

**A Brief History of the Cattle Business
in Apache County, Arizona.**

by

Albert F. Potter.

The following brief history of the cattle business in Apache County, Arizona Territory, will be of interest in connection with the table attached.

[c. 1901]

NA9791
F866

Previous to 1876 there were practically no cattle in this section except a small band in the vicinity of Snow Low owned by a half-breed Indian, who later sold his interests to C. E. Cooley, a former scout with General Crook; and a few small bands belonging to the Mexican settlers on the Little Colorado River. In 1876 the Mormon settlers commenced bringing in small bands of cattle from Utah and Texas. In 1881, with the advent of the building of the Atlantic and Pacific R. R., a few settlers came from California and Texas and embarked in the cattle business. Previous to this time there had been no market for beef steers except the local consumption and the supply for the Military Post and Indian Agency at Camp Apache.

The railroad contractors now opened a new demand, which on account of the small number of cattle in the country, caused an advance in prices. After the completion of the railroad the local butchers along the road continued buying their supplies at home, but on account of the gradually increasing number of cattle raised, the prices paid declined slightly each year. In the spring of 1884 the first California buyers entered the field and for a number of years, while the range continued good, shipments were made to this market.

The prosperity of the cattle men in these early years attracted the attention of men with money to invest, and in 1882 the first English company entered the field, commencing by buying out the cattle and ranches of a few of the small owners.

In 1883 the Wabash Cattle Company of Indiana entered the field under about the same conditions, the following year bringing in 3,200 breeding cows from Mexico, and in the same year, 1884, the Aztec Land and Cattle Company, a New York and Boston corporation, having bought an immense area of railroad land, commenced their operations by shipping in cattle from the Pecos River in Texas. This company turned loose 28,000 head of cattle on the range. During this same period William Garland, The Defiance Cattle Co., The Gardner Gillies and Wilmerding Co., The Esperanza Cattle Co., Reynolds Bros., Miller, Goldberg and Putnam, The Billings Land and Cattle Co., Little and Trainor, and C. O. Brown all shipped or drove in outfits of from 1,000 to 5,000 head of cattle.

Some of the large sheep outfits of New Mexico, being also tempted by the abundance of grass and forage on the range, drove immense herds of sheep on to the Little Colorado River. Coming in when the early spring grass was at its best, they would graze west as far as the foot of the San Francisco Mountains and return in the fall after the summer rains had again replenished the range with feed. This resulted in a sheep and cattle war, which finally culminated in the Tonto Basin War of 1887.

Stock cattle reached their highest price on this range in 1885, when every one was excited over profits that were being made by some of the cattlemen, and there was a general rush to get into the cattle business. The demand for beef cattle kept up pretty well until 1887, when the country suffered a slight drought and from that time on the crowded range supplied very few fat steers. During 1888 and

1889 a few shipments of cattle were made to California alfalfa fields, but as this venture did not prove very successful it was abandoned in 1890, when the northern buyers, attracted by the large number of cattle on this range, commenced making contracts for the delivery of feeding steers.

The seasons previous to this time had been generally favorable and losses on the range during the winters had been very small. It is probable that the number of cattle on the range at this time was at least 150,000, and in addition, the resident owners of sheep had about 120,000 head of sheep on the range; the transient New Mexico herds, however, had discontinued their annual trips.

In 1891 the country suffered a severe drought and the losses of cattle were quite heavy. The market on stock cattle immediately became demoralized, and when the following season of 1892 proved to be a continuation of the drought with another serious loss of cattle, the cattlemen generally became very much discouraged. The market over the entire west was very low at this time, and a few parties who tried shipping cattle to Kansas received very little above the feed and freight expenses in return for them. The general feeling seemed to be that nothing could be done but trust in Providence to bring a little more rain the following season. The demand from the northern buyers for feeding steers kept up, however, and all of the steers which were in shipping condition were sold at fair prices.

Now followed a few years with a slight improvement in the seasons, but the range had been so seriously damaged by the large number of cattle during the drought that it seemed hard for it to recuperate,

cattlemen generally were very much discouraged, prices of feeding steers declined slightly and everyone was anxious to get out of the business. Owners became very careless of the care taken of their cattle, and the Maverick rustler, finding this his golden opportunity, worked diligently building up his herd. So that when in 1895 buyers of stock cattle from Colorado and Kansas entered the field they could almost dictate their own terms. A slight improvement in range conditions and increased demand from Kansas for stock cattle caused prices to advance steadily for the next few years and all of the cattle companies as well as many individual owners took advantage of the favorable opportunity to close out their business, only a few of the individual owners in the most favorable localities remaining in the business.

The spring of 1897 marked an era in the sheep business of this section of the country. Stimulated by the election of William McKinley and the prospective benefits from a protective tariff, the sheep industry took a little boom, and the ranges which were being abandoned by cattlemen were stocked with sheep; in some cases the men who had formerly run cattle selling same and buying sheep. The result being that at the present time the sheep industry is much the more important of the two. A fair estimate is that there are probably about 200,000 head of sheep, and not over 20,000 head of cattle on this range *at the present time.*

The county of Apache was divided by legislative act in 1895 and the county of Navajo created out of its western half, the range described herein being now the section included in both counties.

The past season has been a very favorable one and has done much to recuperate the badly damaged range. With favorable seasons and proper management of the range, it seems probable that this grazing area would steadily improve in condition.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BUREAU OF FORESTRY
WASHINGTON D C

OFFICE OF THE FORESTER

Average prices of Cattle in Apache County, Arizona.

Year	Stock Cattle (yearlings up) \$	Beef Steers (3 years old) \$	Feeding Steers		
			ones	twos	threes
1876	15.00	30.00			
1877	15.00	30.00			
1878	15.00	30.00			
1879	18.00	40.00			
1880	18.00	40.00	15.00	18.00	25.00
1881	18.00	40.00	15.00	18.00	25.00
1882	20.00	40.00	16.00	20.00	25.00
1883	22.50	37.50			
1884	25.00	35.00			
1885	28.00	32.00			
1886	25.00	30.00			
1887	25.00	27.50			
1888	20.00	25.00			
1889	20.00	25.00			
1890	20.00		9.00	12.00	16.00
1891	15.00		9.00	12.00	16.00
1892	7.00		9.00	12.00	16.00
1893	5.00		8.00	11.00	15.00
1894	7.00		8.00	11.00	15.00
1895	10.00		8.00	11.00	15.00
1896	12.00		9.00	12.00	16.00
1897	14.00	25.00	10.00	14.00	18.00
1898	16.00	30.00	12.00	16.00	19.00
1899	20.00	35.00	14.00	17.00	21.00
1900	18.00	30.00	13.00	16.00	19.00
1901	18.00	30.00	13.50	16.50	20.00