Of the principal routes by which Texas longhorn cattle were taken afoot to railheads to the north, the earliest and easternmost was the Shawnee Trail. Used before and just after the Civil War, the Shawnee Trail gathered cattle from east and west of its main stem, which passed through Austin, Waco, and Dallas. It crossed the Red River at Rock Bluff, near Preston, and led north along the eastern edge of what became Oklahoma, a route later followed closely by the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad. The drovers took over a trail long used by Indians in hunting and raiding and by southbound settlers from the Midwest; the latter called it the Texas Road. North of Fort Gibson the cattle route split into terminal branches that ended in such Missouri points as St. Louis, Sedalia, Independence, Westport, and Kansas City, and in Baxter Springs and other towns in eastern Kansas. Early drovers referred to their route as the cattle trail, the Sedalia Trail, the Kansas Trail, or simply the trail. Why some began calling it the Shawnee Trail is uncertain, but the name may have been suggested by a Shawnee village on the Texas side of the Red River just below the trail crossing or by the Shawnee Hills, which the route skirted on the eastern side before crossing the Canadian River.

Texas herds were taken up the Shawnee Trail as early as the 1840s, and use of the route gradually increased. But by 1853 trouble had begun to plague some of the drovers. In June of that year, as 3,000 cattle were trailed through western Missouri, local farmers blocked their passage and forced the drovers to turn back. This opposition arose from the fact that the longhorns carried ticks that bore a serious disease that the farmers called Texas fever. The Texas cattle were immune to this disease; but the ticks that they left on their bedgrounds infected the local cattle, causing many to die and making others unfit for marketing. Some herds avoided the blockades, and the antagonism became stronger and more effective. In 1855 angry farmers in western and central Missouri formed vigilance committees, stopped some of the herds, and killed any Texas cattle that entered their counties. Missouri stockmen in several county seats called on their legislature for action. The outcome was a law, effective in December of that year, which banned diseased cattle from being brought into or through the state. This law failed of its purpose since the longhorns were not themselves diseased. But farmers formed armed bands that turned back some herds, though others managed to get through. Several drovers took their herds up through the eastern edge of
Kansas; but there, too, they met opposition from farmers, who induced their territorial legislature to pass a protective law in 1859.

During the Civil War the Shawnee Trail was virtually unused. After the war, with Texas overflowing with surplus cattle for which there were almost no local markets, pressure for trailing became stronger than ever. In the spring of 1866 an estimated 200,000 to 260,000 longhorns were pointed north. Although some herds were forced to turn back, others managed to get through, while still others were delayed or diverted around the hostile farm settlements. James M. Daugherty, a Texas youth of sixteen, was one who felt the sting of the vigilantes. Trailng north his herd of 500 steers, he was attacked in southeastern Kansas by a band of Jayhawkers dressed as hunters. The mobsters stampeded the herd and killed one of the trail hands; (some sources say they tied Daugherty to a tree with his own picket rope, then whipped him with hickory switches.) After being freed and burying the dead cowboy, Daugherty recovered about 350 of the cattle. He continued at night in a roundabout way and sold his steers in Fort Scott at a profit. With six states enacting laws in the first half of 1867 against trailing, Texas cattlemen realized the need for a new trail that would skirt the farm settlements and thus avoid the trouble over tick fever. In 1867 a young Illinois livestock dealer, Joseph G. McCoy, built market facilities at Abilene, Kansas, at the terminus of Chisholm Trail. The new route to the west of the Shawnee soon began carrying the bulk of the Texas herds, leaving the earlier trail to dwindle for a few years and expire.

East Shawnee Trail  The more recent name for the first major cattle trail from Texas to Kansas, which was sometimes called the Texas Road. It crossed the Red River at Colbert's Ferry and passed near Fort Wichita and Fort Gibson, and crossed into Kansas near the Missouri border. There was a branch that led northward from Fort Gibson (on the west side of the Grand River), which met the original trail at the Kansas border, and one that led northwest (north of the Arkansas River) to meet the West Shawnee Trail in southern Kansas.

SHAWNEE TRAIL

The Shawnee Trail was the first major route used by the cattle trailing industry to deliver longhorns to the markets of the Midwest. Longhorns were collected around San Antonio, Texas, and taken northward through Austin, Waco, and Dallas, crossing the Red River near
Preston, Texas, at Rock Bluff. Here the outcroppings that provide the place name formed a natural chute that forced the cattle together at the ford, and a gradual rise on the north bank made it easy to exit the river. North of the Red River the trail divided for a time, coming together near Boggy Depot in the Choctaw Nation, Indian Territory. Here some herds veered sharply eastward to pass through Fort Smith, Arkansas. The main trail led to the Canadian River directly below the confluence of the north and south branches and forded the Arkansas River between the mouths of the Verdigris and Neosho rivers, and followed the Neosho past Fort Gibson almost to the Kansas border. The trail then subdivided into various routes which, depending on the final destination led to one of the following: Baxter Springs, Kansas, and Westport, Kansas City, Sedalia, and St. Louis, Missouri.

Throughout the 1830s settlers from the United States heading for Texas traveled across present Oklahoma along the Texas Road. When the first herds were taken north in the early 1840s, they reversed the trek, opening a trail to the railheads in Missouri. Newspapers referred to the route as the Sedalia Trail or simply the cattle trail. No one knows why it was called the Shawnee Trail; however, the route did pass by a Shawnee village in north Texas and near the Shawnee Hills in Indian Territory. By the late 1850s the name was in general use.

In the 1840s herds were taken up the trail primarily to Missouri, and during the Mexican War the trail was used almost constantly during the summer months. The gold rush in California increased demand for cattle after 1848, and for several years the Shawnee Trail was heavily used. By the mid-1850s Kansas City, Missouri, was the largest stock market in the west, and the Texas cattle trailing industry was well established.

Westward expansion of the farming frontier soon intervened. In 1853 farmers in Missouri turned back the drovers, fearing that the longhorns would infect their cattle with a tick-borne disease called Texas fever. Longhorns were immune to it, but they harbored ticks that spread it to local herds. Newly infected animals either died or required expensive treatment. Between 1853 and 1855 herds continued to use the trail, but resistance continued to grow. In December 1855 the Missouri legislature passed the first law banning diseased animals. Some drives avoided Missouri, staying on the eastern edge of Kansas Territory. Anxious farmers there pushed a bill through the territorial legislature in 1859 that limited access to the cattle drives. For a time the drovers were forced to run a gauntlet of angry farmers and justices of the peace to get the cattle to rail heads. Through 1859 and 1860 violence erupted when the
drovers encountered the blockades. The outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 virtually stopped traffic on the Shawnee Trail north of Indian Territory.

The end of the Civil War signaled the rebirth of the cattle drives on the Shawnee Trail. More than two hundred thousand longhorns were taken up the trail in 1866. However, resistance grew stiffer and better organized. By 1867 six states had enacted laws limiting trail drives. Drovers attempted to avoid populated areas by turning to follow the Arkansas River westward or by grazing their herds in the Cherokee Strip until local quarantines were lifted. These delays and poor grazing in Indian Territory reduced profits, and the future of the trail driving industry seemed in peril. However, in 1867 Joseph G. McCoy, a young entrepreneur from Illinois, built stock pens and loading chutes on the railroad at Abilene, Kansas. Soon the majority of cattle were following the old Shawnee Trail from central Texas to Waco, but there they turned toward Fort Worth, following the Chisolm Trail. When the advancing frontier and barbed wire closed the Chisolm Trail, the trail drives turned to the Great Western or Dodge City Trail.

The Legend of Rawhide — Sedalia, Missouri

On the Trail to Sedalia
The first Missouri Pacific Railroad train arrived in Sedalia in 1861, in time for the Civil War and the end of rail construction for its duration. So Sedalia waited five years for the boom that was spawned by the rails, a boom based on a desperate postwar shortage of beef in the eastern states and a cattle glut in Texas, which lacked a market for its livestock. The logical solution was the beginning of an American leg-end, the cattle drives. The first great herd trail, from Brownsville, Texas, stretched through Dallas and Fort Worth to the nearest western railhead: Sedalia, Missouri.

To handle these thundering herds, stockyard were established next to the railroad shops. In 1866 alone, the Missouri Pacific and MKT Railroad Stockyards handled an estimated 168,000 head of longhorn cattle.
A cattle drive of 100 years ago, was a hard way for a cowhand to earn $100. The days were hot and dusty, the nights cold and lonely. It was an unglamorous job but cowboys left a trail of glamour. Such was the life of Gil Favor, Rowdy Yates and the rest of the Rawhide drovers as they headed for Sedalia in the popular 1960's television show: Rawhide. The show, based on the diary of Drover George C. Duffield, depicts the hardships of the 1866 cattle drive from San Antonio to Sedalia.

The series’ first aired on January 9, 1959 with the “Incident of the Tumbleweed”. Almost seven years and 217 shows later, the series ended on December 7, 1965 with the “Crossing at White Feather”.

Rawhide Arrives in Sedalia
This excerpt was taken from The Trampling Herd: The Story of the Cattle Range in America, by Paul L. Wellman et.al.

George C Duffield, who made the drive of 1866, was a young man from Iowa. He owns one great distinction among the trail riders - he alone of all of them kept a diary. The document, published in the Annals of Iowa in 1924, gives illuminating and intensely human view of the difficulties of the trail. With Harvey Ray, his partner, Duffield went down the Mississippi by steamboat, and to Galveston by coasting steamer, then overland to the Colorado River country where they bought cheap cattle and made up a herd to be returned to Iowa. It was April 29, 1866, that the northward march began.
Duffield’s journal gives a picture of the ensuing hard and exasperating journey. Stampedes occurred May 1 and May 6 and pretty continuously thereafter. Each time days were wasted trying to find the animals that were lost. By May 9 the young Iowan wished fervently he was through with his task, as his entry in his diary shows: “Still dark & Gloomy River up everything looks Blue to me.” Four days later another maddening stampede during a thunder storm added to his gloom, although he recovered all but fifty of his steers: “all tired Everything discouraging.”

But when he reached the Brazos the real trouble began. His approximately one thousand cattle were divided into three herds, with twenty cowboys as trailers, and it took three days to make the crossing. Cattle and horses were swum across and provisions and camp equipment were ‘rafted’ over. Unfortunately most of the ‘Kitchen furniture such as camp Kittle Coffee Pots Cups Plates &c &c’ were lost in the process. After rounding up the cattle on the other side of the river, ‘all Hands gave the Brazos one good harty dam,’ and rode away without joy.

Rain fell and the wind blew almost constantly on the journey and the Texas cowboys with the herd grew sulky. Some of them quit. On May 20 Duffield wrote: “Rain poured down for two hours Ground flooded Creeks up - Hands leaving Gloomey times as ever I saw.”

Most of their few remaining cooking utensils were lost in the crossing of the Trinity, and the following night, May 23, “Hard rain that night & cattle behaved very bad - ran all night-was on my Horse the whole night & it raining hard. Glad to see Morning come counted & found we had lost none for the first time-feel very bad.”

For several days things went a little better, although the country was boggy with the heavy rains and the rivers and creeks gave constant trouble. But on June 12 there is the following entry: “Hard rain & Wind Big stampede & here we are among the Indians with 150 head of Cattle gone hunted all day & the rain pouring down with but poor success dark days ware these to me Nothing but Bread & Coffee Hands all Growling & Swearing.”

It was enough to make them swear, but by no means were their troubles over. On June 17 they reached the Arkansas where Duffield spent four more days swimming his depleted herd across that river which was a raging torrent, roaring in spate, owing to the heavy rains. “Worked all day hard in the River trying to make the Beeves swim & did not get one over.” the mournful young chronicler of the trail wrote at the end of the first day’s efforts at the Arkansas. “Had to go back to the Prairie Sick & discouraged. have not got the Blues but am in Hel of a fix.”

Eventually, however, the cattle were crossed and the herd reached the vicinity of Baxter Springs July 10 with no further losses. There Duffield found the cap and climax to his woes - the grangers and Jayhawkers were in charge of the border and the cattle could not pass through Missouri.

Several days were spent in fruitless scouting and negotiations. In spite of Duffield’s lugubrious moans on the trail, he seems to have had plenty of decision and nerve, and he showed at this crisis more enterprise than most of the Texans - possibly because he knew the country in which we now was better than they did. His entry of July 25 reveals his decl-sion “We left the Beefe Road (trail) & started due west across the wide Prairie in the Indian Nation to try to go around Kansas & strike Iowa. I have 490 Beeves.”

It was a wise decision. Swinging his herd to the west he passed around the settlements north to the Nebraska line. One cannot but sympathize with the young trail driver in his woes and even after the passage of sixty years there is joy in know-ing that at last he came to the end of the sorrowful road. Early in September, the ancient journal records, he reached the Missouri River near Nebraska City and ferried his few hundred remaining cattle over into the promised land of Iowa.

There is an expression still current in the American language; “In spite of Hell and high water.” It is a legacy of the cattle trail, when the cowboys drove their horn-spiked masses of longhorns through high water at every river and continuous hell between, in their unalterable determination to reach the end of the trail which was their goal.

Movin’ Them Doggies
Excerpt from Cattle Drives in Missouri, Virginia Sue Hutcheson, Missouri Historical Review

Spanish ranchers brought the first permanent herds of cattle to America more than three hundred years ago. Without fences to control their movement, these hardy animals grew wild and mixed freely on the open prairies. These cattle had long legs, lanky bodies, with legs and feet built for speed. It took a good horse with a good rider to outrun a Texas Longhorn. A century or so of running wild had made the longhorns tough and hardy enough to withstand blizzards, droughts, dust storms, attacks by other animals and indians. They did not require great amounts of water to survive. Over
time, they also developed long horns and grew an independent, often fierce nature. Some of their descendants still roam the western range.

By the late 1860’s it is estimated that more than a million head of cattle grazed the Texas plains. The men and boys who kept the cattle together and ‘drove’ them up the trail to market were called ‘drovers’. Each day the herd traveled 10 to 15 miles. The ‘trail boss’ searched for places where the cattle could ‘graze’ and be watered. It was common to have only 6 to 10 men driving as many as 1,500 head of cattle 500 to 1000 miles. River crossings, storms, and stampedes were just a few of the dangers cowboys faced on the trail drive. Younger men traditionally drove the cattle, a chore more exhausting and dangerous than glamorous.

When handling a herd, some cowboys rode ‘point’ or near the front, with others along the sides, ‘swing’ and ‘flank’. Those in the rear or ‘drag’, kept the stragglers with the herd, always riding in a cloud of dust. The trail boss rode ahead to scout the trail and choose a place to camp. On horse back, a cowboy felt taller, faster and stronger. With the aid of his horse he could round up the cattle, cut them out for branding and drive them to market.

Extra cowhands were hired for the massive roundup. After morning chuck, the cowhands would fan out, drive the ornery critters out of ravines and bottom lands, and circle back toward the chuck wagon’s afternoon destination. They then would sort out the owners stock, doctor the sick, castrate and brand the new calves. Armed with a hot branding iron, cowboys marked livestock as they have for over 4,000 years. Some might have so many brands, marks and notches they would look like a walking billboard.

The cowboys equipment included: low waisted pants; neckerchief; firearm, chaps, bit and bridle, lariat, spurs, knife, boots, gloves, hat and their single most cherished possession, a saddle.

Sedalia, Missouri

Although there were bands of Shawnee in the vicinity of Sedalia when the land was first settled by Americans, historians believe the entire area was first occupied by the Osage (of historical American Indian tribes).[^1]
The area that became Sedalia was founded by General George Rappeen Smith (1804–1879), who went on to found nearby Smithton, Missouri. He filed plans for the official record on 30 November 1857, and gave the area the name Sedville.\[6\]

[edit] Railhead

Following a victory for those proposing the "ridge route" for the railway over those advocating the "river route", the railway reached Sedalia in January 1861.\[12\] Sedalia's early prosperity was directly related to the railroad industry. Many jobs were associated with maintaining tracks and machine shops for the Missouri Pacific and the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad lines. The Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad was most widely known as the "KATY", from its "K-T" stock exchange code.

The KATY trail is the nickname of the 225-mile-trail following the railroad right-of-way through much of Missouri, a successful project of "Rails to Trails" project.

A Texas Longhorn

Sedalia was also an important railhead for the Texas cattle drive of 1866.

Chicago slaughterhouses were willing to pay almost any price [for beef]—longhorns were worth three to four dollars each on the Llano Estacado while in Chicago a steer was worth ten times that amount. It cost about a dollar per head to drive a herd northward to a railroad, and thus with these simple economics, the long drive and the cattle bonanza got its start. During the spring and summer of 1866, some 260,000 head followed the trail to Sedalia, Missouri, the terminus of the Missouri Pacific Railway."