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CHARLES AND MARY ANN GOODNIGHT RANCH STATE HISTORIC SITE

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VISITORS GUIDE

CHARLES AND MARY ANN GOODNIGHT RANCH

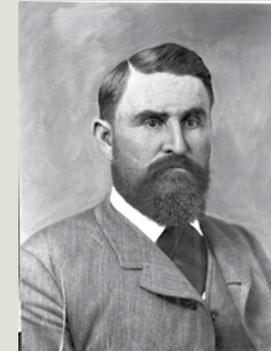
— STATE HISTORIC SITE —
Goodnight, Texas



TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
REAL PLACES TELLING REAL STORIES

Welcome to the Charles and Mary Ann Goodnight Ranch State Historic Site. Tour the restored Goodnight home, learn more about the Goodnights and the cattle industry in the Texas Panhandle at the J. Evetts Haley Visitor and Education Center, and enjoy the countryside views where descendants of the Goodnight bison herd continue to roam.

TEXAS COWBOY BEGINNINGS



Charles Goodnight, Panhandle
– Plains Historical Museum,
Canyon, Texas.

Charles Foxwing Goodnight was born March 5, 1836, on the family farm in Macoupin County, Illinois. After his father died from pneumonia in 1841, his mother remarried a neighboring farmer, Hiram Daugherty, who then moved the family to Milam County, Texas. Goodnight grew up there in the later years of the Republic of Texas. In 1853, his again-widowed mother married Rev. Adam Sheek, a Methodist preacher, who introduced Goodnight to his stepbrother and first business partner, John Wesley Sheek. Goodnight and Sheek ran 400 head of cattle along the Brazos River for 10 years. After completing this venture, Goodnight embraced the cattle industry and became one of the most successful cattle drivers on the western frontier.

Though Goodnight never received a formal education, cattle herding allowed him to acquire hunting, trailing, and survival skills to become a successful cattleman. In 1856, Goodnight served in the local militia and eventually with the Texas Rangers where he fought against Native Americans on the Texas frontier.

In 1866, Goodnight and Oliver Loving organized a large cattle drive from Fort Belknap, Texas to Fort Sumner, New Mexico Territory, to supply the

U.S. Army with beef. This trail, famously known as the Goodnight-Loving Trail, eventually became one of the Southwest's most heavily used cattle trails. It was during this time that Goodnight introduced the concept of the chuckwagon by reinforcing a military wagon, adding a "chuck" food box with drawers to the back, and installing a canvas underneath for supplies.



Oliver Loving



Cowboy and a chuckwagon.

Over the years, Goodnight partnered with several successful cattlemen and began building a name for himself in the industry. In 1869, Goodnight established the Rock Cañon Ranch on the Arkansas River west of Pueblo, Colorado and registered the PAT brand for his cattle. He eventually partnered with the Dyer brothers to operate the Goodnight-Dyer Cattle Company.

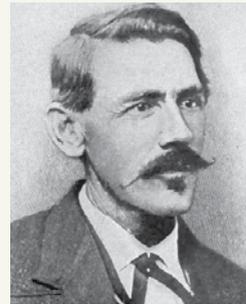
MARRIAGE AND MOVING TO TEXAS

On July 26, 1870, Goodnight married his long time sweetheart Mary “Molly” Ann Dyer. Mary Ann was a Tennessee native and educator who taught in Weatherford, Texas, to support her younger brothers after their parents’ passing. Charles and Mary Ann spent their first six years of marriage at the Rock Cañon



Mary Ann Goodnight, Panhandle – Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas.

Ranch, where Charles continued to drive cattle with other successful cattlemen like John Chisum. With the economic panic of 1873 and overstocked ranges in the



John Chisum

Southwest, Goodnight realized he needed to move elsewhere. In 1876, he settled in the Palo Duro Canyon area of the Texas Panhandle. He drove his cattle from Rock Cañon to what would soon become a large and successful ranch near the Texas headwaters of the Red River.

For his new endeavor, Goodnight sought financial assistance through a brokerage firm in Denver. There he met English aristocrat John D. Adair who agreed to provide a loan and personally partnered with Goodnight to operate a cattle business, thus creating the JA Ranch in 1877. During the 11-year partnership, Goodnight expanded the ranch and built up the herd.



John Adair, Panhandle – Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas.

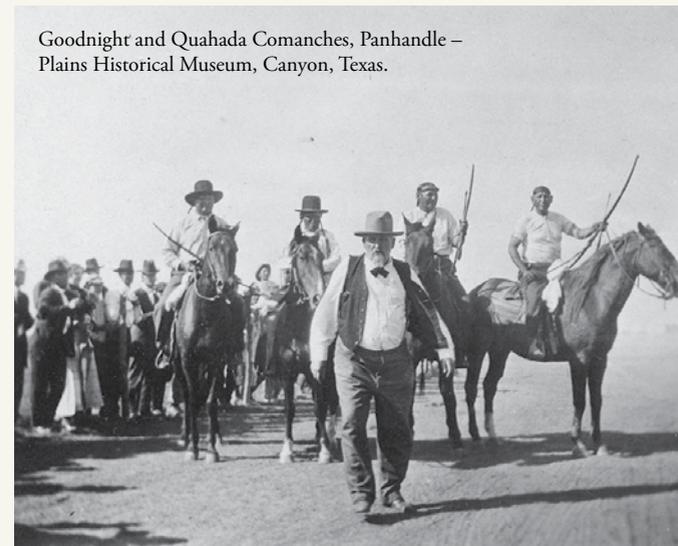
GOODNIGHT AND QUANAH PARKER

Bison became scarce on the Southern Plains by the late 1870s, which led to Indian raids on the cattle herds at the JA Ranch. To protect his herd, Goodnight signed an agreement with Quanah Parker, the last chief of the Quahada Comanches. He promised bison meat every other day to Quanah if he did not disturb the operations of the JA Ranch. This agreement began a positive and enduring friendship between Goodnight and Parker, which is now commemorated with large arrow sculptures installed at the ranch and along the Quanah Parker Trail.



Quanah Parker

By the time of Adair’s death in 1885, the JA Ranch encompassed 1,325,000 acres with more than 100,000 head of cattle. Charles bred his herds with Hereford bulls and experimented with crossbreeding Angus cows and bison resulting in the creation of “cattalos.” In response to the drastic decline of bison, Mary Ann encouraged Charles to breed a domestic bison herd. Their direct descendants continue to graze near the ranch today, and others comprise the Official State of Texas Bison Herd in Caprock Canyons State Park. By 1880, Goodnight helped organize the first Panhandle stockman’s association, which introduced purebred cattle, policed trails, and found cattle thieves and outlaws.



Goodnight and Quahada Comanches, Panhandle – Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas.



Goodnight Ranch, Panhandle – Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas.

LEAVING THE JA RANCH

After a series of droughts, falling beef prices, and the arrival of railroads and farmers to the Panhandle, Goodnight began to limit his ranch activities. In 1887, Goodnight decided to sell his interests in the JA Ranch. He bought 102,400 acres of land in nearby Armstrong County, where he built his two-story ranch house for him and Mary Ann. Goodnight relocated his cattle and bison herd to the ranch, and decided to expand his livestock with elk, antelope, and other exotic animals. He established the Goodnight-Thayer cattle company, and was the first to grow wheat in the county.

The Goodnight ranch became the Goodnight American Buffalo Park and was open to the public. As a tourist attraction, visitors could picnic and gather at the ranch on Sundays and purchase bison meat that was shipped around the country and world. The array of exotic animals at the ranch was so extensive that many were sent to zoos and preserves worldwide. Charles and Mary Ann became very involved in their community and opened the Goodnight College in 1898, which remained in operation until 1917. Since they did not have children, they would often board college students at the ranch house and have them work on the ranch for room and board.



Buffalo Herd at Goodnight Ranch

LATER YEARS AT THE GOODNIGHT RANCH

By 1900, Goodnight sold his interests in the Goodnight-Thayer enterprise and restricted his range activities to 38,400 acres near the railroad. Mary Ann passed away in April 1926, and Charles fell ill shortly after. He was nursed back to health by a distant cousin, Corinne Goodnight. She was a young nurse and telegraph operator from Butte, Montana. Goodnight married 26-year-old Corinne on his 91st birthday in March 1927. They soon sold the house and remaining acreage, and moved to Clarendon, Texas. He passed away on December 12, 1929, at his winter home in Phoenix, Arizona. Goodnight is buried next to his first wife, Mary Ann, at the Goodnight Community Cemetery.



Charles and Corinne Goodnight, Panhandle – Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas.

OWNERSHIP AND RESTORATION

The Goodnight ranch house was passed down to a succession of owners for the next 76 years until it and about 30 acres were donated to the Armstrong County Museum in 2005. The ranch house was then restored and preserved by the community and local craftsmen. In 2012, the ranch house and bunkhouse reopened to the public. The next year, the museum opened the J. Evetts Haley Visitor and Education Center to tell the story of the Goodnight Ranch and how Goodnight became known as the Father of the Texas Panhandle. On June 1, 2020, the Armstrong County Museum gifted the Goodnight Ranch and Visitor Center to the Texas Historical Commission, allowing it to become another addition to the state’s effort to preserve the vast and rich culture of Texas history.