Would you believe Chicot once had longhorn cattle from Texas in their community? Well, only for a short period of time until the herds could be driven through on their way on "Hog's Point" on the Red River or points on the Mississippi to be loaded on board boats to be shipped to New Orleans and in some cases to England.

The older folks, including my mother, for she lived on the corner as a young girl where her father kept post office, said that they had seen large droves of these longhorns, sometimes as many as 1800 or 2000 head pass by.

The man in charge sent several cowboys ahead to get every one off the road and into their houses. They were asked to make no loud noises as sometimes only a simple thing could spook the cattle and cause a stampede. If that happened they would run over anything, even through houses, if in the way.

We heard tales of two young children many years ago, Ida and Branch Griffith (children of Obed Griffith) who were running away from their home to go visit their grandmother, Mrs. Anselm, when one of these large herds were coming down the road.

The little girl and boy had their mind on only one thing, and that was "going to grandma's." They saw no danger or possibly never even saw the cattle coming. Mrs. George Grimm, living near the road, saw the children, and ran into the road just before the cattle got to them, scooped them up and ran back into the safety of her home.

The high time of the drives lasted only about twenty years from the end of the Civil War to about 1880. In this brief period of time, ten million cows walked to the rail heads in Missouri and Kansas from the plains of Texas. It is said the smallest number of 35,000 was sent to market in 1867, and the largest number in one year was 600,000 head in 1871.

A small herd might number 500 or less, while the biggest herd ever to hit the trail under one group of cowboys numbered 15,000 and they moved out of Texas in 1869. But no matter what the size of the herd each drive had its special measure of toll and trouble, as you saw if you watched "Centennial" Saturday night.

Sometimes steers drowned in crossing streams, sometimes they died from drinking poisoned water, or died from the lack of water, then in that time there was always the threat of Indians or outlaws. The cowboys were always weary from the hard days in the saddle and from the lack of sleep.

My mother told us on some of these drives coming through Chicot they had a "lead beef" named Tony. The cowboys used to sing to Tony as the cattle walked along. Tony led the herd from the home range to the boats. The cowboys made Tony stay back when the others were loaded and brought Tony back to Texas so he could lead others for them.

It seems lead steer comes into being in a very simple way. Usually on the first day of the drive one or two steerers marshal to the head of the herd and remain there all during the journey.

According to history of cowboys one lead beef that became quite famous was "Old Blue" who led the herds of Charles Goodnight during eight seasons. Old Blue had a bell around his neck that the cows followed. When he ended the eighth season he was retired to a comfortable pasture where he died at the age of twenty years. His horns were mounted and placed in the ranch office of Mr. Goodnight.

Stampedes caused the cattlemen to lose money for a long run could cause a steer to lose as much as 50 pounds, many were trampled to death...