

The Bandera PROPHEET

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Today in Texas history

By Bandera Spirits of Texas

On this day in 1873, Margaret Borland died of "trail fever" or "congestion of the brain" after successfully leading a drive of about 2,500 cattle from Victoria, Texas, to Wichita, Kansas.

She was born in Ireland on April 3, 1824. Her family was among the Irish colonists who arrived in Texas in 1829 with John McMullen and James McGloin and settled at San Patricio. Margaret was thrice married and widowed. Her first husband, Harrison Dunbar, was killed in a private argument in Victoria soon after she bore their only child, a daughter.

Margaret married Milton Hardy several years later; Hardy died of cholera in 1855, leaving two more children with Margaret. She married Alexander Borland about 1858, a marriage that produced four children. Borland died in 1867; several of Margaret's children and grandchildren died the same year in a yellow fever epidemic.

She had assisted Borland in his cattle business and, after his death, assumed full responsibility for the estate. Though she left the physical labor to her hired hands, she bought and sold livestock. By 1873 she owned a herd of more than 10,000 cattle.

She left her Victoria home in the spring of that year with two sons, both under 15; a 7-year-old daughter; an even younger granddaughter; and a group of trail hands. She was said to be the only woman to have led a cattle drive. Her body was returned to Texas and buried in Victoria Cemetery.