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Review of "Charles Goodnight: Father of the Texas Panhandle," By William T. Hagan

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Charles Goodnight: Father of the Texas Panhandle. By William T. Hagan. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007. xiv + 147 pp. Photographs, maps, index. $26.95.

In tackling Charles Goodnight, William Hagan successfully condenses an epic life story into a concise form—one of the requirements of University of Oklahoma Press's Western Biographies Series. Hagan's biography is well-paced, smoothly written, and engaging. It's a story well told, but not a revisionist history. Even as he points out the way in which Goodnight has reached Western hero status, Hagan does not question or challenge the grand narrative of the pioneer West that provides the basis for Goodnight's iconic position.

In the course of telling Goodnight's story, however, Hagan corrects a number of legendary errors—notably that Goodnight was first to drive the cattle trail subsequently known as Goodnight-Loving—and on the whole manages to demythologize his subject without detracting from this legitimately impressive life. For that reason, Hagan's book is important, making a fine companion and corrective to J. Evetts Haley's classic 1936 biography, *Charles Goodnight: Cowman and Plainsman.*

I particularly appreciated Hagan's balanced attention to Goodnight's later years in the Texas Panhandle, years often given short shrift in favor of his frontier-era exploits. Hagan pays proper attention to Goodnight's political manipulations in defense of land, water, and grass in the Southern Plains, a matter treated lightly in Haley's biography. In fact, in a modest way (given the book's brevity), Hagan's most valuable contribution may be his cogent explanation of the ways in which state and national

history, politics, individuals like Goodnight, and other factors conspired to shape the southern Great Plains of Texas at a formative period. As Hagan points out, Goodnight's efforts to preserve the range for large ranching interests clearly contradict the man's claims to be indifferent to politics, just as his efforts at cultivating his place in history undercut his protests against popular attention.

Hagan makes some embarrassing errors (sometimes confusing Palo Pinto for Palo Duro; misspelling Corinne Goodnight's name) and touches the surface of subjects we wish we could hear more about, such as Goodnight's breeding of buffalo, his relationship with Native peoples, and the nature of his marriage at ninety-one to the twenty-six-year-old Corinne. Hagan's book will no doubt find a grateful readership among Western history aficionados and the many readers interested in Goodnight. Serious historians will find it a respectable step toward a more accurate sense of Goodnight's significance to the history of the Great Plains and the West. They may also find it an enticement: the definitive biography of Goodnight remains to be written.

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