

Rethinking Porkopolis

What does the term “porkopolis” mean to you?



Above—From *The Pig* by William Youatt, Courtesy of the Hathi Trust.

Below left—Bicentennial Commons Gateway Sculpture by Andrew Leicester. Courtesy Chris Albert.

Below right—“View of Cincinnati from Covington,” Edwin Whitfield, 1848. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

From 1820 to 1860, Cincinnati was the pork-packing capital of the United States, and one of the largest meat-packing cities in the world. Every year, 400,000 or more hogs would make their way through the city's streets to be slaughtered, packed and processed into scores of different products that made their way across the country, and all over the globe. In the twenty-first century, Cincinnatians are justifiably proud of this heritage that helped make their hometown the “Queen City of the West.” Pigs still adorn t-shirts, posters and bumper stickers, the Flying Pig Marathon is one of our premier sporting events, and “Porkopolis” is still one of our unofficial nicknames.

But what does that history really mean? How did Cincinnati’s porcine heritage shape the city and the region in the decades before the American Civil War? Once we do go back, the pig is more than just a cute logo, but a vital and fascinating organic engine that powered the American economy and reshaped the environment of Cincinnati and the greater Ohio River Valley.


To help us think about why pigs were important, and how they connected Cincinnati to the larger region and world, “Rethinking Porkopolis” will use the tools of environmental history, a field that explores how humans shape the natural world, and how the natural world shapes human societies. Because it focuses on physical changes to cities, the landscape and animals themselves, environmental history allows us to get into the muck of early America, and think about how pigs looked and smelled, how pork products were made and tasted, and how they shaped the bodies and lives of Americans. It will also allow us to explore the real, physical connections between Cincinnati and the rest of the United States, especially the cotton plantations of the Deep South, which were the center of the American economy in the 19th century.

In order to tell this story, “Rethinking Porkopolis” will go on a journey from Southwest Ohio to New Orleans and beyond in three stages:

- **Farm**—The origins of the pig in North America and the Ohio River Valley and how local farmers began breeding and engineering animals to be superior pork producers
- **City**—The rise of Cincinnati in the early 19th century and how the priorities of the packers and purveyors shaped the landscape and environment of the entire city
- **Market**—The various destinations for Cincinnati pork, especially the cotton plantations of the Lower Mississippi River Valley

“What crocodiles were in Egypt, what cows are in Bengal, or storks in Holland, pigs are in Cincinnati, with this trifling difference – their sacredness of character lasts but as long as their mortal coil; and this is abbreviated without ceremony, and from the most worldly motives.”

— From *The Plough, Loom and the Anvil*, Vol. 3, 1851



Pigs in the New World



Above—Allowing pigs to forage for themselves was cheap and easy, but a farmer could be held liable if their pig destroyed their neighbor's crops. To prevent this, farmers placed a metal ring through the pig's nose. If the pig tried to root around in the dirt, the ring would press up against their nasal cartilage and cause a sharp pain. From *Ringing a Pig* by William Sidney Mount. Image courtesy of the-athenaeum.org.

Top right—Pigs spread through the New World soon after Columbus's voyage in 1492, and quickly became semi-wild or "feral" animals and would be hunted regularly by Native Americans. From *The Manner of Hunting in Early America* by Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas. Image courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library.

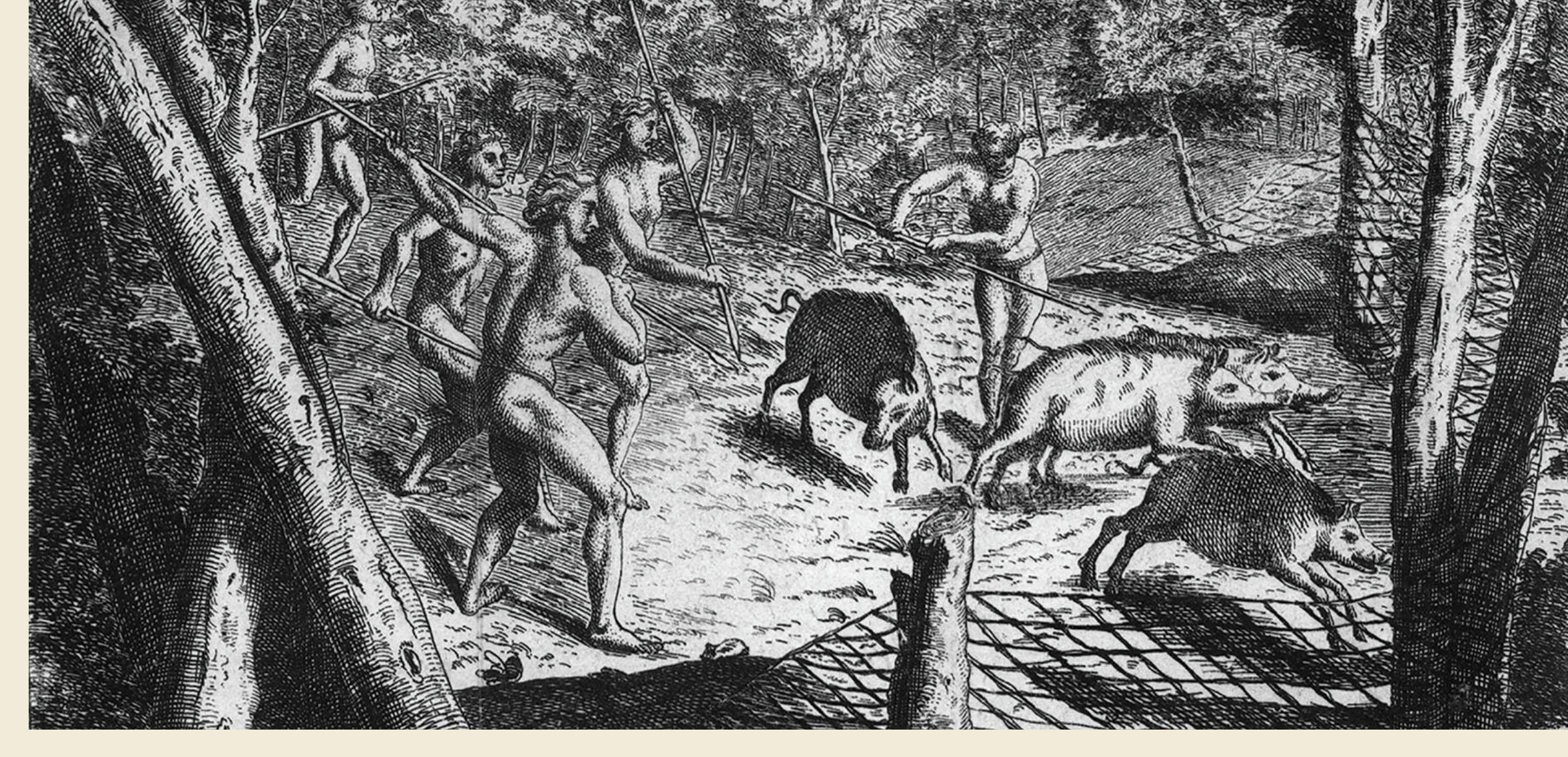
Below—Semi-wild boars or "razorbacks" were leaner, to help them run from predators, had tusks to defend themselves, and long snouts to dig up edible roots and other food. From John Monteith, *Familiar Animals and their Wild Kindred*. Image courtesy of the University of South Florida.

Although the domestication of pigs goes back to ancient times, the animals were not native to the Western Hemisphere. Christopher Columbus and other explorers brought over hundreds of species of animals, plants and diseases during what was known as the "Columbian Exchange," the great biological mixing of the Old and New Worlds that began after 1492. Pigs readily adapted themselves to the New World, especially in the British colonies in North America.

The British valued neat and orderly farms and believed the correct management of livestock was a sign of a farmer's skill and intelligence. In England, pigs and cattle spent most of their lives either fenced in or constantly tended by human beings. This model did not work in the colonies, however, because there was too much land and not enough people. It was hard to find workers to tend to the livestock.

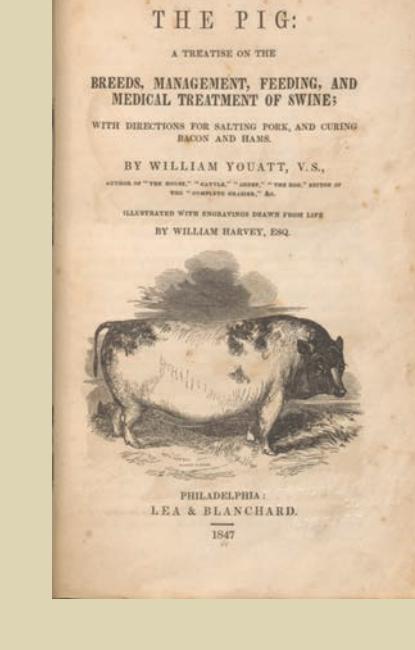
The solution was to take advantage of that extra land, as well as the pig's toughness and omnivorous diet, and let the hogs roam free. Colonists would let their pigs run wild in local forests all throughout the spring and summer, feeding primarily on acorns, chestnuts and beech nuts, also known as "mast." The pigs would be collected in early fall and brought back to the farm to be fattened up on corn and scraps for a few weeks, then slaughtered.

What made pigs so perfect for this form of "free-range" husbandry was their intelligence in being able to track down food. But also, when they are allowed to roam in the wild, domesticated pigs become semi-feral, and certain characteristics will reemerge in pigs after a generation or two, such as sharp teeth, a long snout and a leaner, more muscular build. This makes them better at rooting around for food and more effective at staving off predators. Their meat was often times tough and rank, but they were a perfect protein source for a sparsely populated continent.



Four Hooved Invaders

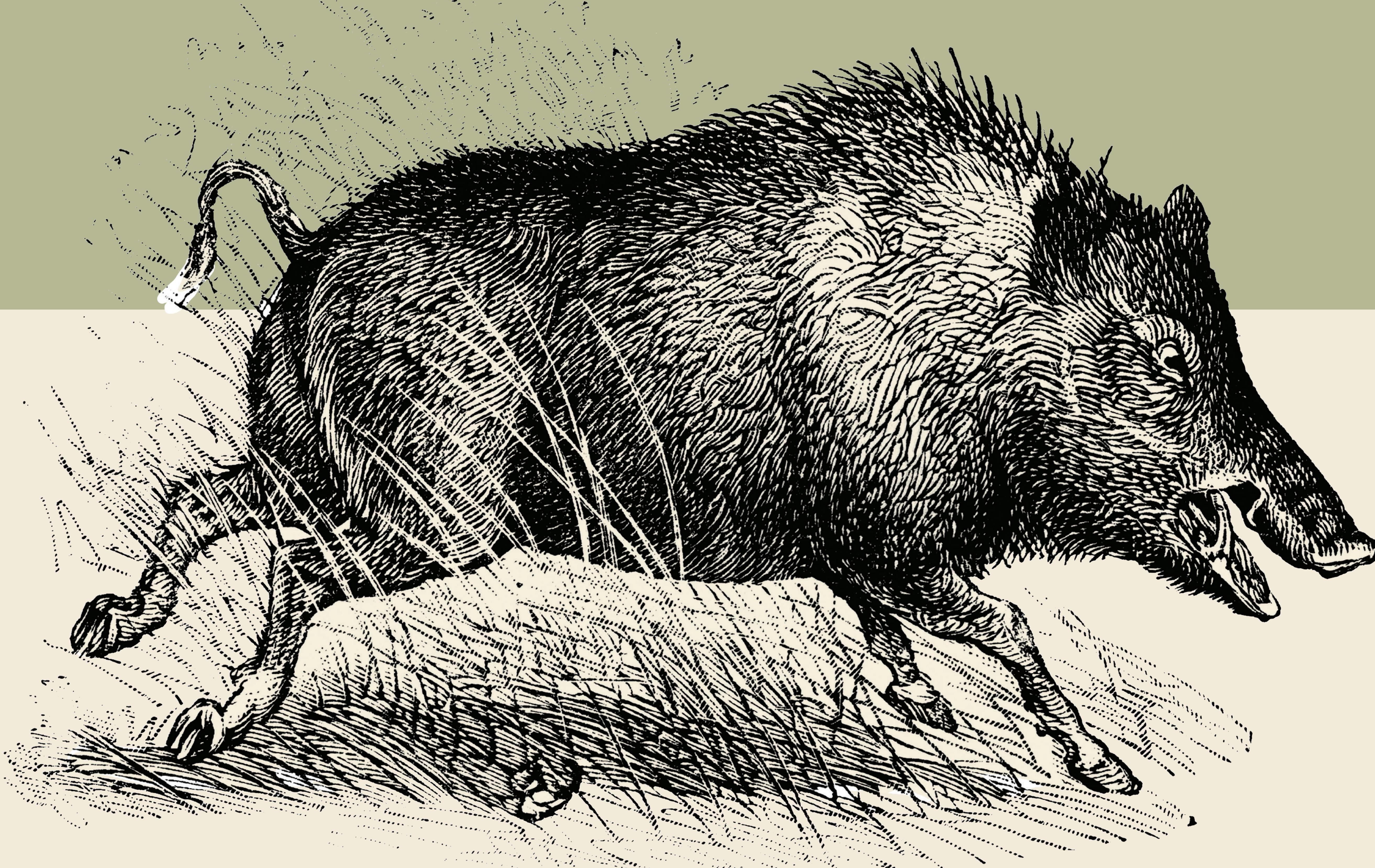
The British decision to let their livestock roam free had severe consequences. Pig hooves and snouts tore up existing vegetation, shaping the landscape and changing the ecology of the colonies. The animals also caused conflict with Native Americans. When they were roaming, Native Americans saw pigs as just another animal that could be hunted and killed. But the British argued that these animals were still private property, and pushed for compensation. Arguments over livestock and land use were constant in early America, and even helped lead to King Philip's War, the bloodiest conflict between Native Americans and colonists in colonial New England. Some historians have even argued that livestock were the first wave in the European conquest of North America.



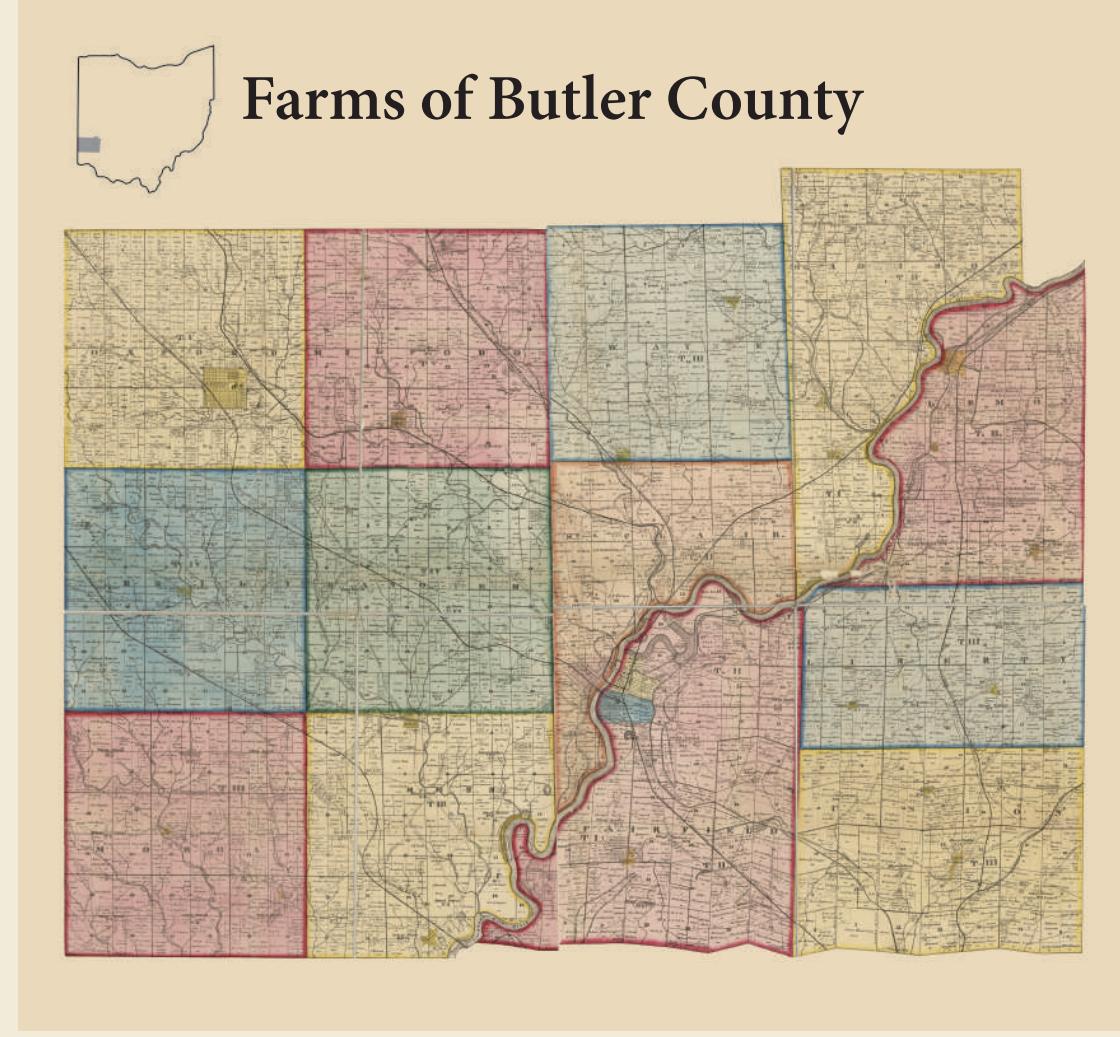
"... they have long peaked snouts, coarse heads, thin chests, narrow shoulders, sharp backs, slab sides, meager (sic) diminutive hams, big legs, clumped feet, the hide of a rhinoceros, the hair and bristles of a porcupine, and as thick and shaggy as a bear's; they have no capacity for digesting and concocting their food in the stomach for nourishment; there is nothing but offal. Bones, rind, bristles, and hair, with a narrow streak of gristle underneath, and a still narrower line of lean as tough and as rank as white."

—From William Youatt, *The Pig*, 1847, describing the "razorback," which was the nickname for the tough, semi-wild animal that ruled the backwoods of much of eastern North America for more than two hundred years, and was a vital tool of settlement and conquest.

Razorback Hog



Southwest Ohio: From Forest to Farm



Above—By the 1870s, the dense forest of Southwest Ohio had largely been cleared, and was replaced by an orderly grid of fields and farmsteads. From the *Combination Atlas of Butler County*, 1875.

Right—Although it was quicker to chop down trees, it was labor intensive, and Ohio was sparsely settled. It was easier and cheaper for settlers to “girdle” trees, removing the bark at the base of the trunk. In a few years the tree would die, and it would be much easier to remove them. From “Harvey’s American Scenery” by William Bennett, based on the paintings of George Harvey. Images courtesy of the New York Public Library.

Below—The residence of Milton Vail. From the *Combination Atlas of Butler County*, 1875.

In 1788 John Cleves Symmes—lawyer, judge, patriot and speculator—purchased more than 300,000 acres between the Great Miami and the Little Miami rivers from the United States government, for about \$225,000. Symmes had no desire to settle this large tract of land himself, but planned sell it off in smaller parcels to eager settlers. He then had himself appointed as a judge in the new Northwest Territory, and made his way to Cincinnati to keep the peace and reap his fortune. He was, however, a poor businessman and died in 1814 in Cincinnati, largely penniless.

Nevertheless, the land that would bear his name, Symmes Purchase, was quite successful. Prospective settlers flooded across the Appalachian mountains into the Miami Valley in the late 18th and early 19th century, making it one of the first agricultural boom regions of the young republic.

Ohio Fever

Settlers were attracted to the Miami Valley for reasons both political and environmental. Symmes divided his land up into smaller parcels that individual farmers could more easily afford, thus allowing settlers to try and fulfill the Jeffersonian dream of economic and political independence. Thomas Jefferson believed that only if a man was not dependent on others economically could he be truly independent politically. Drained by both the Little Miami and Great Miami Rivers, the valley offered rich alluvial soils that were ideal for planning corn, which would become the region’s primary crop.

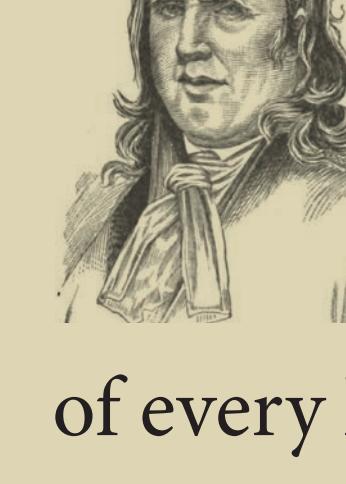
Despite affordable land and good soils, early Ohioans encountered one environmental obstacle: trees. Before white settlement, almost all of Ohio was forested, and the Miami Valley was no exception, and early farmers spent a lot of their time chopping down trees. Once

they purchased a plot of land, farmers would clear eight to ten acres for their first crops as fast as possible. They then would spend every winter for as long as a decade clearing the rest of their land, often times hiring laborers or neighbors to assist with the process. Land was cleared either by cutting down trees with an ax, or by girdling. This involved removing the bark from the base of the tree and cutting off the branches, which would cause the tree to die in about two years, and be



much easier to cut down. But even farmers who chopped down green trees with an ax could rarely remove the stumps immediately. Thus the farms of Southwest Ohio, like much of the frontier, remained pockmarked with stumps and girdled trees well into the 1800s, and farmers just plowed around them.

By the 1850s, much the clearing of the Southwest Ohio’s forests was complete. Instead of the dense woodland that would have been familiar to Native Americans and early settlers, it was an orderly grid of fields and farm-houses. This was now a landscape that was perfect for the intensive planting of corn and specialized breeding of hogs.



“The land is generally free from stone and a rich, easy soil for tillage. There are no mountains and few hills, so that the country for the most part is level! ... the finest timber of every kind known in the middle states, with many other sorts of more southerly production, grow in plenty here, but there is very little underwood or brush.”

—John Cleves Symmes in an advertisement from 1788, promoting the land in Symmes Purchase to prospective buyers.



Breeding for Better Hogs



Above- By the 1820s scores of Southwest Ohio farmers were cross-breeding their hogs to emphasize certain characteristics. Although the creation of the most popular breed, the Poland-China, is disputed, many agricultural historians credit Butler County resident David Magic. From *History of the Poland-China Breed of Swine*.

Near right- A memorial sign to the Poland China hog in Warren County. Image courtesy of Chris Albert.

Far right- These images of model hog pens show how much effort farmers put into raising large hogs as efficiently as possible. From *The Hog in America* by Silas Shepard.

Below- A Poland China hog from G. F. Warren, *Elements of Agriculture*. Image courtesy of the University of South Florida.

Early Ohio settlers had brought their semi-feral hogs, or “razorbacks” with them from Pennsylvania, Virginia and North Carolina, and these scavenging animals were perfect for frontier conditions. But as more and more land was settled and cleared, there were fewer forests for the razorbacks to roam. This forced farmers to begin feeding their pigs corn grown on their farm. But although the loss of forest was important, it was their proximity to Cincinnati, America’s great western emporium, that led farmers to adopt new livestock practices.

Ohio’s first pork boom began in the early 1820s, when steamboats and readily available salt made it much easier to preserve and transport pork down the Mississippi River. Ohio farmers had begun experimenting with specialized breeds in the years before, crossing their razor-backs with imported English Berkshire hogs that were more docile and grew more muscle and fat. But improved packing and transportation technologies increased demand, which forced farmers to try and breed a better pig.

Condensed Corn

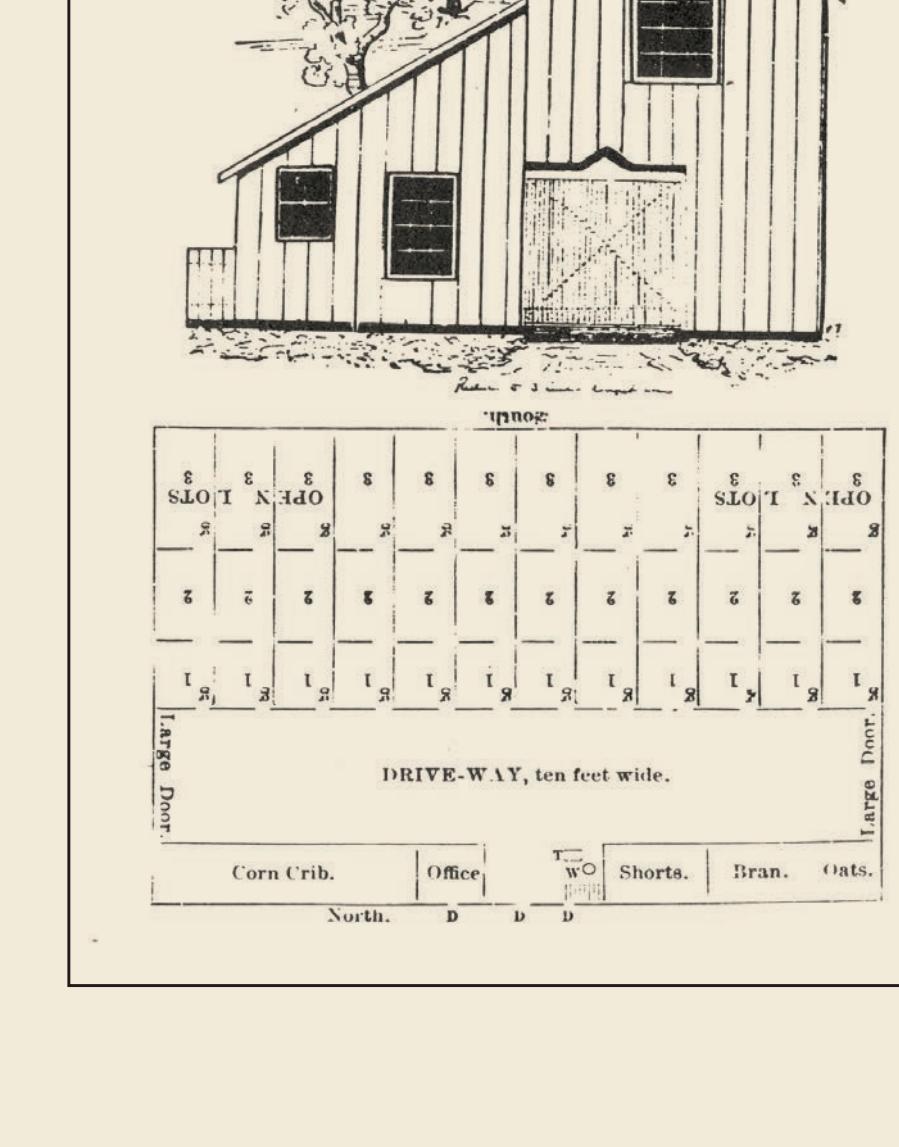
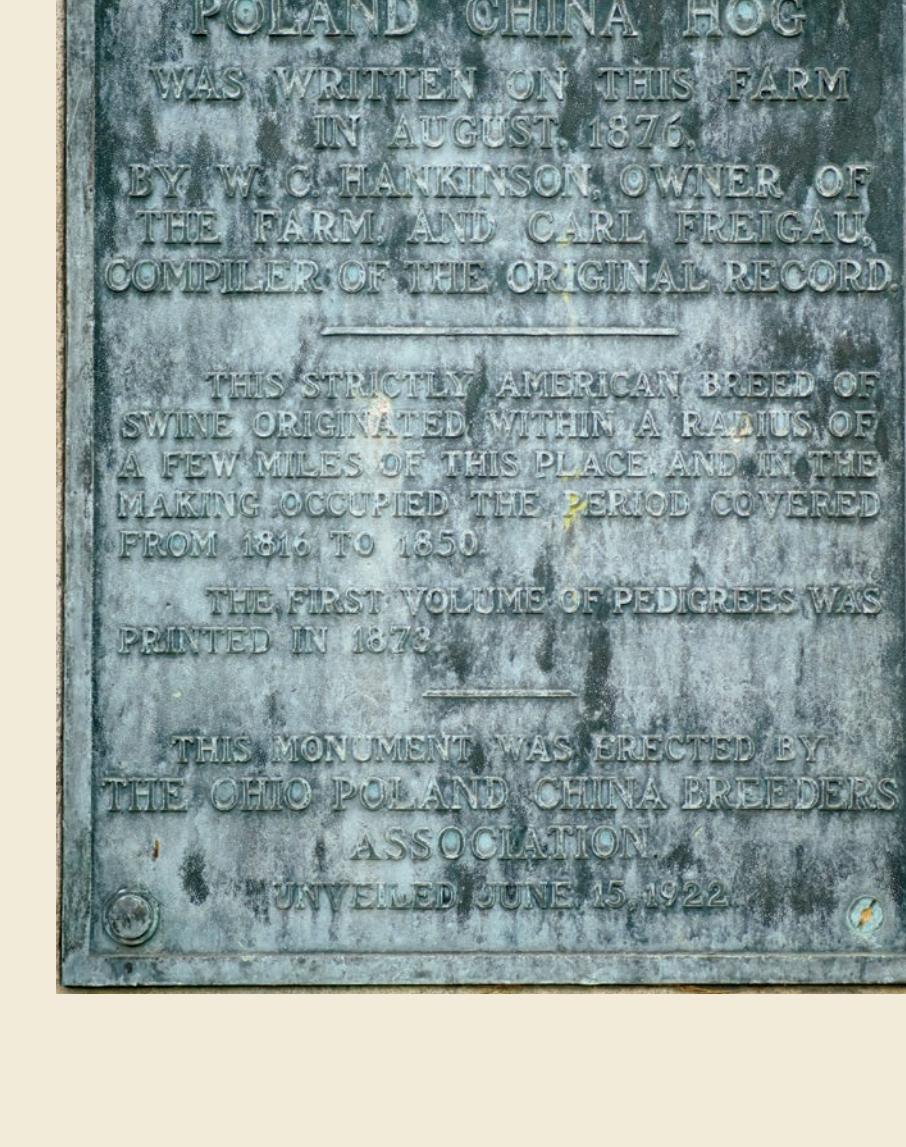
One of the reasons hogs were so attractive to farmers was that they were “condensed corn.” Corn was too bulky to take to the market, so farmers fed it to their pigs to fatten them up in the fall before slaughter. By the 1820s, more and more Miami Valley hogs no longer ran feral. They were penned up and fully domesticated, fed corn and farm scraps all year round to prepare them for market. With this new system in place, farmers began looking to breed hogs that could help them maximize their profits. To do this, they had to overcome three challenges: transport, weight and fattening efficiency. Most pigs were taken to the slaughterhouse “on the hoof,” which meant they

were driven there, live, from as far as two hundred miles away. This required strong legs and hooves. In terms of weight, farmers wanted hogs that would grow to at least two-hundred pounds, and could be as large as three or four hundred pounds. The final requirement, fattening efficiency, meant maximizing the corn to weight ratio. Farmers carefully measured how much corn they used to fatten their hogs, and ideally they could raise a two-hundred and fifty pound pig with as little corn as possible.

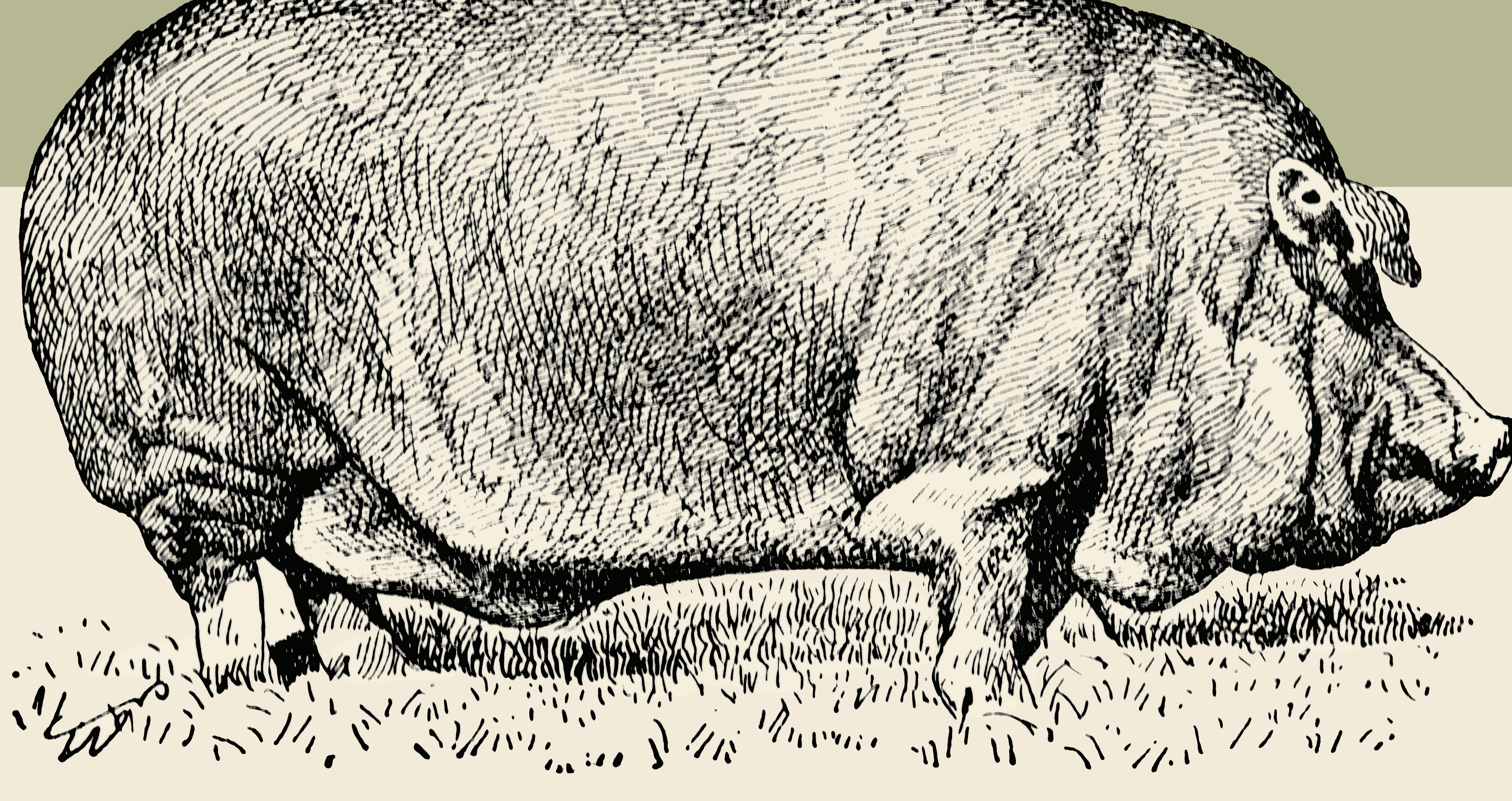
To develop these characteristics, farmers used a variety of breeding practices, which they learned about from farming journals, magazines, newspapers, and word of mouth. Most of these involved choosing two animals that had desirable characteristics – ability to put on fat, strong legs – and then mate them together. Then once these animals had enough offspring, they would begin mating them together, a practice known as “in-an-in” breeding. Pigs were ideal for breeding because female pigs have one to two litters per year, with multiple pigs in each litter.

Poland China Hog

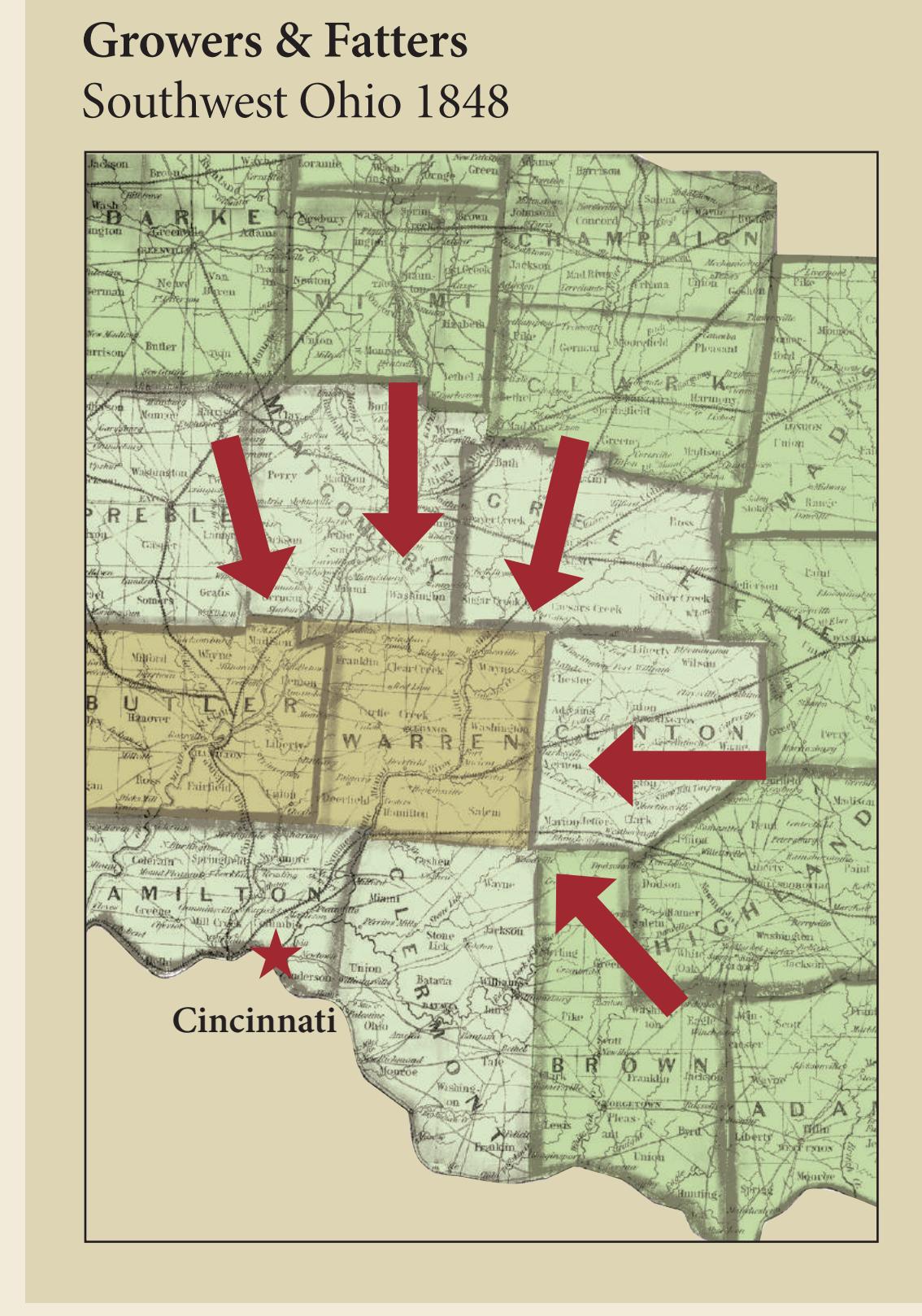
The first specialized breeds in the Miami Valley were imported from Great Britain, but by the 1840s farmers had begun to develop American breeds. Miami Valley farmers began breeding their hogs for specific characteristics in the 1820s. Among the most celebrated was the Poland China hog. So named because it was descended from China hogs, and believed to have first been bred by a Polish immigrant, it became one of the most popular American breeds of the late 1800s.



Farm-Raised Hog



The Ohio Farm Network



Above Top—Many of the farms that raised young pigs or “growers” formed a belt around Butler and Warren counties, where they would then be driven in the late summer and early fall to be fattened on larger farms that specialized in hog production. Graphic by Jamie Albert.

Above Bottom—Drovers bringing their hogs through a hillside pass. From *Harper's Monthly*, 1857.

Below—The residence of J.J. Davis. From the *Combination Atlas of Butler County*, 1875.

Below—From Arthur Mee and Holland Thompson, eds. *The Book of Knowledge*. Image courtesy of the University of South Florida.

Through careful selective breeding, Miami Valley farmers were able to develop hogs that gained weight quickly and efficiently, produced a lot of lard, and easily walked to market, which increased the profitability of each individual animal. This commercialization of agriculture was not limited to breeding, however. By the 1850s, it extended to almost every aspect of hog production in the region.

Growers and Fatters

Not all farmers that supplied Cincinnati with hogs were equal. The most advanced operations were a belt of farms in northern Butler and Warren counties, where specialty breeds, like the Poland China, were developed. These farmers developed breeds to improve their own stock, but also so they could market their pigs to the smaller farmers in the region. Many of these more sophisticated operations were owned or funded by Cincinnati meat-packers. William Neff, for example, had breeding farms outside of Yellow Springs, Ohio, and in Cheviot, in Hamilton County.

These farms were commercial in orientation, with some farmers raising more than 1,000 hogs in a given year. But many of pigs that would eventually be slaughtered in Cincinnati came from smaller farms that raised anywhere from a dozen to one hundred pigs a year. These farmers were often called “growers” and they would typically sell their hogs to “fatters” in Warren and Butler counties, where the pigs would be fattened up on corn for two to three months before finally being driven to Cincinnati in November and December, where thousands of hogs would flood the city streets every day.

Droving

Drovers were responsible for transporting large groups of live hogs “on the hoof”—some times as many as 3,000—from the countryside to Cincinnati. Most drovers were not just transport agents, but speculators in their own right. Farmers, especially those who only raised a few dozen hogs, wanted to avoid the expense and cost of transporting their hogs to Cincinnati, so they sold their stock to drovers for cash. The drovers, in turn, would gamble that they could turn a profit by bringing a large amount of hogs to Cincinnati at the right time, when they could fetch a good price from the packers.

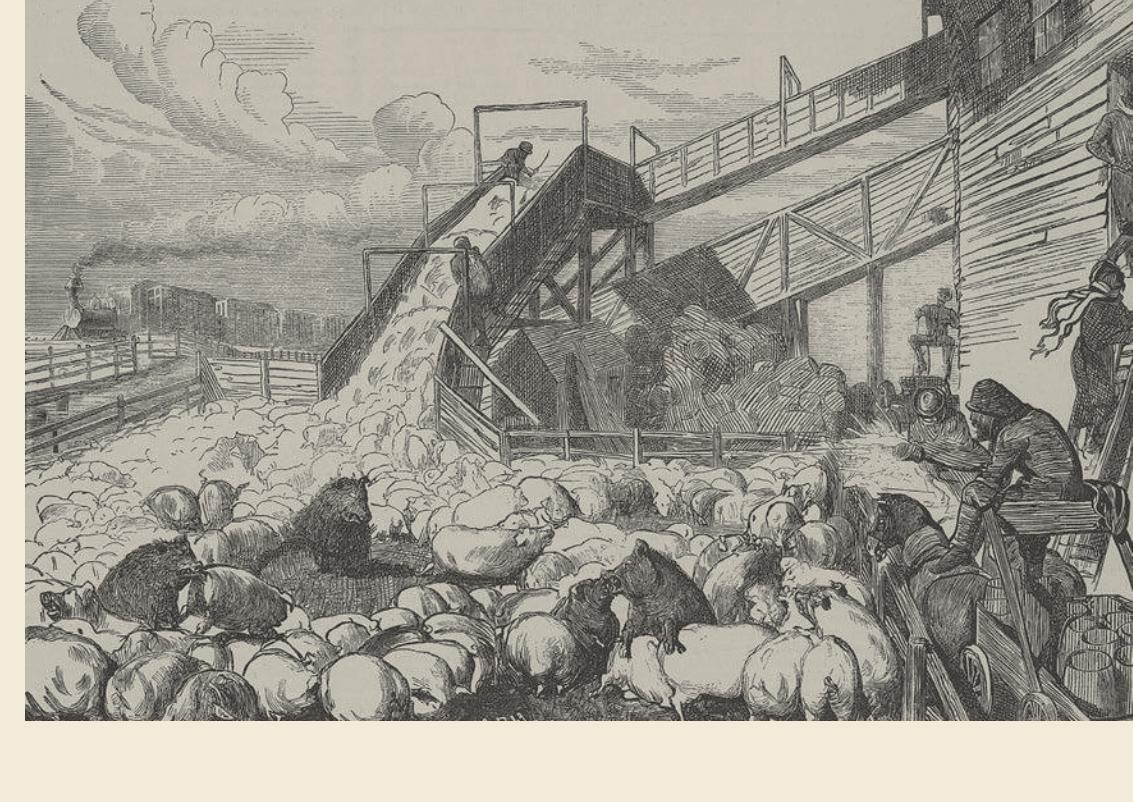
In order to reduce their risk and push up prices, drovers would also purchase hogs on what were known as “early contracts” committing to buy pigs from a large number of farmers up to a year in advance. With a large supply of hogs to bring to Cincinnati, drovers would then try to squeeze packers for higher prices.

Futures Markets

By the 1840s, “early contracts” were common agreements between farmers and merchants all across the United States. The farmer could lock in the price for his corn, wheat, pigs, etc., well in advance of harvest or slaughter, and the merchant knew what his costs would be. By the 1860s, these contracts were so common that the Chicago Board of Trade created a regulated futures market. Now speculators would not even be trading commodities, but the promise to purchase commodities at some future date. This revolutionized agriculture in the United States, but also further disconnected the commercial markets from the actual, physical products that were being bought and sold.



Cincinnati's Hog Geography



Above Top— Although the Miami and Erie Canal did not transport many pigs (it was cheaper to drive them “on the hoof” into the city) it was a key transportation connection that helped fuel Cincinnati’s rise as a pork-packing capital. Image courtesy of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.

Above Bottom— Pig driving in Cincinnati and on board a river steamer. Image courtesy of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.

Right— Charles Cist from *Queen City Heritage*, Winter 1990

Below— Since the city did not have any sort of sewer system until the 1860s, almost all of Cincinnati’s early slaughterhouses clustered around the Deer Creek on the far east side, at the foot of Mt. Adams. This map shows how by the 1840s they had migrated northward, around the Miami and Erie Canal. Each red dot represents a commercial pork packer or merchant. From *Williams’ Cincinnati Guide and General Business Directory*, 1848. Graphic by Jamie Albert.

Cincinnati’s emergence as the pork packing capital of the world was not preordained, but the city had a number of advantages over its prospective competitors, including a good location near the Little Miami, Great Miami and Ohio rivers. The Miami Valley was also settled quite rapidly in the early 19th century, which provided the city with thousands of productive farms in its immediate vicinity. The opening of a branch of the Second Bank of the United States in 1817, and the construction of the Miami and Erie Canal in 1825, also gave local businesses ready access to capital and credit, and cemented the city’s superior transportation connections. Finally, Cincinnati had a large and easily accessible public landing, which encouraged river commerce.

High Prices and Byproducts

With access to funding and transit, Cincinnati merchants and packers were able to pay higher prices for hogs, making the city more attractive as a market for local farmers. By the 1840s these advantages would be compounded even more with emergence of the “byproduct” industry. More than fifty businesses took the non-edible parts of every pig and turned them into lamp oil, candles, soap, industrial lubricants, fabric dye and a variety of other products. These ancillary industries meant that Cincinnati packers were able to pay two to three cents more per pound for live pigs. For a farmer with 50 pigs, that could mean an extra \$250-\$300 per year, a huge margin in the 19th century.

Once they were driven into Cincinnati, most hogs would immediately go the slaughterhouses, which were clustered on the southeastern side of the city, along the Deer Creek. Proprietors actually paid for the privilege of slaughtering the pigs, because they kept the lard, blood and hairs, which they sold to the byproduct manufacturers. After slaughter they were taken to the packinghouses, where they were butchered and packed into various edible products.

Almost all of these businesses were separate and independent in the decades before the Civil War, with scores of different slaughterhouses, meatpackers, lard oil manufacturers, and candle and soap makers. The diversity and small scale of these businesses is one of the reasons cities like Cincinnati offered so much opportunity in antebellum America. Running a business was very risky, and bankruptcies were common. But for white men, the barrier to entry was low, and hard work, savvy decision making, good connections and little bit of luck could lead to stability and security.

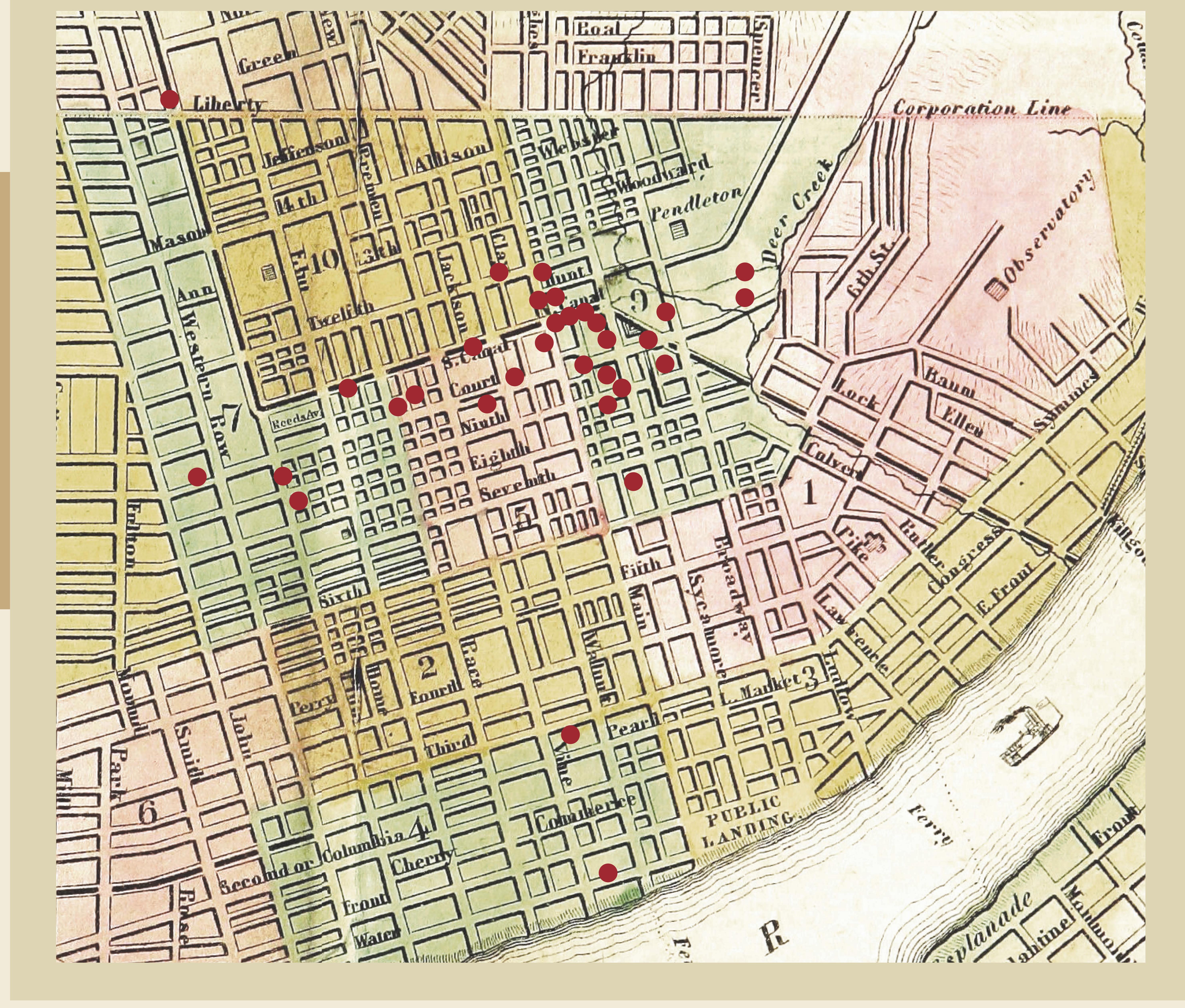
By the 1850s this was beginning to change. Larger firms began to build big, integrated packinghouses, where the slaughtering and packing was done under one roof, and hundreds of hogs were processed every day.



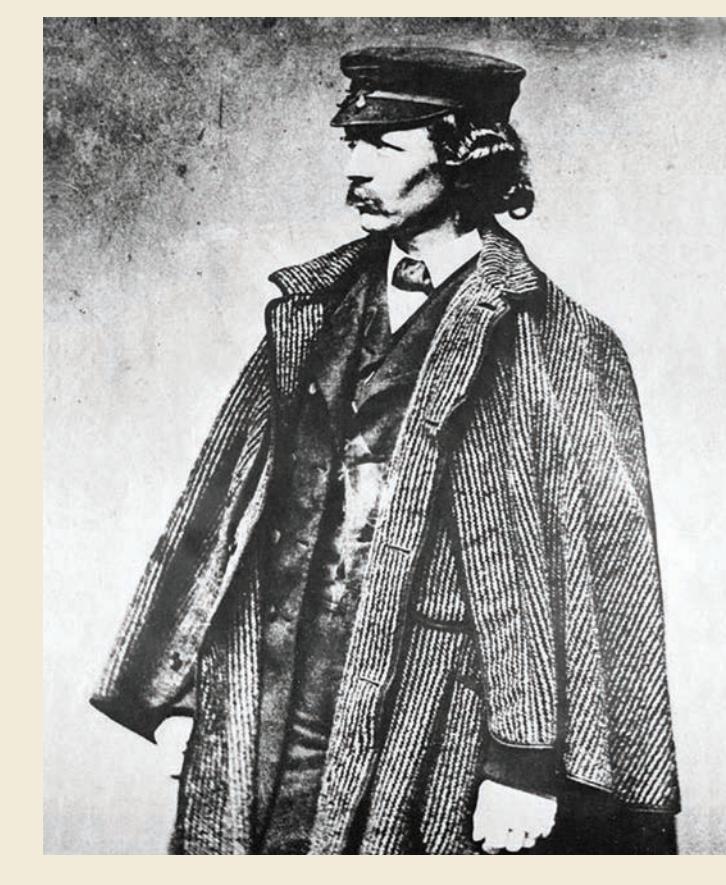
“The putting up of Pork has been so important a branch of business in our city, for five and twenty years, as to have constituted its largest item of manufacture, and acquired for it the soubriquet of Porkopolis ... there are few things which make a more vivid impression on the visitor, who see Cincinnati for the first time, than the magnitude and extent of the various buildings connected with this business; many of them with four stories, extensive fronts, and reaching in depth from street to street.”

— Charles Cist, from *The Cincinnati Miscellany*, 1846

Pork Packers and Merchants – Cincinnati 1848



Butchering and Packing



Above—Frederick Law Olmsted. Although later known as a landscape architect, Olmsted began his career as a journalist. In addition to traveling to Cincinnati, he wrote some of the best commentaries on slavery during the 1850s. Image courtesy of Wikipedia.

Below Top—Images of pigs being evaluated and corralled in the stockyards. From *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 1886. Image courtesy of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.

Below Bottom—Hogs arriving in Cincinnati from *Harper's Weekly*, 1860. Image courtesy of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.

In 1853, journalist Frederick Law Olmsted was on his way to Texas when he stopped in Cincinnati. Eager to get a sense of the city's most well-known industry, he requested and was given a tour of a local packinghouse.

"We entered an immense, low-ceiled room and followed a vista of dead swine, upon their backs, their paws stretching mutely toward heaven. Walking down to the vanishing point, we found there a sort of human chopping machine where the hogs were converted into commercial port. A plank table, two men to lift and turn, two to wield the cleavers were its component parts. No iron cog-wheels could work with more regular motion. Plump falls the hog upon the table, chop, chop; chop chop; chop, chop fall the cleavers ... Amazed beyond all expectation at the celerity we took out our watches and counted thirty five seconds from the moment when one hog touched the table until the next occupied its place."

Olmsted's description, one of the few first person accounts of the work in Cincinnati's packinghouses, illustrates how sophisticated these operations had become by the 1850s. Instead of one butcher methodically working through each hog, Cincinnati packers had pioneered the "disassembly line," where each worker completed one step in the butchering process over and over again, as quickly as possible, then moving the carcass along for the next chop and cut.



A Seasonal Business

There were multiple reasons for this emphasis on efficiency and speed. Obviously more pigs butchered and packed per day was more profitable for the proprietor. But Cincinnati's pork business was also severely constrained by the weather. These were the days before refrigeration, and so to prevent spoilage, packing could only begin once the weather was going to be consistently below 40 degrees Fahrenheit, which was usually in early November, and lasted until mid-February.

For these three months, Cincinnati was a frenzy of activity, with thousands of pigs being driven into the city every day. In addition to the "swinish multitude," the streets were also clogged with carts and wagons moving carcasses from the slaughterhouse to the packinghouse, barrels of pork to merchants' warehouses, and vats of lard to the soap factories. Since most of the work was seasonal, the packinghouse workers were carpenters, masons and other builders who were often unemployed during the winter months. Packers also recruited local farmers, who were eager to supplement their income with seasonal wage work in the city.



Mastering the Disassembly Line

Below— “Pork Packing in Cincinnati” by Henry Farny. Although he would eventually become famous for his portraits of western scenes, Farny was a little known artist when the Pork Packers Association of Cincinnati commissioned this illustration for display at the 1873 World Exhibition in Vienna to promote Cincinnati’s most important industry to the rest of the world. The original exhibit was 30 feet long and 5 feet tall. This lithograph was one of a number of reprints made of the original, including a well-known article in *Harper’s Weekly* in 1873. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

By the 1860s, the largest Cincinnati packers had integrated factories that combined slaughtering, butchering and packing, along with the processing of other byproducts. They were also experimenting with new technologies that moved hogs along different stages of the packing process. Despite this, meat-packing remained (and is still today) a tremendously manual process, dependent on the repeated physical exertion of individual workers.

1 Killing— Pigs are led in from holding pens into the killing room. They were usually first stunned with a blow to the head, and then hung by their feet from the overhead rail.

2 Cutting— The pigs have their throats cut and the blood drains into vats below. The blood was used in a variety of byproducts, so it was always saved.

3 Cleaning— To remove their hair, each dead pig was dipped in the scalding tanks of hot water, which loosened their skin. Once lifted out of the tank, workers shaved and scraped the skin furiously to remove any trace of the hair and bristles.

4 Gutting— After the skin was cleaned, the pigs’ legs were spread with a bar called a gambrel, and then they were placed back on the overhead railway. They were sliced open and the “gutters” pulled out all of the intestines and internal organs, and washed out the interior of the carcass. In the background the organs are being separated, with the highly valuable “gut fat” being removed from the intestines.

5 Cooling— After slaughtering the carcasses need to cool for 24 to 48 hours before they could be butchered. In these integrated factories they were placed in vast warehouses.

6 Butchering— In local shops, skilled butchers did most of the meat cutting in the United States. But in order to speed up production and lower their labor costs, Cincinnati packers broke up each step in the meat cutting process to one action that could be easily learned, and completed over and over again.

7 Child Labor— There are a number of children in this image, and child labor was not uncommon in Cincinnati packing plants, and in the United States in general. Children began working on family farms

at a young age, and in cities, most working class children were also expected to work inside or outside of the house. Many children, like the ones pictured here, would begin working full time by age twelve or thirteen. Their wages contributed to the household income, and they were ideally gaining experience and apprenticing for a trade.

8 Segregation— Most of the workers in this image are white men, but Farny includes at least four who appear to be African American. This was not unusual, but Cincinnati’s packing plants, like most industries in the city, were rigidly segregated throughout the 19th century. White owners usually refused to hire black workers, and when they did, confined them to the most dangerous and dirtiest jobs.

9 Byproducts— In the 1820s, Cincinnati’s packers threw out what were considered waste products, such as extra fat, offal and even the spare ribs! But by the 1850s, they had uses for every part of the hog, and the fat from Cincinnati pigs was almost as valuable as the meat. There were different types of fat from each part of the pig, and it was processed into a variety of products.

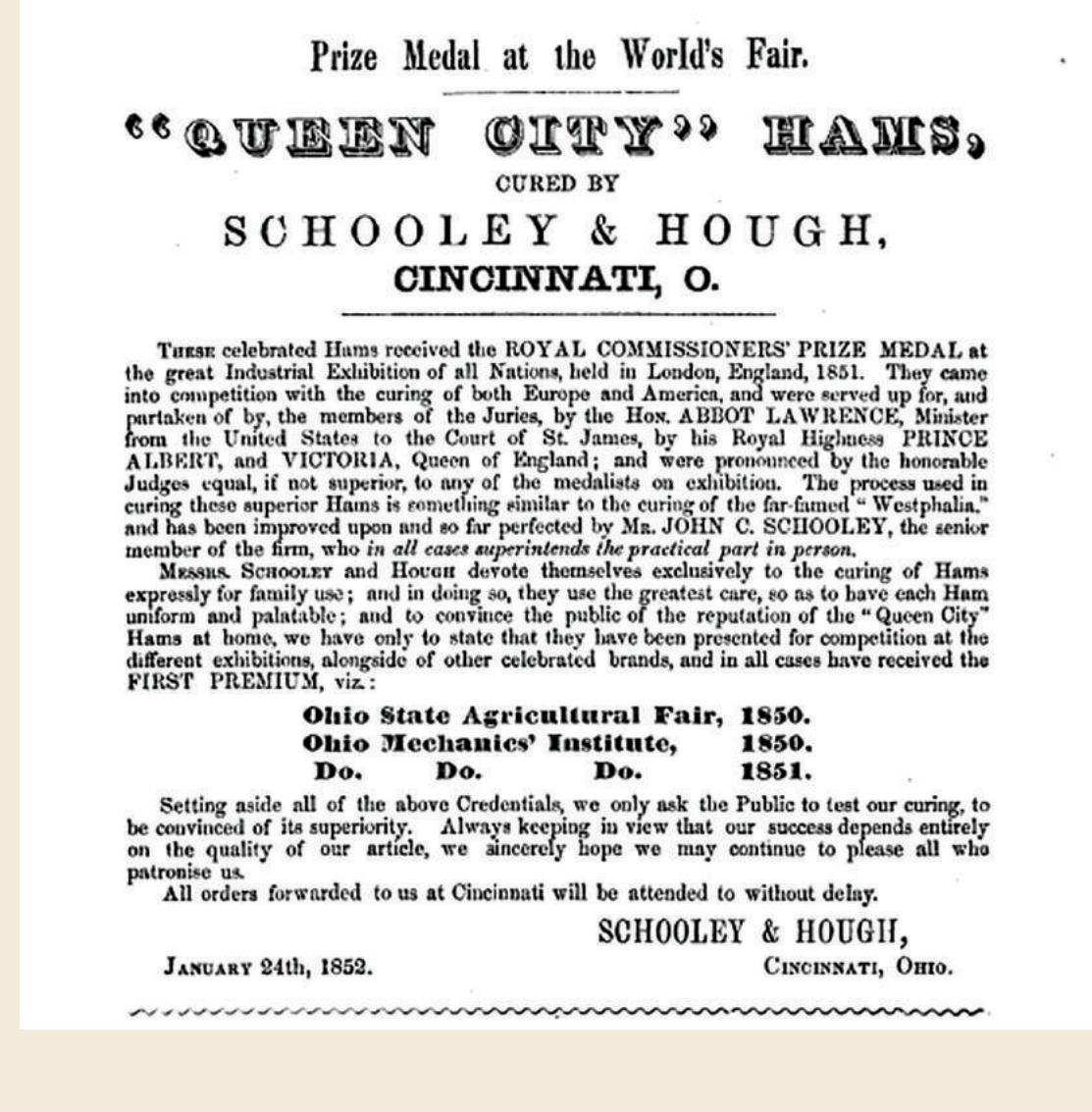
10 Steam Rendering— Fat was valuable because of steam rendering, which emerged in Cincinnati in the 1840s. Previously, most fat was rendered into lard through kettle boiling. But steam rendering, which is shown here, allowed for the production of a much higher grade of lard. Fat was dumped into the tank, and then high temperature steam was injected, which cooked the fats and separated them out, without causing them to break down.

11 Preservation— Since there was no refrigeration in the 19th century, all meat had to be eaten fresh, or preserved through a combination of smoking and salting. Since it was so fatty, pork was much easier to preserve (and tastier) than beef or chicken.

12 Salting— Cincinnati pork was preserved in a variety of ways, but salt was the primary ingredient in every method, because it pulls the moisture out of meat and this prevents bacteria from growing. This made salt an important commodity to 19th century meatpackers.



Products



Cincinnati firm of Schenck and Hough
boasts of the multiple prizes their hams have
won. From *A condensed history
of the origination rise, progress and comple-
tion of the “Great exhibition of the industry
of all nations,” held in the Crystal palace,
London, during the summer of the year 1851*
by D. Eldon Hall, 1852.

were bred specifically for lard production. Notice how much fatter and rounder this pig is than the its razorback forbears. Image courtesy of the University of South Florida.

Below- A whole pig with some common cuts. Graphic by Jamie Albert. Images from *Pork Packing* by Arthur William Goedert, 1932.

Every Cincinnati hog was butchered and packed into a variety of products. Although some were consumed in the city, most were intended for long-distance trade. Each market had particular cuts and products that they preferred to purchase from Cincinnati, depending on local tastes and needs.

Fresh Pork

Pork tenderloins, popular today because they are so lean, were actually the least marketable product for the packers. The lack of fat made them hard to preserve. They were usually sold directly to local butchers to be sold whole, or made into various sausages.

By the 1840s

reputation. The best hams were selected to be cured with a mixture of salt and sugar for up to a month, and then smoked. Cincinnati hams were a high-end product, usually sold to the best restaurants and hotels in Boston or New York. In 1851 the Cincinnati firm of Schooley and Hough won first prize at the Crystal Palace Exhibition in London, the first world's fair, for their "Queen City Hams."

Much like

butchered, sides of bacon would be cured through mixtures of salt and sugar, and then smoked and packed in huge barrels called “hogsheads” that weighed up to 800 pounds.

The majority of each
known as bulk or “b

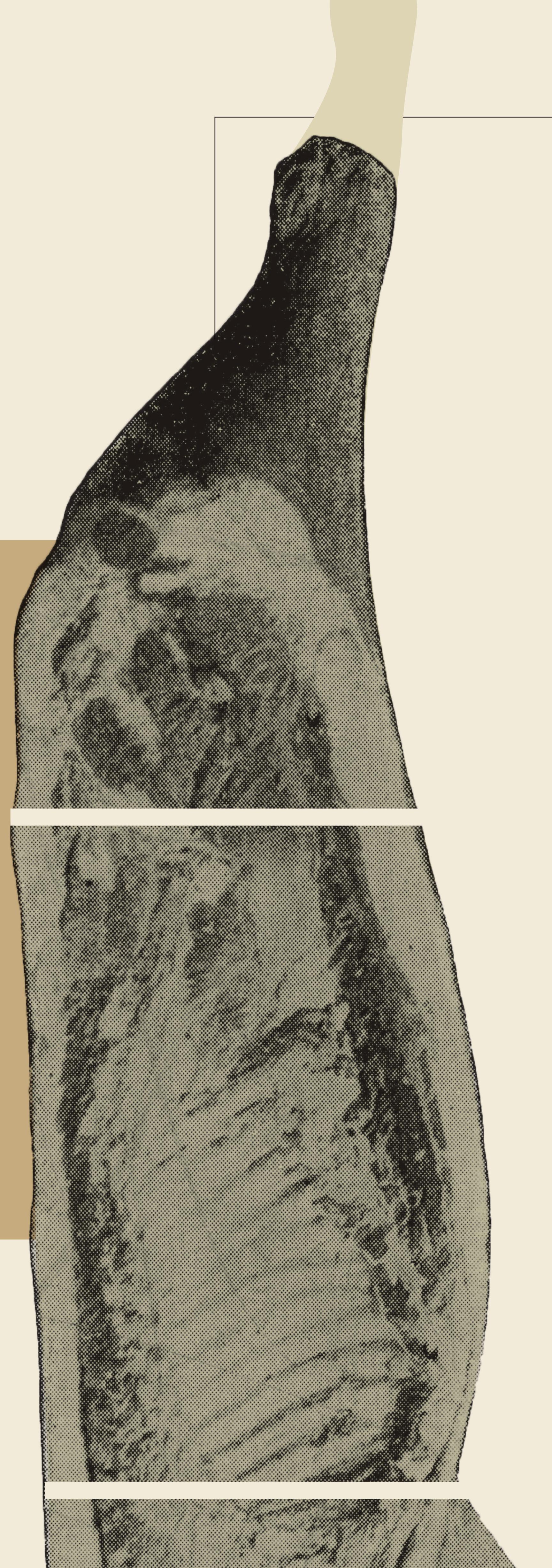
barrels with specific cuts of the hog that had been cured in a salt brine solution. In the early 1800s, some Cincinnati packers got the

reputation for selling barrels of rotten meat. This hurt long-distance sales, so the state legislature passed a series of laws in that required that each barrel be inspected and meet specific standards. Bulk pork was divided up into three categories:

- **Mess pork**- So named because it was usually purchased for the “mess” of a U.S. Naval vessel or merchant marine ship, mess pork had to be from large, corn-fattened hogs that weighed at least 250 pounds. These barrels contained sides of the hogs, with two shoulders.
 - **Clear pork**- Also called “clear mess” because it was the standard mess pork but with the ribs and backbone removed. This was the highest class of bulk pork, and was usually purchased by commercial fisherman from Massachusetts and other northeastern states. As journalist Charles Cist wrote “the New Englanders, in the line of pickled pork, buy nothing but the best.”
 - **Prime Pork**- This was the lowest grade, usually from smaller hogs of around 150 pounds. It included all of the least desirable cuts, such as legs, necks, jowls and heads. Most of this was shipped to what was known as the “southern market” to be used as rations on cotton plantations.

There w

into lard for cooking. During the 19th century, lard was especially popular for frying and baking. Much of Cincinnati's lard was also shipped to the Caribbean, where it was a popular butter substitute in countries like Cuba.



Leg H

- Leg Rump
Hock Leg
Leg Set



Belly

- Eye of Loin
Eye of Short Loin
Loin Back Ribs



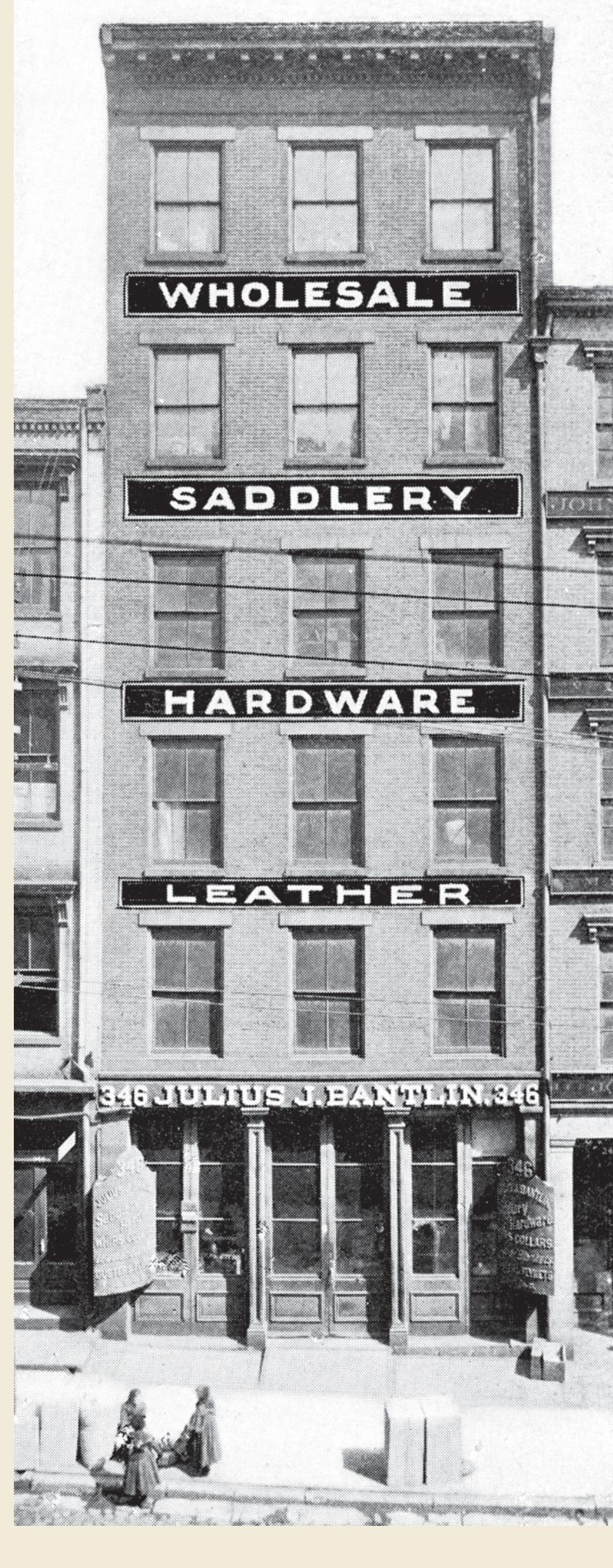
Should

- # Riblets Collar Butt Shoulder Picnic



Boneless Rolled Ham & Shoulder

Byproducts



Above—The Bantlin Saddlery, one of the many businesses that used byproducts from hog production. From *Illustrated Cincinnati* by Daniel J. Kenny, 1875. Image courtesy of Harvard University.

Top left—Pure lard from the Cincinnati Abattoir Company. Image courtesy of Liveauctioneers.com and Rich Penn Auctions.

Top right—Procter and Gamble originally called their stearine candles “Star Candles.” But eventually star candles became a generic name for all stearine candles. Image courtesy of Everything But the House.

Below left—Advertisements from Cincinnati soap and candle companies, from the 1840s. From *The Cincinnati Business Directory for the Year 1844*.

Below middle—Procter and Gamble was just one of many Cincinnati companies that used pork fats to produce soap and candles in the 1850s. But products like Ivory Soap would help make them one of America’s largest soap companies by the end of the century. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Below right—The oil warehouse of Cochran and Fearing, located on 9 West Second Street. From *Kenny’s Illustrated Cincinnati*, 1875. Image courtesy of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.

When bragging about the efficiency of their operations in the 1890s, Chicago’s meatpackers argued that they had figured out a way to wring profits from “everything but the squeal” of a pig. But those techniques, of processing and profiting from every part of a slaughtered pig’s anatomy, were pioneered and mastered in Cincinnati a generation before. By the 1850s, if Cincinnati’s packers were not processing and selling one part of the hog, there were factories in town that knew what to do with them.

Lard

Pig fat was big business in Cincinnati. Steam rendering could profitably render fat into a variety of highly marketable products. In some years, depending on the prices of lard versus pork, packers were processing up to seventy percent of their hogs into lard. This market actually drove the breeding practices, as farmers developed breeds that “fatten up” quickly on corn and thus produce a larger amount of higher quality lard. Pig fat was processed into a variety of products, but the primary ones were lard oil, candles and soap.

- **Lard oil** was processed from rendered lard where the solids had been removed. It was popular as an industrial lubricant, but was used most often for home illumination because it was long-lasting and clean burning.
- **Star candles** were made from stearine, which was separated out from fat during steam rendering. Star candles were much easier to produce than tallow candles (made from beef fat), and cleaner burning.
- **Soap** was also made from rendered lard and by the 1850s, Cincinnati firms such as Procter and Gamble were large, industrial concerns, producing a variety of high and lower grade soaps.

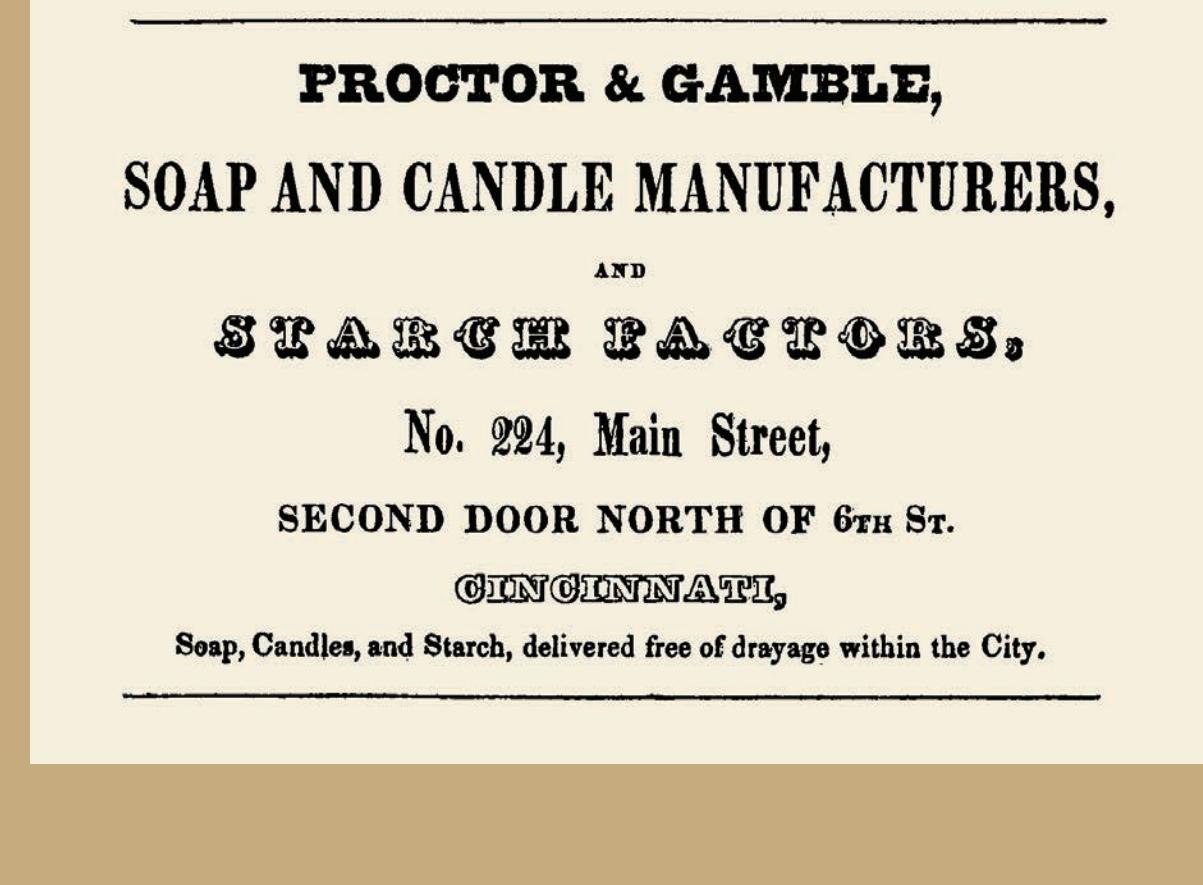
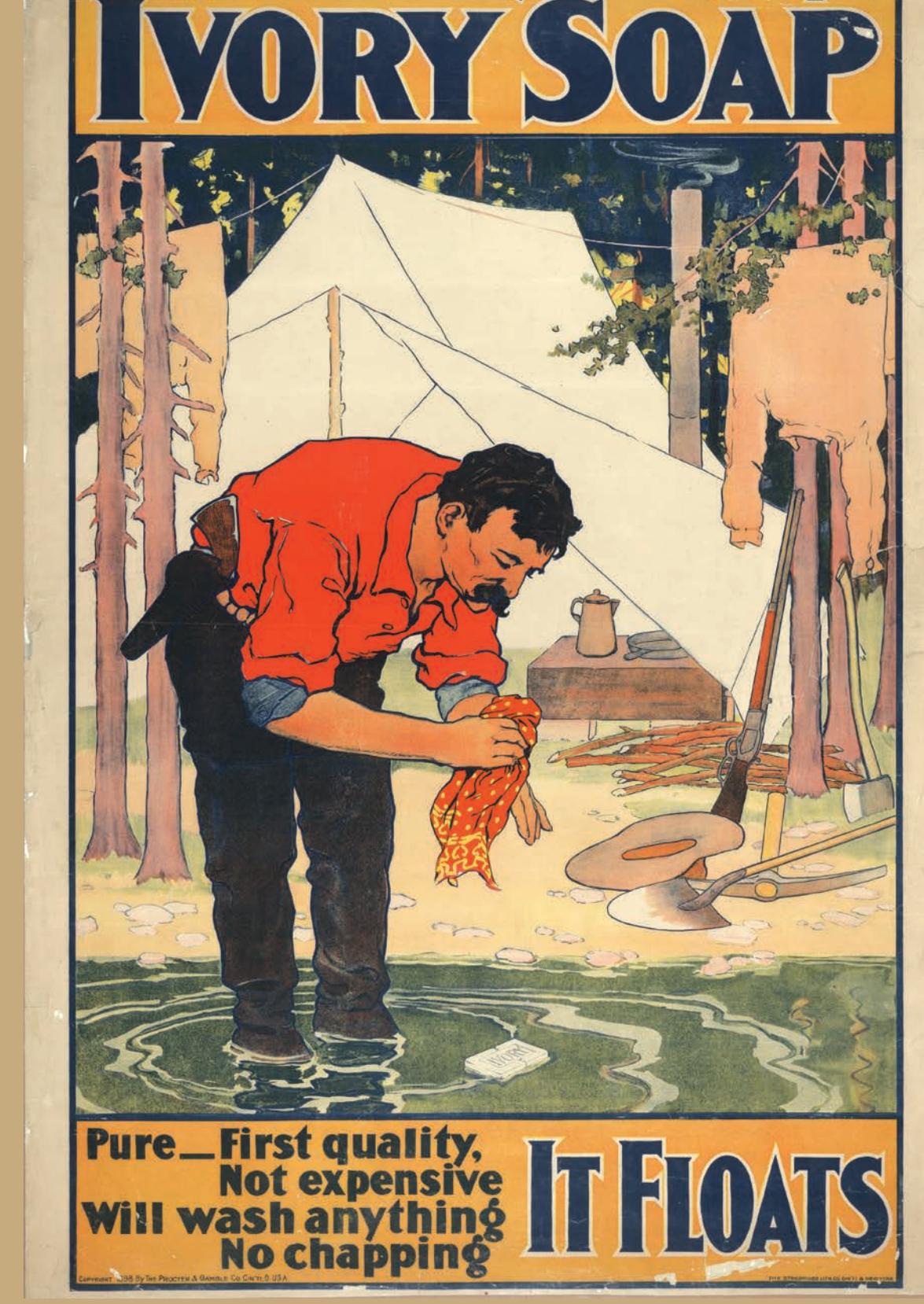
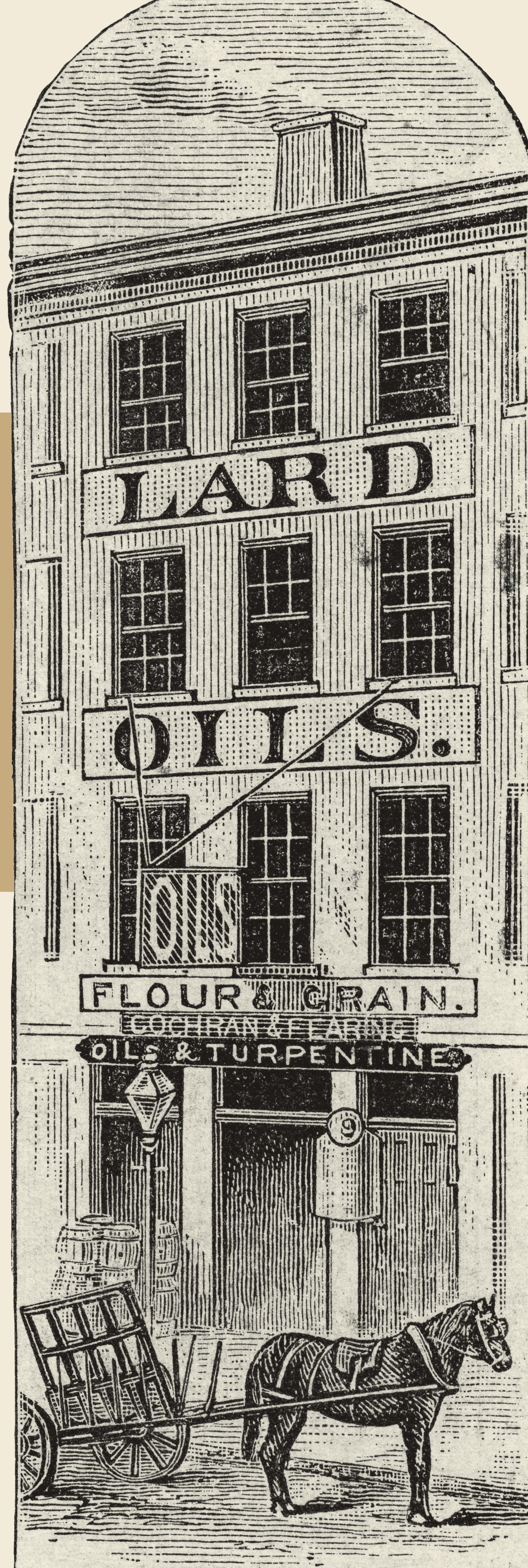


Bristles and Hair

The bristles and hair that were scraped from the hogs before butchering were used in a variety of products, especially for brushes. When cleaned they were also used as filler in mattresses and in furniture.

Blood and Bone

Many chemicals today are petrochemicals, produced from processed petroleum products. But in the 19th century, inks, dyes and other chemicals were produced from a variety of plant and animal products, including blood, bones and fat. Hog blood was a particularly important ingredient in Prussian Blue, which was a popular dye. Bones would be ground up for various other chemicals, as well as for fertilizer, and they could be shaped and shorn into buttons, comb handles, and other household items.



The Urban Environment



Above top—Most of Cincinnati's slaughterhouses clustered near the Deer Creek, which ran between Mt. Auburn and Mt. Adams. The mouth of the Deer Creek and a bridge over it, which drained into the Ohio River below Mt. Adams, is visible in this image from the Cincinnati Panorama of 1848. Image courtesy of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.

Above bottom—Although pigs received a lot of the blame for Cincinnati's unsanitary conditions, the main culprit was often the lack of a proper sewer system in a large and growing city. This image, from the Cincinnati Panorama of 1848, shows what is most probably runoff from a privy behind this building on Lawrence Street, right near the riverfront. These types of outhouse leaks were one of the main causes of disease outbreaks, such as cholera, during this period. Image courtesy of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.

Right top—From *Francis Trollope* by August Hervieu. Image courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.

Right bottom—From *Harriet Martineau* by Richard Evans. Image courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.

Below—Hogs in the streets of Cincinnati from *Harper's Weekly*, 1860. Image courtesy of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.

Pigs and pork packing shaped almost every aspect of life in Cincinnati during the 1800s, including the environment.

Many of the pollution problems were relative. Cincinnati could have a noxious smell, especially during packing season, when the transport, slaughter and processing of hogs spewed all sorts of odors. But this in itself was not unusual. Most 19th century cities would be offensive to our noses today. The two environmental problems both visitors and residents commented on at the time were the pollution of the Deer Creek, and the pigs running loose in the city.

The Deer Creek

For most of the antebellum period, Cincinnati's slaughterhouses were located on the east side of the city, along what was then known as the Deer Creek, a small stream. This location was not unusual. By custom and regulation, the noxious industries – slaughterhouses, tanneries, bone boilers – were expected to place themselves on the outskirts of town in most American cities, preferably near a stream, so that its natural flow could be used to flush pollution downriver. Because of these industrial uses, most Cincinnatians avoided living in the Deer Creek area, but some did not have a choice. The city's small African American population was usually confined to the areas of the city where rents were often low, which were usually areas with significant environmental hazards. This included "Little Africa," which was right along the river, and thus flooded frequently, and "Bucktown," which was centered around Broadway and Sixth Street, next to the Deer Creek, and just north of the city's cluster of slaughterhouses.

Pigs in the Street

Visitors to Cincinnati and new residents commented regularly on the presence of live hogs in Cincinnati's streets, complaining about how they ran wild, and seemed to run the city. But although Cincinnati did have a large population of urban hogs, this was not unusual for American cities. For a number of years, the city did not have a regular garbage collection service, and so residents were instructed to throw their household refuse in the middle of the street, so that it could be consumed by the pigs. Moreover, many residents still kept pigs in their yards or courtyards, or tended herds that roamed through the



"We found the brook we had to cross, at its foot, red with the stream from a pig slaughter-house; while our noses ... were greeted by odours that I will not describe and which I heartily hope my readers cannot imagine; our feet ... literally got entangled in pigs tails and jawbones and thus the prettiest walk in the neighbourhood was interdicted for ever."

— Francis Trollope, from *The Domestic Manners of the Americans*, 1832, describing crossing the Deer Creek on a day trip to Mt. Adams.



"We soon entered a somewhat different scene, passing the slaughter houses on Deer Creek, the place where more thousands of hogs in a year than I dare to specify are destined to breathe their last. Deer Creek, pretty as its name is, is little more than the channel through which their blood runs away."

— From Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel*, 1838

city. Accounts from many other American cities, from Columbus to New York City, contain descriptions of packs of pigs teeming throughout the streets.

Where Cincinnati was unusual was during the packing season. Until the 1850s, most pigs were driven into the city "on the hoof" and taken directly to the various slaughterhouses. Since the packing season only lasted about four months, this meant that during the late fall and winter, thousands of pigs a day would be winding their way through the Queen City on the way to their ultimate demise.

"Swine are here in abundance –

to be expected in this vast pork market. The beasts are impudent. They know enough to give way to a carriage, but as to a foot passenger he must always turn out; they won't budge an inch for a whole regiment and no one wishes to come in contact with their filthiness." — From the "Journal of Cyrus P. Bradley," 1835



Southern Ties



Above top—Cincinnati's wide and open public landing, which provided access for steam-boats and other vessels of all sizes, was a key part of the city's commercial success. Image courtesy of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.

Above bottom—In the 19th century the Ohio River would freeze over on a regular basis. This made it possible to walk across the river, but, most importantly, halted all travel and transport on the river. Image courtesy of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.

Right—Daniel Drake. From Charles Theodore Greve, *Centennial History of Cincinnati and Representative Citizens*, 1905.

Below left—Plantations on the Lower Mississippi River Valley were a prime market for Cincinnati's pork. This map shows the density of cotton (in blue and red) and sugar (in yellow and green) plantations in Mississippi and Louisiana. The plantations were long and narrow because space on the riverfront was so valuable. From Norman's Chart of the Lower Mississippi River. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress.

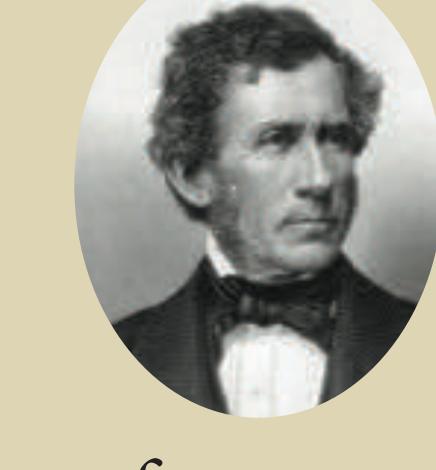
Below right—Front page of *Cotton is King, and Proslavery Arguments*. Image courtesy of John Hopkins University Libraries.

Almost all of the pork that was packed in Cincinnati was headed down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, to New Orleans. Here it would be reshipped all over the world, including to farms and plantations in every part of the American South. These ties between Cincinnati and the South were not just economic, but also social and cultural, and were also shaped by the physical environment, especially the Ohio and Mississippi rivers.

Free but Not Welcome

Slavery was illegal in Ohio in the decades before the American Civil War, but although free African Americans were allowed to settle in the state, they were not welcome, especially in southern Ohio. The Buckeye State had "Black Laws" that severely limited African American rights, and were designed to discourage black settlement. White Ohioans wanted Ohio to be for white men and their families. Moreover, they did not want to encourage fugitive slaves from the neighboring states of Kentucky and Virginia, who would compete with whites for jobs and land.

White Cincinnatians were also hostile to abolitionists. Many better off Cincinnatians made their fortunes from the "southern trade," selling their wares, including pork, to merchants and plantation owners in the South, and they worried that the city's abolitionists were straining their business relationship with the South. White workingmen were also worried that a loss of business could lead to a loss of jobs, but also that abolition would bring about an influx of African Americans to the city. These sentiments would spill into violence numerous times, including major riots by white Cincinnatians in 1836 and 1841. Much of this anger was directed towards abolitionists, but rioters also attacked black communities and businesses.



"The relations between the upper and lower Mississippi States, established by the collective waters of the whole valley, must for ever continue unchanged ... we must live in the bonds of companionship or imbrue our hands in each other's blood. We have no middle destiny. To secure the former to our posterity, we should begin while society is still tender and pliable."

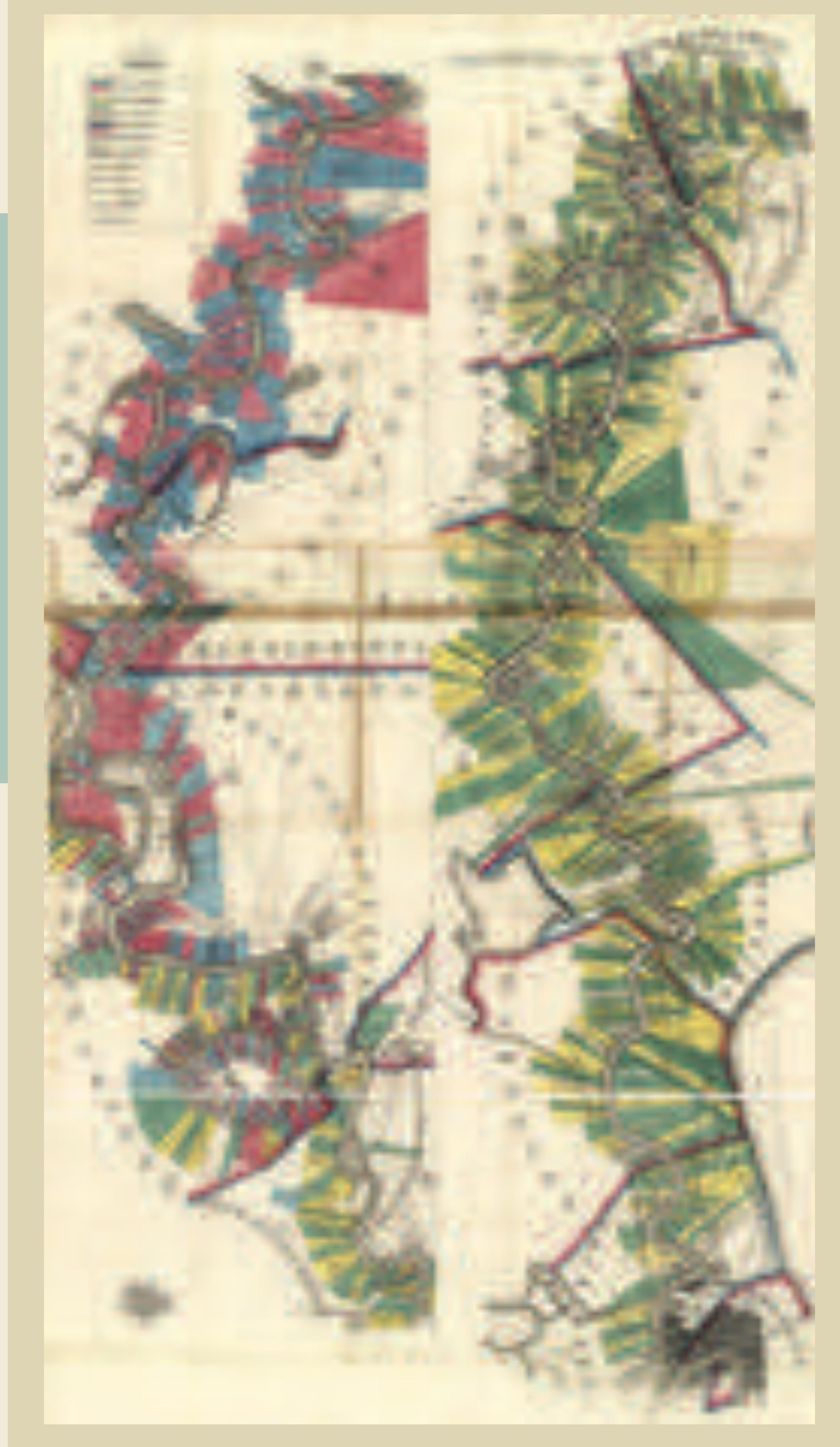
—From Daniel Drake, in a address to the Literary Society of Kentucky, quoted in Harriet Martineau, *A Retrospect of Western Travel*, 1838

Banking on the River

The key link between Cincinnati and the South was the Ohio River. But although the river was usually a conduit, every winter it was also a barrier. The need for cool temperatures limited the packing season to the winter months. But the same cold winds that stopped the growth of bacteria also brought shipping to a standstill. During the 19th century the Ohio River's flow would decrease significantly during the winter, virtually drying up in some spots. This low flow in turn made it much more likely the river would freeze. Almost all regular commerce would come to a standstill until the spring thaw and rains.

This meant that after the frenzy of killing, cutting and packing, there was a lot of waiting. Two-hundred pound barrels of salt pork, eight-hundred pound hogsheads of bacon, and boxes of gourmet hams all sat in warehouses for months. This was good for the meat, as aging only strengthens the flavor and intensity of salted pork. But for Cincinnati's merchants, those boxes and barrels meant accumulating debt and unrealized profits. In order to help bridge the months between packing and final sales, Cincinnati merchants needed ready access to credit, at easy terms, so they could purchase the hogs, pay their workers, and purchase supplies. This made banks key financial cogs in the pork-processing wheel, and Cincinnati one of the largest centers of banking west of the Appalachian Mountains.

Lower Mississippi River From Natchez to New Orleans



"From this view of the subject, it appears that slavery is not a self-sustaining system, independently remunerative; but that it attains its importance to the nation and to the world, by standing as an agency, intermediate, between the grain-growing States and our foreign commerce. As the distillers of the West transformed the surplus grain into whisky, that it might bear transport, so slavery takes the products of the North, and metamorphoses them into cotton, that they may bear export."

—David Christy, *Cotton is King*, 1860

Plantation Economies

Right – Once they harvested their cotton, planters wanted to get it to market as quickly as possible. Steamboats such as this one would have every inch of their decks covered with cotton bales. Image courtesy of the Spartanburg County Public Library.

Below top – By the 1850s the United States had a burgeoning textile industry, but the majority of cotton was shipped overseas, to be spun into thread and textiles in northern, the heart of the Industrial Revolution. Graphic by Jamie Albert, based on “Carte figurative et approximative des quantités de coton en laine importées en Europe en 1858 et en 1861” by Charles Minard, 1862.

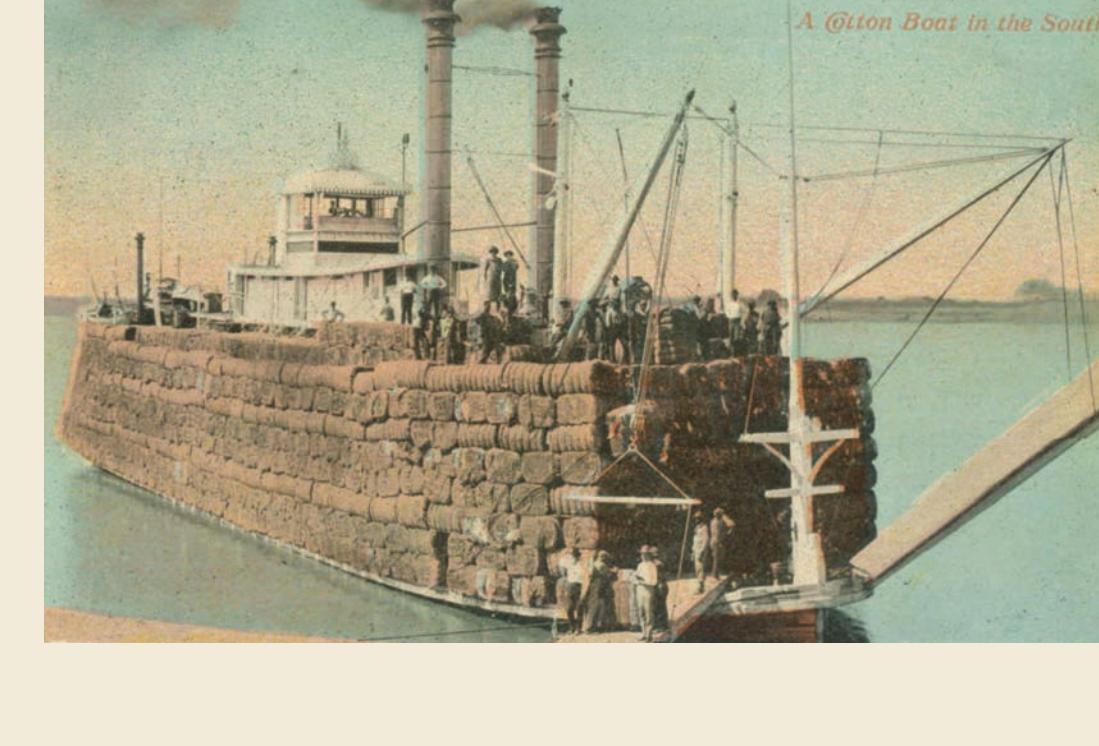
Below bottom – The New Orleans Levee, pictured here, was the destination not only for Cincinnati's pork products, but also for most of the cotton from the Mississippi River Valley. From here it would be re-shipped to factories in New England and to Europe. From *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 1860. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress.

One of the primary places that Cincinnati pork ended up was on the cotton plantations of the Lower Mississippi River Valley. It was an important food source for the enslaved laborers on these plantations, thus directly tying the Queen City to the most important, and controversial, aspect of the 19th century American economy.

Thirst for Land

The emergence of the cotton kingdom began in the 1790s, after the invention of the cotton gin made the production what was known as “short staple” cotton profitable. The South's first cotton boom was in the early 1800s, primarily in South Carolina, which led to a cotton fever throughout the South, and planters looked to the west to open up more lands to cotton production. One of the reasons they needed new land was that cotton rapidly exhausted nutrients from the soil, which meant yields would decrease significantly after a few years.

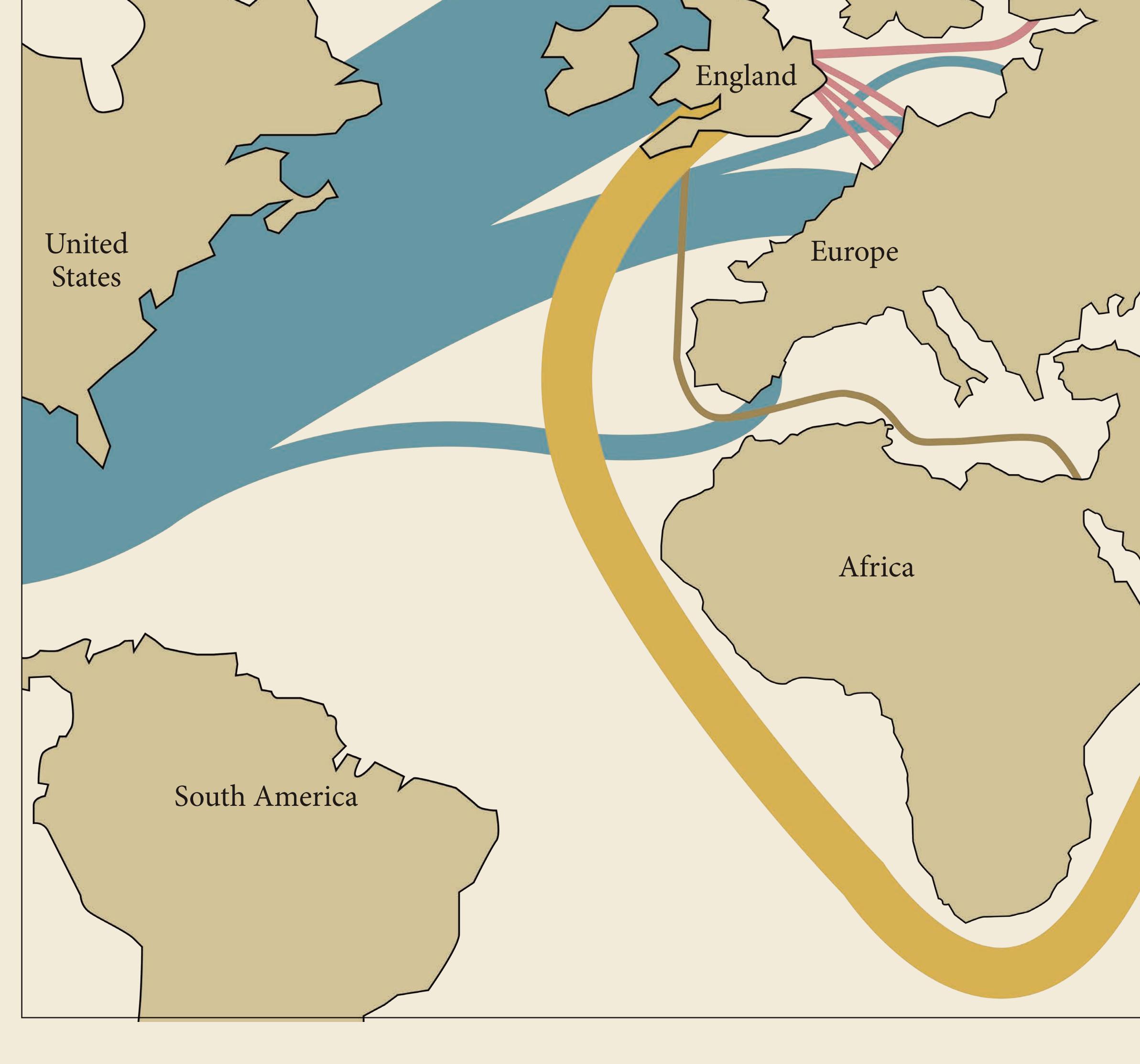
This thirst for land was what pushed westward expansion in the American South, and eventually led to the forced expulsion of Native American populations in the 1830s. Using the power of the federal government and the U.S. Army to relocate tens of thousands of Native Americans, Southern states opened up millions of acres to cotton production by 1840. Much of that land, in the Lower Mississippi River Valley, was some of the most fertile in the world. This region became the cutting edge of American capitalism in the 1840s and 1850s, as well financed planters developed massive plantations focused on cotton production.



Empire of Cotton

The cotton that was grown in the South was an extraordinarily valuable commodity that drove the global economy for decades. After leaving Southern ports, it made its way to the textile mills of New England in the United States, but most importantly to northern England, the center of the industrial revolution. According to British author Arthur Arnold, in 1860, Lancashire, the most important mill region, had approximately 2,600 cotton mills that employed almost 500,000 people. They processed almost 1.4 billion pounds of cotton per year in thread and fabric, and 80 percent of that cotton was grown in the American South.

The cotton economy was not just about the mills, however. It was also about the merchants who served as important middlemen at every stage of the process – the shipping companies that moved billions of pounds of cotton and finished textile goods across the globe every year; the banks that financed every transaction; and the insurance companies that guaranteed every transaction. Most importantly, it was about the enslaved persons on whose labor the whole system depended.



Cotton Exports to England and Europe, 1858

- [Blue square] from United States
- [Yellow square] from India
- [Brown square] from Egypt
- [Pink square] from Europe



Slavery in the Deep South



Above— Images of cotton picking from Mississippi, circa 1860s. From the Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs of the New York Public Library.

Right— Solomon Northrup, by Frederick M. Coffin. Image courtesy of Archive.org.

Below— The density of the residence of enslaved persons in the United States in 1860. Note how some of the highest densities are in the Lower Mississippi River Valley. From "Map showing the distribution of slaves in the Southern States," by Adolph von Steinwehr, circa 1860s. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress.

The enslavement of people of African descent is an American institution that went back to the first colonies. It was fully legal in every state at the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, and did not end until the passage of the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1865. Within this long history, slavery varied tremendously over time and place, but it was never more brutal, more single-mindedly focused on profit, than in the cotton growing regions of the American South during the 19th century.

Many of the stereotypes we have of American slavery come from the specific conditions of the cotton plantations in the Deep South. Enslaved people woke early in the morning, before the sunrise, to labor in the cotton fields. They primarily worked in gangs, with each person assigned to a row to plant, weed or pick cotton. The gangs were designed to control their labor, with an overseer pushing each enslaved person to work as fast as possible. They took only a few short breaks, eating their meals in the fields, and working until the sun went down.

"When a new hand, one unaccustomed to the business, is sent for the first time into the field, he is whipped up smartly, and made for that day to pick as fast as he can possibly. At night it is weighed, so that his capability in cotton picking is known. He must bring in the same weight each night following. If it falls short, it is considered evidence that he has been laggard, and a greater or less number of lashes is the penalty."

— Solomon Northrup from *Twelve Years a Slave*

The Pushing System

Cotton planters, especially in the Lower Mississippi Valley, were firmly committed capitalists, and worked to squeeze as much profit from their enslaved laborers as possible. One of the key ways they did this was with the "pushing" system. During picking season especially, each person was given a benchmark for how many pounds of cotton they needed to pick on a given day. If they passed the benchmark, that number was their new standard. If they did not, they would be whipped, often brutally and mercilessly. Enslaved people responded by developing personal techniques – picking with both hands, making all of their movements as smooth as possible – to pick as much cotton as they could, to avoid systematic torture. According to historian Edward Baptist, this system, built on violence, allowed cotton planters to increase productivity four hundred percent over the course of the 19th century.

All of this labor – ten to fourteen hour days, six to seven days a week – required a tremendous amount of energy. Enslaved persons probably burned up to 6,000 calories per day, which would ideally require a large and diverse diet. For decades many scholars assumed that planters would have an economic interest in keeping their slaves well-fed, and thus would provide them with plenty of food. But new research has shown that planters saw food as just another cost, and so they provided their enslaved laborers with enough food to survive, but rarely more.

Distribution of Enslaved Persons in the Southern States



Plantation Foodways

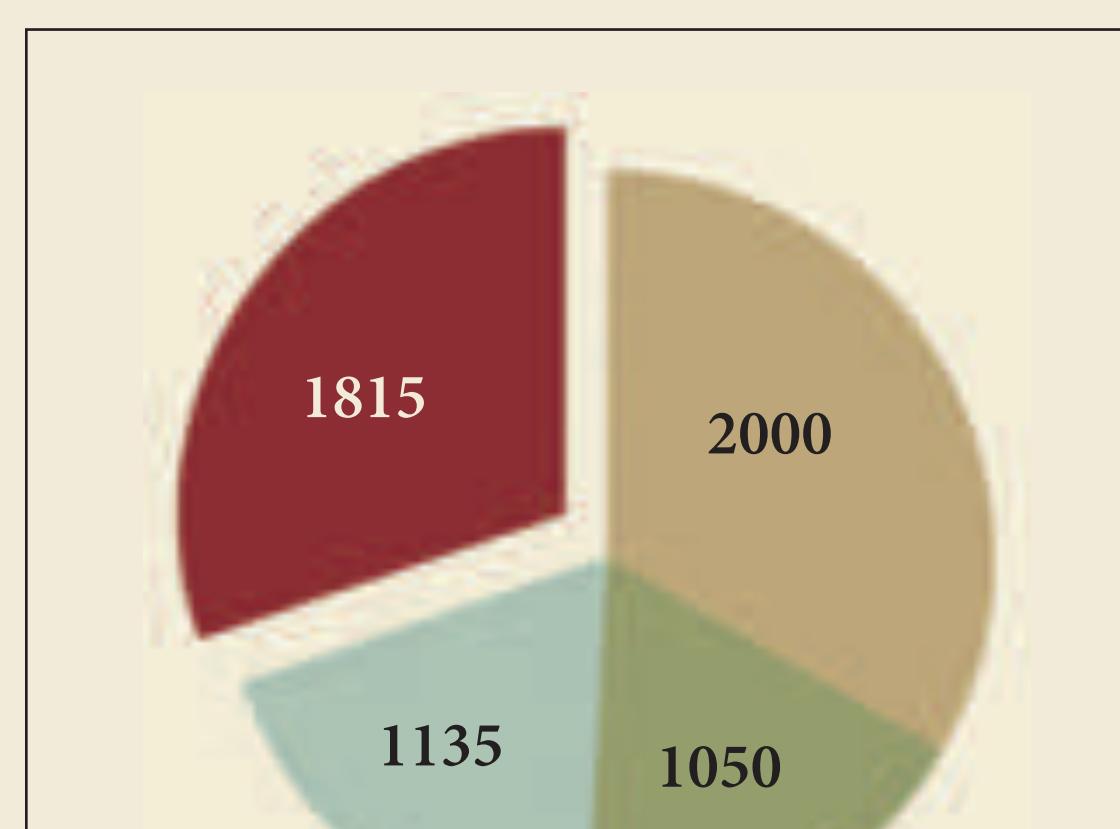


During the antebellum period, the rations that planters provided to their enslaved laborers were barely enough to survive, especially with the calorie demands of daily, backbreaking labor. So African Americans always supplemented their diets with additional foods.

Rations

Rations in Lower Mississippi River Valley cotton plantations were relatively standard: about a peck (two gallons) of corn meal, and three and a half pounds of salt pork per week, per adult, with less going to children and the elderly. The corn meal was usually cooked into corn bread, which could be eaten immediately or taken into the fields. The pork was the lowest grade of salted barrel pork, ironically called "prime." This included unwanted cuts such as jowls and necks, and very fatty pieces that today are often called "fatback." These pieces were mostly fat, with very little protein. Although high in calories, they had little nutritional value and were primarily used as a flavoring, and not as the main course.

Many plantations in the South were self-sufficient, with all food produced on the property over the course of the year. But in certain parts of the Deep South, planters were so focused on producing cotton that they were often times unable to grow enough food to supply yearly rations, and so had to purchase corn meal and pork from merchants. At various times during the 1840s and 1850s, as much as fifty percent of rations on plantations in Mississippi and Louisiana was procured from outside the region. This regularly included large barrels of pork that had been packed in Cincinnati, from hogs raised in the Ohio Valley.



Malnourishment:

The Average Enslaved Adult Needed 6,000 Calories / Day

Corn Rations	2000
Hunting, Fishing and Vegetable Gardens	1135
Pork Rations	1050
Deficiency	1815

Above top – Rations only provided basic sustenance for enslaved persons, so most had individual or family vegetable plots. Similar to this recreated plot at Colonial Williamsburg, they were generally small but tremendously important food sources. Image courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg.

Left – Henry Bibb, from a copper engraving by Patrick H. Reason. Image courtesy of the Bentley Historical Library.

Below – Rations of pork and corn meal were distributed to enslaved persons on a weekly or monthly basis. This illustration is a recreation of a ration day scene from Alabama in the 1850s. From *Harper's Weekly*, 1867.



"And yet if a slave presumed to take a little from the abundance which he had made by his own sweat and toil, to supply the demands of nature, to quiet the craving appetite which is sometimes almost irresistible, it is called stealing by slaveholders. But I did not regard it as stealing then, I do not regard it as such now. I hold that a slave has a moral right to eat drink and wear all that he needs, and that it would be a sin on his part to suffer and starve in a country where there is a plenty to eat and wear within his reach. I consider that I had a just right to what I took, because it was the labor of my own hands."

–Henry Bibb from *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave*

Hunting, Fishing and "Stealing"

Enslaved peoples supplemented their diet in a variety of ways. Most planters allowed vegetable gardens. These provided fresh produce such as peas, tomatoes, onions, cabbage, greens, potatoes, and okra a few months out of the year, but they had to be planted and tended on an enslaved person's own time, which was usually late in the evening, or on the weekends. Hunting and fishing for small game – raccoons, possums, birds and fish – was also common. All of these survival strategies depended on expert knowledge of the local environment, including soil conditions, climate and weather patterns, and the behavioral patterns of local animals.

The other way that enslaved persons supplemented their diet was by stealing from their masters. They did this by pilfering food from the main kitchen, raiding the ration shed (which was kept under lock and key) or sneaking out leftovers. Enslaved persons stole primarily because they were hungry, but they also did it as a form of resistance and rebellion. Most did not even consider it stealing, rightly seeing the planter's fine hams, cakes, and fresh fruits as products purchased with their forced labor.

Africa in America

Because rations included the cheapest, fattiest cuts of pork, they were usually used to season dishes, and not as a main course. Many of the dishes seasoned with pork were stewed vegetables, such as tomatoes, greens, or okra. These types of dishes have their origins in western Africa, where the food staples in this region were stewed vegetables, slow-cooked and then served over rice. Generations of enslaved persons brought this food and cooking knowledge with them to North America and adapted it to local ingredients and conditions.



The Ecology of Porkopolis

Right- The pork cutting room at Swift and Co. in Chicago, 1905. Although Chicago had far surpassed Cincinnati as the global capital of meatpacking, the packing process was very similar to what had been pioneered in Cincinnati more than fifty years before. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Below- "View of Cincinnati, the Queen City of the West." Image courtesy of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.

Further Reading

Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *Creatures of Empire: How Animals Transformed Early America* (2006)

Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (2014)

Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (2014)

William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (1991)

Stephen Canning Gordon, *The City as Porkopolis* (1981)

Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (2013)

Robert Leslie Jones, *History of Agriculture in Ohio to 1880* (1983)

Adrian Miller, *Soul Food: The Surprising Story of an American Cuisine, One Plate at a Time* (2013)

Frederick Douglass Opie, *Hog and Hominy: Soul Food From Africa to America* (2010)

Margaret Walsh, *The Rise of the Midwestern Meatpacking Industry* (1982)

The meat that was consumed by enslaved persons was only a percentage of the pork that was packed in Cincinnati every year. Millions of pounds also went to New England, the Caribbean and across the Atlantic, to Europe and Great Britain. Nevertheless, following this story helps us understand the key connections between Cincinnati and the rest of the global economy during this period. The energy from Cincinnati pork helped fuel millions of people across the world, including those who were enslaved.

These networks also brought about a tremendous environmental transformation. Southwest Ohio was cleared from a dense, temperate forest into an orderly grid of fields and hog farms. Cincinnati, a city of 160,000 by 1860, became the great metabolizer of these hogs, turning 400,000 of them a year into bacon, spare ribs, lard oil, brushes and dozens of other food and consumer products. Moreover, animals themselves were transformed. The demands of the market caused farmers to engineer a new type of pig. Instead of the tough, sinewy razorbacks of the colonial era, by the 1850s they had turned Miami Valley hogs into three-hundred pound, lard producing machines.

These types of networks and the environmental transformation they brought about are not just important historically. They also help us understand our contemporary environmental challenges, and how they are intertwined with social and economic issues. Much of our food today is produced far away from where we consume it, which has a significant environmental impact. Many of the other products we purchase – cars, refrigerators, shoes – are also manufactured in foreign countries. This not only increases the environmental impact of transportation, but often times the workers and residents of those foreign countries are subject to the largest burdens of the pollution and toxic waste caused by that manufacturing.

Credits

Robert Gioielli, Project Director and Historian

Jamie Albert, Graphic Designer

Julie Carpenter, Project Consultant

Kristen Fleming, Project Associate

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Patricia Van Skaik

Manager, History and Genealogy Department

Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County



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Porkopolis in the Windy City

In 1914, poet Carl Sandburg declared Chicago "hog butcher for the world." The Windy City had surpassed Cincinnati as the capital of American meat packing in the 1860s for a number of reasons, most having to do with railroads. The railroad helped packers overcome the limits of distance and the weather, and Chicago was well positioned to take advantage of the vast farms and cattle ranches of the plains states and the far west. But even though Chicago bested Cincinnati in scale, Porkopolis was arguably more innovative. Most of the technologies and practices of modern meatpacking that Chicago would become famous for – the disassembly line, the byproduct business – were pioneered and perfected in the Queen City.

