



Slaughter Of The Billions

In 1846 Abraham R. Beck saw one of the last great flights of the passenger pigeon. He described it as a dense mass covering the sky a mile wide and extending from horizon to horizon. Flying at a speed of sixty miles an hour, and more, it took the flock three hours to pass over Lititz. His accurate account of seeing more than two billion pigeons on this April day is valuable in the literature of American Ornithology. James K

Miksch was one of the gunners out that day and bagged about twelve of them. The passenger pigeons were the dumbest, messiest and most destructive birds ever encountered. But they were beautiful. If you fancy pastels, they were the most gorgeous thing we ever had around. Their size was about half again the size of our mourning doves. William Penn was astounded at the flight of wild pigeons and

for the next 150 years every spring the heavens would be made purple with their pilgrimage to hatching places in the north. No other bird ever appeared in America in such colossal numbers. They ate everything in sight when they landed, including insects. Audubon estimated it required nine million bushels of food a day to feed one flock. They were a curse to the settlers who were unfortunate enough to have them

light on their farms. When they approached, everyone turned out with guns and noise makers to chase off the "Witte Douwa", but the birds paid no heed and cleaned up everything, including trees. If the season was too late for replanting, the farmers suffered a real hardship.

When these birds landed their weight was so great that two-foot trees would often be broken down. Fortunately they were a dainty fare and had a delicious flavor, whether boiled, baked or fried and everybody ate them. The Indians had long been using

their fat for both a lard and butter.

The birds knew no fear and all that was necessary was to go out with clubs and gather them up in huge quantities. The going price was 1c each to the city markets, but there was often a surplus that was fed to the hogs. Then, about a century ago, the professional pigeoners found it was much easier to go to the nesting places and steal the young from their nests. A better price could be had for squabs and they would make as much as \$40 a day while they followed (Continued on Page 22)

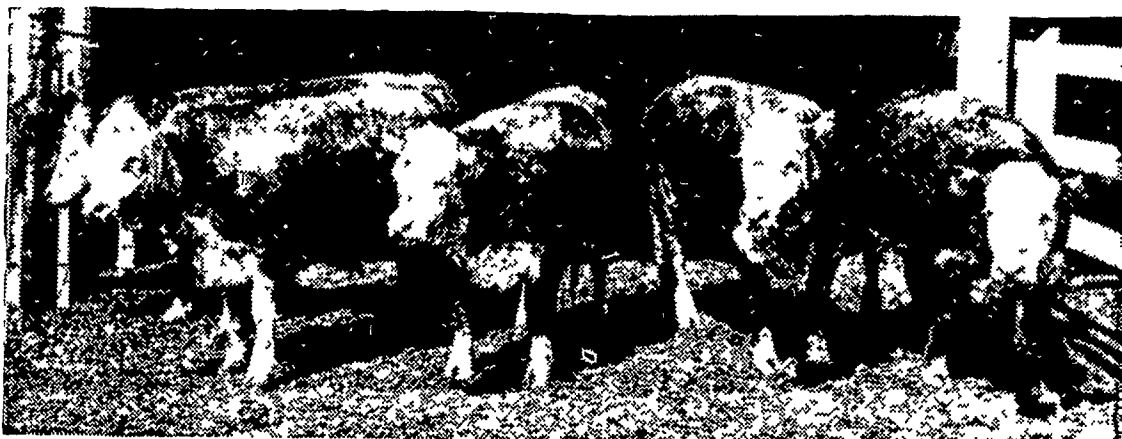


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