Dawson, Goodnight and the Great American Cattle Drives

This paper gives a brief account of the Dawson-Goodnight-Loving connection and how John Dawson came to settle near Cimarron, New Mexico.

Early Cattle Herds of the Plains

In 1521 the first cattle arrived in the Southwest from Spain and twenty years later, Coronado drove a herd of 1500 longhorns into the Southwest that would later interbreed to produce the Longhorn breed we recognize today. By 1836, Texas was host to six times as many cattle as inhabitants. Prior to the Civil War, most herders were Mexican vaqueros and it is from their culture that many common terms and customs derive, such as the lariat, branding irons and boots. Unbranded cattle were later named after a Texas Lawyer Sam Maverick who had let his herd roam unmarked.

Cattle were used primarily for their hides, tallow and horns and had relatively little value as most Americans at the time ate pork and Indians much preferred buffalo to beef. It was said that: "A man's poverty was estimated by the number of cattle he possessed." As population centers in the East grew, the demand for beef rose spurring a few Texans to drive small herds to New Orleans. In 1852, two men from Illinois drove 700 longhorns over 2000 miles from Texas across the Midwest to arrive in downtown NYC two years later, making a 400% profit on their investment. During the 1850s some herds were driven up from Texas to the first railheads in Missouri but Longhorn cattle carried a tick to which they but not other cattle were immune. Outbreaks of "Texas fever" led local farmers in Kansas and Missouri first to set up blockades and then to pass legislation prohibiting Texas herds from entering their states. With the outbreak of the Civil War, the northern movement of cattle ceased, in part because most beef was being sent eastward across the Mississippi River to feed the Confederate army.

With the discovery of gold in California (1849) and Colorado (1959), other ranchmen began to consider supplying beef to miners in the Far West. One such was John Wesley Iliff (1832-78), an Ohioan who settled in the Pikes Peak area during 1859 gold rush. Three years later he started a cattle ranch on the South Platte in northeastern Colorado and by the end of the Civil War was an important buyer of cattle.

The First Cattle Drives

During the Civil War cattle growth went unchecked – by war's end there were over five million mavericks roaming throughout Texas. Returning Confederate soldiers in their 20s needed work so they became drovers. Approximately one-third of all drovers were either black or Mexican. The Indian Wars of the 1860s that helped decimate the buffalo also brought easterners west to serve as soldiers and to man the newly constructed forts. As Indian tribes were pacified and confined to reservations, local Agencies were organized to help provide for their needs. The government thus required large amounts of beef to supply both the Indians as well as the soldiers who had fought them.

At the end of the war in 1865, Philip Armour and Gustavus Swift, in anticipation of an increase in beef demand, built meatpacking plants in Chicago, a growing town linked by rail to Sedalia, Missouri. Ranchers soon learned that cattle which sold for $3-4 a head in Texas could

be worth ten times as much in Missouri. Thus the Sedalia Trail (1866-67) following the old Shawnee Indian Trail was born (most cattle trails followed previous Indian trails). As the initial investments in a trail drive were considerable (oxen teams, wagons, drovers were needed) and Americans were generally broke after the war, most initial drives were financed by wealthy European capitalists and royalty.

Although cattle drives were long and tedious, often lasting for weeks, the men looked forward to them as a relief from the boredom associated with the menial chores of mending fences and corrals, looking for strays, and branding. A typical drive would be about 700-1000 miles in length with the 2000-3000 cattle walking four abreast, attended by a crew of about twenty men, including a wrangler, cook and Trail Boss, the latter being addressed as "Mister." Each would be paid $100 for their work, with the Trail Boss getting more. Often the Trail Boss would have his own cattle included in the herd.

The order of the drive was important – the Trail Boss would ride ahead scouting for water, pasture and the best route, while up front and to one side would be the cook and chuck wagon. The cattle would usually be guided by a lead steer who knew the trail from numerous previous trips. Of all the lead steers, the most famous was Charles Goodnight's "Old Blue." Alongside the herd would ride the Point, Swing and Flankers, with the Drag bringing up the rear and choking in the dust; drovers would change position throughout the drive The wrangler working the remuda would be near the rear to one side and each drover would have about a dozen horses in the remuda, switching out every three hours. Some of a drover's horses would be dedicated to a particular task, such as riding herd at night or branding. The herd typically moved about one mile per hour, or about ten to fifteen miles per day.

While Indians, who were mainly interested in stealing horses, and rustlers, who would take anything, were constant threats, most feared by the cowmen was the stampede, particularly at night. Any sudden noise – a thunderclap, startled rabbit or broken twig – could set the herd running, so horses were kept saddled during the night. In case of a stampede men would dash to the front, hoping their horses would avoid the prairie dog holes, to try to turn the lead group into a spiral heading back into the side of the herd and thus set them milling again. Besides the danger to men and cattle, a four mile run could burn off fifty pounds from a steer and at the end of a drive, meat meant money. Men would therefore speak to one another in low voices and would often sing at night to soothe a jittery herd. Night shifts would change every two to four hours with time being told by the rotation of the Big Dipper around the North Star.

But the highlight of every drive was getting to the end of the line, whether it was Abilene, Dodge or Denver. As soon as the herd was sold, the men received their pay, and just as quickly spent it – on whiskey, a bath, women, and cards, and probably in that order. If any was left for the trip back, a new hat or pair of boots might be bought. Most drovers were young and single and lived for the excitement and danger of the trail. Those who were older and had families saved their earnings and looked at the drive as a business; these men, such as Goodnight and Dawson, wanted their own land and hoped one day to become wealthy cattle barons. And one day each would.

Loving, Goodnight and Dawson

Oliver Loving (1812-67) was a Kentucky farmer who moved to the Brazos River Valley in north-central Texas, south of present-day Wichita Falls, with his family in 1855. He received 640 acres to farm and for a time ran a country store. By 1857 he had acquired 1000 acres and had begun to raise cattle. In that and the following year Loving drove small herds to Illinois along the Sedalia Trail.

Charles Goodnight (1836-1929) was born in Illinois and moved with his family to Texas when he was ten. In 1857 he joined the Texas Rangers and would later serve with them during the Civil War fighting the Plains Indians. In that same year, he and his stepbrother Wes Sheek formed a cattle partnership and moved about 400 head from central Texas north to the Brazos Valley. During this ten-year stay Goodnight met fellow rancher Oliver Loving.

John Barkley Dawson (1830-1918) was born in Western Kentucky into a prominent family who had settled in America before the Revolution. When John was three, his family move to the Missouri frontier; at age ten they moved again, this time to farm along the Arkansas River near Fort Smith, Arkansas. In 1853 his family uprooted once more, taking a wagon train through Pueblo, Denver, and Salt Lake City to the gold fields of Grass Valley, California. Two years later they returned to Arkansas. Despite having little formal education, the seemingly constant travels throughout the West had taught John much and by the time he arrived back in Arkansas he was ready to go it alone.

With his father's help Dawson bought a small herd of cattle (probably about 500) and immediately drove them to California, for by this time the miners and settlers of California's gold country had decimated the area's wild game. John knew that there was much money to be made in Grass Valley, but rather by selling to prospectors than being one. Dawson's drive probably followed the Arkansas River into Colorado, then north to Fort Laramie, Wyoming, before turning west through Utah, Nevada and on into Northern California – a route much the same as his family had taken two years earlier.

While in Fort Smith, either before or after his drive to California, Dawson met Kit Carson who told him of "free" land in Young County, Texas near Fort Belknap along the Brazos River. In 1857, the Dawson family moved to Texas, receiving almost 1,000 acres to settle (320 to John and 640 to his married father). It was there that Dawson befriended fellow ranchers Charles Goodnight and Oliver Loving.

The Dawson Trail (1859-61)

In 1859, gold was discovered in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. From his experiences in California's gold country, John Dawson knew that Colorado was now a ready market for beef – and 1500 miles closer than California. He left for the Pike's Peak area in the fall of 1859, striking north from the Brazos Valley to the Arkansas River, then heading west into Colorado Territory to Pueblo, following the identical route he had used earlier during his cattle drive to California. This trail, sometimes known as the Dawson Trail (but never confused with the gold trail to Alaska), would later be extended by others into South Texas and called the Western Trail to Dodge City.

On a second drive in the summer of 1860, as Trail Boss for Goodnight and Loving and having a financial stake in the drive as well, Dawson went as far as Denver, but the return entry of the men into Texas the following spring was delayed by Union authorities as the Civil War had now begun. It was only through the intercession of Kit Carson and Lucien Maxwell that the men were allowed to return home. On this trip Dawson was accompanied by his good friend Tom Stockton from San Antonio. At age 30, John was now a successful cattleman and that fall met and married Tom's half-sister, Edwena. When Edwena died two years later, Dawson and Stockton joined the Texas Rangers, spending three to four months each year defending the Texas frontier against marauding Indian and Mexican raiders.

The Goodnight-Loving Trail (1866-85)

Charles Goodnight and John Dawson both knew that cattle could driven west and sold to Indians, miners, soldiers and railroad men in New Mexico and Colorado, avoiding the growing competition in eastern Kansas. During the winter of 1864-5, rancher E. S. Newman noted that grass west of the 100th meridian was rich in calcium. This told Goodnight that the range bordering the Rockies would fatter cattle better than the sparser Oklahoma land along Dawson's route. Also, in the event that all the cattle couldn't be sold immediately in Colorado, there was plenty of good range to hold them in until a buyer was found. Thus Goodnight came up with an alternate trail to Colorado, one that first went west into New Mexico before turning north and following the front range of the Rockies.

In the summer of 1866, Goodnight and Dawson gathered 2200 mavericks that had bred unchecked during the war and they, Loving and Stockton headed west from west-central Texas, following the overland stage route to the Pecos River. Once in New Mexico they would turn north to Fort Sumner and Las Vegas, and on into Southern Colorado, supplying cattle along the way to government forts and other eager buyers, including Lucien Maxwell, at whose ranch in Cimarron Goodnight had often stopped. Also along as drovers were Dawson's brother-in-law, Joel Curtis, a cousin's husband, Taylor Maulding, a young man who recently resettled to the Brazos area from Tennessee, Robert Clay Allison, and Reed Anthony, whose "autobiography" was written by Andy Adams, author of the classic work *The Log of a Cowboy*. According to Adams, the outfit consisted of the beeves, a chuck wagon, an eighty-five horse and mule remuda and seventeen men. The chuck wagon, which Goodnight had invented particularly for the drive, was a converted surplus Army wagon and named after the chuckbox mounted on the back that had a swing-down cover to serve as a table. Despite being attacked twice by Indians in West Texas, the most difficult part of the drive was the 100-mile dry stretch from the Concho River to the Pecos. Halfway to the Pecos the tired and thirsty herd encountered a damp yet waterless creek. Goodnight was not perturbed as he ordered all the cattle onto the creek bed where the trampling and weight of the beeves soon forced water to the surface.

In a third drive in late 1867, over 6000 cattle were driven over the trail as far north as Cheyenne but a slight change in the route into Colorado was made to avoid paying the 10¢/head toll Dick Wootton levied in using his road over Raton Pass. Goodnight chose a course that tracked slightly east of his previous drives, passing through Trinchera Pass from New Mexico down into Colorado. The herd was sold to ranchman J. W. Iliff who requested that the cattle be driven on to Cheyenne. In return for partial payment from Iliff, Goodnight accepted a ten-

thousand dollar note against Lucien Maxwell. On the return trip to Texas, Goodnight stopped off in Cimarron where Maxwell paid off the note with gold from his mine.

During this third drive, Oliver Loving was wounded by Indians near Fort Sumner and due to inadequate medical attention died shortly thereafter. The Goodnight-Loving relationship, particularly the return of Loving's body to Texas by Goodnight, served as the basis for Larry McMurtry's novel *Lonesome Dove*.

Back in Texas

After returning to Texas in 1868, John Dawson married a schoolteacher, Laura Stout, from neighboring Veal's Station. He also agreed to purchase 24,000 acres from Lucien Maxwell along the lush Vermejo River valley with Curtis and Maulding, having seen the land during the earlier drives. Shortly thereafter Dawson moved his new family to New Mexico to begin life as a serious rancher. He is soon joined by other friends such as the Stocktons, who would similarly buy land from Maxwell, and would meet the neighboring Chases, who had bought land the previous year along the Ponil Creek a few miles south. (Dawson may have met Manly Chase during the 1866 drive into Colorado as the Chases were living and purchasing cattle there at the time. Manly and Theresa Chase would name their daughter Laura after John's wife.) In 1872, Laura Dawson would die from childbirth complications, just after her sister Dove and Tom Stockton's brother Matthias, called "Thyke," became engaged. Some time after Laura's death, Dawson read an article in a small Baptist magazine written by a widowed schoolteacher in Iowa, Lavinia Jefferson. The tone of the work pleased him so he wrote to her suggesting that the two of them meet. At Lavinia's insistence he waited the appropriate year before traveling to Iowa whereupon they were married and remained so until John died 45 years later.

In 1870 Lucien Maxwell sold his land to an English syndicate from Colorado who then went by the name of The Maxwell Land Grant and Railway Company. Corrupt company, local and state politics soon led to the bloody Colfax County War which resulted in a reorganization of the company as The Maxwell Land Grant Company. In 1891 the company sued John Dawson claiming that his deal with Maxwell involved only 1,260 acres, not the 24,000 acres Dawson held title to. While Dawson was being ignored during the Colfax County War, he and other families had been collecting coal for use in heating and cooking. As it became clear to all that the railroad industry needed vast amounts of coal to fuel its network, the new Grant owners felt it was time to flex their muscles. When Dawson was surprised that his "friend" Frank Springer appeared on the court summons as the lawyer representing the Grant, John asked Frank's brother Charles for advice. Charles Springer recommended a young attorney by the name of A. A. Jones and three years later Jones and Dawson prevailed. When John and Lavinia sold the mineral rights to their land in 1896 for $450,000, half of the proceeds were given to Charles.

By 1901, the Dawson Fuel Company and the town of Dawson were thriving under the ownership of Charles Eddy and partners. Two years later Dawson sold off his remaining land on the Vermejo to the Phelps Dodge Corporation and moved to Yampa Valley in northern Colorado. Dawson acquired a ranch of 2400 acres by buying out five homesteaders and soon the Dawson Ranch was one of the largest employers in the valley. But, as luck would have it, Dawson's land once more sat atop large coal reserves so in 1915 he sold out to the Victor

American Fuel Company. John and Lavinia Dawson moved to Los Angeles where John died in 1918 and Lavinia in 1923.

In 1870, Charles Goodnight married Molly Dyer, a schoolteacher from Weatherford, Texas and built a ranch in the Brazos country. By adding a second horn on the side of a saddle, Goodnight invented a saddle that his wife could ride while wearing a dress. In 1876 he moved to Palo Duro Canyon and, together with Irish landowner John Adair, started and then managed the famed JA Ranch. At the time of Adair's death in 1885, the JA Ranch was grazing more than 100,000 head on over 1,300,000 acres. During his stay at the ranch, Goodnight introduced Hereford bulls, experimented with breeding by crossing Longhorns with Herefords to produce a heartier yet less stringy stock, and bred buffalo with Angus cattle to yield the "cattalo." In 1887, he sold his interest in the JA Ranch and moved a few miles east to the Salt Fork River, near the town that now bears his name. In his later years Goodnight became involved in civil affairs, opening Goodnight College in 1898, and with wildlife preservation issues, meeting naturalists like Ernest Thompson Seton. In 1926, his wife Molly died. Until his own death three years later, Charles Goodnight lived as a frontier legend, his life recognized by the journalists, authors and scholars who came to interview him.

Later Cattle Drives

With settlers following the railroad west into the "Great American Desert," as the Great Plains was called, communities like Sedalia turned increasingly toward farming, forcing trailheads further west to start towns like Abilene (1867-70), Newton (1871), Wichita (1872), and finally Dodge City (1873-1880), which were served by other well-known trails such as the Chisholm (1867-82) and Western (1876-84). These routes carried the bulk of cattle traffic out of Texas until 1885 when the introduction of barbed wire, the growth of railroads and settlements across the Plains, and further outbreaks of Texas fever shut down the long cattle drive for good. The combination of this westward expansion and northern movement of cattle also contributed to the demise of the Indian population of the Plains through an unintended though successful divide-and-conquer strategy. By the turn of the century, life on the trail would be remembered only by the romanticized novels of authors such as Zane Grey and Andy Adams and by the paintings of Western artists Frederick Remington and Charles Russell.

Gene Lamm, September, 2006
Cimarron, New Mexico

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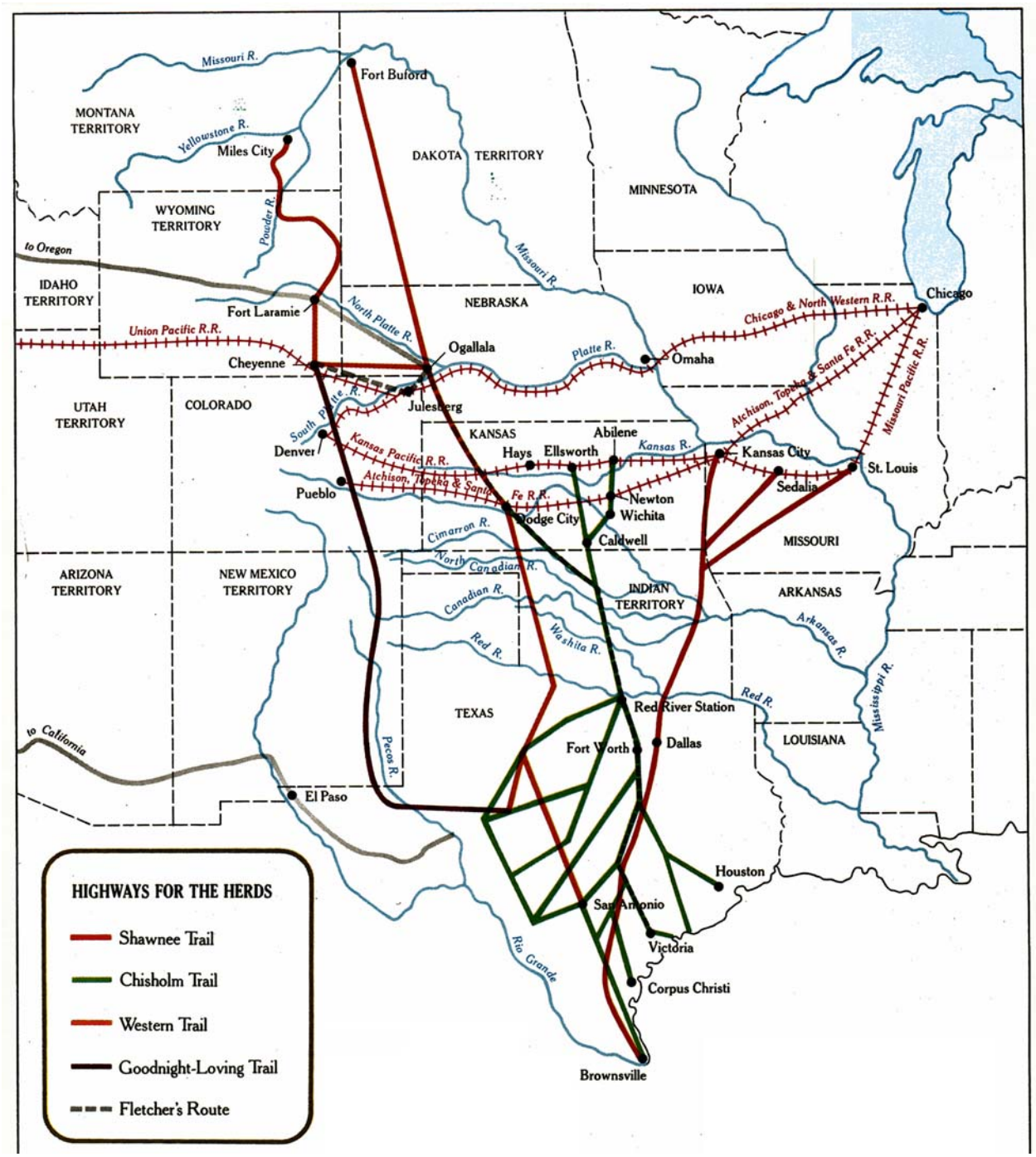

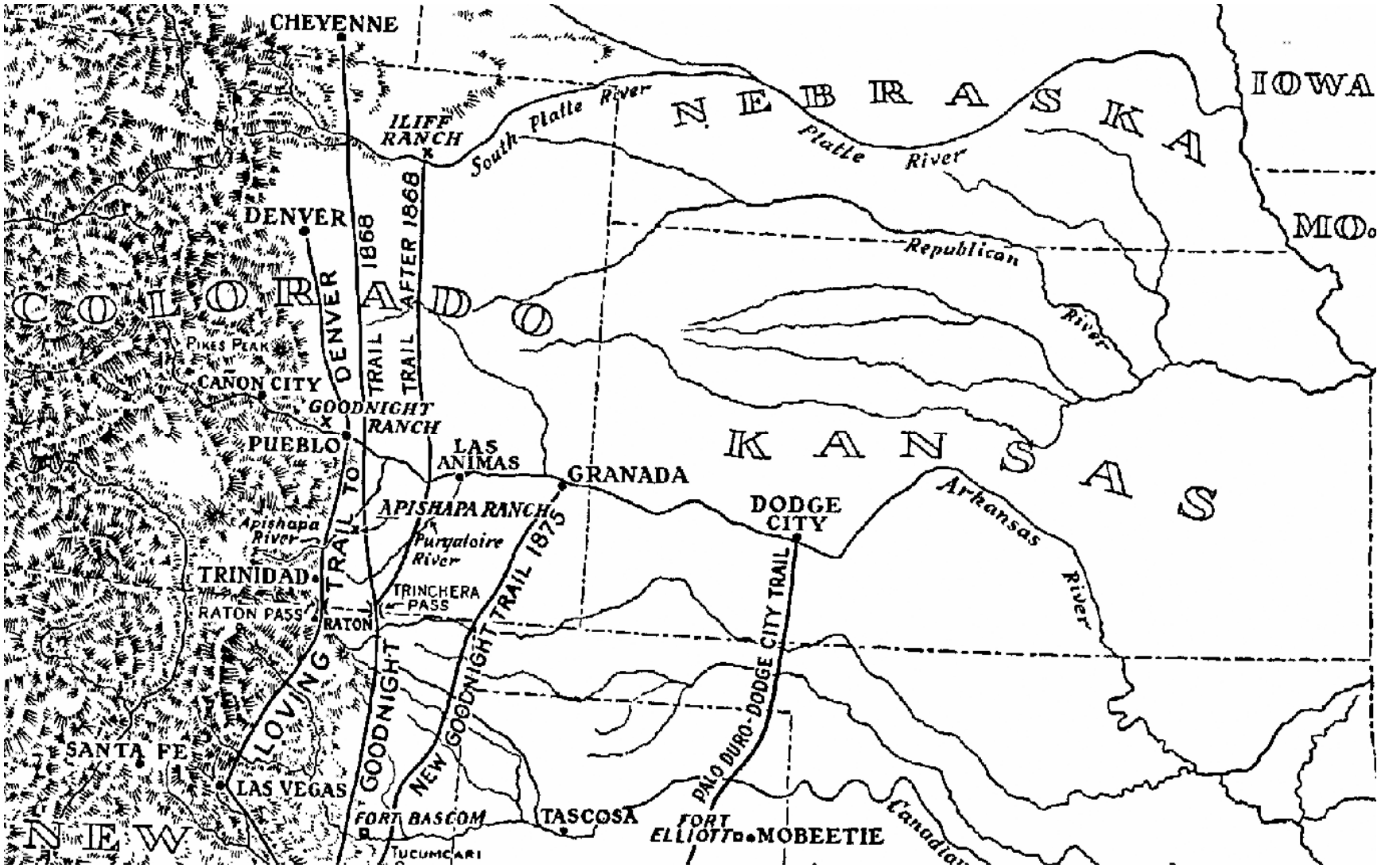
CHEYENNE
ILIFF RANCH
South Platte River
Platte River
NEBRASKA
IOWA
MO.
DENVER
COLORADO
DENVER TRAIL TO 1868
TRAIL AFTER 1868
Republican River
Pikes Peak
CANON CITY
GOODNIGHT RANCH
PUEBLO
LAS ANIMAS
GRANADA
KANSAS
APISHAPA RANCH
Apishapa River
Purgatoire River
DODGE CITY
Arkansas River
TRINIDAD
TRINCHERA PASS
RATON PASS
RATON
LOVING TRAIL
GOODNIGHT TRAIL 1875
NEW GOODNIGHT TRAIL
PALO DURO-DODGE CITY TRAIL
SANTA FE
LAS VEGAS
FORT BASCOM
TASCOSA
FORT ELLIOTT
MOBEETIE
Canadian
NEW
TUCUMCARI