

Art Manwaring and Chester Manwaring were the pioneers of the poultry business in the Mentone Community commencing around the turn of the century. Eggs being a good price around World War I, attracted several other area men into the poultry business producing eggs for market.

Men such as Chester Manwaring, Forrest Kesler, Herschel Nellans, Ora Beeson, Masa Nelson, along with Hobart and Russel Creighton ran hatcheries to produce their own baby chicks and sold baby chicks to the other farmers in the Mentone and surrounding area.

It was not uncommon for large eggs to sell for 60¢ per dozen in the early fall and winter months in the 1930's. The egg producing business grew quite rapidly during these years with many people having 500 to 1000 laying hens or more. Elmer Sarber, Clarence Leininger, Clarence Eiler, Royse Tucker and many others contributed to help make Mentone, The Egg Basket of the Middle West.

As the best price for eggs was in the eastern markets, eggs were graded and packed in wooden egg cases and expressed by rail to Jewish egg buyers in New York City. The price being much above what the local stores could pay for eggs and the abundant supply becoming available in the Mentone area, these same pioneers of the business got together and formed an EggShipping Association. They would have a refrigerated box car spotted on the rail siding on the Nickle Plate Rail Road every Saturday and area producers brought their eggs to be sent to New York. The freight was around 60¢ per case and this method of pooling eggs, enabled the producers of the Mentone area to take advantage of the best market available in these early years.

Following this, the need to promote this rapidly expanding egg business in the Mentone area was recognized by this group of pioneer poultry farmers. Thus, the Mentone Egg Show was originated commencing around 1935-36. Trophies and cash prizes were offered for the most uniform dozen of large eggs. There were several classes entered: 4-H Class: For producers with flocks under 1000 laying hens: A commercial class open to any producer and from these displays, a grand champion dozen of eggs

(2)

would be judged the winner. Judges were of the staff of the Poultry Department of Purdue University. Educational programs for the producers on various poultry situations were held with speakers from the Purdue Poultry Department. The Egg Show was usually a 3 day affair with a banquet on the closing night, at which time the awards were presented to the winners, along with some outstanding entertainment and speakers. Several of our Indiana Governors came and attended the banquet and were featured speakers. Among those who came were Governor Henry Schricker and M. Clifford Townsend. An Egg Show Queen was also a feature each year. The candidates were chosen from the surrounding High Schools of the area. The New York egg buyers were always in attendance, making contact with the producers of the area. All in all the Mentone Egg Show was quite an affair in Northern Indiana. Yes, the big egg on display in Mentone was part of the Mentone Egg Show promotion.

While we have only mentioned a few of the egg producers of the Mentone area, it must be remembered that almost every farm in the area had a chicken house that would house from 200 to 1000 laying hens. Many of these old poultry houses, while obsolete, are still standing in the community, having given over to the much larger commercial complexes. But ^{it} still places Mentone and Kosciusko County well up in egg production and ^{still} is known as The Egg Basket of the Middle West.