

...the mining communities of Montana in the early sixties were supplied in part by cattle raised in the Valley of the Columbia..

It was in the decade of the 80s that the greatest movements of cattle took place from the Far~~th~~ Northwest to the ranges of Montana. During the boom years, when the cattle business was spreading in central and eastern Montana, the high prices offered for cattle for stocking purposes acted as a magnet...

Statistical information required for accurate measurement of this influence is not abundant...

The boom period of the cattle industry on the Great Plains synchronized with the decline of the range-cattle industry in the Columbia basin...

Signs of changing times were..apparent in Yakima and Klickitat counties. "Running cattle in large bands in this country is fast getting to be a thing of the past," complained a Klickitat stockman, and this view was fully shared by a Yakima cattleman.<sup>5</sup> Both spoke in bitter terms of the inroads of sheep on the ranges of these districts. In southeastern Washington free range had virtually disappeared by 18

...Two roads led from the ranges of the Far Northwest into Montana Territory. One was the Mullan Military road, which ran in a northeasterly direction from Fort Walla Walla to the Spokane valley, thence into northern Idaho, across the narrow neck of that territory into Montana, and thence to its eastern terminus at Fort Benton. The other route passed through southern Idaho by way of Boise City. Both were extensively used, but the importance of the Mullan road for the cattle trade declined after the completion of the Northern Pacific Railroad in 1883 had brought the Columbia basin economically closer to the ranges of eastern Montana...

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## Cattle to Montana (2)

For the early years of the 70s...the eastward movement of cattle...if any took place, was undoubtedly slight...In 1875 the surveyor-general of Montana declared that numerous herds of horses, cattle and sheep were entering Montana from Oregon, Texas and Colorado (other drives in late 70s)...

For the early years of the eighties there is direct evidence that several thousand head of western cattle were driven to Montana (thousands were also driven over in 1880)...

The year 1885 appears to have been the most important in the history of western cattle movements to Montana...From the Yakima valley alone, it has been asserted that between April 1 and October 31 1885, there were shipped by rail to Montana and Chicago 37,477 head of cattle,<sup>32</sup> but this is probably an over-statement. As early as the middle of April, however, a Walla Walla editor was told that about 10,000 head of cattle had been sold in the Yakima valley "to Montana buyers for \$19 a head." <sup>33</sup> ...It would seem reasonable to suppose that in 1885 somewhat more than 40,000 head of western cattle entered Montana...Early in 1886 heavy buying of cattle by Montana stockmen was reported in eastern Washington, northern Idaho and western Oregon...the movement was (probably) slightly less in 1886 than it had been in the preceding year...

Outward shipments and drives in previous years had reduced the number of cattle in this region...Moreover, a rapidly growing population in the Far Northwest was providing more adequate local markets. Finally, the increasing trade in sheep and the rapid conversion of range lands into farms are facts not without significance...

The losses of cattle on the ranges of Montana during the winter of 1886-87 were simply appalling.

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<sup>32</sup> Illustrated History of Klickitat, Yakima and Kittitas Cos. P. 178  
<sup>33</sup> Walla Walla Union April 18, 1885

...But the cattle industry of Montana, though a heavy blow had been dealt it, was not put to route. Conditions favored rapid recovery, and by the close of the 80s there were more cattle in Montana than there had been in 1886. To the rehabilitation of this industry, however, western cattle contributed little....

importance of increasing shipments of western sheep into that territory...

Movements of cattle out of northern Idaho, northwestern Oregon and eastern Washington for stocking ranges in Montana had virtually ceased by 1890. This trade, though not to be compared with the vast movement of cattle northward from Texas after the Civil War, had nevertheless been of economic importance, not alone to the Far Northwest, but to Montana as well. To the former region, the trade had furnished during the boom years of the 80s an outlet for an industry in retreat; to the latter, it had been an important factor in sustaining the superior quality of Montana herds.

--The Cattle Trade from the Far Northwest to Montana  
J.O. Oliphant, Agricultural History, April 1932

(considerably condensed but containing  
all Yakima references)