

from
THE LOG OF A COWBOY
1903

----- *Andy Adams* -----

The cowboy originated in Texas in the decades following the Civil War, when an increasing demand for beef and access to distant markets via new railroads helped create a new industry based on cattle. Andy Adams (1859–1935) was one of these cowboys. His account, *The Log of a Cowboy*, was one that helped launch the cowboy as a mythical figure, symbolic of American independence, initiative, and possibility.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY : Analyzing Causes, Recognizing Effects

What are some of the elements of his account that might have made it popular with the public?

THE ATASCOSA

...Our route now led northward through what were then the two largest ranches in Texas, the "Running W" and Laurel Leaf, which sent more cattle up the trail, bred in their own brand, than any other four ranches in the Lone Star State. We were nearly a week passing through their ranges, and on reaching Santa Gertruda ranch learned that three trail herds, of over three thousand head each, had already started in these two brands, while four more were to follow.

So far we had been having splendid luck in securing water for the herd, once a day at least, and often twice and three times. Our herd was becoming well trail-broken by this time, and for range cattle had quieted down and were docile and easy to handle.... Though hunger and thirst are probably responsible for more stampedes than all other causes combined, it is the unexpected which cannot be guarded against. A stampede is the natural result of fear, and at night or in an uncertain light, this timidity might be imparted to an entire herd by a flash of lightning or a peal of thunder, while the stumbling of a night horse, or the scent of some wild animal, would in a moment's time, from frightening a few head, so infect a herd as to throw them into the wildest panic. Amongst the thousands of herds like ours which were driven over the trail during its brief existence, none ever made the trip without encountering more or less trouble from runs. Frequently a herd became so spoiled in this manner that it grew into a mania with them, so that they would stampede on the slightest provocation,— or no provocation at all....

We were beginning to feel a degree of overconfidence in the good behavior of our herd, when one night during the third week out, an incident occurred in which they displayed their running qualities to our complete satisfaction.

It occurred during our guard, and about two o'clock in the morning. The night was an unusually dark one and the atmosphere was very humid. After we had been on guard possibly an hour, John Officer and I riding in one direction on opposite sides of the herd, and The Rebel circling in the opposite, Officer's horse suddenly struck a gopher burrow with his front feet, and in a moment horse and rider were sprawling on the ground. The accident happened but a few rods from the sleeping herd, which instantly came to their feet as one steer, and were off like a flash....As the cattle headed toward me, away from the cause of their fright, I had to use both quirt and rowel to keep clear of the onrush. Fortunately we had a clear country near the bed ground, and while the terrified cattle pressed me close, my horse kept the lead. In the rumbling which ensued, all sounds were submerged by the general din; and I was only brought to the consciousness that I was not alone by seeing several distinct flashes from six-shooters on my left, and, realizing that I also had a gun, fired several times in the air in reply....

The signs left by the running cattle were as easy to follow as a public road, and in places where the ground was sandy, the sod was cut up as if a regiment of cavalry had charged across it. On again bearing off to the right, I rode for an elevation which ought to give me a good view of the country. Slight as this elevation was, on reaching it, I made out a large band of cattle under herd, and as I was on the point of riding to them, saw our wagon and saddle horses heave in sight from a northwest quarter. Supposing they were following up the largest trail, I rode for the herd, where Flood and two of the boys had about twelve hundred cattle....

Joining Honeyman, I took the first horse which came within reach of my rope, and with a fresh mount under me, we rushed the saddle horses past the wagon and shortly came up with our foreman. There we rounded in the horses as best we could without the aid of the wagon, and before McCann arrived, all had fresh mounts and were ready for orders. This was my first trip on the trail, and I was hungry and thirsty enough to hope something would be said about eating, but that seemed to be the last idea in our foreman's mind. Instead, he ordered me to take the two other boys with me, and...to drift in what cattle we had held on our left. But as we went, we managed to encounter the wagon and get a drink and a canteen of water from McCann before we galloped away on our mission....We soon sighted the main herd, and saw across to our right and about five miles distant two of our men bringing in another bunch. As soon as we turned our cattle into the herd, Flood ordered me, on account of my light weight, to meet this bunch, find out where the last cattle were, and go to their assistance.

With a hungry look in the direction of our wagon, I obeyed, and on meeting Durham and Borrowstone, learned that the outside bunch on the right, which had got into the regular trail, had not been checked until daybreak. All they knew about their location was that the up stage from Oakville had seen two men with Circle Dot cattle about five miles below, and had sent up word by the driver that they had something like four hundred head. With this meagre

information, I rode away in the direction where one would naturally expect to find our absent men, and after scouring the country for an hour, sighted a single horseman on an elevation, whom from the gray mount I knew for Quince Forrest. He was evidently on the lookout for some one to pilot them in. They had been drifting like lost sheep ever since dawn, but we soon had their cattle pointed in the right direction, and Forrest taking the lead, Quarternight and I put the necessary push behind them. Both of them cursed me roundly for not bringing them a canteen of water, though they were well aware that in an emergency like the present, our foreman would never give a thought to anything but the recovery of the herd. Our comfort was nothing; men were cheap, but cattle cost money.

Source: *The Log of a Cowboy: A Narrative of the Old Trail Days* by Andy Adams (Cambridge, Mass.: The Riverside Press, 1903), pp. 40–42, 50–52.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY : ANSWER

Students may answer that Adams's account would have been popular because of its action-packed description of life on the cattle range. Students may note that Adams describes the danger of a cattle stampede and the hard physical work and danger required to prevent one. Students may also note that Adams's explanatory writing style, with its wry humor, appeals to the general reader. Some students may argue that because many Americans lived in cities or towns by the turn of the century, Adams's account of rugged frontier life would have been appealing because it was unlike what most Americans experienced.