

Scheduled To Close:

## Swift & Co. Plant Was a Boon to SSF

By Ray Spangler

I see a little item in the newspapers that the Swift & Co. meat packing plant at South San Francisco will be closed April 6, 1968.

I wonder if South San Francisco knows how much it owes to Swift & Co., and its predecessor, Western Meat Co.?

Having lived in the industrial city for about 20 years and having worked many a summer at Western Meat Co., I knew some of the people who made it go. And I once wrote some of the history of the community and I learned how much it evolved around the meat packing plant which came there in 1892.

Before that the area had been in the ownership of Charles Lux, and it was the grazing land for thousands of Miller and Lux cattle.

Henry Miller would drive them from the valleys to the Lux property. From there Lux would drive them to his meat packing plants in the southern part of San Francisco.

G. F. Swift came to San Francisco looking for a suitable place for a western branch of the family meat packing business. He saw the Lux property and bought it.

In fact, he proposed the combine of large meat packing companies to join him in establishing a community of packing plants, stock yards, and a town for the employees. Agreements were made, the land was purchased and the titles were transferred to the newly organized South San Francisco Land and Improvement Co.

Western Meat Co. introduced refrigeration to the meat packing business in this area. The Butchertown boys called it "embalmed meat."

The only packers ever to join the Swift venture at South San Francisco were the Virden Packing Co., which later became an Armour subsidiary, and an independent outfit which lasted only a few years.

But the Swift interest laid out the town, sold the lots, established a street car line, and a belt railroad.

This was before the days of the Bayshore cutoff of the Southern Pacific Co. The main line was up Colma Creek valley via Daly City and Valencia Street.

The old Western Meat Co. had some subsidiaries of its own: the Oakland Meat Packing Co. and the Nevada Packing Co., at Reno.

I believe these are long since gone.

And it had some forgotten brand names, which were recalled to me by Mrs. V. D. Phillips, present secretary to the plant manager, L. T. Bott.

Who remembers Mayrose Hams and Bacon, Golden Gate Pure Lard, Primrose Pure Pork Sausage, Arrow Shortening, Callfene, Calinut Margarine and Primrose Salad Oil?

I showed up at the Western Meat Co. one summer's day when school was out and asked for a job. I was asked what I could do? I said I would do anything.

They put me to work in the hide cellar. It was a stifling experience which I will never forget. Not long after I was promoted to the lard shipping room and at various times I served as the sheep gang scaler, shipping dock checker, cutting room scaler, relief time keeper and at various other jobs.

J. O. Snyder was superintendent then. D. W. Duncan handled the repair gang and William Watt was chief engineer. How these two Scotsmen could battle.

Charles King ran the pickle cellar. Jack Athridge was the beef scaler. John Bowler and his brother Pat ran the wool pullery. Charles Deuer was head of the glue factory. Alec Welti ran the smoke department. He later became the fire chief of South San Francisco. There were the Murrays, the Silvas, the Lippis, the Dayens, the Signorellis and the Fouries, to mention a few.

Among the former employees of the Western Meat Co. were Thomas L. Hickey, who came from Chicago with the reputation of being the fastest calf skinner in the West. He later became San Mateo County supervisor and is given large credit for establishing the San Mateo County General Hospital and Memorial Park.

The late W. H. Augustus, county clerk, was a graduate of Western Meat Co. - from the office side. The present postmaster of Moss Beach is Charles K. Elder, who was timekeeper when I knew him at the Western Meat Co., and it was my job to take his place when he went on vacation.

In those days every man had a little brass check with a number on it which was given to him when he entered the plant and which he deposited with the timekeeper when he left. Twice a day we checked the whole plant to see that all hands were still there.

At the end of the week we had to extend the time book as a payroll form. The payroll department would put the money in small envelopes with the man's name on it, and on pay day we walked around the plant and handed it out.

Elder was one of the founders of San Mateo County Development Association.

Western Meat Co. gave South San Francisco its early day giants - W. J. Martin who ran the land and improvement company; E. C. Peck of Peck-Judah who was the chief lot selling agent; and later came Percy J. Shaw, another land company manager, who was one of the founders of the South San Francisco Manufacturers Association, and who played an important part in winning the rail rates which made it possible to bring the present development to San Mateo County's "Industrial City."

Well, so much for history. Time has changed. The steel mill furnaces have already gone.

The stock yards and public livestock market where the National Junior Livestock Show was born - they are gone.

The old 1892 plant was obviously in need of complete reconstruction, and the development closing in on the

meat packing plant makes it desirable to pull up stakes and move elsewhere.

Meat packing plants are not welcomed everywhere. The proposal to move Swift & Co. to San Jose was rebuffed. A meat packing plant isn't the most pleasant-smelling neighbor in the world. But in South San Francisco the Western Meat Co. - which became Swift & Co. in 1932 when the family sold its interest to the corporation - plowed the furrow that grew the industrial plants that make the city today. That shouldn't be forgotten.

*Written in 1968 by Ray Spangler  
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