



THE CATTLE KINGDOM

by Joe Herring

In downtown Kerrville there is a living reminder of the great cattle drives of the late 1800s.

Captain Charles Schreiner, along with partners, sent many cattle “up the trail” during the 1870s and 1880s, until the arrival of the railroad here in 1887.

According to the Texas author T. R. Fehrenbach, the fellows we recognize from the Westerns, the flickering black and white *matinée* images, the Cowboys, were really a part of the short-lived Cattle Kingdom that sprang up right after the Civil War and was virtually gone by the 1890’s. What gave rise to this important, but brief, part of our history was pure economics: cattle was worth 50 cents a head in Texas, but worth \$16 per head in Kansas. The cowboy was invented to meet the challenge of getting the cattle from here to there.

Many cultures contributed to the cowboy we recognize today. A significant part of his heritage came from Mexico, where the *vaquero* way of life was well developed, importing such words as *ranch*, *corral*, *mustang*, *ariat*, and even *rodeo* to our vocabulary. The cattle of Mexico were largely used for their hides; the markets in Kansas focused on the value of the beef needed to feed the growing industrial cities of the American North. All types of people were needed to help move the cattle north to market, and many of the cowboys were Hispanic or Black, foreign or Yankee, and they blended together into their own culture. They were almost uniformly young, “teenagers out in a dangerous area making their own rules.”

According to research by Sue Whinery, “Kerr County played a key role in the cattle trailing industry, due largely to Capt. Charles Schreiner and his partners, Capt. John Lytle, John W. Light and T. M. McDaniels. It was Lytle who actually blazed the Western Trail in 1874. By then, increasing settlement along the Chisholm trail

route demanded a more westerly route. In addition, Texas herds were quarantined from eastern Kansas due to cattle fever. The Texas cattle carried a tick that transmitted the disease, but the sturdy longhorns were immune to the disease. From 1874 until the late 1880’s, Schreiner, Lytle and their partners delivered more than half a million head of Texas longhorns to Kansas markets.”

Captain Schreiner’s son, Gus, spent his adult life in the cattle business, and had actually been on at least one cattle drive north.

Family lore says from one of those cattle drives, he brought back a piñon pine seedling to his parents, which they planted in the front yard of their Earl Garrett Street home.

That tree still stands there, a reminder of the great cattle drives of the late 1800s, and of a young man who brought his parents a living keepsake of those days.

