

WESTERN CATTLE TRAIL

ASSOCIATION



DODGE CITY CHAPTER

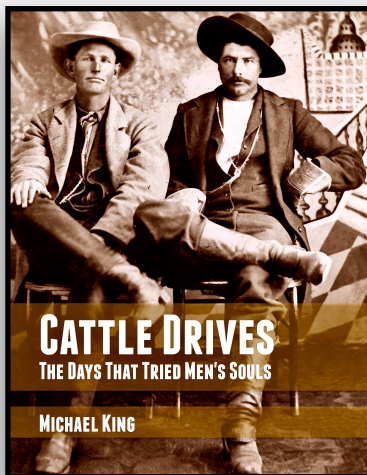
DODGE CITY KANSAS 67801

FEBRUARY 2023 NEWSLETTER

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THE WESTERN CATTLE TRAIL AS VIEWED IN THE 1930s

PART II

By Margaret Kraisinger
WCTA Historian

By the 1930s, the belief that any cattle trail across our country was the Chisholm Trail was well entrenched into the psyche of the American public.

James R. Mead, one of the founders of Wichita in the 1870s, had accomplished his goal beyond reach by promoting his old pal's wagon road from the North Canadian River in Indian Territory into Wichita, Kansas, as the one and only way to reach the AT&ST rails.

Newspaper journalists quickly jumped on board and christened the route the "Chisholm Trail" and inadvertently extended that route's name south into Texas.

In 1874, only three years after Wichita became a cattle town, the state of Kansas revised their cattle quarantine law to take effect after the 1875 season, which ceased the legal driving of Texas herds to the various cattle towns in eastern Kansas, including Wichita.

To adjust to the widening of the Kansas quarantine zone and to avoid incoming homesteaders, a new cattle trailing system from out of the southern triangle of Texas started to develop—the Western Cattle Trail, heading for the AT&SF rails in Dodge City, Kansas, and beyond.

During this period, experienced trail drivers still used the old Eastern-Chisholm pathway but splintered from this route toward the new cow town of Dodge. One of those splinter routes, a favored one, left the "Chisholm Trail" in Indian Territory at Red Fork Ranch (Dover) and followed the north side of the Cimarron River until merging into the Western Trail south of Dodge City. (We called this route the "Cimarron Cut-Off Feeder Route" in our 2016 book [pg. 213].)

(continued on page 2)

(continued from page 1)

To the Chisholm Trail paradigm-ist, however, this Cimarron River cut-off was simply an extension of the Chisholm Trail.

Some maps issued in the early years of the 20th Century show the “Chisholm Trail” branching into Dodge City and on north. Thus, for years, the public believed that Dodge City was part of the Chisholm Trail system.

As suggested in Part I, Hollywood bought into that belief as late as 1939. The main trunk line of the Western Cattle Trail from south Texas via Fort Griffin, Texas, Doan’s Crossing on the Red River, and Camp Supply in Indian Territory to Dodge City seemed to have been forgotten.

Therefore, in the 1920s and 1930s, the general public believed that the Chisholm Trail started at Brownsville, Texas, and followed the old eastern route, branched at Dover, Oklahoma, and continued on to Dodge City and on north. OR, trail drivers using the Western Cattle Trail were told that they were trailing on a newly charted route of the Chisholm Trail to Dodge City.

In other words, if a trail driver used a trail to Kansas during the trail-driving period, it had to have been the Chisholm Trail. Period.

In the early 1920s, when aging trail drivers wrote of their experiences on the trail at the request of George W. Saunders, many recalled the were on the Chisholm Trail, whether they had been or not (The Trail Drivers of Texas, pub. 1925).

When the WPA Life Histories project sent out writers starting in 1936 to interview oldsters for their Cowboy Lore series, many of the drovers recalled being on the Chisholm Trail. Why?

Because that was what they were told. That was the belief in the 1920s and 1930s. Drover Peter P. Ackley stubbornly believed it.



THE WESTERN CATTLE TRAIL AS VIEWED IN THE 1930s PART III PETER P. ACKLEY DISTORTS WCT HISTORY

By Margaret Kraisinger
WCTA Historian

By 1931, the confusion and controversy over conflicting trail names and locations came to a head. George W. Saunders, president of The Old Time Trail Drivers’ Association, finally decided something had to be done. He knew that there were two different trail systems —the Eastern (Shawnee) and the Western. (The Chisholm Trail is one branch of the Eastern- Shawnee System).

He knew that Jesse Chisholm’s wagon road was only a short segment in Indian Territory and did not extend into Texas.

He became frustrated by the public’s confusion over the location of the two different trail systems and the fact that the Chisholm Trail name had been extended into Texas.

Therefore, in 1931 at the Old Time Trail Drivers’ Association meeting, Saunders introduced a resolution to set the record straight. The membership of the association voted to state that the Chisholm Trail did not go into Texas and that the Western Cattle Trail crossed at Doan’s Crossing on the Red River.

Saunders was trying to squash what he foresaw as a possible mis-naming of the Western Trail.

The belief that the Chisholm Trail had crossed at Doan’s Crossing was circulating. In fact, a group of enthusiasts were in the process of marking the cattle trail in Texas and Oklahoma under a false name! The promoter of this movement was a former trail driver by the name of Peter P. Ackley.

Starting in 1928-1929, Ackley had envisioned a modern highway following the general direction of the Western Trail, a route he claimed to have used in 1878 on a trail drive from Dodge City to Ogallala, Nebraska. By the early 1930s, Ackley had won support of Sam Hawks, chairman of the Oklahoma Highway Commission, who would promote Highway 34 as a trail highway.

Ackley also gathered a group of Texans to support his vision and set up the National Longhorn Chisholm Trail Association, of which he was president, with the aim to promote an international highway under the name of the "Longhorn Chisholm Trail."

While Ackley was planting trail markers from Texas to the Dakotas, with the famed longhorn steer head and placing highway markers that bore the inscription, "Going up the Texas Chisholm Trail, 1867" (note the incorrect date as well as name), the State of Oklahoma stepped in.

In their House Bill No. 149, in 1931, it was stipulated that money would be allocated to the locating and mapping of the Chisholm and Texas Cattle Trails in their state. H.

S. Tennant of the Oklahoma State Highway Department followed the mandate to clear up the confusion between the two trails.

However, regardless of the actions of The Old Time Trail Drivers, the State of Oklahoma, pleas from other trail drivers, and letters from George Saunders, Ackley persistently continued with his campaign.

On the weekend of October 20-21, 1931, Ackley and his followers placed a large granite marker at Doan's Crossing near the old Doan's Store, marking "The Longhorn Chisholm Trails and the Western Trail, 1876-1895."

With Ackley's lead, many people believed in the 1930s that the trail via Doan's Crossing was an extension or later addendum to the Eastern-Chisholm cattle-trailing system. He continued to place his road-side markers along the Western Cattle Trail.

Upon his death in April of 1940, his obituary stated that he was the "father of the Longhorn Chisholm Trail highway across western Oklahoma." (Clinton Daily News, April 8, 1940)

In the aftermath, H. S. Tennant, whose research was concluded in 1933 and published in 1936, came to the same conclusion that the Old Time Trail Drivers had said all along: the Chisholm Trail did not go south of the Red River and that there were two trail systems, the Eastern-Shawnee that crossed at Red River Station and the Western that crossed at Doan's Crossing.

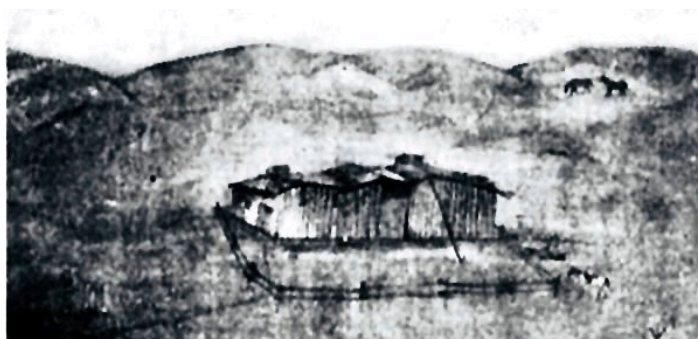
Someone, at some time, changed the wording on the granite marker at Doan's Crossing, cutting out the words "Longhorn Chisholm Trail." And the designation of Highway 34 across Oklahoma named the Longhorn Chisholm Highway did not last.

George W. Saunders until his death in 1933 continued to do damage control and fight to keep the records straight.

Even though corrections and deletes were made, Peter P. Ackley's effort to change the history and the narrative of the Western Cattle Trail continued to mar and cloud the trail's heritage for years.

DOAN'S CROSSING

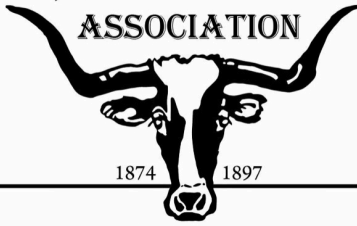
After the Civil War ended in 1865, the cattle industry became an important economic activity in Texas, and ranchers drove thousands of cattle northward through the Indian Territory (present Oklahoma) to the railroads of Kansas. As the route shifted from the Chisholm Trail to the Western Trail in the mid-1870s, drovers usually forded the Red River about ten miles north of Vernon, Texas. When in 1878 Jonathan Doan, joined later that year by his nephew, Corwin Doan, established a trading post approximately one mile southwest of the river, in Texas, the ford became known as Doan's Crossing.



The first house at Doan's was made of pickets with a dirt roof and floor of the same material. The store which had consisted mainly of ammunition and a few groceries occupied one end and the family lived in the other. A huge fireplace around which Indians, buffalo hunters and the family sat, proved very comforting.

WESTERN CATTLE TRAIL

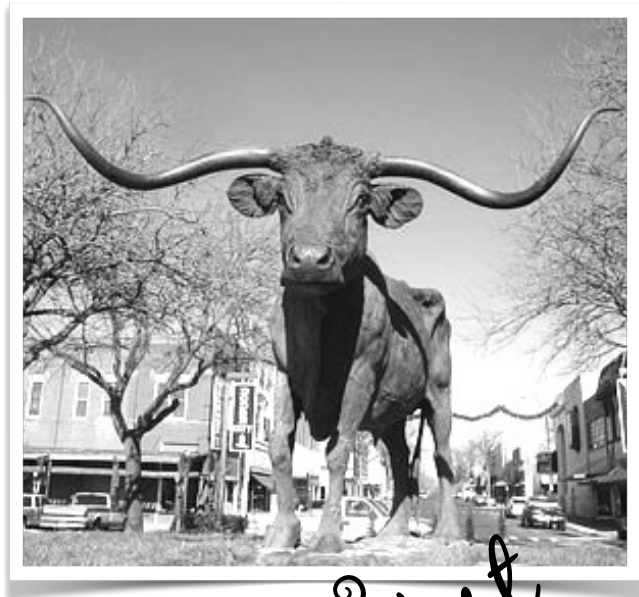
ASSOCIATION



1874 1897

Committed to historical accuracy of the Western Cattle Trail

"THE MISSION OF THE WESTERN CATTLE TRAIL ASSOCIATION IS TO PROTECT AND PRESERVE THE WESTERN CATTLE TRAIL AND TO ACCURATELY PROMOTE AWARENESS OF IT'S HISTORICAL LEGACY." - AUGUST 27, 2018



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As a member of the WCTA, your contribution safeguards our heritage for generations to come. This will allow our children and our children's children to enjoy the history of the WCT. Each membership is an important voice as an advocate for Trail preservation and education.

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