

The Saga of the Armour Family in Kansas City, 1870 - 1900

By Edwin D. Shutt

"Ambition coupled with energy is the driving force of mankind."

Philip Armour

It was in March of 1873 when I first met Mr. K. B. Armour. He was a tall well built young man still in his teens. A man named Sullivan who had worked in the Plankinton and Armour's packing house died a few weeks previous, leaving a wife and three children in poor circumstances. Young Armour was in search of the family to see if he could help them by giving employment to the children. The family had left west Kansas immediately after the death of the father and the neighbors referred Mr. Armour to me to learn where they had moved. They were staying with relatives a few miles out in Kansas. Mr. Armour seemed pleased when I informed him that the boy was old enough to work. He sent for the family, paid out of his own pocket, two months rent for a cottage for them near Santa Fe and Eighth Streets and left orders at a grocery store to supply them with provisions and to forward him the bill. The lad was put in the office of the packing house as an errand boy.

Mr. Armour supplied him with books and paid his tuition in a night school. Young Sullivan continued a protege of Mr. Armour, gradually advancing in position until in 1878 he left for New York with his family to receive a comfortable inheritance left by an uncle.¹

The Reverend William J. Dalton related this story in a *Kansas City Times* article shortly after the death of Kirkland B. Armour. A close family friend, he had witnessed the kindness and generosity of the Armour family for many years--as bankers, meatpackers, civic and social leaders, and philanthropists. The Armours were perhaps the most important and influential family in Kansas City, Missouri from 1870 until the turn of the century. Two brothers of the great Chicago meatpacker Philip Armour, Simeon Brooks Armour and Andrew Watson Armour, along with two nephews, Kirkland B. Armour and Charles W. Armour, came to the city and made a lasting contribution to its growth and development.

"There will be the future seat of the empire of the West," Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton stated in reference to the small town of Kansas City. Such optimism aside, Kansas City actually had a eluded future prior to and immediately after the Civil War. Glowing predictions

were also being made for several rival river towns in the area, such as St. Joseph, Atchison, Wyandotte, Leavenworth, and Quindaro. In 1843 Audubon convinced himself that St. Joseph, Missouri had the brightest future. Horace Greeley in 1859 was sure that it was the town of Wyandotte (part of present day Kansas City, Kansas). Many others favored Leavenworth, Kansas as the coming metropolis. An early official of the Territory of Kansas recalled having a visiting eastern capitalist admonish him on the likelihood of a railroad center being developed at the mouth of the Kansas and Missouri Rivers by replying:

My dear sir, I beg of you, for your sake, and that of your promising town, you will never again make your last observation to anyone else. I can excuse your enthusiasm but others may not. Your steam boats are here, you will have a good town, perhaps a respectable city, but never in your day or your children's will a railroad reach, much less go to the west of you.²

The railroads were coming, however, and soon. By the Civil War, railroads from the east had already linked Chicago, were rapidly expanding westward, and would reach all parts of the nation. Kansas City, Missouri's major rivals, by 1867, all seemed to be in better positions to secure a major railroad link. Several factors, however, resulted in the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad's decision to build a bridge over the Missouri River. The bridge and the resulting trunk line into the southwest was an effort to capitalize on the rising revenues of the cattle business. The Hannibal Bridge officially opened at Kansas City on Saturday, July 3, 1869, and it virtually assured that the city would become a major metropolitan center. The

urban historian Lawrence H. Larsen noted that "In a remarkable story, Kansas City partially by its own design, a bit of luck and some chicanery became a successful railroad center by spending, according to one estimate, only \$740,000 over a 15 year period on railroad projects. At the very least Kansas City business leaders received a fantastic return on their investment of time and money."³

During the 1870s and 80s, the Hannibal Bridge and the arrival of the railroad stimulated the greatest era of commercial growth in Kansas City, Missouri's history. By 1880 eleven railroads linked the city with other parts of the nation. The city's population grew dramatically from 4,418 in 1860 to 32,260 in 1870 and 55,785 by 1880.⁴ A final factor in this period of unprecedented growth was the establishment of a market where the drover with his millions of Texas longhorns could link with the northern cattle buyers and meatpackers.

The driving force behind the establishment of such a cattle market was L.V. Morse, Superintendent of the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad. Morse correctly theorized that thousands of western cattle (which their owners were unable to sell at the Kansas railhead towns) could be shipped eastward and marketed at Kansas City. In 1870, the Hannibal Railroad acquired five acres of land, had the site fenced in, and built eleven stock pens. The railroad incorporated the operation as the Kansas City Stockyards Company.⁵

A large one and one-half story building was erected as a Livestock Exchange Building near Twelfth and State Line. In 1872 the building was made two stories high. The first floor was divided into six enclosures where six commission firms had their first offices and quarters. In the fall of that same year five more commission firms arrived and the building was doubled in

size. In 1876, a brick building was erected at Sixteenth and State Line, and eventually this Exchange Building would contain 350 offices and cover three and a half acres of floor space.⁶

Second only to the railroads, perhaps, nothing was so important to the growth of the two Kansas Cities as the establishment of a great meatpacking center there. The arrival of Armour and other national packing interests between 1870 and 1900 dictated heavy outside capital investment in plants and land, and resulted in a large labor force being gainfully employed. During the Civil War, cattle had greatly multiplied on the Texas plains. The rapidly growing industrial population of the East and upper Mid-West created a market for these cattle. Joseph G. McCoy is often referred to as the father of the Kansas City livestock industry. In 1868 he was successful in establishing a railhead at Abilene, Kansas, and in the fall of that year the first shipment of Texas cattle passed through Kansas City—most of it on its way to the Chicago market.

Packing operations were established as early as 1858 by M. Diverly and by J.L. Mitchener in 1859. They were only small local efforts, though, and the Civil War brought the demise of their operations. *The Kansas City Daily Journal of Commerce* in 1866 noted however, that "The dozen railroads that will center here in the next five years will afford transportation facilities in every direction and the result will be that a number of packing houses will be built at this point."⁷

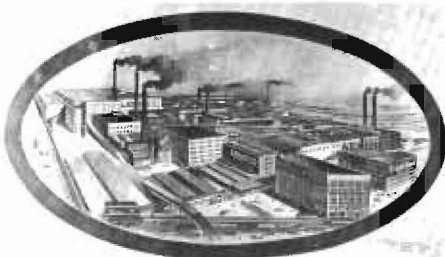
Two years later, E.W. Patterson, William Epperson and J.W. L. Slavens established a packing plant in Kansas City, Missouri, in a stone building that had a killing capacity of 250 cattle and 1,000 hogs. It was here that the first cattle and hogs were killed in Kansas City. That same year, Thomas J. Bigger rented what was later known as the Dubois hide house on

St. Louis Avenue, just west of Hickory Street, and packed hogs during the winter of 1868-69. During the following years he bought ground and built a house of his own on the Kansas side.⁸ This was the future site of the Fowler Packing Company. In 1869, Dr. F.B. Nofsinger of Indianapolis bought out the firm of Slavens, Epperson and Patterson. No less an authority than Joseph McCoy remarked that "It is enough to say that the location for packing houses could not be improved upon or surpassed in the West. This may be truthfully said as to the exact grounds upon which they are built, as well as the point in the West at which they are located."⁹

The decision of Plankinton and Armour to build a branch plant in Kansas City in 1870 was probably the most influential factor in the development of Kansas City's livestock and meatpacking industry. The tremendous success of the Armour family here in that first decade resulted in the establishment of plants by other major national packers. In 1880, the Anglo-American Packing Company, later reorganized as George Fowler and Son, began operations near the mouth of the Kansas River. That same year, Jacob Dold from Buffalo, New York, also built a plant. In 1884, Morris Butt and Company of St. Louis opened a plant in the town of Armourdale (after 1886 a part of Kansas City, Kansas). This was later the site, after 1893, of Schwarzschild and Sulzberger of New York. Thomas Wilson purchased this bankrupt firm in 1916 and renamed it Wilson and Company. In 1885, W.P. Allcutt and Sons began an independent operation. Two years later Kingan and Company located on the west bank of the Kaw (or Kansas) River; after 1900, this was the home of the Cudahy Packing Company. Swift and Company, a major rival of the Armours in Chicago, arrived in 1887, and in 1903, Morris and Company, also of Chicago, became the last of the major

firms to locate in Kansas City.¹⁰

Numerous smaller, local firms also operated and contributed significantly to the thriving economies of Kansas City, Missouri (Jackson County) and her sister city, Kansas City, Kansas (Wyandotte County). Kansas City, (referring to the twin cities), was in fact--for over seven decades--second only to Chicago as the largest livestock and meatpacking center. It should be noted that with the exception of Jacob Dold and Company, all of the major meatpackers and most of the minor firms were located in Kansas City, Kansas. Approximately two-thirds of the stockyards were also on the Kansas side. Kansas City, Kansas and Omaha were the only two cities to house the "Big Four"--Armour, Swift, Cudahy, and Wilson. Nelson Morris's firm has been included in what authorities in the industry later referred to as the "Big Five." Kansas City, Kansas alone had the distinction of being the home of these plants operating concurrently.



Plant of Armour Packing Co., Kansas City, U.S.A.

*Armour Packing Co. - Kansas City, Kansas
Courtesy of the Kansas City, Missouri Public
Library*

The Armour Packing Company, less than two decades after its founding, became one of the late nineteenth century giants of American industry. The Armour family, however, came from rather humble origins. The company founder, Philip D.

Armour, was born in Stockbridge (now Oneida), New York, on May 16, 1832. Five other sons and two daughters were born to Danford Armour and Julianna Brooks Armour. The family, of Scottish-Irish ancestry, was engaged in farming there. One son, Charles, was killed while serving with a Kansas regiment in Missouri during the Civil War. Philip Armour's four other brothers would be actively engaged in the operations of the Armour Company. These four brothers were Simeon Brooks, born February 1, 1828; Andrew Watson, born January 27, 1829; Herman Ossian Armour, born March 8, 1837; and Joseph Francis Armour, born August 29, 1841.¹¹ Andrew Watson and Simeon Brooks would organize and manage the Kansas City branch of the family business.

In 1852, at the age of twenty, Philip Armour left the Stockbridge farm and headed for the California gold fields. He journeyed to the wild frontier town of Independence, Missouri, which was near the fork of the Santa Fe and Oregon Trails. He joined an Oregon Trail caravan, securing employment as an oxen driver. While passing through the Missouri River west bottoms, he doubtless passed near the future site of his packing plant. In California, Armour primarily toiled as a ditch contractor supplying water for miners. His enterprise was a success and within five years he had accumulated the impressive sum of \$8,000.

In the meantime, younger brother Herman had moved to Milwaukee and started a grain and provision business there. Philip joined him in partnership in 1859. Three years later, Philip Armour was invited by John Plankinton, also of Milwaukee, to join his meatpacking company as a junior partner. In 1864, a New York branch to market their products in the East was organized under the leadership of Joseph Armour, and in 1867, the great Chicago plant was established in

conjunction with a grain commission business founded by Herman Armour in 1862.

Years later the early Kansas City meatpacker J.L. Mitchener told his version of how the Armour family came to Kansas City. He stated that in 1869 he had strongly advocated to Plankinton and Armour that they build yet another branch plant in his city. He claimed that Philip Armour had ridiculed the proposition. Nevertheless, Mitchener bought 7,000 head of Kansas cattle that year and persuaded them to take 3,000 of them. Plankinton and Armour then rented the packing house of Nofsinger and Company for the packing season of 1870-71. Mitchener claimed that the two partners netted \$200,000 profit on the cattle purchased from him.¹²

Mitchener's account concerning his role possibly was exaggerated. A more plausible explanation is that astute businessman Philip Armour recognized Kansas City's proximity to the Kansas railroad towns and their source of Texas cattle. Just as the Milwaukee and Chicago plants were in the heart of the nation's hog-growing region, so could a Kansas City branch be established to slaughter the Texas cattle brought up on the cattle trails.



Simeon Brooks Armour

From the Western History Manuscript Collection of the University of Missouri at Kansas City

Simeon Brooks Armour, with a nucleus of trained manpower, was sent to

Kansas City to oversee the new operation. The first season was a successful one, as 13,000 cattle and 15,000 hogs were slaughtered. The year before, only 4,420 cattle and 23,000 hogs had been slaughtered by the smaller packers. So successful were the initial efforts that the decision was made during the summer of 1871 to build a plant on the Kansas side near the confluence of the Kaw and Missouri Rivers.¹³ In 1871-72 the firm slaughtered 25,800 cattle and 30,000 hogs in the new plant. In 1873 the slaughtering capacity doubled. Three years later year-round packing was initiated through the installation of refrigerating equipment. "By 1878 the plant was roughly equivalent in both capacity and in output to the rest of the smaller firms combined."¹⁴

An anonymous contributor to the *United States Biographical Dictionary* provided this detailed account of his June 15, 1878 visit to the Kansas City, Kansas plant:

The perfect cleanliness of the whole establishment is one of its marked features; no offensive odor is perceptible, and the utmost order, regularity and system prevails. One walks for hours through these vast cellars, as through the galleries and chambers of some silent mine; door after door opens noiselessly as he approaches and closes as silently when he passes; around him lie masses of pork in layers of dry salt; occasionally in some gallery he meets a solitary barrow-man or stumbles on a group at work, until the eye, gradually accustomed to the darkness, expands and sees everywhere the same order, the same system, the same cleanliness; all so quietly managed

that when at last he emerges into day and recalls his subterranean journey he finds it impossible to realize that through these doors a ceaseless procession of pork has been passing at the rate of one hog a minute for every hour of the working day during the past twelve months.¹⁵

The visitor was also impressed by the extent of the firm's operations. The Armour plant covered an area of fifteen acres utilizing a labor force of over six hundred men. There were eleven smoke houses that could smoke a million pounds of pork per week. The rendering room had a capacity of fifteen million pounds of lard per year. Over two million board feet of lumber were required by the plant to make boxes in which to ship the salt and smoked bacon. The cooperage of the firm cost sixty thousand dollars a year. Pickling required three thousand tons of salt, six thousand tons of saltpeter, and a thousand tons of sugar per year. The visitor estimated that the value of the real estate and buildings alone was at least \$300,000. The firm paid \$110,000 per year in annual wages. "Nearly 810 carloads of material for curing and boxing meat, not including cooperage, lard cans or fuel, had been unloaded at the Company's docks during the year; and at least 4,000 carloads of livestock had been killed, packed and shipped during the same period. The writer found it 'impossible justly to estimate' the enormous value of this gigantic enterprise to the city."¹⁶

During the summer of 1882 two large, four-story warehouses were built and put in use for the fall slaughter. The packing plant now had the capacity to kill eight hundred hogs per hour. Eight hundred cattle could also be slaughtered daily. The plant packed 450,000 hogs and 35,000 head of cattle that year, and had a full-time work force of 1,000 men, whose weekly wages each

Monday night totaled from ten thousand dollars to thirteen thousand dollars. The neighboring Anglo-American Packing Company had a daily slaughtering and packing capacity of three thousand hogs, four hundred cattle and two hundred sheep, and the previous year did over seven million dollars worth of business. Another indicator of the rising impact of the livestock industry was the fact that in 1881 281,134 cattle, 1,015,447 hogs, 79,848 sheep, and 12,604 horses were brought into the Kansas City stockyards. It was estimated that the yards would handle half a million head of cattle and more than a million and a half head of hogs the next year.¹⁷

By 1890 Kansas City was the second largest meatpacking center in the United States. The Armour plant was the second largest one in the country. The buildings alone covered nine acres. The plant contained blacksmith shops, a laundry, and car and machine shops for the rebuilding and repairing of refrigerator cars. Two hundred fifty refrigerator cars were utilized for the shipment of dressed beef to different parts of the country. The firm averaged 415 carloads monthly with an average weight of 35,000 pounds per car. Seventeen large, heavy express wagons and forty-six horses were used for delivery to the home and shipping trade. Armour employed monthly an average of nineteen hundred men daily, exclusive of the clerical force and officials. The monthly payroll was approximately sixty-seven thousand dollars per month or around eight hundred thousand dollars yearly. The greatest day of killing, to that time, was 1,124 cattle, 6,800 hogs, and 1,900 sheep. From August 12, 1889 to August 12, 1890, however, the kill total increased to 208,139 cattle, 703,715 hogs, and 43,857 sheep.¹⁸

In 1890 the Doid Packing Company employed approximately fifteen hundred men, with a business of more than ten

million dollars annually. The plant covered an area of six acres with a killing capacity of 5,000 hogs, 2,000 cattle, and 1,000 sheep per day. The Fowler Packing Company was doing an export trade of more than five million dollars annually. The establishment of Swift and Company of Chicago in 1887 made the capacity for handling hogs and cattle in Kansas City unexcelled by any other meatpacking center in the nation.¹⁹

Likewise, Kansas City's stockyards industry had experienced tremendous growth. From 1871 through 1889 5,607,732 cattle, 4,569,529 hogs, 1,132,329 sheep, and 207,691 horses and mules had been received on 346,167 railroad cars. The largest receipts in one day were 11,233 cattle, 21,765 hogs, 6,033 sheep, and 730 horses and mules on 616 cars. The largest receipts for any single year were: cattle, 1,220,343 in 1889; hogs, 2,432,262 in 1887; 370,772 sheep in 1889; and 370,722 horses and mules, also in 1889. The value of stock received at the Kansas City stockyards in the previous nineteen years was estimated to be \$453,524,601.²⁰

"Begin work tomorrow and push it night and day." This was the telegram received by Simeon Brooks Armour in the early afternoon of May 26, 1892, from his brother in Chicago. Philip Armour had made the decision to erect the largest dressed beef plant in the world to operate in conjunction with his brother's already enormous operation. The Armour operation in Kansas City would have the capacity to slaughter 3,000 hogs, 3,000 cattle, and 4,000 sheep daily, and employ approximately 3,000 workers. The *Kansas City Star* newspaper stated that twelve hundred or more men would be employed in the construction of the new facilities. The principal buildings would be three in number, with the largest being 500 feet long by 175 feet wide, the second 150 feet long by 120 feet wide, and the third 120 feet long by 100 feet wide. Each building

would be 86 feet high (or the height of a seven story building), and their construction would require six million bricks and twelve million perch of stone. The new plant would do sixty to seventy million dollars worth of business annually. The slaughtering and packing departments would regularly employ two thousand men, and the box factories, copper shops and other associated departments an additional one thousand workers.²¹

The *Kansas City Times* newspaper reported that the \$750,000 site would be located to the north and northwest of the present firm. The newspaper estimated that an additional 18,000 cattle, 18,000 hogs, and 21,000 sheep would be slaughtered weekly. Livestock receipts would be increased by sixty thousand dollars per week. An annual business of seventy-five million dollars would be conducted yearly, enabling Kansas City's population to increase by twenty thousand people. Kansas City would be the packing center of the world. The newspaper stated that:

The many branches of trade which are but necessary adjuncts of the packing business are sure to be attracted by the immensity of the city's packing interests and the location in this city of immense tanneries, boot and shoe factories, box factories and cooper shops, is but a question of time.

It is probably the greatest event in the history of Kansas City and can not fail to attract the attention of the entire commercial world to the opportunities this city offers to the capitalist and manufacturers for the safe investment of their funds.²²

H.P. Child, Superintendent of the Kansas City Stockyards Company, said:

It means that Kansas City had been very carefully weighed in the balance with Omaha and has tipped the beam on her neighbor. Yes, there was a contest between Omaha and Kansas City for this new Armour plant. It matters not what the contest was. But it was sharp and decisive. Of course we won, for our town is far superior in point of location and facilities. Omaha is a strong healthy market and will always hold a nice line of business, but she sits on the edge while we are in the middle of the pan.²³



Andrew Watson Armour

From the Western History Manuscript Collection at the University of Missouri at Kansas City

Just two days after Philip Armour's dramatic announcement, tragedy struck the Armour family. On May 28, 1892, millionaire financier and packing house executive Andrew Watson Armour died suddenly of a stroke in Kansas City, Missouri, at the age of sixty-three. The last to leave the Stockbridge farm, he came to the city in September of 1878 and organized the Armour Brothers Banking Company. Its incorporators were Andrew Watson Armour, Simeon Brooks Armour, Kirkland B. Armour, Charles Watson Armour of Kansas City, Philip Armour and Joseph Francis Armour of Chicago,

Herman Ossian Armour of New York, and John Plankinton of Milwaukee. Kirkland and Charles Armour were the two young sons of Andrew Watson Armour. The bank's original officers included Andrew Watson Armour as president and Simeon Brooks Armour as vice-president. The bank was an immediate success, and by 1888 had a capital of \$250,000 and a surplus of \$500,000.²⁴ On January 2, 1888, the Armour Brothers Banking Company merged with the Midland National Bank. Andrew Watson Armour had served as president of the former during all the years of its existence, and after the merger, he was vice-president and a major stockholder in the Midland National Bank until his death. The former home of the old Armour Bank at Fifth and Delaware Streets became the home of the new institution. In July of 1897 the bank was absorbed by the National Bank of Commerce, now the Commerce Bank of Kansas City.²⁵

Typical of the way that financier Andrew Watson Armour conducted is the story of an easterner who had done business by mail but was not personally known at the Armour bank. He requested an interview with the banker. The visitor explained that he needed to get a check cashed for railroad fare. Mr. Armour, in reply, offered to cash a larger check but the man replied that he did not need it. Later Mr. Armour in recounting the story remarked "If he had jumped at the chance for the larger check, I would have doubted him....When he didn't, I believed he was all right. He was."²⁶

The *Kansas City Journal* newspaper in its obituary said:

For twelve years Mr. A.W. Armour has been intimately connected with the business interests of Kansas City. For

twelve years he has stood as an example of the prosperous, clear-headed, progressive man of affairs. For twelve years he has been known as a hard working, temperate, honest, generous man. But that is not all nor is it chief, in the estimate which his fellow men have placed upon him. During that twelve years he has been a kind hearted neighbor, a steadfast friend, a good husband. Mr. Armour is gone and he is mourned by every man and woman in Kansas City. It is not the millionaire, nor the banker, nor the public spirited business man who will be missed, so much as it is Mr. Armour, the neighbor, the friend, the good man, who had a kind word and a look of encouragement for all who came in contact with him. For such a man the mourning is sincere, because his death touches all with a sense of personal loss, much more acute than the feeling that the city has suffered by the departure of one of its commercial props.²⁷

Andrew Watson Armour's funeral was said to have been one of the largest in the early history of Kansas City, Missouri. Burial was in the Elmwood Cemetery where his son Kirkland had a family plot. He was survived by his wife and two sons. He left an estate estimated at over one million dollars. Prominent in civic affairs, he had been a member of the Commercial Club and a charter member of the Kansas City Club. He was not actively involved in the operation of the local packing plant, leaving that role to his two sons, Kirkland and Charles; he was, however, a major stockholder in the company.

Simeon Brooks Armour remained in

charge of the enlarged Armour facilities in Kansas City. Prior to coming to the city, he had been a farmer and a partner in a woolen mill at Stockbridge, New York. In Kansas City he was involved in many profitable business ventures. Following the organization of the Armour Brothers Banking Company, he served as its vice-president for eleven years. When the bank merged with the Midland National Bank he became its president. In 1890 he was one of the organizers and vice-president of the Interstate National Bank which was located in the Exchange Building in the stockyards. He served twice as vice-president of the Kansas City Stockyards Company, and was on the board of directors of the Union Stockyards Company of Denver, Colorado.²⁸ He and his brother Andrew Watson were among the incorporators of the Metropolitan Street Railway Company, which was organized on July 24, 1886. The company was capitalized at \$1,250,000 which purchased the Thomas Corrigan horse railway system. The Fifth, Twelfth and Eighteenth Street horse car lines were immediately converted into cable lines.²⁹ In February of 1890 he and his brother were also among the incorporators of the Kansas City and Missouri River Packet Company, with a paid-up capital of \$132,500. The company was organized with the purpose of navigating the Missouri River with commercial freight carriers. The company even built three boats for that purpose, although it ended operations a little more than four years later.³⁰

It was the Armour Packing Company, however, to which Simeon Brooks Armour devoted most of his energy and talents during a two-decade time span. He earned a reputation as a shrewd judge of cattle and men. Under his supervision, the Kansas City, Kansas plant was one of the largest and most efficient meatpacking plants in the country.

The story was told about Simeon

Armour and a watchman at his plant, which had a no smoking rule. One day Mr. Armour, with a lighted cigar in his mouth, met a watchman who did not recognize him. "Hey there," said the watchman, "don't you know better than to smoke here? Throw that cigar away."

Simeon Armour put away the cigar, walked into his office, and called in George Tourtelot, his plant manager. "George," he said, "I wish you would instruct the men to let me smoke in the building. I have to be here a great deal. I must smoke, but you can depend on it that I will be careful and not set fire to anything."

The plant manager was all for firing the insubordinate employee. "No, George," said Mr. Armour, "we will keep that man. That's a good man. He has the interest of the house at heart. We keep men like that. You just give them the instructions."³¹

In March of 1892, Mayor Benjamin Holmes named Armour to the first permanent Parks Board with August R. Meyer, silver baron and philanthropist, as its first president. For the next nine years Armour was reappointed. This was the beginning of the "City Beautiful" movement in the United States, promoting the idea that the large urban centers should not only be habitable and functional but also aesthetically pleasing as well. Kansas City, Missouri would be in the vanguard of this movement through the leadership of Meyer, Armour, and other members of the Parks Board and the community. *Kansas City Star* owner and dynamic civic leader William Rockhill Nelson was their leading spokesman.

Beginning in 1893 the brilliant young landscape architect George Kessler designed and developed a beautiful system of parks, boulevards and parkways. By 1900, 1,691 acres of parks and over 11 miles of boulevards had already been built.³² The one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Kansas City Board of

Parks and Recreational Commissioners will be celebrated in 1992. Year round activities are being planned to honor the legacy of those foresighted individuals at the turn of the century.

Simeon Brooks Armour died on March 29, 1899, at the age of seventy-one. When the news of his death spread across the city the flags on many prominent buildings were placed at half-mast. His desk at the packing house was draped in black. "The employees of the establishment, many of whom the deceased had known personally, men who had worked for Mr. Armour for many years were the ones who showed their feelings the most. There is hardly an employee of the packing house that is not indebted to him for more than one favor, and, on the other hand, there are several of the city's best known men who have been pulled through financial straits by the hands of the man who now lies dead in his home on Broadway."³³

Like his brother, Simeon Armour was buried in the Elmwood Cemetery. He was survived by his wife, the former Margaret E. Klock, whom he married in Oneida, New York in 1856. The Armours were childless, although Simeon Armour liked to remark that "I had all my children before I married, doing my share in helping to bring up my brothers and sisters."³⁴ He left his widow a huge estate variously estimated at between two and four million dollars. As a memorial to her husband, Margaret Armour donated forty thousand dollars to the Women's Christian Association to build a home for aged couples. The ground for the construction of the building at Twenty-Second Street and Tracy Avenue, was broken on May 28, 1904, when Mrs. Armour moved the first spadeful of earth. The facility was named the Margaret Klock Armour Memorial Home.³⁵ The Armour home, still in use today, is located at 8100 Wornall Road, Kansas City, Missouri.

Mrs. Armour devoted her later years

to charitable and philanthropic work, including the endowment of a chair of Biblical Instruction in Drury College, Springfield, Missouri. She died November 11, 1915, at the age of eighty.³⁶ Her estate was estimated at from one to two million dollars. Charity bequests were made to the Margaret Klock Armour Memorial Home, Drury College, and the Kidder Institute of Kidder, Missouri.³⁷



Kirkland B. Armour

From A Rancherman's Recollections by Frank Hasting

After the death of his uncle, Kirkland B. Armour became the president of the Kansas City branch of the Armour Packing Company. His brother Charles W. served in the capacity of vice-president. They were the sons of Andrew Watson Armour. Kirkland was born on April 6, 1854, in Stockbridge, New York. Kirk Armour, as he was called, came to Kansas City in 1872 at the tender age of eighteen. He joined his Uncle Simeon at the packing plant, starting at the lowest level and working his way up. He worked in all of the departments—shipping, purchasing, and killing and packing of the stock. His first official position was that of vice-president and general manager of the Kansas City plant.

Kirk Armour had other business interests as well. He was a director in the Kansas City Stockyards Company, the New England National Bank, and the Interstate National Bank. He was twice elected president of the National Association of

Hereford Breeders, despite a rule that a man may serve only one term.³⁸

Kirk Armour was also an internationally acclaimed Hereford breeder. Though his career in the Hereford field was brief, he was the most extensive importer of Herefords from England, the breed's homeland, in the history of American Herefords. His career as a breeder began through the efforts of his uncle, Philip Armour, who was a friend of C.M. Culbertson, one of the early breed leaders and improvers in America. Because of his advancing years, Culbertson asked Philip Armour to take his purebred cattle for slaughter. Mr. Armour exclaimed that it would be a shame to dispose of such quality stock in that manner. His nephew, Kirk, had a farm in Excelsior Springs, Missouri, near Kansas City, and perhaps he would be willing to purchase the Culbertson herd for a fair price.

Kirk Armour agreed to this proposal, and in 1891 the herd arrived at his farm. He took an immediate liking to the breed and resolved to significantly enlarge and strengthen the herd. He also decided to acquire a farm site nearer his home and his place of business. Thus he and his brother Charles bought a one-section farm, approximately six miles south of his home in Quality Hill and only a little farther from the packing plant. This farm site totaled approximately six hundred acres and was a few miles outside the city limits of Kansas City, Missouri. Today it comprises the Armour Hills and Armour Fields residential development and part of the exclusive Country Club Plaza shopping district of the city. Built in the late 1890s, the Armour farm house still stands at 6740 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Breeders and stockmen from all over the world came to the Armour farm. It was said that every rancher knew his name and trusted his advocacy of the Hereford's beef-producing superiority. "It was said of

Kirk Armour that he was better known personally among ranchmen than any other man not actually engaged in the range industry. His firm conviction was that the best results on the range could come only from the use of registered bulls, if not Herefords, then the best of some other breed.³⁹

Because of his ample financial means, Kirk Armour bought herd-improving stock both at home and abroad. His herd quickly became one of the largest in the Middle West and received a reputation enjoyed by few others in the history of the breed in America. Perhaps no individual gained such stature in such a brief period of time. He made two major acquisitions of cattle from the herd's homeland in England. The first shipment totaled 237 head and the second shipment 219 head. The latter herd was scheduled for arrival on his farm in the fall of 1901. Unfortunately, Kirk Armour died a premature and untimely death while his cattle were still in quarantine in Baltimore. His brother Charles, however, decided to carry on the Armour Hereford tradition. In 1903 he even made an additional purchase of 112 head of English Herefords. Together, the two brothers brought a total of 568 purebred Herefords over here from England. This number of Hereford purchases is unmatched by any other family in the history of this breed in America.⁴⁰

Armour chose not to show his Herefords at the various fairs. It is conceded, however, that his Herefords could have competed successfully with those of any other breeder. This is readily apparent in the fact that the sensational Hereford Prime Lad, owned by W.S. Van Natta and Sons of Indiana, exhibited at the senior and grand championships at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904, was a product of the Armour program. His sire, or father, bred by Armour, was a son of the Armour herd bull, Kansas Lad. His dam, or mother, was the English-bred cow, Primrose,

brought over by Kirk Armour from England.⁴¹

For his extraordinary contributions to the Hereford breed in America, Kirkland Armour was inducted into the Honor Gallery of the American Hereford Association's Hereford Heritage Hall, established in November 1980. In recognition of the Association's centennial, he was one of the first forty-nine personalities inducted into the Hall. Donald R. Orrduff is the author of a book on the Hereford Heritage Hall and its inductees. For over five decades he was on the staff of the *Hereford Journal*, retiring as its editor in 1970. He is an acknowledged authority on the history of Hereford cattle in America.⁴² He states in his book that:

This man's remarkable breed leadership was embraced wholeheartably (sic) by the Hereford fraternity and Kirk Armour was elected President of the Hereford Association in 1898 after only a few years of activity in the field. His term coincided with the planning and staging of the first National Hereford Show, predecessor of the American Royal Livestock Show, which was held at Kansas City in the fall of 1899....Incidentally, it was at this show that he first presented the handsome sterling silver Armour cup to the exhibitor of the sweepstakes winner of the event's bull division.

So successful in every sense was the initial Kansas City endeavor--to which Armour gave great personal leadership from both a community and industry viewpoint--that he was elected President of the breed association for a second term in 1899. His

untimely death in 1901 at the age of 47, cut short a career that in many ways seemed to have just begun.⁴³

After a two-year struggle with Bright's Disease (glandular kidney degeneration), complicated by a greatly weakened heart and a recent bout with pneumonia, Kirkland B. Armour passed away on September 21, 1901, at the relatively young age of forty-seven. Like his father and his uncle, he was interred in the family plot at the Elmwood Cemetery. He was survived by his wife, the former Anna P. Hearne of Wheeling, West Virginia, whom he had married on April 27, 1881. Kirkland Armour was also survived by two sons and a daughter--Andrew Watson, Laurance Hearne and Mary Augusta. A third son, Kirkland B. Jr., had died in infancy. Mr. Armour left an enormous estate of four million dollars to his family.⁴⁴

Kirkland Armour had been a leading figure in the Elmwood Cemetery's reorganization as a non-profit society. He also served as the cemetery's first president. "The year following his death, Mrs. Armour built a charming and lasting memorial to him there--a small Gothic-style chapel of rough native stone and timber, visible from the cemetery's main entrance. Inside, the tiny sanctuary was finished with solid oak pews seating eighty-five. From March 1904 when the first funeral was held there, the chapel was available for services. Now appropriately, an ecumenical Memorial Day service is held there each year. Both the chapel and the service are fitting, living tributes to Kirkland B. Armour who lies nearby."⁴⁵

When his brother's health began to fail, Charles Watson Armour began to take a more active part in the operation of the Kansas City plant, and in those final months actually ran it. The year 1901 also witnessed the passing of the last of the

original five brothers associated with the packing business. In that year, Philip Armour, the company founder, died in Chicago, and Herman O. Armour, for many years the firm's New York representative, died at Saratoga, New York. J. Ogden Armour, the son of Philip, inherited his father's vast fortunes and became president of the Armour Company. At the age of forty, Charles W. Armour became its vice-president.

Charles W. Armour, although associated with the company for years, was not as well known as his brother Kirkland, who said that his initials K.B. stood for "Keep Busy," and who always lived up to the title. During his early business career, however, he was connected with the Chicago branch of the business. Later he went to Europe and studied foreign methods so carefully that he greatly increased Armour's export trade.⁴⁶

Mr. Armour had other business interests in Kansas City as well. He was a director in the New England National Bank. The Armour family owned much of the stock of the Metropolitan Street Railway Company from the time of its organization, and also in the Kansas City Railways Company, its successor. Charles Armour served as president of the latter company from 1921 until 1924 when he resigned because of ill health. He was one of the founders of the Kansas City Country Club and served as one of its first presidents. He was also president of the Hospital and Health Board for two terms. During World War I he was chairman of the Kansas City War Camp Environs Committee. His zeal on behalf of war sufferers was recognized in a decoration from King Albert of Belgium.⁴⁷

Like Kirkland, he was greatly interested in Hereford breeding and, as mentioned earlier, was a partner in his brother's Hereford farm. On April 21, 1908, however, 229 acres of the Armour

land holdings were sold to J.C. Nichols and the Nichols syndicate for seventy-five thousand dollars for residential development. On the Kansas side, this would be developed into the very exclusive Mission Hills neighborhood. Over the next fifteen years Nichols and his backers purchased from the Armours the eight hundred acres of what was once Kirk Armour's great Hereford breeding farm.⁴⁸

Charles Watson Armour died on March 22, 1927, at the age of sixty-nine. He, too, was buried in the Elmwood Cemetery. He was survived by his widow, the former Rebecca Camp of Lyons, New York, whom he married in 1893. She was the second wife of the packing house executive. His first wife, the former Annie Magic of Milwaukee, had passed away in 1889. No children were born of either union. The value of the Charles Armour estate was placed at one million dollars in real estate and one million dollars in personal assets.⁴⁹ Mrs. Charles Watson Armour passed away in the family home on October 18, 1929 at the age of sixty-three. Charles Watson Armour's death was a milestone in that he was the last of the Armours to live in Kansas City and be associated with the Armour Company.

Laurance Hearne Armour, Jr. of Pierce, Texas, the grandson of Kirkland B. Armour, recently sent this researcher information concerning his family:

When Kirkland Armour died of Bright's Disease at the early age of 48 in 1901, he left two sons, my uncle, A. Watson Armour II, and my father Laurance H. Armour. Both boys were still minors and in school. Although he was to die shortly thereafter, Philip D. Armour--decided that the Armour Packing Company should be merged into Armour and Company, since Charles

Armour, for reasons unknown to me did not wish to run the former and the two boys were too young to take over.

After A. Watson Armour II graduated from Phillips Academy Andover, he was told to move to Chicago to work at the headquarters of Armour and Company by J. Odgen Armour--after completing his education at St. Pauls School, Laurance H. Armour was also summoned to Chicago. Watson had married and in 1911 my father married Lacy Withers of Kansas City. Her grandfather was the legendary Abel Head 'Shanghai' Pierce, who is recognized as one of the original cattle kings of Texas. From that time on all the Armours lived in Chicago, and later in Lake Forest, Illinois.

Armour and Company became a public corporation in 1923. Although they were not direct descendants of Philip D. Armour, my uncle, A. Watson Armour II, and my father Laurance H. Armour, were directors of Armour and Company until my father's death on December 29, 1952, and my uncle's death in November of 1953. They were the last Armours to be connected in any way with Armour and Company.⁵⁰

With the passage of time, the huge, ornate Armour family mansions also left the Kansas City, Missouri scene. Andrew Watson Armour's home stood at 1216 Broadway. It was torn down and in 1909, the Gayete Theater, a burlesque house and later a popular night club, opened on its

site. The theater was itself torn down in the 1940s to make way for an expansion of the Muehlebach Hotel. The first of the Armour mansions in Kansas City was that of Simeon Brooks Armour. It stood at 1216 Broadway and was torn down in the early 1920s. On this site the Commonwealth Hotel was built in 1925. Later called the Kansas Citian, it was demolished in the 1970s and the site is now a parking lot. After the death of her husband, Mrs. Simeon B. Armour built a mansion at 4420 Warwick Boulevard that was later occupied by the Kansas City Conservatory of Music. On the southwest corner of Walnut Street and Armour Boulevard, Charles W. Armour built a home that was razed many years ago.

Kirkland Armour built a home in 1884 in Quality Hill on a lot given to him by his father. The house was located at 1017 Pennsylvania Avenue. It became a boarding house and was razed in the late 1950s. In 1893, Kirkland Armour left Quality Hill and built a \$125,000 mansion at 24 East Armour Boulevard, only a block or so east of his brother's home.⁵¹ The Kirkland Armour home was razed in 1930 and the site was later occupied by the Amoco Oil Company.

During the 1950s and 60s Kansas City began a slow but steady decline as a great meatpacking center. By 1976 all of the "Big Four" had left Kansas City. Armour began phasing out operations in 1965 and closed its Kansas City plant in 1967. Rising labor and transportation costs were mostly to blame. It was the trend then, as well as now, to build smaller, more efficient plants in towns near the grain- and livestock-producing areas. The era of the great meatpacking families with their huge plants employing thousands of people had come to an end.

After the turn of the century, the public perception of these great meatpacking companies drastically changed. The Sherman Anti-Trust Act and other federal regulations would break up "The Beef Trust" of Armour and the other major packers. The publication in 1906 of Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle*—about the Chicago meatpackers—shocked and enraged the American public. The Armour Company slogan "Meats for the World" took on a more sinister meaning in the eyes of many. Sinclair's novel became synonymous with the rapid rise of socialism and the labor movement in the early part of this century.

From the 1880s until 1900, the meatpacking industry was probably the most strife-ridden industry in the country. Though Kansas City did not experience the tragedy of Chicago's Haymarket Square Riot in May of 1886, it certainly had its share of labor unrest. In the early 1890s, Armour brought in Slavic immigrants from south and central Europe as strikebreakers. Most of these workers lived in an area known as "the Patch" around the Armour plant. Not as notorious as Chicago's "Back of the Yards" area, it was nonetheless a crowded and congested neighborhood. For the most part, "the Patch" was wiped out in the 1903 flood, and the workers and their families relocated on higher ground in other parts of Kansas City, Kansas.

Many of these events, though, happened well after the passing of Andrew Watson, Simeon, and Kirkland Armour. The reputations of these men remain, generally, unblemished. The Armours from 1870 to 1900 were arguably the most important and influential family in Kansas City. No statues and only a couple of street names commemorate their memory. Yet their deeds live on, and in a sense, their lasting legacy is the two Kansas Cities.

ENDNOTES

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