

NELSON MORRIS and THE CHICAGO RANCH
1883-1907

by
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1883-1884 --- Chester Arthur was President and Congress had just passed the Pendleton Act improving the Federal Civil Service.¹ Lewis Waterman was experimenting with the fountain pen which he perfected the next year. "Buffalo" Bill Cody gave the first performance of his first wild west show. The Brooklyn Bridge opened in New York City, the cornerstone of the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty was laid and standard time was established. The first classes at the University of Texas were held in Austin and the first American Historical Association was organized in New York.²

In West Texas Jay Gould had barely got his Texas and Pacific tracks laid to Sierra Blanca, where they met the Southern Pacific. Pecos City had a population of from one hundred to one hundred fifty souls. Monahans Wells had the only water well between the Pecos and Big Spring. Big Spring was the place where everybody and everything stopped for water, including the buffalo, coyote, lobo, antelope and wild mustang. The Comanche and Shawnee fought over the spring and soldiers camped near its sweet water. Midland had a handful of stores and saloons.³

A State Legislative Act passed in 1881 had turned loose some of the vast West Texas lands at fifty cents per acre, with half to go to State Public School Funds and the other half into the General Revenue Fund. A partnership of Job Gunter, W. B. Munson, the brothers - John W. and F. M. Maddox, and C. E. Anderson bought 228,000 acres embracing what is now parts of Andrews, Midland, Ector and Martin Counties. In 1883 these lands were transferred to Nelson Morris, a meat packer from Chicago. This ranch eventually contained 320 sections.⁴

Nelson Morris came from the southwest part of Germany when just a boy. He got off the boat and walked most of the way from Buffalo, New York, to Chicago looking for work. He worked here and there in the small stockyards which preceded the building of the Union Stock Yards.

John Sherman, founder of the Union Stock Yards, took Morris under his wing and taught him the hog rendering trade, but after a few years Morris left the employ of Sherman and became a cattle trader in a small way. He learned quickly and would bid on anything and buy anything, usually at his own price, staying out of the market until late in the week to catch his competitors napping. Within only a few years he was shipping everywhere, even trans-atlantic shipments. He secured contracts

