

## CATTLE EMPIRES AND CONFLICTS

The main source of livelihood in this area during the period 1831-1835 was livestock. The Spanish had introduced the Longhorn cow into the country during their rule. Then after the Mexicans abandoned the land in 1842, these cows that were left behind in the wilderness multiplied phenomenally and spread over the countryside until they numbered in the millions. They became wild, dangerous and tough with horns that spread as much as eight feet from tip to tip.

These wild cows and also wild mustangs drifted at will over the great "sea of grass" as the rugged prairie was called. The laws of the Republic of Texas had made unbranded stock "public property" so they became the private property of any cattle hunter who caught them and put his brand on them. This "free for all" system raised about as many thorny questions as it settled. For example, who owns the unbranded calf of a branded cow or the unbranded colt of a branded mare?

Sticky problems like this, plus plain old human orneriness resulted in bitter and bloody cattle wars among the settlers. It led to the general policy adopted by many rancheros to settle their arguments, vent their anger, establish their property rights and sometimes just try to prove their manhood with their six shooters.



An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth became the only ethic that many of these frontiersmen knew or were willing to follow.

A case in point is related here because it involved German immigrants. Earnest Poldrack moved from Germany and settled on land east of Coupland near the Olives, a family noted for violence. The Olives were driving their cattle across the land of Poldrack and Peter Zieschang. In the fall of 1876 both land owners objected to Bob Olive because of the damage being done to their land. Bob Olive and Sam Carr responded by pistol whipping them and threatening to shoot them. In both instances, criminal charges were filed and the cases were placed on the docket in Georgetown along with about seven other charges against Olive, including the murder of Dock Kelly and the kidnapping of a man by the name of Ware. The Olive family had a lawyer who was able to delay action in these cases and they were released. In the meantime, Bob Olive skipped the country and moved to Nebraska. There he ran into the same kind of problems and he was killed by Luther Mitchel in a shootout on Mitchel's farm. His body was brought back by train and buried in the cemetery at Lawrence Chapel. Then 12 years later, on January 13, 1890, the leaden feet of justice finally got around to the cases against Olive. The states attorney in Georgetown moved that the grand jury dismiss all criminal actions against Bob Olive in each case "for the following reason: to wit that the defendant is dead." And for each case the court passed a resolution ordering that "the reason so stated is good and sufficient reason to authorize such dismissal".

In spite of all the violence that accompanied it, the cattle industry played an important role in the development of this area. Periodically thousands of head of wild cows were rounded up and driven to the northern states of Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska to market. From there, the eastern demand for beef was supplied by rail. This cattle trade became an important tie that began to bind the North and South back together again after the tragic division of the Civil War.