



CHUCK WAGONS:

AMERICA'S FIRST DRIVE-THRU MEAL

Chuck Wagon Beginnings in Arizona



1880s



Charles Goodnight is credited with the invention of the chuckwagon. The Texas rancher built a sloped storage box on the back of a Studebaker army wagon and added compartments to store utensils. The sloped side of the box folded down to provide a work table for the cook. Goodnight's new wagon travelled with his large cattle herds as a mobile kitchen to feed the cowboys.

The chuck wagon came to Arizona with the birth of the state's cattle industry. The livestock industry boomed after the Civil War as demand for beef in Eastern cities grew. The Texas plains were unable to support the enormous cattle herds that roamed over them and fed on the prairie grasses. Texas ranchers moved their herds west into Arizona, competing with native Arizona herds for forage. Dr. Alexander J. Chandler, in his role as Territorial Veterinary Surgeon, banned Texas cattle from entering the state. His action resulted in the Arizona cattle industry growing to its largest numbers in the 1890s. Unofficial estimates showed there to be roughly 1.5 million cattle on the Arizona range during the peak years.

