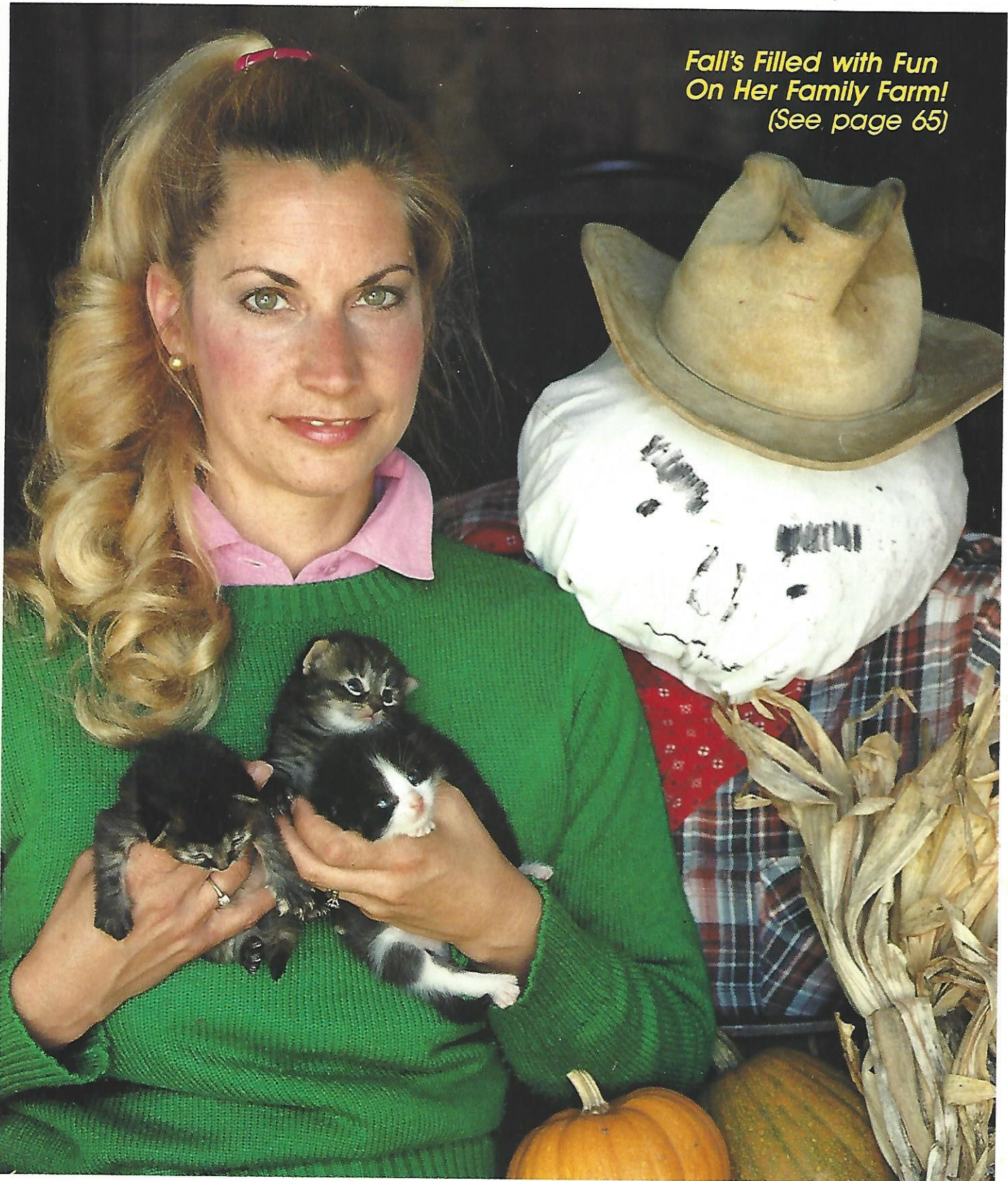


Country Woman

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*Fall's Filled with Fun
On Her Family Farm!
(See page 65)*





Ann Scrambles Through 'Egg Basket of Midwest'

Editor Ann Kaiser gives another "diary report" on her stop in one of our readers' fascinating hometowns.

I'D LIKE to see the chicken that laid *this* egg—it weighs 3,000 lbs.!

Gathered with me around their monumental town symbol in Mentone, Indiana are the young hosts for my latest visit to a standout small town. They promise that we'll keep an eye out for that eggceptional hen.

Mentone, in north-central Indiana, is known as "The Egg Basket of the Midwest". And for good reason. The 8 million chickens in the vicinity far outnumber the 972 friendly folks residing here!

They're all justifiably proud of their town and its unusual claim to fame—right down to Cindy Law's third-grade class at Mentone Elementary School. So when Cindy's students heard about my small-town series, they put their heads together and "hatched" a plan.

The letter of invitation they sent me was so well-written—and I was so intrigued with what they told me of their town—that I immediately got cracking on setting up a stop. Come along with me now...

"WE'RE EGG-CITED YOU'RE HERE!" says the bulletin board, and 19 third graders surround me with a lively barrage of enthusiastic greetings and giggles as I enter their classroom! The door is bright with a big bouquet of paper flowers that they've made. In the hallway, copies of *Country Woman* and the correspondence between us that led to this "big day" are on display.

Soon the students themselves are on "display". In groups of two or three, they present reports, illustrations and colorful posters that tell me all about Mentone.



EGG-UCATING ANN. Shonda Brown, left, and Dustin Pifer tell all about their town's ton-and-a-half egg in one of reports third graders compiled for CW Editor Ann Kaiser's visit.

I learn that the town was established in 1882, when settlers a mile west uprooted to move next to the new railroad. And it was that railroad that got the small town on track toward its status as a far-reaching egg center.

In the early days, my young historians relate, just about everybody had chickens, even folks right in town. (Some of the tiny backyard barns are still standing!). After a while, producers decided to pool their eggs to ship in refrigerated box cars to urban areas in the East. Ever since, Mentone's been a major supplier of eggs to much of the country.

Interesting! But one report *real-*

ly makes a big impression when it mentions Mentone's enormous egg downtown. "This I have to see for myself!" I say. So we set out on a walking field trip on this sunny-side-up afternoon.

And there it is—the "big egg" on the corner of Main and Morgan! Built in 1946 to promote the Mentone Egg Show (forerunner of today's Egg Festival), it's made of steel rods plastered with concrete. We're dwarfed in its shadow!

But Mentonians haven't put all their eggs in one basket, I soon discover as we tour the Lawrence D. Bell Museum. Bell—famous around the world for developing the jet-

propelled airplane, commercial helicopter and supersonic airplane—called this tiny community home.

Time is *flying* as we head back to school, walking past manicured lawns, well-kept homes and businesses. I change “partners” every half block so I can talk with everybody! There’s just time for “afternoon milk” and chocolate egg lollipops (my treat) before I wave off my new young friends to their buses.

Soon, Cindy and I leave the now-silent classroom and drive 5 miles southeast. There she settles me in the pretty country home she and her husband, Gail (loan officer at Farmers State Bank), built on the farm his great-grandparents settled in 1867.

“I love antiques and country decorating—as you can see,” Cindy smiles as she shows me around.

The Law children—Gene, 12; Quenton, 10; and Corrine, 8—are all students at Mentone Elementary. Gene’s a pole vaulter on the track team. Quenton and Corrine have busy competitive swimming schedules. The calendar next to the Law telephone is penciled full of activities—looks like mine at home!

Keeps Them Close!

“I’m glad our children go to the same school where I teach,” Cindy says, pouring us a glass of iced tea. “I know how dedicated the staff is and that the kids are getting a quality education. Plus, I can keep an eye on them during the day,” she grins.

Come evening, Cindy, teacher’s aide Marsha Scott and I attend the Mentone Chamber of Commerce meeting. The agenda is filled with upcoming Egg Festival plans, including the rooster crowin’ and hen cluckin’ contests, egg toss, “Mr. Rooster and Miss Chick” parade, music by Mentone’s Scrambled Egg Band and a chicken barbecue. The Chamber will sell boiled and pickled eggs, egg sandwiches and muffins.

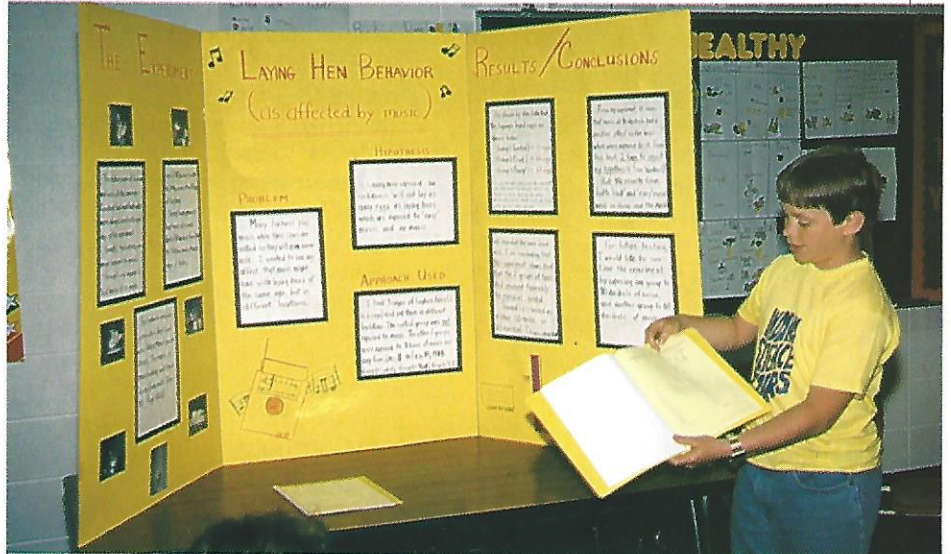
Then there’s the “Chicken Drop”.

“What’s that?” I ask innocently. I’m told that this paltry...er, *poultry* game of chance involves buying claim to 3-in. squares of a plot. A chicken is then released on it. Gamblers wait with bated breath until the chicken...well, you know...and the winner gets \$500! All in ♣

CRACKING SMILES. Young hosts—joined by Ann, teacher Cindy Law and aide Marsha Scott—are up in arms with enthusiasm over enormous egg! Children are Mary Harrell, Darren Parker, Kara Tucker, Alisha Ryman, Carmen Hart, Shonda Brown, Ruby Weaver, Kelly Montelongo, Brandon Justice, Nicole Kuhn, John Hill, Jamie Sagen, Cory Fore, Scott Whetstone, Dustin Pifer, Joshua Banghart, Emily Erp, Jamie McClone and Joey Woods.



HENHOUSE ROCK. Seventh grader Chris Tucker thought that easy-listening tunes would help henhouse production—but project proved chickens prefer to roll out eggs with rock!



SCRAMBLED EGG BAND. Mentone seniors—some with imaginative makeshift instruments—make lively, lighthearted music at Egg Festival, area banquets and State Fair.





EGGMATION. At "Mac's Eggs", Bruce McDaniel shows Ann automated system that carries a million eggs a week from the chickens to cartons on his family farm.

good old-fashioned country fun. "The whole community participates in the Egg Festival!" says Chamber President Orabelle Meredith. "It's a real family affair."

After a comfortable night at the Laws', I'm up next morning to help Cindy get her brood organized.

Heading to town, we stop at Teel's Restaurant. There I meet the owner, Mary Teel, busy cooking for the breakfast crowd.

"After 22 years, my favorite job is still manning the grill for breakfast and visiting with the folks who

EGGSTRA INFORMATION

- The average American eats 170 eggs a year.
- The U.S. has as many laying hens as people.
- Commercial producers strive for 220-230 eggs annually from each chicken.
- The longer a chicken has been laying, the thinner the eggshell as she depletes her body's calcium supply.
- The fresher the egg, the less it spreads when cracked into the frying pan.
- Indiana is second only to California in egg production, and Kosciusko County—home of Mentone—contributes more to the total than any other Hoosier county.

—"Separated" from conversation with Bruce McDaniel, Mac's Eggs!

come in," says the silver-haired, aproned widow as she cracks eggs (and jokes!). "When the regulars walk in, I know just how many eggs to put on!

"We use about 180 dozen eggs a week here—for breakfast, of course, and also deviled, pickled, and in custards and our bread pudding (recipe on page 11). We get our eggs from Manwaring Farms, just at the edge of town."

We're due at school for a staff "carry-in" breakfast, but we tell Mary we'll stop back at Teel's for lunch.

In the school cafeteria, a buffet table is laden with egg dishes, homemade biscuits, rolls, fruit and coffee cakes. (Cindy's favorite egg bake recipe is on page 11.) The food is delicious, and I enjoy meeting the friendly group of teachers and administrators.

This morning, my bright-eyed, bushy-tailed third-grade hosts present me with a surprise Mentone memento—a blue T-shirt sporting the town's "Egg Basket of the Midwest" design.

Then seventh grader Chris Tucker comes in to tell us all—in an "eggshell"—about his award-winning science project:

"Since many dairy farmers play music in their barns to help the cows give more milk, I thought music might also affect laying hens," explains Chris.

He set up three separate groups of chickens. For 60 days he played easy-listening music for one...rock music for another...and no music for the third.

"The results surprised me!" reports this promising young poultry expert. "My rock 'n' roll chickens laid the most eggs!" (Did I just hear a few farmers groan?)

Following the report, substitute teacher Darcy McDaniel takes over for Cindy. Then Cindy and I scramble off with teacher's aide Marsha to meet Darcy's husband, Bruce, at Mac's Eggs, the farm they operate with Bruce's parents.

"With 220,000 layers, we're considered small producers," Bruce explains. But small doesn't mean unsophisticated. I marvel as I track



OVER EASY? No question but the eggs are all fresh—and abundant—when Mary Teel cracks them onto the grill at popular Mentone eatery she has run for 22 years.

on-the-move eggs traveling via belts from the chicken houses through the washing, candling, sorting and packaging stages.

"They're never touched by human hands until a housewife grabs one from the carton," Bruce notes. Mac's Eggs markets 1 million eggs a week, mostly to the Kroger chain of supermarkets. (Maybe you had one of Darcy and Bruce's eggs this morning!)

At our next stop, McClone Farms, I see the computer age has hit the henhouse! Electronic screens show at a glance how many eggs are moving into the packing room.

Computers also regulate feed and water cycles, light, temperature and ventilation for the 550,000 hens—but I notice that no rock music fills the air in this comfortable, state-of-the-art henhouse!

The sound of music greets us back in Mentone, though, as we catch The Scrambled Egg Band in rehearsal. These 35 talented senior citizens make lighthearted music on piano, violin, banjo, bass, chimes, kazoos, washboards, tambourines, shakers, graters and washboards played with metal thimbles.

When The Eggers take a break, so do we—and head for Teel's and

chicken salad sandwiches. Lunch fortifies us for a tour of Mentone Egg Products, where “break” takes on a whole new dimension. They crack *half a million eggs a day* here for the frozen and packaged egg market!

Plant Manager Steve Tucker (he is third grader Kara’s dad) and General Manager Bob Krouse show us around. I’m fascinated as I watch the robot “hands” with suction-cup fingers separate the shells and drop whites and yolks into sieved cups.

After pasteurization, the liquid eggs (yokes only, whites only or mixed) are marketed fresh to the food industry in 45-lb. bag-in-a-box containers or frozen in 4-gal. plastic pails. In addition, whole railroad tank cars regularly chug on out of Mentone to take them to bakeries and salad dressing manufacturers, whose products truly do leave them with a hearty appetite for eggs!

Yes, Mentone’s impressed me as an eggstra special place, adding a flavor all its own to the country’s small-town sampler.

“I will have to come again,” I assure my third-grade friends with a wink as I bid them good-bye. “I still haven’t met that chicken!”

*From the country kitchen of
Cindy Law of Mentone, Indiana*

CINDY’S BAKED BREAKFAST

- 1 pound bulk pork sausage
- 6 eggs
- 2 cups milk
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon dry mustard
- 6 slices bread, crusts removed
- 1/2 pound grated cheddar cheese

Brown and drain sausage; set aside. Beat eggs slightly; add milk, salt and mustard. Tear bread into pieces and stir into liquid along with cheese and sausage. Pour mixture into greased 9-in. x 11-in. casserole dish. Cover and refrigerate 6 hours or overnight. Bake at 350° for 45 minutes. **Yield:** 6 servings.

*From the country kitchen of
Mary Teel of Mentone, Indiana*

TEEL’S BREAD PUDDING

- 6 eggs
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

- 1 tablespoon pure vanilla
- 1/2 teaspoon lemon extract
- 1/2 teaspoon almond extract
- 6 rolls, cut up
- 5 cups milk, scalded
- 1/4 cup butter
- 1 tablespoon cinnamon
- 1 cup sugar

Blend eggs, sugar, salt, vanilla, lemon and almond extracts; set aside. Add rolls to scalded milk; let soak a few minutes. Add egg mixture to milk and rolls. Pour into 8-in. x 8-in. baking dish. Melt butter and pour over top. Mix cinnamon and sugar; sprinkle over butter. Bake at 350° on rack over water for 1 hour. **Yield:** 9 servings.

HALLMARKS OF HOMETOWN. Rural royalty reigns at fun Egg Festival (right). Below left, Classroom Connection store owner Julia Teel (no—no relation to Mary!) shows Cindy and Marsha bright ideas. Lower, class tours Lawrence Bell Museum as namesake “looks on”.

