



T.M. SINCLAIR & CO. LTD.  
1871-1921

THE NATIONAL BOARD  
1871-1921

# *Semi-Centennial*

1871---1921

*T. M. Sinclair & Co., Ltd.*



*Cedar Rapids, Iowa*



1878

THE HISTORY of an institution must necessarily begin with the history of its antecedents. The history of T. M. Sinclair & Co., Ltd., therefore, begins in the packing plant of J. & T. Sinclair, in Belfast, Ireland, the business established in 1832 and owned by the fathers of the founders of this plant in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. In addition to the packing business, this firm operated the largest and finest fleet of sailing vessels owned in Ireland.

Into this business in 1859 entered Thomas M. Sinclair, a young man of eighteen years. Earnest application to work soon gave him an intimate knowledge of the business and responsibilities were placed upon him, and in February, 1862, he went to Liverpool to assist in the work of the branch there, which had been opened by his older brother, William.

During the summer of 1862 plans were made to open a branch in this country. Mr. Thomas Sinclair, Jr., a cousin of Mr. T. M. Sinclair, and later well known as The Right Honorable Thomas Sinclair of Belfast, came to America and made preliminary investigations and arrangements, and on October 4th, 1862, Mr. T. M. Sinclair sailed on the Allen Line steamer "Hibernian" from Londonderry, Ireland, for Quebec with twenty-two men in his charge to start a plant in New York City. This plant was established on Tenth Street and afterwards moved to Sixteenth Street on the west side of New York, and was operated for possibly twelve years. As in Belfast, dressed hogs only were cut, the meat being cured for export. The business seems to have prospered during the years of the war from 1862 to 1865, inclusive, but it is interesting at the present moment to read the following extract from a letter written by Mr. T. M. Sinclair in 1869 describing the results of the year 1866, the year following the war, and to see how completely history repeats itself:

"Previous to 1866 our house in Belfast, the old house, was the largest provision house in Ireland, and indeed in the world, and they are, in fact, so still. In addition to that, they were the largest ship owners in Ireland, but the destruction of the Belfast plant by fire at Easter time was followed by the panic, with its

famous "Black Friday." Their ships decreased in value so much that they would not sell for half their ordinary price, owing partly to the opening of the Suez Canal, and our shipments of products from here, which were very large—there was no Atlantic cable at this time—fell to below half what they cost, and then several firms with whom we did a very large business failed and we lost a great deal of money through them, and thus it was a whole fortune was swept away in a few months. The agony of that time was fearful—to any honest man the pain of feeling that perhaps he must stop payment and that he may not be able to pay his creditors all he owes is almost unendurable. The Bank with whom our old house had done business, as long as they existed, undertook to carry us through on condition that we—that is the five young members of the firm—would promise each to undertake a proportion of the debt and pay it off by degrees as we should be able."

The news of this disaster summoned Mr. T. M. Sinclair and his cousin, Mr. John Sinclair, who had been with him in New York jointly representing the parent company since 1864, to Belfast, and on their return the New York business was made independent of the parent company and established under the name of John Sinclair & Company. The financing of the business was handled through American friends and thus relief was given to the parent company. Fortunately, the results of the business for the next few years were quite satisfactory and a considerable portion of the debts assumed on account of the disaster of 1866 were paid up at this time.

The years 1869 and 1870 brought new problems in the increased competition, developing from packing houses in the west. A former superintendent of the New York plant, Mr. David Blakely, had come west and settled at Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and he was at this time urging the Sinclairs with all the power of Irish persistence to come to Cedar Rapids, in the center of the section of the country where hogs were raised, and establish a packing plant.

In the latter part of August, 1871, Mr. T. M. Sinclair came west via the Great Lakes, Duluth, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Winona



Thomas M. Sinclair





and Dubuque. He was immediately attracted by the advantages of Cedar Rapids and determined at once to enter into the project into which he had been urged. This was not snap judgment, as he had been carefully investigating the situation and the advantages of this country for some little time, consulting such men as Mr. J. I. Blair, the builder of the Northwestern Railroad.

Having made this decision, there was no delay in the progress of events. The day after his arrival he investigated two locations which had previously been selected by Mr. Blakely as possible sites for the packing plant. One of these, along the Northwestern tracks, about where the Northwestern Roundhouse now stands, at the foot of Oak Hill, appealed to Mr. Sinclair immediately. Before the evening was over he had arranged with the owner, Mr. Curliss, to purchase this farm of 35 acres for \$2,350.00, or about \$67.00 per acre.

The following extract from a letter to Mr. John Sinclair gives the impression which Mr. T. M. Sinclair had of Cedar Rapids:

"The more I see of Cedar Rapids the more I am pleased with it; indeed I may almost say I am charmed with the place."

Mr. Sinclair was enthusiastic also about the Curliss property which provided flat ground for the plant and attractive sites for residences for the employees on what is now Oak Hill. All seems to have gone smoothly until it was discovered that Mr. Curliss was unable to give a clear title to the property. Litigation was started and delays occurred, and it was February before this litigation was finally settled adversely to the claims of Mr. Curliss, and the purchase of this piece of property had to be relinquished.

Before this was decided Mr. Sinclair returned to New York, where after serious conference it was determined that he should move to Cedar Rapids to manage this end of the business, leaving Mr. John Sinclair in New York to handle the important financial and shipping arrangements.

It must not be thought that the people of Cedar Rapids were entirely passive in connection with the negotiations which were going on. It is revealed in a letter written by Mr. John Sinclair that in the latter part of September he received a call in New York

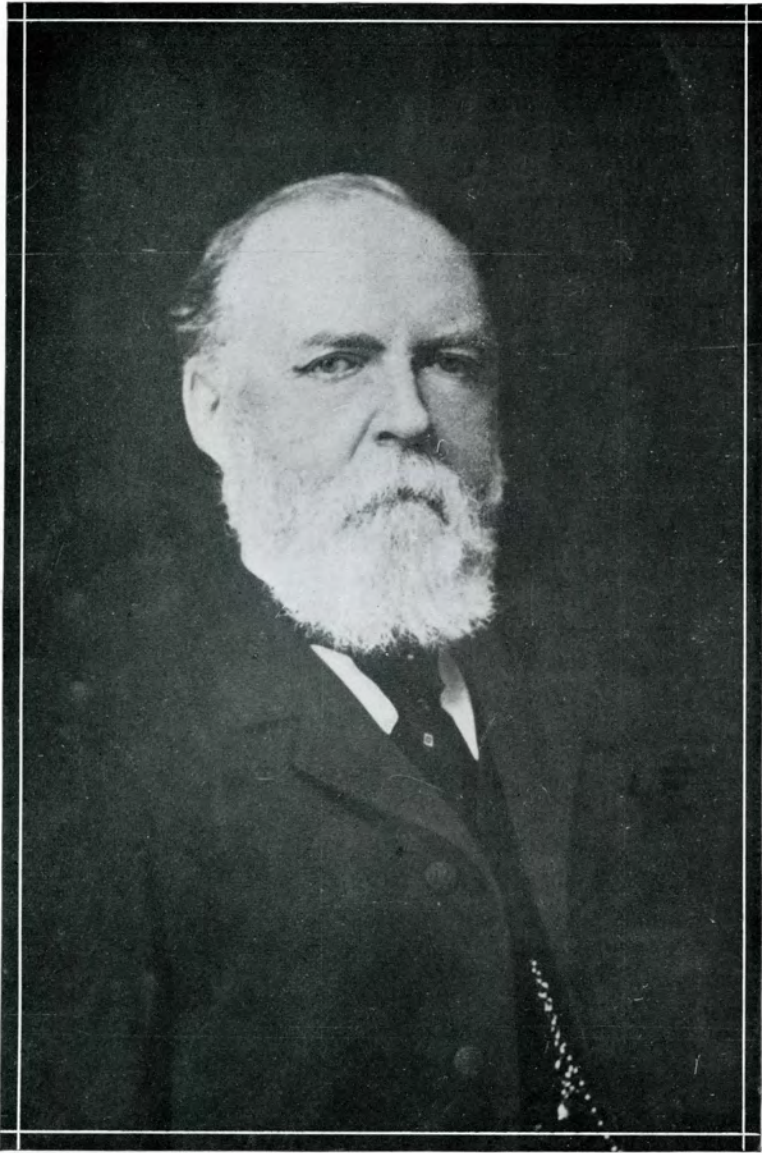
from Mr. H. G. Angle. How like the present day the following quotation from this letter sounds:

"This Cedar Rapids man—Mr. H. G. Angle—is a most influential man there and is making, or at least has a great deal to do with the road in process of construction to St. Louis. He was exceedingly cordial and friendly. He thinks we have made a magnificent selection of locality. He thinks there is no better point in the West than Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He enters thoroughly into the importance of the project being carried through promptly, as regards the interests of Cedar Rapids, owing to the increase it would make to the population and the employment it would give and the cheap food, etc."

The fact is that the impressions made upon Mr. Sinclair by the individuals whom he met in Cedar Rapids, the energy and activity which he found here, and the high character of the leaders of the community were very large elements of the attraction which made Mr. Sinclair so enthusiastic about Cedar Rapids as a place in which to live and in which to start the western packing plant. Other places had been considered. He had investigated Winona and Dubuque, but it was to Cedar Rapids that his mind ever turned after he met the people here and saw the situation and felt its appeal.

Because of the failure to get immediate possession of the Cur-liss property other arrangements were necessary so as to make use of the winter season of 1871 and 1872. An ice house standing on the river bank between what are now Fourth and Fifth Avenues East was rented during a second visit to Cedar Rapids, which occurred toward the end of October, 1871, and plans were laid out for the equipment and necessary machinery bought.

It has been difficult to get a description of this plant. Apparently it was operated for only one year during the winter of 1871 and 1872. From some of the men who remember, we have the description, that the tanks for rendering the lard stood at one end of the building; next to that was a space where the killing operations were carried on; then there was space where dressed hogs were hung for chilling; next to that were the tables and blocks on



John Sinclair



which the hogs were cut, the rest of the building being given over to curing. The operations being carried on in the winter, there was apparently no attempt to refrigerate with ice and the whole arrangement was so crude and operated under such difficulties that the first year's operations were not a success. It is even said that the first shipment from this plant was lost at sea.

The method of handling and cutting of hogs had not changed from that employed in Belfast. The hog was chilled whole and placed on the cutting block upon its back. The most skilled and difficult point in the operations was splitting this hog along the back bone so as to leave the back bone on one side without cutting into the meat on the other side. For this skilled work it was necessary to train men, as experienced men were not available.

After the unfavorable court decision in regard to the Curliss property was rendered in February, 1872, sixteen acres of a permanent property were purchased, that on which the present plant has since grown. It was evidently the hope to have property available for the trackage of the Northwestern Railroad and, if possible, also the Burlington, Cedar Rapids and Northern Railroad, and this was one of the chief advantages of the Curliss property. In order to make available to this property direct connection with the Northwestern Railroad, the city, by ordinance, granted a right of way to the city limits down the west side of Fourth Street from Sixth Avenue, thus connecting with the Northwestern Railroad and, by agreement, the Northwestern Railroad laid trackage on this right of way into the plant. This right of way was later extended by ordinance, as the city limits grew, thus securing to the plant the advantages of direct connection with all railroads entering into Cedar Rapids.

With the purchase of the new property and the opening up of spring, it was hoped that everything would go along much more smoothly, but trouble came from another source. Sentimental objections were raised to the establishment of a business of this kind in Cedar Rapids. The agitation reached such a point that an injunction was taken out to stop any further operation of the business in the temporary quarters and the question was raised as to the advantages of such a business to the city.

Looking back at the methods of operation we must agree that there was some justification in the objection raised to the operation of this business. The perfection of details in the packing business had not reached the point which it has reached in these days and but little use was made of many parts of the animal. Those parts which did not yield lard were very largely disposed of in the river. This same thing was true of the early slaughtering operations at the plant at its present location, and it will be remembered that the Indians came from the Tama reservation to gather out of the pile of refuse of the slaughter house, choice pieces of livers, hearts, etc.

During the summer these legal difficulties were finally overcome. The first permanent building, which still stands as part of the main warehouse of the plant, was built, and the frame slaughter house and engine room, with small office nearby, were erected.

The season opened favorably and the operations were carried on under more satisfactory conditions. The results of the following years were evidently satisfactory, and in fact from this time on the business fulfilled all hopes and expectations.

It would perhaps be tedious to describe the gradual development of the plant from 1872 on. With the growth of the business the plant grew. Not only did the amount of business done increase rapidly, as is shown by the list of hog killings which you have before you, but gradually the detail of the business developed as well and every new development required new processes and equipment. Smoking was begun about 1874, but the most interesting development about this time was the starting of summer curing. This plant was the second in America to continue killing in summer with ice chilling instead of shutting down about March 1st.

At first there were but nine export cuts made. Today there are almost innumerable cuts of meat made for sale in different parts of the world. In those days sales were made in large quantities. Much of the product was shipped across the water to W. P. Sinclair & Co., Ltd., in Liverpool, still the agents of the company.

From the beginning a large part of the working force consisted of coopers, who made entire the barrels in which the pork was packed. In those days there were ships on the sea which needed this pork for long voyages. Today this business has almost vanished with the development of steamships and refrigeration. There are those who tell us of the packing house yards being crowded with barrels of pork awaiting shipment to the seaboard at the end of some of these seasons in the Seventies.

In those days facilities for refrigeration were very limited. Ice was the only means of cooling, in fact one of the advantages of the location in Cedar Rapids was the fact that the river could produce sufficient ice to refrigerate the plant. Large ice houses were built to store the ice for the summer chilling and much of the space inside the buildings was occupied by the ice bunkers. This system of refrigeration continued until about 1885 or '86 when a new system of ice refrigeration, called the "Sanford Boxes," was established, wherein the ice fed itself down through the buildings as it melted. This was, of course, no great improvement, the final improvement coming in 1890, when refrigerator engines were established and refrigerator equipment installed throughout the plant.

It was in March 1879 that the first disaster to the plant occurred in a fire, which entirely destroyed the slaughter house building. However, as we look back upon these fires, we sometimes wonder whether they were not blessings in disguise. Improvements, especially at this time, were rapidly being made in the mechanical appliances in packing house establishments, and when the building was rebuilt—this time of brick—new machinery was installed for the scraping of the hogs and to take care of many of the different operations of the slaughter house. Twice again the plant was visited by fire to a sufficient extent to interfere with its operations—once in the early spring of 1883 and again in the summer of 1887. In all of these cases, as quickly as possible temporary arrangements were made for hog killing on a small scale.

With the increase of the business, the working force increased as well. While we are unable to give actual statistics as to the number of men employed, we have record that by 1878 there

were about 400 men employed at the plant. This has grown, due to the increased detail of the business, so that the employment today ranges from 800 to 1,500 men, according to the season.

The manufacturing of sausage started in 1880 and the pressing of lard to produce lard oil was begun about the same time. A very good grade of lard oil was produced because good lard was used, partly for the purpose of producing lard stearine which was used in the manufacture of bladdered lard, a method of packing lard in hog bladders, which was a process brought over from Ireland and used by but few other plants in this country. Under the control of the food administration during the war this process was discontinued and has not been resumed because of its expense.

In the early days of 1872 the retail market operated by Mr. Blakely was acquired and operated. Until about 1882 it remained in the brown frame building on Third Avenue between Second and Third Streets, when it was moved to a new brick building built for it on the corner of Third Avenue and First Street.

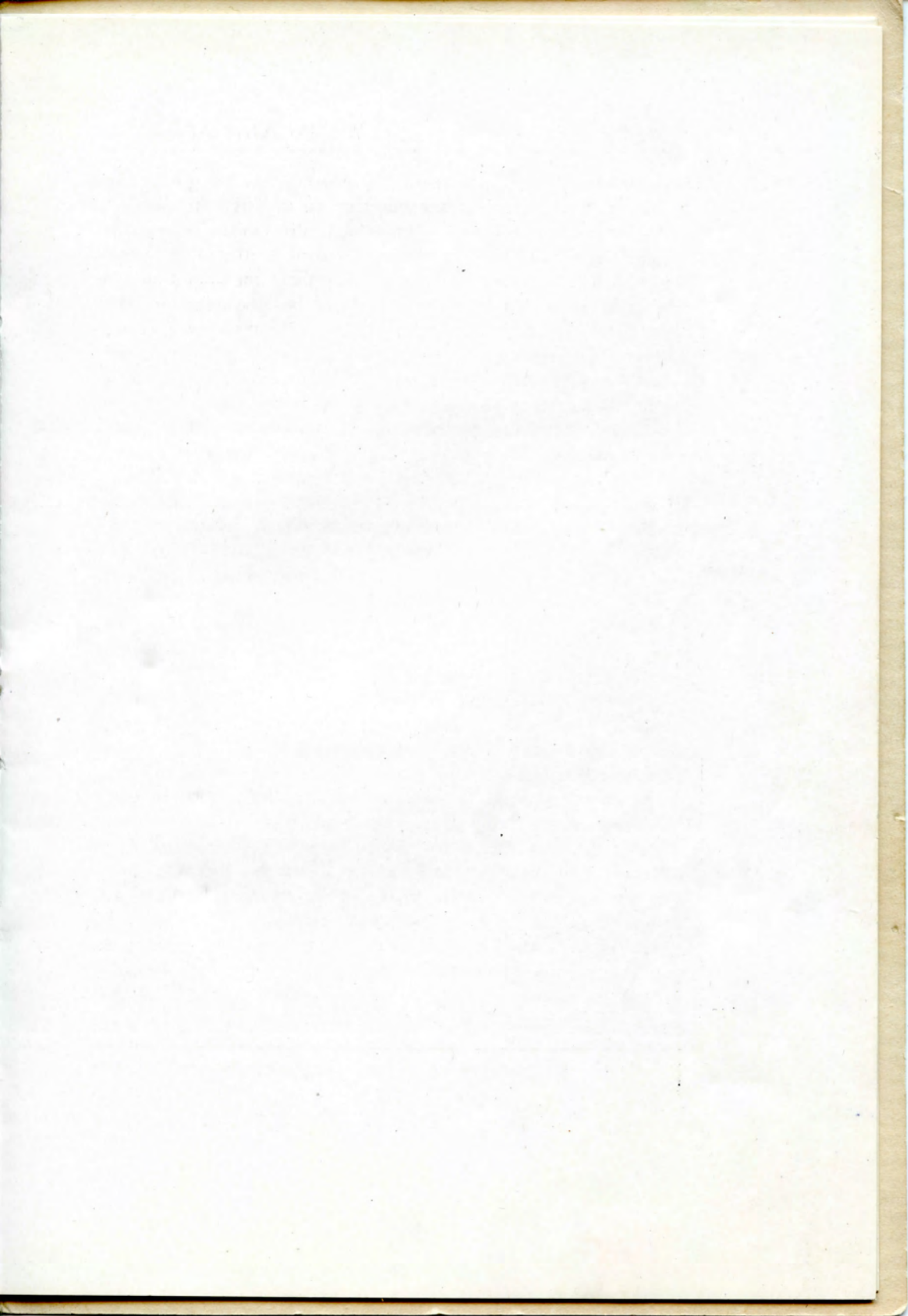
"Fidelity" as the leading brand in the domestic trade was established about 1879, and has always borne a reputation for quality which has been jealously guarded.

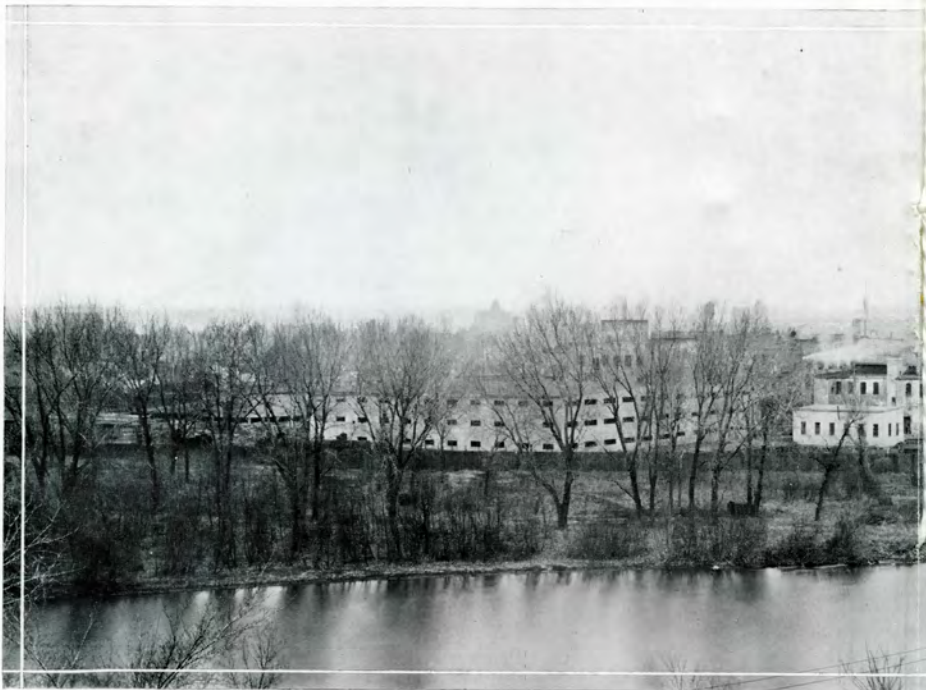
The first telephone in Cedar Rapids was installed between the plant and Mr. Sinclair's residence in order that he might keep in close touch with the plant and was used by the night watchman to waken him for the work of the day at 5:30 every morning. When the city system was installed these telephones became numbers one and two and so remained until recent years.

In 1876 Cedar Rapids was visited by a tornado that did much damage. The plant narrowly escaped, for the tornado passed over one corner of it, damaging the end of the long frame cooper shop and carrying away the corner of the fence.

On March 24th, 1881, a blow fell with a shocking suddenness that startled the whole community. Mr. Sinclair, while going through the plant in company with his faithful superintendent, James McCauley, fell down an elevator shaft. He was taken up unconscious and, in spite of the attention that was affectionately given by physicians of the city, he passed away during the









Present Plant



night without regaining consciousness. The sense of loss to the business and the community was deeply felt when this sad news was heard. The testimony of the printed page and the silent years that have followed speak eloquently of the meaning of that day. Though cut down in his thirty-ninth year, after only nine and one-half years of active life in this community, the force of his character still remains influencing the lives of many here.

Who could take his place? Mr. John Sinclair was still in New York, but his importance there was such that he could hardly be spared permanently away from that end of the business. In this crisis it was finally decided that Mr. Charles B. Soutter, a brother of Mrs. T. M. Sinclair, who had for a number of years been connected with the New York office, should come out to Cedar Rapids and assume charge of the management of the business. To step into the work of another man who had bound others about him in personal ties so close as those with which Mr. Sinclair had bound those with whom he did business was no light responsibility, yet Mr. Soutter, a man who understood the meaning of difficulties, who, though somewhat frail in physique, was yet strong in mind, though studious and fond of reading, was yet ready to sacrifice these enjoyments to the hard work that was demanded of him, entered into the business and the life of the community, soon taking his place and making his own life feel in the interests which he took up.

Changes were made in the interests of the various parties in the business. Up to this time it had been an equal partnership between Mr. John Sinclair and Mr. T. M. Sinclair; now Mr. C. B. Soutter was added to the partnership interests. This arrangement continued until 1892, when the business was incorporated as an Iowa corporation under the name of T. M. Sinclair & Co., with Mr. John Sinclair as president, Mr. Charles B. Soutter as vice president, and Mr. Henry B. Soutter as secretary and treasurer.

During the years immediately following under Mr. Soutter's administration the business grew rapidly. The plant was materially enlarged by the addition of new buildings and the domestic business was greatly extended. In 1886 a record of 5,000 hogs

killed per day was made. The killing of beef was begun in 1885 and a butterine business of some magnitude was developed on the basis of good quality. This latter business was destroyed by the laws passed by the Iowa legislature.

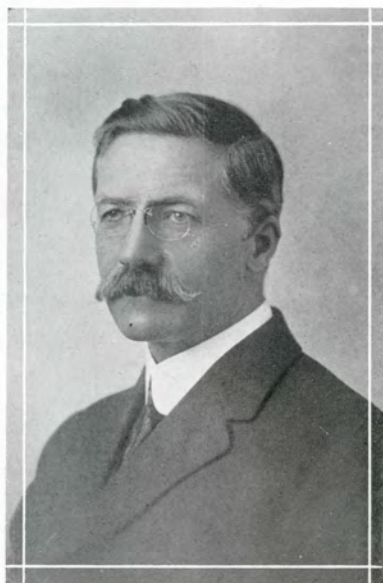
Government inspection of packing plants was established in 1890 and, with all other plants doing an interstate business, this plant went under the charge of the Federal Government. In spite of the additional cost involved, there is no question that this inspection is a great protection and benefit to the meat consuming public. When the law was revised in 1906 and during the agitation following the publication of "The Jungle" the Secretary of Agriculture, Honorable James Wilson, visited this plant early one morning and made a thorough personal inspection of it. The statements which he made at that time as to the cleanliness of it were a great gratification to those in charge. There are now on the plant eighteen in the government inspection force. who have the hearty co-operation of the company in carrying out their work.

During the nineties the condition of Mr. Soutter's health required his absence in the South for a great part of the year, so that on this account and also because of the failing health of Mr. John Sinclair, it was thought best to completely reorganize the company, throwing the responsibility over to some of the younger members of the family, who had by that time come into the business. This reorganization took place in 1899, with the establishment of the present corporation of T. M. Sinclair & Co., Ltd., with Mr. Sydney E. Sinclair as president. To a large extent an entirely new organization was built and gradually the ground lost during preceding years was regained.

During this period, or in 1892, it was found necessary to take up new methods of protection of the interests of the company in the matter of transportation and freight rates, in fact some of the greatest difficulties in the operation of the business were in this connection. The Cedar Rapids Refrigerator Line was organized in 1892, one hundred new cars being purchased at that time. These cars have carried the product of T. M. Sinclair & Co., Ltd., all over



Charles B. Soutter



Sydney E. Sinclair





the country. Today there are 203 cars being operated by this company, which is wholly and solely owned by T. M. Sinclair & Co., Ltd. These cars cover about four million miles per year.

While speaking of the car line, we wish to draw attention to the fact that the cars carry the name of "Cedar Rapids" wherever they go and also that on all packages and all the product going out from this plant the place of origin stands out prominently, and thereby Cedar Rapids has become a familiar name all over this country and in many foreign lands. The company is not ashamed of Cedar Rapids and we hope that Cedar Rapids will not be ashamed of it.

By careful watching of the cleanliness and upkeep of the plant, any serious loss by fire has been avoided since 1887, but in order to make sure that the business would not be interrupted by such a calamity, a sprinkler equipment was installed throughout the plant in 1907. The cost of this improvement was a large sum, but the saving in insurance and the comfort and confidence engendered by its existence has been most satisfactory. This plant was one of two packing establishments to first make this installation.

During the recent war the packing business was called upon to meet a tremendous need of all the allied countries. This plant had its full share in this work and dealt with perfect satisfaction to all concerned with our own food administration and the buying commissioners of the allied and neutral governments.

In August, 1913, an affiliation was made with the predecessors of Wilson & Co., which still continues, and benefits have accrued therefrom, though the business of T. M. Sinclair & Co., Ltd., is operated independently in all its features.

A Pension Fund was established in January, 1917, which already has been a great benefit in several cases, and is heartily supported by the employees who are eligible to it.

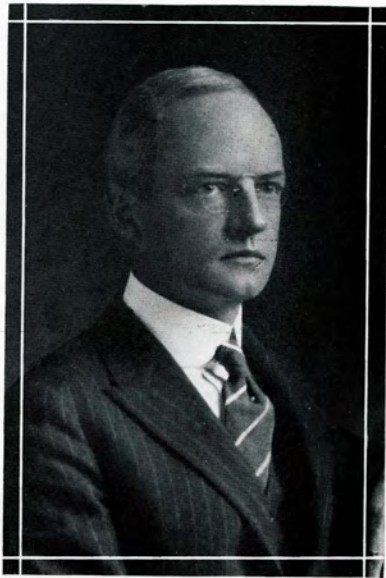
For the benefit of the employees of the plant, there was established a welfare work and dispensary in the plant in 1919, also a cafeteria for the accommodation of those who wished to take their noon meal at the plant. The former of these has been very

helpful in preventing serious affects from minor accidents, which are so liable to occur in connection with a business of this character. Some idea of the amount of this work can be obtained from the fact that the number of surgical dressings applied in this dispensary runs as high as one thousand a single month.

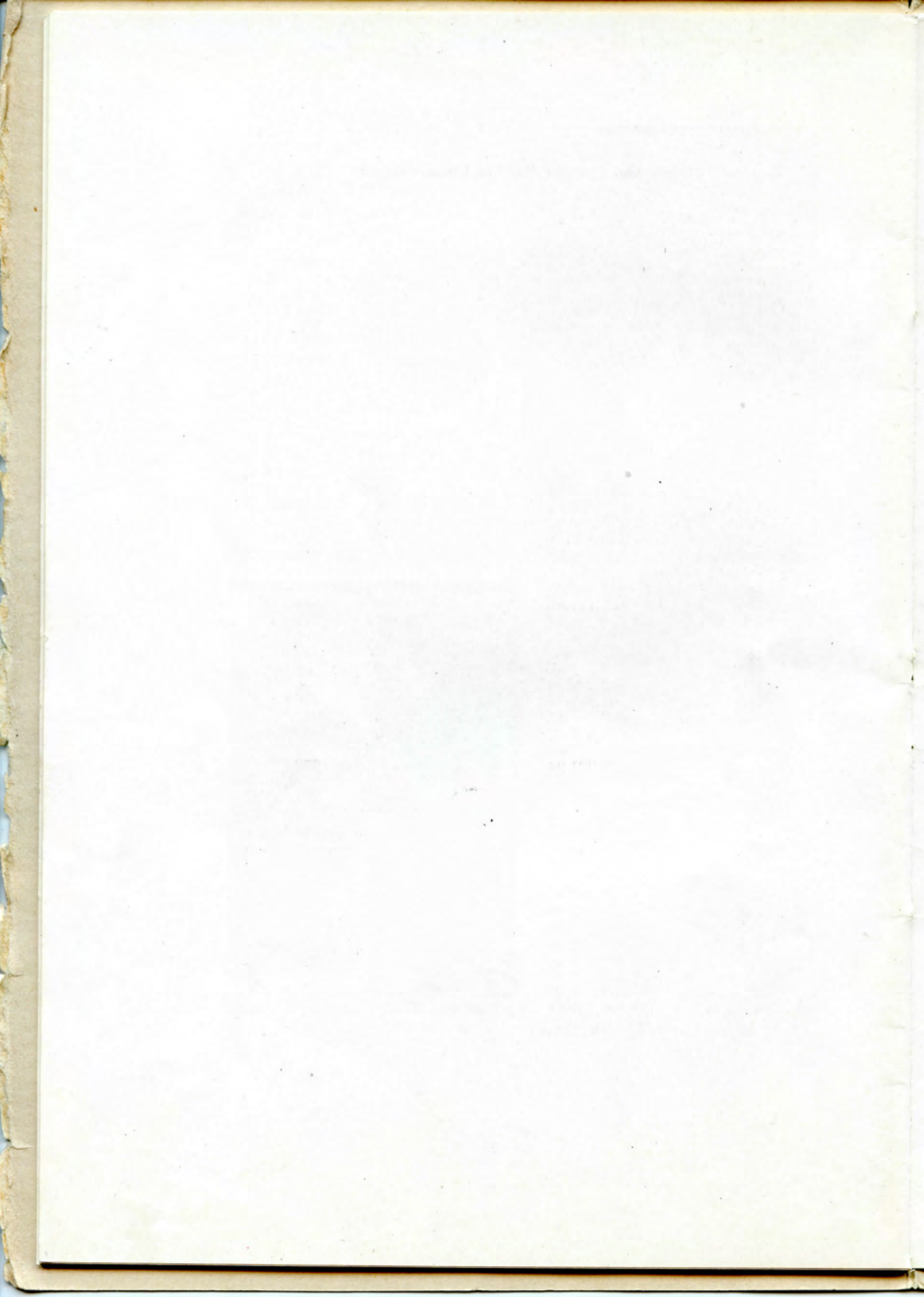
On August 15th, 1917, occurred the death of Mr. Sydney E. Sinclair. His death has been too recent for us to feel that in any way his personality and influence has been forgotten. It has certainly left its impression upon the character of the business and those who have followed him gladly testify to this. In fact, in the whole history of this plant there are certain moral values that it would not be right to omit in this account. From the very beginning there has been a strong element of uprightness and honor. The heritage left by those who have gone has been a blessing and is today one of the bulwarks of the business in the relation it sustains both to financial and trade interests and to the employees of the plant. The history of the Sunday School established in the Box Factory in the early days of the operation of the plant, of the Bible Class among the plant men, carried on in the home by both the organizers of this plant, and the personal contact sustained by all those who have been responsible for the work in this plant with the men in its employ, have brought about during these years a spirit as nearly perfect as the frailties of human nature make possible. These have been the direct results of the Christian ideal held by the founders of this company and their successors, that prosperity brought with it conditions of stewardship and not solely further opportunities of personal gain. Because this thought stands out so prominently and definitely in this history, it seems best to leave it as the closing thought of this account of the history of T. M. Sinclair & Co., Ltd., during the last fifty years.



Robert S. Sinclair



Archer C. Sinclair



## Wages and Freight Paid at Cedar Rapids

Wages		Freight	
Aug. 1872-Dec. 1872	15,333.94	1876	\$ 47,450.85
Year—1873	30,998.43	1877	69,239.68
1874	68,706.27	1878	145,909.87
1875	74,192.75	1879	105,649.27
1876	88,304.81	1880	155,223.08
1877	98,464.01	1881	151,628.87
1878	117,118.01	1882	144,212.21
1879	112,776.68	1883	157,051.56
1880	142,033.91	1884	221,400.33
1881	140,223.28	1885	125,474.46
1882	126,821.79	1886	179,497.86
1883	136,333.80	1887	177,549.49
1884	139,427.12	1888	121,214.56
1885	116,705.54	1889	202,508.77
1886	89,051.91	1890	356,482.87
1887	114,487.97	1891	376,726.85
1888	100,041.73	1892	198,780.34
1889	111,410.36	1893	146,461.92
1890	142,316.68	1894	199,193.73
1891	179,266.61	1895	261,858.54
1892	160,183.42	1896	297,120.06
1893	131,834.08	1897	410,425.39
1894	136,270.48	1898	410,626.68
1895	133,487.65	1899	436,201.93
1896	128,177.86	1900	545,219.19
1897	160,906.96	1901	572,102.70
1898	179,268.12	1902	458,942.54
1899	226,654.38	1903	413,675.70
1900	310,380.59	1904	523,284.54
1901	327,202.64	1905	538,378.64
1902	301,537.72	1906	696,624.06
1903	308,280.83	1907	722,551.38
1904	353,223.07	1908	828,097.39
1905	384,550.62	1909	762,224.70
1906	438,221.24	1910	673,875.89
1907	463,421.01	1911	688,551.44
1908	522,832.78	1914	731,873.05
1909	485,517.44	1915	650,237.32
1910	450,313.52	1912	668,681.48
1911	495,815.83	1913	681,064.30
1912	515,871.89	1916	712,905.16
1913	480,726.05	1917	1,006,647.49
1914	600,261.80	1918	808,573.46
1915	644,531.42	1919	1,427,758.89
1916	645,741.05	1920	1,181,687.55
1917	731,609.88	1921	1,432,986.60
1918	988,454.42	Total	\$21,823,832.59
1919	1,461,999.67		
1920	1,493,576.95		
1921	1,430,309.83		
	<u>\$17,235,178.80</u>		

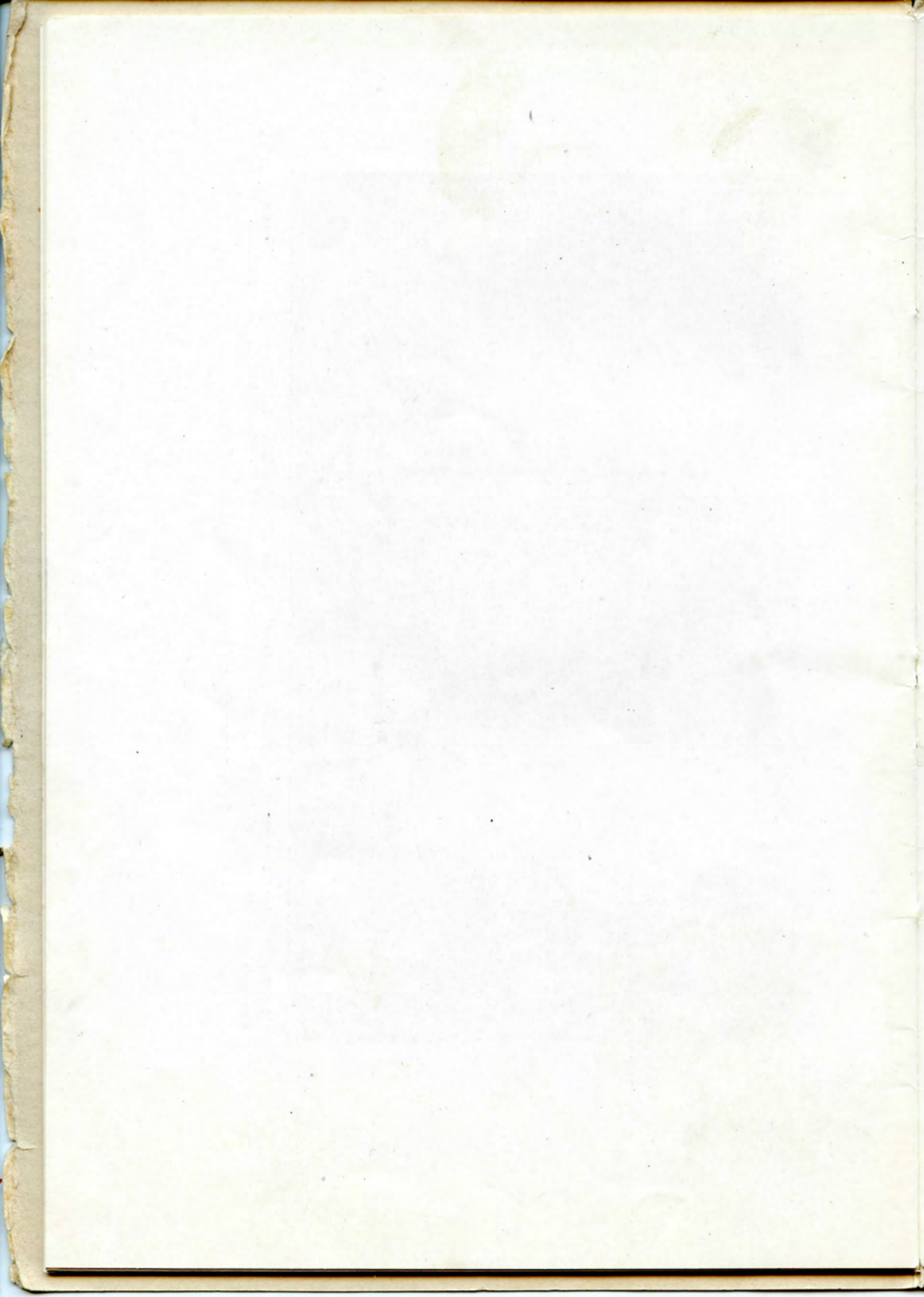
## Hogs Killed at Cedar Rapids

(Winter) Year	No. Hogs	Avg. Weight	Avg. Price
1871	15,039	278	3.76
1872	41,995	272	3.54
1873	113,997	227	4.33
1874	127,715	212	5.72
1875	148,040	229	6.74
1876	185,412	228	5.71
1877	236,454	236	4.13
1878	338,941	218	2.96
1879	296,179	227	3.63
1880	417,959	226	4.29
1881	336,463	229	5.80
1882	327,160	220	6.59
1883	340,189	230	5.28
1884	403,674	235	4.64
1885	396,812	228	3.48
1886	477,090	227	3.46
1887	321,476	226	4.38
1888	303,658	201	5.12
1889	421,408	248	3.35
1890	581,074	236	3.65
1891	429,056	208	3.64
1892	299,904	227	5.58
1893	313,157	240	5.88
1894	353,832	223	4.50
1895	347,890	235	3.91
1896	435,843	234	3.21
1897	457,511	229	3.55
1898	483,323	234	3.61
1899	427,585	234	3.58
1900	466,502	227	4.77
1901	489,312	232	5.46
1902	424,631	218	6.44
1903	424,737	233	6.10
1904	508,298	220	4.78
1905	509,282	227	4.94
1906	627,312	230	5.79
1907	553,481	233	6.24
1908	647,689	217	5.10
1909	512,549	225	6.57
1910	375,160	230	8.74
1911	439,337	232	6.80
1912	486,092	224	6.87
1913	420,883	237	7.98
1914	475,760	227	8.18
1915	542,579	224	7.00
1916	552,763	205	8.27
1917	519,509	207	13.30
1918	452,743	232	17.14
1919	561,283	225	18.84
1920	500,574	237	14.41
1921	497,118	233	9.09
	<u>20,366,430</u>		
	<b>Total Weight</b>		<b>Total Cost</b>
	4,609,170,436		\$297,428,530.13



John Dvorak Hitchcock Dlask Kovar Higginson Holmes S. Cowden Miller B. McGowan Gibbs Nezerka  
 Fitzpatrick Wm. McGowan Zeithmmel Jacobs Koubka Kucera Ranc Tosh J. P. Cowden Matheson

Present employees in service 35 years and over.

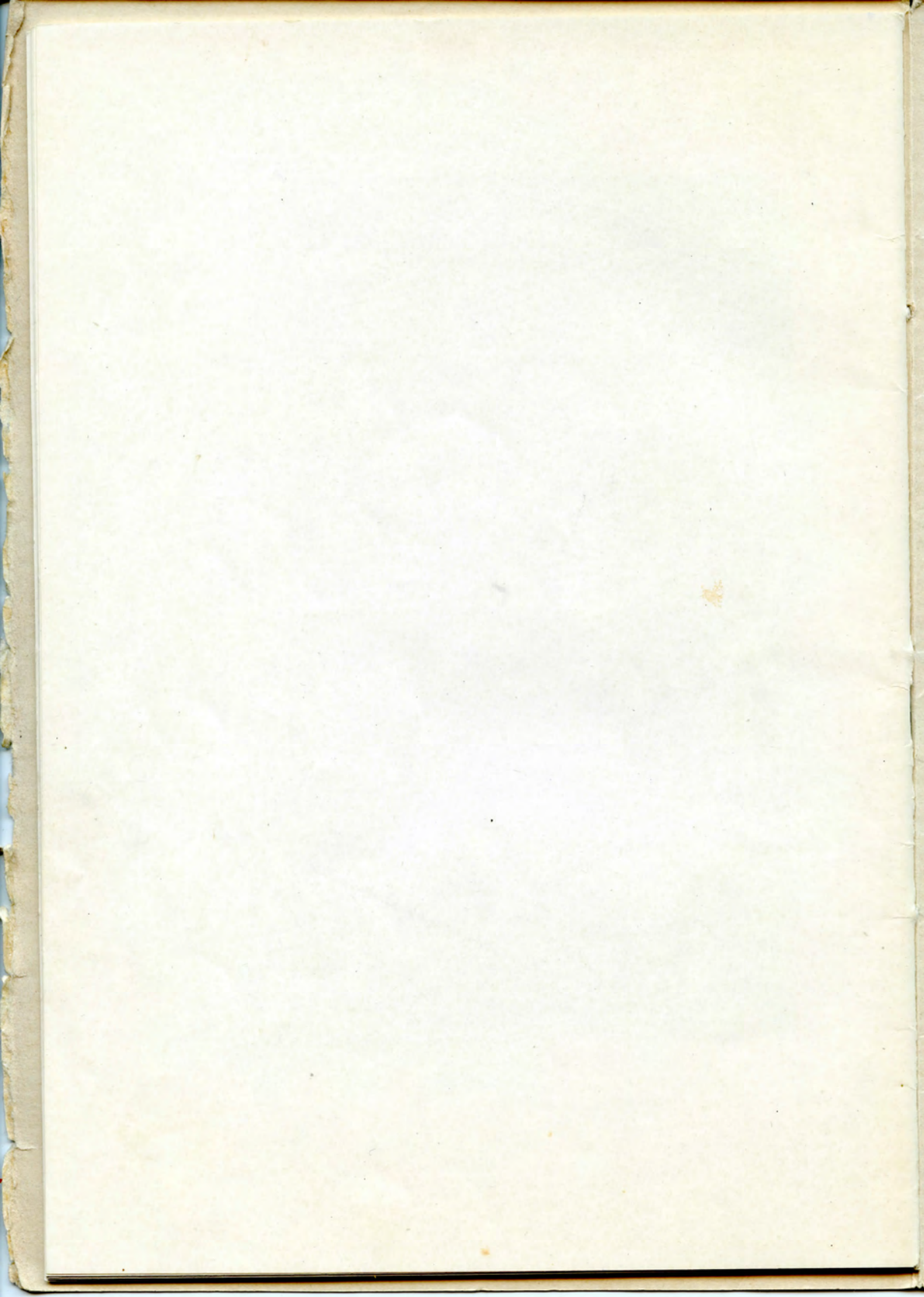






Palmer	Groth	Joe Dvorak	Vavra	Gannon	Cunning	Trcka	Easker
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