

HOW THE MENTONE EGG AFFECTS OUR LIVES

by

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to

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April 26, 1984

According to the guidelines given for this paper, the importance of the problem studied should be mentioned in the introduction. After reading the title of this expose, the reader almost certainly has the right to ask, "But how can the Mentone Egg have a problem?" Well, it does.

The Mentone Egg is often misunderstood and ignored. The Egg is more than an oval piece of white painted concrete. It represents the impact of the poultry industry on Mentone, Kosciusko County and the State of Indiana. According to Vic Virgil of the County Extension Office, in 1983 Kosciusko County was first in the State in poultry production, which includes the number of pullets sold and laying hens producing. Mr. Virgil also mentioned that Indiana has consistently been a leader in the poultry business nationwide but now that the figure includes ducks, Indiana may very well be at the top soon.

The poultry business, per se, did not reach Mentone as a serious means of income until the early 1900s. Even then it had a slow start, often meeting with discouragements. However, out of the hard work of some very dedicated and determined people, came local industries that have gained national and even worldwide attention. Three of these companies will be discussed later.

One of the roadblocks in tackling this subject was the absence of any

assembled information on the construction of the Egg itself. But thanks to the help of Mr. Del Nelson and Mr. Hugh Rickel, in particular, accurate data was secured. However, first the Mentone Egg Festival should be discussed since it was this event that led to the idea of the Egg.

The growth and subsequent impact of the poultry and egg industries in and around the Mentone area, up to 1936, led a group of hatcherymen, businessmen, feed dealers, manufacturers and others connected with the Kosciusko County area poultry business to the conclusion that some type of celebration should be held to emphasize to the community as well as the outlying areas the importance of the poultry industry. Therefore, in 1936 the first Mentone Egg Festival was held. The goal of the Festival was not only to emphasize the importance of poultry and eggs upon the local area, but also to promote these high-quality industries.

The Festival was held annually in the Spring during the first few years then eventually was moved to the Fall months. Due to World War II there was no Festival from 1942-1945. Each year, though, the celebration seemed to mature and expand. There was an egg competition with various classifications for entrants: 4-H; producers with flocks under 100 laying hens and commercial. Usually 100 to 150 dozen eggs were exhibited, mostly by boys and girls under 18 years old. With few exceptions the Grand Champion was some young person. Workshops on topics such as financing, marketing techniques, newest innovations in machinery and commerce were led by different Purdue scientists and poultry experts. The area hatcheries, farms and other poultry related businesses conducted tours through their

facilities so that others could see just what is involved in the poultry industry.

During the planning for the 1940 Festival, the committee decided to hold the first Egg Queen contest. Entrants were selected from area high schools. The first Queen was Delta Dean Doran from Burket followed in 1941 by Ileen Sarber, also from Burket. When the Festival resumed after the war, the following is a list of the queens and the schools they represented:

- 1946 - Patricia Gaerte - North Manchester
- 1947 - Phyllis Latta - Warsaw
- 1948 - Wylan Titus - Atwood
- 1949 - Kathleen Perry - Beaver Dam
- 1950 - Tomaline Witham - Atwood
- 1951 - Geneva Whetstone - Mentone
- 1952 - Shirley Overmyer - Talma
- 1953 - Sally Shively - Beaver Dam
- 1954 - Sandra VanLue - Akron
- 1955 - Betty Griffis - Mentone
- 1956 - JoAnn Tucker - Beaver Dam
- 1957 - Boni Spradlin - Mentone
- 1958 - Sandra VanKirk - Atwood
- 1959 - Diana Ballenger - Beaver Dam

In 1955 the one and only egg eating contest was held. Rob Redman of Plymouth, Indiana was the champion eating five dozen, half-poached eggs in

twenty minutes. His technique was to swallow a dozen at a time out of a dish. After the contest was concluded a local doctor informed the contest committee that eating large quantities of eggs was not beneficial to one's health due to the high cholesterol level. So further "egg eating contests" were banned.

The Festival always concluded on Saturday evening with a banquet that was attended by the largest crowds to attend any dinner in all of Indiana. Typically the Mentone people served as hosts and hostesses to the Governor, New York egg buyers and staff from the Poultry Department at Purdue University.

In 1960 the Egg Festival committee felt that due to varied and rapid changes in the poultry industry over past years, it was a proper time to re-evaluate the needs of the day and perhaps institute other programs or means that might be of more value to the industry. So the Mentone Egg Festival ceased to exist until 1975 when after two years of being called "Mentone Days" the Committee President, Bill Westerman, announced that the name was to once again become the "Mentone Egg Festival".

Advertising for each Festival was usually fairly routine and carried out much the same as the year before. However, desiring to advertise the 1946 Egg Festival in a truly unique manner, the Northern Indiana Co-op Association, under the leadership of Ed Ward, built what was and still is quite an appropriate "ad". Built in a building just west of Dr. Davison's dental office, Hugh Rickel of Palestine designed and supervised the construction of a 3,000 pound cement egg.

The shaping of the egg was done on the drawing board. A cross-section was drawn with horizontal and vertical lines at 1' intervals. These lines represented the 3/8" steel rods to be used in completing the frame of the egg. A 3/4" reinforcing rod was placed vertically in the middle of the egg. Hugh Rickel wrote, "By measuring the diameters, the circumference could be computed. By welding the different size circles together before erection, the egg took shape as they placed one above the other." All these rods were first wired together and then welded for extra strength. Over this frame was wired metal lath and two coats of concrete plaster followed by a coat of finish plaster. Pete Goble of Atwood did the base coats but due to an eye injury to Pete, Mr. Rickel had Clyde and George Reed of Mentone do the final coat.

The egg was painted and the lettering completed by Harry Meredith. Mr. Meredith painted the front of the egg showing a basket holding many eggs. The large egg in the middle reads "Mentone" and the other eggs indicate names of surrounding communities. The slogan "Egg Basket of the Midwest" was then written at the base of the design.

When the egg was completed, twelve "unknown" men loaded the 3,000 pound piece of art onto a truck and proceeded toward Warsaw. Upon reaching the lawn of the Kosciusko County Court House, the egg was left and a phone call was made to the Warsaw Times-Union notifying them that the Easter bunny had left a small surprise on the Court House lawn. Needless to say, this caused quite a story, so much so that the entire incident was picked up by the UPI wire service and most of the nation was able to share in this event. A few days before the Festival began the egg was

transported back to Mentone to be placed on a concrete base on the southwest corner of Main and Morgan Streets where it sits today. The land was originally donated by the Northern Indiana Co-op Association but today is owned and maintained by Lake City Bank. According to the Bank's manager, Charlie Smith, in November 1983, Lake City Bank totally landscaped around the egg and is planning to have it repainted in the near future.

As mentioned earlier, the impact of the poultry industry on the local area has been extraordinary. Currently there are many businesses and farming operations within this industry that provide jobs and economic dollars to Kosciusko County. Manwaring Leghorn Farms, Inc. is the area's first and oldest hatchery.

The year was 1911, the place was Mentone, the man was Artemus Manwaring and the business was "raising chickens." Manwaring had just returned from Colorado where he had seen white chickens being raised for profit. He became so enthusiastic that he returned to Mentone, which he had left earlier after selling his business to his partner, and selected a site near a creek upon which to start the business. This particular site was selected due to the good drainage and sufficient land for raising chickens and feeds. Manwaring noted that the topography of the area lent itself to excellent drainage which carried away disease thereby allowing fewer laying hens to die or fail to produce. Many area neighbors shook their heads in disagreement with Manwaring's ideas but soon his enterprise budded and prospered and many of these same neighbors caught the poultry fever. Chester Manwaring, Art's son, was a mathematics teacher at a local

high school but soon quit the profession to join his father. After many ups and downs, the Manwaring Leghorn Farms (originally titled White City Egg Farm and Hatchery) had become one of the largest Leghorn farms in the Midwest by 1949. They have consistently ranked in the top ten list of Leghorn breeders and egg producers among all large (over 500 entered) breeders and producers.

Today Manwaring Farms is headed by Richard Manwaring and nephews Frank and James Manwaring. They are the oldest hatchery in Indiana hatching in excess of 4,000,000 chicks per year and a share ownership of 2,000,000 laying hens. Leghorns are raised for their egg production abilities as opposed to their use for meat. Approximately 175 people are employed by Manwaring Farms. Kralis Brothers Food, Inc. was founded in Gary, Indiana on October 22, 1922 by Joseph, Dan, George and Louis Kralis. The purpose of the company was the wholesale marketing of live poultry and eggs in markets around Gary. From 1922 through 1935, Kralis opened many country buying stations in Northern Indiana. This created a system whereby distribution was possible to large cities, i.e. Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland.

Processing plants were established in Gary, Indiana, Olney, Illinois and Winamac, Indiana. These plants shipped, via rail, poultry on a daily basis to such customers as Campbell Soup Company, Swanson and Sons and what is now Banquet Foods.

During the 1940's Kralis shipped many shelled eggs to servicemen and refugees overseas. It was in 1946 that a buying station was established in

Warsaw and four years later a plant was purchased in Mentone for the purpose of eviscerating. Upon the death of Joseph Kralis in September 1967, managerial and operational changes became necessary. "A policy was immediately adopted to process fowl exclusively for further processing upon customer specifications." The Gary plant was phased out in 1969 and the Olney and Mentone operations were expanded. In 1971 the general offices were moved to Mentone.

Flowers Industries, Inc. of Thomasville, Georgia purchased Kralis Brothers on August 3, 1973. Flowers is a large specialty foods company. Jerry Kralis and staff continued to operate the business and with extensive remodeling the Mentone plant became one of the most modern and efficient poultry processing plants in the United States. In May, 1983, the Olney plant was closed. This shutdown has permitted the local plant to operate to almost full capacity. Jerry Kralis retired as Chairman of the Board on August 3, 1983.

Kralis Brothers is one of the largest fowl producers in the United States with annual sales in excess of \$12,000,000. It is also the tenth largest employer in Kosciusko County. In 1925, with only a few hundred chicks as collateral, Hobart and Russel Creighton formed Creighton Brothers. Since that time, Creighton Brothers has grown into a large, diversified, nearly self-sufficient poultry operation.

Creightons maintain breeder flocks to produce hatching eggs for themselves and other operations in the Midwest. Of the 2,800,000 pullet chicks raised annually, 1,200,000 are retained for local use.

Approximately 900,000 cases of eggs are produced annually for one of three uses: 1) sale to other processors, 2) grading and packaging in Creighton's shell egg plant, or 3) processing in Creighton's Crystal Lake Egg Product's plant. The shell egg plant packages and sends eggs to supermarkets, restaurants, schools, hospitals, etc.

The eggs to be used in businesses where only certain parts are needed, are shipped from the Crystal Lake plant after they have been broken, separated, and packed in various special containers. Creightons ship the products in their own trucks to insure the condition and time of arrival to the customer.

Creighton's farming operations include raising of hogs and cattle. In order to supply feed for these operations, Creightons produce about 1/2 of their corn for the poultry operation on their own land. The tonnage is handled by their own milling department and stored in huge grain bins. There are approximately 170 people currently employed by Creighton Brothers.

Hopefully by now the reader has grasped the idea behind the Mentone Egg. It serves as a reminder to all who pass by just how much the poultry industry touches our lives. We should be proud, therefore, that we have just such a reminder and that we now understand and will not ignore the Mentone Egg.

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We would like to thank the following persons and businesses for supplying
us with very valuable material and help:

Creighton Brothers

Kralis Brothers

Manwaring Leghorn Farms, Inc.

The Mentone Library

Orabell Meredith

Del Nelson

Hugh Rickel

Victor Virgil

Jane Smoker