

Section

4

The Closing of the Open Range

Main Ideas

1. The use of barbed wire led to the closing of the open range and to range wars.
2. Overgrazing and heavy use of ranch land helped contribute to the decline of the Cattle Kingdom.

Why It Matters Today

Technological innovations changed the Texas frontier. Use current events sources to learn more about new technology and scientific discoveries that affect the world today.



TEKS: 6A, 6B, 6D, 8A, 8B, 9C, 10A, 17C, 20C, 20D, 21B, 21C, 21E, 21H, 22A, 22C, 22D

myNotebook

Use the annotation tools in your eBook to take notes on the decline of the Cattle Kingdom and the close of the open range in Texas.

Key Terms and People

- Joseph F. Glidden
- barbed wire
- range wars

The Story Continues

John Warne Gates, an eager salesman, saw a golden opportunity to increase sales of barbed wire in Texas. In 1878 he held a demonstration in downtown San Antonio to advertise his product. Gates fenced a holding pen with barbed wire and stocked it with a herd of wild longhorns. Although the longhorns were strong and mean, the barbed wire held them back. The crowds were very impressed, and sales of barbed wire in Texas skyrocketed.



Fencing the Open Range

Farmers moving into West Texas wanted to fence their land to protect their crops from stray cattle. Some ranchers also tried to fence in their land. But building long fences was difficult because wood was scarce on the open plains. **Joseph F. Glidden**, a farmer in De Kalb, Illinois, answered this challenge. In 1873 he developed **barbed wire**, a type of wire fencing designed with sharp points, or barbs, at intervals along its length. The wire was strung between fence posts, and the barbs kept cattle off the fences without hurting the animals. Glidden quickly opened a factory to make his product. Soon, inexpensive barbed wire was readily available. The sharp wire fences even survived the strong Texas winds. One advertisement described barbed wire as “light as air . . . and cheap as dirt.”

Many people, particularly small-scale ranchers, disliked the idea of fencing the range. Over time, however, the idea became more popular. The new invention made large-scale fencing both easy and inexpensive. By the end of the 1880s, there were barbed-wire fences in nearly every Texas county. This marked the end of the open range in Texas and the close of the frontier.

Reading Check Identifying Cause and Effect What innovation was widely used in the 1880s, and how did it affect the use of land?

★ The Range Wars

Widespread fencing led to conflict in Texas in the early 1880s. Owners of small properties complained that they were being surrounded by the fences of giant cattle companies. Fencing became so extensive that public roads were blocked and mail delivery was interrupted. Many large ranchers fenced off water sources even though they did not own the land. Ranchers who let their cattle roam free complained that fencing cut their cattle off from water sources.

This issue became critical when Texas was hit by a drought in 1883 and cattle began to die of thirst. Under the cover of darkness, ranchers would snip the barbed-wire fences. Before long, **range wars** broke out. A Gainesville farmer found a note that read, “If you don’t make gates, we will make them for you.”

In Coleman County, cutters destroyed 500 miles of barbed-wire fences. Other ranchers, usually wealthy cattle operators, struck back. They hired guards to protect their fences, and gunfights sometimes broke out. After seeing several of her fences destroyed, rancher Mabel Day brought the issue of fence cutting before the state legislature.

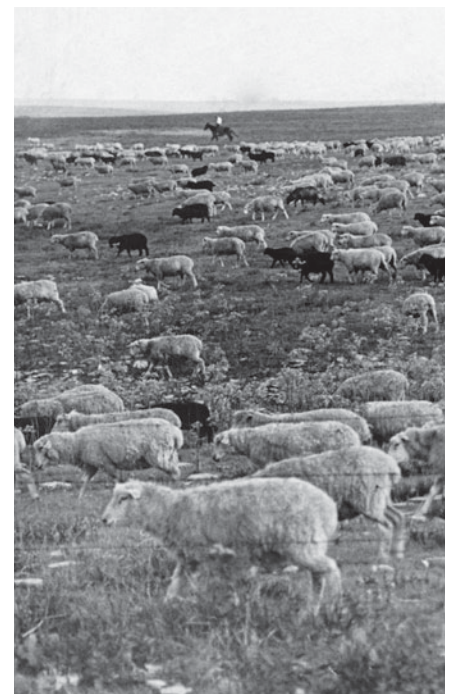
Fence cutting soon became an important political issue. In 1884 Governor John Ireland called an emergency session of the legislature. After heated debate, it passed a law making fence cutting illegal. The law also required a gate in every three miles of fence to allow passage for roads and railroads. In addition, the law banned people from fencing land they did not own or lease. The governor sent out the Texas Rangers to enforce the law.

Cattle ranchers also came into conflict with sheep ranchers. The Spanish had introduced sheep ranching to Texas in the early 1700s. By the time of the range wars, most sheep ranching in Texas took place in the state’s southern and western regions. In general, sheep were raised for their wool rather than for meat. Many cattle ranchers resented the presence of sheep ranchers in Texas. They were angry because sheep ate grass all the way to the root, making land useless for cattle.

Reading Check Analyzing Information How did the ranchers’ use of fencing spark a political controversy?

Interpreting Visuals

Sheep ranching. As sheep ranching expanded in the late 1800s, many Mexican Americans worked as pastores, or herders, on Texas ranches. **In what ways do you think sheep ranching is similar to and different from cattle ranching?**



SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Barbed Wire and Windmills

Barbed wire consists of two wires. The first wire is long. The second is cut into short sharp pieces that are twisted around the long portion. The wire is very effective at keeping livestock in or out of fields. Inventors tinkered with windmills by adding a vane to allow the windmill's wheel to turn into the wind. This ensured that the wheel would turn whenever a breeze was present, continuously pumping water. **How did these technical innovations affect Texas?**



Legacy of the Open Range

Toward the end of the 1880s the open range began to disappear. After the introduction of windmills, farmers and their crops were expanding onto the plains. Sheep ranching was also expanding in the late 1800s. Greater demand for woolen textiles in New England led to a rise in wool prices. Texas ranchers, particularly in regions with dry climates and more-rugged land, began to turn to sheep herding. Many cattle ranchers resented these changes.

The cattle industry changed in other ways as well. Severe winters in the 1880s caused the death of thousands of open-range cattle and thus cut down on the number of cattle drives. Many ranches went out of business. A number of ranchers had expanded too quickly and allowed overgrazing of their land to occur. Years of heavy use had stripped the grass and damaged the soil itself. Some cattle operators sold their land to farmers. These new trends limited job opportunities for cowboys. In addition, the extension of railroad lines to Texas eventually ended the need for long cattle drives. Newly invented refrigerator cars could move processed beef to eastern cities. Large ranches remained, but the era of the open range was over.

Despite the decline of the cattle era, the industry created an important legacy in Texas. Throughout the world, people associate Texas with cowboys and cattle ranchers, and many Texans still raise and sell cattle. In addition, tourists visit Texas to watch rodeos and tour cattle operations such as the King Ranch. Cattle ranching continues to contribute to the state's economy. In 2010, for example, the total value of cattle production in the state was over \$6 billion.

Reading Check Summarizing What two technological innovations came to the open range, and how did they affect the cattle industry?



Section 4 Review


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ONLINE QUIZ

1. Define and explain:

- barbed wire
- range wars

2. Identify and explain

the historical significance of:

- Joseph F. Glidden

3. Identifying Cause and Effect

Copy the graphic organizer below. Use it to explain what innovations came into use in the 1870s and 1880s and how they influenced the development of Texas.



4. Finding the Main Idea

- How did the development of the railroad affect the Texas cattle industry?
- How did ranchers' use of land contribute to the decline of the Cattle Kingdom?

5. Writing and Critical Thinking

[myWriteSmart](#)

Supporting a Point of View Imagine that you are a Texas rancher who either supports or opposes fencing the open range. Write a letter to your neighbor expressing your viewpoint.

Consider the following:

- the economic consequences of fencing
- the political consequences of fencing