

FYI on Texas History by Bob Heinonen

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*Bob Heinonen
presenting
A Cowboy's Christmas*

EDUCATION AT ALL AGES

One of our clients (and probably several others), Collier Park Retirement Community in Beaumont, has a continuing education program for its residents. Their Activity Director brings in programs that are considered educational and residents receive Continuing Education Unit (CEU) points for attending these programs.

Once a year, a special event is held where certificates are handed out to all participants plus those with the most CEU points receive awards.

This program has so many up sides. It increases attendance at programs and thus brings seniors out of their apartments to socialize. It brings out the competitiveness of the seniors. It increases their knowledge and enjoyment. It recognizes the need of seniors to continue learning. There is always a large turnout when we perform at Collier Park.

LEGENDS OF TEXAS

Legend: Charles Goodnight invented the chuckwagon

In late 1865 or early 1866, Charles Goodnight decided to take a herd of cattle to Colorado instead of straight north to the railheads in Kansas like every other man was doing. Instead of going straight to Denver from north Texas, he chose a route that was safer from the Comanche who ruled the plains. He decided to head southwest like he was going to El Paso, then turn north at the Pecos River that runs down the east side of New Mexico, and up and over the passes into Denver. This is a long, rough route and he knew he would need special equipment.

Goodnight "bought the gear of a government wagon, pulled it over to a wood-worker in Parker County, and had it entirely rebuilt with the toughest wood available, seasoned bois d'arc [also called the Horse Apple tree because of its large puckered-up green apples]. Its axles were of iron instead of wood, and in the place of a tar bucket he put in a can of tallow to use in greasing [the axles]. He prepared to take twelve yoke of oxen, six to be used at a time.

"For the back end of the wagon he built the first chuck-box he had ever seen, and recalled that 'it has been altered little to this day.' Its hinged lid let down on a swinging leg for the cook's work-table, and inside was probably the first sour-dough jar that ever went up the trail. Since that time, among outfits in the open country, the keg of sour-dough has become a favorite institution, even as the biscuits it has produced have become a fragrant memory. Goodnight learned its use from his efficient mother, who kept a jar brewing at home."

This information comes from J. Evetts Haley's biography of Goodnight entitled *Charles Goodnight - Cowman and Plainsman*. Much of the information in the book comes from personal interviews with Goodnight by Haley. The book is well written and an easy read.

There are a few skeptics that say the chuckwagon was really derived from a military medical wagon and the name came from the supposed fact the food was called chuck which came from that part of the beef called chuck.

In any case, Charles Goodnight thought he invented the chuckwagon. Whether it got its name from the nickname for food or from the nickname for Charles may always be debated.

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