



# Slaughterhouse: Chicago's Union Stock Yard and the World It Made

*Dominic A. Pacyga*

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## **Slaughterhouse: Chicago's Union Stock Yard and the World It Made** Dominic A. Pacyga

From the minute it opened—on Christmas Day in 1865—it was Chicago's must-see tourist attraction, drawing more than half a million visitors each year. Families, visiting dignitaries, even school groups all made trips to the South Side to tour the Union Stock Yard. There they got a firsthand look at the city's industrial prowess as they witnessed cattle, hogs, and sheep disassembled with breathtaking efficiency. At their height, the kill floors employed 50,000 workers and processed six hundred animals an hour, an astonishing spectacle of industrialized death.

*Slaughterhouse* tells the story of the Union Stock Yard, chronicling the rise and fall of an industrial district that, for better or worse, served as the public face of Chicago for decades. Dominic A. Pacyga is a guide like no other—he grew up in the shadow of the stockyards, spent summers in their hog house and cattle yards, and maintains a long-standing connection with the working-class neighborhoods around them. Pacyga takes readers through the packinghouses as only an insider can, covering the rough and toxic life inside the plants and their lasting effects on the world outside. He shows how the yards shaped the surrounding neighborhoods and controlled the livelihoods of thousands of families. He looks at the Union Stock Yard's political and economic power and its sometimes volatile role in the city's race and labor relations. And he traces its decades of mechanized innovations, which introduced millions of consumers across the country to an industrialized food system.

Although the Union Stock Yard closed in 1971, the story doesn't end there. Pacyga takes readers to present day, showing how the manufacturing spirit lives on. Ironically, today the site of the legendary "stockyard stench" is now home to some of Chicago's most successful green agriculture companies.

Marking the hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the stockyards, *Slaughterhouse* is an engrossing story of one of the most important—and deadliest—square miles in American history.

## **Slaughterhouse: Chicago's Union Stock Yard and the World It Made Details**

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## **From Reader Review Slaughterhouse: Chicago's Union Stock Yard and the World It Made for online ebook**

### **Peter says**

Fascinating subject, but the narrative was drier than I expected. Too much emphasis on numbers.

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### **Barbara says**

I won this advanced reader copy and just finished it. Very well written, growing up as a farm girl I somewhat knew what to expect from stock yards. This was a eye opener to me and I did find this quite interesting, intriguing and fascinating. Thank you very much for putting this in writing and educating the public!

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### **Caroline says**

Well-researched and comprehensive, and makes one proud of Chicago. But the writing sounded like a college freshman trying to tie every sentence to her/his thesis, and the number of typos was just unacceptable.

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### **Gretchen Lida says**

Compelling and beautifully written, A Chicago must read by one of the best historians in the city.

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### **David Eppenstein says**

This is a rather difficult book to rate. For what it really is, an academic presentation, it probably deserves 4 stars. However, as a book for the average reader its popular appeal is very limited. I have opted for the the rating with the average reader in mind and given it 3 stars. It is a book that will appeal to a narrow group of readers. If you have read Upton Sinclair's "The Jungle", and most of us probably have, then you are at least aware of the subject of this book, the Chicago Stockyards. I am a born and bred Chicagoan and Chicago history is one of my favorite reading subjects. The history of my hometown is colorful to say the least and I try to learn as much as I can about it. I found this book on the TR list of a GR friend (thank you Cathy K) and ordered a copy as the Stockyards is a gap in my knowledge of Chicago and it has a strong personal significance. My maternal grandfather and several of my mother's 7 brothers worked in The Yards. I spent the first 6 years of my life living next-door to my paternal grandparents on the 4300 block of South Emerald Avenue. For those not familiar with Chicago, Emerald is the next street East of Halsted and Halsted is the East boundary of the The Yards. Less than a half block down the street was the 19th century home of Ira Darling the infamous founder of the Darling & Co. rendering firm and less than 2 blocks down the street was the 19th century home of Augustus Swift of Swift & Co. fame. This was Canaryville, a neighborhood created in the shadow of The Yards and where the smell of The Yards was what we thought air always smelled like. Yes, the story of this particular place has a special interest to me.

The author is a local college professor whose books I have read before. They are all well researched and well written but they do tend to be works that lack popular appeal. I would guess that this book, as well as the author's other works, is more of interest to students of urban planning, sociology, business, and history. In this book the author presents not only the history of the Chicago Stockyards but also the evolution of an industry, a social order, and an urban landscape and he does it well. The knowledge we think we might have of this area as derived from our reading of "The Jungle" is mentioned in several references primarily to illustrate how that book affected the evolution of the industry. The book's content, however, is debunked as entirely fictional and based on legends and myths about The Yards. What is presented is how The Yards changed society's relationship with our food.

Prior to the existence of the Chicago Stockyards the food people ate was grown or raised at home. With regard to meat what was eaten at dinner was probably running around outside the house just a few hours before. The Yards changed that relationship and then with the invention of refrigeration and canning and other methods of food preservation people rapidly moved away from the need to raise their own livestock and grow their own vegetables. Out of The Yards grew not only mass produced dressed meat but also various prepared and canned meats and vegetable items. It transformed an industry and a way of life in this country.

The Yards also had an affect on the labor movement and social structure both locally and nationally. It also had an early affect on race relations and progressive politics and social issues. What is most interesting, however, is to trace the evolution of the business from its origins in 1865 until it demise in 1971. It was for a long time unthinkable that The Yards would ever not be a part of the Chicago landscape. Unfortunately, businesses are not unlike living organisms and they must adapt to change or perish. The industry didn't die but adapted and technological advances in the areas that made the Chicago Yards indispensable made The Yards a relic of times past. Chicago itself even started to consider The Yards as something they would be better off without. The author ends his treatment with what could be considered a post mortem of The Yards and then its rebirth or resurrection into an eco-friendly industrial park and nursery for a variety of new businesses and entrepreneurship. As I mentioned earlier the real value of this book is for city planners, urban sociologists, and business people as it illustrates the birth, life, death, and rebirth of an industry, a social order, and an urban environment. If any of those areas is of interest to you then you will enjoy this book.

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### **Teri L. says**

Good history of a significant part of Chicago history. Meatpacking was a dominant business in Chicago. Focusing on the Union Stockyards and related businesses, we can see the path of "the modern" in the late 1800's and early 1900's. Tourists flocked to the stockyards to see these factories, including the kill floor.

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### **Cfkotula says**

Have you ever wondered how the packaged beef, ham or veal you purchase at the grocery store came into being? During the Stockyards era, the live animal (along with millions of others) was shipped to, killed, butchered, dressed, packed and shipped out all from one place - the Chicago Stockyards. With only the limestone entrance gate left standing, it is hard to imagine the massive livestock pens, killing floors, rivers of blood, and assembly-line processing that once provided meat for the entire nation. Having grown up only a few neighborhoods away from the yards, I do remember the stench on Sundays coming from several miles away. But I never knew the whole picture of what was happening there, and how it shaped modern life in America. I'm surprised how little this subject is covered in Chicago history. Although the narrative can be a

little dry, I give 4 stars for how much I learned. I look forward to the new Packingtown Museum that is being created onsite, to open in Spring of 2018!

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