

Transcript for H.M Rea Diary
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Introduction:

In the late spring of 1884 Henry Rea, a young man who hailed from near Keelville, Cherokee County Kansas began an adventure of a lifetime trailing a herd of cattle from Ogalalla, Nebraska to Johnson County Wyoming. Henry, like many young men during that time, was looking for adventure beyond the everyday drudgery of work on the family farm but he was different than most young cowboys because he kept a journal. In a small 3" x6" notebook Henry Rea wrote of his experiences and the things he saw along the trail. Because of this diary which is part of the collections of the American Heritage Center in Laramie, Wyoming, we can experience today the life of a young cowboy trailing a herd of cattle to the Power River Country of Wyoming in 1884.

Henry begins the diary on May 20, 1884 in Colorado where he is loading wood...

Cowboy:

May 20th 1884. Killed my first yellow rattler snake in Colorado while loading a load of wood.

May 21st Quit work for D. Jr. Compter today

Around camp all day and got very tired doing nothing.

Got my pay and started for Denver stayed there one or 2 days then went to Sheyenne with Mr. Langs on the train.

Got there at 9:02 am loaded the cattle and went to camp at 12-00.

Seen some very fine farms around Greeley and beautiful country all the way through.

Rode on top of the cars from Denver to Cheyenne.

Cheyenne is a very nice town most all rich people.
Every thing is very high - 50cts a meal is the cheapest.

This is June 3rd and I have laid around here a little over a week and find it very tiresome doing nothing so long.

I rode my first horse in Wyo. to day it was a wild bronco just caught [off the range] and I found it pretty hard riding but it did not throw me although it fell once. I stuck to him nearly an hour first bucking then kicking then running as hard as it could and then he would buck and jump again but he got pretty great at last.

I expect to go to Ogallala Keith Co., Nebraska tomorrow

Went to Ogalalla to day with Mr. Bassett's horses got there June 4th at about 7o'clock. in the morning unloaded and went to breakfast.

Pretty tired after riding all night

June 5 -Begun cooking. Cooked one day then went to busting broncos. One of them fell with me but did not throw me.

June 17th I am still at Ogalalla. Expect to start in about a week have had a very good time here.

Have broke 4 broncos since I came and have not been thrown yet.

There is lots of prairie dog towns here.

A man by the name of A.L. Willey is my foreman and a good one too.

We never ride one horse more than ½ day and some times change oftener.

Telling stories is the main pastime.

There is any amount of buffalo bones & horns laying all over the country here.

Some places they are very thick & there is a great emigration west this spring.

There is at least on average of 20 teams a day.

I have been here a week and in that time I have seen over 6000 head of cattle all agoing west.

Mr. Lang shipped 9000 head of cattle from the Pan Handle of Texas to Cheyenne and is agoing to drive them to the Mussel Shell Mountains a distance of nearly 800 miles.

We are agoing about 400 miles up on Tongue River Wyo.

We have to night herd all the way through.

One of our broncos that we call Wild Bill ran away with me the other day over the hills and in the worst holes he could find.

He jumped down some places that was 30 ft. and then slid a long way and jumped in the Platte river but I stuck to him till he got tired out and stopped and you can be sure I was glad of it to.

I don't intend to ride him again either.

I had a good swim across the Platte River and back to day.

June 15th went to town yesterday and sent home my valise.
Now I have nothing to bother with but my bed, one change of clothes & my six shooter.

We expect our cattle to come this afternoon if they do we shall start on trail about Wednesday as it will take two or three days to brand.

June 16th the cattle came today & now we have more work to do.

I rode a bout 40 miles after the horses this morning so I did not get in very early to breakfast .

June 17th Our cattle got mixed up this morning and we had quite a job to separate them.

June 17th 1884 we had a heavy rain last night and it makes every thing nasty for branding & the cattle getting mixed up.

The foreman caught me asleep out on guard this morning but did not say much it being the first time and I don't calculate he will find me asleep the second time on duty very soon.

June 19th Commenced branding today we have begun night herding and I feel quite sleepy herding half the night.

The foreman just caught another man asleep.
It was Charles Hart.

June 21st Will finish branding about tomorrow noon and then we will start on trail.

June 22nd went to town this afternoon for the last time before we start.

Will have to night herd all the cattle tonight as there is over 2000 came in this afternoon and will take all the yards.

Mr. Bassett came down this evening again.

We have finished branding this forenoon and I am glad of it.

We branded 300 yesterday forenoon.

June 23rd Was night herding last night and am a little tired to day.

We expect to start this afternoon.

If all is well there is now over 17,000 head of cattle here besides ours.

Some for sale and some to drive north & northwest and about 4 times as many to come yet

June 24th started on trail to day!

June 25th reached the north river this forenoon camped on the river. All going well.

June 26th camped near what is known as the "narrows".

Had fine weather so far.

June 27 - Passed Ash Hollow this morning seen a little timber.

The first I have seen in the western part of the state.

A large herd passed us today.

June 28th had a little accident this forenoon driving 4 horses to the mess wagon.

Two of them broncos and they tried to run away and broke the tongue and one single tree but nothing hurt otherways.

Sent two men back to Ash Hollow after a stick to make a tongue ½ day lost on account of it had a hard rain this afternoon getting nearly every thing wet

July 1st We are at Court House Rock so named for its resemblance of a courthouse.

We're also in sight of Chimney Rock it is about 30 miles from here can see it very plain with a spy glass it is a very tall slim rock resembling a church spire all though there was 70 feet shot of the top with a cannon by an officer who got discharged for it

July 5th At camp Clark today.

July 6 Going to get in a new supply of chuck. All is going back today.

We are a little above Chimney Rock which they say is nearly 300 feet high.
The country here is very rough and rocky

July 11th Jumped out of the wagon and sprained my ankle very bad and can't do anything for a few days.

We came through the 15 mile pass day before yesterday a very narrow place hardly room for the wagon to pass and many hundred feet high

July 14th We are now in Wyoming

July 15th Another trail out fit just behind us had quite a shooting affair at noon to day and one man hit .in the Considerable shooting but no one else hurt

July 17th Crossed the river today. All crossed well, no stock lost.
Swum it three times myself and once with a horse crossing the cattle.

July 18th Lost one of the work horses this morning and while I was hunting for it in a deep canyon I saw a large Panther and could have shot him easy if I'd had anything to have shot him with for he was not over 50 yards off

Conclusion: July 18, 1884 is the last entry in Rea's journal for that year. He begins writing again the following fall, September of 1885 and describes moving cattle from near Prairie Dog Creek in what is now Sheridan, Wyoming north into Montana near the Crow Indian Agency.

More about Henry Rea and the others he mentions in his journal can be accessed in the C.F. Coffee Gallery archives.