

The Bark Covered House by William Nowlin
Excerpt Five -- Cowbell

“The old cow always wore a bell. Early in the spring... (she and the cattle) sometimes wandered off. At such times we watched them, to see which way they went, and listened to the (cow’s) bell after they were out of sight in order (to) know which way to go after them if they didn’t return.

“Before night I would start to look for them, going in the direction I last heard them. I would go half a mile or so into the woods, then stop and listen, to see if I could hear the faintest sound of the bell. ...When I found the cattle I would pick up a stick and throw it at them, halloo very loudly and they would start straight for home. Sometimes, in cloudy weather, I (felt turned around) and it looked to me as though they were going the wrong way, but I followed them, through black-ash **swales** where the water was knee-deep, sometimes nearly barefooted. (The cattle always led me home.)

One time the cattle strayed off and went so far I could not find them. I told father (and)... the next morning (we) started to see if we could find them. We looked two or three days (and on the fourth day) we heard the **report** of a rifle close by us and hurried up. It was an Indian. Father told him we had lost our cattle... and asked him if he had seen them. (He replied) “Me see them day before yesterday.” Father took a silver half-dollar out of his pocket...and told (the Indian) he should have it if he would show us the cattle. (The Indian) showed us where he had seen them...and then (he) started (following) their tracks. The Indian had no trouble in following (the tracks), and he went on a **trot**. He moved like an antelope, with such ease...he looked as if he hardly touched the ground. He followed all their (twists and turns), and we followed him. (After) nearly two hours, we came in hearing of the bell. I was pleased when we got to the cattle. Father paid the Indian the half-dollar he had earned so well, and thanked him most heartily.

“(That night) mother and all the children were happy to see the cattle come, for (we depended on them so much). They were called many dear names and told not to go off so far any more.”

Vocabulary: swales = low, marshy land; report = sound; trot = an easy run.

Questions to think about and answer:

1. What did the cow wear?
2. Why did she wear it?
3. How did William find the cattle when they wandered off?
4. How did he get the cattle to start home when he found them?
5. How do you think the cattle knew the way home every time?
6. How many days did it take William and his father to find the cattle once?
7. Who helped them find the lost cattle?
8. How did the Indian locate the cattle?
9. What did the Indian earn for finding the cattle?
10. Why were mother and the children glad to see the cattle when they returned?