

Livestock in Frontier Minnesota

Merrill E. Jarchow

ALTHOUGH THE PIONEER Minnesota farmer placed much faith in spring wheat as a cash staple, he by no means neglected the livestock industry. In fact domestic animals were introduced into the region before wheat was grown there. In the vicinity of missions, trading posts, and military forts the white man early carried on farming which included stock raising. Lieutenant Zebulon M. Pike in 1806 wrote that at the post of the North West Company on Sandy Lake he saw horses procured from the Red River country and from the Indians. In the next year George Henry Monk reported of Fond du Lac: "Here are two Horses, a Cow, a Bull, and a few pigs." At Lac qui Parle by 1830 Joseph Renville was reported to have owned "sheep by the hundreds and cattle by the score." Two years later the Reverend William T. Boutwell visited the Sandy Lake post and saw there stables for thirty head of cattle, three or four horses, and fifteen swine.¹

As time went on the number of heads of livestock gradually increased, although until nearly 1860 much of the livestock in the Northwest was imported from other sections for slaughter, dairy, and draught purposes.² There was little effort to improve breeds prior to the middle 1850's, and most farmers paid slight attention to their farm animals. In December, 1845, for example, William R. Brown made the following entries in his diary: "Tuesday 16 E. Brissette and I went out on the hills to look for his hogs which have been lost for several weeks. I found them on the hills Back of Harrison's Claim. Brissette & I followed them all day but could not get to them." On the following day Brown recorded that "Brissette

¹ Frank E. Balmer, "The Farmer and Minnesota History," *ante*, 7:206; Edward V. Robinson, *Early Economic Conditions and the Development of Agriculture in Minnesota*, 40 (University of Minnesota, *Studies in the Social Sciences*, no. 3—Minneapolis, 1915).

² *Minnesota Pioneer* (St. Paul), July 14, 1853; Mildred Hartsough, *The Development of the Twin Cities as a Metropolitan Market*, 66 (Minneapolis, 1925).

& I went out and built a pen over his hogs bed (we found where they slept) hoping at night we could slip up & shut the door at night & thus fasten them in so we made a pen & at night went down but only 3 of them were in we fastened those in intending to shoot the others & haul them home, next day his old Black sow had pigs this evening." Not until December 23 did Brown and a companion go "to haul Brissette's hogs home he had shut them all up but one little pig it ran away. we tied them & put them in the sled."³

From these extracts it is apparent that some farmers of the 1840's made little effort to house their hogs, and other livestock fared little better. Most farm animals were used for home consumption, though some meat might be sold at a fort or a village if one happened to be near enough to make such a sale profitable.

At the beginning of the decade of the 1840's, according to the sixth census, there were in St. Croix County, Wisconsin, which included Minnesota east of the Mississippi, 58 horses and mules, 434 cattle, 6 sheep, and 187 swine. These statistics probably are inaccurate and they give no clue, of course, to the number of animals in Minnesota proper. Ten years later the census included statistics for Minnesota Territory by counties. The livestock population had grown appreciably, though the validity of the figures is again open to doubt. Most of the increase was due to importation, as items in the first newspaper of the territory testify. On one occasion it noted that the "boiler deck of the Senator . . . was crowded with cattle and horses migrating to Minnesota"; on another it spoke of cattle and horses that were destined "to be let down, as it were in a sheet by the four corners, before St. Peters."⁴

Many head of cattle were driven overland along with the covered wagons of the settlers. One writer, F. D. Currier, however, stated that the majority of settlers in the 1850's reached their destination without a hoofed or horned animal upon which to draw for sustenance. Most early settlers had to be content with buying a calf and waiting for it to grow. No attention was paid to breeds, and the

³ Rodney C. Loehr, ed., *Minnesota Farmers' Diaries*, 49, 50, 52 (St. Paul, 1939).

⁴ *Pioneer*, May 19, 26, 1849.

buyer had to be satisfied with "anything that walked on four legs, could grow horns, and would resemble a cow when grown up." In 1850 Minnesota's "livestock comprised chiefly horses and work oxen, though some milch cows were reported, especially in Washington and Pembina counties."⁵

The lack of home-produced beef and pork was reflected in price quotations, which were extremely changeable. In February, 1851, for example, beef and pork had advanced to ten cents a pound in St. Paul, partly because hogs from Dubuque, Prairie du Chien, and other places had not yet arrived. At the same time good butter was scarce, all kinds bringing twenty-five cents a pound. Less than a year later, in January, 1852, when there was a good supply of beef on hand in St. Paul, it sold for from five to seven cents a pound by the quarter, or six to eight cents by the piece. There was no fresh pork to speak of, only one wagonload having reached St. Paul during the previous few days. As a result pork brought from eight to ten cents a pound and hams, twelve and a half cents.⁶

In the early 1850's good cows could be purchased in Iowa, Illinois, or Wisconsin for about twenty-five dollars each, and the cost of taking one from Galena to St. Paul by steamboat was between three and four dollars. This, however, was too expensive for the average farmer, who generally was short of cash. Hence, importation of livestock and improved breeding methods were carried on for the most part by the wealthier men of the territory. They performed a valuable service for Minnesota—a service, by the way, which did not go unnoticed. In 1854, for example, this item appeared in the weekly *Pioneer*: "As yet but little has been done towards the improvement

⁵ Minnesota Butter, Cheese and Dairy Stock Association, *Proceedings*, 1885, p. 27 (Red Wing, 1886); William G. Gresham, ed., *History of Nicollet and Le Sueur Counties*, 1:460 (Indianapolis, 1916); Robinson, *Agriculture in Minnesota*, 41. In a master's thesis on "Public Opinion on Federal Land Policies in Minnesota, 1837-1862," p. 26, Ben R. Brainerd states that many new settlers in the prairie region engaged in stock raising in the middle 1850's, but that since few brought cattle with them, they had to buy from drovers who demanded cash. In 1855 at St. Peter, milch cows cost from \$35.00 to \$70.00; year-old heifers, from \$15.00 to \$25.00; work oxen, from \$130.00 to \$175.00 a yoke; and three-year-old steers, from \$70.00 to \$120.00. A copy of Brainerd's thesis, which was prepared at the University of Minnesota in 1935, is owned by the Minnesota Historical Society.

⁶ *Pioneer*, February 6, 1851; January 1, 1852.

of stock in the Territory, and we are highly gratified to see that at this time, many are making exertions to bring in improved breeds. Col. Stevens of Minneapolis, last year got up a fine Durham Bull and a heifer of the same breed, from which the farmers in Hennepin County are now breeding very extensively, which will of course make a general improvement in that region, and Mr. William Fowler of Red Rock prairie has just brought up a beautiful Devonshire Bull, which he purchased in Geauga County, Ohio." The writer mentions two other Minnesotans who "are now below for the purpose of procuring an improved stock of horses," and he concludes with the remark that "They will, probably, bring on some good stock, and our present race of ponies will soon disappear from the land."⁷ Perhaps such importations of stock brought the desired results. At least C. C. Andrews, commenting on a trip to Minnesota in 1856, when he noted the absence of mules, declared: "Minnesotians are supplied with uncommonly good horses. I do not remember to have seen a mean horse in the territory."⁸

In the spring of 1855 the press once more reported on the activities of stock importers. It was expected that beginning in May extensive droves would arrive. Even in April, fifty or sixty milch cows, work oxen, and beef cattle were on their way from northern Illinois, and another herd was coming from Iowa. By June 1, a large lot was expected from Missouri. Some uncertainty regarding sheep importation was expressed, but of live pork there was plenty, and it was believed that Ramsey County could almost supply its own demand for that article.⁹

In addition to the importers already mentioned, notice should be given to Joseph Haskell, one of Minnesota's earliest farmers, who in 1851 brought the first Devons into the region and bred them successfully for some years thereafter. Joseph P. Miller also deserves recognition, since he and Colonel John H. Stevens in 1853 imported the first full-blooded Devon cow and bull into Hennepin County at a cost of \$2,000. Devons, however, did not prove popular and were

⁷ *Pioneer*, July 15, 1852; weekly edition, May 4, 1854.

⁸ C. C. Andrews, *Minnesota and Dacotah*, 158 (Washington, 1857).

⁹ *Pioneer*, April 19, 1855.

rarely profitable in Minnesota. At the same time, in the early 1850's, Herefords, Anguses, and Galloways were practically unknown in the region.¹⁰

The breed of horses in greatest favor was the Morgan. At the Minnesota Territorial Agricultural Society's fair of 1855 the first premiums for stallions went to "Flying Morgan, 2," a full-blooded Morgan owned by Daniel Hopkins, and first on colts went to another Morgan owned by William Holcombe. There was not then a Percheron, a Belgian, or a Clydesdale in Minnesota. At the same fair the first premium for bulls went to a three-year-old Durham, and for sheep to a Leicester. The hogs exhibited evidently did not belong to any particular breed.¹¹

In 1859, about the time when wheat was becoming commercially important in the state, the first shipment of cattle was made from Minnesota to the East. On November 10 Colonel Salathiel Olin of Rochester sent three carloads, comprising forty-five cattle in all, over the Milwaukee and La Crosse road directly to Boston. The cattle were purchased in the neighborhood of Rochester, and they averaged 1,700 pounds in weight.¹² The shipment was a welcome harbinger of the future to Minnesotans accustomed only to importing stock.

Shortly after Olin's venture, G. W. Piper of St. Peter took east a drove of Minnesota fattened cattle. He reported that they met with a ready sale in Buffalo and "That the speculation netted a handsome profit to those who embarked their means in it." The local market, however, did not always prove so attractive, for it was discovered by one owner of some fat cattle driven from Rice County to St. Paul that he could not find a purchaser among the city butchers, though he asked only four cents a pound on the hoof. He therefore resolved to drive the cattle to Superior.¹³

¹⁰ Darwin S. Hall and Return I. Holcombe, *History of the Minnesota State Agricultural Society from Its Organization in 1854 to the Annual Meeting of 1910*, 16 (St. Paul, 1910); *St. Anthony Express*, May 27, 1853.

¹¹ Hall and Holcombe, *State Agricultural Society*, 31; V. P. Hedrick, *A History of Agriculture in the State of New York*, 358 (New York, 1933). Devon and Durham cattle were becoming numerous in Freeborn County, according to the *Minnesota Farmer and Gardener* (St. Paul), 1:72 (January, 1861).

¹² Henrietta M. Larson, *The Wheat Market and the Farmer in Minnesota, 1858-1900*, 17 (New York, 1926); *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat* (St. Paul), November 18, 1859.

¹³ *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat*, April 27, June 1, 1860.

According to the census of 1850 there were only 80 sheep in all Minnesota Territory, of which 45 were in Ramsey County and 26 in Wabasha County. By 1860, however, there were 13,044 sheep in the state. Then came the Civil War with the accompanying demand for wool, and as a result the sheep population jumped to 97,241 in 1864 and 193,045 in 1866. Then the movement subsided, and there were only 135,450 sheep in the state in 1869. The end of the war and the general price decline caused this falling off in sheep production.¹⁴

Much ink was used by the papers of the territory and state in an attempt to interest farmers in sheep production. In 1853 one editor predicted that "Within the time necessary for a farmer to get an extensive sheep farm in complete operation, we will be in a condition to avail ourselves of any and all the markets, both in Europe and America." Several years later the *St. Peter Statesman* published an account of P. S. Carson's experience as a sheep raiser. "All honor," said the writer, "is due Mr. Carson for his efforts in establishing the success of wool growing in this section of Minnesota, as it promises to be one of the most profitable branches of agricultural industry in the State." A farmers' club organized by members of the state legislature became interested in the question of sheep raising and devoted many discussions to it. One member pointed out that a good sheep yielded four and a half pounds of wool a year. Wool could be sent to New York and Boston for two and a half cents a pound, including commissions. Since the average price of wool in 1860 was forty cents a pound, at least \$1.50 a year could be realized on each sheep. The speaker claimed that he had raised five hundred sheep himself, and he therefore knew from experience what he was talking about.¹⁵

Ample evidence of a craze for wool production can be found in the newspapers from 1860 to 1866. A flock of sheep from Vermont and another from New York were driven through Mantorville in one week in 1860. Richard Healy of New York and Russell Smith of Wisconsin let out sheep in flocks of five hundred to three farmers

¹⁴ Robinson, *Agriculture in Minnesota*, 62; J. A. Willard, *Blue Earth County: Its Advantages to Settlers*, 6 (Mankato, 1868).

¹⁵ *Pioneer*, September 29, 1853; *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat*, July 14, 1859; February 3, 1860.

in Olmsted County in the fall of 1860. Half of the wool and half of the increase went to the owners, who claimed thirty to fifty per cent dividends in the first year. J. G. Getty, who lived south of Sauk Centre, spent the winter of 1860-61 in Illinois, where he planned to buy two thousand sheep to take back to his farm the following spring. By 1863 there were many different breeds of sheep in the state, and each had defenders who vigorously proclaimed its merits. Some of the breeds most frequently mentioned were Leicester, South-down, Sussex, Silesian, Saxon, and Merino. As late as September, 1866, forty thousand pounds of wool were at the railroad depot in St. Anthony ready to be shipped East—the largest amount exported from the state up to that time. A local newspaper commented on the year's shipment as follows: "Only half a dozen seasons since the entire wool clip of the State could not have filled a dozen burlaps. This year our exports of wool will exceed half a million pounds, and is almost doubling every season. It has become one of our most profitable branches of husbandry, or of any business, and numbers are embarking capital in it."¹⁶

But however impressive the state's expansion of sheep raising was, Minnesota lagged far behind other states in the Middle West, as the following table shows.

	POUNDS OF WOOL	
	1862	1865
Illinois	5,800,000	12,000,000
Wisconsin	2,200,000	5,000,000
Iowa	2,000,000	7,000,000
Minnesota	150,000	450,000

The proportion of sheep to other livestock in the state can be seen by looking at a table, based upon assessors' returns.

	1860	1863	1866	Per cent of increase
Horses	10,196	34,749	63,600	500
Cattle	40,928	194,736	210,921	400
Sheep	8,042	63,624	194,522	2,300
Hogs	21,317	87,857	95,472	350

¹⁶ *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat*, June 8, August 31, October 12, 1860; July 17, 1863; *Weekly Pioneer*, September 7, 1866; *Farmer and Gardener*, 1:194 (July, 1861). Wool exports from St. Paul amounted to 3,000 pounds in 1861, to 36,105 pounds in 1862, to 114,698 pounds in 1863, and to 175,000 pounds in 1864.

The actual value of livestock in 1866 was about \$21,286,697, more than double that of wheat. Fillmore, Olmsted, Goodhue, Dakota, Hennepin, Blue Earth, and Carver were banner livestock counties in the middle 1860's.¹⁷

The price of medium-grade wool fluctuated greatly during the war, but it seldom if ever sank below a figure remunerative to the farmer. The price range for 1862 was from \$.40 to \$.65 a pound; for 1863, from \$.63 to \$.75; for 1864, from \$.70 to \$1.10; for 1865, from \$.45 to \$.90.¹⁸ Despite high war prices, the sheepman's life was not always a bed of roses. Disease, wolves, and dogs were three of his worst enemies.

The Minnesota State Agricultural Society and individuals bemoaned the dog menace and repeatedly petitioned the legislature to pass a stringent dog law. Typical was a plea from a well-known sheep raiser, R. H. Bennett of Cottage Grove: "I am confident the time is not far distant when Minnesota will rank first among the *wool producing States . . . Provided, our intelligent Legislature* will pass a *law taxing all Dogs*, and creating a revenue, *sufficient to pay for the depredations of the canine race*, the only efficient protection that we can have." An act levying a dog tax was approved on March 6, 1862, but it was not stringent enough to please the sheepmen. An act of March 6, 1873, made the owner of a dog who killed or wounded a sheep liable for the value of such sheep. Diseases among sheep, especially foot rot, were prevalent between 1864 and 1867. Later the flocks appear to have been generally healthy.¹⁹

With the decline in the production of sheep after 1866, there was a noticeable decrease in public interest. In 1870 there were 132,343 sheep in Minnesota, fewer than the number given in the state re-

¹⁷ *Weekly Pioneer*, May 18, 1866; January 25, 1867. The figures for livestock are undoubtedly far too low. The 1860 census reported 16,879 horses, 106,009 cattle, 384 mules, 12,595 sheep, and 104,479 hogs.

¹⁸ *Weekly Pioneer*, May 18, 1866; *Farmer and Gardener*, 2:15 (January, 1862). Andrew Peterson, a farmer near Shakopee, sold three pounds of wool at eighty cents a pound, according to his diary for July 2, 1864. This diary, which is written in Swedish, is preserved by the Minnesota Historical Society. An English translation is available.

¹⁹ *Farmer and Gardener*, 2:11, 75 (January, March, 1862); *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat*, February 5, 1864; *Farmers' Union* (Minneapolis), March 29, 1873; *Minnesota, General Laws*, 1873, p. 140. In his diary for April 1, 1864, Peterson recorded that he collected \$5.50 for a sheep killed by a dog.

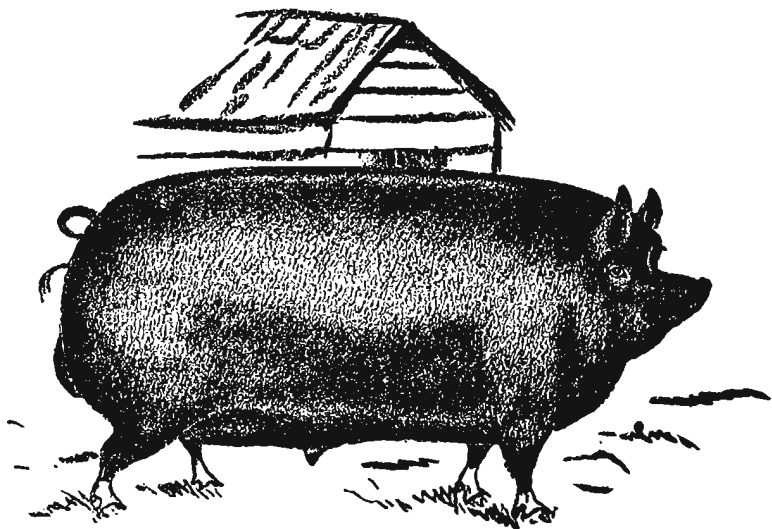
turns of 1869; and in 1880 there were 267,598, exclusive of spring lambs. The increase of sheep during the 1870's was relatively smaller than that of any other class of livestock except work oxen. It would seem that the postwar years dealt the industry a blow from which it did not easily recover. No organization of farmers to stimulate sheep and wool production appeared until 1879, when the Minnesota State Wool Growers' Association was formed.²⁰

According to the census of 1850, there were 734 swine in the territory, 590 of which were found in Wabasha and Washington counties. By 1860 the total number had increased to 101,371 and by 1870, to 148,473. This was a percentage increase for the 1860's of 46.5, a smaller relative gain than was found in any other class of livestock on the farms in the state, even including work oxen. There were 82.7 swine per hundred of the rural population in 1860 and 45.3 in 1870. During the 1870's there was an increase in the hog population of 156.9 per cent to a total of 381,415 in 1880, or 70.2 swine for each hundred of the country population.²¹

Important factors in retarding swine production during the 1860's were the state's limited corn crop and the high price of grain. In this connection Thomas Lamb, whose dealings in pork were the most extensive in St. Paul, said that \$300,000 worth of pork reached the city from Iowa during the winter of 1867-68. Slaughtered hogs valued at \$500,000 probably were imported by the state during the same period. The *Minnesota Monthly* deplored this condition, and pointed out that since Canadian farmers fattened hogs with peas, Minnesota farmers could do likewise. George Biscoe gave evidence of the scarcity of pigs when he wrote: "Mr. Van Slyke offered to give me a young pig if I would come and get it. Young pigs are

²⁰ *Farmers' Union*, August 1868; April, 1869; July 18, 1874; *Minnesota Monthly* (St. Paul), 1:247, 324 (July, September, 1869); *Minnesota Farmer* (St. Paul), 2:184, 3:128 (March, 1879; February, 1880); United States Commissioner of Agriculture, *Report*, 1865, p. 479-484; *Statistics of Minnesota for 1876*, 139 (Commissioner of Statistics, *Eighth Annual Report* — St. Paul, 1877); Robinson, *Agriculture in Minnesota*, 62, 105. For information on a slightly later period, see D. E. Salmon, *Special Report on the History and Present Condition of the Sheep Industry of the United States* (52 Congress, 2 session, *House Miscellaneous Documents*, no. 105 — serial 3124).

²¹ Robinson, *Agriculture in Minnesota*, 103, 105, 244.



Berkshire Boar "GEN. HANCOCK," Property of DeGraff & Hopkins, Janesville, Minnesota.

[From the *Minnesota Farmer*, vol. 1, no. 6, p. 9 (February, 1878).]

very scarce and bringing a high price for Minn., so it is worth going for." ²²

Prior to 1860 there seems to have been little commercial pork raising in the state. According to the *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat* of March 29, 1861, "Very little was done in this city in pork packing until the winter of 1859-60—the time when we were relieved from the necessity of dependence on importations from below. In that winter a packing house was established by Messrs. Strong and Miller, which was quite successful. Last winter other firms commenced the business, and the results go to show that hereafter this will become a prominent source of occupation and profit."

E. and H. Y. Bell, St. Paul dealers, sent pork to Chicago during the winter of 1860-61 and made a fair profit on it. The price for hauling the pork to La Crosse was a dollar a hundredweight. Thence

²² *Minnesota Monthly*, 1:31 (January, 1869). See also a letter written by George Biscoe from Cottage Grove, July 24, 1863, in the Biscoe Papers in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

it was sent on to Chicago by rail. Not only St. Paul, but Northfield, St. Peter, Winona, and Stillwater figured in this early trade.²³

Hogs were seldom sold alive. When freezing weather arrived the farmers had a hog-killing bee, with neighbors assisting one another, as they did at threshing time. As soon as the pork was frozen, it was taken to town, where on many a cold day the street would be lined with loads of dressed hogs. Buyers took the meat to the depot, where it was weighed and marked. When business was especially good, the railroads sometimes ran short of cars. Then if a thaw set in, the meat stored in the depot freight room was likely to turn green, and it would have to be sent to a soap factory. About 1870, men were paid from twenty-five to thirty-five cents an hour to load cars with frozen pork. Farmers generally rendered the entrails only for lard, as the leaf lard had to go with the hogs when they were sold.²⁴

Prior to 1860 little if any attention was paid to any particular breed of swine. At the state fair of that year, however, a Chester White barrow attracted wide notice, and the breed took prizes at many other state fairs in 1860. It originated in Chester County, Pennsylvania, as the result of a very careful breeding of the common white hog for many years. It became larger than the popular little Suffolk, which it resembled, Chester Whites often weighing from five hundred to eight hundred pounds in the early 1860's. By 1861 Chester Whites were appearing on Minnesota farms, and many of the good hogs that went to market during the winter of 1860-61, eliciting "much praise," were of that breed.²⁵

As time went on more interest was taken in improved breeds of swine. The lead there, as in other branches of the industry, was taken by wealthy farmers, and not by average farmers. Charles

²³ *Farmer and Gardener*, 1:120 (February, 1861); *Hastings Independent*, April 12, 1860; *Belle Plaine Enquirer*, February 9, 1861; *St. Cloud Democrat*, April 4, 1861; *Stillwater Messenger*, October 6, 1863.

²⁴ J. E. Townsend, "Store Business . . . in Belle Plaine 63 Years Ago," in *Belle Plaine Herald*, September 7, 1933. See also a letter to Mrs. Nancy Aiton from her brother Andrew, December 4, 1851, in the Aiton Papers in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

²⁵ *Farmer and Gardener*, 1:264 (September, 1861); Hedrick, *Agriculture in the State of New York*, 375.

Reeve and William S. King of Minneapolis, Brockway Brothers of Eyota, and Charles de Graff of Janesville were among the leading swine raisers. As a result of the work of Brockway Brothers and others, the Olmsted County auditor was able to report that he believed the grade of swine in the county was improved fifty per cent between 1869 and 1871. These men were particularly interested in Essex and Berkshire swine. Reeve, in a letter dated February 2, 1877, said that he raised Berkshires, some of which he obtained from England. Although he raised 140 pigs in 1874, for two years he had been unable to fill all the orders that reached him. He received \$25.00 a pair for hogs four months old, \$15.00 for single pigs, and as high as \$50.00 each for choice sows in pig. Some of his swine were sent to Wisconsin and Iowa, and one of his pigs at two years weighed 502 pounds when dressed. He complained, however, that prices were very low in the state when compared with other parts of the country. De Graff, like the rest, raised some Berkshires, but he also had Chester Whites and Poland Chinas.²⁶

Complaints of low prices were fairly general until the late 1870's. In 1873 the *Winona Weekly Republican* explained that the pork trade had been poor during the previous winter because of low prices, ranging from \$4.00 to \$4.10 a hundredweight most of the season. Such prices, however, caused farmers to devote more care to methods of fattening and more attention to improved breeds. During the season of 1872 the practice of summer packing was introduced to several of the large markets of the West, and the influence of this development was soon felt in Minnesota. Hogs could be fattened more cheaply in summer than in winter, so there was now a greater inducement to farmers to engage in the business.²⁷

Another innovation of interest came with the establishment, in the spring of 1878, of a meat-packing business by Holbrook and Company of Minneapolis. This firm had a retail department where Minneapolitans could secure for the first time the frankfurt sausage.

²⁶ *Statistics of Minnesota for 1876*, 135-137. The average price for hogs in a number of western states in 1874 was as follows: Iowa, \$6.78; Missouri, \$3.13; Wisconsin, \$5.17; Michigan, \$6.80; Illinois, \$6.31; Kansas, \$3.69; California, \$5.77; Minnesota, \$5.08.

²⁷ *Winona Weekly Republican*, February 12, 1873.

By 1880 a large part of the Minnesota product was going to Chicago and Milwaukee, centers which maintained buyers in Minnesota and could be easily reached by rail. The cry then went up in many circles that Minnesota farmers should raise more pork and that capitalists should invest in meat packing, in order to put pork on a par with wheat in the state.²⁸

The census of 1850 recorded 874 horses in the territory, a figure which included a small number of asses and mules. Pembina, Washington, and Wabasha counties accounted for the majority of the animals. In 1860 there were 17,065 horses in the state, and in 1870 the number was 93,011, a percentage increase for the 1860's of 445. By 1880 the horse population had mounted to 257,282, for a percentage increase of 176.6 during the decade of the 1870's. There were only 13.9 horses per 100 of the rural population in 1860 as compared with 47.3 in 1880. An interesting contrast appears when the figures on horses are compared with those on work oxen. In 1860 there were 27,568 of these animals; in 1870, 43,176; and in 1880 only 36,344. The introduction of farm machinery, which operated more efficiently with horses, plus an improved standard of living, were closely related to the disappearance of oxen.²⁹

As was the case with other farm animals, the average horse owned by pioneer Minnesotans was of a nondescript breed. For good blooded horses the state was indebted to men "not bred of farming"—Captain D. Haney of Rochester, Colonel John Farrington of St. Paul, a certain Wollgate of Fort Snelling, and Thomas Crosby of Ramsey County. Ruble Brothers of Freeborn County also raised fine horses, George S. Ruble's stallion Red Eye being known as the best in the state in 1861. Most experienced farmers welcomed these men as friends and benefactors.³⁰

Although Morgans were in greatest favor during the 1850's, in time other breeds became popular in the region. As late as 1863, however, all the horses shown at the Minnesota State Fair were

²⁸ *Minnesota Farmer*, vol. 1, no. 8, p. 7; vol. 2, p. 182 (April, 1878; March, 1879).

²⁹ Robinson, *Agriculture in Minnesota*, 103, 105, 244.

³⁰ *Minnesota Monthly*, 1:155 (May, 1869); *Farmer and Gardener*, 1:72, 154 (January, May, 1861).



PERCHERON NORMAN STALLION IMPORTED FROM FRANCE IN 1876

[From the *Minnesota Farmer*, vol. 2, no. 1, p. 35 (September, 1878).]

Morgans or Morgan crosses. At the 1870 fair, which was held in Winona, fine Clydesdales and Percherons were shown, but not until 1875 were the latter in considerable numbers exhibited at the state fair. Leonard Johnson of Castle Rock, Dr. O. O. Evans of Minneapolis, and S. B. Spearin of Empire exhibited Percherons, and the breed drew considerable comment in the press. The horses, however, were described as "huge creatures," and the general opinion was that they were "too large and clumsy and would cost too much to maintain to be of much use to Minnesota farmers." Spearin's gray draught stallion "Sensation" weighed two thousand pounds and stood eighteen hands high.³¹

Two enemies that particularly jeopardized farm horses in the pioneer period were thieves and disease. The disease that was most widely publicized was "epizoot," which struck in southern Minnesota in November and December, 1872, and rapidly became epidemic. Veterinaries said it was acute catarrh and influenza, and that it originated in eastern Canada where thousands of horses died. Next it appeared in the eastern states and then it spread westward. Cities were especially hard hit. In the latter part of December, 1872, nearly all business in some counties was at a standstill because of the epizooty. It was said that the best treatment was to give afflicted horses perfect rest and keep them warm and dry. They were to be fed no hay, oats, corn, or barley, only warm bran mash mixed with a little oat or rye straw. A small dose of bromide of potassium two or three times a day in the mash for the first two or three days was recommended, as was tar on the trough, manger, and horse's nose. Fewer horses actually died of the disease in Minnesota than in some other areas.³²

Various associations were formed from time to time to combat horse thieves. In southern Minnesota thieves were extremely active in the 1860's and 1870's, and they were not unknown elsewhere.

³¹ Hall and Holcombe, *State Agricultural Society*, 75, 104, 121-123, 140. On his farm near Lake City, Willis Baker had eighteen brood mares and sixty-three horses and colts, as well as a driving park. The average price of horses in 1874 was \$72.80 in Minnesota and \$89.82 in New York. See *Statistics of Minnesota for 1876*, 121-124.

³² J. E. Child, *History of Waseca County*, 256 (Owatonna, 1905); J. A. Kiestler, *History of Faribault County*, 356 (Minneapolis, 1896).

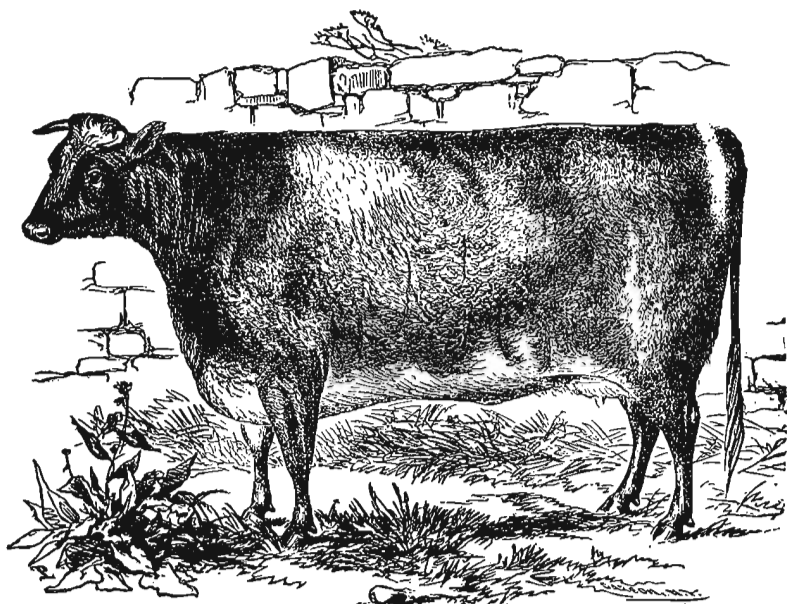
One such organization, the Waseca County Horse Thief Detectives, founded in 1864, continues to hold meetings and collect membership dues after more than eighty years. In March, 1872, the Anti-Horse Thief Association of Fergus Falls was organized, although, according to one writer, "there was not a horse in town valuable enough to tempt the most ornery horse thief." The tenth bylaw of the organization read as follows: "It shall be the sworn duty of any and all members of this society capturing a horse thief having in his possession the property of any member of the association, to promptly execute the said horse thief, by hanging, or in the absence of facilities for hanging, by shooting, or in any other manner, but in any and all events to take such effective measures as shall preclude the possibility of the return of said horse thief to commit any further depredations in the county."³³

The interest in beef cattle during the 1850's and 1860's has been noted. In 1850, there were 1,395 cattle other than milch cows in Minnesota Territory, mainly in Washington, Pembina, Wabasha, and Ramsey counties. Ten years later the figure had increased to 51,345, and in 1870 it was 145,736. The increase for the 1860's was 183.8 per cent, a smaller relative gain than for any other class of stock, except swine and work oxen. In absolute numbers, however, cattle ranked second to hogs. During the 1870's the beef cattle population grew to 347,161, a gain of 138.2 per cent. In 1860 there were 41.9 cattle for every hundred people, and in 1880 there were 63.9, though cattle still ranked second in numbers to hogs.³⁴

The most popular breed of cattle in the early years was the Shorthorn or Durham. Well-known Shorthorn raisers were De Graff and Hopkins of the Lake Elysian Stock Farm at Janesville, N. R. Clark of St. Cloud, H. F. Brown of Minneapolis, Brockway Brothers of Eyota, Major George H. Smith of Carlton County, Dr. Charles W. Ballard of Albert Lea, and William S. King of Minneapolis. The latter gained international recognition. In 1868

³³ John W. Mason, ed., *History of Otter Tail County*, 1:605 (Indianapolis, 1916); Gladys H. Du Priest, "The Waseca County Horse Thief Detectives," *ante*, 13:153; *Waseca Journal*, April 4, 1945. The Waseca County organization held its eighty-first annual meeting on March 31, 1945.

³⁴ Robinson, *Agriculture in Minnesota*, 103, 105, 244.



THE SHORT-HORN COW "BLUSH," THE PROPERTY OF COL. WM. S. KING.—COST \$1,000
[From the *Farmers' Union*, September, 1869.]

he purchased some blooded stock in New York for his farm, located three miles from Minneapolis. Included were the "Sixth Duke of Geneva," a pure Duchess bull costing \$3,000, and "Blush," a Short-horn cow. About the same time King also bought some Ayrshires and some Jerseys. By 1869 his was said to be one of the three most valuable herds in the United States. "Mr. King's enterprise will become historic as the pioneer adventure, on a comprehensive scale, in this highly classic department of Minnesota husbandry," read one press comment.³⁵

In 1874, when King disposed of his herd of Shorthorns in Chicago, the sale received wide publicity, and it attracted buyers from as far away as England. The cows and heifers sold at an average price of \$1,730, and the bulls at \$1,210. For one bull, the "2 Duke of

³⁵ *Statistics of Minnesota for 1876*, 126, 132-135; *Minnesota Farmer*, 2:12 (September, 1878); *Farmers' Union*, September, 1869; *Minnesota Monthly*, 1:242, 250 (July, 1869); *Independent Farmer and Fireside Companion* (St. Paul), 1:180 (November 1, 1879); *Weekly Pioneer*, October 23, 1868.

Hillhurst," King was offered \$14,000, which was said to be the highest figure ever quoted on a bull, but the deal fell through and the animal was taken back to Minnesota. Fifty-eight cows and twenty-one bulls were sold for a total of \$126,990. After the sale King still retained a fine herd of cattle in Meeker County.³⁶

Dr. Charles W. Ballard wrote from Albert Lea, on January 14, 1877, that drovers traveling through Minnesota to buy stock to fatten in Illinois and Iowa could not obtain as good cattle as were available ten years before, even though the number of cattle was increasing. Steers two and one-half years old averaged 700 to 800 pounds and heifers 650 to 700 pounds. The reasons for the condition were lack of good care and the use of poor bulls throughout the state. Bulls were prohibited by law from running at large, but since many people figured that all animals under two years of age were calves, yearling bulls were found ranging with nearly every herd. The amount of pasture was being reduced each year, and prices were low during the 1870's. Of purebred cattle, Dr. Ballard claimed, Minnesota had produced fewer than 500, among which Shorthorns predominated. The American herd book of 1876 showed that breeders of the state had recorded only forty-nine bulls of their own raising, and of those probably a third had been sold out of the state. About 150 bulls were imported. Dr. Ballard makes it clear that so far as breeding methods were concerned, the average farmer had not progressed far beyond his predecessor of the 1850's. In 1876 at public sales 774 Shorthorn bulls were sold in Minnesota at an average price of \$242.00, and 3,230 cows brought an average price of \$365.00.³⁷

In addition to Shorthorns, Ayrshires, and Jerseys, other breeds, such as Guernsey, Galloway, Holstein, and Angus cattle, appeared as dairying began to develop. At the state fair of 1873 Shorthorns, Ayrshires, Alderneys, and Jerseys were represented, while Shorthorns and Alderneys were the leading breeds at the fair of the next

³⁶ *Farmers' Union*, May 16, 30, 1874.

³⁷ *Statistics of Minnesota for 1876*, 130-132. The state press tried to stimulate cattle production. See, for example, the *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat*, February 22, 1861. Farmers in Freeborn County received \$6,000 for beef cattle in the fall of 1860, according to the *Farmer and Gardener*, 1:72 (January, 1861).

year. In 1883 J. J. Hill drew upon his herd, which had a national reputation, for the only showing of Polled Angus, and J. C. Easton entered the only exhibit of Scotch Galloways. A. V. Ellis of the Evergreen Stock Farm at Austin received credit for first introducing and breeding Holsteins in Minnesota.³⁸

The Minnesota Stock Breeders' Association was organized in 1877. William S. King served as its first president, and R. C. Judson, as secretary. The organization was composed of farmers from central Minnesota, while breeders in the southern part of the state belonged to the Southern Minnesota Stock Breeders' Association. In 1878 one outstanding figure in the Minnesota livestock business, Leonard Johnson of East Castle Rock, was elected a vice-president of the National Association of Importers and Breeders of Norman Horses at a meeting in Peoria, Illinois.³⁹

Fencing was a problem that sooner or later confronted most stockmen. At first stock was fenced out, not in. As one man put it: "In those days we used a great deal of board fencing as all our cultivated land had to be fenced in, all stock being allowed to run at large." Another, writing in the spring of 1867, complained that "Our Legislature did not see fit to compel us to restrain our cattle, therefore we must fence our crops." At times local communities took action. At Waseca, for example, the subject aroused much debate among the people and the city fathers in 1868, and as a result, on July 22, an ordinance was passed providing that cattle, horses, mules, or sheep found running at large within the village between one hour after sunset and the following sunrise should be impounded by the poundmaster, marshal, street commissioner, or constable. This was better than no law, but it was poor protection for gardens and lawns.⁴⁰

³⁸ Hall and Holcombe, *State Agricultural Society*, 117, 119, 140; *Statistics of Minnesota for 1883*, 220 (Commissioner of Statistics, *Fifteenth Annual Report*—St. Paul, 1884); Minnesota Butter, Cheese and Dairy Stock Association, *Third Annual Meeting*, 1883, p. 120 (Austin, 1884).

³⁹ *Minnesota Farmer*, vol. 1, no. 6, p. 3; no. 7, p. 7; no. 8, p. 9 (February, March, April, 1878).

⁴⁰ Robert Watson, *Notes on the Early Settlement of Cottage Grove and Vicinity*, 19 (Northfield, 1924); Child, *Waseca County*, 203; *Weekly Pioneer*, March 22, 1867; Biscoe's letter, July 7, 1863, Biscoe Papers.

In his message to the legislature in 1873 Governor Horace Austin recommended "that the several counties or towns be authorized to determine for themselves the vexed question of 'fencing in or fencing out' livestock." Finally, in 1874, a herd law applying to certain parts of the state was enacted. Under its terms a farmer had no redress for damage done to his crops by stock in the daytime unless he could prove that he had a three-rail fence four feet high on the side from which the cattle entered. A law of 1878 gave the farmer damages whether or not he had a fence. Thus it became necessary to keep stock in fenced enclosures or to send them to ranges away from the farming district. Something of a business of summer herding was built up. The usual charge for herding stock from May 15 to October 15 was \$1.00 to \$1.25 a head. Some herders even went out of the state into Dakota.⁴¹

Another problem that the raiser of beef cattle had to face was how to market his animals. During the middle 1860's, for example, large herds of cattle were driven annually to Chicago from Blue Earth County. When the railroad was completed to the county it proved of great assistance in getting livestock to market. By 1880 the Twin Cities were the chief market and slaughtering center, and St. Paul soon took precedence over Minneapolis. In St. Paul there were three well-equipped stockyards, through which over 28,000 head of cattle passed in 1878. By 1882 the livestock and dressed meat business of the city was valued at \$3,515,700.⁴² By that time the dairy industry had made great strides in the state, but that is a story which must be left for a later article.

⁴¹ Theodore Christianson, *Minnesota, The Land of Sky-tinted Waters*, 1:454 (New York, 1935); L. R. Moyer and O. G. Dale, eds., *History of Chippewa and Lac qui Parle Counties*, 1:484 (Indianapolis, 1916); *General Laws*, 1874, p. 191-193; 1879, p. 82; H. P. McLellan, "History of the Early Settlement and Development of Polk County, Minnesota," 84. The latter item is a master's thesis prepared at Northwestern University in 1928; the Minnesota Historical Society has a copy.

⁴² Willard, *Blue Earth County*, 6; Hartsough, *The Twin Cities as a Metropolitan Market*, 66; *Independent Farmer and Fireside Companion*, 1:7 (January 1, 1879).



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, or email articles, however, for individual use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#).