

## CAROLINA COWBOYS

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Many of us grew up being entertained by stories of the West and the American Cowboy was the hero in many of these stories. Did you know that South Carolina and the rest of the South had cowboys long before the West? Our cowboys probably used horses and ropes infrequently, relying mostly upon staffs and whips.

Throughout the Colonial Period and nearly all of the 19th Century, free range grazing of cattle and other livestock was the law in South Carolina. Because there was so much forest and other underutilized land within the state, it was considered wasteful not to let livestock graze in it. It was impractical to fence the forests, so farmers were required to fence their fields if they did not want livestock damaging them.

Areas used to pasture and pen cattle gathered for market were called cowpens. One such cowpen, thought to have been named Hannah's Cowpens, was located near the Spartanburg/Cherokee county line. It was the site of a major victory for the Patriots in the Revolutionary War.

In the middle 19th Century as the South Carolina Piedmont transformed from the subsistence "Back Country" into the more prosperous "Up Country" with cotton production, political and economic pressure for changing open range law grew. It was argued that "many valuable plantations were being abandoned because they did not include enough timberland to keep up the fences."<sup>1</sup> However, the Civil War intervened.

In the 1880s, the open range laws in South Carolina and most of the South were abolished. In the 1881-1882 session the South Carolina Code for General Stock Law and Fencing Stock, was modified to read, "It shall not be lawful for the owner or manager of any horse, mule, ass, genet, swine, sheep, goat, or neat cattle of any description, or for any other person, to permit the said animals, or any of them, or any other domestic animal, to run at large beyond the limits of his own land, or the lands leased, occupied, or controlled by him..."<sup>2</sup> This change applied to all but a few low country counties.

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur R. Hall, *The Story of Soil Conservation in the South Carolina Piedmont 1800–1860*, United States Department of Agriculture Miscellaneous Publication No. 407, (Washington, D.C., 1940), p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *The General Statutes and the Code of Civil Procedure of the State of South Carolina, Adopted by the General Assembly of 1881-82*, Columbia, SC, 1882, pp. 350-351.