



## *George McJunkin*

Cowboy, Rancher, Accidental Archaeologist



The story of George McJunkin's life is remarkable. Born into slavery in Texas in 1851, he gained his freedom following the American Civil War through the Emancipation Proclamation. Like many other former slaves, George initially remained in the area employed as a tenant at local ranches, dedicating his time to learning everything he could about horsemanship from Vaqueros (Mexican cowboys), who also taught him Spanish.

Living near the bustle of frontier life on the range, he soon joined up on cattle drives along the famous Chisholm and Goodnight-Loving Trails, eventually making his way to New Mexico. It was on his second drive that he met Gideon Roberds, a horse breeder and trainer who sold horses to cattle drives along the Santa Fe Trail. He took notice of McJunkin's roping skills and offered him a job training horses. George worked for Roberds for several years, earning a solid reputation as an expert roper, bronco buster and reliable rancher. The company settled around Trinidad, Colorado but spent substantial time in and around Folsom, New Mexico. George quickly felt at home in the Cimmaron Valley and in 1902 successfully applied for his own homestead, though he then traded it for a small herd of cattle with grazing and branding rights. With the income from cattle sales he eventually built a home in Folsom.

It was during his time with the Gideon family that he discovered a passion for learning, exchanging roping lessons for reading and writing lessons. He continued his own educational pursuits the rest of his life. Curious about the world around him, he was known to carry a telescope and satchel of books wherever he went. He also taught himself to play violin and developed a interest in collecting artifacts. Little did he know this hobby would earn him an important place in history!

Following the devastating 1908 Folsom Flood, George McJunkin noticed some large bones embedded in the bank of an arroyo, larger than any cow or bison bones he'd seen. He knew this was something special, so he showed the bones to various



experts, hoping to persuade further investigation, but very little attention was received on the matter. George carried on with his life and passed away in 1922. Fortunately he shared his discovery with Carl Schwachheim and Fred Howarth, who would later become famous for their association with the extremely significant Folsom archaeological site.

After years of discussion, finally in 1925, scientists took a deeper look into George's discovery and announced that the bones he found were from an extinct bison estimated to be over ten thousand years old! They excavated the site where McJunkin's discovery took place and found something even more amazing, a stone projectile point lodged into the ribs of another extinct bison. This discovery was the greatest archaeological find of the 20th century because it proved that humans were living in the American Southwest far earlier than previously believed. The archaeological site that McJunkin discovered eventually yielded human remains that became known as "Folsom Man".

Unfortunately George McJunkin did not live long enough to witness these finds, nor did he realize the significance of his discovery, but nonetheless, he has since been given his well-deserved place in history!

Click [here](#) to learn more about George McJunkin!