

The Black's Meat Market

Notes written by Ada Black Huyck Mead - June 1996

During the depression of 1932-33, my father took a load of fat hogs to Detroit market to sell. He got just six cents a pound for them. I can remember he came home and said "we can't sell anymore at that price, we've got to do something different." Well he did. He started butchering hogs himself and then we set up a place in our back room in our MT. Hope Rd farmhouse. There he cut those hogs all into chunks and it was ground up. He got a recipe for making sausage from M.S.C. and made the ground meat into sausage. We would package it in one pound packages on Friday and then on Saturday, then Daddy would take Jean and I, and the sausage into East Lansing and we went "door to door" selling it 2 pounds for twenty five cents. I can't remember how many months we did that but our customers were always waiting and willing to buy that delicious fresh sausage. [I have never been able to find a sausage, seasoned as well anywhere since.] Soon the customers started asking for pork chops, pork roasts, and other cuts. So, Daddy decided we needed to have more facilities to handle the trade. So he rented a very small building in Okemos that was once a barbershop. That is where this advertisement was run.

He soon started going to cattle markets and buying fat steers and heifers so he could sell beef products also. It was in this little market that Mama was working one day alone, when a man came in and wanted to buy a whole round steak. She couldn't lift the hind quarter of beef herself so she told him if he'd get it on the butcher block, she'd cut him a steak. That is what they did. He was shocked that a little lady like my mother could do that.

Daddy outgrew that tiny store and moved down the street to a much bigger building and there he was either with a grocery store operator or he started handling some groceries, I'm not quite sure how that happened. The next move was to East Lansing near the corner of Grand River and Abbott Rd. in a bigger store. I know he handled groceries there, and as his business grew, and he needed to go to Charlotte on Monday nights and also on Thursday nights to the Cattle markets, he decided he'd have to have help with all the butchering. This is when he found Julius Fishler, who had been raised in Benton Harbor, the son of a butcher. Julius was at M.S.C. studying to be a veterinarian and needed the extra work to put himself through School. So,

Julius, and later his brother Bernie, did the major part of the butchering for Daddy. I do remember on several occasions helping Daddy myself, butcher and dress out hogs on Sunday afternoon when he needed extra for Monday. He had learned to cure the side, hams, and shoulders, then he built a smokehouse and made all our own smoked meats. He also hired butcher to work in the market and that was when Ray Pillar, a student at M.S.C. , became a part of our enterprise. He was a very fine meat cutter and it was he who rolled the first turkey. He took it to the meat Lab at M.S.C. and showed them how to do it.

Speaking of Turkeys, Daddy talked Jean and I into raising turkeys for our 4-H Club summer projects and that is what we did so we'd have fresh, home-grown turkeys to sell in the market at Thanksgiving time. That is another story in itself. We also bought and sold fresh chickens. Jean and I both learned how to kill and dress turkeys and chickens.

From that store, we moved to a building closer to M.S.C. Street, in part of the Hicks Realty building. In the back of that building we had the first food locker plant to rent to customers. They were drawers that pushed into this large freezer unit. They rented for fifteen dollars a month, I believe. Daddy sold a lot of meat to the special sorority houses of East Lansing.

Then WWII came with the rationing of meat and foods. Daddy had had a heart attack and they finally decided to go out of the meat market business and just move the locker plant to a new cement block building on the far at MT Hope. A story Mother often told. Was the sign "Black's Market" hung over the front. One day she was working near the road and some people stopped and one person said to the other, "My, they have their nerve advertising their Black Market." [A thing that was run during the war by people to get more rationed products.] I believe it was about 1943 or 44 that the locker plant was closed and in 1946 the building was made over for a little house for Mama and Daddy.[Ada's memories]]]
