Era Begins with Sale
By Avoyelles Indians

(Editor's Note: The following colorful, fact-laden article by a Southwestern Louisiana Institute faculty member is based on interviews with Dr. T. J. Arceneaux, dean of SLI's College of Agriculture; "Cattle of the World," publication of the National Geographic Society; and "History of Louisiana," by du Page. The latest developments in the fascinating history of U. S. cattle as traced by Mr. Broussard and the scientific strides that have been made in cattle-raising will be on display April 10 at Blackham coliseum when the second annual auction sale of registered beef cattle, raised by the SLI Animal Husbandry department, begins at 3 p.m.)

By Allen E. Broussard
About 200 years ago a small band of Indians, the Avoyelles, sold some cattle to some French settlers in Southwest Louisiana and thereby started the American cattle industry.

The panorama of the fabulous American cattle industry, with its huge herds, its hardy cowboys, gun-toting swaggers of a colorful era, and later the adoption of scientific breeding, may trace its inception to the purchase of some Spanish longhorn cattle by far-traveling braves of the Avoyelles.

The Avoyelles bought their animals from Mexican Indians in New Mexico and upon returning to their homes in Louisiana they sold some of their cattle to French Acadians.

The longhorns of the Mexican Indians, or their ancestors, had been brought to the American continent by the adventurous Spaniards, who were intent upon finding fabled treasures in the New World.

The Spaniards, eager to colonize the land discovered and claimed by Columbus, were the first to bring cattle to the American continent. Cortez landed on the western Mexican coast in March, 1519, and in his city, he believed to have brought the first cattle to America. Documents prove that two years later, in 1521, Mendana, then vicerey of New Spain, landed at Vera Cruz and brought with him some calves which were later sold to Santo Domingo. "Let them be the first to bring them to New Spain," he instructed his agent. The hardy Spanish cattle thrived in their new environment and for eight years later, when Diego de Ezpeleta, governor of New Spain, wrote a favorable report on the progress of cattle, horses, and sheep that had been brought from Spain to New Spain.

Treasure Trone
Spanish expeditions, especially one to find the Seven Cities of Cibola, reportedly gold-laden Indian cities somewhere in the North beyond the Rio Grande, were brought to the spread of Spanish cattle in the interior.

The explorers took cattle and other domestic animals with them and, of course, became foundation stock for the great American cattle industry. The descendants of these cattle were sold to the Avoyelles, who sold them to the Acadians.

Although he did not realize the significance of his works at the time, a French historian, M. Le Page du Pratz, recorded in his eye-witness account of the birth of a major American industry in his "History of Louisiana," published in 1738.

Le Pratz wrote: "I am ignorant of what view the Indians may have in that country, but I know that notwithstanding the fatigues of the journey, they never see the cattle, oxes with another, did not come, after deducting all expenses, and even selling all their horses, but in about two platoles a head; whence I ought to presume, they have them in New Mexico. By means of this nation of Indians, we have in Louisiana three beautiful horses, of the species of those of Old Spain, which, if managed and trained, people of first rank might ride. As to the oxen and cows, they are the same as those of France, and both are at present very common in Louisiana."

Cheap Going Price
Le Pratz reported that he did not know how the Avoyelles paid for the animals but they sold them to the French in Louisiana that the settlers had more than doubled their flocks.

Thus it was that the Acadians of Nova Scotia, the real founders of the cattle industry in America, found the beginnings of large cattle when they settled in the historical Texas country.

These early Louisiana cattle were typical longhorn Spanish cattle. The quality of their meat has undergone changes since today's standards but the brute resistance to diseases and exposure was an asset in the Louisiana coastal region.

On the Louisiana prairies the animals multiplied rapidly and when the Acadians arrived from Nova Scotia to settle along Bayou Teche in 1764 they were apparently plentiful for all.

The Spaniards owned Louisiana at that time but they welcomed the exiled French Acadians and granted them large tracts of land and herds of cattle in Southwest Louisiana.

A big private deal that resulted in acquisition of many cattle by a number of Acadian settlers was reported by Alcide Portier, Louisiana historian. The contract was made by Antoine Bernard Dau, a former captain of infantry, with Joseph "Beausoleil" Broussard, Alexandre Brinsson, Joseph Guillebeau, Jean Dugas, Olivier Thibaudau, Jean Baptiste Broussard, Pierre Arcenaud and Victoire Broussard, ill chiefs of the Acadians.

Captain DauBre, apparently a very wealthy man, promised to furnish each Acadian family with five cows and their calves, and one bull, for six consecutive years. The Acadian captain agreed to replace animals that might die during the first year, but he reserved the right to rescind the contract after three years, in which case he would divide all increases and profits with the Acadians.

Cattle Without Cash
The settlers had little to lose and they must have considered themselves fortunate. Their lands were probably given to them without cost by the government and their cattle were obtained without any outlay of cash.

How DauBre acquired so many cattle isn't known but it may be assumed that much of his wealth was accumulated with the privileges of his office as military commander of the Attakapas district. Although Louisiana had been acquired by Spain before the Acadians arrived in 1763, the contract retained DauBre.

Having come originally from the important agricultural and cattle region of Normandy, France, for Nova Scotia, the Acadians were the first farmers of Canada. They brought know-how to the Louisiana plains and under their expert care great cattle herds rapidly developed and soon the plains teemed with thousands of animals.

The Louisiana prairies provided abundant grazing land and numerous natural ponds supplied water. Some fortunate Acadians in the coastal areas acquired inland pastures, and by increasing their herds the cattle produced as feed for cattle.

The American cattle industry has come a long way since the early Acadians of Louisiana started their herds from stock obtained from Mexico.

Du Pratz, describing one of these islands, wrote: "The first Canadians, who settled in Acadia, had got most of their cattle, in great numbers, that are particularly adapted to grow rich even when they slept. The cattle required no attention or other care, in this island, came to multiply in such a manner that the owners made great profits of them on their arrival in the colony."

Because the Acadians raised their cattle and sold them, there was a necessity. To be an effective farmer and a good owner, the breeders were recorded and, fortunately, these records, going back to 1760, are extant.

Two brand books in the Ste. Marthas Memorial Library of Southwestern Louisiana Institute, Lafayette, contain a record of Louisiana brands from 1760 to 1944 when the Central Brand Office was abolished and the Louisiana branding commission was established.

Further belief that the American cattle industry was founded in Southwest Louisiana is offered by Dr. T. J. Arceneaux, dean of the College of Agriculture at Southwestern Louisiana Institute and a renowned livestock historian. The Acadians arrived from Nova Scotia and they established the cattle industry in the northernmost area of the United States.

The industry was later widened in Louisiana by the cattle tick industry, which was then vastly different from Acadian cattle. A pest in this industry, which was a continuous battle, was the fever tick infestation. The cattle were on the move and the farmers were on the move to keep the cattle healthy and supply their own needs. The cattle industry in the United States was adapted to the Gulf Coast region.

Farmers found out that they could grow pastures more easily than in the other section of the nation. They are finding, too, that the increasing population and industrialization of South Louisiana have increased the demand for dairy products as well as beef cattle.

With the combination of better breeds, more and improved pastures, and increased urban demands for beef and dairy products, the cattle industry in Louisiana promises to recover and even exceed its once held superiority on the plains of the Acadian country.

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