

## To Market with Hogs

In the spring of 1837 Joel Bailey came to Iowa, working as a government surveyor in the south half of Delaware County and parts of Dubuque and Buchanan counties. That fall he returned to Wisconsin, where he had been surveying, but came back the next spring, accompanied by John and Cyrus Keeler of Delaware County, New York, and built a cabin on the Maquoketa River at the spot since known as Bailey's Ford. There he raised wheat and corn, which he had to take to Dubuque to be ground.

It was not long before these early settlers decided it was more practicable to raise hogs than to haul the corn so far, especially since the market for corn meal was limited and uncertain. Moreover, the woods were full of acorns, nuts, and other good hog feed. The disposal of the surplus swine for cash, however, was about as difficult as peddling flour and meal.

In the fall of 1842, David Lowry, in charge of the Winnebago Indian mission near Fort Atkinson, advertised for fifteen thousand pounds of pork to supply his charges for the winter. Bailey and Keeler had enough hogs to produce that amount of pork and they decided to bid. At the mission, more than fifty miles away, Keeler found competitors, equally anxious to

sell their hogs. Each one put in a bid to sell for \$2.25 per hundred pounds dressed. Keeler then reduced his offer to \$2.00 and started for home, discouraged. On the way, however, he was told by a man who was familiar with the mission-school contract biddings that he would have to come down to \$1.75 if he expected to dispose of his hogs. This seemed much like giving them away, but winter was approaching, when the hogs would no longer be able to feed themselves on "mast" in the woods, so he decided to reduce his bid to \$1.75.

The mails were not regular in those days, letters being sent by any one who happened to be going in the right direction, and the answer to this bid came about a week later, when a man who lived near Marion, stopped at Bailey's Ford with a notice that the bid of \$1.75 had been accepted and that the pork must be delivered by Christmas day. Keeler and Bailey hesitated about accepting the contract on these terms, but when the messenger offered them five dollars for the contract they concluded that if he could afford to do it perhaps they could make a little profit also.

Preparations were made as rapidly as possible. As they would be several days on the road it was necessary to take corn for the hogs and oxen, blankets and the articles needed for killing, scalding, and dressing a large drove of hogs. James Kibbee, William Padelford, and Lucius Vandever were induced to join them and

furnish extra teams and much-needed help in driving the hogs.

The start was made on the seventeenth of December. The weather was cold and the snow knee-deep. Seven yoke of oxen, hitched to the three sleds, went ahead to break a road for the swine. If any one doubts the labor and vexation of this trip let him drive one unruly hog one mile in deep snow and then consider the task of driving a drove of one hundred twenty-five over fifty miles. It took eight days to reach the mission, and every night but one was spent out in the open.

It was Christmas day when they reached the mission where they received a joyous welcome. The weary travellers had no time to rest, but began butchering immediately. The weather was bitterly cold and they had to work on the open prairie, without protection from the wind, though the fires for heating water afforded some comfort when they could avail themselves of it. Five short winter days were required to kill, scrape, and dress the swine at the rate of twenty-five a day.

They started for home on New Year's Day, camping on the banks of the Little Turkey River the first night with the hope of reaching Beatty's cabin on the Volga, twenty miles away, the next day. During the night a furious snowstorm from the southeast began. They realized the danger of starting across the prairie where there was no protection from the storm and no

landmarks visible because of the driving snow, but their food supply was exhausted, so they struggled on. About noon, the storm became so violent that they lost their way and were forced to turn back, arriving about nightfall at the campground they had left in the morning.

All that night the storm raged, but at dawn the men resolutely set out again through the whirling snow, feeling that their only hope was to reach the Volga timber that night. The weather was warmer and their boots and clothing were soon soaked. Rubber footwear was unknown and the coarse leather boots of that time were not waterproof unless freshly coated with tallow. The snow was from two to four feet deep, which made it necessary for the men to take turns going ahead of the oxen to wallow a track for them.

About ten o'clock the snow ceased falling, the wind shifted suddenly to the northwest, and the temperature fell rapidly. As their clothing was soaked they were in great danger of freezing to death. The deep snow, constantly drifting in the strong wind, made progress very slow. About noon, they caught a glimpse of the Volga timber in the distance, but the early dusk of a short winter day found them still miles away from the sheltering forest. Since it would have been folly to push on after dark they were forced to spend the night on the open prairie, exposed to the bitter wind.

As experienced pioneers they knew their danger and

did all they could for safety. Their largest sled was about ten feet long and had a box on it two boards high. By shoveling the snow from a small spot beside it, as it rested high on the deep snow, the top of it was about as high as their heads, thus giving them a slight shelter with a comparatively hard surface for stamping their feet. They tried to build a fire, using another sled box as fuel, but matches and ammunition were too wet to ignite, and their fingers were too numb to use flint and steel. They had been without food for twenty-four hours. Thoroughly exhausted from struggling through the deep snow all day, sleep was sorely tempting, but sleep meant death. They wrapped their blankets around them and stood huddled together, stamping to keep up the circulation in their feet and talking steadily to prevent any one from falling to sleep undiscovered in the darkness.

Joel Bailey, whose story of this dreadful experience has been handed down to posterity, said many years later, "The fearful horrors of that terrible night are as vividly impressed upon my memory as if they occurred but yesterday. We had to watch for each other's voices. If we failed to hear one, we hunted about in the dark, until we found him leaning against the sled, and started him going again. It seemed as if the day would never dawn."

At daylight another start was made and about noon they reached the Volga River and obtained water to

satisfy the intense thirst of the men and their patient oxen. The Beatty cabin was three miles farther and they knew they must get to it that day or perish. Weak with hunger and exhaustion they staggered on through the deep snow, their frozen feet obeying their stubborn determination with difficulty. They were almost past caring whether they lived or died.

About half a mile from the cabin they were encouraged by finding a track which enabled them to reach the cabin just before darkness caught them. There they found three storm-bound men en route to the mission and fort with two loads of butter, eggs, and poultry. Drawing on the loads of provisions for extra supplies, one of them prepared supper while the others attended to the needs of Bailey's party. With haste they cut the stiff and icy boots from their frozen feet, which were then plunged into tubs of cold water. As their feet thawed the men tried to relieve the pain by pouring whiskey and hot water down their throats. Mr. Bailey said afterwards, "That whiskey had been bought of an Indian trader who had thoroughly reduced it to increase the quantity before selling it to the Indians," otherwise it would have killed them all. Meanwhile great kettles of turnips had been put to boil. As soon as the frost was out of their feet and they had broken their forty-eight hour fast with a good warm supper, their feet were done up in turnip poultices and they fell asleep in spite of the pain.

It was weeks before Bailey, Keeler, and Vandever could walk. As soon as they could be moved on beds in the sleds, the kind-hearted Beatty and a man named Johnson took them as far as Brush Creek, an all-day journey of seven miles. Having spent the night at Major Mumford's, the invalids were transported another seven or eight miles to Joe Hewett's, northwest of Strawberry Point. On the evening of the third day they arrived at Eads's Grove, where they found some Delaware County friends who brought them home to Bailey's Ford.

Keeler was laid up for several weeks. Bailey could not walk for three months as both his feet festered and the dead flesh dropped off one of his toes, leaving the naked bone, which Keeler cut off with a knife. This primitive operation was evidently successful for he recovered the use of his feet so completely that he was able to make the overland trip to California with the gold seekers and was employed by the government as a surveyor in northern Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Vandever was not so fortunate. He lost eight toes. Though his feet finally healed, he was a cripple for life.

BELLE BAILEY