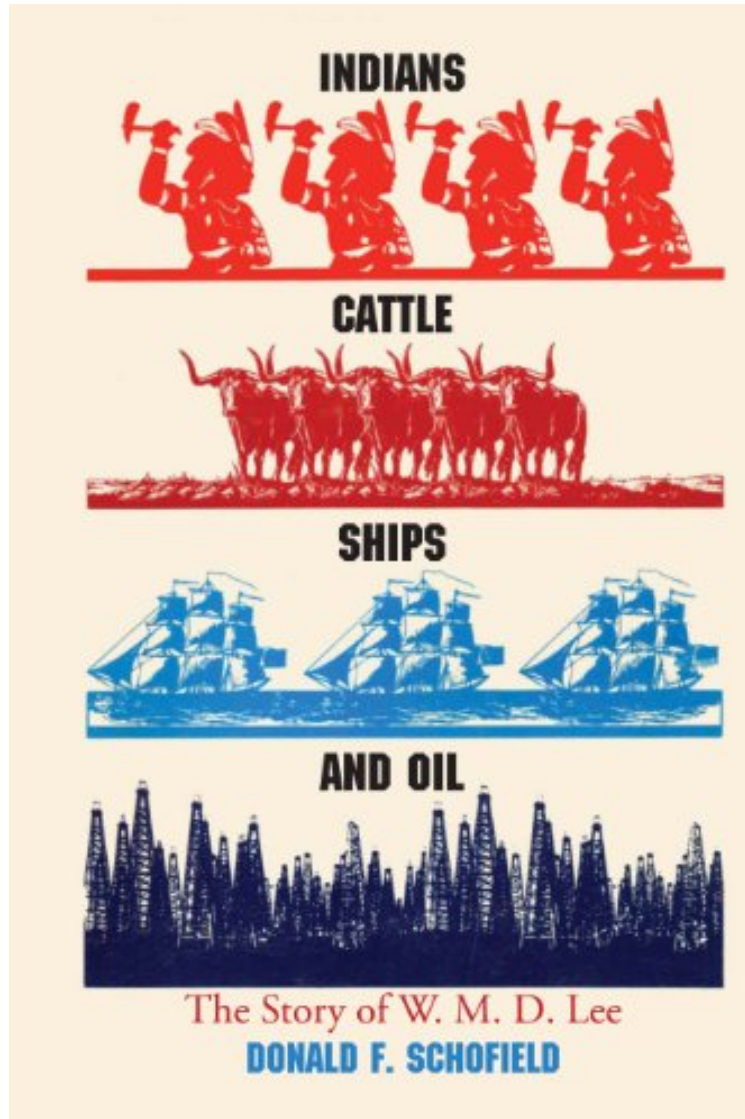


Indians, Cattle, Ships and Oil: The Story of W. M. D. Lee

Donald F. Schofield

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Donald F. Schofield : Indians, Cattle, Ships and Oil: The Story of W. M. D. Lee before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Indians, Cattle, Ships and Oil: The Story of W. M. D. Lee:

Indian trader, rancher, harbor developer, oil impresariomdash;these are the many worlds of one of the least chronicled but most fascinating characters of the American West. In the early, bustling years of the frontier, a brazen young man

named William McDole Lee moved from Wisconsin to Kansas and then to Texas to forge a life for himself. Becoming a driving entrepreneurial force in Texas's development, Lee soon garnered the alliances and resources necessary to shape the financial destinies of disparate groups throughout the state. His story is expertly told in Donald F. Schofield's *Indians, Cattle, Ships, and Oil*. Beginning in 1869 as a trader to the southern Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes and fort provisioner to troops garrisoned at Camp Supply, Indian Territory, Lee gained a partner and amassed a fortune in short order from trading buffalo hides and robes. Vast herds of buffalo grazing on the southern plains were killed largely on his order. When buffalo were no longer a profitable commodity, Lee tackled his next challenge—the cattle trade. He began with herds branded LR that grazed on pastures near Fort Supply. Then came his LE herd in the Texas Panhandle. Another partnership, with noted cattle rancher Lucien Scott, resulted in the vast LS ranch, one of the most successful operations of its day. Lee even introduced a new breed of cattle, the Aberdeen-Angus, to the western range. But as his partnership faded, Lee moved on to his next undertaking—the development of Texas' first deep-water harbor. In 1888, Lee and other financiers put up one million dollars to finance a dream: opening international trade from the waters of the Gulf of Mexico to the mainland at the mouth of the Brazos River. Their Brazos River Channel and Dock Company was to construct, own, and operate a deep-water harbor at Velasco, with a railroad link to Houston. Though threats of financial disaster loomed large, the Velasco facility was to welcome, in its day, tugs, barges, and three-masted schooners and to provide impetus for Houston's boom. Yet with success, the mercurial Lee turned to yet another challenge—oil. Starting still another partnership, Lee committed himself to prospecting for oil on the West Columbia Ridge in Brazoria County. Lee and crew struck oil in 1907, developing one of the first producing wells of Brazoria County, but inadequate drilling equipment hampered further fruitful exploration. Lee moved his rigs to the famed Spindletop, where he perfected the technique of shallow drilling. Though spectacular success in the oil business eluded him, Lee's accomplishments set him squarely among the great entrepreneurs of the Texas oil industry. Lee's exploits led him to roles in some of the most dramatic moments in Texas and the West—Indian uprisings, buffalo hunts, political scandals, cowboy strikes and shoot-outs, railroad promotions, oil-well blow-outs and gushers. The people he encountered are the famous and infamous of western history: Cheyenne Chief Little Robe and the outlaw "Hurricane Bill" Martin; Indian Agent John D. Miles and Major General John Pope; outlaws Tom Harris and William Bonney, and Sheriff Pat Garrett. Altogether, Lee's biography vividly shows one man's manipulation of people and events during the settlement of the American frontier.