



Chicago Stockyards in 1866

Why did Cows go to Chicago??

In the middle of the 1800's, before cars and trucks, before McDonalds or Burger King, some farmers lived in Illinois and raised cows. The farmers raised the cows to provide meat for people in distant cities. When the cows were grown, the farmers herded them on horseback to a town called Chicago.

In Chicago, the cows were loaded onto trains and hauled to other cities for slaughter. Cows were shipped alive because refrigerators did not exist until the late 1800's. Animals had to be slaughtered in the town where they would be eaten. If cows were killed in Chicago, their meat would spoil before it arrived by train in a far away city like Boston or New York.

The beef cows in Chicago were held in pens until they could be loaded onto trains. The pens were owned by railroad companies. The cattle pen area was called the stockyard.