

Rosevale Packing Company

By Ken Coin

In 1916 Arthur “Del” Rose obtained the use of a slaughter house on “Bone Hill” (part of the Henry Webb farm) and butchered his first cow. From this small beginning, Mr. Rose, through hard work and wise investment, was able to expand his butchering operation into one of the largest in the state.

During the years following 1916 Mr. Rose acquired a log building on the Truesdale farm east of DeWitt where he raised and butchered hogs. At a later date he bought of Frank Rouse, a slaughter house situated on 90 acres further east of town.

He soon went into partnership with Fred Vail and as a team they operated a slaughtering, butchering, and delivery business throughout the DeWitt area.

In the early 1920’s they took on a third partner, Allen Howard. That decade saw a great expansion within the company. They opened many retail meat markets in central Michigan and also sold wholesale to large city distributors. By 1929, when Mr. Howard left the partnership, Rosevale had seventeen retail outlets in Michigan which included: DeWitt, St. Johns, Ionia, Alma, Ithaca, St. Louis, Midland, Flint, Howell, Brighton, Mason, Grand Ledge, Eaton Rapids, Hastings, and two in Lansing.

A major fire broke out at the packing plant on April 30, 1931, causing an estimated \$50,000 worth of damage. For a while it looked as though the company itself was ruined, but after securing the assistance of Woodruff Bros. Bank, Rosevale was able to rebuild a more modern and efficient packing plant and its production was greatly increased.

During the years of the Great Depression, Rosevale kept the economy of DeWitt going by offering its residents employment. There were few families in DeWitt that did not directly or indirectly rely on Rosevale for its livelihood. The company also offered area farmers a good market for their livestock.

Rosevale prided itself on the quality of its meats, especially sausages, and other meat byproducts. Its red, white, and blue lard pails, which ranged in sizes from three to fifty pounds, became common in most Michigan households.

Besides buying cattle, hogs, and lambs from area farmers, Rosevale also had company farms on which they raised and bred livestock. One such farm was the former Shavey (Schoewe) farm west of DeWitt which was managed by Leo Hanson for many years. Another farm was the former Gunnison farm east of DeWitt which was in later years subdivided by Del Rose’s son, Frank. John McCrum, a son-in-law of Del Rose, was employed by the company as a livestock buyer. He traveled throughout the West and Midwest purchasing cattle and hogs for breeding or slaughter.

Conflicts between the union and management continuously surfaced during the late 1940's and early 1950's. The demands of the union ultimately forced the owners to choose to shut down the plant permanently.

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