

Section 3

The Cattle Kingdom

Key Events

1867

First cattle drive on Chisholm Trail.

1887

Dawes Act breaks up Native American tribal lands.

1889

Oklahoma opens to homesteaders.

✓ Checkpoint

Name the type of cattle that roamed the open range of Texas.

✓ Checkpoint

Name three types of clothes American cowhands borrowed from the vaqueros.

Section 3 Focus Question

What factors led to boom and bust in the cattle industry? To begin answering this question,

- Find out about the rise of the cattle industry.
- Explore life on the trail.
- Learn about the Wild West.
- Learn why the cattle boom went bust.

Section 3 Summary

Cattle towns and the life of the cowhand on the trail helped create the Wild West. But the boom was short-lived.

The Rise of the Cattle Industry

Wild longhorn cattle had roamed the **open range**, or unfenced land, of Texas for years. When the railroads crossed the Plains in the 1860s, Texas ranchers saw a way to get these cattle to market. They could drive the cattle to the railroad towns. Then the cattle could be shipped by rail to slaughterhouses and then sold in the East. These **cattle drives** meant herding cattle over very long distances. Texan cattle were driven as far as 1,000 miles to rail lines. ✓

Life on the Trail

Cowhands who drove the cattle had to have nerves of steel. They had to control thousands of cows and keep the herds together through rivers, fires, and droughts. Yet, for all their efforts, their pay was low.

The first cowhands were the Spanish and Mexican **vaqueros** (vah KAYR os). This Spanish word for cowhand or cowboy comes from *vaca*, the Spanish word for “cow.” Americans learned how to ride, rope, and brand from vaqueros. They also adopted the vaqueros’ spurs, chaps, and cowboy hats. About one third of all cowhands on the trails were Mexican. Many others were African American or white Civil War veterans. ✓

The Wild West

Railroad towns were the destination of the cattle drives. Abilene, Kansas, was the first big **cow town**, or settlement at the end of a cattle trail. It was founded in 1867 by Joseph

McCoy, where the Chisholm Trail met the Kansas Pacific Railroad.

Cow towns were filled with unruly men. Their saloons, gambling, dance halls, and gun fighting helped spread the myth of the Wild West.

William “Buffalo Bill” Cody promoted the Wild West with his traveling show. Starting in 1883, it had gun-slinging cowboys, Native Americans on horseback, and reenactments of battles from the Indian Wars. But the West was being transformed. Native Americans were on reservations, and big companies ran mining and ranching. Most cow towns were quieting down. ✓

Boom and Bust in the Cattle Kingdom

The cattle boom lasted from the 1860s to the 1880s. At its height, ranchers could buy a calf for \$5 and sell a grown steer for \$60. The region dominated by the cattle industry and its ranches, trails, and cow towns became known as the **cattle kingdom**.

By the 1880s, the open range had more cattle than the land could support. Two years of hard weather in 1886 and 1887 killed millions of cattle. A depression in eastern cities lowered demand for beef. Farmers fenced in the open range. As the railroads expanded, their lines moved closer to the ranches. The cattle drives ended, as did the cattle boom itself. ✓

Check Your Progress

1. Why did ranchers have to drive their cattle so far?

2. How was Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show out of date?

Vocabulary Builder

Reread the bracketed paragraph. Based on context clues in the paragraph, write a definition of the word *transform*.

✓ Checkpoint

List three ways the West was changing in the 1880s.

✓ Checkpoint

List three factors that hurt the cattle industry.
