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How KC became 1 of great stock markets of world

(Editor's note: This is the 65th in a series of "then and now" articles on places and things of interest in Kansas City, Kan., compiled by area historian Margaret Landis in observance of the 100th birthday of KCK in 1986. Much of the information has appeared in past editions of The Kansan.)

(Transcriptions are presented without changes except to improve readability.)

The Kansas City Stock Yards were established in 1871, principally by Boston capitalists and were second to Chicago as a livestock and provision market.

Several factors made Kansas City one of the great stock markets of the world:

- Transportation facilities -- Sixteen railroads centering in Kansas City switched directly to the yards.
- Geographical location -- The proximity of both consumer and producer. The vast cattle ranges to the West and Southwest, corn and stock producing states and the local packing houses.
- Handling of stock -- The excellent yards and facilities for the handling, feeding, loading and reshipping of livestock.
- Fees and charges -- The fees and charges at the yard were considered "moderate." "The Stock Yards Company furnished hay to cattlemen at \$1 per hundred. The charge for yardage on cattle sold was 20 cents a head. No yardage charge was made for cattle not sold. The commission men charged 50 cents a head for selling cattle and \$6 a car for hogs and sheep."

"The Stock Yards Company guaranteed prompt settlement of all sales of stock that were sent here," it was reported in *The Kansan*.

Stock Yards Acreage



The Kansas City Stock Yards and The Kansas City Stock Yards Horse and The Mule Market (insert in lower right corner) were located "on Kansas soil lying between the Kansas River and the State Line, on the south of the Union Pacific and Missouri Pacific tracks at the east end of the Kansas River bridges." Photo courtesy of Kansas City, Kan., Public Library

When the stock yards started in 1871, five acres were fenced off and divided into 11 pens; 15 unloading chutes were constructed and one small pair of wagon scales were installed.

By 1883, the acreage had increased to 130 acres; about two-thirds were in Kansas and one-third in Missouri.

In the heyday year of 1923, 2,631,808 cattle were received at the Kansas City yards. Of these, 1,194,527 were purchased for use in Kansas City by the packing houses and local markets; the remainder or about 55 percent was shipped out. Of 2,736,174 hogs received, 879,031 were shipped out; of 377,038 calves, 199,084 were shipped out; of 1,165,606 sheep, 445,539 were shipped and of 42,987 horses and mules, all but 1,664 were shipped out.

"The yards are probably the best equipped in the world," it was reported in a *Kansan* story in 1924. "They contain 238 acres, of which 175 acres are paved and 87 acres under cover."

Stock Exchange Building

The Stock Exchange Building was built in 1876, costing \$35,000 and "fitted-up with every modern convenience." In addition to its own offices, 34 were rented to commission merchants and livestock men. The Bank of Kansas City and the Merchants National Bank were located in the Stock Exchange Building.

Officers of the Stock Exchange: Charles F. Adams Jr., president; Charles Merriam, secretary and treasurer; Col. Charles F. Morse, general manager; H.P. Childs, superintendent; E.E. Richardson, assistant secretary and treasurer.

Horse and Mule Market

The Kansas City Stock Yards Company Horse and Mule Market was a department of the yards by itself and was regarded as being the leading horse and mule market in the country.

A cosmopolitan market was served. "The East generally takes fine drivers and riders; the South mostly mules for cotton work, although some very fine horses are also taken; for the West and Northwest, mostly heavy draft animals." They also handled stock for breeding purposes.

F.E. Short and Company managed the market. Frank E. Short and Capt. W.S. Tough held regular auction sales on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Horse and Mule Market

Closely associated with the Stock yards were the local packing houses. *The Kansan's* "Then and Now" for Nov. 24, 1985, listed the early-day packing houses:

- Plankington and Armour
- Armour and Company
- Western Dressed Beef Co.
- Fowler Brothers (National Packing Co.)
- Morrison Packing House
- Kansas City Packing House
- Allcutt Packing Co.
- Kingan Packing Co.
- Swift and Co.
- Schwarzchald and Sulzberg (Old Western Dressed Beef Co.)
- Sulzberg and Sons
- Wilson and Company
- Ruddy Packing Plant
- American Dressed Beef and provision Co.
- St. Joe packing Co.
- Cochrane and Son
- J.C. Bertram
- Holmes Packing Plant
- August Freund
- Cudahy Packing Co.
- Baum and Adler
- Jacob Dold and Son (Old Slavens Plant)
- Morris Packing Plant

Packing house buyers would purchase the fat stock. The cattle too thin for packing were bought by farmers as "stockers and feeders" and shipped to their farms where they had a good supply of grain to fatten them.

Today

By the 1960s the large packing companies had closed most of their plants (namely because of the disastrous flood of '51) and consolidated them with plants in other cities.

The departure of the packing houses had a direct effect upon the Stock Yards, reflecting a greatly reduced market.

Meat packers, livestock businesses and butchering still continue here, but on a much smaller scale as compared with the earlier thriving market place.