

MACLEAN'S REPORTS

**ADVENTURES IN  
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How several  
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HARRY BRUCK | AUGUST 24 1963

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JOHN LAUN, Ivan Domazlicky, Juan Domalicki and Juan Domalique are all names used, at one time or another, in one country or another, by a man whose bearing and broad smile suggest so much financial competence that many people just can't help investing in him. He was John Laun in Canada and it was under this name that he engineered an armchair-farming enterprise outside Toronto called Piggyland Paradise. Piggyland, it turns out, was one of Canada's most farcical, costly and occasionally gruesome business adventures. It happened in 1962 but some of the hangovers are clearing up only now.

## SOUTH AMERICA LOST ITS CHARM

Laun was Ivan Domazlicky in 1947 when he arrived in Venezuela from Europe and confided to the woman who became his quickly disillusioned wife that during the war he'd been a friend of Heinrich Himmler and a career prison-camp informer. Domazlicky said he was a Czech and carried a French passport, but then he also said he was single

when in fact, somewhere in his earlier years, lay two undivorced wives. He was Juan Domalicki when he started a food-distributing firm that took four years to go bankrupt and he was Juan Domalique when he showed up in Bogota, Colombia. He stayed there, peddling what he billed as a stunning discovery in chocolate milk, until a business partner asked unfriendly questions about 25,000 pesos he'd let Domalique have. Domalique became John Laun of Dresden, Germany, and with his newworld wife he left for Canada. That was in 1952. Ten years later, he deserted Canada, his wife, two daughters and hundreds of petty investors who had sunk \$1.8 million in Piggyland Paradise.

The postscript to the Piggyland adventure occurred only a few weeks ago. At Piggyland itself, a little emporium of pigpens, picnic grounds and buildings fifty miles northeast of Toronto, several hundred people attended a bankruptcy sale. The event was well advertised and somehow it was appropriate that pickpockets adroitly worked the scene; they were sure that anyone who had any thing to do

with Piggyland would be easy pickings indeed.

Piggyland wasn't Laun's first Canadian enterprise. He'd also run a firm that sold magnifying plastic. It went bankrupt. He'd named himself president of something called Canadian Inventive and Scientific Associates and claimed to own the Canadian rights to a paint that hid things from radar beams. He couldn't discuss it freely. Security, you know.

But the paint and the plastic were crude compared to the Piggyland scheme. It worked like this: for \$100, plus \$45 for feed, the investor got the joy of owning his own pig. He didn't have to clean pig houses or fill troughs; he was a farmer, right in his own living room. On weekends, the armchair farmers — there were about 1,100 of them — could drive out to affable John Laun's Piggyland to see what they believed to be their own pigs (the pigs had nametags on their ears). "It was like parents visiting a boy at camp," says an exPiggyland worker. Laun had a swimming pool, dance floor, restaurant, barbershop quartet and kiddies' playground to amuse pig-owning families and sometimes he'd give the children ice cream. His firm, Algo (Associated Livestock Growers of Ontario) Sunderland Ltd., got the litters and the investor was supposed to get a forty percent profit. To participate in all this, it helped to speak a European language;

Laun advertised exclusively in the foreign-language press and most of Piggyland's victims were new Canadians. Most were also strictly one-pig buyers, though there was a man in Cleveland who put \$60,000 into Piggyland pigs, a West German who was in for \$27,000 and a widow who invested all she had, \$10,000.

Laun had plans to start new Piggylands in San Diego and in Germany. Early last year he collected \$25,000 of the firm's money and Piggyland's house mother, a good-looking woman named Use Thummel, and started out on a business trip to Germany. According to one story, he and Use were last seen heading for Mexico in a chauffeur-driven car. Laun left, in addition to the piggyland above ground, a five-room bomb shelter that held two hundred cases of canned food, \$3,000 worth of liquor and a twenty-five-foot house-trailer. He may have been carrying a revolver which, according to a Piggyland guard, he wore in a shoulder holster and liked to show off occasionally.

Laun never came back. A few weeks after he left, Piggyland was declared bankrupt. It had taken in \$1,875,250.32 and it owed \$1,613,259.39. William Curran, of Dunwoodco Ltd., trustees in bankruptcy,

estimated that the amateur pig-owners might get back ten percent of their money.

## TO A CITY MAN, PIGS ARE JUST PIGS

At \$100 each, 18,000 pigs should have been living at Piggyland. In fact, there were at the outside only 2,500. On busy Sundays somebody at Piggyland was miraculously dexterous at shuffling nametags. The pig-owners didn't know how many other pigs there were: they were city people. "Show them fifteen hundred sows and they think they've seen a million," says Peter Beekman, a German farmer who quit Piggyland when he began to see what Laun was doing. Piggyland was hardly a paradise for the pigs. They were jammed unmercifully into unheated houses. Many died

of cold or disease. Once, 864 pigs died in eighteen days. Piggyland shoveled hundreds of piglets into shallow graves. The place was, Beekman says, "a concentration camp for pigs."

Nobody in Canada knows exactly where John Laun is now but he's probably in West Germany. Only a month before Piggyland was declared bankrupt an ad appeared in a Frankfurt newspaper: "Sit home and

