Cattle

The red and white spotted cattle seen at both the 1850 and 1900 era farms are Shorthorns, sometimes called Durham cattle. Shorthorns are dual purpose—good for meat and milk. Both male and female Shorthorns can grow horns, but not all do.

Historically:

In the 1850s, pioneers moving to Iowa most commonly raised mixed breeds of cattle. Later in the century, farmers were able to specialize in pure breeds of beef or dairy cows. Martin Flynn, builder of the Flynn Mansion and Barn, specialized in raising purebred Shorthorn cattle. Pioneers often allowed cattle to graze freely on the open prairie in the summer. In the winter, cattle could be sheltered in outdoor lean-tos. Barns were reserved for grain storage. By 1900, cows were turned into fenced pastures. Dairy cows were brought up to barns fitted with stalls for milking. Pioneer farmers drank very little milk. Instead, the cream was made into butter which could be preserved for longer periods.

You should know:

- Cattle toss their heads to shake off flies in the summer. Be aware of where the horns of the cow might go when standing near them.
- Cattle staked out to graze at the 1850 Farm are monitored throughout the day. Water is provided many times a day in hot weather.
- Living History Farms’ milk cows weigh about 1400 pounds as adults.
- A milking cow can eat 24 lbs of hay each day. Living History Farms' cattle are fed twice daily and allowed pasture grazing.
- Cows give milk only after having a calf. When our cows are producing milk, Living History Farms farmers milk cows twice a day or leave the calf with the cow to nurse.

Sheep

The sheep at Living History Farms can be seen at the 1850 Pioneer Farm and sometimes in the pastures in Walnut Hill. They are a flock of cross-breeds. The most common Pioneer breeds were Merino and Leicester. The sheep are sheared in April or May each year.

Historically:

Many Iowa farmers kept small flocks of sheep. Pioneers pastured their sheep in the summer, and generally housed their sheep in crude shelters in the winter to protect them from wind. Farmers were interested mostly in wool production, rather than meat. Fleece was used on the farm or sold locally. Iowa was not considered a big wool producing state. About 60% of Polk county farmers in 1851 owned sheep. A typical sheep fleece weighed about 8 lbs. In 1850, farmers could sell one pound of wool for 50 cents.

You should know:

- Sheep are flock animals. When they are separated from the flock, they will act anxious.
- Sheep have excellent hearing. Sudden loud noises will scare the flock. As prey animals, they will attempt to flee.
- Sheep only have teeth on their lower jaw. The upper jaw is a solid dental plate.
- Sheep are ruminants. They have four stomach chambers. Sheep eat grass and hay which ferments in their rumen. The rumen is then regurgitated and the “cud” is chewed and swallowed again.
- Sheep can eat grains, but too much grain in their diet can harm their digestive system and make them very sick.
- Sheep remember and recognize human faces.
You should know:

**Draft horses and mules**

The horses at the 1900 Farm are Percherons, one of the most popular draft breeds in Iowa in the 1900s. Draft mules were also seen in Iowa at this time, but were often used by teamsters.

**Historically:**

Horses provided the main source of field power for farmers from the 1860s through the 1910s. Horse-drawn machinery allowed farmers to expand the number of acres under cultivation. A walking plow drawn by oxen might cover up to two acres of land a day. A riding plow pulled by horses could cover four acres a day!

**You should know:**

- Draft horses and mules eat between 30-40 lbs of hay and 12 lbs of oats daily.
- Draft horses are measured in hands. One hand is 4 inches. Our horses are between 15 and 16 hands tall.
- Mules are a cross between a horse and a donkey. It gives the best traits of both parents. Mules are strong like horses and patient and smart like donkeys.
- Horses have excellent hearing. Watch the ears of the horses; the ears move in response to stimuli and mood.
- Horses’ eyes are on the side of their face to give them 90 degrees of vision along their sides. They cannot see directly in front or behind themselves.
- Horses or mules in harness are working.

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**Poultry**

Many varieties of chickens, ducks, and turkeys can be seen at Living History Farms. The 1850 Pioneer Farm raises Dorkings, Brahmas, and Dominique Chickens, along with Cayuga Ducks. The 1900 Farm has a mixture of Rhode Island Reds, Wyandottes, Polish (top-knots), Leghorns, Plymouth Rock, Orpingtons, and Iowa Blues. The Tangen House in Walnut Hill keeps fancy footed chicken breeds such as Cochin.

**Historically:**

Farmers and townspeople kept chickens and ducks for eggs and meat. Pioneer farmers allowed poultry to free range and find much of their own food. Pioneer poultry houses were simple sheds. By mid-century, many farmers were building elaborate houses with fenced poultry yards to protect birds.

**You should know:**

- Guests should always wash their hands after handling live chickens to prevent the possible spread of bacteria.
- Historic breeds of chickens laid about 100 eggs per year depending on breeds, feed, and climate. Modern egg producing chickens may lay over 300 eggs a year.
- Chickens will lay eggs whether there are roosters in the flock or not. They will only hatch chicks if there is a rooster to fertilize the eggs.
- Chickens molt in the fall. In the summer, some hens will have a bare spot on their backs if roosters have been mating actively.

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**Oxen**

Oxen are cattle that have been trained to do work, such as pulling plows or carts. The 1850 Pioneer Farm oxen are shorthorn steers. Oxen are driven in pairs, connected by a carved wooden yoke. A teamster uses voice commands and a long wooden stick, called a goad, to direct the oxen.

**Historically:**

Oxen were used for draft power by pioneer farmers because of their strength for pulling loaded carts and for breaking the prairie for planting. Oxen also were cheaper to feed than horses. Oxen were slow, however, and farmers had to walk beside them. Settled farmers switched to horses for power when new riding farm machinery was invented. Horses were much faster and could plow more ground.

**You should know:**

- Any breed of cattle can be trained to be oxen. Ox is a job title, not a breed of cattle.
- A mature ox weighs over 2,000 pounds.
- The color red does not make cattle mad. Cattle are actually red/green color blind.
- The driver stands on the left of the team. The left ox is the nigh or near-ox and the right ox is the off-ox.
- The goad is not used to beat the animal. Instead the teamster taps the animals with the goad or waves it in front of them to turn the team.

**Hogs**

The 1850 Pioneer Farm displays black and cream spotted Ossabaw Island hogs. Ossabaws have an almost wild appearance typical of the 1850 era. The 1900 Farm has several mixed breed sows and a pure-bred Berkshire boar. The 1900 hogs are “lard-style” hogs, bred to be much fatter than modern hogs. Hogs are smart, clean, and usually good tempered, except when protecting piglets. Living History Farms cares for pigs in pens and enclosed pastures. Hogs in the 19th century were often allowed to run free, even into the 1870s.

**Historically:**

Hogs were an important farm product in the 19th century. They were raised for meat and lard to feed the farmer, but could also be sold at market for cash. Early settlers were not very breed conscious, wanting hogs that were hardy and easy to care for. By the 1860s, Berkshires, Chester-Whites, and Poland-China hogs were popular for the heavy amounts of lard they could produce.

**You should know:**

- Hogs have no sweat glands. They wallow in mud to keep cool.
- Market weight for a hog in 1900 averaged 185 to 200 pounds. Today, market weight averages 250 pounds.
- An average litter of pigs is 7 to 9 piglets.
- Scientists believe some hogs are as smart as 3 year old human children.

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Living History Farms maintains and displays agricultural livestock to introduce museum guests to the common breeds and productive uses of livestock on the farm. Livestock are used for education programs, draft power demonstrations, and foodways programming. Living History Farms animals are not pets; they are productive elements of the farmstead.

Many of our smaller animals, such as chickens, ducks, lambs, piglets, are allowed to run free at the historic farm areas. If livestock are seen in unfenced areas, guests should maintain a clear distance from the animal, walk and not run as they pass, and use calm voices. Animals should never be chased or picked up. If you are concerned that an animal is not where it should be, please tell a museum staff person. Please do not attempt to move livestock into a fenced area on your own or open gates to animal enclosures, including chicken or hog houses.

Guests should only attempt to feed, pet or handle any livestock on museum grounds with the specific permission and assistance of trained museum staff. The museum is not a petting zoo. The livestock are not pets, but an important element to the work of each farm site. They are domesticated, but not tamed. Guests are reminded that our livestock, including barn cats, may bite, kick, or jump when the animals feel threatened. Livestock are fed according to best veterinary practices. Please do not feed or pet livestock on museum grounds without the specific direction of museum staff. When touring with a dog, guests must keep the dog on a leash and should avoid animal enclosures and working animals.

Living History Farms is proud to collaborate with Iowa State Extension and the Animal Rescue League of Central Iowa. We also work with central Iowa large animal and equine veterinarians to maintain the health of our livestock.