

Poised to Profit

Fort Pierre and the Development of the Open Range in South Dakota

The open range of the American West, free and available to all, represented opportunity, a place where individuals could prosper through their own hard labors. There, in the popular mind, stockmen roamed, grazing their cattle, horses, and sheep, and succeeding on the basis of their own merits. In South Dakota, the open range existed from the territorial days of the 1860s into the early years of the twentieth century. The development of rangelands west of Fort Pierre, which began with the transfer of land from the Great Sioux Reservation to public hands in 1890, marked an important chapter in the era. The people in and around Fort Pierre were well situated to benefit economically from the opening of the Indian lands. With a heritage rooted in the area and a willingness to adapt, they seized the opportunity to transform the local infrastructure and develop a strong stock-based economy. Although the open-range period would end a short twelve years later, the land west of Fort Pierre offered the prospect of reward for those who linked their livelihoods to it.¹

The Northern Great Plains, including western South Dakota, were originally the domain of the Lakota, or Teton, Sioux Indians who depended for their livelihoods on the herds of bison that grazed the nutritious native grasses. As white settlers arrived in the region in the 1860s, hostilities erupted with the Lakotas and other tribes. The estab-

1. Bob Lee and Dick Williams, *Last Grass Frontier: The South Dakota Stock Grower Heritage* (Sturgis, S.Dak.: South Dakota Stock Growers Association, 1964), pp. 18, 102; Herbert S. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 4th ed., rev. John E. Miller (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2004), pp. 242, 248, 252–53; Gordon Morris Bakken, *Law in the Western United States* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), pp. 72–73; Bert L. Hall, comp., *Roundup Years: Old Muddy to Black Hills*, Centennial ed. (Winner, S.Dak.: Western South Dakota Buck-a-roos, 2000), pp. 19–20.

lishment of the Great Sioux Reservation with the signing of the Fort Laramie Treaty in 1868 temporarily put a stop to the conflict in the territory by setting aside sixty million acres of land for the exclusive use of the Sioux. This tract included all of the land west of the Missouri River that, in 1889, would become the western half of the state of South Dakota. Early stockmen viewed the 1868 treaty with disdain, as it limited their expansion into the vast natural grazing lands of the West River area. The white stockmen saw the lands that had once supported herds of millions of buffalo, now reduced to near nothing, as potential yet inaccessible natural pasturages for large domestic stock.² Within ten years, however, several events occurred that weakened the legal ban on white intrusion.

In 1874, the Black Hills Expedition under Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer reconnoitered the western portion of the Great Sioux Reservation. The expedition discovered gold in the Black Hills, spurring a large and illegal influx of white settlers intent on exploiting this natural resource. White settlers also sought to exploit the region's rich natural grasslands, which Custer described in his 1874 expedition report, noting their potential as choice grazing lands for sheep and cattle.³ The land remained officially closed to white settlers until 1876, however, when another event involving Custer precipitated government action to open and develop the Black Hills area.

During 1875, large numbers of Sioux departed their agencies on the reservation, intent on hunting and conducting raids on the whites who traveled toward the Black Hills in ever-increasing numbers. Though government authorities ordered the Indians to return to the agencies, various bands were unable or unwilling to do so within the prescribed time frame. Consequently, the United States Army mounted a three-pronged offensive against them in the late spring of 1876 in their Pow-

2. Robert M. Utley, *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 42, 57; Jerome A. Greene, *Yellowstone Command: Colonel Nelson A. Miles and the Great Sioux War, 1876–1877* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), pp. 3–4; Schell, *History of South Dakota*, pp. 88–89; Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, p. 103.

3. Hyman Palais, "The Cattle Industry in the Black Hills," *Black Hills Engineer* 28 (1942): 1; John D. McDermott, "The Military Problem and the Black Hills," *South Dakota History* 31 (Fall/Winter 2001): 193–94.

der River hunting grounds. The outcome was the Battle of the Little Bighorn and the killing of Custer and his command in June 1876. A combination of military and political pressure led ultimately to the Black Hills Agreement of 1877, which forced the Sioux to give up the Black Hills as well as their hunting rights in Montana and Wyoming. The United States government ordered the Indians to agencies along the Missouri River and opened the ceded land to develop its mining and grazing resources. Especially important for the later development of the town of Fort Pierre, the agreement further allowed for the construction of wagon roads across specific portions of the reduced reservation to link the mining region of the Black Hills with commercial and agricultural settlements east of the Missouri River. One of these roads would have Fort Pierre as its eastern terminus.⁴

4. Greene, *Yellowstone Command*, pp. 10–14; Schell, *History of South Dakota*, pp. 138–39, 154.



William H. Illingworth's photograph of the Castle Creek valley shows an example of the open grassy meadows, suitable for grazing domestic stock, that Custer found in and near the Black Hills.

Custer's observations about the natural environment for stock raising in the Black Hills proved true. The development of open ranges in and around the Black Hills was so extensive that the area soon became the destination for cattle drives from Texas and Colorado.⁵ Ironically, the region's natural suitability for stock raising was also responsible for rapidly transforming the range into a less desirable place. Signs of overpopulation of livestock appeared as early as 1883 and became such a pressing issue that stockmen appealed to Congress to have the Great Sioux Reservation itself opened. "The cattlemen of the Black Hills," reported the *Sturgis Weekly Record* in October 1883, "are preparing a document for presentation to Congress at its next session, which it is hoped will be a patent argument for the opening of the Sioux reservation. . . . From the best authority there are now between 700,000 and 800,000 stock in the immediate vicinity. Of horses there must be 25,000, and the sheep business is just beginning to show up."⁶

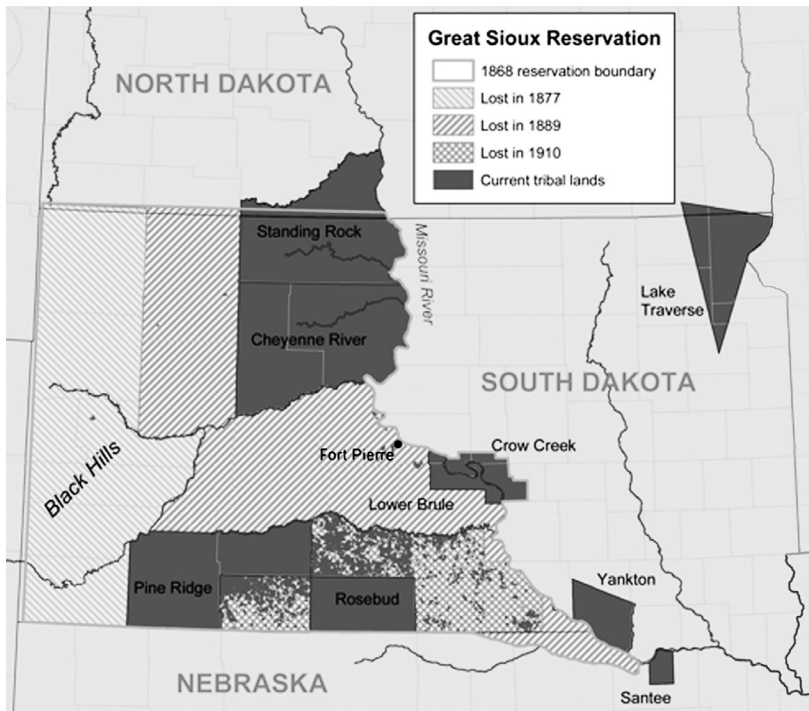
Under the Black Hills Agreement of 1877, the Sioux had retained nearly twenty-two million acres of their former lands. Yet, cattle interests charged, the lands remained idle and undeveloped, with a mere six square miles of the vast expanse actually under cultivation. To counterbalance the effect of overpopulation on existing ranges, cattlemen routinely moved their livestock onto reservation grasslands. Although illegal, this practice usually encountered little or no objection from the Indians, who tended to live close to the agencies where they received their government rations. Attempts to enforce the law typically proved ineffective. On one occasion in 1887, the Cheyenne River agent ordered all whites to remove their cattle from reservation lands or the government would do it for them. Despite the strong words, nothing came of the threat. To complicate enforcement matters further, some of the whites running livestock were men who had married into the tribe and, therefore, had legal rights to do so.⁷

During the 1880s, three different government commissions pressed for further reductions in Indian lands. Cattlemen were prominent

5. Palais, "Cattle Industry in the Black Hills," pp. 10–11.

6. Quoted in Hall, *Roundup Years*, p. 87.

7. Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, pp. 127, 159–60.



Over the two decades following its establishment in 1868, the Great Sioux Reservation was gradually reduced to several smaller reservations.

among the supporters of this movement, which led ultimately to the Sioux Agreement of 1889. The following year, President Benjamin Harrison formally opened nine million acres (in excess of fourteen thousand square miles) of the Great Sioux Reservation. This vast grassland extended from the Missouri River west for approximately one hundred miles and north and south between the Cheyenne and White rivers and into present-day Perkins and northern Meade counties. The area was the size of New Hampshire and Massachusetts combined. This range provided fresh opportunity for the development of the stock-growing industry.⁸

8. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, pp. 247, 299–301; Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Fron-*

Fort Pierre was uniquely suited to benefit from the 1890 decree. A quiet backwater following the decline of the fur-trading industry that flourished from the 1830s into the 1850s, the area had revived in 1876. That year, freighting to the Black Hills commenced via the Deadwood Trail, one of the wagon roads authorized under the Black Hills Agreement. Another provision allowed for a mile-square easement within the Great Sioux Reservation that became the town of Fort Pierre. The white squatters on this square mile of land had no legal claims to it until 1890 and were dependent primarily upon the success of the Deadwood Trail freighting economy. This link is evident in the 1880 census, which indicates that the population of less than three hundred was composed primarily of freighters, teamsters, blacksmiths, and wagon makers.⁹

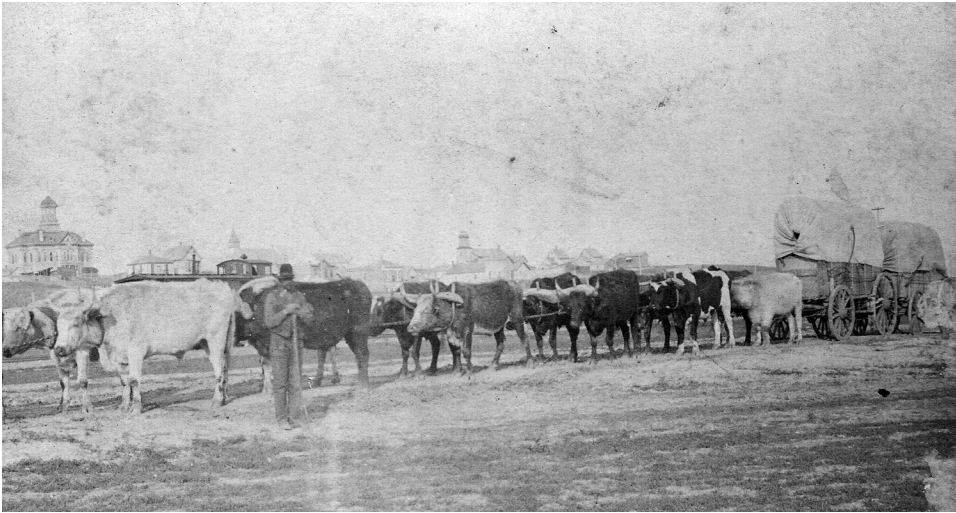
Prior to 1880, the Pierre area, located directly east across the Missouri River on nonreservation land, consisted of only a few scattered ranches, a small ferryboat for river crossing, and a county population of less than three hundred. In the fall of 1880, however, the Chicago & North Western Railroad arrived, bringing with it the excitement of impending growth and development. Within one year, a town site had been platted and numerous buildings were under construction. Within five years, the population of Pierre had grown tenfold to exceed three thousand.¹⁰

Despite the rapid growth that came with the railroad, the expectation that a railroad bridge would soon cross the Missouri and link the two towns remained unfulfilled, and the Great Sioux Reservation remained unopened. Without either of these developments, the economies of both Pierre and Fort Pierre stagnated. In fact, the same technology that had stoked the area's economies in the early 1880s now served to intensify economic stagnation. In 1886, the Fremont, Elkhorn

tier, pp. 128–41; *Pierre Daily Capital*, 11 Feb. 1890; Herbert T. Hoover, “The Sioux Agreement of 1889 and Its Aftermath,” *South Dakota History* 19 (Spring 1989): 65–66, 68, 70.

9. Harold H. Schuler, *A Bridge Apart: History of Early Pierre and Fort Pierre* (Pierre, S.Dak.: By the Author, 1987), p. 28; Manuscript Population Schedule, Fort Pierre, Stanley County, D.T., in U.S., Department of the Interior, Office of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*, National Archives Microfilm Publication 9, roll 112, sheet 1, 29.

10. Schuler, *Bridge Apart*, pp. 70, 72–74.



Until railroads arrived in the Black Hills, bull trains picked up freight at the railheads and carried it to destinations such as Rapid City or Deadwood. William R. Cross photographed this train in Pierre in the early 1880s.

& Missouri Valley Railroad extended a line across northern Nebraska and northward to the Black Hills, marking the decline and precipitous end of the Deadwood Trail and Fort Pierre's freighting industry. The railroad across Nebraska made the delivery of goods and supplies to the Black Hills more efficient, effectively ending the overland trade on which the economy of the area depended.¹¹ Charles Fales, an early settler and resident of the Fort Pierre area until his death in 1967 at the age of one hundred, succinctly summed up this impact. In an interview with Ann Yokley, author of *Grass and Water* in 1955, he stated, "After freighting quit Pierre went dead as a mackerel in 1886–1887."¹²

The economic hardships and frustrations experienced in the late 1880s evaporated with the Sioux Agreement of 1889, which opened nine million acres of reservation land for non-Indian settlement beginning the following spring. The opening of this range was the culmina-

11. *Pierre Daily Capital*, 31 Dec. 1889; Hall, *Roundup Years*, p. 104.

12. "Charlie Fales: life & historical data as told by him to Annie Yokley," box 3343B, folder 6, Annie L. Yokley Papers, State Archives Collection, South Dakota State Historical Society, Pierre.

tion of a dream for many who envisioned using the natural grasslands of western South Dakota for stock growing, and it marked a new chapter in the development of the state's rangeland resources. As the only town situated on the eastern edge of the former reservation land, Fort Pierre was ideally located to become the center of activity for western range development. Furthermore, Fort Pierre lay favorably positioned directly across the Missouri River from the railhead at Pierre. Such access was indispensable to stockmen, for the railroad linked directly to the meat markets of Chicago, the center of the American meat-packing industry in the late nineteenth century.¹³

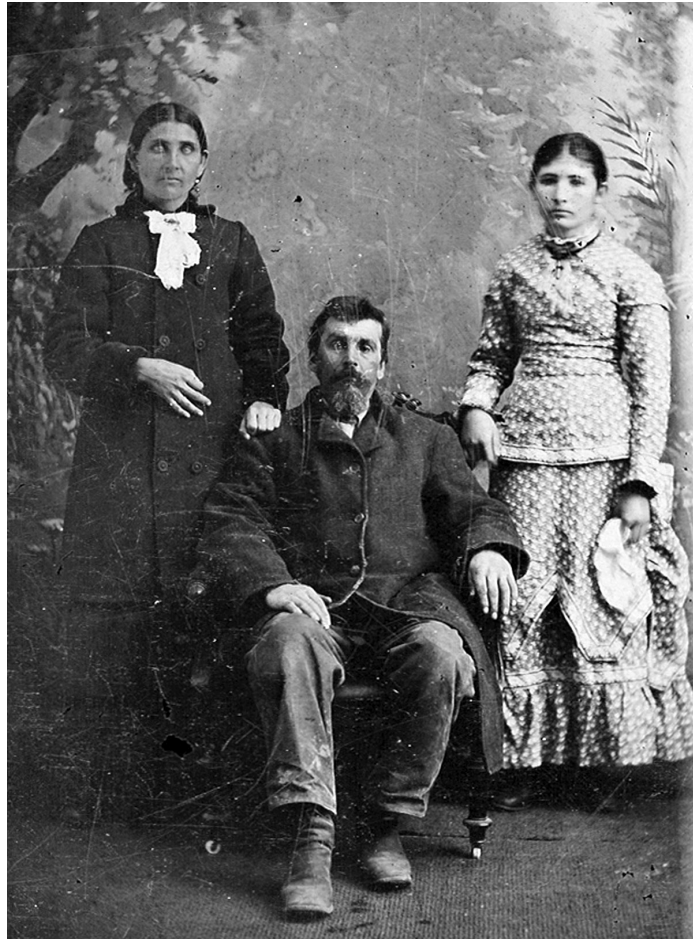
The settlers in and around Fort Pierre were well suited to take advantage of these favorable circumstances. From the outset, local people who had a relatively long presence and intimate knowledge of the area developed and drove the new opportunities. These individuals came from varied backgrounds and included French Canadian fur traders and their offspring of French/Sioux ancestry, as well as European Americans who had worked in freighting on the Deadwood Trail. Among the ranks of the first non-Indian settlers in the region were the employees of fur-trading companies that operated along the Missouri River at and around the post of Fort Pierre until the late 1850s. Many of these men had taken Indian wives and established homes along the bottom lands of the Cheyenne, Bad, and White rivers, which made up part of the West River watershed, years before the reservation opening. On the basis of their wives' heritage, they were able to establish ranching operations on Indian land. Among these first stockmen with fur-trading backgrounds were Basil Claymore, Narcisse Narcelle, Napoleon Duchineau, Romauld Rousseau, Louis La Plante, Sr., Fred and Peter Dupris, Antoine and Ambrose LeBeau, and others.¹⁴

Other early white settlers who had married into Indian families also engaged in ranching before the reservation opening. These men in-

13. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, p. 247; Louise Carroll Wade, *Chicago's Pride: The Stockyards, Packingtowns, and Environs of the Nineteenth Century* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1987), pp. 177–78.

14. Hall, *Roundup Years*, pp. 338, 457; Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, pp. 18, 186; *Timber Lake and Area, 1910–1985* (Timber Lake, S.Dak.: Timber Lake and Area Historical Society, 1984), p. 236.

Some of the earliest stockmen in the West River country, like Romauld Rousseau, began their careers in the fur trade. With Rousseau are his wife Esther and their niece Louise Narcelle.



cluded George Waldron, Arthur Van Metre, James ("Scotty") Philip, L. D. Bentley, Michael Dunn, Buck Williams, and Dan Powell, as well as members of the Rivers, Laferty, and Traversie families and others. Many of these families were large and held allotments approaching one thousand acres, thanks to the right of each child to hold land patents.¹⁵

A number of white freighters who had traversed the Deadwood Trail between Fort Pierre and the Black Hills beginning with the gold

15. *Pierre Daily Capital*, 17 Dec. 1891.

rush of 1876 engaged in stock growing, as well. While some of them had tribal affiliations that allowed them access to reservation lands, others ran cattle on the nonreservation lands immediately adjacent to the Great Sioux Reservation. Because they lacked legal grazing rights, these individuals often paid tribal members to oversee their stock. Among the white settlers involved in this type of operation were George and Dick Mathieson, Tom Philips, Solomon Shoun, Albert and Ulrick Taddicken, Billy Borst, Ledger Labrecque, Rudolph Wickert, Noah Newbanks, and W. I. Walker.¹⁶

All of those who actively ranched in the immediate vicinity of Fort Pierre before the reservation opened played their part in stimulating the economy of the town through trade with the merchants, who in many cases were ranchers, as well. Also among the ranks of the first stockmen were individuals who had settled in adjacent Pierre after the coming of the railroad. These men, who included bankers and investors Eugene Steere and Charles Millet, were speculators who foresaw a promise for prosperity in the development of the area west of Fort Pierre. For these local individuals, the 1890 opening of the reservation represented a long-awaited opportunity for economic growth in Fort Pierre and the surrounding vicinity.¹⁷

The immediate effect of the opening of the Great Sioux Reservation was a flurry of activity as local stockmen sought to pick the best lands and seize early advantage. Most desirable were claims along streams where individuals could establish ranch headquarters from which to run stock on the open range. Marcel Rousseau, a former employee of the American Fur Trading Company and an established rancher and merchant in Fort Pierre, observed the effects of the pent-up demand for West River land when he reported in February of 1890 that East River residents were pouring across the Missouri to claim reservation lands. The newspaper also noted a rush for claims along the Bad River

16. Hall, *Roundup Years*, pp. 63, 164, 479, 493; *Prairie Progress in West Central South Dakota* (N.p.: Historical Society of Old Stanley County, 1968), pp. 46, 284; Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, p. 209; *Tenth Census*.

17. Schuler, *Bridge Apart*, p. 45; Pierre City Directory, July 1883, p. 17, photocopy, State Archives Collection, South Dakota State Historical Society, Pierre; Schell, *History of South Dakota*, p. 247.

as far as eighty-five miles west of Fort Pierre as people sought out desirable sections on which to establish.¹⁸

According to the *Pierre Daily Capital*, several local stockmen were locating new ranches, including Louis and Fred LaPlante, brothers of French Canadian and Sioux ancestry who had established headquarters in the Bad River valley. Also mentioned was George Mathieson, a Fort Pierre merchant, stockman, and former Deadwood Trail freighter who used his acquaintance with Black Tomahawk, a member of the Two Kettle Band of Teton Sioux, to barter for favorable lands on the Bad River. In exchange for three ponies, Mathieson gained a cabin and a quarter section of land twenty miles west of Fort Pierre. His sons filed on this and adjacent parcels, thereby securing enough land to establish

18. *Pierre Daily Capital*, 11, 13 Feb. 1890.



George Mathieson's son Joseph displayed a relaxed attitude for his picture with Black Tomahawk, a family acquaintance.

one of the first white settlers' ranch headquarters on the newly opened range.¹⁹

George Mathieson also played a role in founding one of the financial institutions that funneled capital into the area's stock-growing business and were thus essential to developing the open range. The First National Bank, organized by Mathieson and Pierre banker Eugene Steere, specialized in loans to stockmen and was one of several banks that quickly located in Fort Pierre.²⁰ The bank prospectus, issued in late 1890, promoted the promise of South Dakota's western ranges, which were "admirably adapted to the successful raising of cattle, horses and sheep." Noting that the "Indians and French have raised cattle here for many years," the prospectus went on to state that "Reservation cattle' now bring a higher price in the Chicago market than those from any other part of the west. . . . The stock interests of this region are in their infancy; they have only begun to develop. Prominent cattle men inform us that one million head of cattle can be kept upon the Reservation and fattened for market."²¹ As with the First National Bank, the founders of the Stock Growers Bank in Fort Pierre included an established banker, Charles Millet of Pierre, and Fort Pierre-area rancher James ("Scotty") Philip. Seated on the board of directors was the Reverend Thomas L. Riggs, who ministered to the Sioux at Oahe Mission and was also known for his excellent livestock.²²

19. Ibid., 18 May 1890; Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, p. 128; U.S., Circuit Court, District of South Dakota, Central Division, *Jane E. Waldron, complainant, vs. the United States of America, Black Tomahawk, and Ira A. Hatch, as Indian Agent at Cbeyenne River Indian Agency, defendants* (N.p., 1904), pp. 494–95. This volume contains oral testimony taken in *Waldron v. United States et al.*, a landmark case establishing the equal status of mixed-blood individuals as tribal members. See Harry H. Anderson, "The Waldron–Black Tomahawk Controversy and the Status of Mixed Bloods among the Teton Sioux," *South Dakota History* 21 (Spring 1991): 69–83.

20. *Pierre Daily Capital*, 18 Feb. 1890.

21. "Report of the condition of the First National Bank of Fort Pierre at the close of business October 2, 1890," Verendrye Museum, Fort Pierre, S.Dak.

22. *Prairie Progress*, pp. 12–13. Scotty Philip's nephew details his experiences working as a cowboy for his uncle in *Cowboy Life: The Letters of George Philip*, ed. Cathie Draine (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2007). For the life and work of Thomas Riggs, see *Sunset to Sunset: A Lifetime with My Brothers, the Dakotas* (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 1997).

As locals moved onto the range and developed enterprises linked to its development, the area's newspapers encouraged new settlement by extolling the idea that the common man could make riches. One headline called Fort Pierre "That Coming City on the West Side of the River," and once again, rumors spread that a bridge would soon join Pierre and Fort Pierre. Predictions abounded that Pierre would one day rival the large stock-industry centers of Omaha, Kansas City, and Sioux City, all of which had been sleepy hamlets until the combination of railroad and open range spurred their development.²³

The unorganized reservation lands were quickly organized into Stanley County, with the county seat at Fort Pierre. To appreciate the economic forces driving the politics of the area, one has only to examine the actions of the county commission, whose first act in May 1890 was to form a brand committee consisting of longtime residents George Mathieson and L. D. Bentley.²⁴ In Fort Pierre itself, new construction to house various commercial enterprises began on the principal streets in town, Main and Deadwood. Anticipating a population boom and the need for services that would accompany a land rush, these enterprises included dry goods, hotels, real estate, physicians, restaurants, and even a church, a new entity in Fort Pierre, which had previously lacked formal rule of law and places of worship. Three brothers—Frank, Anton, and Charles Fischer—established Fischer Brothers, a mercantile operation that became a major supplier to both the general population of the town and the outlying ranchers. It served as the principal outfitter of the roundup wagons that would soon be a common sight at Fort Pierre in the spring and fall over the next decade and beyond.²⁵

Along with the construction of stores and banks, the development of new infrastructure at Fort Pierre supported the growth of the stock industry in the area. Although the town was ideally situated across the Missouri from the railhead at Pierre, the means for crossing the river were limited. Until a bridge could be built, a modern ferry was needed to facilitate the transportation of people and, more importantly,

23. *Pierre Daily Capital*, 31 Dec. 1889.

24. *Ibid.*, 1 May 1890.

25. *Ibid.*, 15 Feb., 1 Mar. 1890; Irene Caldwell, ed., *Bad River (Wakpa Sica), Ripples, Rages, and Residents* (Fort Pierre, S.Dak.: Bad River Women's Club, 1983), pp. 80–82.



Indicative of the new construction going on throughout Fort Pierre, the Stock Growers State Bank occupied a wood-frame building during the 1890s.

large numbers of stock to and from the range. To meet this need, local investors Eugene Steere, Frank Ketchum (a Fort Pierre merchant) and James Dowd (a Fort Pierre resident and former Deadwood Trail freighter) formed the Fort Pierre Steam Transportation Company. The Chicago & North Western Railroad later provided this support in the form of two steam-powered ferryboats specifically designed to carry livestock on their decks, penned in by strong railings.²⁶

Additionally, locals proposed to build a temporary bridge across the Missouri River for people and stock to use when the river was free of ice. Fort Pierre citizens promptly pledged financing for a pontoon bridge,²⁷ and construction of this floating causeway began in the summer of 1890. One commentary on the project stated, "The pontoon bridge, when completed and lighted, will be one of the finest drives in the state."²⁸ The bridge opened later in the summer and remained a

26. *Pierre Daily Capital*, 5 Mar. 1890; *Tenth Census*; Schuler, *Bridge Apart*, pp. 58–59.

27. *Pierre Daily Capital*, 9 Mar. 1890.

28. *Ibid.*, 9 Aug. 1890.

seasonal fixture for stock transit until nearly the end of the open-range period.²⁹

As the infrastructure developed, stock growers proceeded with cattle roundups as they had in the past, but these events proved to be small affairs in comparison with those that came later. In July 1890, the *Pierre Daily Capital* reported, “Scotty Philips [*sic*] yesterday evening loaded a special stock train with about four hundred head of cattle and started them for Chicago.”³⁰ The next month, Louis LaPlante shipped two hundred head of cattle, followed shortly by shipments from Charles Waldron, George Mathieson, and Arthur Van Metre.³¹ “These cattle were fattened on the so-called desert reservation,” the newspaper boasted. “Great desert, that!”³²

In the spring of 1890, a number of cattle growers and cattle-syndicate investors had met at Fort Pierre to form a stockmen’s associa-

29. Schuler, *Bridge Apart*, pp. 61–62.

30. *Pierre Daily Capital*, 27 July 1890.

31. *Ibid.*, 10 Aug. 1890.

32. *Ibid.*, 9 Aug. 1890.



Pontoon bridges on the Missouri River provided a temporary but relatively cheap way to connect the towns of Pierre and Fort Pierre. This example was constructed about 1891.

tion, electing George Waldron as president. By late 1891, this group, which defined individual ranchers' grazing areas, had incorporated as the Missouri River Stockmen's Association. Membership rose to thirty during the organization's first year, with virtually all area cattlemen as participants, illustrating their intent to foster the cooperative development of the range. Membership owners at that time had eleven thousand head of livestock on the West River grasslands.³³

During 1890, the spread of the Ghost Dance among the Sioux Indians, who now occupied five smaller reservations in western South Dakota, posed a potential threat to white settlers and temporarily delayed the development of stock interests west of Fort Pierre. The Ghost Dance movement had a violent conclusion at Wounded Knee at the end of that year, but the ranchers' unease persisted. In January 1891, the *Pierre Daily Capital* reported, "The stockmen along Bad River will remove their stock to within a mile or two of Fort Pierre, so that in case of any trouble with the Bad River or Cheyenne [River] Indians, they will be able to transfer their stock across the river."³⁴ The unrest did not manifest itself in significant range losses for the stockmen in the Fort Pierre area, however, and in a letter to one investor, a Fort Pierre National Bank officer correctly predicted only a temporary dampening of development in and around Fort Pierre.³⁵

A renewed enthusiasm for developing the range became apparent in the spring of 1891 in a succession of newspaper articles and advertisements designed to fuel excitement. "Ho Everyone that Thirsteth for Riches," read one headline, while the article went on to describe the "late great Sioux Reservation" as having the "best conditions of any vacant lands in the United States. . . the finest land the sun ever shown upon." The same article touted the "Greatest Stock Country in the World" where cattle grew fat "summer and winter without a spear of hay or peck of grain" and there was "room for millions more." The construction of "mammoth packing houses" and woolen mills was predicted for Pierre, envisioned to become a natural distribution point

33. Ibid., 30 Apr. 1890, 7 Dec. 1891, 2 Jan. 1892.

34. Ibid., 9 Jan. 1891.

35. Ibid., 8 July 1891; Eugene Steere, letter book, Fort Pierre National Bank, 23 Dec. 1890, Verendrye Museum.

once an extension of the railroad connected the town with the Black Hills.³⁶ In glowing reports, cattlemen told of wintering their stock with few losses and no expense aside from their cowboys. One W. E. Heron claimed his cattle to be in better condition than his corn-fed Iowa stock.³⁷ Such publicity encouraged even more interest and growth in the stock-raising industry west of Fort Pierre.

The joint open-range spring roundup that commenced in June of 1891 was larger than any previous event. The *Pierre Daily Capital* reported it as comprising some one hundred cowboys from the Black Hills area and some fifty cowboys from Fort Pierre. The two groups met up at the forks of the Bad River in the heart of the new open range, where, it was reported, the roundup crews were “turning off 1,000 cattle a day . . . all in splendid condition.” There were reports of only small losses due to hostile Indians.³⁸

Following the suppression of the Ghost Dance, activity on the range took on a heightened pace. The cattle syndicates the West River residents and Pierre investors had formed the previous year used their pooled capital resources to travel to the southern plains to buy steers for stocking the new range. The cattlemen were especially eager to get stock to the grasslands, for it took two to three years of growth before steers would be ready for market.³⁹ In the spring of 1891, W. H. Gleckler reported that the First National Bank of Fort Pierre had made loans to ten stock buyers in a single week. Thanks to this financing, some fifty thousand head of cattle were expected to be moved onto the range west of Fort Pierre that year. The banker expounded upon the potential wealth that would be facilitated by the borrowed capital. Cattle could be bought cheaply in Colorado and New Mexico, and the Dakota range was the place where they could fatten profitably.⁴⁰

The newspapers closely followed the activities of stock buyers throughout the spring of 1891 as they traveled to the southern plains and elsewhere in their quest for stock. “Yesterday and the day before,”

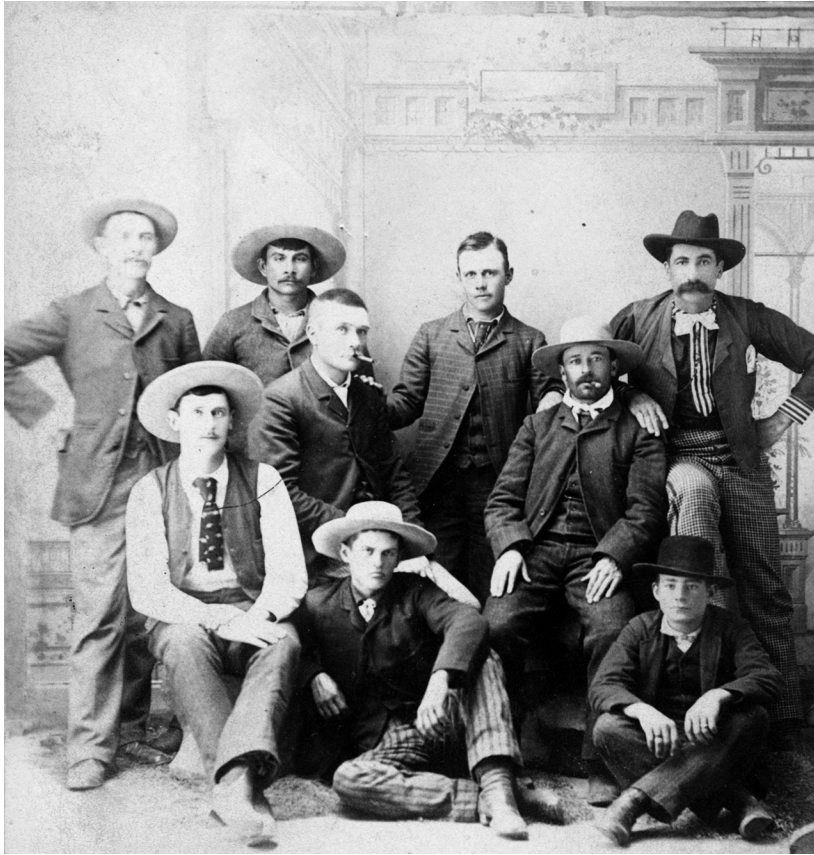
36. *Pierre Daily Capital*, 10 Mar. 1891.

37. *Ibid.*, 5 Apr. 1891.

38. *Ibid.*, 22 June. *See also* *ibid.*, 8 July 1891.

39. *Ibid.*, 29 Apr. 1891.

40. *Ibid.*, 21 Apr., 14 July 1891.



These cowboys, photographed in front of R. L. Kelly's studio backdrop, were among the hundreds who worked the open range west of Fort Pierre. Standing, from left, are Chris Jensen, Paul Rousseau, Joseph D. Mathieson, and Ed Narcelle. Seated in the middle row are Billy Napoleon, Tom Hetlund, and Manuel Sylva. Amadee Rousseau and Eddie Stipes are seated in front.

related one account, "some five or six of the big stockmen west [of the Missouri] left for Texas, where they will pick up a large number of cattle to add to their already large herds."⁴¹ Two weeks earlier, George Waldron and his son Charley were reported as having left to buy several carloads of horses.⁴² In May, the *Pierre Daily Capital* noted that

41. Ibid., 30 Apr. 1891.

42. Ibid., 19 Mar. 1891.

“Charley Waldron, the big horse ranchman west of the river will leave for Washington state in a few days for the purpose of buying up from 200 to 1000 head of horses . . . and with help hired out there will drive the horses through to this country along the route of the Northern Pacific railroad.”⁴³ Tolbert Maupin journeyed to “Indian Territory,” and George Mathieson traveled to Texas on similar missions.⁴⁴

Mathieson next moved on to Trinidad, Colorado, where he planned to find “plenty of young cattle at reasonable figures to fill out the order of the cattle syndicate.”⁴⁵ A subsequent news story reported, “George Mathieson writes from the Pan Handle country where he went to buy cattle that he will have no trouble in buying plenty of two and three year old steers at very low prices. The cattle he buys will be shipped by rail to western Nebraska where they will be taken from the cars and driven across the country to the head of Bad River.”⁴⁶ Mathieson concluded his trip at the end of May, having purchased two thousand head for a “company of Pierre and Fort Pierre citizens” who then sent a party of cowboys to bring the livestock home.⁴⁷ At the same time, new stock came in from the east side of the river via the ferryboat *Jim Leighton*. In late May 1891, Scotty Philip received 650 head for his West River range, while the Williams and Heald syndicate received another 200 head.⁴⁸

The open range was not exclusively the domain of the large-scale cattle raisers; both banker Gleckler and cattleman W. I. Walker endorsed the future of sheep raising on the range.⁴⁹ Similarly, S. S. Clough of the Citizen’s National Bank of Pierre and Stock Growers Bank of Fort Pierre promoted cattle and sheep raising west of the Missouri. He went on to predict that the development of rangelands, along with the harvesting of “one or two good crops,” would help to revive the building of railroads in the area.⁵⁰

43. Ibid., 12 May 1891.

44. Ibid., 29 Apr. 1891.

45. Ibid., 8 May 1891.

46. Ibid., 10 May 1891.

47. Ibid., 21, 30 May 1891.

48. Ibid., 21 May 1891.

49. Ibid., 26 May 1891.

50. Ibid., 1 May 1891.



Equipped with high railings, the steamboat *Jim Leighton* was frequently employed to ferry cattle between Pierre and Fort Pierre.

The cattle syndicate at Fort Pierre continued stocking the range throughout the summer of 1891. No sooner had one purchase been delivered than another buying trip was started. In late June, W. H. Gleckler and George Mathieson left on a second buying trip to the southern plains. In New Mexico, they purchased another two thousand head, which they shipped to Olerichs, South Dakota, in July.⁵¹ In August, Mathieson made his third trip of the season for the Fort Pierre syndicate, this time traveling to Colorado, where he bought cattle and drove them cross-country to the Bad River range. He sold some to the United States government to fulfill a contract for annuities for the Sioux on the Rosebud Indian Reservation, while the remainder grazed on the Bad River range. Banker Gleckler reported glowingly that the cattle were “filled up . . . with rich reservation grasses.”⁵²

51. Ibid., 22 June, 14 July 1891.

52. Ibid., 25 Aug. 1891.

The frequent cattle-buying trips indicated that there was ample room on the range and no shortage of interests to finance the stocking endeavor. These early efforts by buyers from Fort Pierre using pooled capital, much of it local, succeeded in bringing thousands of cattle and horses to the open range. As time went on, more of that capital came from outside sources, including Eastern and foreign investors. The recorded numbers of cattle rounded up from West River, transported across the Missouri from Fort Pierre to Pierre, and shipped east from the Pierre railhead grew from ten thousand head in 1891 (no value recorded) to eight thousand head in 1892 (value \$360,000) to fifteen thousand head in 1893 (value \$750,000).⁵³

53. James M. Robinson, *West from Fort Pierre* (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1974), pp. 93–95; *Pierre Daily Capital*, 30 Nov. 1891, 14 Dec. 1892, 24 June 1894.



George Mathieson, photographed with his wife Kate by R. L. Kelly around 1891, was one of the “magnates” of the Fort Pierre open-range cattle industry.

Even with greater numbers of cattle feeding on the range, the variables of weather and economics could have an adverse effect on the stockmen's livelihood in any given season. The year 1894 in western South Dakota exemplified one in which natural and economic conditions both took their toll on the industry and its local investors. In 1894, the area experienced its first dry season since the opening of the Great Sioux Reservation four years earlier. Range grasses were in poor condition that spring and, as a result, ranchers lacked the feed needed to sustain livestock for the full growing season. Consequently, many chose to ship their cattle in June after the spring roundup.⁵⁴

These forced, early sales encountered a market with lower cattle prices, resulting in economic hardship for the livestock operations and dependent businesses centered at Fort Pierre. The First National Bank of Fort Pierre, for example, reported slow collections from stock growers due to a combination of lower market prices and a tendency on the part of stockmen to hold rather than sell their animals in the hope that prices would rise. The subsequent poor cash flow left the bank without funds to pay investors, precipitating its closing and the liquidation of its assets. William Gleckler and George Mathieson, principal officers for the bank, held a roundup of syndicate cattle the following spring and sold off the herds bearing their brand to satisfy stockholders.⁵⁵

Other economic forces in 1894 also impacted the shipping of livestock from the Pierre railhead. Stock growers complained about the high rates charged by the Chicago & North Western Railroad to take cattle from Pierre to the Chicago market. Cattlemen were thus prompted to seek out lower rates and ship on other railroads at Chamberlain and elsewhere. In October, Louis LaPlante, Noah Newbanks, and Truels Madsen, along with the Barton and Williams and Gleckler and Mathieson syndicates, all decided to ship from the railhead at Cody, Nebraska. Their actions and similar moves by other stockmen resulted in a steep decline in the numbers of stock leaving from the railhead at Pierre. In 1894, only seven thousand cattle were shipped from Pierre, a sharp contrast to the prior year's shipments of fifteen

54. *Pierre Daily Capital*, 28 June 1894.

55. *Ibid.*, 30 Dec. 1894, 21 May 1895.

thousand head and substantially less than the preseason estimate of twenty thousand head.⁵⁶

With organizational, financial, and transportation systems in place at Fort Pierre and neighboring Pierre, the stock-growing industry after 1894 took on a familiar seasonal cycle. Typically, two cattle roundups occurred each year, one in the spring to brand calves, and another in the fall to gather mature cattle to ship to market. The Missouri River Stockmen's Association in Fort Pierre met to establish the dates, which generally coincided with roundups coordinated by stockmen's associations operating in and around the Black Hills. The number of wagons needed was determined, and "wagon bosses" were selected. Additionally, the association outlined each wagon's route and assigned areas for rounding up stock. Finally, crews were hired and horses, wagons, and supplies obtained for the roundup crews. The effort involved both members and nonmembers of the association who pooled their resources for the event.⁵⁷ The roundup grew in scale each year, as the numbers of cattle on the range increased. In 1891, the spring roundup crews originating from Fort Pierre consisted of just fifty riders, who rounded up a total of eleven thousand head of cattle. By contrast, the Missouri River Stockmen's Association organized between 250 and 300 riders at Fort Pierre for the spring roundup in 1899, when roundup crews held some fifty thousand cattle on the Bad River.⁵⁸

The numbers of cattle held on the range grew tremendously in the short span of a dozen years. By 1903, the Missouri River Stockmen's Association reported some two hundred thousand head owned by its members.⁵⁹ This larger scale of operations required more sophisticated means of conducting transactions between buyers and sellers. Summarizing the 1899 spring roundup, the *Pierre Daily Capital* reported: "The evolution of the cattle handling business in this city is marked. A few years ago the sellers and buyers did their business on the curb, the man with cattle to sell running them into the railroad yards or holding them

56. Caldwell, *Bad River*, p. 134; *Pierre Daily Capital*, 29 Dec. 1894.

57. Hall, *Roundup Years*, p. 391; Schell, *History of South Dakota*, p. 249.

58. *Pierre Daily Capital*, 2 Jan. 1892; *Pierre Capital-Journal*, 20 May 1899.

59. *Pierre Daily Capital*, 2 Jan. 1892; *Sioux Stock Journal* (Fort Pierre, S.Dak.), 29 May 1903.



Loading Chockwagons at Ft. Pierre. Tom Jones on horse.



several miles [out] on the prairie, then hunt[ing] along the street for a buyer. This year the regular cattle handlers established fixed offices where they meet their customers and transact their business and now work is in progress on the new stock yards where offices will be fitted up and men on hand to care for stock at all times.”⁶⁰

New holding yards were also constructed on the west side of the Missouri River at Fort Pierre to facilitate the large numbers of cattle and horses brought off the West River range. From the Fort Pierre yards, cattlemen either drove stock across the seasonal pontoon bridge or loaded them into special stock ferryboats for the cross-river trip. From the Chicago & North Western stockyards at Pierre, the animals were loaded into special stock trains for shipment. The Pierre buyers or the stockmen themselves ordered these trains for the speedy delivery of their livestock to the market at Chicago, where they negotiated sale prices. Newspaper accounts from the era recorded the departure of these trains from Pierre, noting the stock owners’ names, the number of train cars required, and the prices realized at the Chicago market.⁶¹

The earliest cattle placed on the West River open range were the traditional “Texas longhorns” of the southern plains. Eventually, however, other breeds took their place. In the spring of 1900, the *Pierre Capital Journal* reported on this evolution: “The shipments this year will be in contrast with past years for the main reason that cattlemen are demanding high grade cattle. . . . The Hereford appears to be in the greatest demand, but a number of Shorthorns will be placed. The day of the scrub [Texas longhorn] is passed, and quality and not price is what will tempt buyers in the future.”⁶² The following week, the news-

60. *Pierre Capital-Journal*, 29 June 1899.

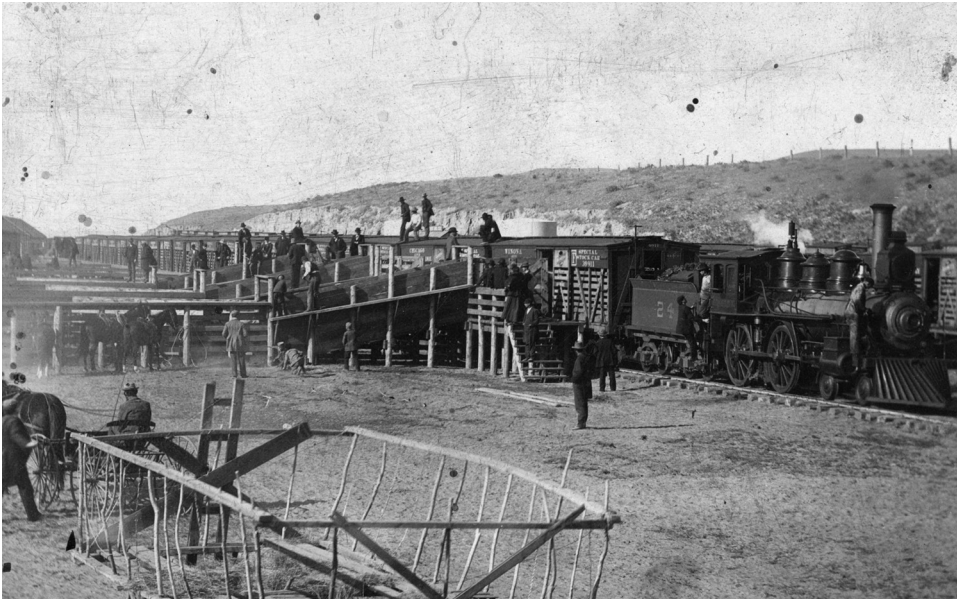
61. Schuler, *Bridge Apart*, p. 34.

62. *Pierre Capital-Journal*, 15 Mar. 1900.

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Top: Traveling photographer P. H. Kellogg captured these two wagons fitting out for a roundup at the Fischer Brothers’ store in Fort Pierre around 1903.

Bottom: Mobility was critical for work on the broad expanses of the open range, as this roundup camp photographed by Kellogg on the Cheyenne River demonstrates.



By 1896, the Pierre stockyards had been improved to include ramps for loading cattle directly onto stock cars waiting on a railroad siding.

paper noted that most of the arriving cattle were “high grade stock, and buyers are showing up on the market for such stock. In the last train which came in there was a car load of Hereford bulls for the herd of the Minnesota & Dakota Cattle company [James (“Scotty”) Philip, foreman], to help grade up their herd. Several others have shipped in short-horn bulls for smaller herds, and the stock which goes out from here in the future will be of good grade and command top prices.”⁶³

Other changes were overtaking the open range west of Fort Pierre, as well. Since the opening of the Great Sioux Reservation in 1890, the area had experienced only a small influx of settlers. In the ten years between 1890 and 1900, the population of Fort Pierre and Stanley County grew from around fourteen hundred to somewhat less than eighteen hundred. Over the next five years, however, the population swelled to more than thirty-one hundred.⁶⁴

63. Ibid., 24 Mar. 1900.

64. Schuler, *Bridge Apart*, p. 36; Schell, *History of South Dakota*, p. 253.

Several factors stood behind this in-migration. Homesteaders had typically favored the more humid, tillable areas east of the Missouri River over the dry lands of the West River region. The initial opening of the reservation had drawn stock interests but few homesteaders. Those who took up lands experienced the drought conditions of those early years, and many left, discouraged at the viability of farming the arid land. The trend reversed in the early 1900s with an ending of the drought, overall improvement in the national economy, and an upswing in railroad construction in the West River region. There was also ample open land available. In a series of agreements enacted between 1904 and 1913, the federal government opened more than four million acres on the Rosebud, Lower Brule, Pine Ridge, Cheyenne River, and Standing Rock reservations, or nearly half of the remaining Indian lands, to white settlement.⁶⁵

65. Howard W. Ottoson et al., *Land and People in the Northern Plains Transition Area* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963), p. 46; Schell, *History of South Dakota*, p. 253.



P. H. Kellogg photographed these men branding cattle in the Fort Pierre stockyards around 1904.

The demand for land was enormous. Throughout the period, the number of applicants far exceeded the homesteads available, and lotteries were needed to distribute claims. Homesteaders keen on taking up small tracts of land poured into the sparsely occupied area dominated by cattlemen. Outfitted and supplied by merchants at Fort Pierre, these new settlers brought a new way of using the land that had up to that time been the realm of the stock grower. The opening of the West River range in 1890 had witnessed the suspension of herd laws to encourage stock raising. With the arrival of increasing numbers of homesteaders looking to develop the land for farming, this situation reversed. The homesteaders' desire to protect their crops from free-ranging cattle resulted in a forceful call for the reintroduction of herd laws that made the rancher responsible for crop damage his free ranging livestock might inflict.⁶⁶

Setting the stage for this final distribution of surplus Indian lands were two events that took place in 1902. In that year, the federal government began charging a fee of one dollar per head to operators who unlawfully allowed their cattle to graze on Indian lands. At the same time, President Theodore Roosevelt ordered all cattle operators' fences, which were intended to keep homesteaders out, to be removed from the public domain. These developments prompted the legendary roundup of 1902, in which large numbers of cattle, horses, and sheep were moved off the former free range of public and Indian lands west of the Missouri.⁶⁷

Without open lands for free grazing, the stockmen of Fort Pierre, with their operations in Stanley County and rangelands farther west, could foresee major change. An editorial in the *Pierre Daily Capital Journal* in the spring of 1903 reflected the widely accepted view. Entitled "Probably the Last One," it related:

Fort Pierre is in annual excitement over the gathering of booted and spurred range riders who are in for the annual spring round-up for branding the spring crop of calves, and locating the herds of different owners on some particular range. What gives it more than usual importance is that this prob-

66. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, pp. 253, 257; Caldwell, *Bad River*, p. 81; *Sioux Stock Journal*, 29 May, 21 Aug. 1903; *Fairplay* (Fort Pierre, S.Dak.), 18 Mar. 1904.

67. Hall, *Roundup Years*, p. 19; Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, pp. 222–24.

ably is the last range round-up of eastern Stanley county, the new settler and fences being the doom of the range riders work in that section. . . . Reports of crop acreage and condition of wheat and corn now fill the papers of the older settled portion of the range, instead of the old matters of range feed; condition of stock; and round-up progress. It is the passing of the old days and the coming of the new to western South Dakota, and while milking cows and following the plow is not so picturesque nor so exciting as the old free life of the range, the time has come for the change, and the milk cow and plow horse are to take the place of the steer and broncho.⁶⁸

Further change came to the range and to the people in and around Fort Pierre in the familiar form of the railroad. The arrival of the Fremont, Elkhorn & Missouri Valley Railroad to the Black Hills in 1886 had ended Fort Pierre's economic significance as the terminus for the Deadwood Trail. Yet, the extension of the Chicago & North Western line to Pierre, combined with the opening of the Great Sioux Reservation in 1890, had assured Fort Pierre an important role in the stock-growing economy of western South Dakota. In late 1907, a new railroad bridge linked Pierre and Fort Pierre, allowing the Chicago & North Western to extend westward and making the transportation of homesteaders and supplies more efficient. With the crossing of the open range, Fort Pierre became the outfitter for the new homesteader rather than the range rider.⁶⁹

By late 1907, the railroad was complete to Rapid City. Doane Robinson, secretary for the South Dakota State Historical Society, took a trip over the Chicago & North Western Railroad extension from Fort Pierre to Rapid City that year and observed: "The valley of the Bad River is always beautiful but it is especially so this season with the autumn colors upon the trees. . . . Stockmen long ago got hold of the land along the streams for range purposes. At intervals we came upon typical old time ranches with the low log houses and outbuildings and extensive corrals and occasionally a new claim shanty squats on the hillside or peeps out from among the breaks. The region is sparsely settled at present. . . . The valley is, however, beautifully wooded and the soil is fertile."⁷⁰

68. *Pierre Daily Capital-Journal*, 20 May 1903.

69. Caldwell, *Bad River*, p. 81; Schuler, *Bridge Apart*, pp. 64–65.

70. *Fairplay*, 8 Nov. 1907.



In 1907, Fort Pierre finally acquired a rail link with Pierre when the Chicago & North Western Railroad bridge spanning the Missouri River was completed.

As homesteaders moved in, stockmen moved off the range to which they had possessed almost exclusive rights for a dozen years or more. Large stock growers closed out their operations or shifted them to the Indian reservations, where large tracts could be leased. Smaller operators reduced their herds, and many chose to breed higher-grade cattle such as Herefords, which could utilize more compact pasturages and were favored by the market.⁷¹ The open-range area west of Fort Pierre disappeared. Just a short time earlier, with the 1890 opening of nine million acres of the Great Sioux Reservation, the people in and around Fort Pierre had proved to be in the right place at the right time. The local population demonstrated its adaptability, taking the steps needed to seize the opportunities the open range offered. Ranching and its associated activities came to dominate the economy, politics, and social culture of the Fort Pierre area and, indeed, came to symbolize the American West itself.

71. *Stockgrower's News* (Fort Pierre, S.Dak.), 26 Dec. 1907, 12 Mar. 1908.

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