

Chapter 22

The Mormons on Mormon Ridge

At the end of the last ice age, the glacial deposit in the southern part of Bangor Township was a little higher than the surrounding country. As the ice melted, the water ran around the higher ground. The Iowa river valley formed to the east, and Minerva Creek developed on the south. A narrow ridge was left, extending out from the higher ground. For over half a mile it lays in a southeast easterly direction, from eighty to a hundred feet high, meandering a bit, as steep as a stairway on the north and more sloping on the south; wider in some places than others, but pretty much just up one side and down the other. At the base of the bluff, on the north side, there used to be a small body of water, a little wider than the river and from thirty to forty rods long. It is now badly filled in. The whole area had always been timberland. This is the setting of Mormon Ridge and Mormon Lake. Here, in the late 1840's, a band of migrating Mormons spent a tragic winter.

There were several groups of Mormons who came through Marshall County on their way to Utah. One of the earliest, led by a James Emmet is well recorded in Mormon history. Many of his group died or fell away, but a nucleus made the journey up the Iowa River, across to Sioux City and down the Missouri to Omaha. But the Mormon Ridge band may have come later. Earliest settlers in Bangor Township to enter land were Jesse Amos and Elkanah Bush the summer of 1848. There were hunters, trappers and "squatters" before them. Stories handed down from these people through several generations may not be accurate, but the Mormon Ridge band seems to have been later than Emmet's band. Settlers coming as late as the fall of 1851 reported seeing the red elm trees stripped of bark that the Mormons had tried to use as food. They were in mortal fear of the Indians and tried to hide at the base of the bluff. After many of them died, the remainder were rescued by the army and taken back to Iowa City. Their two-wheeled carts somehow ended up in the lake. Without authentic records, the actual facts may never be known.

And why did the Mormon bands get this far north on their way to Utah? The trail from Iowa City to Omaha was very difficult. The muddy Skunk River had no solid gravel and rock fords like the Iowa, and was a real barrier. The Des Moines River was crossed mostly on rafts. From the time of Julien Dubuque in 1788 and probably for many years before, the French and the Indians had followed an old trading trail from Dubuque to Sioux City. The streams were small and there were no barriers.

That trail is most likely what attracted the Mormons to come north through Marshall County.

After one hundred and thirty years, little evidence of that tragic winter could be expected to remain. But on April 5, 1981, a group went in to look. It was a party of seven: Royal Young who owns the camp site, John Nichols who owns adjoining land including the top of the Ridge; John's brother Charles Nichols and his wife Ann, Neil Martin and Reg Martin and Wilbur Jessup. The parents of the Nichols brothers grew up on the Ridge and the boys had been over the ground many times. The others were merely interested people.

The traditional site of the camp is just below the lower end of the lake. There are two terraces near the bottom of the bluff where the camp was supposed to be. Royal Young said people from Iowa City believed them to be man-made. Neil Martin suggested that they could have been mud slides from the steep bluff. (There was a violent earthquake in Iowa and Missouri in 1811.) The Mormons were supposed to have camped on the terraces. Depressions there could have been the remains of dugouts made by the campers or merely places where trees had blown over. There was no basis for definite conclusions.

We climbed the bluff to look for the burial site. John Eurom, a local resident who died a few years ago had described the spot. He grew up on an adjoining farm and said he knew where it was, just over the fence from the pasture where he had played as a boy. His early remembrance was of sunken places where the graves were, but in later years leaves and other vegetation had filled them up until they could not be seen. We found a level spot on top of the ridge that fitted his description. Fences had been changed and are not built on the property lines, but there had been a fence on the west side of this place. It is now included in the Willard pasture, which is owned by John Nichols. It is in section thirty four of Bangor Township, situated about midway north and south, and a little west of the center of the Section. A short distance to the north, the ground drops away sharply, there is a ravine running diagonally down the bluff to the east, and there is a boulder almost as big as a table on the opposite bank. This might serve as a landmark. But we did not observe any visible evidence of burials.

The north side of the bluff must have been a miserable place for a winter camp. The sun would be so

far south that they would be almost in the shadow of the bluff and get almost no sunshine. It is not known how many died, it might have been a dozen or it might have been many more. They were in mortal fear of the Indians and believed themselves to be hidden there. They had very little food, and either there were too many or they did not know how to live off the land. Unless some historical record now unknown is discovered, the true story of their suffering will never be known.

Wilbur Jessup

MORMONS

The journey of the Mormons on their long pilgrimage to the west is very significant to Marshall County and the Clemons area. Mormon Ridge, five miles northeast of Clemons near the Iowa River, has long been known as the permanent quarter of this religious sect in the winter of 1846-1847.

The begining of the Mormons began in 1815 when Joseph Smith, then ten years old, had visions he was destined to perform a great work and be the leader. On April 6, 1830 in Manchester, New York, Smith organized the Latter Day Saints. A year later he led his band of believers to Kirkland, Ohio. Here converts were drawn to them in such great numbers that they felt the urge to move. However at this time the sect had constant conflict with their neighbors and were charged with all unlawful violations. They were driven away by outraged bands of residents.

In Illinois their own settlement of Nauvoo was created. Here Smith established polygamy to satisfy his own selfish desires. With more unrest and anger towards him, Joseph Smith was shot and killed by local pioneers. Brigham Young, a youthful and enthusiastic Mormon entered here and became their leader.

The journey crossing the plains continued on with their movement into Iowa. It was by chance they came to Marshall County and to the Ridge area. The staggering bands moved in different directions from Iowa City. They stopped at the Ridge penniless and unprepared for winter. They were without shelter and any means to erect any cabins. There is evidence they excavated to a depth of two to four feet and then built crude huts above ground to brace the winter on the bleak hillsides. Rations were meager. Hunting and fishing were necessary enterprises to provide sufficient food.

The details are vague, but reports indicate approximately 1,000 men, women and children were struggling to survive the winter on Mormon Ridge. The conditions were very distressing. Babies usually died from lack of nourishment and exposure. The winter of suffering and epidemics claimed many of the pilgrims who were buried on the snow covered hillsides in shallow graves. Efforts to locate any burial grounds have failed.

In the spring those surviving were taken to Iowa City by government teams sent to their relief. From there the Mormons continued on west, moving to a land far beyond the Rockies for immunity from law and freedom for themselves.

Two or more members of the pilgrim band returned to Marshall County, giving up all efforts to reach the promised land of the west. George W. Voris and Thomas Gordon disagreed with the leaders and did not condone polygamy. Gordon settled in Marion Township. Voris was interested in La Fayette (Albion) and later moved to Colorado.

Excerpts from 1878 Atlas and 1938 newspaper article.

MORMON RIDGE COAL MINE

As a young boy Warren Reisinger walked the hills of Mormon Ridge frequently as this is where his family lived. He has seen the coal mine many times and heard stories from old timers. Warren estimates the mine was dug about the turn of the century with it's location in Section 34 in Bangor Township. The shaft, approximately 75 feet deep, travels for an unknown distance under the Ridge. The air shaft was located near the Iowa River. The mine shaft is still visible with the equipment still inside. The story tells of the crew stopping work for the weekend and the shaft filling with water. The mine was never used again. Warren said the coal was a good, clean quality as it was used for blacksmithing. The name of the owner and coal company is unknown.

BARTLETT SAWMILL

Herbert Bartlett started operating his sawmill on Mormon Ridge during the summer of 1938. It flourished as a custom sawing mill until 1942.

During World War Two, most of the lumber sawed was made into ammunition crates. Poultry troughs were also sawed. These troughs were used to feed poultry as they were being transported by railroad.

After the end of World War Two, the lumber sawed was made into pop bottle cases and wire bound crates (orange crates and etc.) until 1952.

In 1953, son Jim took over operation of the sawmill. It ran as a custom sawing mill, cutting lumber for most residents in the surrounding area.

The Bartlett Sawmill discontinued operation in 1967.

Submitted by:
Rena Bartlett

PEOPLE OF THE PAST AT MORMON RIDGE as told by Herb Halladay

Wesley Banks

Wesley Banks practiced law in Winterset, Iowa, and was probably one of the top criminal lawyers of his time. He came to Marshalltown about 1917 or 1918 and worked for Jack Harmon who married Aunt Hester Wilson, Herb's mother's sister. Jack was a teamster who had a contract to haul pilings from Mormon Ridge to Marshalltown which were driven down under the Third Avenue viaduct which still stands today.

Mr. Banks had been at Winterset defending the son of a wealthy family who had murdered his girlfriend. During the trial, when it looked like he was losing his case, the lawyer entered the courthouse at night. Seizing the court's recorder's sheet, he doctored the testimony and his client was acquitted.

"Wes" Banks was a colorful character - a man you didn't or couldn't ignore, but he looked like a tramp - scraggly beard, old clothes, overshoes of 2 different kinds on his feet. He was a man of wealth but took no apparent pride in his personal appearance. But he was also a gifted orator making poignant pauses at the right moment to effect a point, a superb elocutionist and made use of a vast vocabulary, much of which was beyond the comprehension of his audience. Influential speaker he may have been, but he also was a man who "ruffled people's feathers".

Mr. Banks eventually left Marshalltown and came to Mormon Ridge, acquired land, and had a house built where Al Shrock now lives.

WESLEY LEVIS

Wesley Levis came to Grandfather "Wes" Halladay's home around 1913 from Kansas but originally believed to have lived in Ohio or Indiana. He ushered himself to Wes's home in a real covered wagon, alone except for his team of horses and 2 dogs. A barrel for water was attached to the side of the wagon and feed was kept in the back-end for the horses.

His plea to Wes was: "Where can I stay for the winter?", and Herb's grandfather, who always held out a helping hand to those in need, immediately went about to solve Mr. Levis' problem. Grandfather Wes had a stack of native lumber and told Mr. Levis he could use it to shore up and make an old ice house habitable which was dug in the north side of the hill on some of his land now owned by Al Shrock. This land consisting of 40 acres is located in Section 33 of Bangor Township also once belonged to Clara Bumbarger, a first cousin to Herb Halladay.

Mr. Levis cleaned out the former ice house cave with a shovel and lined the roof and sides with Grandfather Wes' native lumber. On the cave side facing north, he made a clap board door and put in 2 windows. He put in an old stove and with a few other necessities of life, lived in the cave with his 2 dogs.

Later on, Wes Levis moved into a shack north of the present Al Shrock home on Mormon Ridge which belonged to a former slave family of husband and wife. They died and were buried in the Bangor cemetery. Mr. Levis moved into the slave house and built a pole barn from native timber for his cows and team and there he spent the rest of his days.

SAM MILLER

A true pioneer of Marshall County, who lived off the land. If you walked straight south of Mormon Ridge, crossed Minerva Creek and climbed up a high bank - south of that bank you would have found Sam Miller. Sam was probably never counted in a census since there wasn't even a trail to his home. When you got close to his old clap board house, you would have seen a yard full of chickens and 2 or 3 coon hounds dragging a long chain and possibly a log fastened to the chain. Herb remembers when he was a little boy asking Sam, "Why such a big chain with a log on it?" Sam answered, "You wouldn't believe it, but them hounds will eat our chickens if I don't do that."

This man never worked for any man so far as Herb knows. He raised a big garden and a family of at least 4 children, possibly more. He hunted and trapped in season and knew what he was doing. He caught many muskrat, coon, mink, skunk, fox, badger, and any other fur bearing animal available. During trapping season, he was kept skinning, stretching and drying hundreds of pelts.

In the summertime, this man fished and hunted for bee trees. He cut the bee trees down in the fall and stored the honey in a shed. Some of the varieties of honey were Spanish Needle, Clover, linn tree (linden) and honey bread. Honey bread, a mixture of honey and pollen, was used to feed the larvae and had a distinctive flavor. At times, a conservative estimate of a ton or more of honey would be collected from 25 or 30 bee trees. These always had to be cut at night with the use of a smoker, the trees sawed open and the honey sliced out of the hollow trunks.

Sam made his living by selling honey and furs. There was no road to his house and it was even hard to find a pathway wide enough around the trees for a buggy to pass. Herb remembers his father and other neighbors going to the house to buy 50-100 pounds of honey for their own winter supply at about 10¢ a pound as he recalls.

GRANDFATHER DAN WILSON

Herb's maternal grandfather, Dan Wilson, a Civil War veteran, was renowned for his knowledge of herbs for medicinal purposes. Herb tells about a man by the name of "Blue" Miller who was told he was going to die and Grandfather Dan was called, gave him a concoction of his herbal medicine and the man lived.

Dan also used a common sense approach of cleanliness and understood the concept of spreading infection by contamination. When Herb's brother, John Wesley, had boils all over his back and neck, a Dr. Mantle, who came to Albion in 1903, said the only treatment he knew of was a flaxseed poultice and wait for the boils to come to a head and lance them, which was a long drawn out process. Grandfather Dan suggested they take off the contaminated shirt to prevent the spread of the infection, clean the boils thoroughly with soap and H₂O and cover each boil with a dressing. He then went to the timber and dug some sumac, scrubbed and scraped the roots. He put the scrapings in a tin pan and boiled them in milk until it formed a paste. He then spread this paste on a poultice, applied it to the boils and in just 12 hours they had drawn to a head and were ready to lance.

Submitted by
Elaine E. Robins

MEMORIES OF THE INDIANS as told by Herb Halladay

Herb (b. 9/17/1909) was about 5 years old when "Old Dave" Stackmyer took him by horse and buggy to the Indian Bridge area in Bangor Township where the Indians were holding their pow wow, camping on the Iowa River. It was held in the month of August, just as now, but was not commercialized. It was solely a gathering of Indian families and the white man was considered an interloper.

Families came in covered wagons from Rosebud, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Oklahoma and other reservations. Indians had no surnames as we know them - squaws name their children after something they liked. A white man visiting a camp would have no way of knowing who were brothers and sisters in a family.

An Ed Howard owned the land at Indian Bridge and allowed the Indians to camp on both sides of the road along the river.

Much of the pow wow was a celebration of a deeply religious nature portrayed in dancing, singing and chanting to the beat of the drums and participants were attired in much more colorful regalia than seen in present times as Herb remembers it.

It was also a time for fun and games. Among the games played was one known as "Stickball". Sticks were cut about 2½ feet long with a "Y" shaped fork at one end. Squaws would tan and fit a buckskin "pocket" in the "Y". The game was played on horses with a ball not quite as large as a baseball. From a center line, goal lines were stepped off approximately 300 feet each way from center. Each team would be positioned at intervals approximately 60 feet from the center line. One member of Team A would toss the ball with his racquet to the opposing Team B whose members would attempt to toss the ball as far as possible to fellow team members and get it to their opponents goal line to win a point. The ball could be tossed by the racquets only and if the ball was dropped - there would be much hooting and hollering and conversation and there appeared to be a penalty, but Team B retained possession of the ball. All conversation was in the Indian language so the white "guests" could only guess as to all the rules of the game. Meantime, Team A would try to force Team B back across their own goal line and if successful, Team A won a point and possession of the ball. The game ended when a team scored a pre-determined number of points.

Our present game of Lacrosse was adapted from the North American Indians and the name comes from the French words meaning "the stick".

Some families stayed at Indian Bridge throughout the winter, building their teepees. A circle of stones were piled in the center for their fire and the rest of the teepee was piled with slough grass or other wild grasses about 2 feet high for their floor and bedding. When the Indians slept, they covered themselves with their blankets and lay with their heads toward the fire and their feet towards the edge of the teepee - whereas the white trappers always slept in the reverse position around their camp fires. Herb said the smoke always went straight up out of a hole at the top of the teepee and it did not seem to be smoky inside the dwelling.

The Indians trapped raccoons, badger, ground-hogs, possum, muskrats and mink for their furs and food, which was either boiled or roasted suspended over the fire. The only meat they would not eat was mink. Their favorite protein delicacy was dog. A larger kettle of water would be brought to a boil, the dog would be killed and thrown into the boiling water - the whole dog - hair, entrails, everything went in. The Indians also ate wolves.

East of Indian Bridge was a house which was the home of Herb's Uncle Roy "Joker" Halladay for 25 years. The land was owned by a D. V. Bryant. Uncle Roy had a skin cancer on his face. An Indian brave told him he could cure his cancer but it would be very painful. He put a poultice of herbs on the cancer leaving Roy with almost unbearable pain. The Indian returned about 2 weeks later and put on another poultice of herbs. Again in about 2 weeks the Indian returned and when the poultice was removed, the cancer came off with ten-

tacles attached leaving a deep scar on Roy's face but the cancer never returned.

North of Roy's house was an Indian graveyard. Apparently the dead were laid on the ground and dirt piled over the bodies since several mounds were evident. For years this area was fenced in but as time went on, rain and weather eroded the mounds. Arrowheads, clay pots and other artifacts were occasionally found in this area.

Some of the Indians lived the year around near Indian Bridge. The last one Herb knew about was Bill Leaf who stayed in the area from about 1920-1924. Bill was a Mesquakie Indian and the father of 3 girls and 1 boy. He and his squaw and his family lived in 2 teepees. Some of Herb's cousins, children of Roy Halladay, took the 3 girls to the Hazel Green School. Part of the time the boy also went to school. The Halladay girls became good friends of the Leaf girls who were excellent at beadwork. However, they would never talk about their family or themselves.

Bill was a little, short, heavy-set fellow and would work for whites such as shocking oats and making hay. In the morning, he would go to the river and catch fish for breakfast. Bill Leaf lived off the land by trapping, fishing and hunting.

Bill Leaf was so adept with his knife that Herb's Uncle Roy who did some custom butchering hated to butcher without his assistance. Whenever Roy butchered for somebody, Bill would take the head home for his family.

Sometimes in the winter, members of the Halladay family would visit the Leaf family in their teepee. Whenever they didn't want the whites to know what they were saying, they would converse in their native language.

Herb recently inquired about the Bill Leaf family at the Tama settlement. They are all dead except for one daughter who lives in Oklahoma on a reservation.

Herb also remembers an anecdote by his Grandfather "Wes" who lived at Mormon Ridge in a log cabin. One day a big, tall, gaunt Indian came to borrow Wes' huge black kettle. Wes was planning to butcher and had need of the large utensil himself, but the Indian said, "I bring it back tomorrow". So Wes told the brave to take the kettle but he didn't bring it back until 2 weeks later. Wes scolded the Indian saying, "Can't believe you no more. You said you'd bring it back tomorrow". The Indian replied with a deadpan retort, "I brought it back TODAY - sooner than TOMORROW."

Herb also remembers an old Indian who erected a teepee east of the Marietta Bridge about 1926-1927 for 2 or 3 years for winter trapping with his squaw. He was a typical Indian, very taciturn. Herb's father, Issac, farmed the land and the Indian would get eggs from John Timmons who owned the land. The squaw made their winter moccasins and buckskins but Herb never saw her.

The Indian caught lots of fur bearing animals-mainly muskrats. A wire was strung between trees and the frozen muskrats were strung on the wire. Buyers bought the meat after the muskrats were skinned and it was shipped to Chicago. This meat was called "marsh hare". One buyer from Downing, Missouri, shipped one thousand rabbits with head, eyes and fur, with only the entrails removed to Chicago also.

INDIANS

Although Pioneers were moving into the territory, there were still Indians trying to save their native land. Occasionally there was an Indian scare. One day in about 1864 as William James Clemons was out in the family yard, a band of Indians came from the East about 200 strong and in all their feathers and war paint, yelling and whooping as they passed by the homestead. The boy, his mother and sister piled up flat irons and wedges in case the Indians were hostile. But the Indians passed by and continued up the road.

The late 1800's find the Indians peaceful. They trapped the Minerva Creek and camped in nearby timbers. In the fall, many Indians traveled to the timber west of Burr Atkinson's farm. There they made their home until spring. They staked their teepees and trapped the creek and hunted for wildlife. Some made bow and arrows for the area pioneers.

The Indians acquired much of their food from the pioneers. They bartered trinkets, such as beaded purses for fat pork, milk and bread. Reports indicate they never caused any disturbances with the settlers.

When spring came, they took down their teepees and departed. They were of the Sac and Fox tribes, later called Mesquakie.

THE UNMARKED GRAVES

Herb's grandmother, Emily Porter Whitaker Halladay, was born in the spring of 1847 in Mahaska County, Iowa. Her parents were John and Mary Whitaker who settled in Section 33 of Bangor Township in 1849. One of the men in the Whitaker family relatives enlisted in the Civil War but his mother died before he left and he buried her on the east side of the road between the Joe Stuckmyer and the Whitaker farm in Section 33. When returning from the war, the land of the burial site now had trees cut down, homes and fences built in the area so changing the profile of the land that he was never able to locate his mother's grave.

Another very similar story involved John W. Lacey, grandfather of Flossie Cox Miller. Flossie Miller is the mother of Irma (Mrs. Earl) Roe of Clemons; Hugh Miller, present mayor of Clemons; Claire of St. Anthony; Harold of Homestead, Florida, who once lived in the home now occupied by Florence and Kenneth Lewis of Clemons; and Jane (Mrs. Merl) Manning of Eldora, who built and lived in the Keith Stalzer home in Clemons. He too buried his mother before leaving for the Civil War on a little hill in the timber in Section 28 of Bangor Township east of the Old Sawmill on the north side of the road at Mormon Ridge. He built a white picket fence around the grave and when he came home from the war, he also found trees gone, the land fenced in and turned into a pasture in which a large herd of cattle were grazing. John was unable to find any trace of the white picket fence in these now unfamiliar surroundings, so the location of his mother's grave was forever lost to him, although he searched for it many times.

Herb Halladay's grandfather Wes' sister, Mary E. Halladay (born February 8, 1841) married Isaac "Howard" Pyle (born 1836) and lived at Mormon Ridge. In the early winter of 1865, Mary and a little 2 year old daughter contracted smallpox and Mary died December 8, 1865, as well as her small daughter. Smallpox was a dreaded disease and nobody would come near a home known to have this illness - not even an undertaker to prepare the bodies for burial. Consequently, no one would come to the funeral, so Howard Pyle buried his wife and daughter by himself on Mormon Ridge. A small son, John Franklin Pyle, born September 16, 1864, was raised by his Aunt Sarah Pyle, a sister of his father. Years later Issac "Howard" Pyle dug up the bones of his family and carried the remains in a gunny sack to the Hartland Cemetery where they were buried. Mr. Pyle, upon his death in 1915, was also buried along with his wife and daughter at this cemetery.

Better known stories of unmarked graves at Mormon Ridge are those of the Mormons who wintered here in 1850-1851. Grandmother Emily Whitaker Halladay can remember visiting their camp. They had very little protection and many died of exposure and malnutrition. They depended on their neighbors for food for themselves and their horses. When the corn was fed to the horses, the starving children would eat the chewed corn as it fell from the horses' mouths.

The first known Mormon camp was at Timber Creek near LeGrande. They begged for a lot of straw to be used for bedding and the story is told that after they broke camp, a baby was found in the straw. There is some controversy over the location, as some say the child was found at Mormon Ridge. The child, a boy, was raised by a doctor from Marshalltown.

After the Mormons left, 8 or 9 burial sites were discovered by the depressions of the graves east of the old Whitaker place at the top of the Ridge.

At the southern end of Mormon Ridge on east beyond the old coal banks on the north side of the road a trail ran north between the Iowa River and the ridge to Mormon Lake. Here was a trail just wide enough between the ridge and the lake for a team of horses to pass which eventually comes out to a wide area north of the ridge. Warren Reisinger told Herb that the Mormons also buried their dead in this area.

Submitted by
Elaine E. Robins

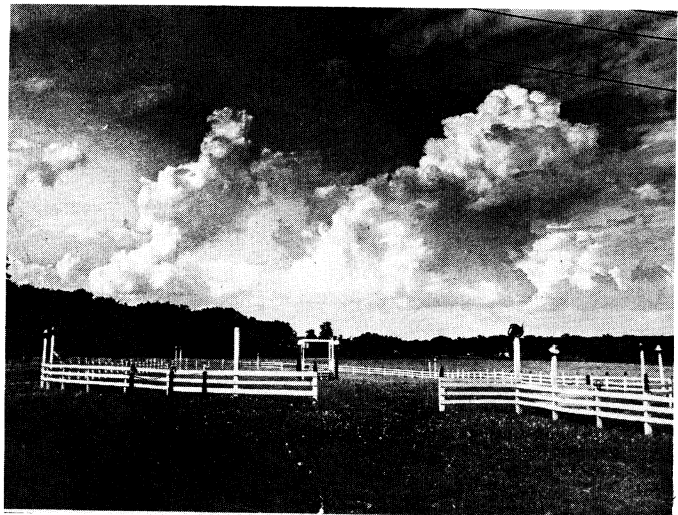
ROYAL RANCH

Union Iowa

Dr. Royal F. French and the Tallcorn Trail Riders in the early 1940's decided that they would get together on a fall weekend and have a trailride and horse show at the Royal Ranch. This was continued until the early 1950's.

People came from many miles, some riding their horses to the Ranch, while others trucked and trailered theirs. Many riders arrived on Saturday and by late afternoon everyone would assemble for a ride through the timber trail down to and along the Iowa River and back. There were about twenty miles of trail in total.

Most of the people would camp out over night and Sunday would be the big day with another trail ride in the morning and a horse show in the afternoon. Box lunches were served in the corn crib. Bleachers were set up on one side of the show ring and cars surrounded the rest of the area around the ring. Ribbons were given to everyone on the trail rides, while trophies and ribbons were given to those in the horse show. There would be 500 to 600 persons participating and watching.



Royal Ranch