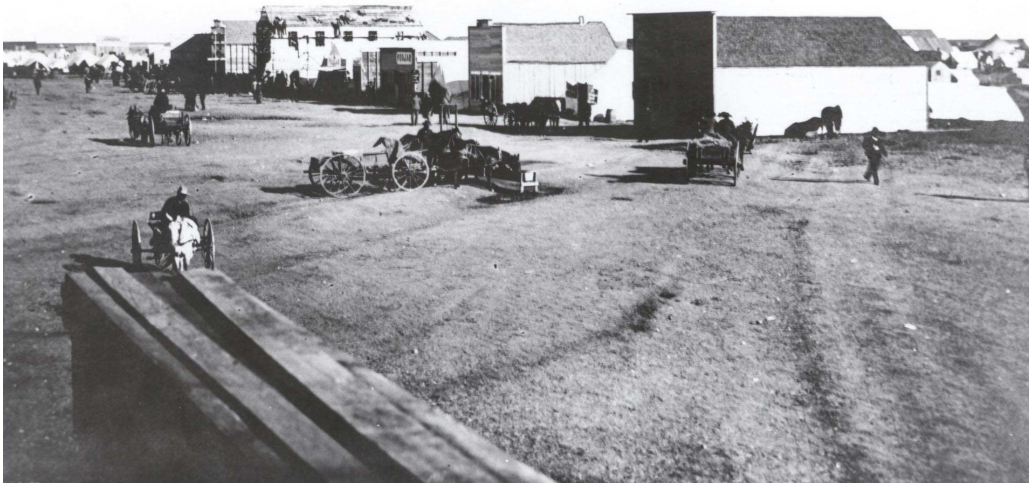


The Chisholm Trail

(The following series of articles appeared in the Enid newspaper during the 100th anniversary of the Chisholm Trail celebrated in 1966. it was reproduced in Robert N. Gray's book "The Sixties" (2003)



Chisholm Trail Through Enid Downtown Square (Nov. 1893)

The One-Hundredth Anniversary of the Trail

This year, [1966] the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Chisholm Trail, will be deserving of meaningful observances in towns along the old trail. It is appropriate that more and more persons have become aware in recent years of the significance of the Chisholm Trail. In Waurika, county seat of Jefferson, talk of the museum was first heard in 1964. The idea grew, and in June of that year the Chisholm Trail Historical Museum Association was incorporated under the laws of Oklahoma.

Many historically significant events for the establishment of a Chisholm Trail Museum are right at the door of Jefferson County and the City of Waurika. This is the only townsite in Oklahoma straddling the 98th Meridian which before statehood was the dividing line between Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory.

Evidences of the trail are still visible about five miles east of Waurika where the famous old trail is crossed by the present east-west U.S. Highway 70. It can be traced southward to the east of Ryan and Terral and then southeasterly to the old Red River Crossing.

In the north, the highest point of Jefferson County bears a monument erected in Memory of drovers who rode the trail. Monument Hill three miles east of Addington on the Price Ranch was a familiar landmark for drivers as they moved northward from Red River Crossing. Thanks to the Pickens County Cow Punchers Association, headed by the late Henry Price, a concrete monument was built in 1940 and is yet to be completed with memorial plaques on each of its four sides. Across the rolling prairie country moved the longhorn cattle from Texas - prairies roamed today by the vastly improved Hereford and Angus cattle.

It is interesting to review why the Longhorns passed this way. It was a matter of supply meeting demand. It was a matter of moving cattle worth about \$11.00 for a mature steer in Texas to northern markets offering up to \$31.50 at Caldwell, Kansas, and \$55.00 farther north and east. In Texas some cattle were worth as little as \$4.50 per head.

Beef was plentiful in Texas after the Civil War. Texas had won her independence from Mex-

Special Points of Interest

- The One-Hundredth Anniversary of the Trail.
- The Legend of Jess Chisholm.
- Cowboys and Cattle Trailing.

ico in 1936 and was an independent republic until statehood in 1845. She joined the Confederacy in 1861 and in the ensuing years to 1867 her herds of Longhorns multiplied rapidly while the cheaper currency of the Confederacy contributed to an economic depression.

Texas was in dire need of a market for her beef. The railheads in Kansas offered that market, and the cattle barons turned their herds to the Jesse Chisholm Trail. In 1867 the first drive was made to Caldwell and on to Winfield, Kansas. The trail in its beginning was approximately 220 miles long, but in its life of almost two decades, it was lengthened to about 800 miles - from San Antonio in Texas to Abilene in Kansas.

It was in 1865 that the original trail was marked by the tracks of a Jesse Chisholm wagon train from the point about five miles east of Caldwell, Kansas, to a trading post owned by Chisholm and his partner J. R. Mead, in the Wichita Mountains.

The tracks of Jesse Chisholm wagons along the Indian Meridian became a part of a much longer trail that served as the best route for taking Texas cattle to the Kansas markets. Within a few years after the death of Chisholm, drivers were giving his name to the whole trail.

In its early years the trail had a variety of names. In many towns it was called simply the Trail or the Cattle Trail. Texans referred to it variously as The Old Kansas Trail, The Abilene Trail or McCoy's Trail. In Kansas it was called The Great Cattle Trail, The Texas Trail, The Great Texas Trail, and The Wichita Trail. Years later, after a new trail farther west was opened, the Jesse Chisholm Trail was referred to as the Eastern Trail.

Just when it became common to call The Chisholm Trail is uncertain. Undoubtedly, it was tagged with Chisholm's name only in conversation for some time before it was used in print. There is one newspaper reference to a letter written in El Dorado, Kansas, on May 18, 1870, telling about the Osage Indians camping on the Chisholm Trail during their spring hunt.

In 1870, the federal government employed a staff of civil engineers to make a survey between the Chickasaw Nation and Western Oklahoma. The 98th Meridian was chosen as a point of beginning for the reason that the Five Civilized Tribes were living east of the 98th Meridian and the Plains or Blanket Indians were living west of the meridian. This line was called the Indian Meridian 37 years later when statehood became a reality.

The original Chisholm Trail extended from the Red River northward to Caldwell, Kansas - from Red River Crossing near the northwest corner of Cook County, Texas, to a point just north of the Kansas line near Caldwell. It followed the present general north/south line of the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad and U.S. Highway 81 in what was called Indian Territory, just east of the 98th meridian. The original trail terminated a few rods east of where the present U.S. Highway 81 crosses the state line into Caldwell.

After 99 years, the trail can be seen in various places in Oklahoma, both from the air and on the ground, or near the following places: Renfrow, Medford, Pond Creek, Kremlin, Enid, Waukomis, Bison, Dover, Kingfisher, Piedmont, Yukon, three and one-half miles east of Chickasha at Rock Crossing, Marlow, one mile east of Duncan where the Old Duncan Store was established in 1883, five miles east of Waurika, Sugden and Ryan, and six miles east of Terral where the trail turned southeast to Red River Station.

As close as he was to the big cattle industry of his day, Jesse Chisholm was known as a trader and not as a cattleman. He was born in Tennessee in 1806 to a Scotch father and a full blood Cherokee mother. The family moved to Arkansas in 1829 from the Cherokee Indian country of Tennessee.

Jesse was 24 when he arrived in Fort Gibson in the Cherokee Nation. He was nephew by marriage of Sam Houston, governor of Tennessee and later general of the Texas Army of Independence. Houston married Tiana Rogers, sister of Jesse Chisholm's mother, after resigning as governor of Texas.

Jesse Chisholm died March 4, 1868, and was buried on a hillside about seven miles east and one mile south of the present Greenfield, Oklahoma, in Blaine County. His grave bore only a modest marker until a Watonga, Oklahoma, school project distinguished it with a tombstone that recalled his creed:



The Legend of Jesse Chisholm

Jesse Chisholm was one of the most remarkable men of his time - a pioneer, peace-maker and pathfinder who spoke 12 Indian languages and never carried a gun. He was friendly with all tribes of Indians in the realm which was later to become Oklahoma. Before he became a trader and established a trading post near Caldwell, Kansas, he participated with the Army Engineers in finding a trail from Fort Smith, Arkansas, which was the dividing line between the state of Arkansas and Indian Territory, west through Indian Territory to the western boundary of Oklahoma.

Arkansas became a state by an Act of Congress dated June 15, 1836. Fort Gibson, on the Arkansas River, to which Jesse Chisholm came from his home in Tennessee, was established in 1822. He was an early arrival of the Cherokees in the Indian Territory.

About the time that Arkansas became a state the remnants of the Cherokee Indian tribe were being removed by the State of Georgia to the Cherokee Nation in the northwestern corner of the Indian Territory. The Cherokee Nation extended south to the Arkansas River opposite Fort Smith.

There proved to be two parties or clans of the Cherokees - those previously removed to the Indian Territory and who were friendly with the whites; those who had later been moved from the

State of Georgia, known as the "Treaty Party," who strongly opposed being moved to a new country, but were being forced by the government to acquiesce in its ultimatum.

Among these parties of Cherokees, some difficulties arose - and with them came fears for the safety of the whites in the sparsely settled State of Arkansas. Since Arkansas was such a young state, some wise counsel in Washington has advised re-establishment of the fort at Fort Smith a month before passage of the Act of Admission dated May 14, 1836. The act passed authorizing the removal of the garrison to Fort Gibson before this, and Congress appropriated \$50,000 to re-establish these forts.

Activation of the various forts in Indian Territory ceased in the summer of 1842 on order of General Taylor, due to an easing of tension and the cooperation of the Five Civilized Tribes.

About September, 1871, after some soldiers had been removed from other forts to Fort Gibson, the property was taken from the control of the War Department and transferred to the Interior Department. The Indians have remained under the Secretary of the Interior since that time.

The creation of the Indian Territory by the treaties of the United States created a haven for outlaws, renegades, thieves and cutthroats. In the territory, evil men were amenable only to the white man's law, which was established by the United States Criminal Court of the Western District of Arkansas on the second Monday in May 1871, with Judge Isaac Parker presiding. Judge Parker became known as "The Hanging Judge." During two decades on the bench he actually hanged 168 men.

The president of the United States, Thomas Jefferson, in a January 9, 1809, letter written to the Cherokees, granted the permission to move from the State of Tennessee to the Indian Territory and guaranteed their safety. It is very probably that Jesse Chisholm's father moved to Arkansas at the same time. We find them located there soon afterward.

The Chisholm family became prominent in the Arkansas settlement of the Cherokees. In the treaty concluded July 8, 1817, between the national government and the Eastern Cherokees and the Arkansas Cherokees, we find among the Arkansas chiefs who signed this treaty the names of James Rogers and John D. Chisholm. Later, Rogers was selected from the tribe in Arkansas as a representative of the United States government, and was sent east to assist in obtaining the consent of the balance of the Cherokees who had not moved to the Indian Territory.

The first recorded account of Jesse Chisholm and his activities dates back to 1832. Jesse participated in the national government's construction of a road over the country between Fort Towson and the Arkansas River so that Indians might receive supplies from the government by boat up the Arkansas River. The trail extended 147 miles over wild, rough country. It was selected, laid out and surveyed by Robert Bean and Jesse Chisholm.

Chisholm was a wise counsel and safe adviser especially to the Indian tribes of the entire Indian Territory, even extend-

ing to the wild Apaches. Jesse's father was named James Edward Chisholm. Jesse succeeded his father in the operation of the store at the mouth of Little River. His success grew and his influence extended until he became known as the most successful and influential trader on the Southern Plains. The Apaches, Kiowas, Comanches and other Plains Indians came long distances to trade at his store. Chisholm continued to push civilization west by establishing trading posts in the towns of Asher, Lexington, Council Grove (which is about six miles east of Oklahoma City, and finally six miles east of Caldwell, Kansas.

It is a well known fact that at this time on the frontier salt was one of the most sought after articles of consumption its potential was recognized by Jesse Chisholm who became interest in the production of salt in what is now the Oklahoma. He produced the salt from a number of points in Indian Territory. One of these, prior to the Civil War, was in what is now Blaine County.

Chisholm established a trading post near what is known as Chisholm Creek, located now within the corporate limits of the City of Wichita, Kansas. His interest in the northern trade, by virtue of the railroads pushing westward, brought about the locating and laying out of the trail which later bore his name.

During the Civil War, Jesse Chisholm remained neutral. At the beginning of the war, he counseled neutrality on the part of all tribes in the Indian Territory. The south, under some conditions, made it almost impossible for some of the Indians to follow this course. For his position in this matter, the federal government employed him as a representative to the Indian Tribes in negotiation and concluding treaties and in matters that were fair and always satisfactory to both parties.

His influence for good was felt in this wild country more than that of any other man. For good reasons did the Indians of the Indian Territory view his death on March 4, 1868 a calamity.

Cowboys and Cattle Trailing

The story of the Chisholm Trail, if told in detail, would abound with romance and tragic affairs that occurred on the trail from Red River Crossing in Oklahoma to Kansas. It is altogether fitting and proper that a museum be established to perpetuate the remembrance of a famous old trail that contributed so much to the settling of the Western Plains of the United States.

Many of the newspapers of the early days printed some kind of story about the Chisholm Trail and the great cattle herds that left Texas for Kansas, which was the only market feasible for the Texas ranchers at a nominal cost for transportation, called "walking the cattle to market."

The Civil War closed too late, and the conditions of the country were too unsettled for any serious attempts to be made to market Texas cattle during the summer of 1865. However, Texas cattlemen were keenly alive to the possibilities offered by the high price of beef in the north and east.

During the winter of 1865, it is probable that six herds were collected preparatory to driving them north as soon as grass would be sufficiently advance to make a start possible. Some men in the north, particularly Iowa, Illinois and Nebraska which constituted the Corn Belt, determined to engage in driving cattle from Texas to these states. During the late winter of 1865, several of these men came to Texas and purchased herds of beeves and stock cattle to drive northward.

The procedure was to journey from St. Louis down the Mississippi River by steamer to New Orleans and on to Galveston. The buyers then proceeded northward to the interior where they bought herds somewhere in the neighborhood of Austin, San Antonio, or wherever such herds were available. They purchased horses, mules, wagons and other equipment, and hired a number of men to drive the cattle northward.

The cattle drives were started about the first of April and continued until about October 1. How many of the cattle were purchased and started north in the spring of 1866 is not definitely known. A few years later, the figure was placed at 160,000 head by men who made a careful study of the subject.

The trail commonly used at that time crossed slightly east of Denison, Texas, and passed Pilot Point, Denton, Sherman and across the Red River to Indian Territory. The north pass, Boggy Depot, was northeast across the two Canadian rivers and on past Fort Gibson to Baxter, Kansas. This was known as The Shawnee Trail. It did not prove satisfactory because most of this territory was bush country and difficulties of all kinds plagued the drovers.

Most of the trouble began at the Red River. Once beyond that stream, there were many problems. The Indians were constant source of worry and vexation. Some of the Indians made it a practice to stampede the cattle in order to collect money for gathering them together again. Some demanded payment (ten cents per head) for grass consumed. White thieves and out-

laws, as well as pilfering Indians, made it necessary for drovers to watch their property closely at all times. Prairie fires and grasshoppers were also a source of concern.

To top it off, the drovers encountered difficulties with the "sodbusters" or settlers of southwest Missouri and southeastern Kansas. The sodbusters could not easily forget their heavy losses from Texas fever during the years preceding the Civil War, and they were fully determined not to risk any repetition of such a disaster. Armed bands of farmers, with pitchforks, shovels or any sort of instrument they could gather, were quickly formed to stop the herds of Texas cattle at the border. Drovers were warned they would not be permitted to proceed farther until cold weather. Some of the drovers were assaulted, beaten, or even killed. Others insisted upon proceeding only to have their cattle shot and killed. Some turned back to Indian Territory to wait the coming of colder weather.

Discouraged by all the hardships, a few men abandoned their herds, selling them for anything they might be offered, and rode back to Texas. Still others turned west into Cherokee country driving in that direction until they passed the western limits of a settlement in Kansas, and turning northward to Kansas and a corner of Nebraska, or on to Iowa.

Difficulties along The Shawnee Trail by way of the Mississippi River thus led to its virtual abandonment. A few herds were trailed from Texas across the coastal prairies to Louisiana, but the price was not high enough to justify the long drive.

The cattle barons began to look northward farther up the Red River. In 1867, the southern branch of the Union Pacific Railway, called the Kansas Pacific was built westward from Kansas City up the valley of the Arkansas River.

Joseph G. McCoy, a prominent cattle dealer of Springfield, Illinois, had become very interested in the Texas cattle trade. He was the youngest of three brothers, and he had been engaged for several years in buying and shipping cattle. McCoy and his associates did an enormous business and were men of wealth and influence in the community in which they lived. Joseph McCoy was the father of the Abilene market for Texas cattle arriving from the Jesse Chisholm Trail.

It must be remembered that these cattle had first to be caught, rounded up, trail broken, trail branded and earmarked before starting on their long trek from Texas to Abilene or Caldwell, Kansas. It is reliably quoted by W.A. (Bill) Poage that "during the time that Chisholm Trail was in flower, 10,000,000 cattle and 50,000 cowboys went up the trail. Each cowboy saw the trail-driving life from his own perspective, and each observed some salient facts and incidents overlooked by others.

Most of the cowboys engaged in trail riding were "rebels", from the Confederacy who had returned to their homes in the Texas plains country. They were pretty rough and rugged, hungry and ragged, but saw this as an opportunity to seek fame, adventure and fortune.

The best records available on the number of cowboys who worked the Chisholm cattle trail cover five pages of names. There are many more whose names are not contained on any rolls or printed on the pages of history. Many of them, who gave their lives and scalps to the Indians, will never be recorded. The number of cowboys who lost their lives on the Chisholm Trail will never be known.

Never again will the world see a movement of cattle to compare with the longhorn exodus from Texas. No matter what their final destination, they had to cross the Red River and follow the Jesse Chisholm Trail to Kansas to reach the northern or eastern markets. The Red River Valley was the main street of frontier history - from Louisiana to the Texas and Oklahoma Panhandles.

It is noteworthy that the highest court of the land recognized this famous cattle thoroughfare as an established trail in litigation growing out of an incident in the spring of 1877. While driving a large herd of cattle from Texas to Kansas through the Kiowa-Comanche country, one Thomas C. Andrews camped on the Washita River. Unfortunately for Andrews, Indians of the reservation drove away a number of his cattle. Later when the Act of March 3, 1891, provided for the adjudication of claims arising from "Indian Depredation," Andrews filed a claim against the Indians and the United States of the U.S. Court of Claims. He contended that his cattle were on the established Chisholm Trail and therefore were lawfully within the reservation as provided by a treaty of August 25, 1868. The government contended that Andrews was a trespasser, in violation of treaty stipulations, and was therefore without right to recover.

The court of claims held that the cattle were on the Chisholm Trail, that it was an established trail, that Andrews was not a trespasser, and gave him judgment in the amount of \$8,300 against the United States and the Kiowa and Comanche Indians. This judgment, when appealed was affirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court.

There have been some questions about the Chisholm Trail to some authorities, but to put their mind at rest, the 13th Oklahoma Legislature in House Bill 149 required the state highway department to survey the old Chisholm Trail from Red River Crossing to the Kansas line. The survey thus ordered resulted in a detailed map that was published in connection with the first article in this series on the Chisholm Trail, through the courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

It is proper to say more about a man whose enterprise did so much to sustain the Chisholm Trail, Joseph G. McCoy. McCoy, prior to 1867, was a cattle buyer and feeder in the states of Illinois and Iowa. Due to the Civil War and the depletion of

the herds from Nebraska, Montana, Wyoming and the Dakotas, he became interested in the cattle market that he thought could be established in Abilene, Kansas. His dream was to ship Texas cattle by rail from Abilene to Kansas City, St. Louis and Chicago.

Up to this time, the western most slaughtering houses of any size were in Cincinnati, Ohio. McCoy called on several railroad company presidents to interest them in pushing the railroads west to the cattle pens of Abilene. He proposed to collect 25-cents-per-head for cattle shipped east by his efforts. Some of the railroad offices were responsive, others hostile.

McCoy was successful with one railroad company. As a result, McCoy contributed much to the frontier people, to the people of Texas who needed a stable market for cattle to revive them from the depression of 1873, to the railroad companies, to the cattle barons who found themselves with plenty of cattle but no coin of the realm and to himself.

At the same time, he ran page advertisements in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa and Michigan luring cattlemen to come to Abilene and stock up on lean and hungry Texas cattle which could be purchased for two to three dollars per head. McCoy and the railroad company built stockyards at Abilene large enough to hold 3,000 head of wild Texas steers. Surveyors were sent out to mark a trail from Wichita to Abilene with little mounds of earth to guide the cowboys.

About 35,000 cattle were moved into Abilene in 1867. The first rail shipment was 20 freight carloads, which left Abilene September 5, 1867, billed to Chicago. During the next two or three years, the cattle movement from Texas was at its highest. No one knows exactly how many cattle were driven to Abilene in that period. The lowest estimate is three million head, and there are estimates higher than five million head. W. R. Poage, a drover, once estimated that 14 million head moved over the Chisholm Trail during its entire life.

When the Santa Fe Railroad finally reached Newton, Kansas, it broke the cattle trade at Abilene. Then when the extension was built south to Wichita, Newton's day as a wild and wooly cowboy town ended. It became a railroad town and Wichita got the cattle business.

After the railroad was completed to Abilene, McCoy began to campaign which made that city the cattle capital of the west. He recognized vast potential of the Chisholm Trail and his experience in Illinois with longhorn cattle brought up the Mississippi River by steamboat before the Civil War had taught him that Texas cattle did well on the high-protein "salt-grass" of the Midwestern states. McCoy reached Abilene in 1867 with the blessings of the promoters of the Kansas and Pacific Railroad, now a part of the Union Pacific, and a promise of every sort of aid the railroad could give him if he brought business to them.

McCoy made good in a big way. He sent emissaries to the big cattlemen of the Texas cow country. He mailed circulars to every outfit whose name and address he could learn. The circulars urged the cattlemen to drive their cattle to Abilene and assured them they would find buyers.

After two decades, from 1865 to 1884, the Jesse Chisholm Trail was coming to a close. The westward march of the railroads, the barbed wire fences, the quarantine laws resulting from tick fever, and other developments in the settlement of the west were hampering and discouraging cattle drives on the trail.

With the fencing off of the Jesse Chisholm Trail in Kansas, the cattlemen had to find another route. The railroad finally got to Dodge City, Kansas, after many trials and tribulations. The cattlemen left the old Chisholm Trail at Elm Creek in the Cherokee Strip of Indian Territory and moved northward to Dodge City. Thus the cowboy capital moved again - to Dodge City - until the railroads were built into the Texas Range country, ending the big cattle drives.

After the season of 1884, the Chisholm Trail was virtually closed. Shipments of cattle were less than one-third of the total the previous year, and this one-third came most from local herds, holdovers, and Indian Territory herds. Loadings continued to diminish. Sodbusters and barbed wire were blocking the drovers. Railroads were piercing deeper into the Texas Ranges and were offering better facilities and more favorable rates for livestock shipments.

The exodus of cattle from Texas and the migration of cattle drovers up and down the Chisholm Trail helped to lessen the sectional animosity that the abolition movement and the Civil War had engendered. The cattle trade created a better feeling between Northern and Texas men by bringing them into contact with each other in commercial transactions.

The Chisholm Trail made a lasting impression upon the nation's economy. It spurred the settlement of the northern ranges including those of Colorado, Wyoming, Montana and the Dakotas.

The Chisholm Trail offered a way of escape to the State of Texas, impoverished by the Civil War. Texas stockmen converted their surplus cattle into federal currency which enabled them to lift the debts and mortgages from their ranches and homes.

Barbed wire fences cut off the Chisholm Trail and rains began to beat out the prints of millions of longhorn hoofs. Soon a carpet of new grass spread over the battered path. But where the land was not cultivated and where streams were crossed, marks of the famous old trail can still be seen. It is good, indeed, that we remember their significance.