

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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SHEEP

The snapshot shown here of dead sheep is one of blood, guts and gore. The picture was taken on May 23, 1925 after two German Shepherds killed 35 sheep and 11 lambs. This terrible massacre took place on Gaines Basin Road on a farm owned by Mrs. George Jeffery. The sheep were jointly owned by Mrs. Jeffery and Mr. Stanley Swierczinski. This photo shows the sheep carcasses piled up ready to be buried. Two different neighbors shot and killed the dogs in their fiendish act. The carcass of one dog lies near the back of a shovel also ready to be buried. It goes without saying that this was an awful, disgusting mess to clean up. Many dog lovers close their eyes to how vicious their canine friends can sometimes be when exposed to a pasture of skitterish, timid sheep. Dogs were always a hazard to a farmer's sheep. In fact several local farmers had to quit raising sheep because of huge losses sustained by dogs. By nature, dogs get enjoyment out of playfully chasing and nipping at sheep. When this occurred in a neighborhood years ago, people would frequently band together in scouting parties to hunt down the dog or dogs.

Mr. Walter Colman of Shelby Center didn't have to do that however. One morning about fifty years ago he went down to his pasture only to discover a dog chasing his sheep. Mr. Colman was a very mild mannered man and rather than getting excited, shouting and calling for help, he simply whistled to the dog. When the dog got up next to Mr. Colman he caught the animal by the collar, took out his jackknife and simply cut the dog's throat.

If it could not be proved whose dog had done damage to a flock of sheep, the township in which the incident happened, was therefore obliged to pay for each dead sheep. Sheep were much more widely raised years ago than now. The 1850 census reports that there were 58,971 sheep in Orleans



County at that time. Current data shows that we now only have about 1,400. This is down drastically from even fifty years ago when some flocks in the county numbered upward of 800 sheep.

Sheep were good gleaners and were often pastured in fields after other crops were harvested. The sheep would willingly eat weeds and grapevines thus keeping fences and corners cleaned out. Types of sheep which were raised here years ago included Southdown, Dorset, Hampshire and Shropshire for mutton. The Merino breed was raised for their abundant, fine wool. Breeders sometimes considered that a cross breeding of Merino and Dorset produced the best type of hot house lambs. This was a name given to lambs that were born in the winter and raised in warm barn basements. Fifty years ago lambs known as feeder lambs were shipped here from Montana. Arriving in the late Fall they were fattened through the winter months and sold in March when they weighed between 75 and 100 pounds. This was a usual increase of 35 to 40 pounds.

Sheep raising is usually associated with the wide open spaces of Wyoming, Montana and Texas. While it is true that these states raise many sheep it nevertheless was true fifty years ago that Orleans County had the distinction of raising by 20,000 more sheep than any other county in the State.