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OPEN-RANGE CATTLE-HERDING IN SOUTHERN FLORIDA

by JOHN S. OTTO

THE herders of the Old South held little land and few slaves but owned considerable numbers of livestock. They grazed their livestock on the unclaimed public lands, or "open-range," at no charge, a practice which was safeguarded by state laws until after the Civil War. Living throughout the Old South, the herders were especially numerous in the mountains and the coastal plain, where the soil possessed little fertility, and where most of the land was unclaimed public domain.¹ In the southern mountains, herders raised hogs in the unfenced hardwood forests, exporting porkers to southern plantations and to mid-western slaughter houses.² In the southern coastal plain—the sandy coastal lowlands which stretched from the Chesapeake Bay to the Rio Grande River—herders raised cattle in the pine forests, exporting beeves to southern cities and to the West Indies.³

During the past decade, historians have rediscovered the southern herders. Much of the recent historical research, however, has focused on the hog-herders of the mountains, and less attention has been devoted to the cattle-herders of the coastal plain.⁴ The latter have been largely overlooked by historians

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1. Frank L. Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South* (Baton Rouge, 1949), vii, 26, 33-35.
2. Edmund C. Burnett, "Hog Raising and Hog Driving in the Region of the French Broad River," *Agricultural History* 20 (April 1946), 86-103.
3. Sam B. Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake: Food Supply in the Old South, 1840-1860* (Carbondale, IL, 1972), 115-22.
4. See Forrest McDonald and Grady McWhiney, "The Antebellum Southern Herdsmen: A *Reinterpretation*," *Journal of Southern History* 61 (May 1975), 147-66; *Ibid.*, "The South from Self-Sufficiency to Peonage: An Interpretation," *American Historical Review* 85 (December 1980), 1095-1118.

because so few of them left personal documents, such as letters and diaries, describing their behavior and thoughts.

Although the lives of cattle-herders are documented incidentally in public records such as federal census manuscripts and county tax lists, these documents were little more than lists of names and numbers describing the quantitative results of past behavior but not the behavior itself.⁵ The behavior of cattle-herders was occasionally described in the travelogues which were written by northern and foreign visitors to the Old South, but such publications contained the inevitably biased observations of visitors who only partly comprehended the reality of the livestock-herders' lives.⁶ In addition to travelogues by outsiders, a few herders and members of their families left written testimonies about their antebellum lives in the form of autobiographies and "old-time" reminiscences. Some of these were later published.⁷

Though few cattle-herders had the time or the inclination to write down their feelings and thoughts, many left oral testimonies of their antebellum lives. Herders often related their experiences to their children and grandchildren who in turn transmitted these oral testimonies to their descendants. These accounts, or traditional oral histories, offer one of the best sources for studying the lifeways of the antebellum cattle-herders.⁸

Oral traditions, nevertheless, leave much to be desired as historical sources. In contrast to written documents, which, if left unaltered, can be regarded as permanent records of past events, oral histories possess no such permanency. Oral tradi-

5. John S. Otto, "Hillsborough County (1850): A Community in the South Florida Flatwoods," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 62 (October 1983), 190.
6. Francis Tuckett, *A Journey in the United States in the Years 1829 and 1830*, ed. by Hubert C. Fox (Plymouth, MA, 1976); Charles Lanman, *Adventures in the Wilds of the United States and British American Provinces*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1856); James Stirling, *Letters from the Slave States* (London, 1857).
7. F. C. M. Boggess, *A Veteran of Four Wars: The Autobiography of F. C. M. Boggess* (Arcadia, 1900); Deacon E. I. Wiggins, *A History of the Mt. Enon Association* (Tampa, 1921); Webster Merritt, "A History of Medicine in Duval County: Part IV," *Journal of the Florida Medical Association* 31 (May 1945), 523-28.
8. Oral traditional history is defined in Richard M. Dorson, "The Oral Historian and the Folklorist," in Peter Olch and Forrest Pogue, eds., *Selections from the Fifth and Sixth National Colloquia on Oral History* (New York, 1972), 44-46.

tions may change with each telling.⁹ Yet, even these deficiencies of oral traditions may be overcome. As folklorist William L. Montell has found, the veracity of oral traditions can be established if there is geographic continuity of populations in an area, and if traditions can be corroborated with local records.¹⁰

Fortunately, these conditions exist in southern Florida, an area where numbers of families have resided from antebellum times to the present, and where many of the statements in oral traditions may be corroborated and supplemented with local historical sources. During the course of an historical study of antebellum Hillsborough County, the author met a life-long resident of the community, Mr. Seth Alderman, whose family had lived in southern Florida since the mid-nineteenth century.¹¹ With this degree of geographic continuity, the Aldermans were able to hand down successfully their family's traditions. Included in their oral traditions were descriptions of the lifeways of James Alderman, a cattle-herder who was born in Duplin County in eastern North Carolina in 1801, and who died in southern Florida in 1880.¹² Alderman moved to Bulloch County, Georgia, in 1815 with his parents, and after marrying Roxie Ann Holloway there, he migrated to Thomas County, Georgia, in 1827, where he engaged in livestock-herding and farming.¹³ About 1850, Alderman moved his family and livestock to sparsely-settled Hillsborough County, Florida: "My great-grandfather came to Florida. . . . [He was] James Alderman. He and my grandfather [Timothy, James' second son] and the whole family moved down here from Georgia. . . . That was before there was anyone in Hillsborough County much." 14

9. Ruth Finnegan, "A Note on Oral Tradition and Historical Evidence," *History and Theory* 9 (Spring 1970), 200-01.
10. William L. Montell, "The Oral Historian as Folklorist," in Olch and Pogue, eds., *Selections from the Fifth and Sixth National Colloquia on Oral History*, 50-53.
11. John S. Otto, "Florida's Cattle-Ranching Frontier: Hillsborough County (1860)," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 63 (July 1984), 71-83.
12. Interview with Seth Alderman by John S. Otto, August 28, 1986 (hereinafter Alderman interview). Transcript of interview on file at Hillsborough County Historical Commission Library, Hillsborough County Courthouse, Tampa. Mr. Alderman is the great-grandson of James Alderman, who lived in Hillsborough County from 1850 to 1880.
13. Kyle S. VanLandingham, "James Alderman, 1801-1880," *South Florida Pioneers* 14 (October 1977), 15-16.
14. Alderman interview.

James Alderman's name was missing from the 1850 census for Hillsborough County. It first appeared in the local records in 1851, when he purchased 160 acres from a private landowner. In later years, he enlarged this farmstead by purchasing additional acreage from the federal government, accumulating a total of 240 acres by 1860.¹⁵ Although he acquired a modest homestead, James Alderman did not purchase grazing lands for his livestock. Florida law permitted citizens to graze their stock on the public land, or open-range, at no charge.¹⁶ By 1860, James Alderman grazed a total of 1,770 cattle on the public lands of Hillsborough County.¹⁷

Alderman's sizable cattle herd was composed of "scrubs"—hardy range animals which survived on coarse native forage, tolerated the heat of southern Florida, and developed an immunity to endemic stock diseases. In spite of their hardiness, scrub cattle were small and scrawny, gaining weight during the wet, warm months when forage was plentiful, and losing weight during the dry, cool winters when food was scarce.¹⁸ At best, a "three year old steer would weigh about 600 pounds," the "cows weighed 500 or 600 pounds," and the "bulls weighed 700 or 800 [pounds]."¹⁹

Weighing only a few hundred pounds, scrub cattle "could cover range so sparse that heavier blooded stock literally walk[ed] themselves to death trying to find enough to eat."²⁰ Roaming the unfenced public lands in search of native forage, scrubs lived in herds which had a known territory: "They

15. VanLandingham, "James Alderman," 16; Otto, "Florida's Cattle-Ranching Frontier," 79.

16. Alderman interview; Leslie A. Thompson, *A Manual or Digest of the Statute Law of the State of Florida* (Boston, 1847), 135.

17. Data on James Alderman's agricultural wealth and household composition in 1860 are from the manuscript returns of the Eighth U.S. Census, 1860, Hillsborough County, Florida, Schedule 4 (Agriculture), Schedule 1 (Free Inhabitants), and Schedule 2 (Slave Inhabitants), on microfilm, Robert Manning Strozier Library, Florida State University, Tallahassee (hereinafter cited as Eighth Census, 1860, with appropriate schedule numbers).

18. W. Theodore Meador, Jr., and Merle Prunty, "Open-Range Ranching in Southern Florida," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 66 (September 1976), 365; John M. Scott, "Native Cattle Small from Lack of Feed," *University of Florida Agricultural Experiment Station Press Bulletin*, No. 191 (Gainesville, 1912).

19. Alderman interview.

20. Stetson Kennedy, *Palmetto Country* (New York, 1942), 216.

formed herds. Oh, like, they'd be various sizes. A lot of them would be like 75 to 110 [in size]. . . . They wandered a lot; but for the most part, they'd stay in a given area. You wouldn't exactly know where you was going to find them, but you'd have a fair idea."²¹

A typical herd of scrub cattle included an old bull, several young bulls, and a few dozen cows, calves, and steers. A herd generally wandered within a three square-mile area. Given the ecological complexity of southern Florida, this territory usually included tracts of hammocks, prairies, and flatwoods.²² During the winters, when forage was less abundant, cattle would browse in the dense hardwood stands, or hammocks, which were located on hillocks or along streams: "They liked the hammocks in the wintertime, because there was moss strewing out of the oaks and that sort of thing. They ate the moss out of the trees. . . . They'd probably eat the leaves off some of the trees . . . There'd be ferns and various other small plants they would get some good out of. But this grey [Spanish] moss that grows in Florida, cattle liked that, especially in the wintertime."²³

Cattle also sought out the seasonally-flooded prairies and ponds which contained stands of maidencane: "A lot of times those prairies were some of the best grazing, especially during dry weather [in winter]. . . . [In addition], there were some old ponds that had 'maidencane' in them that were real good, especially in the winter. . . . I think that in this particular area, the 'wiregrass' and the 'maidencane' were the big things."²⁴

Wiregrass was the most abundant grass in the pine flatwoods—the dominant ecological community in southern Florida. Containing little more than pine trees, saw palmettos, and seasonal grasses, the flatwoods were characterized by low relief, sandy soils, and an underlying hardpan which hindered drainage and caused flooding during the rainy, warm months. How-

21. Alderman interview.

22. Ibid.; John H. Davis, "The Natural Features of Southern Florida," *Florida Geological Bulletin*, No. 25 (Tallahassee, 1943), 44.

23. Alderman interview.

24. Ibid., "Maidencane" (*Panicum hemitomon*) was a tall perennial cane that offered forage for cattle during most of the year. In turn, "wiregrass" (*Aristida stricta*) was a seasonal grass that provided forage from late winter to early fall. See Lewis Yarlett, *Important Native Grasses for Range Conservation in Florida* (Gainesville, 1965), 75-77, 119-20.

ever, during the dry winters, the flood-waters receded, and the flatwoods were susceptible to fires.²⁵ To improve the flatwoods range for his cattle, Alderman deliberately burned the woods during the winter—a practice which removed the frost-killed wiregrass, exposed the spring grass, and reduced the palmetto undergrowth: “The grass—after it gets old and tough— it’s not much good. There’s a lot of wiregrass; and when it’s fresh burned, it’s real good grazing. Then, I guess it kept down the palmetto some. . . . And when the palmetto’s young and tender [after a fire], they [scrubs] would eat it.”²⁶

Within a few weeks, the burned flatwoods yielded a carpet of fresh grass. When the spring grass was most abundant, about half of the cows dropped calves. To protect the young calves from wolves and other predators, Alderman collected the newborn calves and their mothers and penned them on his farmstead: “They used to do what they called ‘penning’ cows. . . . They would be wooden pens or pole pens. . . . They’d get a herd of cows up, and they’d separate the cows from the calves. They’d put the calves on one side . . . and the cows on the other. . . . That would make the cows come up at night.”²⁷

Grazing in the flatwoods during the day and returning to the cowpens at night to nurse their calves, the penned cows furnished milk for the Alderman household: “Some of those old cows were trained to milk. They’d [herders] have a bucket sitting on the gate posts; and they’d have a small bucket; and they’d go around and milk a little from each cow; and they’d pour it in there, so they wouldn’t have to carry the big bucket around. That was usually before they turned the calves in [to nurse] in the morning. They’d usually just do that once a day.”²⁸

When the wiregrass faded in the summer, and when the milk supply declined, Alderman released the cows and calves, allowing them to rejoin the herds on the unfenced range. Predators, however, still posed a threat to young cattle: “I re-

25. Joe A. Edmisten, “The Ecology of the Florida Pine Flatwoods,” (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Florida, 1963), 1-3, 13, 18.

26. Alderman interview. The benefits of burning the flatwoods are discussed in J. B. Hilmon and C. E. Lewis, “Effect of Burning on South Florida Range,” *Southeastern Forest Experiment Station Paper*, No. 146 (Asheville, NC, 1962), 1-12.

27. Alderman interview.

28. *Ibid.*

member hearing them talking about panthers [cougars]. . . . There were panthers and wolves here at that time. . . . They'd shoot them. They had muzzle-loading rifles. I heard them talk about the muzzle-loading rifles."²⁹

Although they hunted predators, burned the flatwoods, and penned the calves, the Aldermans devoted little labor to cattle-herding during most of the year. James Alderman did not provide his scrub cattle with any supplementary fodder, veterinary care, or salt doles. Each fall, however, Alderman found it necessary to collect his hundreds of range cattle, mark and brand the calves, and select the beef steers for market.³⁰ Collecting the range cattle, the "cow-hunt," was the most difficult task confronting Alderman since his animals were scattered across thousands of acres of unfenced range. Although some southern Florida cattle-herders had used black slaves to aid them in collecting cattle, James Alderman possessed no slaves. In fact, Alderman's 1860 household contained only two other adult laborers—his two grown sons, William and Townsend. Given his small work force, James Alderman turned to his scattered neighbors for aid in gathering his cattle. Alderman's neighbors lived within the Alafia Settlement which had grown up around his homestead. Though each farmstead in the Alafia Settlement was located several miles apart so that cattle could graze in the intervening range, the settlement constituted a rural neighborhood, whose members were linked by friendship, kinship, and marriage. In the case of James Alderman, his Alafia neighbors included friends, as well as his four married sons—Matthew, Timothy, Mitchell, and Michael Alderman— and his two sons-in-law.³¹ Calling on his in-laws, sons, and neighbors for casual labor, James Alderman collected his cattle, identified calves, and chose beeves for market.

Meeting on the open-range, Alderman and his Alafia neighbors constructed temporary pens to hold the cattle they collected. In gathering the range cattle, herd-dogs proved indispensable: "They were mostly 'cur-dogs'. . . . Some had a little hound in them and a little bull [dog]. . . . They were just good

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*

31. Otto, "Florida's Cattle-Ranching Frontier," 79-80; VanLandingham, "James Alderman," 16.

old dogs. A good dog was worth two or three men, really. Anyhow, they'd get the cows and circle them and get them together and help drive them into the pen."³² After penning the cattle, Alderman and his neighbors marked the calves' ears and branded their flanks: "They'd have the brand. Build up a lighter-knot fire and have the branding iron on that. Catch the calves. Somebody would do the marking, somebody the castrating, and somebody the branding."³³

Each cattle-herder had his own brands and ear-marks which were registered at the county courthouse. James Alderman, for example, used the "4" and "22" brands. In addition, he cut the ears of his calves: a "swallow-fork in one ear and an upper and underbit crop" in the other.³⁴ As they marked and branded the calves, Alderman selected the beef steers—those older than three years. Though he saved a few for home butchering, James Alderman sold the bulk of his steers. Southern Florida cattle-herders usually sold a tenth of their cattle each year. Thus, in 1860, Alderman's 1,770 cattle should have yielded at least 177 marketable beef steers.³⁵

The problem was finding a market for the steers. In the early 1850s cattle-herders in southern Florida drove beeves on the hoof to such markets as Jacksonville, Savannah, and Charleston. With the opening of the Cuban cattle trade in the late 1850s, this pattern began to change. James McKay, a Tampa merchant, has been credited with opening the Cuban cattle market in 1858.³⁶ McKay exported live scrub steers to Cuba in exchange for Spanish gold and Cuban ponies. By 1860, McKay was shipping about 400 beeves each month to Cuba.³⁷ Taking advantage of the new market, James Alderman and his neighbors drove steers to Tampa for shipment to Cuba. A typical drive consisted of "seven and eight hundred steers with about

32. Alderman interview.

33. Ibid.

34. Richard M. Livingston, ed., "Hillsborough County: Early Marks and Brands," *South Florida Pioneers* 7 (January 1976), 23; *ibid.*, "Hillsborough County: Early Marks and Brands," *South Florida Pioneers* 8 (April 1976), 15.

35. Alderman interview; W. Theodore Meador, Jr., "The Open Range Ranch in South Florida and Its Contemporary Successors," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Georgia, 1972), 40.

36. Otto, "Florida's Cattle-Ranching Frontier," 78.

37. "A New Era in the History of Tampa," *Tampa Florida Peninsular*, July 28, 1860.

eight or ten men with dogs.” Since Tampa lay less than a dozen miles from the Alderman homestead, the drive took only a day or two. In Tampa, scrub steers were worth as much as \$15.00 per head.³⁸ At such prices, Alderman’s harvest of 177 steers may have earned as much as \$2,655.00. Since Alderman grazed his cattle on public lands, and since his stock required no fodder or medicines, it cost little to raise a steer for market, and the money realized from the sale of range steers was nearly all profit.

Despite his sizable income, Alderman lived modestly in a home-made log house. On their farmstead, the Aldermans built a series of unhewn pine-log structures, including a small barn, corn crib, meat house, detached kitchen, and a multi-room house with stick-and-clay chimneys. By 1860, this pine-log house sheltered James, his wife Roxie, their sons, and five daughters.³⁹ In addition to pine-log buildings, Alderman’s farmstead contained the cow pens, which protected young calves and milk cows from predators during the spring. Since the manure from the penned cows enriched the soils, old cowpens offered fertile garden spots: “They’d pen them on this parcel of land that they were going to farm. Well, the droppings, manure, and urine [would accumulate]. . . . They’d do that on the same tract of land for maybe six or eight weeks at a time. It got the land real rich with all that fertilizer they brought in. That’s where they’d plant their sweet potatoes and their [sugar] cane following their sweet potatoes. . . . From the cane, they made syrup and sugar.”⁴⁰

Farming the old cowpens, Alderman produced 400 bushels of sweet potatoes, 1,000 pounds of cane sugar, 400 bushels of corn, and 100 bushels of peas in 1860. The enriched cowpen soils yielded more than enough corn, potatoes, and peas to feed his family. Alderman used the surplus foodstuffs to feed his two horses and fifty hogs.⁴¹ Raising food crops to feed his family,

38. Alderman interview; “List of Produce, &c. Shipped from the Port of Tampa, during the past season,” Tampa *Florida Peninsular*, December 3, 1859.

39. Alderman interview; Eighth Census, 1860, Schedule 1.

40. Alderman interview.

41. In 1860, James Alderman’s household contained ten white adults and children, each of who would have required thirteen bushels of corn per year to meet their subsistence needs. Using a modification of Sam Hilliard’s formula for measuring self-sufficiency in corn, one finds the farm’s total production (400 bushels of corn) minus the seed requirements (five per

and selling scrub steers in Tampa, Alderman easily met his subsistence and cash needs: "It was a self-sufficient farming, really. . . . They lived largely for their livestock and small farming. Most all of them grew sweet potatoes and [sugar] cane. . . . But they had to buy their cloth and make their clothes. I guess they had to buy their salt [to cure their meat]." ⁴²

Purchasing a few consumer necessities, Alderman used the remainder of his cash income to pay taxes and to acquire property. By 1860, Alderman had accumulated \$9,009 worth of livestock and farm land valued at \$1,500. ⁴³ This was somewhat more than the average southern Florida cattle-herders, who owned \$1,410 worth of livestock and \$766 worth of land in 1860. ⁴⁴ Although he was wealthier than the average cattle-herder, Alderman's cattle-herding practices and lifeways were typical of southern Florida. He and other Florida cattle-herders acquired farmsteads, grazed cattle on the open-range, burned the flatwoods range to improve forage, hunted predators, penned calves and cows for protection, planted food crops in old cowpens, conducted annual cow-hunts to collect range cattle, identified calves with marks and brands, and drove beef steers overland to coastal markets. ⁴⁵

cent) and minus the human needs (ten people times thirteen bushels) would have furnished a surplus of 250 bushels of corn. And by converting sweet potatoes and peas to their corn equivalents (400 bushels of potatoes equals 100 bushels of corn and 100 bushels of peas equals 100 bushels of corn), this would have yielded an additional 200 bushels of corn equivalents. Even after feeding his horses and hogs at the following yearly rates (two horses times seven and one-half bushels of corn and fifty hogs times four bushels of corn), Alderman would still have achieved a surplus of 235 bushels of corn and corn equivalents. See Eighth Census, 1860, Schedules 1, 2, and 4; Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*, 158; and Raymond Battalio and John Kagel, "The Structure of Antebellum Southern Agriculture," *Agricultural History* 44 January 1970), 28.

42. Alderman interview.

43. *Ibid.*; Eighth Census, 1860, Schedule 4.

44. Commercial cattle-herders may be identified in the federal census manuscripts as those owning more than eighteen cattle. Eighteen cattle would have furnished a farm family with one work ox, a bull, two milk cows, six breeding cows, and eight steers for sale. The 167 cattle-herders in Hillsborough County in 1860 owned livestock worth \$235,541 and farmland valued at \$128,800, Eighth Census, 1860, Schedule 4; Otto, "Florida's Cattle-Ranching Frontier," 77.

45. James W. Covington, *The Story of Southwestern Florida*, 2 vols. (New York, 1957), I, 100-01, 132-33; Wiggins, *History of Mt. Enon Association*, 3-5; Boggess, *Veteran of Four Wars*, 66, 74, 76, 82; Doris Lewis, *The Kissimmee Island 'Piney Wood Rooters'* (Moweaqua, IL, 1982), 2-3, 11.

This complex of cattle-herding lifeways, moreover, was not confined to southern Florida. These cultural traits were also found in Georgia and the coastal Carolinas.⁴⁶ In fact, this cattle-herding complex apparently originated within coastal South Carolina, an area which was settled after 1670.⁴⁷ Although the founders of Carolina wanted "Planters there and not Graziers," they supplied their colonists in the 1670s with cattle from Virginia, New York, and Bermuda.⁴⁸ Despite the presence of such predators as the "Tyger [cougar], Wolf, and wild Cat," cattle multiplied rapidly in coastal Carolina.⁴⁹ By the 1680s, cattle were so plentiful in the new colony that Carolina was exporting barrels of salt beef to the British West Indian colonies.⁵⁰

The center of Carolina's early cattle industry (1680-1710) was Colleton County, a spacious community located south of Charleston. It had been settled primarily by British immigrants during the late seventeenth century.⁵¹ Among these were many from western England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland.⁵² Signifi-

46. John Ben Pate, *History of Turner County* (Atlanta, 1933), 29, 31, 36, 41-42; Julia E. Harn, "Old Canooche Backwoods Sketches," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 24 (March 1940), 382-83; John H. Goff, "Cow Punching in Old Georgia," *Georgia Review* 3 (Fall 1949), 341-48; Elizabeth W. A. Pringle, *Chronicles of Chicora Wood* (New York, 1923), 17-18.
47. Lewis C. Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860*, 2 vols. (Washington, 1933; reprint ed., Gloucester, MA, 1958), I, 55-57, 148-49; Terry G. Jordan, *Trails to Texas: Southern Roots of Western Cattle Ranching* (Lincoln, NE, 1981), 38-42.
48. [Langdon Cheves, ed.], *Collections of the South Carolina Historical Society*, 5 vols. (Richmond, 1897), V, 272, 275, 286, 298, 320, 437, 440-41 (quotation from p. 437).
49. T. A. [Thomas Ash], *Carolina: or a Description of the Present State of that Country* (London, 1682), 19-20.
50. [Samuel Wilson], *An Account of the Province of Carolina in America* (London, 1682), 13; Editor, "Letters of Thomas Newe from South Carolina, 1682," *American Historical Review* 12 (January 1907), 325.
51. Verner W. Crane, *The Southern Frontier 1670-1732* (Durham, 1928), 163; Clarence L. VerSteeg, "Origins of a Southern Mosaic: Studies of Early Carolina and Georgia," *Mercer University Lamar Memorial Lectures*, No. 17 (Athens; 1975), 115. The three original counties (1682) of South Carolina included Colleton, Berkeley, and Craven. Colleton lay south of the Stono River; Berkeley, between the Stono and Sewee rivers and included Charleston; and Craven, to the north of the Sewee. Colleton's inhabitants were largely British; Berkeley's population, mainly British West Indian; and Craven's settlers were French Huguenots. See Edward McCrady, *The History of South Carolina under the Proprietary Government 1670-1719* (New York, 1901), 193, 329; M. Eugene Sirmans, *Colonial South Carolina: A Political History 1663-1763* (Chapel Hill, 1966), 17, 36-37, 61.
52. McCrady, *History of South Carolina*, 193-94; [John Norris], *Profitable Advice*

cantly, cattle-herding was the leading agricultural pursuit in this part of Britain during the seventeenth century.⁵³

In western Britain, herders lived in hamlets and scattered farmsteads, but they grazed their cattle on the "commons"—the mutually-shared unfenced range.⁵⁴ Most British commons were "moors"—tracts of poor soils which supported little more than heather and coarse grass. To improve the moorland forage for their cattle, Britons burned the moors in winter to remove dead vegetation and promote the growth of new grass. If they were periodically burned, moors provided forage from spring to fall.⁵⁵ Since cattle ranged on the unfenced moors, owners identified their animals with distinctive marks or brands.⁵⁶ Stock grazed on the commons under the care of herdsmen, or "moormen." At night, herdsmen drove their animals into pens, or "folds," for protection from predators and thieves.⁵⁷ Folding of

for Rich and Poor . . . Containing a Description, or True Relation of South Carolina, an English Plantation, or Colony, in America (London, 1712), 13, 83-84; R. F., *The Present State of Carolina with Advice to the Settlers [sic]* (London, 1682), 6; [Wilson], *Province of Carolina*, 7.

53. Crispin Gill, *The West Country* (Edinburgh, 1962), 9-10; Robert Trow-Smith, *A History of British Livestock Husbandry to 1700* (London, 1957), 213, 223, 229. In this article, western Britain includes southwestern England, the Welsh borderland, Wales, northern England, Scotland, and Ireland, the area which Forrest McDonald and Grady McWhiney have termed the "Celtic frontier." McDonald and McWhiney, "The South from Self-Sufficiency to Peonage: An Interpretation," *American Historical Review* 85 (December 1980), 1107-08.
54. F. V. Emery, "England circa 1600," in H. C. Darby, ed., *A New Historical Geography in England* (Cambridge, 1973), 261; E. Estyn Evans, *The Personality of Ireland: Habitat, Heritage, and History* (Cambridge, 1973), 38-39, 53, 60-61; W. G. Hoskins and L. D. Stamp, *The Common Land of England and Wales* (London, 1963), 108.
55. John F. Hart, "The British Moorlands: A Problem in Land Utilization," *University of Georgia Monographs*, No. 2 (Athens, 1955), 3-4, 9-10, 18-19; A. J. Kayll "Moor Burning in Scotland," *Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Tall Timbers Fire Ecology Conference*, No. 6 (Tallahassee, 1967), 32-35. In seventeenth-century England, moor-burning was permitted only during the winter months from November to March. *A Collection in English, of the Statutes Now in Force* (London, 1621), 279-80.
56. R. Bradley, *The Gentleman and Farmer's Guide for the Increase and Improvement of Cattle* (London, 1732), 75; Ian Whyte, *Agriculture and Society in Seventeenth Century Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1979), 83; Edmund Spenser, *A View of the State of Ireland as It was in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth* (Dublin, 1763), 251-52.
57. Joan Thirsk, ed., *The Agrarian History of England and Wales 1500-1640* (Cambridge, 1967), 76; J. E. Handley, *Scottish Farming in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1953), 70; Edward MacLysaght, *Irish Life in the Seventeenth Century* (Shannon, 1969), 167-68. Pen was the generic British term for a

cattle also manured the soils, providing enriched fields for food crops.⁵⁸ In addition to supplying manure, cattle provided milk for households and beef for markets. Each fall, when frost killed the grass and moorland forage became scarce, owners rounded up their cattle. They spared the breeding animals, which were housed and fed on winter fodder, but sold the remainder of their herds to the drovers who toured the moorlands.⁵⁹ Drovers, accompanied by "cur-dogs," herded beef cattle from the western moors to English markets and slaughterhouses. Beef, whether fresh or salted, was a common food in Britain, and barrels of salt beef provisioned the British ships which sailed for the American colonies.⁶⁰

Arriving in the Carolina colony, British immigrants could easily reproduce their cattle-herding system by acquiring farmsteads, buying breeding stock from the established settlers, and grazing their cattle on the unfenced lands.⁶¹ A Carolina law of 1694 required agriculturalists to fence in their crops, allowing cattle to graze freely on any unfenced lands without fear of trespass. Since cattle grazed on unfenced range, Carolina laws of 1683 and 1704 required owners to identify their stock with "ear [marks] and burnt marks [brands]." To comply with the law, herders annually collected their stock, "bringing their cattle to their respective pens and marking them as they were accustomed."⁶² Once marked, cattle required little care during most of the year, receiving neither veterinary care nor supplemental "fother" [fodder].⁶³ Herders, however, deliberately burned the

stock enclosure. Such enclosures were also known as "folds" in Scotland and Ireland and as "ffalds" in Wales. See Joseph Wright, ed., *The English Dialect Dictionary*, 6 vols. (London, 1898), II, 439; *ibid.*, IV, 464; Dorothy Sylvester, *The Rural Landscape of the Welsh Borderland* (London, 1969), 508.

58. Trow-Smith, *History of British Livestock Husbandry*, 239; Eric Kerridge, *The Agricultural Revolution* (New York, 1968), 156.
59. Hart, "British Moorlands," 24, 26; G. E. Fussell, "Farming Methods in the Early Stuart Period, II," *Journal of Modern History* 7 (June 1935), 130; A. R. B. Haldane, *The Drove of Scotlands* (Newton Abbott, 1973), 20; Richard Colyer, *The Welsh Cattle Drovers* (Cardiff, 1976), 7.
60. K. J. Bonser, *The Drovers, Who They Were and How They Went* (London, 1970), 23, 35, 45, 104, 106-08.
61. [Wilson], *Province of Carolina*, 15-16; Editor, "Letters of Thomas Newe," 323; [Norris], *Profitable Advice*, 86-87, 91.
62. Thomas Cooper and David McCord, eds., *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina*, 10 vols. (Columbia, 1837), II, iii, 81-82, 106-07, 261-62.
63. [Wilson], *Province of Carolina*, 13.

unfenced range during the "month of March," a practice which removed "great Quantities of the dry [frost-killed] Russet Grass" and exposed the spring grass for their cattle.⁶⁴ In the spring, when grass was abundant and cows dropped their calves, owners collected new-born calves and mother cows, penning them in a "Fold," or "rail-fenc'd Field," for protection against predators. Cows continued to graze on the unfenced range during the day but returned to the safety of the fold at night to nurse their calves. At this time, owners milked their penned cows sparingly. The practice of folding, or cow-penning, also manured the soils, providing sites for planting "Garden Ware" and "West India [sweet] potatoes."⁶⁵ Before the fall season, herders released cows and calves, allowing them to rejoin the herds on the open-range. By fall, the beef steers were ready for butchering after fattening on the "Summer Russet Grass."⁶⁶ Using dogs to collect range steers, herders drove beeves to Charleston for butchering, salting, and barrelling.⁶⁷

Although Carolinian cattle-herders retained such British practices as grazing on the unfenced range, marking and branding of stock, burning of range lands, folding to protect stock and enrich soils, and fall cattle sales, changes occurred as they adapted to local conditions in South Carolina. Much of coastal Carolina was flatwoods, or "Pine barren Land," which was roughly comparable to the British moors with their poor soils, heather, and grass. The term "pine barren" implied its character, for the soil was a "light, sterill [*Sic*] Sand, productive of little else but Pine-Trees" and grass.⁶⁸ If regularly burned, the pinewoods yielded forage from spring to fall, as did the British moorlands.⁶⁹ Unlike the British moors, however, the Carolina pinewoods contained hardwood hammocks and ponds filled with evergreen cane. During the brief Carolina winters, cattle

64. [Norris], *Profitable Advice*, 91.

65. [Thomas Nairne], *A Letter from South Carolina; Giving an Account of the Soil, Air, Product, Trade, Government, Law, Religion, People, Military Strength, &c. of that Province* (London, 1710), 50; [Norris], *Profitable Advice*, 41-43, 51.

66. [Norris], *Profitable Advice*, 25, 49-50.

67. Jordan, *Trails to Texas*, 33, 41.

68. Mark Catesby, *The Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands*, 2 vols. (London, 1743), 11, iv.

69. John Drayton, *A View of South-Carolina as Respects her Natural and Civil Concerns* (Charleston, 1802), 7; Robert S. Campbell, "Extension of the Range Front to the South," *Journal of Forestry* 49 (November 1951), 787.

browsed upon the "long. . . green [Spanish] Moss" in hardwood forests and upon the "Cane growing plentifully on the lower moist Land," which kept them "in very good plight, till the Grass springs again."⁷⁰ Thanks to canes and Spanish moss, there was no need to provide cattle with winter fodder and housing, as in Britain. "Having little winter, the [Carolina] woods furnished them [cattle] with both shelter and provisions all the year; neither houses nor attendants were provided for them, but each planter's cattle, distinguished only by his mark, everywhere grazed with freedom."⁷¹

Since cattle required little care, herding proved the ideal industry for early Carolina, a colony that was chronically short of labor.⁷² In early Carolina, as in Britain, labor was too costly to provide cattle with daily care. Laborers were needed only to burn the woods in winter, pen the calves and cows in spring, mark and brand the stock, and collect the beeves in fall. Given this small labor input, a herder and a handful of laborers could successfully manage a herd of cattle and produce beef for the West Indies. The export of salt beef provided Carolinians with the necessary capital to purchase more land and laborers while they searched for suitable cash crops to supplement the cattle industry. During the late seventeenth century, Carolinians experimented unsuccessfully with such exotic cash crops as citrus, grapes, ginger, and sugar-cane. By 1700, they found rice to be the cash crop best suited for Carolina's climate and soils.⁷³

Although rice surpassed beef as Carolina's main export during the early eighteenth century, Carolinians continued to raise cattle on "cowpens" for the West Indian trade. Cowpens were isolated farmsteads with cattle pens, dwellings, and fields, sitting amidst large expanses of unfenced range.⁷⁴ By 1750, cowpens

70. [Norris], *Profitable Advice*, 49-50.

71. [Alexander Hewatt], *An Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the Colonies of South Carolina and Georgia*, 2 vols. (London, 1779), I, 95.

72. Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York, 1974), 33, 48-49.

73. Gray, *History of Agriculture*, I, 52-55, 277-78.

74. Converse D. Clowse, "The Charleston Export Trade, 1717-1737" (Ph. D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1963), 51-52; Gary S. Dunbar, "Colonial Carolina Cowpens," *Agricultural History* 35 (July 1961), 126-28; Charles W. Towne and Edward Wentworth, *Cattle and Men* (Norman, OK, 1955), 143. The earliest mention of "cowpen" in Carolina was in a law of 1703 which equated cowpens with stock farms. See Cooper and McCord,

were found throughout South Carolina, and the colony contained an estimated 100,000 head of cattle.⁷⁵ South Carolina was so overstocked with cattle that herders were leading their animals into the neighboring colonies of North Carolina and Georgia.

North Carolina was a colony of farmers and small planters who resented the intrusion of the South Carolina cattle-herders. In 1766, the North Carolina colonial assembly passed an act "to prevent the Inhabitants from South Carolina driving their Stocks of cattle from thence to range and feed in this Province," unless they purchased "a sufficient quantity of Land for feeding the said Cattle."⁷⁶ In spite of this law, cattle-herders gained a foothold in the flatwoods of eastern North Carolina, an area which included Duplin County, the birthplace of James Alderman.⁷⁷

Carolinian herders found a more favorable legal environment in Georgia. That colony adopted cattle-herding laws which resembled those passed in South Carolina. Georgia required farmers to fence in their crops, while allowing marked cattle to graze on unfenced lands at no charge. And by the 1750s Carolinian cattle-herders were moving into Georgia to graze their stock in the coastal flatwoods. By 1775, on the eve of the American Revolution, cattle-herders were found throughout coastal Georgia as well as South Carolina.⁷⁹ The war temporarily interrupted the expansion of the cattle-herders. Since it was not un-

eds., *Statutes at Large of South Carolina*, II, 220-22. The term "cowpen" may derive from "cow-pine"-a compound noun from Somersetshire in western England which meant a stock enclosure. See Wright, ed., *English Dialect Dictionary*, IV, 5 10.

75. John H. Logan, *A History of the Upper Country of South Carolina* (Columbia, 1859), 151-52; David D. Wallace, *The History of South Carolina*, 3 vols. (New York, 1934), I, 451.
76. Walter Clark, ed., *The State Records of North Carolina*, 26 vols. (Goldsboro, 1904), XXIII, 676-77.
77. Jordan, *Trails to Texas*, 40, 52; Faison and Pearl McGowan, eds., *Flashes of Duplin's History and Government* (Raleigh, 1971), 19; VanLandingham, "James Alderman," 15.
78. Allan D. Candler and Lucien Knight, eds., *The Colonial Records of the State of Georgia*, 26 vols. (Atlanta, 1910), XVIII, 73-75; Goff, "Cow Punching in Old Georgia," 345; Louis DeVorse, Jr., ed., *DeBrahm's Report of the General Survey in the Southern District of North America* (Columbia, 1971), 95.
79. William Bartram, *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida* (Philadelphia, 1791), 18-19, 309-10; Jordan, *Trails to Texas*, 45.

common for a herder to own a "thousand . . . head of cattle," and since each cow needed more than fifteen acres of range to find enough forage during a year, such a herd required over 15,000 acres of unfenced range.⁸⁰ In search of range for their cattle, many coastal herders migrated westward into the pine forests of southern Georgia.⁸¹ Included among such migrants was James Alderman, who moved from Duplin County, North Carolina, in 1815, to Bulloch County in coastal Georgia, and then in 1827, settled in Thomas County in southern Georgia.

Many Georgia cattle-herders, in turn, migrated southward into Florida. A Spanish colony from 1565 to 1763 and from 1783 to 1821, Florida had been the scene of a thriving cattle industry during the seventeenth century, but little was left by 1821 except the descendants of the Iberian cattle—the Florida scrubs.⁸² Incorporating scrub cattle into their herds, herders had occupied much of northern Florida by 1835. Only a few had entered the southern Florida flatwoods which lay within the Seminole Indian reservation. Following the removal of most Indians at the close of the Second Seminole War, herders began settling the southern Florida flatwoods. Their cattle grazed on wiregrass during the warm months and then retreated to hammocks and ponds during the winter months to browse on moss and cane-plants which had provided winter forage from the Carolinas to Florida. Included among the herders settling in southern Florida was James Alderman, who migrated in 1850 from Thomas County, Georgia, to Hillsborough County, Florida.

As cattle-herders entered Florida, the territorial legislature adopted a series of herding laws which resembled those passed in colonial South Carolina. A Florida law from 1823 required all farmers to enclose their crops with fences, so cattle were free

80. James S. Schoff, ed., *Life in the South 1778-1779: The Letters of Benjamin West* (Ann Arbor, 1963), 29; Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*, 136.

81. Fussell M. Chalker, *Pioneer Days Along the Ocmulgee* (Carrollton, 1970), 45; Folks Huxford, *The History of Brooks County, Georgia* (Athens, 1949), 25, 227; Victor Davidson, *History of Wilkinson County* (Spartanburg, SC, 1978), 107.

82. Charles W. Arnade, "Cattle Raising in Spanish Florida, 1513-1763," *Agricultural History* 35 (July 1961), 116-24; John E. Rouse, *The Criollo: Spanish Cattle in the Americas* (Norman, 1977), 75-77.

83. Otto, "Hillsborough County," 182-83; G. R. Fairbanks, "Florida," *DeBow's Review* 5 (January 1848), 11-12.

to graze on the unfenced lands. Five years later, the Florida legislature passed a law requiring herders to identify their range cattle with ear marks and brands.⁸⁴

Finding familiar laws and grazing environments in Florida, cattle-herders retained traditional lifeways, which were traceable to colonial South Carolina and to western Britain. Drawing upon their customary cattle-keeping practices, herders successfully raised vast numbers of scrub cattle in the southern Florida flatwoods. By 1860, the three southern Florida counties of Hillsborough, Manatee, and Brevard contained a total of 77,464 cattle.⁸⁵ Southern Florida herders annually exported thousands of beeves to the West Indies, thus continuing an export beef trade which began as early as the 1680s in coastal South Carolina.

84. Thompson, *Statute Law of the State of Florida*, 134, 419.

85. U. S. Bureau of Census, *Agriculture of the United States in 1860* (Washington, D.C., 1864), 18. The total number of cattle in Hillborough, Manatee, and Brevard counties was determined by adding those listed as "milch cows," "working oxen," and "other cattle."