

## Wither Goest the Pound Master?

by Bryan Thompson

When the first Town Meeting in De Kalb was held in 1806, the event was very familiar to the participants. The annual meeting of the town's citizens to perform the functions of governance was a tradition dating back to the founding of New England and even before to the burgess of the English market towns. Such direct participatory democracy and the officials they elected seem far stranger to us today than they were to our forbearers.

Who among us can recite the official responsibilities of the Path Masters, Fence Viewers, Constables, Collectors, Overseer of the Poor, Commissioners of Highways, Assessors, Justices of the Peace, Pound Master and Commissioner of Excise. At the first Town Meeting when the town's adult male property owners eligible to serve numbered less than 50 there were 19 elected Town offices to fill.

Among these early officials was the Pound Master. He was responsible for the feeding and care of wayward livestock such as hogs, cattle, horses and sheep placed in the town pound by the citizenry. It was also his responsibility to read the wayward animals cattle marks and determine the rightful owner. His duties did not include control of cats and dogs, as we would assume today.

The Town Pound was a permanent fixture in all New England towns of the eighteenth century. Centrally located it was usually a stone fenced enclosure about 50 feet square. In new settlements livestock usually ran free. Settlers, busy clearing land, could turn their stock loose to browse on the endless surrounding forest without worry. Most settlements, including De Kalb, had a village green that served as a common pasture for the village livestock.

Not surprisingly, laws controlling livestock and common grazing were among the first passed in the Town of De Kalb. In 1807 it was voted, "Hoggs to be kept up (penned) ." In 1808 "Horses and horsekind not to be free commoners from the first day of April to the first day of October". "Hoggs not to run at large for one year. " As more and more settlers arrived rooting hogs were obviously becoming a nuisance in gardens and fields.

In 1809 it was voted to raise a sum of not more than \$20 to build a pound. (To put this sum in perspective, at the same meeting they voted to pay Amos Comly \$10 for his services as Town Clerk from 1806 to 1809.) At the same meeting a resolution was passed that, "Horses and horned cattle shall not be confined as free commoners from the first day of December to the first day of April." "Hoggs shall not run at large from the first of April to the first of December." During the winter months the ancient practice of grazing livestock in common continued in De Kalb!

Twenty dollars was not enough capital to complete the pound and in 1810 and 1811 additional money was voted for building the pound. "Elisha Griffin and James Burnett to build the same." The pound was eventually erected at the intersection of the Russell Rd. and Canton St. in De Kalb Village near the Hotel.

Control of livestock continued to breed controversy. By 1812 it was ruled that, horses and hogs must be confined at all times. As the area became more thickly settled other animals were added to the confinement list: sheep in 1815 and geese in 1816.

In 1816 it was voted to allot \$25 for the building of a pound in "Bristol's Settlement"(now part of De Peyster). A second Pound Master was elected for this new pound. In 1817 John Rounds and John Wilson were delegated to build the pound at Bristol's Settlement.

Laws were extended to include the confinement of bulls in 1818. A fine was instituted of \$1 per head, for each instance of horned cattle straying in the summer months. In 1822 a resolution was passed that all damages done by swine would be assessed to the owners tax bill.

Despite passing numerous bylaws, problems persisted and in 1823 the Town Meeting voted to build new pounds of stone at De Kalb Village and Rich's Settlement (Richville). A new town law was passed that "no black sheep shall run at large from the first of September until the middle of November". (This is the normal breeding season. Evidently someone was not happy with a surprise crop of black lambs.) The fine was one dollar per instance.

<i>Jeremiah C Parker's Mark is A half penny in the under side of the left Ear Recorded July the 20th 1816</i>		
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<i>Rebecca Smith's Mark is A Grope off the end of Each Ear Recorded November the 15th 1816</i>		
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### Cattle Marks from Town Book 1

The bylaws remained unchanged until 1826 when a clause was added "Horned cattle shall not run at large within 1/2 mile of any store, tavern, or grist mill December first to April first". At the same meeting Amos Stoddard and Ozna Stoel were appointed to build the pound at Rich's Settlement, which had apparently not been completed.

De Kalb was quickly becoming civilized country with farms, yards and mills springing up everywhere. The practice of open grazing in the winter months was no longer possible. At the 1829 Town Meeting a law was passed delineating all lawful fences shall be four and one half feet high. " In 1830 the horned cattle ordinance was reworded. "Horned cattle may run at large from April 20th to November 15th. " Winter common grazing was no longer allowed!

Now it was the responsibility of all owners of livestock to keep them fenced with a legal fence on their own property. 1835 was the last year Pound Masters were appointed at Town Meeting. Within a year, the practice of recording cattlemarks in town records ended, replaced by the recording of " strays that entered the enclosure of \_\_\_\_\_". After 1835 livestock regulations rarely were the subject of town laws.

326  
taken up in the Highways apparently a stray  
One Brown Mare judged to be 12 or 13 yrs  
old apparently part French-Mo while above  
her marks of the harness as if she had been  
recently worked - Said Mare heavy with  
foal - Said Mare taken up by Abner  
Farr and now in custody of James Farr  
Recorded this 39<sup>th</sup>  
day of April 1839  
Orin M. Smith  
Town Clerk

**The first strays recorded in the Town of De Kalb Meeting Book 1839.  
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Between 1806 and 1835 twenty-five people served as Pound Masters in the Town of De Kalb. They were:

- 1806 Daniel Barker
- 1807 William Cleghorn
- 1808 William Cleghorn
- 1809 Timothy Utley
- 1810 Timothy Utley
- 1811 Solomon Pratt
- 1812 Solomon Pratt
- 1813 Isaac Stacy
- 1814 Isaac Stacy
- 1815 James Phelps
- 1816 Potter Goff
- 1817 Asa Sprague (V), Abner Breese (B)
- 1818 Isaac Stacy (V), David Day (B)

1819 Isaac Stacy (V), David Day (B)  
1820 Asa Sprague jr. (V), Timothy Gould (B)  
1821 Seth Pomeroy (V), Timothy Gould (B)  
1822 Harry Stacy (V), Timothy Gould (B)  
1823 Harry Stacy (V), Timothy Gould (B)  
1824 Silas Preston (V), David Day (B), Ralph Thrall (R)  
1825 Silas Preston (V), Josiah King (B), John C. Rich (R)  
1826 Harry Stacy (V), Ralph Thrall (R)  
1827 Nathaniel Holt (V), James Phelps (R)  
1828 Nathaniel Holt (V), Luke White (R)  
1829 Nathaniel Holt (V), Amos Stoddard (R)  
1830 Nathaniel Holt (V), Alfred Phelps (R)  
1831 Harry Stacy (V), Amos Stoddard (R)  
1832 Harry Stacy (V), Amos Stoddard (R)  
1835 George H. Dies (V), Martin Thrall (R)  
(V) De Kalb Village (B) Bristol's Settlement (R) Rich's Settlement

Sources:

De Kalb Town Clerk (ND) Town meeting Book One 1806 to 1845. Town Clerk's Office Town of De Kalb

The first strays recorded in the Town of De Kalb Meeting Book 1839.