

The Bandera PROPHECY

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Today in Texas history

Despite ranch hands' desperate rides, Panhandle cattleman Joe Morgan dies of smallpox

By Bandera Spirits of Texas

On March 16, 1883, pioneer Panhandle rancher Joe Morgan died of smallpox, despite the heroic efforts of two of his cowboys.

Little is known of Morgan's life before he arrived in Texas in 1877. He located his spread in Lipscomb County on a Canadian River tributary.

Morgan was a charter member of the Panhandle Stock Association, organized in 1880, and served on the Wheeler County grand jury in 1882. By the summer of that year he was reported to have significantly increased his rangeland.

Because of his triangle brand, his ranch became known locally as the Triangle. In March 1883, he and his two small sons came down with smallpox. Edward H. Brainard, who had been working at the Triangle for two months, rode 35 miles to Mobeetie for a doctor while another ranch hand, Frank Biggers, rode 150 miles to Fort Dodge, Kansas, trying to find a doctor there in time to save his employer's life.

Though both doctors came, it was too late to save Joe Morgan. Brainard and another cowboy, John Dilly, drove Mrs. Morgan and the two boys to Fort Dodge with the doctor in hopes of saving them there.

Six-month-old Johnny recovered, but his 3-year-old brother died. Mrs. Morgan eventually sold the ranch to Henry W. Cresswell.