

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

Summer 1984

Review of *The Matador Land and Cattle Company* By W. M. Pearce

Richard A. Bartlett
Florida State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Bartlett, Richard A., "Review of *The Matador Land and Cattle Company* By W. M. Pearce" (1984). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1770.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/1770>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

The Matador Land and Cattle Company. By W. M. Pearce. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964, 1982. Maps, photographs, tables, notes, bibliography, index. xiv + 244 pp. \$19.95.

The question that immediately comes to mind is: what justified a second printing in hard-cover of this book first published eighteen years ago? The book is certainly well written, though it is not of great literary excellence; it is also very well organized and researched, yet not brilliantly so. The real contribution is clearly its subject matter.

In 1882 a group of businessmen, most of them from in and around Dundee, Scotland, purchased for \$1,250,000 what became the Matador Land and Cattle Company. At the time, many other British and Scottish investors were also plunging into the American cattle business. Many lost heavily and sold out or went into bankruptcy. Such was not the fate, however, of the Matador, which came to own more than 800,000 acres, most of them in two huge parcels in the Texas Panhandle. It leased nearly an equal acreage in Colorado, South Dakota, Montana, and Saskatchewan. When the company finally sold out in 1951, its investors realized \$23.70 for each seventy-cent share.

What makes the story interesting is the Matador's success. It paid dividends—occasionally very good dividends—and was never really

in financial straits. Reading this book becomes a lesson in sound business practices, for it leaves little doubt as to why the Matador succeeded when so many failed.

Professor Pearce quotes the Texas historian J. Evetts Haley on the reasons for the Matador's success: "a knowledge of good land, a reliance on the best-bred cattle, an ample source of [cash] reserves, and a sound tradition of business management" (p. 224). Pearce adds one more reason: the stability, dedication, and cattle-business acumen of the Matador administrators—men such as Murdo Mackenzie, John McBain, and Alexander Mackay.

The American cattle industry has been romanticized so often that the true story—the realization on the part of the public that the cattle business was just that, a hard-headed business in which profits were hard to come by—is often overlooked. Professor Pearce did justice to the remarkably successful Matador, and, indeed, the book warrants this second printing.

RICHARD A. BARTLETT
Department of History
Florida State University