

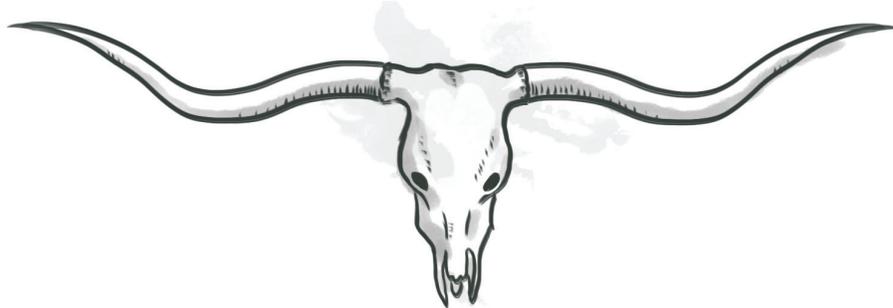
Adventures on the American Frontier

COWBOYS

and Cattle Drives

Part Three

Tom Smith
Marshal at Trail's End



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In the old west, cattlemen in Texas and other western states rounded their cattle up and drove them along trails to cities where there were railroads so they could ship the cattle to markets farther east. It was a long, hard trip for the cowboys.

When the cattle drivers reached the end of the trail after long months on horseback, they looked for a good time. Often they found it in the saloons and dance halls that lined the main street of every town at a trail's end.



Abilene, like many other towns in Kansas, got its start as a railroad shipping point for cattle. When it was new, the people hoped to keep it a quiet, peaceful town. But right away the town filled up with gamblers, gun-slingers, and outlaws.

In 1869, Abilene's first year, the town council voted to build a jail. The little square stone building was almost finished on the night that a gang of cowhands came whooping and shouting out the doors of the saloon across the street.



“Whoopee! Let’s tear down the jail!”

“Yahoo! Down she comes! Ain’t nobody going to lock us up in Abilene!”

And in a few minutes, the walls of the jail were just heaps of stones.

The council met the next morning.

“There’s just one thing to do to keep order in this town,” said Mayor Henry. “We’ve got to pass a law against carrying guns in town. We’ll post signs saying that every cowhand who comes to town must check his guns at the sheriff’s office.”

As men went to work to build the jail again, signs were posted across town. But the Texas cowhands shot the signs full of holes, and the sheriff couldn't get any of them to check their guns with him.

Mayor Henry called another meeting. "We've got to hire a town marshal," he said, and the rest of the council agreed.

One of the first men to ask for the job was Tom Smith, who had been a marshal in a Wyoming town—and he had been a good one.



Tom Smith rode in on his big gray horse, Silverheels. The men of the council liked him right away. He was strong and handsome, with a thatch of red-brown hair. The men liked the honest look in Tom's eyes when he talked to them. There was just one thing that bothered them.

Captain Shane asked Tom Smith about it. "They tell me you're called 'Bear River Tom' because you were the leader in a battle against a sheriff up in the mountain country. Is that so?"