

Hog drives, once common in county, basis for some roads

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Herds of hogs moseying along narrow roads were once familiar winter sights in Butler County, one of Ohio's leading swine producing areas in the 19th century. "The growing of hogs was a lucrative business," reported the 1882 county history, as "many a man made his fortune in raising corn, fattening hogs and driving them to Cincinnati."

"In driving to market, two or three weeks were often consumed, men returning covered with mud and pockets filled with bank notes or silver," explained the History and Biographical Cyclopedia of Butler County.

The marketing process quickened in autumn when farmers in Butler and Warren counties and neighboring Indiana rounded up and penned their pigs. For five or six weeks, they gorged on corn to add weight and firm fat.

The heaviest of the lot were butchered for home use. The leaner, long-legged hogs were best suited for the tedious drives to the slaughterhouses. The animals were at least two years old before being sent to market. The trips started after the first frost, usually in October, and continued into March.

Pork was packed in Cincinnati, Hamilton and other towns during the winter months and shipped down river while colder weather helped preserve the product.

Hog drives from Butler County, specially the western part, were annual events by 1810. Within a few years, after settlement in the Whitewater Valley, the county also was on the route to Cincinnati for Indiana farmers.

In fact, many of the roads in western Butler County began as hog trails, most of them leading to a natural crossing of the Great Miami River at Dick's Ford. The spot near present Wade

Mill Road, south of Ross, also was known as Dick's Mill.

One of the popular routes followed present Layhigh Road through Morgan and Ross townships. Another was along the courses of present Ross-Millville Road, Reily-Millville Road and Indian Creek through Oxford, Reily, Hanover and Ross townships.

Taverns catering to hog drovers were at St. Charles, Bunker Hill and other locations. Some taverns provided yards or pens for the hogs in addition to food and lodging for drovers.

"A very prominent tavern for hog drivers," said the 1882 history, "was at John Wehr's, 2.75 miles above Reily . . . in the southeast quarter of Section 7 of Reily Township." The same account identifies Wilson V. Ragsdill as keeping a tavern at St. Charles, and Obadiah Welliver who "fed many a hungry hog driver" at Bunker Hill.

After crossing the Great Miami, drovers guided their charges up twisting Colerain Pike to slaughterhouses in Cincinnati, then known as Porkopolis because of the prominence of its pork-packing businesses.

The herds traveled about five to seven miles a day, depending on the weather and the terrain. Drovers favored wet, soft ground because a hard frozen surface tended to cut the hogs' feet.

Usually, several farmers teamed on a drive. Most walked with the pigs, some were on horseback to better control stray animals and a few drove wagons, hauling supplies and often transporting stubborn hogs that refused to move or keep pace along the trail.

- Herds varied in size, most in the range of 200 to 300 head. One of the largest, numbering

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