A SALUTE TO THE CATTLE INDUSTRY

"Oldtime Cowboys" of Cameron Parish are from left to right:

Front Row — Mayo Boudreaux, Edras Nunez, J. H. Meaux, Joseph Erbelding, Moise Sturlese

Middle Row — Eraste Hebert, Steven Carter, Robert O. Hackett, Isaac White, Claiborne Duhon and A. A. Myers

Back Row — Fred Erbelding, Bruce J. Vincent, Jasper King, David Y. Doland, and B. C. Cox

The president and members of the Fur and Wildlife Festival Board humbly yet proudly dedicate this program annual to these and other members long associated with the promotion of the beef industry in Cameron Parish. Without these and other dedicated members whose perseverance and dedication sustained them through misfortunes, pestilences, and tragedies, the industry may not have reached the prominence and quality to which it testifies today.
1970 Queens and Runners Up

Left to Right: Catherine Lowery, Miss Cameron 1st Runner Up; Daylene Lasiter, Fur Queen; Katherine Ann LeBlanc, Miss Plaquemines, 2nd Runner Up; Peggy Hanks, Miss Vermilion, 3rd Runner Up.

Left to Right: Rosilie LaBove, 2nd Runner Up; Cherie Griffith, Miss Cameron Parish; Kathy Richard, 1st Runner Up; Pamela LeBleu, 3rd Runner Up.
INTRODUCTION

This work would make far more interesting reading if we had the source and time to trace the coming of the first livestock into every segment of Cameron Parish and the people responsible for their getting here. If we could fill the missing gaps created by time and lack of direct information that link our present society with the first settlers, it would present interesting historical data to our ever increasing reading public.

Much of the information contained here has been compiled through periodicals and book research of a century ago. Most of this information is ambiguous in its presentation and therefore difficult to interpret and restrict to specific areas. The greatest portion has been collected through interviews with the older parishioners. We are fortunate to have access to some near centenarians who will readily inform you that they may not recall what happened yesterday but their chores in caring for cattle and other farm duties of fifty years ago they recall as vividly as though they performed that task yesterday.

Beef has always been a staple food of all who have ever in any way been connected with beef production. This cannot be completely true of those brave daring men who challenged the unknown wilds of southwest Louisiana. Other wildlife, game, and seafood supplied the household with bountiful delectable foods. Therefore, most of the early livestock raised on the prairies was for the market.

As far as has been ascertained about the beef industry, this area in its infancy served primarily as a transient grazing area for moving herds either to or from winter pasturage or to market.

The first permanent settlers especially in the interior of the parish were of French descent and consequently carried much of the French terminology with them in their search for a homeland. For that reason there are some terms that may need explaining:

- prairie — the plain, level grasslands used for grazing purposes;
- bayou — natural water streams used for drinking water, most of them had “floating” bottoms because of silt collected with the flow of the current;
- les penieres — the piney woodlands which lay to the north of the interior of the parish;
- cheniers — oak ridges or barrier beaches, presumably built by actions of the tide;
- coulee — old drainage channels no longer navigable, served mostly for drainage purposes;
- platin — small circular ponds, sometimes created by the constant stomping of cattle in the same general area;
- coves — small prairies, usually surrounded with trees;
- vacherie — a place where one raises cattle.

The beef industry is one of the highest ranking agricultural enterprises in Cameron Parish. Though the early settlers could not afford expensive bulls for various reasons, today’s story is quite different. The early stock was predominately Brahman because they were more resistant to insects and climatic conditions. Yet today a certain portion of Brahman blood is integrated in the local stock but such registered sires as Brangus, Braford, Santa Gertrudis, Short-horn, Angus, Red Poll, and Black Poll are found scattered throughout the parish.

EARLY HISTORY

Unfortunately very little is known about the early beef industry of Cameron Parish. Why do we consider it unfortunate? Principally because that was a secondary factor or enticement to the settling of this area. Since most citizens were preoccupied with clearing the wilderness and toiling tirelessly from “can to can’t” trying to survive the hardships of the virgin lands very little time was left for them to record historical data on their early exploits and means of subsistence.

Historians have established that the longhorn breed of cattle was transplanted to Mexico in 1521 and from there they multiplied and spread northward to the Texas prairies. As early civilizations began to increase, necessitating expansion, these Mexicans began to spread both east and west. By 1845 many large ranches had been established on the plains of Texas consisting of hundreds of Spanish longhorns which served as foundation stock for the range beef industry which was to follow. With all this movement west of Cameron, we can also turn to our own contribution to the world of livestock.

Our records, though incomplete and misleading at times, do show some early encouraging signs to the growth of this industry in southwest Louisiana.

The Poste des Attakapas which was the center of most Louisiana activity around 1750 reveals some information through statistical data registered there. The cattle brand book compiled by Gradney Cochran registers all brands of the Attakapas and Opelousas districts from 1760 to 1888. These extend all the way down the Calcasieu River and the Mermentao (sic) River, and Tiger Lake, and many other waterways which bore other names. We find such owners of livestock in these records as Barthelemy LeBleu, James Elliot, Alex Hebert, and St. Maurice, names which are very familiar and prominent in our society of today. Barthelemy LeBleu in addition to owning a herd of cattle also earned money by supplying trail hands to assist in movement of herds along the Calcasieu River whereas St. Martin earned money on the lower Calcasieu River by feeding cowhands at 25c per day.
The early beef of Southwest Louisiana in 1769 were described as being "of stocky build, large size, and of a wild nature. These animals roamed lazily on the lush range lands of southwest Louisiana where luxuriant forage was beautiful and bountiful." There were picturesque cowboys "ranchero-looking riders" riding back and forth across the early Texas and Louisiana borders with wide hats, rough attire, bearded faces, and belted ornaments of long bowie knives and army revolvers — savagely anti-Comanche and anti-Greaser — not to say particularly dirty and industry. Governor Alejandro O'Reilly toured southwest Louisiana in 1770 and encouraged the establishment of tanneries in this area for the processing of hides in order to expand the population, and he also emphasized restrictions on brands, pasturage, and round-ups in order to keep accurate records of each man's herd.  

Little was heard of southwest Louisiana anymore until after the American Revolution when this served as a "stop over" for the Texas herds moving to the New Orleans shipping center. Juan Coler, who hailed from New Orleans held the meat franchise for shipping from the New Orleans Center. Here a good cow sold for an average of $13 whereas they sold for $4 in Mexico, so this encouraged much smuggling, and rapid movement with direct access routes to New Orleans were necessary.

During these early times near the regions of Attakapas and Opelousas, cattle were auctioned on Sunday. Because of scattered settlements, gatherings were rare, and since everybody, regardless of how far away they lived, worshipped on the sabbath, their coming to gather was twofold — to worship and to auction.

About the same time, James Monroe and Robert Livingston were transacting the sale of the Louisiana Territory in France. In 1803 the Oak Grove settlement was initiated by the Demo-thene LaBove family, who came here to clear the lands to raise cotton and livestock, and it was not until 1840 the far eastern end of the Oak Grove settlement (area of the Bluff) was settled by Mrs. Martha Yocum Rutherford, who came from Rutherford County, Tennessee. Her objective was to raise cotton, cattle, and oranges. From this endeavor, came the Meauxs and the Welch's who still reside in the same vicinity today and who have built large individual herds of cattle.

For a period of time these settlers moved east to the Cheniere Aux Tigre area for winter grazing until Hurricane Audrey (1957) no longer made this necessary because of the destruction of a large percentage of the herds. They now move north to "les penieres" of adjacent parishes for summer grazing.

While these settlers were establishing homesites on the southern periphery of the parish, the French were still migrating, trying to quench their thirst for adventure.

Jean Vileor Theriot had moved into the Lake Arthur area from St. Martinville and later established a claim at Palm-A Royal, southwest of Lake Arthur. However, this did not fulfill his dream of a vacherie. His intuitive adventurous personality prompted his to seek more grazing lands to care for his herd of cattle. He, therefore, wandered down the Mermentau and in and out of many small streams before he ventured upon his dream home, which he later named Chenier Perdu meaning "lost oak" because of its topography.
After surveying the virgin, uninhabited land, he returned to Palm-A-Royal eager to disclose his new-found fortune. His wife, the former Clonise Richard, and one son moved into the area in 1847 by skiff via Grand Lake, the Mermentau, and Cattail Bayou, landing on the northern side of Chenier Perdu where he selected a high spot and re-established his home where the remainder of his family was born. Once his family was settled, his friends and relatives drove his herd of cattle from Lake Arthur to Grand Lake where the animals swam the narrow western bayou and then followed the west banks of the Mermentau River on to Chenier Perdú. Thus was established the cattle trail that was to be used for many a year afterward to drive the steers annually to the cattle markets in Lake Arthur and Mermentau. Vileor’s small herd was to be the beginning of a very large cattle business which over the ensuing years was to grow and flourish on this remote chenier, far exceeding agriculture.

None Vileor, as he was affectionately known, was not a lone settler for very long. He was soon accompanied by James Dyson, Armogene Conner, and Vileor’s two brothers Dolzie and Adolph, who had likewise outgrown the Lake Arthur settlement and headed for the lush green chenier lands. These early settlers were soon joined by the Italian stowaway, Bartolomie Bassigalopi, who was determined to make his way to the new world. His journey was climaxed at the home of Vileor who welcomed him to the wild domain of southwest Louisiana.

These rugged characters overcame the wilds of the prairie and soon found a small self-sustaining community seemingly in the midst of nowhere. They grew cotton, corn, sugar cane, and vegetables of every sort and soon accumulated a thriving business of cattle raising.

A very lasting mark which the great herds of these early days carved out of the marsh and which remains today as a reminder of the “golden” cattle era on Chenier Perdú is the narrow canal that winds its way from the eastern end of the ridge to the Mermentau River. What had once been a trail here in the marsh was eventually hallowed out and deepened into a canal by the heavy trampling of the large herds of cattle driven annually over the trail to the edge of the Mermentau, thence along the west banks northward to the cattle markets. For over half a century, the canal provided the residents of Chenier Perdú, East Creole, and Creole with a link to the Mermentau River thence to the outside world.

The Civil War years had its impact on this remote segment of the country also. The Confederate government ordered Vileor to supply the troops of this area with beef — an order which he obeyed faithfully throughout the rampage here.

This small community began to grow and soon became a hubbub of activity. So in 1849 Ursin Primeaux in Breaux Bridge, hearing of this paradise, sailed for the unknown by skiff down the Mermentau. He passed up the Chenier Perdú settlement and ventured on about ten miles to a high shell knoll which he claimed and settled. He barged lumber from Lake Arthur and built a settlement to include a cotton gin, a sugar can mill, a grist mill, and weaving outfit. Cattle business was of secondary importance to him, yet it was a "must" because most of the labor on the farm was done by oxen. The tilling of the soil, the grinding of the cane, the power of the mills were all supplied by oxen teams. They were a multi-purpose animal because they also afforded a means of transportation plus a supply of meat.

Ursin soon had many followers. As he met with success, despite hard labor, the news began to spread and there soon appeared on the surrounding prairies the Broussards, the Boudoins, the Michons, the Benoits, the Trahans, and the Clements.

In 1855, another pioneer, Sosthene Richard, and his wife moved into the present Creole area and settled a permanent settlement soon to be joined by others from the eastern extremity of the area. This was no doubt the most isolated part of the new settlements in southwest Louisiana. Ox-drawn wagons and slides were the only means of transportation.

Until the Lake Charles-Creole Highway was constructed, all transactions were through the 'Premo' (original spelling of Primeaux) settlement in Little Chenier.

Cattle were of lesser significance to these settlers, as agriculture was more conducive to subsistence. However, the vast majority of large herd owners of interior Cameron Parish are now domiciled in the Creole area.

J. B. Watkins, Samon A. Knapp, and Benjamin Chadwell came to the northern sector of the parish in 1883 to do experimentation with the cattle industry. They were to try fencing for separation of herds, importing of special breeds, dividing ranches for breeding, others for the market, adequate supply of fresh water, available minerals for stock, and supplying the herds with hay for winter consumption.

MARKS OF IDENTIFICATION

Brandings have always served as a legal protection for the rancher. All brands are recorded and a record is kept, compiled, and published. This became his coat of arms, so to speak. Soon ranchers also carved their mark on personal belongings such as wagons, plows, saddles, and other items which they loaned to neighbors and friends. They also became identifying marks for ranches and homesteads and the tradition still prevails today in some local areas. It is not an uncommon sight to see such signs as the Circle K Ranch (©), the Lazy B Home (©©), the Flying B Ranch (©), the Bar H Bar Ranch (©H©), the Seven T Six Ranch (©6©) and many others.

The idea of branding cattle was adopted from the Mexicans and Spanish as they maneuvered about on the plains of Texas and Mexico. This was not original with them, because brandings can be traced all the way back to the ancient Romans, Greeks, or Babylonians for cattle, horses, and even slaves.
At first, only brand marks were used for identification of one's herd and as these grew in number and it became necessary to identify cattle more rapidly and from greater distances and because many times the brand did not have a clear identifying character or it became diffused, therefore an easier and quicker way was designed for identifying ownership — that of earmarks. In most cases, these are not recorded anywhere except indelibly in the minds of all those who work with this industry. Identical brands are never duplicated and are never recorded. Duplicate ear marks are rare. They are both part of every cowboy's vocabulary, not by design but in their own particular vernacular thus

- **G** becomes Diamond G in conversation, **E** becomes box E; **?** is referred to as lazy B seven; **K** becomes K quarter circle; **MD** becomes bar money down; **LU** becomes I see you too; **XXI** becomes double XI, and the list goes on indefinitely.

The carving of the ears into various characters was also a mark of distinctive ownership and those also became part of the "ranch lingo." The following are some of the more prominent marks and any combination of these joined in becoming allid with the mark seared on the hide. These two marks become legal characters to claim ownership to anything possessing them.

- **Under figure Seven**
  - **Upper bit**
  - **Under bit**
- **End Crop**
- **Under Slope**
- **Swallow Fork**
- **Split**

Many of the pioneer settlers could neither read nor write but could recall both earmark and brand marks of every individual in each surrounding community. They could also carve the earmarks with great skill and by use of a "running iron" — a straight, slender iron rod usually about two feet long with a half moon arc or circle on the end — heated to the right temperature, artistically display the mark of any individual on the right hip of any animal.

Today a stamp has replaced the old time "running iron" which speeds branding time considerably and simultaneously produces a clearer, more professional-looking identifying character. However, modern scientists are experimenting with a new system of branding — that of acid burning.

In the early settlements brandings were a major affair and were held at different times throughout the year first at one place, then another. This usually lasted about three weeks, especially on the plains of the Chenier Perdu, Little Chenier, Creole areas, as these were such widespread areas and the marshes took time to travel through. In the mid-nineteenth century, a branding usually involved a thousand calves and this brought together scores of cowboys to test their prowess against the wild yearlings of the prairie. Preparatory to branding, the cattle were herded together and as a calf began to nurse his mother, a very skilled roper lassoed his "game" and pulled him near the huge bonfire in which were the marking irons since early morning hours. As he approached the fire, the youngsters dashed forth for the throw. If the calf had to lieon his left side in order to affix the mark properly. By twisting the neck of the calf in a half right turn the steer was easily overcome and thus lay in a "broadside" position. Then quickly he jumped to the flank of the victim applying as much weight there as possible and pulling backward on the fore right leg.

As one person held his captive, another "ran the mark" while the third carved the ears with the accompanying ear mark. These "Cheniers" cowhands possessed no pencils nor notebooks for record keeping and therefore designed their own method of keeping count of their stock. Each trimmed a long stick with his name or/and brand carved on it and each calf branded for any individual was notched onto the stick for that particular person. These early brandings meant hard work, barrels of fun, plenty of delicious food, and the last night a community "soiree". Brandings today never last more than a day or two.

**CATTLE DRIVES:**

**INTRODUCTION:** The practice of driving cattle in the western part of our country began about 1860 and ended around 1890. The first cattle were driven from Texas to railroad terminals in Kansas. More railroads, packing plants, and fencing of the ranges made it uneconomical to drive cattle on foot. Perhaps that most famous of the early cattle drives was made over the Chisholm Trail. Many a movie and television script and song was written about the colorful life and the dangers that cowboys experienced in those days.

Cameron Parish cowboys have reactivated this old custom to a certain extent. Increasing herds, shortage of private property, a desire to improve the beef industry of the parish, and the geographical outlay of the ranging areas have necessitated this move. The most extensive and comprehensive drive is the Creole Johnson Bayou trek.
THE WESTWARD DRIVE: The flat marshes of Cameron Parish, unlike the northern part of the state where the rolling hills limit the view of the traveler, stretch to join the falling horizon. Tall green grass with an apparent "welcome sign" interspersed with small natural bodies of water are the only visible objects as far as the human eye can stretch.

This area does not provide income only from grazing but also abounds in fur production, a hunter's paradise for wild fowl, and a mammoth production of oil.

To the local residents who have always been concerned about the livestock industry, the appearance of cattle scattered about in these grazing areas is the most rewarding sight of all.

For various reasons enumerated in a subsequent unit, cattle grazing is limited to a seasonal activity, usually late fall and winter in these areas of the southwest corner of the parish namely the Johnson Bayou area. The mode of moving these cattle to these luscious grazing areas is a fascinating one.

The most luxuriant winter grazing areas of the parish are located in this extreme southwest corner adjacent to the Texas line stretching eastward to the Calcasieu River which has a ferry as its only means of crossing. This necessitates the swimming of the channel for the entire herd — a bi-annual event which attracts many sightseers as well as local people.

When the trek begins from Creole, many volunteers assemble in all their "cowboy regalia." The men enjoy the hard work and the feel of being "in" on a real cowboy job. A neophyte cowboy who successfully fulfills his responsibility and completes the drive has "won his spurs."

Usually each rider has two or more well groomed and fed horses to withstand the gruelling twenty-mile-a-day hike and keeping up with each attempt of brute to stray from the main herd. They are usually strong, graceful animals with a beauty to match the personality of the owners. This has all been part of their training for only one purpose — to get cattle from one place to another with the utmost efficiency.

Trail driving entails precise pre-planning and detail assignment. With so many independent cattlemen and valuable cattle involved, someone who knows cattle and horses and who can maintain discipline among the cowboys has to be selected as trail boss. Many times split-second timing must be executed, and the trail boss leads as cavalry officers once did.
The chuck wagon does not resemble the ones used on the trails seventy or so years ago, nor does it produce the same kind of victuals. Years ago the cook was a tobacco chewing, perhaps bearded, dirty, rejected cowboy. His meals were usually prepared from dried or canned foods. A feast would consist occasionally of sour dough biscuits and a stew made from an unlucky wild animal killed along the way. The French cuisine is served from the tail gate of a pick-up truck by the pretty wives of the Creole cowboys. The menu on the day of the last crossing consisted of gumbo, so thick with fresh shrimp and crab meat you could eat it with a fork, rice, potatoes au-gratin, deviled eggs, candied yams, cake, and coffee.

The speed of a walking cow is the same that it was centuries ago, about twenty miles a day if they are all in good shape with no small calves to accompany the herd. Driving cattle on foot is a matter of geography in this particular area. The biggest obstacle to this westward movement is the Calcasieu River with no bridges. It would take too long to haul them in trucks across the only available ferry in competition with the regular traffic. The following pictures are typical scenes at the time of the Calcasieu River Channel Crossing in Cameron:
Swimming the Calcasieu River is not as simple as it may sound. The task is very difficult because the river is very wide with a deep channel allowing ingress and egress to ocean going vessels, barges of equipment, shrimp trawlers, fishing fleets, and tug boats. It is also stream of swift currents when the tide is moving in or out. There is a period of less than an hour when the tide is at a standstill twice a day. This is the time the trail boss must give the order to plunge. When the current is still, cattle can swim directly across to the opposite side. A current upstream would disperse them, fleets, and tug boats, wide with a deep channel allowing ingress and egress to ocean going vessels, barges of equipment, shrimp trawlers, fishing and control could not be maintained. Some would come ashore at both sides of the river and other losses would occur, whereas a current downstream would pull the cattle into the Gulf and they would be lost forever.

The trail boss also must make certain a large ship does not enter the channel simultaneously and cause havoc. A large ship cannot stop in a channel as can shrimp boats and tugs.

The cows are brought up to within a half mile of the river. They are stopped here and await the river's whims. The cows idly graze and rest after a fast pace from Creole, their point of departure. Walking had been fairly easy on the highway and the part of packed sand beach of the Gulf of Mexico. The cowboys stand watch over the herd and take refuge from the hot sun under some small scrubby trees.

The large sticks of wood that have been placed in midstream begin to slow down and finally do not move. The trail boss who has been watching intently for this moment, gives the signal now to move the cattle forward. The cattle are driven fast to gain momentum as they hit the water. Guide horses are poised at the river bank as the first cows approach. The guide horses hit the water first and the cattle follow. The bellowing cows, the cracking whips, the yelling cowboys, and the splashing water stir immense excitement among the many spectators and participants alike.

As the stream of animal bodies moves across to form a living bridge, motor boats on each side of the line of swimming cattle serve the same purpose as horses do on land. Calves that stray from the swimming line are rescued by these "water cowboys". Some reluctant cows who pursue independent courses must be driven back in line by the boats. Constant vigilance must be maintained for the forty minutes it takes to herd the cattle.

By the time the first cow reaches the opposite shore, some horses have been re-saddled and are ready to continue the drive. As the last cow makes its splash, horses are unsaddled for their swim. The saddles with their owners make their way across in boats and continue the drive to Johnson Bayou, the terminal point for the winter.

In the spring the cows and their offspring are rounded up (a process which takes from a week to ten days sometimes) and brought back to Creole in the same manner. In Creole, they are divided where they are brought either to individual pastures or are driven to upland pastures and open ranges in the pine woods of neighboring parishes.

This westward drive was first begun in 1938 by Mr. Mark Richard, who trailed his cattle alone across the channel for two years. Because of high water in 1940 many of the ranchmen of lower Cameron drove their cattle to the piney woods of the parishes north of Cameron. Mr. Richard and these other ranchers then began the drive north for the summers and back to the southwest corner for the winter months. This represented about 3,000 head of cattle before Hurricane Audrey. After Audrey, less than half remained alive.

**THE SOUTHWARD DRIVE**

Probably the shortest drive of all is the "Carter and the Rutherford" herds which are driven to Hackberry Ridge. This area is located about four miles south of the Oak Grove community, extending east to the Bluff area. Encircling the northern section is the Mermentau River to its origin near Rutherford Beach and bordered on the southern side by the Gulf of Mexico. This area affords a winter haven for approximately eight hundred head of cattle once owned by "Old Doc Carter" of Creole. The grazing area is still owned and grazed in the same manner by the Carter and Rutherford heirs.

Though this drive is not as comprehensive as any of the other three directional drives, it still has its adventurous "wild west" atmosphere. It is a one day trek through the southern marsh of the Oak Grove community. The "lead cows" are placed in front of the herd and lead the herd into the Mermentau River across to the Hackberry Ridge where Louisiana straw and sprig-rail grasses remain green throughout the winter months. The entire island is of open range with mesquites in abundance. These offer "wind-breaks" for the cattle during blistering north winds.

One small camp is maintained on the ridge for overnight camping especially in the spring when round-up time comes. It takes more time to herd the cows together and separate the Carter herd from the Rutherford herd. Large waterholes are constructed on the ridge by draglines and these keep fresh water for the herd.
THE EASTWARD DRIVE

In considering the east drive, we must be reminded there were two drives via two different routes with neighboring terminals.

The Oak Grove community of Meauxs and Welchs (or descendants thereof) joined with Mr. Arceneaux Miller of Grand Chenier to drive by way of the beach bordering the Gulf of Mexico to the McIlhenny Refuge south of Avery Island for winter forage.

In 1930-1932 this drive was through the Pecan Island Ridge where they camped overnight allowing the cattle to graze and rest, then across a wide span of marsh to Belle Isle thence to McIlhenny pastures. From 1932 to 1957 when Hurricane Audrey hit the area, the drive was conducted along the beach and usually lasted four to five days. Mr. Johnny Meaux recalls vividly the longest run extending eleven days due to short trips from mosquitoes and low tides and difficulty with the cattle crossing the bayous, and the shortest period was three days. The troop usually left from Joseph Harbor and drove to Roll Over Bayou where they camped overnight on the beach with one-half the cowhands standing watch half the night and vice versa.

A huge bonfire built on either end of the herd scattered over a half mile's distance usually kept the mosquitoes away and provided the hands with warmth and light for the jokesters. (One of the favorite pasttimes of the cowhands was to see who could outdo the others in telling jokes). Tending the fires helped keep the hands alert to the possible stray of any cattle. The only drinking water available on this drive was found in small reservoirs north of the beach that may have held fresh water from a previous rain.

Men in small mud boats from Pecan Island kept company with the cowhands and assisted in crossing the four or five bayous they had to cross. These were not very wide and had no dangerous undercurrents, but the bayous were boggy and sticky; therefore, the animals had to be rested and be in fair condition to make the pull across the bayou. By 1957, of the five or six large herd owners driving this trip, only Mr. Johnny Meaux was still using this grazing range.

Mr. Meaux recounts of unauthenticated tales of cow drives originating in Jefferson County, Texas, prior to the 1880's, proceeding through Cameron to Pecan Island where the cattle were placed in Fresh Water Bayou and driven to Mulberry for winter grazing. This was done by the Broussards and Heberts of East Texas.

The other eastward drive was conducted by the Eugene Miller family. This was an arduous drive usually lasting five days and entailed the movement of about 1,000 head of cattle herded on the eastern end of Grand Chenier where the cattle had grazed all summer on marsh range between Grand Chenier and Pecan Island and on the banks of White Lake.

From this departure their first stop was on Pecan Island where they camped overnight and then moved through the eastern marshes to the second night's camp on Lost Island. From there they journeyed to the third nights' resting area at Belle Isle, where again the cattle were allowed to rest and graze before moving to their fourth night's rest. Belle Isle was separated from the Chenier Aux Tigre area by Belle Isle Bayou, a wide body of water completely clogged with water lilies so thick that passage was almost impossible. The cowboys first had to wade in the water pushing aside the lilies and tying them back with ropes long enough for the cattle to swim across. After an overnight stay at Chenier Aux Tigre, the cattle were driven to the sandy beach and headed back to Mulberry, where they remained for the winter. This route was long and consisted mostly of marshy lands but not as difficult and less hazardous than the more direct route would have been. This drive began in 1916 and has never ceased since the Miller heirs continued the trek until recently when it was continued only by Dr. M. O. Miller.

With the advent of oil explorations in the swampy marshland between Pecan Island and Mulberry, the Cowboys were blessed in that huge canals were dug to transport oil equipment. Most of the dirt excavated from the marshlands was levied on one side thus constructing a much shorter passage route to the winter grazing area. The trip is now completed in two days with hardly any marshes to bog through.

Today, Dr. M. O. Miller has done extensive planning and caring for the grazing areas on Belle Isle and Mulberry and grazes several thousand head of cattle there annually. Pastures have been fenced to prevent co-mingling of herds and less wandering aimlessly for grazing. This also facilitates herding the cattle in the spring. The area has been transformed into a modern well-planned ranch.

THE NORTHWARD DRIVE

Because of the destruction of large herds of livestock and damage to the grazing areas in 1957, there was little need for extra grazing territory. However, as the herds began to rebuild, the Oak Grove and the Cameron cowhands began moving herds to "les Penieres" in the parishes of Calcasieu and Beauregard for summer grazing. This was a three-day trip on high land following the highway from Creole to the final destination in Gillis and Ragley. The Meauxs and Welchs of Oak Grove stop their herd in Gillis, where they remain for the summer, while the Davis and Henry heirs drive their herds on to the Ragley area.
After crossing Interstate 10, the herd does pass through a wooded area before swimming the Calcasieu River. This swim does not pose much of a problem in that the approach to the river is fenced in a chute style, extending outward in a wide wing where the cattle are entrapped and forced to enter the Calcasieu River. This swim is short and quickly executed with boaters standing by for any emergency. The small calves are hauled by truck. The calves are transported from one sleeping area to the next, whereas the bulls are taken directly to the summer grazing areas.

The return trip follows the same route and the same procedure. The big obstacle of this drive is the menace to highway vehicular traffic.

CATTLE WALKWAYS:

The marsh rangelands of southwest Louisiana supply an abundance of choice winter forage for livestock. However, until about 1950, a vast percentage of these areas were inaccessible for grazing purposes because of soft soil, bayous sloughs, and ponds.

Through the ingenuity of Mr. Mayo Boudreaux of the Oak Grove community much of this condition has been alleviated. Mr. Boudreaux observed the cattle grazing only a fourth of a mile marshward causing overgrazing in some areas and undergrazing in the deep marshes where the luscious grasses of high quality forage abound. This, much of the potential grazing area was lying idle being overcome with brush and weeds of no value. After contemplating on the reclaimed areas established elsewhere in lower Cameron and neighboring area, he conceived the idea of the now famous cattle walkways. His idea was to actually dig a levee by means of a dragline, joining the main ridgeland and proceeding into the deep marsh. These were constructed with dirt removed from staggered borrow pits so cattle can descend into marshland to graze on either side. Staggering the pits also prevents drainage or salt water intrusion which often occurs with a continuous pit. The levees are constructed to a settled height of two feet above normal marsh water level. Sides are sloped to the constructed walkway to facilitate accessibility. The top width is usually approximately twelve feet.

The walkway offers many advantages to the farmer-rancher. In addition to providing accessibility to more than twice the ranging area, they serve as a refuge area from high water created by heavy rainfall or storm tides and they are used for bedding and resting areas as well as calving areas. They are used by ranchers for getting to and caring for their herds of cattle.

The borrow pits provide drinking areas for the cattle and a home for many other forms of wildlife such as the alligator, nutria, or muskrat.

Where walkways cross bayous or other natural drainage courses, bridges or other drainages are provided in order not to disturb the natural water conditions. Without these openings, drainage and tidal fluctuations would be interrupted, causing unnatural flooding which often results in a change of marsh vegetation reducing the production of desirable grazing plants.

More than one hundred and fifty miles of walkways have been built in Cameron Parish up to date. It is a common practice now in use in many areas of marsh range in the United States as well as several foreign countries.
PROTECTION:

The protection of one’s livestock has never been of major importance in Cameron yet their welfare was always paramount to the ranchers in that their living depended upon revenue therefrom.

RUSTLERS: In 1884 the parishes of Vermilion and Cameron joined in organizing “The Regulators”, a group of volunteers who banded together in mutual support to suppress lawlessness from rustlers. Though not heavy in toll, annually it is one hazard that has demanded the constant surveillance of ranchers. Within the last decade rustlers were apprehended in the Johnson Bayou area. The heavy fines imposed by the courts have aided in discouraging this infringement on the property of others.

THE ELEMENTS: Manmade and natural disasters, hurricanes, storms, and lightning have all added their impact on the cattle industry. Little can be done to avert some of these, yet much precaution is observed when threats of these occur. Cameronites have learned a lesson from experience with natural disasters and exercise all precautionary warnings with strict obedience.

DISEASES: The old timers will attest to the heavy toll taken annually from pestilences that ravaged many herds of early settlers because of lack of proper immunization. Modern science has done much to relieve this situation. Drugs and vaccines have helped to near eradicate deadly diseases. The more common diseases that demand the attention of ranchers are: charbon, pink eye, mern, blind staggers, blackleg, and encephalitis. The following picture shows Cameronites preparing for the immunization of their livestock.

INSECTS: Since the marshes and the salt water of the area provide an excellent breeding area for mosquitoes, this has been a deterrent to the cattle industry from its beginning. These insects and flies have been prevalent since the first attempt at cattle raising and is just as pronounced today as it was two centuries ago. In former times the ranchers would herd the cattle together in large troupes so as to better destroy the insects or a large fire would be started and smothered with green wood, manure, leaves, or grasses in order to ward off the pests. Smokes are still used today for protection against insects. However, liquid and dusting insecticides have offered much relief from the threat of insects.

Back scratchers are used on many ranches and the cattle adjust to these readily. Many report very satisfactory effects from these.
WEATHER: The climate and weather conditions of this area are more conducive to the cattle industry than elsewhere. The climate is never to either extreme thus permitting year-round grazing in almost any area of the parish. However, within recent years cattlemen have helped the situation because of increasing herds by harvesting hay and planting rye grass and other winter forage. This is used especially for the young heifers, weaned from their mothers in late fall, the bulls, and the sick or poor cows.

Very little has been done in the way of building shelters for the cattle because of the astronomical cost. However, Mr. Isaac White of Hackberry has built levees that serve as windbreaks from the wintery north wind. He reports these have helped his herd immensely. The Grand Lake cattlemen have planted pine seedlings for the same purpose and are also encouraged with the results.

TRENDS

According to statistics collected and compiled by the members of the Parish Cooperative Extension Service Advisory Committee in 1964, of Cameron's 1,444 square miles of land area, approximately two-thirds is under agricultural status either in farming or livestock production. A total of about 350,000 acres of this land is devoted to the grazing of livestock.

Even this cannot adequately provide for the ever increasing number of cattle ranging in lower Cameron. This fact, coupled with constant threat of destruction from hurricanes plus the menace of insects and mosquitoes, compel large herd owners to evacuate approximately 15,000 head of cattle to the adjoining parishes of Calcasieu, Allen, and Beauregard parishes for the summer months. This movement also allows the forage to build a good yield and maintain high vigor for winter grazing.

Controlled burning of the grazing areas is also a very profitable practice in that it burns all the old, tough, or partially dead forage and allows the lush, tender, green forage to sprout in time for the return of the cattle from the summer grazing areas. The following picture shows a common scene of Cameron Parish marshes being burned.

A new endeavor of recent interest to the beef industry is the sale of calves for rodeo steers in early spring. Several thousand calves ranging from one hundred twenty-five to two hundred pounds are sold annually for sixty to eighty-five dollars per steer depending upon the market demand. This is a good price considering that some of these calves are part Brahman. This trend has played right into the hands of the cattle raiser in that more money is realized ultimately since there is no shrinkage, vaccination, castration, death loss, nor sales yard fee, and the mother cow regains her strength and weight more rapidly thus potentially increasing the calf crop the ensuing year.

The residents of the upper portion of Cameron Parish, where rice and soybeans are grown in abundance, sell a percentage of calves as feeders in the late summer and early fall. This is a profitable practice, also.

Ten per cent of all reactor herds to tuberculosis in the United States is found in Cameron Parish. There is also a high percentage of Brucellosis. The reason for this is the movement of herds, co-mingling of herds, mosquitoes, horse flies, and stagnant drinking water. Within recent years the federal government has initiated an eradication program through required testing of all reactor herds in Cameron Parish. The citizens of Cameron have availed themselves of this service, and a continuous annual testing program is culling any and all reactors.

Severe mosquito and horse fly infestation is the greatest deterrent to a good calf crop followed by co-mingling of herds on large open ranges, poor culling practices and insufficient bull power. A more recent pest is the fire ant infestation.

Through experience and professional assistance and personal training Cameron ranchers are trying to improve the quality of their herds through purchasing good bulls, selecting the best heifers for replacement, culling unproductive cows, fencing more lands for better management, and control of internal and external parasites.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The writer wishes to thank Mrs. Charles Hebert and Mrs. Geneva Griffith for the valuable information which they so freely gave on this manuscript.