership of the Maltese Cross cattle and horses, the "old stockade shack" was converted into a stable, and a replacement dwelling was constructed of horizontal logs.¹⁴⁸ (Figure 8.)

Vertical log construction is known elsewhere on the Great Plains. Two examples of vertical log construction were built in the central Niobrara River valley in Nebraska. In both cases, no associations with French-Canadian or Texan building traditions were identified.¹⁴⁹

There were also known examples constructed of stone, including the 16' square stone house on Wallis Huidekoper's Rock Ranch. The ranch house on the Bellows Ranch was reportedly built "of stone and mud, the walls two feet thick."¹⁵⁰ (See Figure 9.)

Two notable exceptions to the temporary, least expensive model for ranch headquarters involved Frenchmen, Pierre Wibaux and Antoine de Vallombrosa, the Marquis de Mores. Although Wibaux's ranch headquarters were located just across the line in Montana, he ran cattle in western North Dakota and maintained a supplementary ranch on Cherry Creek. Plans for his home at the W-Bar Ranch on Beaver Creek in Montana reveal an 80' x 36' dwelling with four bedrooms, a kitchen (with wash room and pantry), a small "wine room," a large sitting room, two closets, a dining room, and a billiard room.¹⁵¹ (Figure 14.)

The Marquis' Chateau de Mores in the town he founded, Medora, was built in 1883 (and still stands, a state historic property). Using materials brought in by rail, he built a large 16-room two-story house. A contemporary account likened it to a "summer boarding house by its size," and a rustic hunting lodge by its furnishings.¹⁵² Also extant and related to the Marquis' dubious and elaborate approach to cattle management on the plains are a brick house used by his wealthy father-in-law and a Catholic church. Both buildings were constructed of locally produced brick, another atypical decision.¹⁵³

Another prominent European who ranched in present North Dakota, Coutts Marjoribanks (pronounced March-banks), the son of a wealthy Scottish nobleman, dwelt in far more modest accommodations more typical of the period. A water color executed by Marjoribanks' sister, Ishbel Marjoribanks, when she visited the Horse-Shoe Ranch in 1887 depicts a rather long

gable-side log house. (Figure 12.) The centered entrance has a small gabled enclosed entry porch and two windows on either side of the doorway. A gabled rear extension resulted in a T-shaped house.¹⁵⁴

Another residential housing type, the **homesteader shack**, may have represented in western North Dakota during the open range era. In order to maintain control of a creek or other water source, ranchers or their employees sometimes reportedly staked a homestead claim on the site, although there is no documentary evidence. The shack would have been constructed to "meet the homestead requirements and no more." The shack was therefore built of the cheapest available materials. Some depicted examples had very shallowly pitched gabled roofs, one entrance, and were small in size. Some appear to have been covered with tar paper and were of wood frame construction. It is not clear whether ranchers built homesteader shacks of these materials. Designed to be impermanent, extant examples would be exceedingly rare. As noted in Bulletin 214 in 1928, "a few of these abandoned shacks remain, monuments to the homestead days."

Outbuildings related to the ranch headquarters are rarely mentioned in contemporary accounts. We do know of a few examples. A **spring house** and a log **ice house** (with a chute down to Deep Creek) still stood in 1930 at the old HT Ranch. An early photograph of the HT Ranch shows a one-unit shed-roofed **privy** by the ranch house.¹⁵⁵ (Figure 11.)

The **bunk house** at a ranch headquarters provided sleeping accommodations for the cowboys, who took their meals in the **mess hall**, if one was provided. Like other buildings at the ranch, they were typically one-story, of log construction, gabled, and of utilitarian design. An example is the Caudle Ranch which had a "stockade house with a large shed, bunk house, and corrals."¹⁵⁶

Perhaps the most visually notable element altering the landscape were the **corrals** constructed at the ranch. Images of the Little Missouri Horse Company, the Birdhead Ranch, and the Bellows Ranch include corrals which dominate the views. (Figure 9.) Corrals were necessary for managing livestock. Horse corrals were circular while those for cattle were more square or rectangular. Established in 1887 as a horse ranch, Wallis Huidekoper's T Cross Ranch had corrals consisting of cedar posts and cottonwood rails, and this mix may have been the norm. The cedar posts would have held up well, while more cottonwood rails and posts were necessary, necessitating a ready, easily obtainable supply.¹⁵⁷

Livestock-related facilities at the ranch typically included a **horse barn**, various outbuildings including a **blacksmith shop**, and corrals. As the ranch headquarters evolved, a well and windmill and additional livestock **sheds** might be added. Even the crudest of operations might have ancillary structures. Ferris and Merrifield's Maltese Cross Ranch had a one-room log house and also a "**chicken-shed** abutting the cabin on the west."¹⁵⁸

One source stated that on the central and northern plains, some ranchers drilled deep **wells** or constructed **reservoirs** to catch the rainfall in a concerted effort to increase grazing areas.¹⁵⁹ No

specific mention of such facilities in North Dakota has come to light. An historic photograph (Figure 10.) shows a pump by the ranch house.

Fee Simple Ranch Facilities 1897-1920

In addition to the resources associated with free range ranching, the fee simple ranch property types might be represented by the following additional properties:

- Wood frame or other more permanent ranch house

- Hay storage

- Fencing

- Community hall

- School

- Church

- Dipping tanks

- Large livestock sheds

- Shearing plant

- Sale barn

ADDITIONAL PAGE! NUMBERING
WILL BE CORRECTED IN FINAL

EVALUATION CRITERIA

CRITERIA

The property types and subtypes discussed above are associated with the historical development of open ranch ranching in North Dakota. Significant properties will meet one or more of the following criteria in conjunction with satisfying integrity standards. While each property must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, relatively unaltered examples of open range ranch property types are expected to be rare, if only due to the brevity of the period when ranches were established. This project did not involve field survey; it is expected that survey efforts would result in revisions to the evaluation criteria of the property type.

A reconnaissance level survey of Lake Sakakawea in Williams and McKenzie counties and a 1983 architectural overview of western North Dakota identified six properties directly associated with open range ranching. (See Appendix for list of other described but unsurveyed properties.)

- ▶ Maltese Cross Cabin, Billings County, Theodore Roosevelt (32BI8)
- ▶ Peaceful Valley Ranch, Billings County, Ben Lamb (32BI167) (NRHP)
- ▶ Tipi Bottoms Ranch, Billings County, LeMoyne Cattle Company (said to be in ruins)
- ▶ Chateau de Mores, Medora, Billings County (32BI60) (State Historic Property)
- ▶ H-T Ranch, Slope County, A.C. Huidekoper (NRHP)
- ▶ Birdhead Ranch, McKenzie County, Stroud Brothers (NRHP)

Criterion A

- ▶ Served as a documented significant open range ranch headquarters during the period of significance.
- ▶ Strongly representative of livestock management, economic infrastructure, or other agricultural production activities.
- ▶ Represents a unique or demonstrably representative facet of open range ranching, one that can be demonstrated to have had a significant impact on the patterns of life and agricultural development in the region.
- ▶ Represents an important series of aspects associated with open range ranching, such as livestock management networks, ranch headquarters operations, and aspects of the cultural landscape.

Criterion B

- ▶ Directly associated with the pivotal career years of a demonstrably important open range ranching participant(s).

As noted in Bulletin 32, Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Properties Associated with Significant Persons, an example would be a "farmer whose business acumen or practical innovations in agronomy established or revived an area's agricultural economy." According to Bulletin 30, an important ranching participant would be one who "by their success, talent, or ingenuity, [a participant] contributed to the historical development or economic prosperity of [his] community."

Criterion C

- ▶ A unique or representative example of open range ranch design, including lay-out, materials, form, and design.

To be significant, a property must embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction. Relationships to the three primary avenues of design sources--Texas, midwestern/eastern, and non-American--would be explored under this Criterion. Methods of construction, including vertical and horizontal log and sod, fall under this category and merit attention, as do patterns of land use. The siting of ranches may illustrate an important pattern of land use which is significant for its representation of traditional practices unique to open range ranching.

Several variables, which are also applicable to historic archeological sites, come to mind. Consideration of them should enhance our understanding of land use and specific properties. As mentioned above, one group of variables involves the background of the rancher. The primary backgrounds are (1) Texas or the Southwest, (2) the Midwest and the East, and (3) non-American, including French, Scottish, German, Dutch, and Canadian.

Another layer of variables is the presence or absence of other family members, especially wives and children. Women seem to have been present, either as wives, employees, or ranchers themselves, more often than is commonly thought. When Theodore Roosevelt closed out his Elkhorn Ranch in the fall of 1886, the wives of the ranch foremen, Sewell and Dow, had each just given birth. Yet they receive scant mention in accounts of the Roosevelt ranches. The 1885 Territorial Census offers a number of ranch households with wife and family present.

Still another potentially important variable involves the motivation or circumstances behind the decision to establish an open range ranch. Was it serendipity, attraction to the allure of the Great Plains, or a continuance of ranching practices?

Much has been made of the speculative nature of the larger ranches. There may be discernable and important differences between a large scale speculative venture with absentee owners, a smaller scale but still speculative operation, and a ranch where the owner is in residence and actively engaged in ranching.

Criterion D

- ▶ A well documented open range ranch site which retains the ability to yield important, otherwise unobtainable information.

The South Dakota State Historical Preservation Center completed a draft context study in 1993 regarding homesteading and agricultural development. Their contribution regarding the historic archeological record is intriguing and potentially applicable to North Dakota's open range ranching properties. The following draws heavily on the South Dakota context study, and the contribution of that document, by Allyson Brooks and Steph Jacon, is gratefully acknowledged. Many of the variables discussed above in Criterion C are applicable to Criterion D properties as well.

In general, a significant historic archeological site will be associated with documentary evidence about the inhabitants of the site. The documentary evidence is crucial for forming proper research questions. Examples of such evidence include diaries and letters, manuscript census data, and oral histories. Letters "back home" might portray a way of life that was far more bright and positive than what the archeological record reveals. With the possibility for comparison, it may be possible to learn more about what life was really like on the open range for that household. (Household is interpreted to include ranches with non-relative cowboys and other boarders.)

The archeological record is particularly important because of the apparent paucity of detailed accounts of a variety of aspects of daily life on the open range. To be sure, many former cowboys in later years penned memoirs. But they often concentrated on tall tales, "characters," and events out of the ordinary for the cowboy. Many such accounts describe the round-up in some detail. They are far less likely to describe how they passed their time on the ranch, what exactly they ate, and--above all--what life was like on the numerous small-scale often owner-operated open range ranches. There are certainly references to diet (limited), cowtowns (wild), and ranches (crude), but the kind of detail from daily journals from a number of open range ranchers or their wives is apparently lacking. (The mountain of writing on the many facets of open range ranching in the Great Plains precluded detailed study of diaries or other difficult to find primary sources.) Theodore Roosevelt evidently maintained rather detailed journals, which would be applicable to the Midwest/East model.

The South Dakota study outlines five research areas, two of which we have adapted to the more narrow confines of the open range.

- ▶ **Physical Manifestation of Life on the Open Range**
Beyond the ranch house and corrals which are often mentioned, what other outbuildings and land uses were present at the ranch headquarters? What aspects of material culture were located outside the headquarters? How and why were economic activities organized on the land as they were? What strategies were adopted to cope with the environment and related exploitation of resources?

▶ Economic Aspects of Open Range Occupation

What do the documentary record and the material remains reveal about the relationships between consumer behavior and gender, also ethnicity and social class? For example, in *Land of the Burnt Thigh*, Edith Eudora Kohl recounts the clear differences between the living conditions of men as opposed to men and women on the frontier. Glenda Riley, an historian who researches pioneer women's written accounts, has also remarked on the differences between housekeeping and consumer behavior regarding men and women.

Were the ^{PE}discernable variations in how Texas, non-American, and Midwest/East ranchers engaged in consumer behavior?

INTEGRITY

To determine the significance of identified examples, the physical features, associative characteristics, and degree of alteration must all be weighed. Significant examples will convey some (or all) of the qualities discussed in the Criteria section above.

Both a place of residence and a place of business, the ranch and its numerous buildings, if continuously occupied, will naturally evolve over the years. Examples in the literature discuss, variously, re-using logs from earlier buildings, transforming a log ranch house into the blacksmith shop or shed, and making numerous additions to dwellings. When these changes occurred outside the period of significance, they are detrimental. However, when a property is being considered as an example of both open range and fee simple ranching, such alterations may well represent the normal evolution of the property.

An archeological site retains its integrity when sufficient material culture remains for the researcher to answer questions about human behavior.

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE, 1870S-1910S

Open range ranching in Dakota Territory may be said to date from the early 1870s when cattle raisers received government contracts to supply forts and Indian agencies. The discovery of gold in 1874 further contributed to the onset of cattle ranching as mining towns provided markets for beef in the Black Hills. It was not until the removal of the buffalo and of Indians from the Plains, coupled with railroad construction, that open range ranching began in earnest in present North Dakota, around 1881. According to many accounts, the cattle boom peaked in 1884, then suffered a severe blow after the heavy winter of 1886-87. Nonetheless, open range ranching continued in some areas and on a smaller scale until the beginning of the 20th century. According to some accounts, homesteading peaked around 1907 (at least in McKenzie County), then outmigration began. Homesteading had its effect on signaling and contribution to the end of open range ranching by around 1907. Its demise was not uniform across the landscape: the timing of land surveys and the related arrival of increasing numbers of homesteaders were important factors which varied with the county in question.

LANDSCAPE ISSUES

Setting refers to the overall physical environment a property inhabits, while *location* refers to the specific locus of the property itself. The land a ranch headquarters occupies is its location, and the surrounding valleys and other landscape features are the property's setting. For a property to be significant, its setting must retain the majority of its historic visual qualities. The OX open range ranch has been described as being located on the edge of present Marmarth. If modern urban construction intrudes visually on the historic setting of the ranch, it probably is not eligible for the National Register.

Despite its value, the setting for an historic property associated with open range ranching need not be included in the boundaries of a nominated property, even though open range activities occurred there. According to Bulletin 30, the historic property is the "unit of land actively managed, occupied, settled or manipulated during the historic period for purposes related to significance" (emphasis added). Seasonal use of portions of the open range need not be considered active management of the land.

Seasonal land use--spring and fall round-ups, driving herds--scattered over an immense range diffuses the impact and National Register significance of these activities. These activities and related properties may be what Bulletin 30 characterizes as "small-scale elements" on the landscape. If it were possible to document a series of these elements and especially in conjunction with ranch headquarters, a large district is possible. Isolated examples of, say, an auxiliary camp, trail remnant, or round-up grounds, are unlikely to be individually eligible for the National Register.

Bulletin 30 also states that it is reasonable to evaluate properties at various geographic levels. Taken to its extreme in the case of open range ranching, relevant properties could include railroad systems, cowtowns, slaughterhouses in Chicago, and the entire open range. At another geographic level, again in theory, it would be possible to define the range limits of a particular ranch and include the range limits in the property's boundaries. In reality, the open range would like function as the setting but not be part of a National Register nomination.

DATA GAPS

INFORMATION SOURCES

Specific Ranches and Their Locations

A valiant effort was made to map the locations, by county, of ranches mentioned in a variety of sources. One of the joys of western history is apparently to list the names of participants. However, the location, size, type, and duration of their operations is often lacking. Operations which were located in South Dakota and Montana are often lumped together with North Dakota examples, an understandable but nonetheless frustrating situation. Before statehood in 1889, Dakota was naturally considered as one. Large scale operations had no interest in or need to adhere to territorial boundaries, and many ranch headquarters were located in one state or territory while their cattle occupied ranges in another.

A herd of Great Plains historians, as well as ranchers writing reminiscences, revisited the same territory. Some accounts were actually little more than lists of ranches and ranchers. Because ranches often had a ranch name, company name, and ranch operator's or owner's name associated with them, it became confusing to unravel. For example, Hughes & Simpson were primary owners of the Continental Livestock Company, which operated the Hashknife Ranch.

As a method for organizing the considerable data, a simple data base was employed. Variables included name, ranch name, location, type of livestock, number of head of livestock, year of arrival, circumstances behind ranch establishment, and birthplace. The two last-named were seldom available, and arrival data and number of head of livestock were also not all that common. Many ranches were described as "early" arrivals. Locational information was often rudimentary.

Plat maps were of no use because the area in question had not been surveyed. Maps from the 19th century were valuable to see changes in county boundaries and county names. By combining a variety of maps, especially those showing creek names, it was possible to determine general locations of some 145 ranches.

Statistical Data

Efforts to locate meaningful figures on the number of livestock on the North Dakota open range was also challenging. Again, the lack of differentiation during the territorial period was a factor as was the fact that much of the open range ranching region contained unorganized counties which were often ignored in statistical compilations. Livestock numbers which included the unspecified "unorganized" counties were given only for 1885 and 1890. The fact that many operations ran their cattle in more than one state or territory further complicated efforts to arrive at a meaningful number.

History of Grazing Files

During the 1930s, a WPA project involved assembling data on the history of grazing in North Dakota. (Other states apparently were involved in their own history of grazing projects as well.) The result, which was never published, has provided a resource that is valuable, difficult to deal with, and needful of caution. The Clippings File consists of typed transcriptions of newspaper articles from all over the state from the 1880s to the 1930s. In some cases, the newspaper is not completely identified, although the community it was published in is. In other instances, only a general date is given, such as 1896-97. The Clippings File afforded this project access to otherwise unobtainable contemporary data, for it would not have been feasible to peruse as many newspapers as the WPA researchers did.

The Final Manuscript, a typed series of chapters, was clearly prepared by more than one author. Each author mines (and sometimes repeats) the same data, which included previous scholarly accounts and a set of oral interviews apparently conducted in conjunction with the History of Grazing project. The oral interviews contain the types of sometimes vague, inaccurate, and conflicting statements common to the genre, but they also provided very valuable insights.

SHPO Studies

Three ranches in North Dakota are listed in the National Register. Copies of these nominations were obtained and applied to the project. The Wyoming SHPO has completed a multiple property documentation form on the historic resources of the Bozeman Trail in Wyoming as well as several nominations of trail remnant. Despite the context, early stock raising settlement in the Powder River Basin, 1876-1890, the document was not useful.

The context document prepared by the South Dakota SHPO covered homesteading and agricultural development in that state. Significant portions of the study were applicable to the development of evaluative criteria for this project, especially regarding historic archeological sites. The scope of the South Dakota study--all agriculture in the state--may have hindered its ultimate success. By concentrating on a single, rather narrow context, open range ranching, it may be possible to expand upon the lessons learned and to apply them to other agricultural context studies. When too broad a context is attacked, the result may be too diluted for realistic application to specific examples.

Published Accounts

Works by Lewis Crawford and Harold E. Briggs were very useful. Ironically, Crawford testily denounced Briggs' work, which was drawn from the Crawford's notes he had compiled:

He has misspelled names and otherwise encumbered the article ["Ranching and Stock Raising"] with obvious errors. It is simply a case of a man's writing an article on a subject without having a sufficient background to enable him to interpret the facts that others give."

Hagedorn, Huidekoper, Johnson, and Roosevelt offered valuable accounts or reminiscences. Because of its emphasis on historical geography, Terry Jordan's detailed study of the cattle ranching frontier was very helpful. Many accounts which encompass the entire Great Plains tend to give North Dakota short shrift or to lump activities with South Dakota. Thus, while the aggregate number of words on Great Plains ranching is immense and the need to seek to apply them specifically to the North Dakota story correspondingly large scale, the presence of specific facts about North Dakota (not just Dakota) were disappointingly low. Nonetheless, it was necessary to consult these references to obtain a Great Plains-wide context.

Property Types

The property types were developed through consideration of what is involved in open range ranching and through assembling as many written and illustrated sources as possible. These written and illustrated sources included reminiscences, contemporary accounts, and a limited number of recent county histories. Through repetition, we determined that, for example, log construction was a fundamental feature.

A conscious effort was made to distinguish between resources associated with open range ranching and those unique to fee simple ranching. While the two types of ranching may ultimately be grouped together in a larger study of North Dakota agriculture, it seemed important to make the distinction for this study. The line between these types of ranches may ultimately be blurred, especially when a ranch was established after around 1887 or evolved over time. For example, the Stroud ranch was described as it was in the 1890s when it had a windmill and well. Yet accounts of 1880s open range ranches suggest these elements were not typical of the original components of a ranch headquarters.

Landscape Issues

Bulletin 30, *Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes*, was immensely helpful in characterizing landscape issues. Discussion of the four processes and seven components of the cultural landscape helped define the property types, point out the importance of archeological sites in understanding the landscape, and state the role of "small-scale elements," and the distinction between setting and location outlined in the bulletin was applied to the open range property type.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- ▶ **Extant Examples**
Curt Schweigert states that six buildings (ranch headquarters) are known from the open range ranch period. Are there more extant examples of ranch headquarters? Are there extant examples of the many other types of properties associated with the context, such as ford sites, brothels, and hay camps?

- ▶ **Texan, Midwest/East, Non-American Influences**
 These three groups fostered the ranchers who came to western North Dakota during the open range period. Are there physical manifestations--ranching practices, ranch headquarters layout, consumer choices, design decisions--that reflect these influences?

- ▶ **Historic Archeology**
 It appears that many open range ranches were relatively briefly occupied, as cattlemen capitalized on the boom period of the 1880s. Historic archeological sites may therefore be "sealed deposits," relatively unaltered over time. These sites, if located, could yield important information about daily life, consumer choices, and variations among ranch operations. For example, a Texas style absentee owner operation could be contrasted with a owner-occupant from the Midwest. Is it possible to locate, through research, potential sites, find them on the ground, and survey them?

- ▶ **Contemporary Sources**
 It was beyond the scope of this project to locate each and every source associated with the context. Our mission was to establish contextual and property type parameters. However, it is important to obtain documentary evidence--diaries, letters, census data--on specific properties in order to assess their significance (National Register eligibility). What are the type, quantity, and quality of these site-specific sources? Will they provide additional insight into the day-to-day operations of small-, medium-, and large-scale ranches?

- ▶ **Number of Open Range Ranches**
 Our research identified 145 small-large scale ranches believed to be in operation some time during the period 1870s-1897 and for which a general location could be found. These ranch locations revealed a pattern of ranch locations and also identified far more than was expected. Are there still others to be found from other sources?

- ▶ **Comparison Between Open Range and Fee Simple Ranching**
 The line between these two types of ranching becomes more blurred as one moves from the peak period of open range ranching, i.e., after 1887. Is it useful to draw a distinction? What are the differences and how do they relate to the physical resources, land use patterns, and social structure? Are there areas where open range ranching occurred that fee simple ranching did not?

PRESERVATION STRATEGIES

SHPOs have been grappling with the agricultural context for some time, with mixed results. By commencing with a limited property type, open range ranching, the subject is at least somewhat less overwhelming. By starting "small"--although the considerable data on open range ranching in the Great Plains is by no means small--it is possible to test and refine the context and, later, apply the experience to other aspects of agriculture. If site-specific research and limited survey are undertaken on this aspect of North Dakota agriculture, we may obtain a better picture of the daunting task of identifying and evaluating significant examples of other agricultural properties, including historic archeological sites, non-ranch headquarters properties, and transitional or mixed open range/fee simple ranching resources.

- ▶ **Develop Methods for Identifying Resources**

Limited survey efforts aimed at identifying open range ranch properties appear to have been undertaken. The work that has been done apparently concentrated primarily on standing structures associated with ranch headquarters, especially ranch houses.

Additional survey work preceded by site-specific research should identify additional examples and refine our knowledge regarding the potential existence of extant examples as well as historic archeological sites.

- ▶ **Undertake Site-Specific Research**

Possible avenues of approach include:

- Compile data on longstanding ranch operations from Crawford, county histories, and the North Dakota Stockmen's Association

- Investigate computer database at North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies for the 1885 Territorial Census. It is a combined alphabetical index (nearly 60,000 names) and "a number of smaller counties are also included, particularly for western and north central ND."

- Investigate the 1937-40 farm and ranch survey by the Resettlement Division of the Farm Security Administration (Series 509, North Dakota State Archives). All known ranch sites within the Roosevelt RDA were reportedly razed. Is this the case elsewhere? If so, these areas can effectively be "written off" as offering extant examples.

- Determine the type, number, and relevance of contemporary accounts, including diaries and letters from open range participants. Repositories outside North Dakota may hold important offerings, since many participants moved on or returned to home bases in the East.

- GLO records of original land surveys are sometimes detailed. Homestead proofs are quite detailed, as the homesteader must describe in some detail the types of

improvements made to the property. These may yield valuable information to our effort. One source (Skaggs, p. 78) states that "in North Dakota more public land passed into private hands through preemption than through final-proof homestead procedures," so the homestead proofs may be of very limited application.

- ▶ Integrate Site-Specific Findings Into a Data Base
A roster of open range ranch data (location, cattle company name, owners, ranch, etc.) could be developed for Section 106 and other survey application. For all rural projects in targeted (western) areas of the state, the roster would be checked and applied to the project.
- ▶ Test Significance of Historic Archeological Resources
- ▶ Apply Open Range Research & Survey to Other Agricultural Contexts

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