

Trailblazing Drovers of Texas and the Odyssey of Oliver Loving

by Joseph McCracken III

The talks and papers delivered at our meetings are by and large the result of studious research of the antique guns and edged weapons we collect and the men and companies that made them. This paper will present some history of the men who used these guns in the opening of the American Southwestern cattle industry — specifically the cattle marketing business. It is based upon historical documents and writings, recorded interviews with the men involved, and conversations with their descendants in the next generation.

One of such men was Oliver Loving. You will note the word "Odyssey" in the title of this paper. I must confess that I plagiarized this from a chapter in the book, *Cattle Kings of Texas*, by Douglas. However, as I hope you will agree, it is a most fitting title for the dictionary defines "Odyssey" to be "a long trip — especially when filled with notable experiences and hardships."

The events I shall relate take place in West Texas, New Mexico and Southern Colorado. The main event takes place about one hundred and forty miles from El Paso, at the compass point of East by North, approximately eight miles down the Pecos River South of the presently existing City of Carlsbad, New Mexico.

To begin our story some historical background is necessary. Oliver and Susan Morgan Loving came to Texas from Kentucky in 1845, settling in the old original Peters Colony, and initiating business interests consisting of cattle raising, mercantile store operations and contract freight hauling. In 1855, being pushed by too much settlement in and around the eastern sides of Dallas and Collin Counties, as they are known today, they, together with their nine children and several slaves, moved to the northern portion of Palo Pinto County, Texas. There Loving began extensive cattle operations, and in 1857, with his neighboring rancher, John Durkee, put on the trail to market approximately 1500 steers aimed to the northeast. They crossed the boundary line between Indian Territory and Arkansas, then on across Missouri, then crossing the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers, and then on in to South Central Illinois to Christian County, where the cattle were sold for \$38.00 per head. The trail boss on this venture was his son, Bill Loving, then nineteen years old, and he wrote to his father that he sold the cattle "tolerable well," and only "lost six steers and one pony."

In 1859 and '60 Loving, together with neighbors, Syl Reed, John Dawson and Jowell Curtis, took the first known herd of beef steers, some fifteen hundred or so in number, into Colorado territory. The trail moved northwest from Palo Pinto and Jack Counties, cutting across Indian Territory (Oklahoma) and Southwest Kansas to the Arkansas River, and thence into the area of Pueblo. A sec-



ond such trip was made by Loving, together with these and other men, in 1861. Unfortunately for them, they arrived in Colorado territory at a time after the hostilities of the Civil War had begun and Loving was detained by U.S. Government and Army officials. Here it is worthy of note that he and his colleagues were given their release and allowed to return to Texas with their belongings only after the intervention in their behalf by the well-known frontiersman, Kit Carson.

During the Civil War Loving contracted with and delivered to the Confederacy stocks of beef and pork. These drives moved straight east from Palo Pinto. They terminated either at points on the Mississippi River or at Jefferson, Texas, on Cypress Bayou, which connected to the Mississippi by steamboat down the Red River. On the drives to the Mississippi, with hogs in wagons and steers afoot, they crossed nine rivers. Those of you who specialize in history pertaining to the Civil War understand the impact of the cessation of hostilities after Appomattox. The Confederate States of America owed Mr. Loving over a hundred thousand dollars. If he were not in fact broke, he was severely bent!

At this point in history there arrived upon the scene a twenty-eight or nine year old frontiersman known as Charles Goodnight, whose name I am sure is familiar to many of you, for he not only played a starring role in the main event which we will discuss, but was a pioneer in the entire development of the beef cattle industry of the American West.

Both men are anxious to find a market for the beef steers they have ranging over Palo Pinto, Young and Jack Counties. A drive such as those made by Loving to Colorado in 1860-61 is out of the question due to the Texas Panhandle and western portions of Oklahoma and Kansas being now thoroughly dominated and ruled by the Comanche and Kiowa. From 1857 to 1861 there had been developed a stage line through Texas to California known as the "Butterfield Overland Mail" — the Southern Route — and it is here that both men take their inspiration for



Oliver Loving, Circa 1860-61, approximately forty-eight years of age, from the author's collection.

the development of a trail to a market with hard money. The goals of course are the frontier forts of New Mexico for sale to the Army and the Indian Agencies, and then on in to Colorado for sale to the mining camps. The bargain is struck by these two men and the business partnership officially known as "Loving and Goodnight" is sealed.

They throw together their herds, consisting of a total of something more than two thousand steers, at a point west of the Brazos River from Fort Belknap in Young County, thence they moved Southwesterly by old Camp Cooper, and the ruins of Phantom Hill to Buffalo Gap, which lies in the hills between the present cities of Abilene and San Angelo, Texas, then southwest by Fort Chadbourne, then across just north of the present city of San Angelo, on across the North and Middle Concho Rivers. It is at this point that they face the most critical portion of the drive, for from the last of the Concho Rivers to the Pecos is a distance of ninety miles, with no rivers to cross and no water whatsoever except what might exist in natural potholes and dry washes by virtue of rain.

They aimed the herd for a well-known point on the Pecos River known as Horsehead Crossing. It takes them approximately eight days to cover this distance; the last few days, with the cattle smelling the waters of the river from the West wind, they break into a mild trot. On the first drive over a hundred steers pile up in the river and drown.

After crossing, they take the west side of the Pecos and proceed and follow its west bank to the vicinity of a crossing near the present New Mexico-Texas border known as "Pope's Crossing," and here it is intended to cross again to the east side of the river in order to maintain the natural barriers of the feet of the Guadalupe Mountains and the river between the trail herd and the marauding members of the Apache and Comanche Nations.

History tells us that the first drive in 1866 was completed at Fort Sumner with a successful sale of part of the herd to the Army and Indian Agents, with the rest of the

herd continuing on to Las Vegas and thence by Raton and over "Uncle Dick Wootton's Toll Bridge" at the top of Raton Pass. Incidentally the paying by Loving of ten cents per head, the toll cost through the Pass on the first drive had the end result of causing these two men, in particular Goodnight, to search out and find Trinchera Pass, some twenty-odd miles to the east, through which today passes the Fort Worth & Denver Railroad main line, and it was through there on later drives by Goodnight and James C. Loving that they made a free passage to the mining camp markets.

Now the prelude to the main event is the gathering for the second drive, which takes place beginning in May of 1867. Again they put together a herd of something more than two thousand steers and cover the same passage from Fort Belknap that I have mentioned. They reach the Horsehead Crossing of the Pecos and proceed north. They are behind schedule to arrive for a contract with the Army at Fort Sumner! Loving becomes anxious that he must be there on time to advise of the pending arrival of the herd and to participate in any possible submission of bids.

Some two hundred and fifty miles south of Fort Sumner, and with the danger in mind, Loving decides to ride ahead and precede the arrival of the herd. The partners finally agree and Loving departs, accompanied by the courageous and clearheaded pioneer of the American West, W. J. "One Arm Bill" Wilson. For the first few days they travel at night, but Loving, being fifty-five years old and believing business comes first, prefers to travel in daylight in order to cover more ground and obviate the natural dangers of horse riding at night.

They proceed by daylight, cross into New Mexico and come to the juncture of the Black River where it flows from the west to join the Pecos. They are still on the west side of the Pecos River, and after resting and refreshing the horses and themselves on the Black River, begin proceeding north to Fort Sumner. Late in the afternoon of the third day a party of Indians is encountered to the west and they rein their horses to the east for the natural cover and protection of the river and down the steep bank, which is today known as "Loving's Bluff," they charge, dismount from their horses and remove and take with them their guns and saddlebags.

Immediately their horses — at least four, maybe five or six — are captured by the Indians and they take refuge in a small cut-bank or cave in the side of the bluff just off the edge of the river. Wilson quickly shoots one or two Indians, but after a pause one prominently accoutered Indian raises the Western Plains parley sign. Somehow or other Loving exposes himself and is immediately shot from above, receiving a bullet through and breaking his arm above the left wrist and into his left side. The two men take refuge in their little "fort" where they do not expose themselves except to a frontal approach from the river directly in front of them, whereupon immediately on Indian attempts such by crawling through the grass with lance. It is here that he disturbs a rattlesnake and decides to retreat, but as Fate would have it, this snake crawls

toward Loving and Wilson and passes within several feet of them, both men remaining absolutely motionless, and the snake eventually departs for the good of everyone concerned, including the snake!

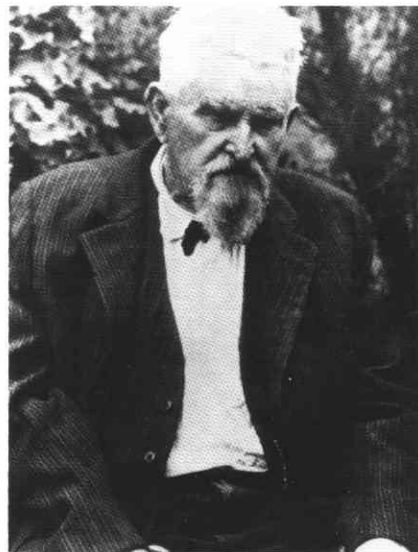
Loving is fearful that the wound in his side is fatal, and in truth it raises a very high fever, for which Wilson treats him by creeping to the river at night and filling his boots with water, bathing Loving's face and washing him. After much argument Loving convinces Wilson that he must try to escape during the second night and if possible make his way to the trail and intercept Goodnight.

It takes much persuasion for Wilson to leave Loving, but the "Boss" prevails. Mr. Loving was known by his family rarely — if ever — to wear a handgun around his waist, but was known to have a saddle holster fitted into one side of his saddlebags which contained his 1851 Navy Colt and its accessories. Wilson was carrying several revolving percussion pistols and one "Yarger"¹ revolving five-shot rifle. He may have borrowed the revolving rifle from Goodnight! It was agreed that all of these would be left with Loving and Wilson would take Mr. Loving's repeating Henry rifle containing sixteen metallic cartridges with waterproof qualities in order that he have a workable and usable firearm after escaping through the river. Goodnight recounts in his memoirs that Mr. Loving's Henry gun was the first repeating metallic cartridge rifle that he had ever seen!

Wilson removes most, if in fact not all, of his clothes and tries to swim with the rifle, succeeds in floating down the river a considerable distance away from the scene of the danger from the Indians. It becomes difficult for him to swim with his good arm and the remains of an arm earlier in life partially amputated, and at one point he decides that he must dispose of the rifle and he places it muzzle down into the bed of the Pecos River, with its butt barely under the surface.

Wilson's own escape to safety is a miraculous story of the American West. On his escape trip he finds a teepee pole to aid in walking, but has to use it often to scare and beat off a pack of threatening wolves. He reaches the trail several days later — starved, sunburned and barefooted. He makes contact with Goodnight and the herd and comments that everything in Southern New Mexico "has stickers and thorns." It takes water and food to get Wilson far enough along in recovery to make sense in his description of the fight and his escape, but Goodnight is soon able to get the details and a description of the location. Wilson is placed in one of the wagons to speed his recovery, and Goodnight and several cowboys make their way to the scene of the fight. The Indians are gone — and Loving is nowhere to be found! Following Wilson's description of his escape through the river, Goodnight is able to recover some of his clothes, his pocket knife and Loving's Henry rifle.

Meanwhile Loving's fever has subsided and it appears that the wound in his side is not as mortal as he initially thought, and he himself makes his way to the river during the cover of darkness of the fourth night. He later com-



Charles Goodnight, Circa 1927, age approximately ninety-one. (Reproduced through the courtesy of Dean Krakel, Editor of "Persimmon Hill," quarterly magazine published by the National Cowboy Hall of Fame, Oklahoma City.)

ments that possibly the Indians had departed the scene, having become impatient as they were known to be, or having thought that they had killed both occupants of the little cave-fort. For several days he travels, left forearm broken, nothing to eat, but he successfully builds a fire late one afternoon and roasts his leather gloves and chews them for the juices remaining. He makes it a sufficient distance to cross a trail and there encounters a group of Mexican farmers and agrees to pay them several hundred dollars if they will transport him to Fort Sumner. He arrives and immediately the Army begins attending his wounds. The elder chief surgeon of the Army is away on medical business at Las Vegas, and the younger post surgeon tends Mr. Loving's wounds as best he can. The wound in the side is healing, but the bullet wound in his broken left forearm has begun to cause blood poisoning.

The broken bones are set, but Loving's condition continues to worsen. Several days later Mr. Goodnight and several cowboys arrive ahead of the herd. Strong persuasive arguments are made to the young surgeon to attempt amputation to save Loving's life. Finally convinced, he performs the amputation. With his condition failing, Loving realizes he is dying and Goodnight knows it. The two men strike an oral agreement for the partnership to be continued after his death until all debts can be paid in full, and Goodnight keeps this agreement in the following two years.

On September 25, 1867 Oliver Loving died. By virtue of the respect for him held by the local community of U.S. Army and other Government personnel, a metallic officer's casket was furnished for his temporary burial in the "Old Cemetery." It might be mentioned that one of Mr. Loving's sons, Joe, was one of the company on this trail drive, and he and Goodnight make a partial sale of beeves to the Army at Fort Sumner and continue on into Colo-

rado and make a division of the remaining steers for marketing at various points in that area.

Some time later in the Fall, Goodnight and the full complement of cowboys returned South to Fort Sumner. In compliance with the deathbed request of Mr. Loving not to be buried in foreign land, but be returned for burial in his home country, the casket is exhumed by Goodnight and Joe Loving, placed within the confines of a bed of charcoal in a flat bed wagon. The longest funeral cortege in the history of the opening of the American West takes place as the eighteen remaining members of the trail driving company proceed 600 miles from Fort Sumner Southeast across the Panhandle down through Texas and return his body to the family at their principal residence in Weatherford, Texas, where he is today buried in the Weatherford Greenwood Cemetery, having been interred with full Masonic honors.

In this connection it is interesting to note that about a hundred feet west there is buried another of the great historical characters of the opening of the American Southwest, same being none other than the great Negro cowboy, Bose Ikard. This excellent and courageous cowboy had accompanied Goodnight and Loving on all of their trailing ventures, and his own life story is worthy of more in-depth research. After his death, Goodnight secured and had placed upon his grave a monument with an inscription which reads as follows:

Served with me four years on Goodnight-Loving Trail, never shirked a duty or disobeyed an order, rode with me in many stampedes, participated in three engagements with Comanches. Splendid behavior. — C. Goodnight.

And so ends our story except for the epilogue that Mr. Charles Goodnight remained faithful to his partner, Oliver Loving, and with the assistance of James C. Loving, Oliver's oldest son, the partnership was continued into and through 1868 and '69, and with all debts being paid, Good-

night returned to Weatherford to Susan Loving's home and presented to her one-half of the net profits which totalled in the thousands of dollars.

As many of you know, and as I have mentioned, Charles Goodnight continued as a pioneer of the opening of the American West in the Texas Panhandle, Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado, and managed to survive drouths, blizzards and financial panics, to die in 1929 at the age of ninety-three. It is probable his attitude toward the livestock business and life in general was patterned after his old partner, Oliver Loving, and this fact might be easily demonstrated if I close with the story of the infestation of "tick fever" or "Texas fever" which was rampant in the '70s and '80s, during which time Goodnight was in residence on the "J. A. Ranch" above the Texas caprock, an altitude of three thousand plus feet, where the existence of the fever was *diminimus*. As a trail herd from the Southern regions of Texas approached his ranges he had dispatched the following letter:

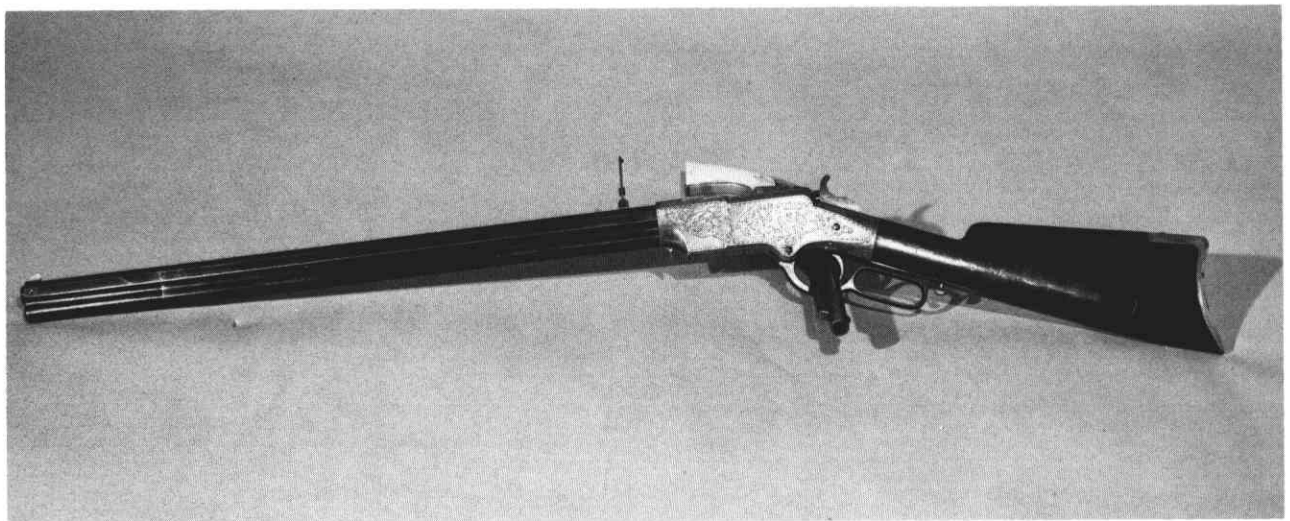
"Que Ti Qua Ranch, August 20. (1881)

"Dear Sir:

"I send Mr. Smith to turn your cattle so they will not pass through our range. He will show you around and guide you until you strike the head of this stream and then you will have a road. The way he will show you is nearer and there are shorter drives to the water than any route you can take. Should you come by here you will have a drive of 35 miles to make.

"I hope you will take this advice as yourself and I have always been good friends, but even friendship will not protect you in the drive through here, and should you attempt to pass through, be kind enough to tell your men of what they will have to face as I do not wish to hurt men that do not understand what they will be very sure to meet.

"I hope you will not treat this as idle talk, for I mean every word of this, and if you have any feeling



Henry Rifle Serial #1293, from the author's collection.

for me as a friend or acquaintance, you will not put me to any desperate actions. I will not perhaps see you myself, but take this advice from one that is and always has been your friend.

"My cattle are now dying of the fever contracted from cattle driven from Fort Worth, therefore do not have any hope that you can convince me that your cattle will not give mine the fever, this we will not speak of. I simply say to you that you will never pass through here in good health.

Yours truly,
C. Goodnight"

The foregoing letter illustrates Goodnight's written effectuation of the so-called "Winchester Quarantine" which prevailed across the southern edges of the Texas Panhandle in the 1880's and assisted immeasurably in preventing the spread of the tick fever into the Southern regions of the area.

Such were the men who carried and used the antique guns we have in our collections!

So called in his memoirs, taken down in a statement in 1917.

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Winchester Model 1873 Rifle, from the author's collection, known as the "J. C. Loving Rifle."