Charles Goodnight, Father of the Texas Panhandle. By William T. Hagan. 2007. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, OK, USA. 147 p. US$26.95. hardcover. ISBN 978-0-8061-3827-5.

At 140 pages, this concise volume (a perfect supplemental reading for *Range 101*?) tells the story of legendary Charles Goodnight and his pivotal role in the development of western ranching. Arising from humble, hardscrabble origins, Goodnight became, in various stages, an Indian fighter, a pioneering trail drover, an audacious open-range rancher, and finally, a facilitator of an advancing civilization that ushered in the end of his era.

Goodnight first partnered with the more experienced Oliver Loving to gather and drive 2,000 head of Longhorns to supply beef to the Navaho and Apache held in miserable captivity at Ft. Sumner, New Mexico. The 600-mile drive involved 18 drovers (no drinking, gambling, or fighting allowed), a chuck wagon (a Goodnight invention) drawn by twenty oxen, and a desperate 100-mile stretch with little grass and no water. Despite stock losses and human hardship, the venture proved profitable (and provided grist for mythmakers, most recently in *Lonesome Dove*).

Following the general slaughter of buffalo, and the 1875 defeat of the Comanche, an ocean of "free grass," waving across the trackless Llano Estacado, was an irresistible lure to intrepid stockman. Goodnight was among the first to arrive, following a brief, promising, but ultimately unsuccessful stint as an undercapitalized Colorado rancher. Quickly realizing the strategic value of the natural springs and watering points of the Palo Duro Canyon, Goodnight, this time in a well-financed partnership with John Adair (an aristocratic Irish investor who knew how to strike a shrewd bargain), managed to wrest titles to key locations that established effective control of over 1.3 million acres and 60,000 cattle (bearing the soon-to-be famous JA brand).

While competitors often found themselves out of water or short on grass, the JA utilized the maze-like Palo Duro canyon for winter refuge and drought relief when the surrounding table-top uplands of the llano alternately shivered or shriveled through the seasons. Facing many challenges today's ranchers would recognize (only his were in spades), Goodnight met them with typical determination and tenacity. Predators abounded, both the two-legged (rustlers and renegades), and four-legged varieties (lions and lobos—thought individually to kill 75 head per year); both were met with fierce resolution.

The flourishing of the great panhandle cattle boom, brought on by such promotional tracts as *The Beef Bonanza, or How to Get Rich on the Plains*, was a brief episode of not much more than a decade's duration. Pressures increased to open the land to settlement and realize public income from the "children's grass" belonging to the State of Texas. Goodnight and his fellow "Cattle Barons" were soon derided as "bullionaires" and "impediments to settlement."

A disastrous winter in 1885–1886, followed by devastating drought, coincided with his declining health, a beef market crash, and a disadvantageous dissolution (for Goodnight) of the Adair partnership to bring about the gradual demise of his empire. Having once stampeded the remaining buffalo out of his canyon, he now kept a remnant herd on his remnant ranch, experimented in cross breeding "Cattalo," and even produced a short silent film, featuring former Comanche adversaries who recreated the glory days of the horseback buffalo hunt. "To see your buffalo," they declared, "[makes] these old Indians glad!"

Less than 100 years later there is today a Texas State park where the skinny fingers of the Palo Duro canyon crack slowly into fields of flatland winter wheat. A statue of Goodnight, the "Father of the Panhandle," stands tall before the remarkable Panhandle Plains Museum in Canyon, twenty miles south of bustling Amarillo. Both are worth a look by roaming rangelanders.

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BOOK REVIEW

CHARLES GOODNIGHT

Father of the Texas Panhandle

William T. Hagan