

Winnipeg Livestock and Meat Processing Industry: A Century of Development

by Ralph Parliament*

The first known movement of cattle into western Canada took place in 1823 after the establishment of the Red River settlement. A herd of 300 head of cattle was driven across the border from the United States and sold to the colonists in Manitoba. Later, many homesteaders from Ontario brought with them more cattle, hogs, sheep and horses which helped to further the industry.

The development of the livestock industry in Manitoba followed closely the pattern of development in the United States and Upper Canada. These stages are:

1. The "pioneer stage" when livestock was imported into Manitoba to supply the immediate needs of the new community.

2. The "local slaughtering" stage when animals were slaughtered by the village butcher or by farmers and sold from door to door or at the village market place.

3. A "small packer" stage when hogs were slaughtered on the farm during the winter and cured and packed by numerous small packers. At this stage practically all by-products were completely wasted.

This was roughly the nature of the packing industry when Winnipeg became a City in 1874.

During all this period the industry was strictly a local one supplying the needs of the local population. There were no means of supplying outside markets, so all operations were quite small.

However, the basic foundations of the industry were laid in the period between 1850 and 1875. It so happened that Winnipeg became a City at the same time that livestock and meat packing were becoming an important part of the Winnipeg economy.

Another very important development took place between 1850 and 1875. An American developed ice-making equipment. This started a

*Vice-President, Canada Packers Limited (Retired).