The following pages are excerpts from the book:

TRAILS SOUTH

The Wagon-Road Economy in the Dodge City-Panhandle Region

By C. Robert Haywood

the book is available at:
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Trails South:
Haywood, C. Robert (Clarence Robert), 1921–2005

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Cover art by Nancy Ohnick

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First Edition published in 1986 by the University of Oklahoma Press, Norman

Published in the United States of America
ISBN 0-9746222-2-2

1. The Dodge City–Panhandle Region

We, and all others who took land, came south from Dodge City. We kept as near the beaten trails as we could because they were the anchor of safety. The trail was the only compass we had on these lonely prairies. —Mrs. E. May Novinger, Meade County, Kansas pioneer. [1]

At one point in the historiography of the United States, the study of regionalism took on the dimensions of faddish popularity. The proper use of such terms as *area, regional, sectional,* and *localism* were the sources of heated debates. The *South*, *Prairie Provinces*, and *Trans-Mississippi West* were expressions given nuances of meaning that were understood to help explain why certain areas in certain times developed as they did. Professor Howard W. Odum of the University of North Carolina found the concept "a highly useful instrument of analysis, understanding, and synthesis in the social science." As a frame of reference, the concept was useful but, unfortunately, over-refined and frayed to tatters. If the problems of precise definitions can be set aside, however, the study of a geographical area, reflecting its cultural and economic similarities, can contribute to the clarification of that region's development and its place in history. [2]

In the 1870s and 1880s there were such a region—localized area or subdivision, if you will—in what was to become the panhandle of Texas and Oklahoma and in southwestern Kansas. For those few years, that section of the West appears to have had enough distinctly identifiable and significantly interdependent characteristics to warrant a separate designation. The area met most of the agreed-upon criteria of a region. There was cultural consistency, which uniformly changed as the economic base was altered; there were common physiographical and demographical characteristics, such as rainfall and population density; there were shared attitudes relating to the land, the natives, dress, and acceptable social behavior; there was interdependence of trade area, market, and transportation lines; and, finally, there was a recognition of this commonality by those who lived there.

The region at hand can best be described as a ragged, imprecise triangle encompassing the upper panhandle of Texas, the northwestern

tier of counties plus the panhandle of Oklahoma, and the major portion of half a dozen counties in southwestern Kansas. Irregular fingers of related territory extended from the triangle at some points, as they did in the south while Clarendon flourished in Donley County, Texas. What held the region together were the north-south lines of communications connected at their base by an east-west route, forming a tenuous interior skeleton. These freighting trails with their north-south orientation to Dodge City did much to maintain the region. Other trails and roads, including railroads, exerted varying degrees of pressure on the continuity of the region, but such pressures were successfully resisted until near the close of the 1880s; continuity remained intact for at least two decades. In order to have a shorthand designation for the area, it will be referred to as the Dodge City–Panhandle Region or, simply, the Region. It is at best an awkward term. However, political divisions have so firmly labeled the geographical areas today that the triangle symbol and the Dodge City–Panhandle designation is as clear as any that can be found.

At the apex of the Region stood Dodge City, with the three trails—the Dodge City–Fort Supply Trail, or Military Road, the Tascosa–Dodge City Trail, and the Jones and Plummer Trail—converging on the railhead that gave the town its preeminence. For a quarter of a century Dodge City was to be the marketplace for and the purveyor of goods to the Region. Whether the economy was fueled by buffalo hunters, cattlemen, or grangers, the town remained the essential hub as long as the wagon-road economy existed. Dodge City's astute journalist Nicholas ("Nick") Klaine explained in an editorial titled "Our Southern Tributary":

> *The topographical position of a country has much to do with its destiny. History points to great centers of trade that have grown up through their superior commercial advantages endowed by nature . . . Dodge City lies in favorable position . . . at the gateway of a great country that leads south and southwest . . . in a direct line with the eastern boundary of the Panhandle of Texas. That vast extent of country is a tributary to this by reason of the advantages nature has given.*

With a town booster's myopia, Klaine must have assumed that the Santa Fe Railroad was a localized natural phenomenon on the order of the Arkansas River or the hills of Dodge City. He implied that geography and railroad construction had combined to give Dodge City a kind of manifest destiny to dominate the region. These conditions did, in

2. The Dodge City–Fort Supply Trail: From Military Road to Commercial Highway

The October 1867 Treaty of Medicine Lodge was a dazzling showpiece for both the Indians and the army. Satanta, Little Raven, and Black Kettle were never more eloquent. They spoke of their desire to grow old in peace on the prairie, of their disappointment with their white brother and the sorrow in their hearts at the killing of the buffalo. Now they had come willing to "listen to the good word" so that the chiefs could lay down lance and bow. All five of the major Plains Indian tribes were there, thousands of them, with the two hundred fifty Cheyenne lodges prominently in sight. And the soldiers came. As one Indian eyewitness reported, "they came and came and came, in part of the evening and all night. I did not know when they stopped coming in." Commissioner Nathaniel Taylor welcomed each tribe and spoke as forcefully as the chiefs of a troubled Great Father and the white brothers' desire for peace. The sixty wagons of presents were distributed, papers signed, promises made. The red man and the white smoked and drank whiskey together and pledged lasting friendship. [1]

Despite the pageantry and dramatic oratory, both forces at the council knew that Medicine Lodge was little more than an interruption in the continuing conquest of Indian lands as the frontier moved west. The Cheyennes and Arapahos broke camp at the end of the council and moved south as they had agreed to do. Other tribes and other individuals were not impressed with the sincerity of the white man. Roman Nose did not sign. And before the main body of lodges were struck, some four hundred Indians already were heading north from the Cimarron, their lives committed to a warrior who would not surrender. By June 1868 the Cheyennes had raided the Council Grove countryside and the Kaw Reservation, and Major General Philip H. Sheridan had been placed in command of the department of Missouri with orders to control Indian depredations by driving them south of the Kansas border, "pursuing to kill if necessary." [2]

It was a difficult assignment, although not a disagreeable one for the general. The summer of 1868 saw brief skirmishes, but the army was for the most part helpless in the face of the scattered, free-ranging tribes, who used an attack-and-run strategy. Winter was another matter. If Sheridan could maintain his troops in the field—better fed, better clothed, better mounted and better armed than his adversary—he was certain he could force his will on the Indians. The key to his strategy, the absolute necessity, was supplies. At this point the concept of Camp Supply and a protected trail to it from Fort Dodge turned into reality.

Brigadier General Alfred Sully had noted a likely site for a base camp on his extended scouting expedition in the Panhandle during the fall. He was now put in command of a force consisting of elements of the Nineteenth Kansas Volunteer Cavalry and the Seventh U.S. Cavalry with orders to march south and establish a temporary "camp for supplies." On November 12 the forces assigned to the expedition were joined at Mulberry Creek just south of Fort Dodge by an immense train of approximately four hundred wagons guarded by a few companies of infantry. Heading south, the troops proceeded to Cavalry Creek, then on to Bear Creek, the Cimarron, and the Beaver, a distance of one hundred thirteen miles. On November 18 they reached Wolf Creek at its confluence with the North Canadian, the site Sully had noted in his earlier tour. The spot was identified as Camp Supply. For the moment it was assumed that Camp Supply would be a temporary base, lasting only until General Sheridan had completed his winter campaign. It was a shortsighted view of a tenacity of the Indian and the difficulty of the terrain in which they were to find refuge. [3]

The first passage down what was to be known as the Military Road was one of the most impressive expeditions in the West. Among the officers of this force of more than one thousand one hundred men and four hundred wagons was Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer, who described in detail the line of march:

> *Everything being in readiness, the cavalry moved from its camp on the north bank of the Arkansas on the morning of the 12th of November and after fording the river began its march toward the Indian territory. That night we encamped on Mulberry Creek, where we were joined by the infantry and the supply train. General Sully, commanding the district, here took active command of the combined forces. Much anxiety existed in the minds of some of the officers, remembering no doubt their late experience, lest the Indians should attack us while on the march, when, hampered as we should be in the protection of so large a train of wagons, we*

3. The Fort Elliot Extension and the Mobeetie–Tascosa Trail: The Base of the Triangle

After Fort Elliott was commissioned in 1875, the trail from Kansas to Fort Supply was extended into the panhandle of Texas. Although not a part of the Military Road, the extension appeared on the maps as a continuation of the old route. Altered in detail from time to time as it adjusted to new way stations, improved water crossings, or smoother ground, the new extension remained basically unchanged until the end of the era. From the beginning the road was used heavily by nonmilitary traffic. Although it had been laid out by the army and was intended to be a link between the two forts, hide men, ranchers, and settlers all found it a useful trail south. Even after the Jones and Plummer Trail became the preferred route of the freighters, the old Military Road was more widely known outside the Region and continued to be used extensively by people living in the area.

The extension ran south out of Fort Supply, angling slightly west over rich prairie lands. About ten miles down the trail, still within the Cherokee Outlet, the marks of the Western Cattle Trail spread across the prairie for a quarter-mile or more. In 1874, under army escort, John T. Lytle drove three thousand longhorns to Dodge City over this route. By 1878, the Western Cattle Trail was well established along the ninety-ninth meridian and was used by the majority of the Texas cattlemen who drove herds north to Kansas. Once the cattle trail was in full use, there were times when freighters and the stagecoach drivers on the Fort Elliot extension had to wait for hours while a herd of Texas cattle passed. A few miles beyond the Western Trail, a traveler would begin noticing the heavy growth of timber to the south. The cedar trees growing there served as a lucrative second cargo for otherwise empty wagons returning from delivering supplies to either of the two forts. A Dodge City paper noted: "The wood used by our bakers is hauled from Texas by freighters who realize ten or twelve dollars to the wagon are just that much ahead as they would be coming to Dodge empty." The

presence of timber also made possible a new type of construction for houses and other buildings. Wherever trees of sufficient size were found, picket walls replaced the sod used on the prairie. Posts eight or nine feet long and seven or eight inches in diameter were set vertically in a trench, which was dug according to a floor plan. Although picket houses were no more permanent than sod houses, they were considerably cleaner and just as easy to build. [1]

The first of several good camping spots and the first serviceable way station lay eighteen miles south of Fort Supply in the valley where Buzzard Creek, fed by an ever-flowing spring, converged with Wolf Creek. The way station, on the south bank of Wolf Creek, took its name, Buzzard Roost, from the stand of timber along the smaller stream. The trees on the creek had been the summer roosting place for thousands of buzzards and had been known as Buzzard Roost since the first white man came to the territory. The station changed hands frequently over the years but remained in operation until the end of the freighting era. [2]

Crossing Wolf Creek was normally a simply matter, but, as was true of any prairie stream after a rain, it could turn into a torrent as wild as its name. The force of the water and its depth were often misleading to people new to the country, as Mani Leopard learned the hard way:

> *The Wolf was up and still rising when the northbound stage rolled in driven by Mani Leopard. There was one passenger, an Englishman full of booze and wind. It was about midnight. They ate their lunch, put on two teams—the trail was heavy—and pulled out. At the Wolf crossing two miles north, Leopard got out and looked at the creek; then he came back and said, "Creek's up; got to turn back." The passenger said, "In England they pay no attention to high water, but drive right in. You Americans are such damned cowards. And I want to get to Supply." (At least that's the way Leopard told it afterwards). Leopard asked him, "Well, what do you say?" The Englishman said, "Drive in." So in they went. The stage turned over. Mani swam out. They found the passenger in a drift close by, the stage-coach and team half a mile below, and some of the mail.* [3]

Buzzard Roost was a busy place. Sam Manning, who came to the Panhandle in 1874 and eventually settled in Higgins, Texas, remembered it as "one of civilization's first outposts in these parts":

> *Intersecting the Fort Supply–Fort Elliot Military telegraph line and overland stage and freight trail at Buzzard Roost another overland freight trail came in from the northwest and followed a*

4. The Jones and Plummer Trail: The Freighting Road to the Panhandle

The more centrally located of the major trails south, the Jones and Plummer, did not follow the pattern Lieutenant J. H. Simpson had outlined in his report of 1848. Neither the army nor the federal government had a role in its creation, nor was there any thought of advancing civilization through it. The founders were motivated by no more an uplifting purpose than the hope of making a profit supplying the needs of the buffalo hunters who had followed General Philip Sheridan's advice to go where the buffalo were. Since it was not a part of the federal defense strategy for the southwestern frontier, the trail was never surveyed by the army or systematically patrolled. The only military connection it had was in its service as freighting road for wagons bringing supplies from Dodge City to Fort Supply and Fort Elliott and as an occasional alternated route for troops passing between Dodge City and the eastern Texas Panhandle.

The Jones and Plummer Trail was from the beginning a civilian road, created for commercial purposes. The two former buffalo hunters turned merchants and freighters who marked the trail saw it simply as a route for transporting supplies from Dodge City to their store on the Canadian River and returning buffalo products to the Dodge City railroad sidings. Their comings and goings carved ruts deep enough into the sod for others to follow. The chance meeting Ed Jones and Joe Plummer that led to their brief partnership and establishment of the trail reflects the nonmilitary side of the development of wagon-road economy. For two decades of the 1870s and 1880s, the trail served as a major freighting highway while the Dodge City–Panhandle Region changed from a culture based on buffalo hunting to one solidly founded on ranching and farming.

The two founders of the trail were true but quite different representatives of the Western Plains pioneers of the post–Civil War period. Charles Edward ("Ed") Jones's life was to encompass nearly the whole of the plains experience. He was at one time or another buffalo hunter,

Indian trader, Indian fighter, hide buyer, freighter, bone picker, merchant, rancher, and farmer. He came to the Region when it was an untracked prairie and lived to see it become a settled and productive land. Ed's partner, Joe Plummer, on the other hand, drifted into the Region from an obscure background, made his brief mark on the land, and moved on to new lands and ventures that are totally lost to history.

Charles Edward Jones was born August 10, 1852 at Neenah, Wisconsin. His father, James J. Jones, was an Englishman who came in 1846 with his immigrant parents to Wisconsin, where they settled in Winnebago county. James married Esther T. Clarke from New York State, and there were twelve children, Ed being the next to the oldest. [1]

As a young man just turned twenty, Ed hired out to a Wisconsin firm to hunt buffalo and ship the hides back. His salary was fifty dollars a month, substantial for a young man of his years. With contract in hand, he came to Kansas early in 1872 and for the next few years was a familiar figure in the buffalo camps in and around Dodge City. Ed claimed to have killed one hundred and six buffalo "before breakfast" as his biggest single killing. For a time, either while he was still hunting or immediately thereafter, he traded with the Indians for hides. When buffalo became scarce in Kansas, he turned to freighting supplies from Dodge City into the Panhandle. [2]

Jones gained a reputation for being a hard customer not to be trifled with, fearless, and self-reliant on the plains, whether hunting or freighting. His appearance and name added to the image. He acquired the sobriquet *Dirty Face* when an Indian fired a gun so close to him that Jones was marked by severe powder burns. His was a good reputation to have, particularly if backed by a certain amount of bravado; legends are made of such stuff. At one point he was driving a twelve-mule team down the Palo Duro on a dark night when someone yelled, "You halt." In J. Wright Mooar's words, "Old Jones says, 'You go to hell, you son-of-a-bitch,' and kept a-going. That fellow never said another word." Jones also knew how to deal with horse thieves. It was his custom on the trail to turn his mules loose at night, making certain his saddle horse was secured to a wagon wheel, for he knew the mules would not stray far from the camp. In Dodge he announced, so that all could hear, that he wouldn't hunt his mules if they were stolen, instead, he would take his buffalo gun and hunt down four men, known horse thieves he named. He apparently made believers of the horse thieves operating in Indian Territory. On one of his trips south his mules were stolen, but the next night the leader of the gang sent one of the men back, not only with the mules, but with an apology and a buckskin

5. The Dodge City–Tascosa Trail: The Link Between Sister Cow Towns

For more than a decade, Tascosa on the sandy flats above the Canadian River in Texas and Dodge City on the hills above the Arkansas River in Kansas were the liveliest cow towns in the West. The same gamblers, bartenders, and dance-hall girls at various times served the same trail-herd cowboys, determined to have a "high ol' time." The economic link that made them sister cities, although by no means a mirror image, was the cattle trade; the physical link was the Dodge City–Tascosa Trail.

Tascosa was almost totally supplied by freighters moving down from Dodge City, although some traffic continued throughout the period from 1870 to 1890 between Tascosa and Springer, New Mexico, and the Fort Bascom Trail was fairly heavily traveled for the brief period of that fort's existence. But the isolation of Tascosa made the Dodge City–Tascosa Trail one of paramount importance as long as the town flourished. Although the physical difficulties were not as formidable as those on the other two Panhandle freighting trails, the long distances between way stations and the absence of settlements made it seem longer and less inviting. The demand for goods, however, brought heavy traffic to the trail. At its peak, the population of Tascosa never exceeded 600 permanent residents, but cowboys' attraction to the soiled doves and the seven saloons on the wild side of town, known as Hogtown, and the big ranchers' merchandise requirements boosted sales far beyond the town's own needs. In 1886 the *Tascosa Pioneer* noted one hundred nineteen thousand pounds of goods received during the previous week and complained, "It wasn't a good week for receiving merchandise, either." The firms of Cone & Duran and Wright & Farnsworth each had freighting teams pulling two wagons in tandem in constant use, averaging as much as fifty thousand pounds of merchandise hauled overland each month from Dodge City. [1]

The general configuration of the Dodge City–Tascosa Trail was determined by the location of the Cator brothers' ranch, known as the

Zulu Stockade. Comancheros, Indians, buffalo hunters, and soldiers had moved southward across the plains for years, sometimes following old paths and sometimes relying on their own intuition and past experiences. All kept within watering distance of the streams and generally on the high ground. There were, however, no permanent routes to that section of the Texas Panhandle until Jim and Bob Cator began making trips to Dodge City from their Palo Duro station. Because they used the same tracks and the same crossings repeatedly, their habits became a fixed trail and their home base the best known landmark in the area. When Tascosa was founded, the trial that had ended at the Zulu Stockade was continued to the Canadian River, following a path of least difficulty over the Texas terrain.

The Dodge City–Tascosa Trail was divided into two distinct sections: the northern half followed the established Jones and Plummer Trail and also was used by freighters headed for Fort Elliott and Mobeetie; the southern half, from Beaver, Oklahoma on south, was used almost exclusively by those headed for Tascosa. W. S. Mabry's log of the northern section, given to Charles Goodnight by the Oldham Land District surveyor, reads:

Jim Lanes to Hines Crossing on Cimarron	*40 miles*
Cimarron to Hoodu Brown's on Crooked Creek	*20 miles*
Hoodu Brown's on Crooked Creek to Dodge City	*42 miles*

There were no surprises or independent routing on this section of the trail. It simply followed the established and clearly marked route Ed Jones and Joe Plummer had started.

Mabry's log for the southern stint was as specific as that for the Jones and Plummer section:

Tascosa to Little Blue stage stand	*35 miles*
Little Blue stage stand to Zulu (Jim Cator's)	*30 miles*
Zulu (Cator's) to Hardesty Ranch	*40 miles*
Hardesty's Ranch to Jim Lane's on the Beaver	*35 miles*

The two stations on either side of the Cators' place were selected because of their relationship to the Zulu Stockade. The Hardesty ranch, the first station south out of Beaver, was a well-protected establishment approximately halfway between the Cators' ranch and the connection with the Jones and Plummer Trail. Little Blue Station, offering the advantage of a flowing spring, was about midway between Zulu Stockade and Tascosa. The trail between these fixed points followed the logic of terrain, avoiding the sharp breaks and steep draws. [2]

6. Freighting: A Grimy Business Fit Only for Peculiar Men

There is a tendency in describing the developing West to people it with stereotypes. There were cowboys, nesters, miners, ranchers, schoolmarms, prostitutes, gamblers, homesteaders, and outlaws. Each, it would seem, knew his or her place and did not stray from it. No category of western types has been more universally depicted with unfounded uniformity than the freighters. Penny dreadfuls, regional novelists, history buffs, and professional historians have painted them with a broad and unvarying brush. Rarely were the freighters made the center of any great drama; instead, they were allowed to blend into the scenery as quaint, humorous, somewhat disreputable characters of a predictable type. [1]

Expressmen, freighters, in fact all who were involved in moving wagons down the trail were lumped together as unfortunates caught in a dusty, monotonous, and unpleasant trade. Even the serious scholar found them a strange and peculiar lot:

> *For all that may be said in his behalf, a teamster possessed few of the refinements of life and little of the dash and flamboyance that made other types of frontiersmen legendary figures. He belonged, by and large, to a class of illiterates. A teamster's face, hands, and clothes (including frock pants tucked into jackboots, checkered shirt, and broad and sloppy-brimmed felt hat) were invariably and indescribably dirty and grimy due to constant exposure to dust or mud and to the back spray of tobacco juice squirted into the prairie winds. Nor was he considered the soberest of men. He drank more than his thirty-five dollar monthly pay with keep would allow. He brawled long and hard before extended trips, and enroute he not only patronized saloons where he found them, but was even known at times to have raided the liquor in freight. At such times and places he often became involved in quarrels, but seldom in gun fights.* [2]

When distinctions were made among freighters, the role of the man within the wagon crew was considered most important in determining his characteristics. The wagonmaster was "almost invariably a powerful figure . . . forceful enough to impose his authority on men who were themselves tough and often restless. By the very nature of their job, they had to be strong, brave, and tireless. They had to know how to exact obedience to their commands. On the other hand, they were profane, hard drinking, fighting men who could handle a revolver or bowie knife and were 'often guilty of barbarous tyranny.'" The bullwhackers who drove the oxen, on the other hand, "were anonymous men," "taciturn and often peculiar." "The chasm," we are told, "separating the wagonmaster from the muleskinner and bullwhacker was wide, and in turn the teamsters looked with no small degree of condescension, if not scorn, upon the swampers and 'cavvy boys.'" Among the teamsters, the muleskinner held himself a notch above the bullwhacker, the notch representing about ten dollars more per month in pay. Cooks, when there was a separate assignment, bore a striking resemblance to the cattle-drive cook, having a heart of gold, the charm of an irritated porcupine, unsanitary but superior culinary abilities, and a vulnerability that made them the butt of campfire practical jokes. At the lowest level were the herders, or cavvy boys, who looked after the extra stock: green kids, earnest but error prone. Taken as a whole, teamsters were "hard-bitten men" who "stuck together" and "remained in a class to themselves." [3]

Such one-dimensional categories are not very useful in describing individuals in the wagon-road business of the Dodge City–Panhandle Region. Furthermore, such stereotyping promotes a superficial understanding of the people who settled the Region, for nearly all of the wagon-trail personnel remained in the West to become farmers, stockmen, merchants, or community leaders—the eventual permanent settlers.

In truth, teamsters, confined as they were to a dusty, slow-moving routine, did not compare favorably with their more glamorous peers in stagecoach and riverboat settings. They had neither the dash nor the flair of a stage driver, nor did they possess the aura of authority and adventure of a Mississippi sidewheeler captain. In the words of R. D. Holt: "The old-time freighter was no picturesque character, as was the cowboy. . . . In frontier communities, however, he was not ranked as low in the economic and social scale as were the sheep herders."

Even though teamsters may have ranked low in the transportation hierarchy of their day, there was no single freighting type. Nor was there within the wagon-team hierarchy a fixed position. Individuals

7. P.G. Reynolds: Mail Contractor and Entrepreneur of the Wagon Road

Land, capital, and labor without direction do not produce anything; the catalyst for productive yield lies in the efficacy of the fourth factor, the entrepreneur. Although all four components are interdependent, the managerial role is the essential creative force. If the entrepreneur is effective, the enterprise prospers; if not, the other factors may for a time carry the project forward, but eventually it will fail. The entrepreneur, as F. W. Taussig has said, "stands at the helm of industry and guides its operation." He is the driving force in a capitalist society.

In the Dodge City–Panhandle Region a number of creative entrepreneurs, men such as W. M. D. Lee, Charles Rath, and Casimiro Romero, used the wagon roads to develop profitable and reasonably efficient ventures. As compared with transportation facilities in the more settled areas of the United States, the wagon-road service was slow, costly, and primitive. But considering the frontier nature of the territory, the utilization of capital and labor was sophisticated enough to support fairly large operations. Since it was a time of transition, the early developers were able to make the first substantial modification of the environment that would permit more intensive use of all four factors of production.

The entrepreneurs of the road were attracted to the frontier from widely different backgrounds, lured, as were others, to the West by the expectation of a new start and the conviction that success, honor, and power were clearly within grasp. Although their personalities reflected the diversity of their upbringing, there were certain characteristics, certain attitudes toward life, and certain convictions about themselves and the new environment that were held in common. These traits and predilections set them apart from the wage-earning freighters, cowboys, and farmhands, who were used by the entrepreneurs to further their own ambitions.

As a rule the entrepreneurs were older than the typical plainsman and had already served an apprenticeship in a related activity before

coming to the Dodge City–Panhandle Region. W. M. D. Lee was only twenty-nine when he began his career at Camp Supply, but he was experienced as a driver for Wells Fargo and had served as quartermaster in Sherman's army during the war and as a civilian immediately following the war; Casimiro Romero had already built an empire based on sheep, complete with its own town, when at the age of forty-nine, he organized his first freighting outfit. The entrepreneurs considered themselves self-made men, but all brought with them to the Region either capital or, more important, some grant of privilege, license, or contract. Romero had cash; Lee had a contract as post trader, a monopoly of great value. There is no question that their greatest motivation was the expectation of making money. Like the cattle barons, whom they resembled, they came in the hope of accumulating wealth and power over the years. This contrasted markedly with the cowboys, freighters, and buffalo hunters, who sought wages to gratify immediate needs and pleasure.

Nearly all entrepreneurs in the Region during the 1880s invested in cattle. The difference, therefore, between the cattle kings and the leaders of commercial enterprise became quite blurred at times. It is difficult to separate the businessman in Colonel Jack Hardesty or Ham Bell from the rancher. In most matters, the two types thought alike and frequently joined forces to advance their common cause. The major distinction was that the entrepreneurs of the road were not committed to a way of life to the same extent as were the cattle kings; consequently, they could make major adjustments in their business with more ease and a clearer conscience. They apparently felt little compunction in totally changing their means of making a living. When he became convinced the ranchers would someday dominate the land, Romero sold his sheep empire, which had taken years to develop and which rivaled neighbor Charles Goodnight's cattle holdings in size and value. Lee shifted partners and property frequently, left his lucrative sutler's post, and plunged into large-scale ranching with no sign of regret. It is reported that when he eventually left the Region, Lee never again mentioned his life there. [1]

As businessmen they were willing to take large financial risks, but such boldness did not mean they took their enterprises lightly. "A man might as well be dead as to lose his property," Robert Wright said when weighing the options of facing death if he stayed to drive off an Indian attack or saving his scalp by running and leaving his stock. All were prodigious workers and pursued the business at hand with inordinate drive and singleness of purpose. The worst charge one could lay on any man was that he "was not much force," meaning he was lazy. [2]

Business reverses were accepted philosophically as being in the nature of things, the luck of the draw, a setback but never a catastrophe. Robert Wright concluded that "out of great conflict rises a period of prosperity . . . this endurance of adversity, equipped people with courage." Wright undoubtedly would have denied the charge, but he and his peers unmistakenly endorsed the same principles of social Darwinism that the eastern industrial moguls of that day endorsed. The strong ought always to prevail, they believed, and any successful entrepreneur knew which man deserved his status. They prided themselves on being good judges of character, and they entered into partnerships and other business relationships with little more than a handshake and dissolved them with scarcely less bother. All used the partnership to pool capital and share talents. Few men tried to build a sizable enterprise on their own. They were quite willing to experiment with new methods and, like most Americans of that age, they were fascinated by new technology and put much reliance on improved equipment and mechanical gadgets.

As was true of other Gilded Age capitalists, they were politically conservative, were leery of federal or even state government, and were champions of home rule. The government's police role, which included ridding the plains of unproductive Indians, curbing the lawless, and protecting the arteries of commerce, was their concept of the extent of useful governmental powers. Lee was never reluctant to call for military protection of his hay parties and teams or demand escorts for his mule trains when they were in hostile territory. The entrepreneurs were, above all else, strong law-and-order men. Most, however, reflected the cynicism of their eastern counterparts in accepting the financial rewards of governmental policy described as the Great Barbecue by Vernon Louis Parrington. They willingly accepted free lands, government contracts, and policies that supported their private enterprise.

In social attitudes, the entrepreneurs of the Region acknowledged their role as models of community decorum, which placed them a cut above the rest of the people. They accepted the obligation of propriety, married good women, raised industrious sons and dutiful daughters, saw to it that their families attended church, worked to advance the community, and generally eschewed politics beyond their own immediate environs. In short, they tried to be good and contributing citizens and accepted the role of leadership as a natural obligation of class.

Philander Gillette Reynolds, the Dodge City mail contractor, was one such contributing entrepreneur. As much as any single person, he

8. Stage Drivers: The Men in the Box

"From the earliest days of stagecoaching," writes Ralph Moody, "the drivers, particularly the more colorful and dashing, were regarded by Americans with much the same idolatry as that of the Romans for their chariot racers." [1] Sitting high in the box, as the driver's seat was called, and wielding a whip that made a cracking good sound, with four spirited horses at his command and beneath him a swaying coach laden with mailbags and travelers anxious to make an end of their journey, the stagecoach driver on a Dodge City–Panhandle Region trail surely must have felt some of the allure and excitement of his role. But a Roman charioteer on the order of Ben Hur he was not. Glamorous he was not. After sweltering all day in dust kicked up by the team or freezing in near-zero cold on the windswept prairie, he had no illusions of grandeur. An understanding of the importance and necessity of his job might remain, but it was clear to him that it was only a job, and a tough one at that.

Far less is known of stage drivers in the Dodge City–Panhandle Region than of other wagon-road users. Of those who left records of their lives, none reeked or even hinted of glamour. The one authentic desperado in the lot, Henry Newton Brown, certainly belied the role while in Kansas and the Panhandle. There were rumors of past association with Billy the Kid, but in Tascosa he built a solid reputation as a worthy citizen working on the right side of the law. In Kansas, until the May morning he and Assistant Marshal Ben Wheeler obtained the Caldwell mayor's permission to be absent for a few days and headed west out of town, Brown was a model of law-enforcing propriety. He looked and acted the part of a fearless marshal, and the people of Caldwell were reminded: "He neither drank, smoked, chewed nor gambled." His fellow townsmen found him cool, courageous, and gentlemanly. He was a "quiet and obtrusive" man who arrested troublemakers with dispatch, shot only those who resisted, and minded his own business when not looking after the peace and security of the town. His neighbors took him on picnics; appointed him marshal three times; lavished gifts on him, including "an elegant gold-mounted and

handsomely-engraved" Winchester; and rejoiced in his marriage. Understandably, the stunned citizens of Caldwell could not believe that Brown was shot down by a mob after he and Wheeler had been a party to a bungled bank robbery. [2]

The stage drivers, particularly P.G. Reynolds' drivers, came nearer —but only nearer—to the hard-drinking, tobacco-spewing, tough-minded eccentrics of Hollywood vintage film. Fred Tracy found one such driver on his way to Englewood, Kansas, in 1885. "The driver wore a walrus mustache," he recalled, "big white hat and high heel boots. He possessed an extensive vocabulary of profanity. About his first remark was about the heavy rain and that probably that God Damn Mulberry Creek would be up and we would not be able to cross." Ben Steed on the Fort Elliott line was so profane that the ranch women dreaded to meet the mail stage. But for each driver resembling the tough image, there were many more pedestrian souls doing a good job for modest pay. About the only safe generalizations applicable to all drivers were these: the were generally young men in their twenties or early thirties; they were new to the West; and, like their freighting compatriots, they remained on the job only long enough to find something better to do. [3]

Driving stage was not the easy way to wealth. Pay for all drivers was at or near the level of that for a day laborer. In the ranks of civilian employees, the army paid ambulance drivers, "teamsters for public transportation," and laborers the same thirty-five dollars a month; clerks made one hundred dollars, and even a house painter or sailmaker who repaired wagon covers and tents made more than twice as much as a driver. Consequently, the turnover of drivers was high. The fact that most missed the census takers indicates something of their transient nature. In an age when every farm boy had handled teams of horses since the day he was old enough to stumble down a furrow behind a plow, most young men moving west had the skills to qualify as a stage driver. P.G. had no trouble finding replacements when he drivers moved on to greener pastures, which they did literally as well as figuratively, since most eventually became either ranchers or farmers. [4]

The driver's major qualification was that of reinsman, that is, knowing how to handle horses, oxen, or mules. About the only article of dress the drivers had in common was their gloves or gauntlets, which had to be thin enough for the driver to communicate and respond to the team through the leather ribbons in his hands. Reins, not the whip, gave the driver authority the team recognized. But in the parlance of the day, a good reinsman also had to have a good horse sense,

9. Way Stations and the People Who Ran Them: Guideposts Marking the Trails

The landmarks used in describing trails were either the creeks and river crossings or the way stations. Occasionally, natural land formations, such as Mount Jesus or Devil's Gap on the Military Road, were mentioned as points of reference, but the way stations were the more familiar and accepted guideposts for identifying routes and marking distances. As they developed in the 1870s and 1880s in the Dodge City–Panhandle Region, way stations were variously called stage stations or stands, inns, road ranches, [1] way stations, posts, stores, and, in one instance, stockades. Each term described a slightly different function, although all performed a number of common services. Stations varied widely in size and operational style. Some were owned by stage companies, but most were independently established with the expectation of making a profit, that is, a living, for the owners. If the record of rapid operator turnover is any indication, it would appear that few succeeded in accomplishing that objective. It is, of course, impossible to account for all the stations on the trails at this late date. They came into existence with little public notice and were abandoned with even less. Caterers to the stage coach and freighters on the prairie trails were no more permanent than good restaurants on a modern highway, but while they existed they were an important part of the transportation system, contributing to the settlement and stability of the Region.

In spite of their diversity, way stations shared certain common characteristics. First, few were established exclusively to capture the trade generated by the trails, and fewer still were built by the stage companies. This is apparently somewhat unusual in the trail system in the West, although it was typical of the early post roads in the East. Most of the western stage companies outside the Region established their own stations or purchased facilities already established in military forts, towns, and cities along the route and staffed them with company agents. The most notable exception to the rule was Ben Holladay, who cared little for passenger comfort and did not own or supervise any

way stations. John Butterfield; Russell, Majors and Waddell; and the Leavenworth and Pike's Peak Express, on the other hand, built and operated with their own agents stage stations that were spaced to correspond with one day's travel or the relay change of teams. The stage lines in Texas depended heavily on military forts, building their own facilities within protection of the walls. Of the twelve stops on the Jackass Line between San Diego and San Antonio, eight were forts. Independent owners who established stations on other trails without the support of the stage lines built them specifically to service the stage business. Donald F. Danker found the proprietors of road ranches in neighboring Nebraska "a hardy and brave group" who moved far in advance of settlement for the specific purpose of capturing the "profit from overland trade." [2]

On the trails in the Dodge City–Panhandle Region, the location of way stations was in many instances accidental. There were few independent operators, such as Matt Hutchinson, who determined a road ranch's location in cooperation with stage owners. Joe Plummer and Ed Jones were unique in that they staked a trail to their trading post, a trail later used by other freighters and stage lines. Most station operators, however, simply found themselves at a convenient river or creek crossing or about the right distance from another road ranch on the trail. The Cators at Zulu, the first Hutchinson road ranch in Meade County, and O.D. Lemert at Crooked Creek just happened to settle where the freighters or stages needed service or at a usable crossing. Since distances between stops for the stage freighters varied from fifteen to forty miles, luck or simple availability seemed to determine where some road ranches would become operative. The Cators, Jim Springer on the Canadian, and Jack Hardesty on the Tascosa Trail are examples of being about the right distance from the nearest competitors or being an established landmark on the trail.

The second condition on the Region's trails was that few road ranches could survive on trail business alone; some diversification was required. The Hutchinson brothers on the Jones and Plummer Trail pursued a variety of enterprises ranging from sugar manufacturing to sheep raising. The operator at Little Blue Station in Moore County, Texas was that county's first farmer. Silas Maley also tried farming on the Bluff Creek bottoms, as did John and George Gerlach on the Canadian. Jim Springer sold whiskey and expertly extracted cash from card-playing troopers at Fort Elliott.

On the other hand, it was not advisable to attempt to couple the station with some major activity, such as ranching. When an over ambitious operator attempted to continue two or more major enterprises,

10. End of the Trail

Scarce any trace remaining, vestige, gray,
Or marked lines along old trails,
To points where herds once moved—the day
Now night the sunset fails.—H.H. Halsell [1]

While the talk of new rail lines and new track was no more than rumor and gossip, the people served by the wagon trails believed the old ruts would give one more service. "It is our observation," wrote the editor of the *Meade County Globe*, "that railways usually follow water courses and the greater trails of the country. If this holds good in Meade County we are doubly blessed, as the placid waters of Crooked Creek bubble up by our door, and the great trail from Dodge City to Tascosa, via Fowler and Meade Center, is a feasible route." The Fowler editor ran the same story, suggesting that the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe would find that in following the old trail "few cuts and fills" would be required, and, furthermore, "the public domain south of us could be crossed without additional legislation, and the Panhandle of Texas, which is rapidly settling up, would furnish immense traffic." Citizens in both Meade and Fowler believed their chances of acquiring rail connections were especially good because the north-south line to Mobeetie would "not deviate far from the old Jones & Plummer Trail."

Wilburn, north of Fowler, gambled and lost on the prospect that the Chicago, Nebraska, Kansas and Southwestern Railroad would run a line from White Cloud, Nebraska to "some point in Texas." Wilburn folks believed the line would follow the Jones and Plummer, at least through Ford and Meade counties. The citizens of Bloom, fifteen miles east of Wilburn, were as strongly convinced that the same Chicago, Nebraska, Kansas and Southwestern would make its north-south line follow the old Dodge City–Fort Supply route. The conviction was shared with the town boomers in Ashland, who also supported the platting of Deep Hole as the logical first depot south of their town. [2]

The long-standing north-south orientation was so firmly fixed in the minds of people who knew the Region that they could not imagine

it would not prevail when the railroads began seriously surveying lines. If there was to be a continuation of the existing patterns, the logic of following either the Military Road or the Jones and Plummer Trail was clear. Furthermore, people living in the hinterland believed Dodge City would continue to dominate the transportation facilities. The Meade editor thought the disruption of Dodge City's monopoly of trade in the area would be ruinous to Dodge merchants. He suggested that even the threat of diverting some of the trade away from town would bring "irreparable injury." If Meade merchants were to support even a wagon road leading directly into Cimarron, Kansas, the Dodge merchants would make concessions to prevent the loss of trade. Dodge City, as "the great distribution point for all this section of country for miles and miles to the south," was so dependent on that trade that it would do all it could to keep it. The powerful merchants of Dodge City, with their long-time connections with railroad officials and politicians, would fight even harder to preserve their north-south trade when the railroads came. Under the circumstances, many residents of the Region believed that the old trails, which had helped maintain the configuration of the Region, would continue to serve as "guide and compass" for the new transportation system. [3]

This final service was not to be. The small improvements, cuts and fills, made on the prairie trails over the years were insignificant when compared with the requirements of grading for tracks. Any following of the old trails by new tracks would be accidental and inconsequential. By the time the rail lines reached the Region, the pattern of east-west tracks had been set by facilities beyond the borders of Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. When the tracks were finally laid, the trails were completely ignored.

In a remarkably short time the economy based on wagon transportation, with its network of roads, freighting wagons, accommodations, and stagecoach lines, came to an end. The railroads killed the industry. Obviously, animals and wagons did not disappear overnight, however, with but a few anachronistic exceptions the long-distance hauling ended within a half-dozen years after the rail lines cut through the Region. Wagons remained as local carriers only. P.G. Reynolds' old stage barn at Ashland was converted to a transfer and bus business, and Perry Monroe and Frank Cavender, who had managed one of Reynolds' stage lines north of Dodge, moved into town to operate it. Theirs was a symbolic shift; from a stage line covering a one-hundred-mile run to short hauls to the train depot. [4]

Local business sustained the wagon freighters for a time. Until the end of the World War I, they continued to be an essential part