The End of the Open Range

Why It Matters Now
Ranching greatly influenced the economy and culture of Texas.

TERMS & NAMES
King Ranch, Charles Goodnight, XIT Ranch, rustler, Joseph F. Glidden, open-range ranching, barbed wire.

OBJECTIVES
1. Analyze the political, economic, and social impact of the cattle industry.
2. Analyze the effects of barbed wire and the windmill on the ranching industry.
3. Identify the myths and realities of the cowhand.
4. Explain the social and economic impact of the development of West Texas resulting from the close of the frontier.

MAIN IDEA
The expansion of large ranches, multiplying herds of livestock, and barbed wire all served to close the open range in Texas.

The Great Spreads
Cattle ranching was big business in Texas. Several large ranches stood out in the cattle industry. Four of the best known were the King Ranch, the JA Ranch, the Matador Ranch, and the XIT Ranch.

The King Ranch was founded in 1852 by Richard King and his partner, Mifflin Kenedy, along Santa Gertrudis Creek in South Texas. In 1868 the partners divided their property. King developed his ranch with the help of his future son-in-law, Robert Kleberg. At the time of King’s death in 1885, the King Ranch covered 614,000 acres of land. King’s wife, Henrietta, inherited the ranch. With Kleberg’s help, she expanded it to more than a million acres.

In 1876, after the Comanches in West Texas had been defeated, Charles Goodnight and his partner, John Adair, established the JA Ranch in Palo Duro Canyon. Goodnight used the canyon walls as part of the ranch’s enclosure and the Red River as a source of water. The ranch included more than a million acres and 100,000 head of cattle. Goodnight’s wife, Moll’, was one of the first Anglo American women to live on the Texas plains.

The Matador Ranch was founded by investors A. M. Britton and H. H. Campbell on a homestead in Motley County in 1878. A Scottish company, The Matador Land and Cattle Company, purchased the ranch in 1882 and expanded it. Eventually, the Matador Ranch acquired land in several states and Canada.
Mexican Americans were responsible for much of the sheep ranching in Texas. Several sheep ranches in Texas were owned by Mexican Americans, and most were operated by Mexican American pastores, or shepherds. Almost all of the tasinquers, or shearers who cut the wool off the sheep, were of Mexican descent. Even Anglo American sheep ranchers often adopted the Spanish method of hiring contract herders to manage the flocks.

How do you think sheep ranching is similar to cattle ranching? How is it different?

Mexican American Sheep Ranchers

As the cattle industry flourished, ranches were established across the state. In what part of Texas were most of the ranches located?

Sheep and Goat Ranching

Cattle were not the only product of the ranching industry in Texas. Herds of sheep and goats were also raised on ranches across the state. Sheep, like cattle, were originally brought to Texas by Spanish explorers and settlers. In the 1850s George Wilkins Kendall established a sheep ranch near Boerne, Texas. He began raising sheep for their wool instead of mutton, or meat. Other ranchers soon followed his lead. After the Civil War the demand for wool increased, and the number of sheep ranches grew rapidly. By 1880 more than a million head of sheep grazed on Texas pastures. For a time, Texas was the leading wool-producing state in the nation.

Ranchers such as Charles Schreiner of Kerr County also began raising goats. Schreiner promoted mohair, a type of yarn made from the silky hair of the Angora goat. It could be used to make clothing and soon brought high prices. Goat raising was concentrated mostly on the Edwards Plateau. Even today, the Edwards Plateau is the leading mohair production area in the country.
Barbed Wire and Windmills

The success of the ranching industry was also the cause of its decline. As more ranchers moved into Texas, the range became crowded. The grazing pastures could not support the growing number of cattle. Ranchers tried to keep track of their cattle and separate them from other herds, but this proved to be difficult. Also, farmers moved onto the range after Native Americans were confined to reservations. They farmed on the same lands the cattle needed to roam. A conflict over use of the land was unavoidable.

Cattle owners in West Texas had operated on the open-range method of ranching. They did so in part because fencing materials, such as wooden rails and rocks, were not easy to find. In 1873 Joseph F. Glidden changed this with his invention of barbed wire, which was inexpensive and effective. Glidden’s design was just one of many patents that were eventually filed for barbed wire.

When ranchers and farmers first studied the thin strand of wire with barbed edges, they did not believe that it could confine large herds. Salesman John W. Gates convinced them otherwise. He built a wire pen in San Antonio and filled it with longhorn cattle. Spectators were amazed that the cattle moved to the center of the pen after charging the fence only once. Barbed wire soon spread across the state, fencing off individual farms and ranches. The XIT Ranch alone was surrounded by more than 6,000 miles of barbed wire. The open range soon became a thing of the past.

Many people in Texas were against fences on the open range. In the 1870s and 1880s fence cutting became a major problem. Fences were cut by rustlers and others who resented the closing of the range. In 1884 the state legislature passed a series of laws that outlawed fence cutting.

The introduction of windmills also encouraged ranchers to fence their land. Much of West Texas was dry, with few rivers or streams. Cattle owners had allowed the livestock to roam the open range in search of water. The windmill made it possible for these cattle owners to pump water from underground sources. As a result, ranchers could contain their cattle in a certain area and use windmills to provide water.

In the late 1880s the ranching industry began to suffer serious problems. Too many cattle to feed, droughts, and severe winters on the range resulted in smaller herds. Problems also arose when foreign investors, hearing of money-making business deals, bought ranches in West Texas. The owners did not live on the ranches and depended on others to carry out the day-to-day operations. By the 1890s the old ways of the cattle kingdom were gone. Cattle raising continued, but it was becoming more a business than a way of life.
The Myth and the Reality of the Cowhand

Soon after the cattle industry experienced a time of economic growth following the Civil War, Americans became very interested in the life of the cowhand. Books portrayed a larger-than-life image of cowhands. The rugged heroes of these novels braved great dangers and had exciting adventures on the wild frontier. Plays, Wild West shows, and, later, movies and television shows often exaggerated life in the West.

The reality of being a cowhand was very different from the myth created by books and movies. The myth overlooked the different kinds of people involved in the cattle industry. Often the contributions of African Americans, Tejanos, and women were reduced or ignored. In addition, conflicts between Native Americans and white settlers usually focused on attacks by Native Americans. The misunderstandings, broken treaties, and violence that often led to these attacks were rarely mentioned in the folklore of the times.

The Range of Cultures

People of many cultures contributed to the ranching industry in Texas. Anglo Americans, Tejanos, African Americans, Europeans and people of other heritages worked side by side on the cattle trails and ranches. They shared similar experiences and hardships on the range.

Many African Americans worked on Texas ranches and on cattle drives. On the range, they suffered less discrimination than in other industries of the time. Daniel Webster “80 John” Wallace was a former slave who served as trail boss on several cattle drives. He eventually owned his

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WINDMILLS

Windmills began appearing on Texas ranches after the late 1870s. By drilling a well and using the windmill as a pump, ranchers could tap underground sources of water to support their livestock. By 1900 the XIT Ranch had 300 windmills, one of which—at 132 feet—was believed to be the tallest in the world. By 1900 most Texas farms and ranchers had windmills. Seventy years later, researchers began studying windmills for a different purpose. Scientists found that by harnessing wind, they could produce electricity. Even though wind farms with more than 100 windmills are used today to provide an alternate source of electricity, many windmills still are used to pump water.

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*How did windmills affect the expansion of the cattle range?*
Chapter 17

After working as a bookkeeper for several ranchers, Lizzie Johnson understood the profit that could be made in the cattle industry. In 1871 she purchased a small ranch near Austin and a herd of cattle, and then registered her own brand. A “hands-on” owner, Williams personally drove her cattle up the Chisholm Trail and is thought to be the first woman to have done so. Before her death in 1924, Williams owned property in several counties and was worth almost a quarter of a million dollars. Her success as a rancher earned her the title “Cattle Queen of Texas.”

In what ways did women contribute to life on the cattle range?

Elizabeth “Lizzie” Johnson Williams

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Women also played an important role on the Texas range. They suffered the hardships of frontier life to establish their homes. Some worked alongside their husbands to ensure that the ranches operated smoothly. Other women, such as María del Carmen Cavillo and Rosa María Hinojosa de Ballí, became independent ranchers. Margaret Borland operated her own ranch near Victoria with more than 10,000 cattle. Lizzie Johnson Williams, another Texas ranch owner, was well known and respected for her knowledge of ranching. Both Borland and Williams accompanied their herds up the cattle trails.

The men and women of the ranching industry have greatly influenced Texas’s heritage. They were known for their bravery, toughness, and determination. The images of the rancher and the cowhand remain important symbols of Texas culture. Although the cowhand became a popular folk hero and a symbol of the West, other industries, such as cotton farming, were also important to the Texas economy.

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Terms & Names
Identify:
- King Ranch
- Charles Goodnight
- XIT Ranch
- rustler
- open-range ranching
- barbed wire

Organizing Information
Use a cause-and-effect diagram like the one shown to analyze the factors that resulted in the end of open-range ranching.

Critical Thinking
1. How did the growth of the cattle industry affect ranching in Texas?
2. How did barbed wire and windmills contribute to the end of open-range ranching?
3. How did the myth of the cowhand differ from the reality?
4. In what ways did the ranching industry reflect the diverse population in Texas?
5. What was the economic impact of the development of West Texas after the close of the frontier?

Interact with History
Review your response to Interact with History in your Texas Notebook. How does your response compare to the effects of barbed wire discussed in the chapter?

ACTIVITY
History
Imagine that you have been hired to sell barbed wire in Texas. Create an advertisement that illustrates the benefits of barbed wire over other fencing material.

Go to www.celebratingtexas.com to research the Activity topic.