

# THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CHISHOLM CATTLE TRAIL: BEYOND THE LEGEND

*Gary & Margaret Kraisinger*

## Preface

As members of the Wild West History Association for twelve years, we know that the group takes history seriously. We have witnessed the implementation of the association's mission "to research the truth" on numerous occasions and have actually seen the untruth thrown out and denounced in meetings. We are proud to be part of this group just for that reason, and chuckled a few years ago when Michael Wallis stated that "we are as serious about history as a heart attack."

Gary and I aren't historians of Old West personalities as most of our fellow members, but we are "hard-nosed" when it comes to recording the truth about cattle trails of the 19th Century. As you all know, sometimes facts get twisted, myths become truths, and stories are repeated enough times over the decades that readers feel that the tales must be gospel. It is our job, based on solid research, to show what we understand actually happened, to debunk untruths, and write with historic accuracy. This is our case with the Chisholm Cattle Trail.

We have studied south-to-north Texas cattle trails for over fifty years. So when prickly points kept presenting themselves to us in our research of the Chisholm Trail, and the National Parks Service was given the direction to investigate the Trail for National Status by President Obama in 2009, we decided to intensely focus on that famous, world-known cattle trail. At the time, we didn't agree with its history as written.

The currently accepted narrative about the Chisholm Trail states that the Chisholm Trail, named after Indian trader Jesse Chisholm, started in south Texas in 1867, crossed the Red River into Indian Territory at Red River Station and continued north from there into Kansas, terminating at

Abilene, Kansas. Wrong, wrong, and wrong.<sup>1</sup> This anecdote has been believed by readers for over 100 years. Most importantly this narrative is incorrect on all three counts.

Therefore, I felt particularly encouraged to unveil our current research and the truth about this endeared narrative last month after visiting with Casey Tefertiller at our Cheyenne, Wyoming Roundup. He told me that research on Wyatt Earp "needed to start over," that for 100 years, it has been misrepresented.<sup>2</sup> I thought to myself, "Exactly how we feel about the Chisholm Trail!"

## Four Points

Following are four points that need to be emphasized about this misrepresented Chisholm Trail narrative:

First, the trail that the cowboys and their herds followed in Texas was not known as the "Chisholm Trail" during the trail-driving era. It was called something else during the time. We are not going to get tangled up on names of trails here. We will explain.

Second, in 1867, Texas herds mostly crossed the Red River at another location to head north to Abilene, Kansas. The Red River Station crossing was not used to point herds toward Kansas until 1870, for a good reason.

Third, the Trail cannot be called the "Chisholm" to Abilene, Kansas, because the term was not used during that period of time. From 1867 through 1870, the Chisholm Trail label was not in the vocabulary of the general public.

Finally, after in-depth research of the Western, Shawnee (Eastern) and Chisholm trails, we conclude that *the Chisholm Trail was not a stand-alone cattle system at all. The route was a temporary splinter pathway of a larger system.*

### (1) The Chisholm Trail is not in Texas:

To brush back the fur and to get to the hide of the matter: cowboys really didn't care much about trail names. Pushing herds north to market started in Texas under Spanish rule and earnestly after Texas statehood in 1846. The breeding grounds and heavy concentration of cattle were in south Texas and since the demand for beef and oxen was in the north, trail drivers walked their cattle across Texas, Indian Territory, Missouri, Kansas and Nebraska to

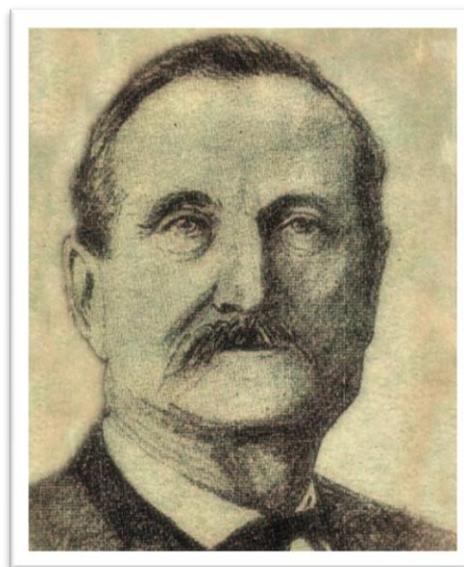
the westward-trails outfitting centers and to the river barges on the Mississippi and Missouri rivers.<sup>3</sup>

According to historian Wayne Gard, this first trunkline of cattle traffic eventually became known as the Shawnee Trail around 1854; perhaps because he wrote of “an Indian village, called Shawneetown, on the Texas bank of the Red River just below the trail crossing,” or because the route skirted the “Shawnee Hills on their eastern side before crossing the Canadian River.”<sup>4</sup> This label for the well-worn trail, however, appears to have been used more by journalists and cartographers than the cowboys themselves.<sup>5</sup> In the drovers’ early recollections, their pathway was the “Kansas Trail,” the northern trail, or simply “the Trail.” In order to keep all the routes organized, historians, journalists, and cartographers in later years gave names to the cattle trails.

In 1954, when Gard published his research on the Shawnee and Chisholm trails in *The Chisholm Trail*, the most comprehensive scholarly treatment of cattle trailing up to that time, he accepted the paradigm, as had all historians before him, that the post-Civil War Chisholm Trail was the major and foremost cattle trail in all history. Its tale consumed and overshadowed all other south-to-north cattle trail narratives.<sup>6</sup> The matriarch trail, the pre- and post-Civil War Shawnee Trail, that had existed for over two decades and its importance in the whole panoramic view of cattle trailing history, has been largely ignored by historians. The general belief by the public in Wayne Gard’s time was that Texas cattle trailing started after the Civil War with the Chisholm Trail in 1867. Gard discovered, however, the truth in his years of inquiry, but because of the paradigm that had existed for years that the Chisholm Trail was the imperial trail system that traversed from south Texas to Kansas, he succumbed to that belief. On his map, “The Chisholm Trail, in earlier years 1867-75,” (page 77) he exposed his turmoil between the Shawnee and Chisholm trails in Texas. He stated: “At its Texas beginnings, the new cattle trail to Kansas [Chisholm] followed paths already beaten by Longhorn herds headed up the Shawnee Trail.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, on his map, he shows the Chisholm Trail overlaying the Shawnee Trail in Texas and splintering off on its own (*now this is important*) at Waco, Texas. Gard regarded the trail that came out

of south Texas to deliver cattle into Kansas as the Chisholm Trail, and relegated the original Shawnee Trail to a shadowed background.

Another common perception of the Chisholm Trail that had penetrated itself into the minds of the public was that the Western Trail, a subsequent trail system, was actually only an extension of the greater Chisholm Trail. This concept peaked into a serious controversy by the late 1920s and into the 1930s.<sup>8</sup> Gard followed his predecessors’ accepted notion on his second map, “the Chisholm Trail, in later years, 1876-1884,” where he dropped the Shawnee Trail label altogether and showed the Chisholm Trail in Texas (where the original Shawnee Trail had been) and erroneously showed the Chisholm Trail feeding or sustaining the Western Trail below San Antonio.<sup>9</sup>



**George W. Saunders, President  
Old Time Trail Drivers' Association**

The core document to challenge this historical error had been introduced by the president of the Old Time Trail Drivers’ Association in October of 1931. George W. Saunders, an experienced trail driver, announced a month earlier in the *San Antonio Express* that “The famed Chisholm cattle trail, about which more has been written than any other trail, cannot be traced in Texas for the reason that it never existed in this state.”<sup>10</sup> Then at the Old Time Trail Drivers’ Association 17th annual meeting in October when, according to him, “over 500 trailers were present,” Saunders entertained a motion in

regard to the location of the Chisholm Trail. The membership unanimously agreed to a resolution that stated, in part, that “the herds originating at all points in Texas drove north over the western or eastern Texas-Kansas Cattle Trails, the eastern branch of which met the Chisholm Trail at Red River Station...”<sup>11</sup>

Here Saunders and his fellow trail drivers referred to the trails of Texas as the eastern and the western. This suggests that the cattle drovers may have rarely used the term “Shawnee,” but instead, preferred to use the directional terms. We assert that the term “Eastern” came into use after the Western Trail was blazed in 1874. The resolution also indicates that, in Texas, trail drivers thought of the trails as either the east one or the west one, but definitely not the Chisholm Trail in Texas.

In spite of George W. Saunders’ efforts to keep the record straight and to dispel rampant myths and inaccurate statements about the Chisholm Trail in the 1930s, the erroneous stories continued to be circulated. From the earliest attempt to record the history of the Chisholm Trail in 1892, through the mid-century when Wayne Gard could not draw a clear-cut distinction between the trails, to today, the errors have been repeated and repeated. Promoters continue to do damage. In 2017, when Chisholm Trail enthusiasts celebrated the Trail’s 150th anniversary, the year’s logo showed the Trail going from San Antonio, Texas, to Abilene, Kansas via Red River Station crossing. Over the eighty-some years since The Old Time Trail Drivers announced to the public that the Chisholm Trail did not exist in Texas, the old myth was still intact.

The current battle to present the truth that the Chisholm Trail was never in Texas, has been launched by ourselves and a native Texan, Wayne Ludwig. In our 2016 book, *The Shawnee-Arbuckle Cattle Trail*, we stated that Jesse Chisholm’s Wagon Road started at the South Canadian River in Indian Territory. Ludwig states in his 2018 book that “the fact remains that a map with provenance to the historical period of the cattle drives that shows any trail in Texas designated as the Chisholm Trail does not seem to exist.”<sup>12</sup>

Ludwig’s concentration in his work was to investigate and uncover any documentation about the Chisholm Trail in Texas during the trail-driving days of 1867 to 1887. He discovered that the old

trail drivers were right: the Chisholm Trail was not in Texas. Our scope is wider: the Shawnee (Eastern) Trail, not the Chisholm Trail, was the first south-to-north cattle trail that started in south Texas, and the Shawnee Trail became a major system.

**The truth:** Longhorn cattle have been trailed out of south Texas since 1846 over a route that eventually became known as the Shawnee Trail or, via cartographical evidence, the Eastern Trail. The Texas portion of this trail should not be labeled the Chisholm Trail.

**(2) Cowboys and their herds in 1867-1870 did not cross the Red River at Red River Station and go north from there:**

According to favored stories, historic accounts, and any current map that one might see in a promotional brochure or on the Internet (including celebration flyers for the 2017 anniversary), trail drivers with their herds on the Chisholm Trail crossed the Red River at Red River Station into Indian Territory to continue north to Abilene, Kansas. This route is accurate only after 1870. The cowboys who trailed their longhorns into Abilene during the height of that cowtown’s activity under the encouragement of Joseph G. McCoy, followed a different pathway in Indian Territory. Most of them crossed the Red River at a different location, some forty miles east.

In 1867, the second driving season after the war, when Joseph McCoy publicized that there was now a safe railhead for Texas drovers on the Union Pacific, Eastern Division Railroad at a little known Kansas town of Abilene, drovers broke away from the familiar Shawnee Trail at Waco, Texas, or at Boggy Depot in Indian Territory to point their herds to the new available railhead.<sup>13</sup> Those cowboys south of the Red River, splintered from the old familiar Shawnee Trail at Waco and crossed the Red River at either Sivells Bend or Rock Bluff Crossing. North of these crossings, sat the only military fort in the area still viable after the War. Fort Arbuckle had escaped the ravages of the Civil War, unlike her sister forts Washita and Cobb.<sup>14</sup> In 1867, the fort had been re-garrisoned by soldiers from the Sixth Infantry and Tenth Cavalry and would serve as a supply post for General Philip H. Sheridan’s upcoming winter campaign farther west

in the Territory. Located in the Chickasaw Nation, the fort provided protection for travelers and represented the western edge of civilization, a stronghold between the civilized Indians of the established nations and the hostile, rampaging tribes to the west.<sup>15</sup>

This Shawnee Trail splinter route via Fort Arbuckle continued north to the South Canadian River where the drovers discovered an established wagon road that had been in use by a local trader. The drovers and their herds followed the worn road to the Arkansas River in Kansas. The trader was Jesse Chisholm who died only a few months later in the spring of 1868, and the northern terminus of his trade road on the Arkansas River later became Wichita, Kansas. If a McCoy guide was not available near or around the Arkansas River crossing to guide the outfit to Abilene, drovers followed the north star and hoped for the best.<sup>16</sup>

This early route lasted four years, and after Fort Arbuckle was abandoned in 1870, the line of protection moved west to Fort Sill, the Indians of the area were moved onto reservations because of General Sheridan's campaign, and the trail drivers moved their cattle route to a "more direct" pathway to Abilene, one that, according to Joseph G. McCoy who described the route in 1874:

- ...has more prairie, less timber, more small streams and less large ones,
- and altogether better grass and fewer flies—no civilized Indian tax or wild
- Indian disturbances—than any other route yet driven over, and is also much
- shorter in distance because direct from the Red river to Kansas.<sup>17</sup>

The new route from Red River Station crossing continued north to Duncan's stage station and trading post on Cow Creek that sat on the east-west Fort Sill - Fort Arbuckle supply road, passed twenty-five miles east of Fort Sill, and continued on north to Red Fork trader's ranch on the Cimarron River.<sup>18</sup> At Red Fork Ranch, the trail connected with Jesse Chisholm's Wagon Road that came up from the southeast.

According to cowboy journals and accounts, this more westerly route appears to not have been used much in 1870, but both the Fort Arbuckle

route and the newer westerly route were used heavily in 1871, Abilene's last year as a cow town. Because 1869 and 1870 had proven to be successful cattle-driving seasons for Texas cattlemen, they gathered all possible ages and sizes of trail cattle from their ranches in 1871 and sent 600,000 head to Kansas, the heaviest cattle-driving season in history. In order to handle the volume, all available cattle trails were used: the old Shawnee trunkline to Baxter Springs, the West Shawnee via Boggy Depot to Junction City, the Fort Arbuckle route (that blended into Jesse Chisholm's Wagon Road), and the new Abilene Trail in Indian Territory to Abilene, Kansas. Some herds may have been shipped from Newton that year, as well, for that town received the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway in July.

**The truth:** Documents and the trail drivers themselves relate that the cattle trail that crossed the Red River at Red River Station and continued north passing Duncan's trading post and on north to Red Fork's Ranch through Indian Territory was not used until 1870, four seasons after Abilene first accepted Texas cattle. This more westerly route was called the "Abilene Trail" by cowboys and cartographers.<sup>19</sup>

### **(3) It was not the Chisholm Trail that went into Abilene, Kansas:**

Trail drivers often called the trail they were following after its destination. Archival map evidence shows that government maps and atlases referred to the trail to Abilene, Kansas, as the Abilene Trail.<sup>20</sup>

In 1872, however, routes moved again in the Shawnee Trail System. Abilene ceased to be a Texas cattle depot; trail drivers splintered from the Shawnee Trail at Pond Creek in Indian Territory to go to Ellsworth; and Newton and Wichita became railheads for Texas cattle. The term "Abilene Trail" was no longer appropriate.

During the 1871-1872 transition from Abilene to other destinations, journalists were contemplating the cattle-trailing regimen in their written work. The *Georgetown Watchman* in Georgetown, Texas, may have suggested the use of "Chisholm Trail" in April of 1869, when it reported that "the Western route due north from Fort Arbuckle, known as the 'Chisholm Trail....'" This perhaps earliest reference to the Chisholm Trail term is actually saying: a western branch of the Shawnee Trail ("Western

route") north of Fort Arbuckle, used a portion of Jesse Chisholm's Wagon Road.<sup>21</sup>

By the next year, *The Emporia Weekly News* tried to understand the transitioning and wrote: "The cattle-trade of Texas is carried on over two principal trails: the Chism and Shawnee trails." Here the editor understood the use of the well-known Shawnee Trail, but obviously was not sure about this new trail he spelled "Chism."<sup>22</sup>

By late 1870, the term appears to have been cemented into the minds of journalists. In the *Walnut Valley Times* in El Dorado, Kansas, in September, this appeared: "Most of the droves are brought through the Indian Territory on what is known as the Chisholm Trail."<sup>23</sup> And, in the following month, the *Kansas Daily Commonwealth* in Topeka, Kansas, wrote in a narrative that they "...camped on the Chisholm Trail from the south line of the state [Kansas] to Red fork."<sup>24</sup> Both of these accounts refer to the Jesse Chisholm Wagon Road from the South Canadian via the Cimarron River crossing at Red Fork to the Arkansas River in Kansas. The name "Chisholm's Wagon Road" had metamorphosed to the "Chisholm Trail."

By the summer of 1871, when 600,000 longhorns were driven up the numerous trails to Kansas, *The Leavenworth Times*, wrote: "Droves of cattle, numbering thousands, are being driven along the Chisholm Trail from Texas to this place."<sup>25</sup> Now, the new westerly route in Indian Territory, via Red River Station crossing and on north that was blazed by Texas drovers, and had been known as the "Abilene Trail," suddenly became the "Chisholm Trail."

On the north end of this newly christened cattle trail, J.R. Mead was busy promoting Wichita. In 1864 and 1865, Mead and Jesse Chisholm had settled on the banks of the Arkansas River and opened trading posts alongside the Wichita tribe who had migrated to the area during the Civil War to avoid conflict with the pro-Southern tribes in Indian Territory.

Jesse Chisholm had been an Indian trading partner and interpreter for many years with various Indian tribes in Indian Territory. Around the mid-1850s, he reestablished the Chouteau trading post on the South Canadian that once sat near old traveling routes to California. Chisholm also worked another road ranch on the North Canadian

near Council Grove.<sup>26</sup> However, during the Civil War because the Confederate armies had moved into Indian Territory, Chisholm came farther north to the Arkansas River in Kansas.

From the Arkansas River location, Mead and Chisholm developed a trade route south to Chisholm's Council Grove post, stocking it with supplies from Fort Leavenworth. While Mead stayed mostly in the Arkansas River area after the War to tend to his own business, Chisholm drove his trade wagon south into Indian Territory and back. It was this wagon road from the old Chouteau post on the South Canadian north that the Texas cowboys first used in 1867, after leaving Fort Arbuckle, to continue toward Abilene, Kansas. Mead knew his trading partner's route well.

After the death of his partner in the spring of 1868, Mead sold his ranch in Towanda, moved to a claim near the junction of the Big and Little Arkansas rivers, named the spot Wichita, and proceeded to get immersed in county and state politics. Together with three other developers, Mead promoted the town, organized and became president of the Wichita and Southwestern Rail Road,<sup>27</sup> held various offices and positions, but mostly, for our concern, turned the Texas cattle herds toward Wichita. In May of 1871, he was elected chairman of a committee for the "purpose of discussing the best means of securing the cattle trail at this place."<sup>28</sup> A year later, in May of 1872, the railroad reached Wichita. Who better to promote his former partner's route than J.R. Mead himself?<sup>29</sup> According to Mead, the Chisholm Trail started at Wichita and ended at Council Grove, in Indian Territory. He did not, at first, concede that Jesse Chisholm's Wagon Road went to Abilene, Kansas, and why should he? It didn't. However, years later in 1890, he wrote that the Chisholm Trail had "lengthened out to each end until it reached from Abilene, Kansas, to San Antonio, Texas."<sup>30</sup> By 1890, the journalists and his fellow promoters had created their myth.

These two factors, the christening of the Chisholm Trail name for the cattle trail by journalists and the promotion of its use by the vigorous J.R. Mead, caused a humble Indian-trader's wagon road to become known as the famous Chisholm Cattle Trail. Both incidents came at the opportune time. Abilene was finished as a cattle

town. Newton lost its chance to become much of a cattle town because of Mead and his cohorts (that is another story), and Ellsworth was much farther west and north on a different railroad.

Before 1871 and 1872, the name “Chisholm Trail” was not in the vocabulary of Texas cattlemen. The trail to Abilene—from Red Fork crossing on the Cimarron River to Abilene—was not called the Chisholm Trail during its use from 1867 to 1870 and government maps labeled the pathway as the “Abilene Trail.” But in the time span from when J.R. Mead became the committee chair in Wichita to promote “the cattle trail” to his town—to the next year, the term “Chisholm Trail” was in the vocabulary of Wichita journalists.<sup>31</sup>

Joseph G. McCoy never made reference to a Chisholm Trail while in Abilene. None of the Abilene newspapers ever printed that the Chisholm Trail entered into their town. No cowboy, during the trail driving days, said that he came to Abilene from the Chisholm Trail. Later on, in 1911, when many “boosters” were organizing the Chisholm Trail Good Roads Association to try to name a new interstate highway after the trail, the elderly Joseph McCoy wrote that the proposed road “should be called the Abilene Trail,” for he knew that the trail that entered Abilene from 1867 through 1871 was not the Chisholm Trail.<sup>32</sup>

**The truth:** The trail that fed Texas longhorns to the Smoky Hill River and Abilene, Kansas, from 1867 to 1871 was not the Chisholm Trail—because the term was not in the vocabulary of drovers or the towns’ people of Abilene.

#### **Comments:**

Of the above three points, the first one — that the trail was not called “Chisholm Trail” in Texas — was resolved in 1931 by the Old Time Trail Drivers and has been stated repeatedly since then, but apparently to little avail.

The second one — that the trail drivers used the Shawnee-Arbuckle Trail first in 1867-1870 to go to Abilene, and not the Red River Station crossing route—has been alluded to by the trail drivers and historians through the years, but only recently has the National Parks Service recognized its existence.<sup>33</sup>

The third point — that the Chisholm Trail did not go into Abilene; that trail was called the Abilene Trail — has not been suggested before, and may not be accepted in the future.

Shortly after the end of the Texas trail driving days in the mid-1890s, with the help of Buffalo Bill and his Wild West shows, dime novels, and early silent films, tales of the adventurous cowboys, Indians on raids, lawmen, and outlaws became the genre of entertainment. By 1911, the legend of the Chisholm Cattle Trail that stretched from south Texas to Abilene, Kansas, was embedded into the psyche of the American public.<sup>34</sup>

The Kraisingers, however, are going to go one step farther. Using our years of research on the various cattle trails and placing them on maps, we present point number 4:

#### **(4) The Chisholm Trail is a splinter route of a greater Trail System:**

Look at the accompanying map. Where is the Chisholm Trail? View the entire Shawnee (Eastern) Trail System that existed from 1846 to 1875. The branches have not been labeled in order to not detract from our demonstration.

The trunkline of the System, from San Antonio, Texas, to Baxter Springs, Kansas, was blazed soon after Texas statehood and continued to be used for the next three decades, before and after the Civil War. Its branches, like arms of a huge tree, reached out into Indian Territory, Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska. Because of constant pressure from incoming settlers — as homesteaders moved west across our land — drovers had to adapt and blaze new channels for their herds. The trunkline in Texas and Indian Territory stayed intact, but the system’s upper branches faded as new sprouts were formed.

The earliest branches reached across Missouri to the Mississippi River and edged up the border of Kansas Territory to barges on the Missouri River in Nebraska (East Shawnee, 1846-1861). After the Civil War, drovers trailed mostly in front of the settlements in Kansas via Baxter Springs and west, skirting the settled counties in Kansas to deliver their herds to the Missouri River towns in Kansas and Nebraska (Middle Shawnee, 1866-1867). Because of increasing pressure from settlements, in 1866-1867, drovers splintered from Boggy Depot in Indian Territory and headed north to Junction City

(West Shawnee, 1866-1875). After Abilene was opened as a cowtown by Joseph McCoy, another branch sprouted from Waco, Texas, and continued

north across Indian Territory and Kansas to Abilene (Shawnee-Arbuckle Trail, 1867-1871).

THE SHAWNEE [EASTERN] CATTLE TRAIL SYSTEM  
1846 - 1875





**Joseph G. McCoy:**

McCoy was twenty-nine years old when he arrived in Abilene, Kansas. Representing the McCoy Brothers from Illinois, a livestock shipping firm, the young McCoy in a matter of months established a badly needed terminal for Texas cattle on the Union Pacific, Eastern Division Railroad. From 1867 through 1871, at no time did McCoy, the people of the town, or local newspapers refer to the trail into Abilene as the "Chisholm Trail."

(Courtesy of Dickinson County Historical Society, Abilene, Kansas)

In 1871, Abilene's last year as a cowtown when 600,000 longhorns were on the trails, drovers splintered from the Shawnee-Arbuckle Trail, ventured out onto the Plains in order to create another route to handle the volume of herds and continued to Abilene (Abilene Trail, 1871). When Abilene ceased to be the major depot after 1871, a chaotic transition occurred when Newton (on the AT&SF), Chetopa (on the MK&T or Katy); Coffeyville (on the Leavenworth, Lawrence & Galveston RR), and Baxter Springs (on the Kansas City, Fort Scott & Gulf Railway) all received rails and temporarily became shipping points.



**James R. Mead in 1900:**

As one of the founders of Wichita, Mead promoted his town in 1871 to any possible railroad and was elected chairman of a committee to secure a cattle trail. By May of 1872, the Wichita & Southwestern Railroad reached Wichita and Mead fostered his late partner's Indian Territory trade route (Chisholm's Wagon Road) for Texas cattle. He later said "the original [cattle] trail started at Wichita and ended at the North Canadian." *The Wichita Weekly*, May 19, 1871 and *The Wichita Daily Eagle*, March 1, 1890. (From Mead's book, *Hunting and Trading on the Great Plains*)

Upon receiving the Wichita & Southwest Railroad (later the AT&SF Railway) in the spring of 1872, Wichita finally claimed to be the major railhead and the Trail that fed into its stockyards then became known as the Chisholm Trail because of J. R. Mead's promotion. At the same time, trail drivers splintered from the trunkline at Pond Creek, Indian Territory, and drove their herds to Ellsworth on the Kansas Pacific (Ellsworth or Cox extension, 1872-1875).

In 1875, the State of Kansas, because of Texas cattle fever<sup>35</sup> and an onslaught of new settlers, quarantined the eastern cattle depots from all incoming Texas cattle. For four years, trail drivers

splintered from the old system to the newly blazed Western Trail in Indian Territory because they could no longer deliver cattle into Wichita.

On June 2, 1880, the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe extended its line to Caldwell, Kansas, and the Kansas City, Lawrence and Southern Railroad built a line to the neighboring town of Hunnewell. Because these towns sat on the southern border of Kansas, the Trail was revived. Using the old trunkline from Texas and across Indian Territory, drovers delivered their herds to these border towns until the Land Rush in 1889.<sup>36</sup>

The western lap of this cattle trail system, from Waco, Texas, north, has been peeled off and represented for decades as another trail system. But, look, again. The branch stems from the trunkline of the older Shawnee/Eastern System. How can one accurately say that the Chisholm Trail was in Texas when the pathway is obviously the trunkline of the Shawnee/Eastern Trail?

The sprout to Abilene, Kansas, was operating at the same time as its neighboring routes to the east, especially in 1871. Because of the sheer volume of cattle coming up the trails, all the pathways in Indian Territory were used. If we were to assign a name to these routes, we would say: Shawnee Trail trunkline, West Shawnee Trail, Shawnee-Arbuckle Trail and Abilene Trail. The term “Chisholm Trail” or even “Chisholm’s Wagon Road” does not fit into the equation.

During the transition after Abilene ceased to be a cow town, trail drivers scrambled to find another dependable pathway and journalists sought a new name for the pathway. By this time, Ellsworth had been established and Newton and Wichita received the AT&SF Railway in the late summer of 1871 and spring of 1872. Whether they be journalists or individuals, promoters decided to call this route: The Chisholm Trail.

This cattle-trailing system, whether one calls it the “Shawnee” or “Eastern,” was an elaborate complex of trails and routes. And as for the Chisholm Trail?<sup>37</sup> The branch that eventually received this label was one shoot, among many. It was not a stand-alone system of its own at all, going from south Texas to Abilene, Kansas. It was only one branch of many limbs that grew from a trunkline that was planted in south Texas by drovers in 1846.

## Epilogue:

As this article is being submitted for the *Journal*, promoters in Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas are contacting their respective state senators and hurriedly working to finalize the writing of a bill to be introduced by Kansas Senator Moran in the U.S. Senate for an upcoming vote for national trail status. The fictional narrative will say that the Chisholm Trail started at San Antonio, Texas, in 1867, crossed the Red River into Indian Territory (Oklahoma) at Red River Station and continue north from there to Abilene, Kansas.

These enthusiasts have ignored primary-source evidence as presented to them. They prefer the “Legend.”

If the bill is accepted, signage will sprout up across the three states labeling roadways and landmarks as “The Chisholm Trail.”

## **Endnotes:**

1. Former noted Chisholm Trail historians: H. S. Tennant, Sam Ridings, John Rossel, Wayne Gard, Harry Sinclair Drago, and Don Worcester all wrote that the Chisholm Trail followed this narrative. “How Historians and Scholars presented the Trail to Abilene, Kansas,” Chapter 3, pp. 29-43, by Gary & Margaret Kraisinger, *The Shawnee-Arbuckle Cattle Trail 1867-1870, The Predecessor of the Chisholm Trail to Abilene, Kansas.* (Newton, KS: Mennonite Press, 2016)

Also, go to *The Texas Handbook* online and key in “Chisholm Trail.” There are several articles that boast about the Trail in Texas, starting in 1867. tshaonline.org.

2. Roy Young, Gary Roberts, and Casey Tefertiller had just released their new book, *A Wyatt Earp Anthology, Long May His Story Be Told.* (Denton, Texas: University of North Texas Press, 2019)

3. Texas cattle outlets before railroads were centers like Westport (Kansas City) and Leavenworth, Kansas Territory, or St. Joseph, Missouri, where caravans for the Oregon Trail, Mormon Trail or Santa Fe Trail convened, or to the river barges at Quincy and St. Louis, Missouri, and Nebraska City and Brownville, Nebraska Territory.

4. Wayne Gard. *The Chisholm Trail.* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954) pp. 26-28.

5. There are numerous archival maps showing the “Shawnee Trail” in Indian Territory after 1854. Two examples are: “Indian Territory, 1879,” General Land Office Map, Act of Congress, May 25, 1879, Vol. 17, p. 159; “Military Map of Oklahoma,” prepared under the direction of 1st Lieut. H. L. Ripley, 24th Infantry, Nov. 1885. (authors' collection)

6. In 1954, when Wayne Gard published his Chisholm Trail book, the public was enthralled with cowboy characters and heroes. The 1948 movie, *Red River*, with John Wayne traveling the Chisholm Trail to Abilene, Kansas, was still fresh in the minds of western lore followers, and over the next few

years, Americans watched on their TVs an explosion of western episodes that dominated the genre of television viewing. During this time, any cowboy that went up any cattle trail was, naturally, on the Chisholm Trail.

7. Gard, p. 76.

8. The belief that Dodge City, Kansas, (on the Western Trail) was on a branch or extension of the Chisholm Trail is shown in the 1939 Warner Bros. movie "Dodge City." Trail driver Error Flynn ends up in lawless Dodge City, after having traveled up the Chisholm Trail.

9. Gard, p. 229.

10. "Trail Historian Corrects Errors," *San Antonio Express*, San Antonio, TX, Sept. 19, 1931.

11. Kraisinger & Kraisinger, *The Western, The Greatest Texas Cattle Trail, 1874-1886*, (Newton, KS: Mennonite Press, Inc., 2004) pp. 10-11. Also see Ludwig's p. 153.

What should be noted here is that the Old Time Trail Drivers thought that the Chisholm Trail went as far south as the Red River Station crossing. Jesse Chisholm's trade route did not go that far south nor did his wagon road use the westerly pathway of Red River Station-Duncan-Red Fork Ranch. Propaganda of the Chisholm Trail by journalists and promoters had told the public and the remaining trail drivers that the Chisholm Trail went all the way from its northern origin and on south across Indian Territory and down to San Antonio, Texas. In the fifty years since the end of the Chisholm Trail's activity, the old drovers knew that Jesse's road did not go into Texas, but they were led to believe that it did go to Red River Station.

12. Wayne Ludwig, *The Old Chisholm Trail From Cow Path to Tourist Stop*, (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2018) p. 101.

Julius Bien, Department of Interior, "Map of Texas showing Routes of Transportation of Cattle, 1881," shows the cattle route named, "Eastern Trail."

13. Cattle herd outfits at Boggy Depot were on the West Shawnee branch—which is another story. This essay addresses only the splinter routes of the Shawnee Cattle Trail System via the Fort Arbuckle Trail or Abilene Trail to Kansas.

14. Drover outfits from west Texas did use the Red River Station crossing on the Red River, which sat on the old Fort Belknap - Fort Arbuckle Military Road. The trail drivers, however, followed the military road to Fort Arbuckle and did not drive herds north of the crossing. It was too dangerous, and the area had no military protection.

15. L. David Norris, "Fort Arbuckle," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*. [www.okhistory.org](http://www.okhistory.org) [accessed July 20, 2019]

16. The movie *Red River* depicts the anxiety of the cowboy outfit in searching and hoping to find the town of Abilene. In the fall of 1868, Joseph McCoy hired a survey crew to mark a pathway from the Arkansas River to Abilene, Kansas. "Joseph G. McCoy and the Chisholm Trail, 1867-1871," Dickinson County Historical Society online, [dkcohistory.blogspot.com](http://dkcohistory.blogspot.com)

17. Here Joseph McCoy describes the new route to Kansas in 1874. Abilene existed as a terminal for Texas cattle from 1867 through 1871. Drovers created the new route

through Indian Territory in 1870 and 1871. Joseph G. McCoy, *Historic Sketches of the Cattle Trade of the West and Southwest*, (Kansas City, KS: Ramsey, Millett & Hudson, 1874) p. 93.

18. The Duncan trading post was not purchased and established by William Duncan until after Fort Sill had been built and a supply road established between the new fort and the older Fort Arbuckle, c. 1872. William McDole Lee and Albert E. Reynolds established Red Fork Ranch in 1872 to cater to the cattlemen and their herds coming from the south and to serve passengers on the Arkansas City, Kansas and Fort Sill Stage Road. Fort Sill was officially established January 8, 1869; the two road ranches opened in 1872. These dates show that the new cattle route was definitely not used as early as 1867 as history suggests today.

Kraisinger & Kraisinger, *The Shawnee - Arbuckle Cattle Trail, 1867-1870*, pp. 102-104.

19. Jonathan Baker wrote in his diary on September 5, 1870: ". . . traveling brought us to Santa Fe [Trail] road, where we turned directly to the right in the direction of Council Grove, leaving the Abilene trail." "Jonathan H. Baker Diary," (second trip, 1870), Dolph Briscoe Center for American Studies, University of Texas at Austin.

Government maps of that time period and even years later show the Red River Station crossing route as the "Abilene Trail." One example: United States Indian Bureau, "Indian Territory," 1889 government map. McCasland Digital Collection, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater. Map shows both the "Jesse Chisholm Cattle Trail" near Fort Arbuckle and the "Abilene Cattle Trail" north of the Red River Station crossing.

20. Two more examples: George F. Cram Atlas, "Map of the Oklahoma Country in Indian Territory," 1889, owner's collection. (Map shows the westerly route as the "Abilene Trail.") Township Survey Map, Marion County, Kansas, GLO, 1876, showing the "Abilene Cattle Trail," Wichita State University Special Collections, Wichita, Kansas.

21. *Georgetown Watchman*, Georgetown, Texas, April 10, 1869. [www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com)

22. "Texan Cattle," *The Emporia Weekly News*, Emporia, Kansas, Jan. 28, 1870, page 2. [www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com)

23. "The Texas Cattle Trade," *Walnut Valley Times*, El Dorado, Kansas, Sept. 30, 1870, page 1. [www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com)

24. *Kansas Daily Commonwealth*, Topeka, Kansas, May 27, 1870 and Oct. 11, 1870. [www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com)

25. "Southwest Kansas," to the Editor from Florence, Kansas, June 5, 1871. *The Leavenworth Times*, Leavenworth, Kansas, Thursday, June 8, 1871, p. 2. [www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com)

26. The Chouteau trading post that was connected via roads to Fort Gibson and Fort Smith where Chisholm acquired supplies, was closed down around 1858. Chisholm continued to work the Council Grove ranch until the Civil War. Even though the pathway south of the Council Grove ranch to the Chouteau post was not heavily used in 1867 when the Texas herds came north, the pathway was there and used by local travelers. Kraisinger, *The Shawnee-Arbuckle Trail*, pp. 4, 79-81.

27. The Wichita and Southwestern Rail Road was a subsidiary of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe.

28.

"The Cattle Trail," *The Wichita Tribune*, Wichita, Kansas, May 18, 1871, p. 2. In this early article, editor A. W. Yale, wrote of "the cattle trail" or simply "the trail." The term "Chisholm Trail" had not yet come into use there in Wichita. [www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com)

29. "James R. Mead Biography," Washburn University, Thomas Fox Averill Kansas Studies Collection, online, [washburn.edu](http://washburn.edu).

James R. Mead, *Hunting and Trading on the Great Plains, 1859-1875*, (Wichita, KS: Rowfant Press, 1986) pp. 14 and 32.

30. "Old Settlers, celebrate their fifteenth anniversary with banquet," *The Wichita Daily Eagle*, Wichita, Kansas, March 1, 1890, p. 5. [www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com)

31. "Wichita, the Metropolis of the Southwest," *The Daily Commonwealth*, Topeka, Kansas, Oct. 15, 1872, p. 2. "Mr. Brydren rushed to the "Chisholm trail" to talk Wichita to drovers." [www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com)

32. "The Abilene Trail," *Manchester Motor*, Manchester, Kansas, Sept. 28, 1911, p. 1. [www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com)

33. In the NPS Feasibility Study turned over to the Department of Interior and to Congress this year (2019), the "Fort Arbuckle Trail" is noted as an alternate trail to the Chisholm Trail. Their source is the research of Gary and Margaret Kraisinger. [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov)

34. Wayne Ludwig, *ibid.* Chapter 14, "From Chisholm's Trail to Meridian Highway," pp. 140-151.

35. South Tex as longhorns often carried a disease called Texas, or Spanish, Fever. Domestic cattle picked up the "fever" after longhorns passed through their area and often died shortly afterward. The Missouri Legislature passed a quarantine law in 1855, and Kansas Territory Legislature passed one in 1859. The problem continued to persist throughout the trail-driving era prompting states to constantly revisit the law and adjust the deadline for cattle herds. In the mid-1890s, veterinarians discovered that the fever was caused by the south Texas tick.

36. Kraisinger & Kraisinger, *The Western, the Greatest Texas Cattle Trail, 1874-1886*, pp. 191-195.

37. Archival map consensus usually shows the label "Shawnee" in Indian Territory (Oklahoma) and Kansas, while maps of Texas and the Old Time Trail Drivers refer to the Texas portion of this trail system as the "Eastern," people of the town, or local newspapers refer to the trail into Abilene as the "Chisholm Trail."



### S. Omar Barker's

#### NOCHE BUENA

'TIS the night before Christmas, and all through the *casa*  
Not a creature is stirring. *Caramba! Qué pasa?*  
The stockings are hanging with *mucho cuidado*,  
In hopes that old Santa will feel *obligado*  
To leave a few *cosas aquí y allí*  
For *chicos* and *chicas*, and something for me.  
*Los niños* are all snuggled safe in their *camas*,  
Some in *calzones*, some in *pajamas*,  
Their little *cabezas* all full of sweet dreams  
Of Santa Panzón and his reindeero teams.  
Though some have been *buenos* and some have been *malos*,  
They're all *esperando* their share of *regalos*.  
Alfonso has asked for a twenty-two rifle,  
And what Pedro wants is a make-noise *chifle*.  
Bettina and Teresa, *las dos muchachitas*,  
Are hoping he'll bring them *muñecas bonitas*.

*La vieja*, tired out from too *mucho trabajo*,  
Would like some new *ropa*, but *ay que carrejo!*  
Old Santa *está* at the corner saloon  
Getting *barracho* since mid-afternoon.  
Mamá sits alone there beside the *ventana*,  
Shining her rolling pin *para mañana*,  
When Santa will come home all *zigzagueando*,  
Lit up like a rocket and loudly *cantando*  
About "Adelita," the *guapa muchacha*,  
Or maybe some version of "*La Cucaracha*."  
Then Mamá will arise from beside the *ventana*  
And knock him as cold as a wilted banana.  
With one solid *golpe*, she'll put out his light.  
Merry Christmas to all, and a *todos*, goodnight!

(Original author unknown.)

Overhaul and valve job by S. Omar Barker.

Gift Memberships to  
Wild West History Association  
Make Wonderful  
Christmas Gifts

See contents page for information

