Acadians, Not Texans, Started Cattle Industry

By ALTON BROUSSARD

The man on the street will probably agree that the most popular contributions of the Acadians are beautiful women and boudoirs, but historical information indicates they were also responsible for founding this nation's huge cattle industry.

In the public mind, Texas is usually considered the cradle of the industry, but Southwest Louisiana Acadians were developing cattle herds when mostly Indians roamed the vast stretches of what later became the Lone Star State.

The Louisiana Acadians, in turn, must share at least some of the credit for this historical accomplishment with a small nation of Indians, the Avoyelles, who served as middlemen and who knew how to turn a neat pistol.

Cattle Were Cheap

Over 200 years ago the Avoyelles had in their possession horses and cattle which they had acquired from Mexican Indians in what is now New Mexico. We don't know how much the shrewd Avoyelles sold them for, but according to a French historian, M. Le Page du Pratz, who wrote in his "History of Louisiana," published in 1758, they got two pistols a head from the Indians with a Spanish coin worth about $4.

Du Pratz wrote in his history: "I am ignorant of what view the Indians may have in that commerce; but well assured this was not withstanding the fatigues of the journey, these cattle, once with another, did not come, after deducting all expenses, and every plank and handkerchief about two pistols a head; whereas I ought to presume, they have them cheap in New Mexico."

Indians Supplied Horses

"By means of this nation (Avoyelles), we have in Louisiana very beautiful horses of the species of Old Spain, which, if managed or trained people of first rank might ride. As to the oxen and cows, they are the same as those of France, and both are present very common in Louisiana."

Du Pratz commented that the Indians sold the cattle so cheap to the Acadians that the settlers had more than they wanted.

Columbia Was Responsible

Some historians believe that cattle were first introduced into the New World by the Norwegians who arrived in the early 1600's, but Christopher Columbus must be indirectly credited with bringing in the foundation of the American cattle industry.

Columbia himself brought horned cattle from Spain to St. Augustine on his second voyage to America. The Spanish didn't "invent" the longhorn. Descendants of these cattle were later introduced into Mexico and undoubtedly these were the source of cattle owned by Indians of the North American Southwest.

THE NATION'S cattle industry was started in Acadiana with cattle that looked like those Acadians obtained cattle from the Spaniards and from Indians and developed large herds. The longhorns here are owned by Bobby Hyde of Robert, La. Hyde and his young son are examining the rare animals.

from the Spanish is demonstrated in a recorded deal reported by Alesco Porter, Louisiana historian.

The cattle purchases were made between Captain Antoine Bernard Dauterive, a former captain of industry and military commandant of the Attakapas district, "Beausoleil" Broussard, Alexandre Broussard, Joseph Gulebeaux, Jean Dugas, Olivier Thibaudau, Jean Baptiste Broussard, Pierre Arceneaux and Victory Broussard, all of whom were described as "chiefs of the Acadians."

Dauterive was either a very wealthy man or acted for the Spanish government, which had retained many French officers when it took control of Louisiana from the French. He promised to furnish each of the Acadian "chiefs" with five cows, their calves and one bull for five years.

He agreed to replace any animals that died during the first year, but he reserved the right to rescind the contract after three years. He promised to divide all increases and profits with the Acadians.

Dauterive: How They Did It

The Acadians, who came originally from the agricultural and cattle section of Normandy in France, were no strangers to the requirements of their homeland. They brought their know-how to the Louisiana plains and under their expert leadership, large cattle herds rapidly developed.

Most of the cattle were raised on the open ranges and branding was required to establish ownership. Here, too, the Acadians established another first: They recorded their cattle brands beginning in 1760, two years before the earliest records were recorded in Texas.

Two books in which are recorded Louisiana cattle brands from 1760 to 1944 are open to inspection in the Dupre Library at the University of Southwestern Louisiana. Descendants of these early Cajun cowmen may find their cattle brands in these books. After 1944 brands were recorded by the Louisiana Branding Commission.

The Cajuns may not have retained leadership in the cattle industry, but the Cajun is a documented claim that they will forever have the help of their friends - the cowboys - at its start.

And if a host of two-gun Texans come looking for this dispute that claim, tell them we went that way podnah.