

PIONEERS EARMARKED THEIR LIVESTOCK

By Linda Anders

On January 14, 1792, Buncombe County was formed from the western parts of Rutherford and Burke Counties, NC. In January, 1793, former militiaman Joseph Henry, owner of land on the western waters of the upper French Broad Valley, recorded his earmarks and Heart H brand with the Court of Buncombe County. This was the first known public notice of cattle ownership in what is now Transylvania County.

Description of the earmark and brand were: “The mark is a Crop in the left Ear & a hole in the right. Brand as follows: the H enclosed in a heart is 3-1/2 inches wide and the same length. The H one inch and three quarters long and the H is one inch wide.”

Another early settler, Lambert Clayton, a veteran of the North Carolina Continental Line, identified his livestock with “a crop and two slits in the left ear, a swallow fork and a underbit out of the right ear.” These were typical marks recorded in the early deed books.

The reason earmarks and brands were so important was because cattle and other livestock were allowed to range freely throughout the mountains and valleys. Unoccupied land was plentiful and cultivated acreage was rare, so fences were built to keep the animals out, not in.

Allowing cattle, horses and hogs to roam freely benefited the farmers because they did not have to supplement their animals' feed. Hogs were very adept at finding all the food they needed in the woods, especially with the plentiful chestnuts from the large trees which grew before the blight.

North Carolina was known as a “fencing-out” state throughout the 19th century, but laws changed around the turn of the century due to population growth,

expansion of tourism, and increased crop production. In 1917, the State allowed local governments to put the burden of fencing on livestock owner, but the last open ranges in North Carolina, on the Outer Banks, were not closed until the 1950s.

While most people think of cowboys and cattle drives as being only in the Old West, Western North Carolina was the frontier in the early 1800s. The Southern pioneers would round up their herds, meet up with others, and drive their livestock together over the mountains and rivers to distant markets.

Trail herds from the old “Cherokee range” in the Balsams and North Fork of the French Broad were made up in a settlement on the headwaters of the river now known as Balsam Grove. Cattle were moved to a point just west of Indian Creek, south through a small gap to the head of Jake Branch, continuing south until they reached Lamance Creek on the old Gloucester road, where they turned east. After fording the North Fork, the cattle moved up Jason Branch a short way, then east through Big Mountain Gap to the headwaters of Cherryfield Creek and downstream to the Gathering Place. From there, herds bound for South Carolina trailed east to Feed Rock, near the line between the Carolinas, and on down to Southern markets. Herds bound for the Northeast followed the old Indian path to “Ben Davidson’s Creek,” then along the Boylston Road and Western Turnpike to Asheville, Swannanoa, and beyond.

The Transylvania Heritage Museum is honoring the memory of these Southern cowboys with a “Brandin’ Party” on Saturday, October 10, from 6 to 8 pm, at the Allison-Deaver House grounds on Asheville Hwy. Bar-B-Q will be provided by Pisgah Fish Camp, and entertainment will include music by the Transylvania Troubadors, clogging, and an opportunity for guests to brand their own boards to take home. Cash wine bar.

Tickets are \$15 per person. Proceeds from the event will be divided between the Jim Bob & Dottie Tinsley Communications Scholarship fund and the Museum. Reservations may be made at the Transylvania Heritage Museum at 40 W. Jordan St., Brevard or by calling 884-2347 before October 7. The Museum is open Wednesday through Saturday, 10 am to 5 pm.

Website: www.transylvaniaheritage.org