

Union Stock Yards postcards

245

Last updated on June 30, 2015.

Audiovisual Collections and Digital Initiatives Department

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Summary Information

Repository	Hagley Museum and Library: Audiovisual Collections and Digital Initiatives Department
Creator	Union Stock Yard & Transit Company of Chicago.
Title	Union Stock Yards postcards
Call number	245
Date	1905-1915
Extent	5 images
General Physical Description	5 items : color postcards ; 3.5 x 5.5 in.
Location	GL Box 1.
Language	English
Abstract	Chicago's Union Stock Yard was the meatpacking district for Chicago, Illinois. In 1864, a consortium of nine railroad companies purchased 320-acres of swamp land in southwest Chicago to build a new more efficient stockyard. The result was that Chicago's Union Stock Yard and Transit Company opened Christmas Day 1865. This collection consists of five postcards (one used) showing scenes from the Union Stock Yards.

Biography/History

Chicago's Union Stock Yard was the meatpacking district for Chicago, Illinois. In 1848, small stockyards were scattered throughout the city along various rail lines. Several factors contributed to Chicago's need for a larger, more centralized stockyard: Chicago's evolution into a major railroad hub, the Mississippi River blockade during the Civil War that closed the north-south trade route, and the influx of meatpackers and livestock to Chicago.

In 1864, a consortium of nine railroad companies purchased 320-acres of swamp land in southwest Chicago to build a new more efficient stockyard. The result was that Chicago's Union Stock Yard and Transit Company opened Christmas Day 1865. Livestock was brought to the stockyards by fifteen miles of track that linked to the city's mail railroad lines. By 1900, the stockyard grew to 475 acres, contained fifty miles of road, and had 130 miles of track.

After World War II, new technology led to their obsolescence. The rapid growth of the federal highway system and the development of the refrigerated truck gave packinghouses the freedom to move out of the city they had depended upon for railroad access. Competition led to the building of mechanized meatpacking plants in less expensive rural areas. In addition, meatpackers began doing business with farmers directly, therefore bypassing the need for a stockyard. And increase in land value, property taxes, and anti-pollution laws contributed to the stockyards' decline.

On July 31, 1971, Chicago's Union Stock Yards officially closed. The area has since become an industrial park. Only the giant limestone arch, erected in 1879, that marked the entrance to the stockyards remains.

Scope and Contents

This collection consists of five postcards (one used) showing scenes from the Union Stock Yards in Chicago. Scenes show the cattle run and animal pens. Most of the views show workers on horseback. The four unused postcards were printed in Germany and are hand dated April 21, 1909.

Administrative Information

Audiovisual Collections and Digital Initiatives Department

Access Restrictions

This collection is open for research.

Controlled Access Headings

Form/Genre(s)

- Postcards.

Subject(s)

- Meat industry and trade--History.--Illinois--Chicago
- Stockyards.