

Fort Worth, TX- Cattle & Railroad History

Fort Worth, a city that was built on the backs of cattle trails and railroads, gave birth to the Fort Worth stockyards and grew into a booming metropolis. Early in its history, Fort Worth saloons provided cowboys with refreshment and entertainment, and the city is still known for unique, down-home hospitality today.

The fort was originally built in 1849 to protect early Texas settlers from Indian attacks during the Mexican War. When military operations ended, the barracks were taken over by businesses, which would serve residents and travelling cowboys.

As you are riding the train, try to imagine endless herds of cattle being driven by cowboys on horseback- this is what Fort Worth looked like one hundred years ago. During the later part of the 19th century the Chisholm and other cattle trails were developed to move cattle north where they could be sold for more money than they could fetch in the markets of the south. Fort Worth was one of the last stops on the Chisholm Trail before cattle drivers crossed into Indian Territory. Cowboys paused there to stock up on necessities and spend time gambling and carousing in the saloons that lined the town streets. During the short time that the Chisholm Trail was used, millions of head of cattle were driven north, the cowboy became a famous Western icon, and towns came into being as stopping points for cattle drives north. Fort Worth became the largest livestock market in Texas and the Southwest.

The railroad came to Fort Worth in 1876, and replaced traditional cattle drives. Anticipating this change, Fort Worth businessmen had already made plans for stockyards and slaughterhouses, which would put Fort Worth permanently on the map as a center for the cattle industry. Four stockyards were built by 1886, paving the way for businesses like the Fort Worth Stockyards Company and meat packing companies. Soon thereafter, a new Livestock Exchange and hotel were built, in addition to the Cowtown Coliseum, an indoor show facility that was built to be the finest livestock exhibition building in the south.

Even through the Great Depression, the stockyards in Fort Worth worked round the clock and kept operations running. In May of 1937 the total receipts of animals surpassed even Kansas and Chicago, making Fort Worth the busiest stockyards in the United States. The city held this honor through the 1960's.

In 1976, the Fort Worth Stockyards National Historical District was founded to preserve livestock heritage and promote the stockyards' incredible history. Since that time, the Exchange building has become home to the Stockyards Museum, and special breed events and sales continue to take place weekly. The Fort Worth Stockyards still capture the essence of what "Cowtown" was once like and the city continues to be a popular attraction for people from all over the United States. Visitors can watch a small daily cattle drive and enjoy Texas-style hospitality in restaurants housed within restored historic stockyard buildings. Today the City of Fort Worth celebrates its cattle and cowboy history by telling the story of historic cattle trails and early cattle history to residents and guests, and retains their Western cowboy culture.

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