

Lesson Overview:

How did cattle and railroads change the course of Texas?

In this interactive, simulation-based lesson, students explore how the rise of the cattle industry and railroad expansion changed life in Texas, especially for Native Americans. Through a board-style cattle trail game, students uncover the interconnected effects of geography, economy, and westward expansion. They analyze the roles of key figures like Charles Goodnight, Richard King, and Lizzie Johnson, and evaluate the long-term consequences for Native communities and settlers. This lesson blends historical inquiry with hands-on simulation and digital mapping.

Objectives

SWBAT (Students Will Be Able To):

- Explain how the cattle and railroad industries developed in Texas and impacted settlement.
- Identify contributions by Charles Goodnight, Richard King, and Lizzie Johnson.
- Consider how forts and buffalo loss affected Native life.
- Use Google Maps to show cattle trails, railroad routes, and impacted Native regions.
- Collaborate to simulate the challenges of herding cattle and settling new lands.

Social Studies TEKS

- **4.4(B)** Explain the growth, development, and impact of the cattle industry, including contributions made by Charles Goodnight, Richard King, and Lizzie Johnson.
- **4.4(C)** Explain the effects of the railroad industry on life in Texas, including changes to cities and major industries.
- **4.4(D)** Explain the effects on Native American life brought about by the Red River War, building of U.S. forts and railroads, and loss of buffalo.
- **4.9(B)** Explain the economic activities early settlers to Texas used to meet their needs and wants.
- **4.2(A)** Summarize motivations for European exploration and settlement of Texas, including economic opportunity, competition, and the desire for expansion.

Materials
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whiteboard or chart paper (to display the scenario and guiding questions)• Markers or dry erase markers• Student notebooks or lined paper• Pencils

Vocabulary

1. **Cattle drive** (*noun*): The process of moving cattle from ranches to railroads or markets.
2. **Trail** (*noun*): a track made by passage especially through a wilderness.
3. **Industry** (*noun*): a distinct group of productive or profit-making enterprises.
4. **Displace** (*verb*): to remove from the usual or proper place.
5. **Settlement** (*noun*): a new community started in a new area.
6. **Ranch** (*noun*): a large farm for raising horses, beef cattle, or sheep.

Pacing Guide

Activity	Time	Purpose
1. Hook: Quick Think-Pair-Share	5 minutes	Engage students by asking: “ <i>What would it be like to move hundreds of cattle across Texas?</i> ” and “ <i>What happens when a railroad is built through someone’s land?</i> ” Students briefly discuss ideas with a partner to activate prior knowledge.
2. Main Activity: Build the Railroad....or Not?	25 minutes	Students participate in a problem-based learning activity where they take on roles to decide whether a railroad should be built in Texas. They discuss how it would help or harm their group and make a decision with reasons.
3. Reflection Activity: Winners & Losers Chart	15 minutes	Students analyze who benefited and who was harmed by cattle drives and railroad expansion. They use evidence from the simulation to support their thinking and consider multiple perspectives, including American Indians and settlers.
4. Wrap-Up: Exit Ticket	5 minutes	Students individually reflect by identifying one group that benefited and one that was harmed, explaining why using what they learned in the lesson.

Hook/Engage: Cattle Trail Simulation Game

Time: 15–20 minutes

Instructions:

1. Read the following to the students:

- A long time ago, people in Texas wanted to build railroads to move cattle faster and make money. Ranchers (like Charles Goodnight) thought it would help them. But Native American groups lived on that land and depended on buffalo. After events like the Red River War, their land and way of life were already changing.
- Put the students in groups of 4 or 5 and give each group ONE role:
 1. *Ranchers*: A person who raises cattle on a ranch and wants to sell them for money.
 2. *Railroad builders*: A person who builds train tracks to help move people and goods across Texas.
 3. *Settlers*: A person who moves to a new place to build a home and start a life there.
 4. *Native Americans*: A person from the first groups who lived on the land before settlers arrived and depended on the land for survival.

(Keep it simple: just tell them who they are, so no cards needed)

2. Student groups answer the following about their assigned role:

- What do we want?
(Example: money, land, safety, food)
- How would the railroad help us?
- How could the railroad hurt us?
- Our decision:
 1. Build it
 2. Do not build it
- Why? (1–2 sentences)

3. Each group will share their answers with the rest of the class.

ESL/ELL: Sentence stem: “We are ____, and we think the railroad should / should not be built because ____.”

SPED: Use a simplified board with fewer spaces, allow verbal recording, and pair with partner

GT: Ask: “Would you change your decision after hearing other groups? Why or why not?”

Explore: Ranchers & Natives Reflection + Discussion

Time: 30 minutes

Instructions:

1. On paper or as a class, create a chart with two columns:

- Ranchers
- Native Americans

2. Think about the simulation and discuss:

- How did this group benefit from cattle drives and railroads?
- What were some of the negative impacts on them?
- Be sure to add at least 2 examples in each column

Scale	Ranchers	Native Americans
Positive		
Neutral		
Negative		

3. Share Aloud:

- Each group will answer the following two questions:
 - How were they affected?
 - Why?

4. Class Discussion:

- Guide students with the following questions:
 - “How did railroads change life for settlers?”
 - “How were Native Americans affected?”
 - “Can something help one group but hurt another?”

ESL/ELL: Sentence stems: “___ benefited because ___.” or “___ was harmed because ___.”

SPED: Provide pre-filled chart with choices (ranchers, Native Americans, railroad companies, settlers)

GT: Ask extension question: “Was expansion worth it? Why or why not?”

Conclusion: Wrap-Up Exit Ticket

Time: 10 minutes

Instructions:

1. Student select one of the following questions to answer:

- “One group that benefited was ___ because ___.”
- “One group that was harmed was ___ because ___.”

ESL/ELL: Allow drawing + labeling instead of full sentences.

SPED: Allow verbal responses instead of written.

GT: Ask students: “Was expansion worth it? Why or why not?” (encourage use of evidence from the simulation)

State Historic Site Connection

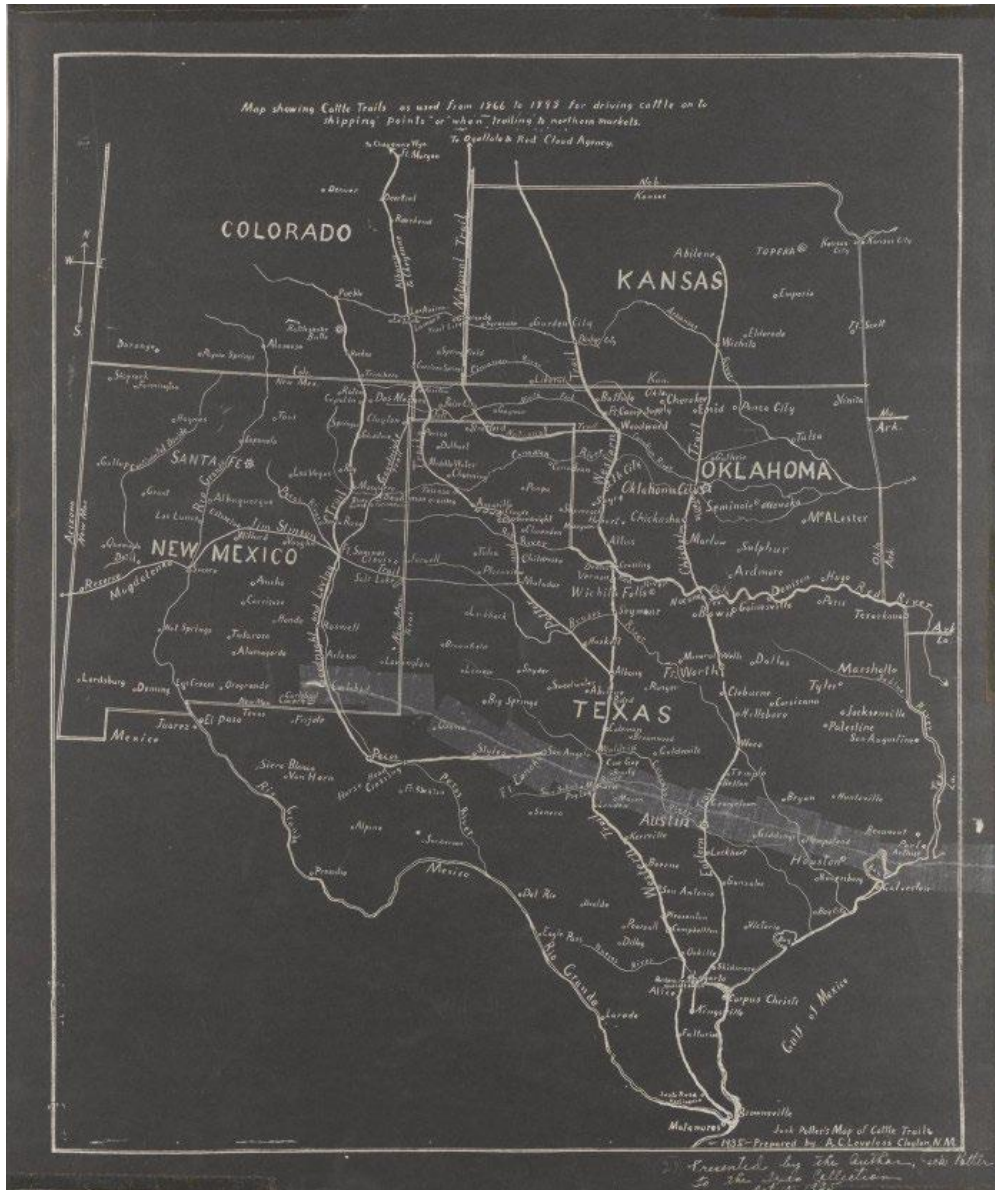
Imagine standing on the rugged plains of the Texas Panhandle, where vast cattle herds and bison once roamed. This is the [Charles and Mary Ann Goodnight Ranch](#), home to one of Texas’ most influential ranching families. Here, Charles Goodnight helped shape the West by creating the chuckwagon, leading cattle drives, and co-founding the JA Ranch. His wife, Mary Ann, was an educator and conservationist who worked to save the Southern Plains bison. Together, they built a successful ranch and supported their community, even opening a college.

Tour the restored home, see descendants of the Goodnight bison herd, and imagine life on the Texas frontier.

Resources



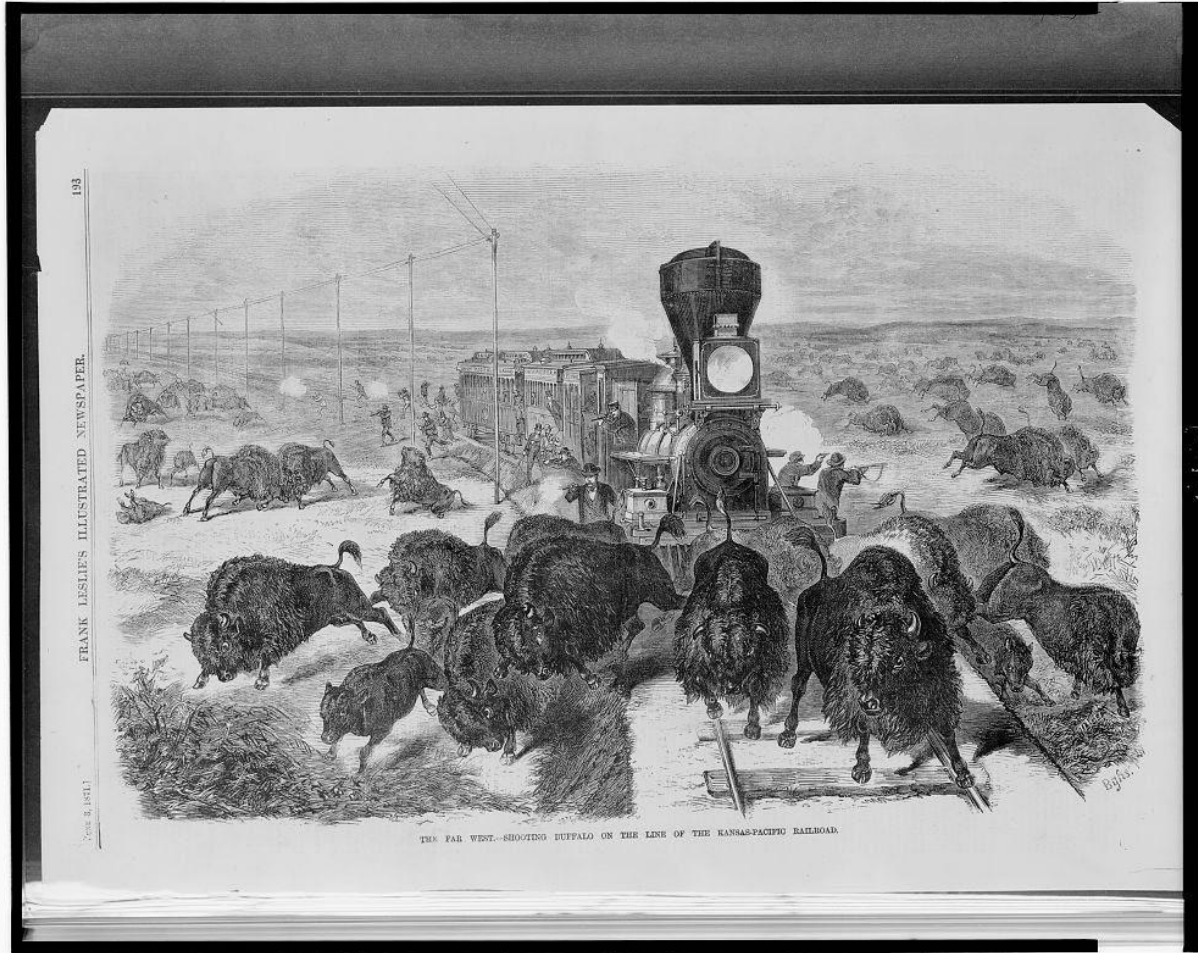
“Texas Trails: 1716-1886.” *The Portal to Texas History*, 19 Aug. 2025, texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth494162/m1/1/, local-cont-no: HSU-0307002110947.



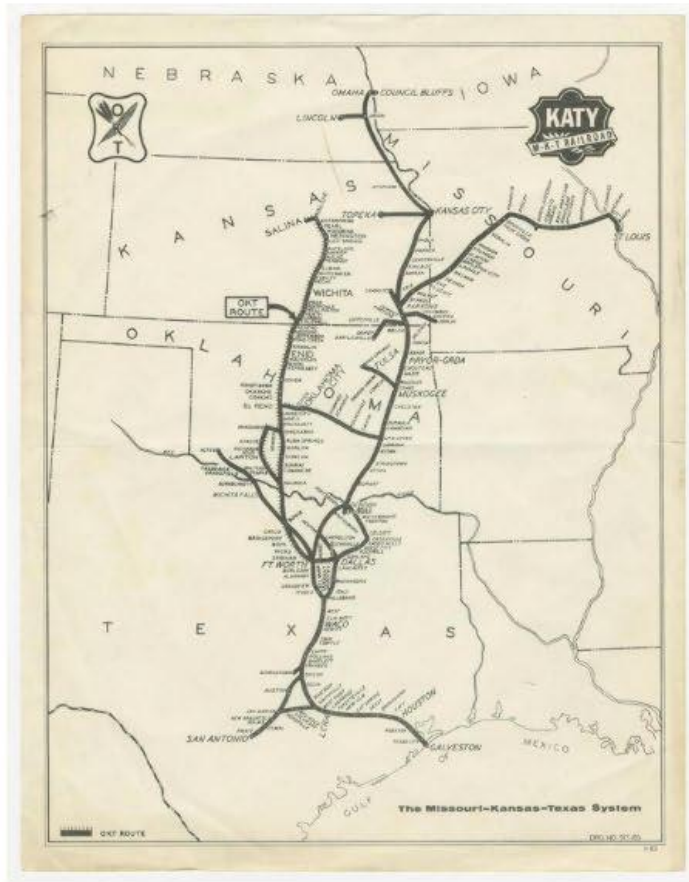
C, Loveless A, and Jack Potter. "Map Showing Cattle Trails as Used from 1866 to 1895." *The Portal to Texas History*, 19 Aug. 2025, texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph493278/m1/1/, local-cont-no: HSU-0307002109170.



*“Charles Goodnight.” The Portal to Texas History, 19 Aug. 2025,
texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth44851/m1/1/, local-cont-no: 00177.*



“The Far West - Shooting Buffalo on the Line of the Kansas-Pacific Railroad / Bghs.” Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA, www.loc.gov/item/2004669992/.



Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad. "Missouri-Kansas-Texas System." The Portal to Texas History, 2025, texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph117410/m1/1/zoom/?resolution=6&lat=2268&lon=1778.5, call-no: G4050.P3 1983 M57.



The Buffalo Bayou, Brazos and Colorado Railroad (BBB&C)
1850 - 1868



Compiled by Kevin Greszler, Carlos Varela, and Patrick Walsh, 2022. River data from Texas Water Development Board. Railroad, county, and cities data from the Texas Department of Transportation. Historical marker data from the Texas Historical Commission. Basemap from Esri. The Texas General Land Office makes no representations or warranties regarding the accuracy or completeness of the information depicted on this map or the data from which it was produced. This map IS NOT suitable for navigational purposes and does not purport to depict or establish boundaries between private and public land.

Historictexasmaps.com, 2025, historictexasmaps.com/collection/search-results/97088-the-buffalo-bayou-brazos-and-colorado-railroad-bbbc-gis-educational-maps. Accessed 25 Sept. 2025.