

## Did You Know....

By Clem Dougherty

[Editor's Note: Clem continues to provide us with information in his series on San Francisco.]

Did you know..... that in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries San Francisco became the principal market for the then largest integrated cattle raising and meatpacking business in the United States? Yes it's true. Our story begins with a young immigrant by the name of Henry Miller. He was born on July 27, 1827, in Germany where he grew up in a family cattle and butchering business. It was in Germany that Henry learned the art of raising/butchering cattle for human consumption. Leaving Germany to seek a better life for himself, Henry arrived in Gold Rush San Francisco on September 24, 1850, with only 6 dollars in his pocket. Deciding not to search for gold, Henry instead saw more money to be made by following his own profession of butchering meat. Because of his skill as a master butcher, Henry soon acquired a reputation in San Francisco for producing quality meat at reasonable prices.



Henry Miller c. 1867

Since the available cattle during the Gold Rush were the wiry and bony long horns left over from the Spanish/Mexican occupation of California, Henry sought to find fatter, more meat-producing American breeds. Learning that some American cattle had been shipped to the San Joaquin Valley, Henry rode by horse back into the San Joaquin Valley where he acquired an option to buy land and the cattle thereon. Upon returning to San Francisco, Henry obtained a loan from William Ralston and the Bank of California to buy the land and cattle. Henry named the ranch the Rancho Sanjon de Santa Rita that eventually stretched 120 miles along both sides of the San Joaquin River. When Henry told Ralston that he preferred to travel to other parts of California to buy other ranches as well, Ralston advised Henry to seek a partner who would remain in San Francisco to manage the business there. Henry quickly sought out his main competitor Charles Lux, a fellow German, and the two of them formed one of the most successful partnerships in American history. (For more on Ralston and the Bank of California, see Did You Know, August , 2015 Clarion.)

The partnership now named “Miller and Lux” was an integrated business, meaning that Miller and Lux controlled the whole process from raising beef on its own land to preparing and selling the final product to willing buyers. The partners split their responsibilities. Henry was an outdoors person who travelled by horseback the length and breadth of California buying land and cattle and managing the various ranches while Lux, more refined and urbane, remained in San Francisco managing the business out of an office on California Street. California Street at that time was the Wall Street of the West. Later, while the partnership kept an office in San Francisco to handle business there, the partners moved the headquarters of Miller and Lux to Los Baños on the west side of the San Joaquin Valley. As San Francisco’s

population steadily increased to reach approximately 450,000 by 1900, San Francisco quickly became the principal market for Miller and Lux meat products.

Miller quickly bought land and cattle not only in California, but in Nevada and Oregon as well. The backbone of the empire became three ranches, namely, the Rancho Sanjon de Santa Rita in the San Joaquin Valley, the Rancho Las Animas near present day Gilroy in the Santa Clara Valley, and the Rancho Buri-Buri in what is now South San Francisco. Henry built his home, that he named Bloomfield Ranch, on the Rancho Las Animas.

Before the coming of the railroad to take over the transportation of cattle from country to market, Henry conducted cattle drives from Rancho Santa Rita in the San Joaquin Valley to Rancho Las Animas in the Santa Clara Valley to Rancho Buri-Buri in South San Francisco where the cattle were held and then driven as needed to slaughter houses in the City. By 1900 Miller and Lux owned approximately 1.4 million acres of land, over 100,000 head of cattle, and over 80,000 sheep. By 1900 Miller and Lux had become the largest integrated cattle and meat packing business in the United States. Although something of an exaggeration, Henry liked to boast that he could travel from Mexico to Oregon and stay each night in a ranch he owned.

Henry's success was largely due to his own natural abilities to recognize and accurately evaluate the land's suitability for ranching and farming. Although he never mastered the English language and spoke English with a heavy German accent all his life, he possessed a remarkable memory where he could recall the strengths and weaknesses of each of the properties that the partnership acquired. Mathematics came naturally to him, and he could quickly determine in his own head profits and losses in

business transactions. Henry was a “hands-on” owner writing constantly to his many foremen of each ranch with directives as to how to manage the ranch. He was one of the first to realize that water management, including irrigation and reclamation, was the key to ranching and farming in California. He employed extensive irrigation methods on all of his properties to insure abundant pastures to feed the partnership’s cattle. His appreciation of water as the key to success in agriculture resulted in a lawsuit entitled *Lux v. Haggin* which was a landmark decision re: water rights in California (and will be the subject of next month’s “Did You Know...” article in the *Clarion*).

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A downside to the Miller and Lux story is the location of slaughter houses in San Francisco. Henry first located a slaughter house on Grant Ave. in San Francisco and then moved it to Howard and 5<sup>th</sup> Streets south of Market St. Public pressure then caused the City to force the slaughter houses further south of Market. Henry organized all the butchers in the City to deal with the matter together. With Henry in the lead, the butchers acquired from the State of California as the owner of the tidelands surrounding the Bay, a “Butchers’ Reservation” over the tidelands. The Butchers’ Reservation was subject to tidal action and was located principally where Islais Creek meets the Bay not far from where Candlestick Park once stood until recently. The butchers led by Henry Miller built huge platforms on pilings over the tidelands. The platforms were several blocks long on the top of which were built the slaughter houses owned by individual butchers including Miller and Lux. This now became known in San Francisco as “**Butchertown.**”



**Map of Historical SF Slaughterhouses in the SF Bay**

In what has got to be one of the most harmful environmental damages ever done to the Bay, the slaughterhouses on the Butchers' Reservation were allowed to dump the slaughter excess into the marshes underneath the platforms to be washed by the tide out into the Bay. With cities later dumping raw sewage into the Bay and then filling in the Bay so as to allow business and residential development on top of the fill, the deliberate and callous damage done to the Bay exemplified by what occurred at Butchertown and elsewhere gave rise to the great environmental movement of the 1960s-70s to save the Bay. The last slaughter house in Butchertown stopped operating in 1971.

Charles Lux died in 1887. Henry died on October 14, 1916. Subsequent to Henry's death, the Miller and Lux empire declined due to alleged mismanagement by successor officers and to lengthy and extensive litigation by heirs. By 1940 most of the land and cattle had been sold, and the partnership was formally dissolved in 1964. Although the partnership did not survive into the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup>

century, Miller and Lux by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had become the largest integrated cattle and meat packing business in the United States. In so doing Henry Miller and Charles Lux helped to create San Francisco as the leading business center of the West Coast.

(Sources: Treadwell, Edward F., *The Cattle King*, 1981, pp.3-375; Waldschmidt-Nelson, Britta, *Henry Miller: The Cattle King Of California*, German Historical Institute, September 5, 2013, pp.1-24; Smith, Dennis, *San Francisco Is Burning*, p.29; *San Francisco, the Southeast Waterfront*, <http://www.sewsf.org/aboutislaiscreek.html>; *San Francisco, Butchertown* <https://localwiki.org/sf/Butcher-Town>)