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Review of The Cattle-Trailing Industry: Between Supply and Demand, 1866-1890.

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The Cattle-Trailing Industry: Between Supply and Demand, 1866-1890. By Jimmy M. Skaggs. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991. Preface, notes, bibliography, index. x + 173 pp. \$12.95.

From Zane Grey novels to the television series *Rawhide*, the cattle-trailing period has always fascinated Americans. Jimmy M. Skaggs presents a very readable account of this brief but very important period in the settlement of the American West. Skaggs an economic historian structures his work as a study of the activities of Great Plains cattle-trailing contractors. First published in 1973 and now reprinted the book also includes information on the establishment of stockyards and commission companies. These were vital to the efficient handling of the tremendous influx of beef cattle being trailed up from Texas following the Civil War.

Skaggs uses the majority of the book to identify the purpose and methods of the trailing contractors and attempts to establish their importance to the range cattle industry in the late 1880s. Because ranchers and contractors kept few records in their dealings with each other, Skaggs refers to the contractors as "hip-pocket businessmen." He gives short biographical sketches of many of the most prominent contractors along with a historical outline of each contracting company. The companies and individuals were middlemen whose earnings came from, as Skaggs points out, "... performing a service, or from speculating on future prices by buying the cattle that he drove to market" (p. 59). After the cattle reached the railhead and were moved east to market, commission companies often undertook the task of buying and selling cattle for stockmen. Skaggs provides vignettes of the various personalities associated with commission companies and stockyards between 1866-1890.

While the contractors, commission agents, and stockyard owners were the major figures in the cattle-trailing industry, others also profited. Skaggs details the economic benefits

reaped by the railroads, meat packers, and frontier communities in general as a result of large numbers of cattle moving north.

This book is a convenient source for information that is covered lightly, if at all, in many other works on the early cattle kingdom of the American West. The book would have benefitted from having photographs of all the individual contractors discussed rather than just a few, and of early stockyards and packing plants. Also, more detailed maps of the cattle trails and source counties in Texas would have been helpful. A few minor typographical errors distract the reader and should have been eliminated in a second printing.

Despite these problems, Jimmy M. Skaggs has written a book that cuts through the fog of romantic legend to uncover the organizational structure of the trailing industry. That should prove valuable to all students of the American West.

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