



THE STATE OF TEXAS ANNIVERSARY REMEMBRANCE DAY FOUNDATION  
***THE TEXAS BISON STUDENT STUDY GROUP JOURNAL***

***“The Charles Goodnight Day”***

By

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**CHARLES GOODNIGHT  
(1836-1929)**

The names of certain individuals stand out boldly in the history of the Lone Star State, and for more than a century, the life of famed rancher Charles Goodnight has inspired generations of Texans.

Born on March 5, 1836, to Charles and Charlotte Goodnight in Macoupin County, Illinois, young Charles Goodnight joined his family in 1845 on the 800-mile journey to Milam County, Texas, where the boy arrived riding bareback on a white-faced mare named Blaze;

from an early age, he learned the virtue of hard work, laboring as a farmhand, racing as a jockey, and hauling freight with teams of oxen.

Mr. Goodnight entered into a partnership with his stepbrother, John Wesley Sheek, in 1856 to raise 400 head of cattle in the Brazos Valley; in the late 1850s, he met Oliver Loving, and together the two young men drove a herd to the gold rush camps in Colorado before the Civil War; during the 1860s, he worked as a scout for the Texas Rangers, taking part in the Comanche wars and fighting outlaws along the Colorado and Brazos River.

After his service with the Rangers, Mr. Goodnight returned to the cattle business, and in 1866, he, Mr. Loving, and 18 cowhands drove a herd from Fort Belknap, Texas, to Fort Sumner, New Mexico, and the route they forged became known as the Goodnight-Loving Trail, one of the most heavily trafficked cattle trails in the Southwest; Charles Goodnight is also credited with inventing the chuck wagon during that legendary drive.

In 1870, he married Mary Ann "Molly" Dyer, a schoolteacher, and the couple settled in Colorado for several years before returning to Texas; in 1876, he entered into a partnership with John G. Adair to set up the JA Ranch along Palo Duro Canyon, with Mr. Goodnight serving as resident manager and part owner of the operation; over the next 11 years, he increased the ranch's herd and expanded its range and helped establish law and order in the Panhandle; he pioneered the use of many new techniques and inventions, including artificial watering facilities, barbed wire fences, and the development of Hereford bulls through crossbreeding; he also created one of the first western sidesaddles, for use by his wife.

From 1887 to 1926, Charles and Molly Goodnight lived in a spacious, two-story ranch house on the Goodnight Ranch near the Salt Fork of the Red River; when his wife became

distressed at the decline of the southern herd of native bison, Mr. Goodnight took up their cause, breeding them on his ranch and shipping buffalo to Yellowstone National Park and to zoos on the East Coast and in Europe; he also raised other animals and performed agricultural experiments with the encouragement of botanist Luther Burbank.

Molly Goodnight died in 1926, and Charles Goodnight followed her three years later at the age of 93, and they are buried together in the Goodnight Cemetery, not far from the ranch they called home for nearly 40 years; the descendants of the Goodnights' buffalo live on as the Official State Bison Herd of Texas at Caprock Canyons State Park, and the legacy of Charles Goodnight, pioneer, cattleman, and naturalist, will endure as long as the Lone Star shines bright over Texas.”

NOTE: The picture has been drawn from the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas. The above text is the text of House Concurrent Resolution (HCR) 51 authored by State Representative Ken King and sponsored by State Senator Kel Seliger during the 83<sup>rd</sup> Regular Session of the Texas State Legislature. HCR 51 designated March 5<sup>th</sup> as “The Charles Goodnight Day” in Texas to honor and remember his life and achievements. He is truly deserving of this signal honor for his pioneering work alongside his wife and his visionary leadership efforts of saving a herd of Texas’ Plains bison that is now “The Official State Bison Herd of Texas” at Caprock Canyons State Park for the people of Texas. The bill was proposed by The Texas Bison Student Study Group (The Group) sponsored by The STAR DAY Foundation of El Paso, Texas as an after-school student enrichment program hosted by Texas schools. The STAR DAY Foundation shall invite Texas Junior High and Middle School history teachers, Texas homeschooling families and others to plan, develop and conduct an annual

“Charles Goodnight Day” classroom student studies activity to inspire and motivate students to explore and discover his life and achievements as an outstanding conservation, preservation and restoration historical role model.

**Editor’s Note** Dennis M. Kulvicki is a founder and president of The STAR DAY Foundation established in 1999 as a Texas nonprofit 501(c)3 tax exempt organization with a primary mission to carryout the legislative intent of the STAR DAY bill passed in 1999 in partnership Texas schools and other organizations by celebrating each year the birthday of the State of Texas on February 19<sup>th</sup> each year to inspire and motivate students to explore and discover the founding and founders of the State of Texas at partnering schools.

**FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:**

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