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— A leading Western Oklahoma historian reveals a little-known story about ranching

**A Reservation**

**Cattle Ranch**

**(1882 - 1885)**

— by Patt Hodge

A few years following the close of the Civil War, the cattle industry grew in importance and many large ranches were established in Texas and the Indian Territory. Few people have heard of the largest ranch that ever existed in Oklahoma, the Cheyenne-Arapaho Cattle Ranch, 1882-1885.

The Cheyenne-Arapaho Reservation had long been sought by cattlemen. The reservation with its prime grass covered about 4,300,000 acres and had been set aside for the Cheyenne-Arapaho Indians in 1869. About 3,500 Indians lived on the reservation; two-thirds were Cheyenne, and one-third were Arapaho. The Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency was located at Darlington, not far from Ft. Reno. In charge of the Indian Agency was John D. Miles.

L. E. Hodge, Jr., Patt Hodge, Lt. Gov. and Mrs. Spencer Bernard at the dedication of the C-A cattle Ranch as a listing on the National Register — April, 1981

PHOTO BY Dee Ann Ray
On December 12, 1882, the chiefs and warriors of the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribe met in public council, with the agent, John D. Miles, and Edward Fenlon, long time cattleman. Edward Fenlon made the proposition to lease 2,004,000 acres at two cents an acre for ten years. Half of the money was to be used in buying cattle for the starving Indians. The request was forwarded to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. A second meeting was held on January 8, 1883 with the chiefs. Agent Miles gave the go-ahead for the agreement with the cattlemen even though he had not received authorization from the Commissioner. The agreement was signed by sixteen Cheyenne chiefs and nine Arapaho chiefs.

A corporation was formed, called the Cheyenne-Arapaho Cattle Company, with R. W. Raymond, New York City as president, A. F. Childs, New York City, Calvin Hood, banker from Emporia, Kansas, William E. Malaley, Caldwell, Kansas, Hampton B. Denman, Washington, D. C. and Edward Fenlon, Leavenworth, Kansas, were stockholders. Fenlon would serve as ranch manager.

Other lessees were Albert G. Evans and Robert D. Hunter, St. Louis, Missouri, and Lewis M. Briggs, Muscotah, Kansas. Fenlon was a good selection for the ranch manager, as he had been in the cattle business fifteen years. He had been a government contractor and had freighted goods from the end of the railroad, at Caldwell, Kansas, to the Cheyenne-Arapaho, Kiowa, and Wichita Agencies. During the Civil War, he had served as postmaster for Leavenworth, Kansas.

The Cheyenne-Arapaho Cattle Ranch was also called the C. & A. Ranch or the "Apple Ranch." One of the brands used was in the shape of an apple. The ranch was located in the northwest part of Western Oklahoma and included part of Custer and Roger Mills counties and all of Dewey and Ellis counties. The lease shows the ranch was bounded on the west by the Texas line, the south boundary was the Washita River, the east line was the Western Cattle trail, and the north boundary was the south side of the Cherokee Strip.

The ranch was managed from three locations. The main headquarters, where all the business was transacted, was located at the mouth of the Quartermaster Creek and the Washita River, six miles northeast of the present Hammon, Oklahoma. Three log houses and large corrals were built at this location. The second site was near the Antelope Hills on Commission Creek. The third and smallest location was on Turkey Creek, west of the present town of Camargo.

The first payment to the Indians, $30,000 in silver, was brought to Darlington by Edward Fenlon. The money came from Peter Cooper, well-known American inventor, manufacturer, and philanthropist. Cooper was the inventor of the first American steam locomotive, the "Tom Thumb." He was the founder of the Cooper Union, an important center for free instruction in art and science in New York City. Cooper died shortly after the ranch was started, but his estate continued financing the ranch.

From the very beginning, the C. & A. Ranch had nothing but trouble. Cattlemen on the reservation, who had no agreements, refused to move their herds. A small band of Indians, who had not signed the lease did not approve of it, began to cause trouble. By 1884, the cattlemen on the reservation had lost $100,000 and, added to the grass payment, made the cattle business anything but profitable.

The Department of the Interior had at last replied to the issue of grazing upon Indian Territory. The department did not recognize any lease or agreement with the C. & A. Ranch. Other ranchers made arrangements with the Indians, who did not sign the C. & A. lease, and moved their cattle onto the range.

About this time a group of Indians left the reservation, causing further trouble for Agent Miles. The C. & A. boundary lines were questioned by other cattlemen. There had been a rumor that Agent Miles had received a large sum of money from Edward Fenlon for help in securing the C. & A. lease. The rumor was not true, but nevertheless, John D. Miles resigned as Indian Agent on April 1, 1884.

For more than ten years Agent Miles had served the Indian tribes with honesty and fairness. The agent sent to succeed him, D. B. Dryer, did not have the experience for such a difficult job. As disorder and depredation increased, Agent Dryer sent calls for troops between May and August.

In December, 1884, Agent Dryer went to Washington to request more aid. He stated that conditions were worse than ever before and could be checked only by military force.

On March 4, 1885, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs requested the Secretary of the Interior to ask the War Department to put enough troops on the Cheyenne-Arapaho reservation to preserve peace. He also asked that Agent Dryer be replaced and that the Indians be disarmed and all leases be annulled and all the cattlemen and their herds be removed from the reservation.

On July 10, 1885, President Cleveland issued a proclamation that all leases on the Cheyenne-Arapaho reservation were void, and that persons on these lands were there unlawfully, and that they must move within forty days all cattle and other property.

More than 210,000 head of cattle were removed from the Cheyenne-Arapaho reservation. The cattle were placed on range that had already been overstocked, and many were lost that winter. The removal of the ranchers from the reservation was the beginning of the decline of the cattle market. The winter of 1886-87 was financially disastrous for almost all cattlemen who had cattle on the Great Plains.

The C. & A. Cattle Ranch was in existence but a short time, but it was one of the great ranches of the plains. The C. & A. Cattle Company lost millions of dollars in their gamble against two elements, nature and the range. Seven years later, in 1892, the reservation was opened for settlement to the white man.