



The Headless Rooster

Compiled from Star Beacon, February 7, 1997

Occasionally, after having their heads chopped off, a chicken will "run around", but this is not because the chicken is still alive. Rather, it is due to nervous impulses that cause the chicken's muscles to move involuntarily. Tell that to John Marrison of Ashtabula, Ohio. He knows all about killing chickens. He has chopped off enough rooster heads to know. But one time, things were different.

It was new years eve morning in 1946. John and his wife Helen were planning on having chicken for dinner on New Year's Day. John went out with his trusty double bit axe and picked a lively White Rock rooster for a date with the dinner table. After a single quick blow, the rooster's head fell off and the rest of the chicken flopped around for a few minutes. John tossed the bird in a bucket, put it in the basement for his wife to clean, and then went to work.

Later that morning Helen called John at work and said, "Honey, that chicken is alive down in the basement walking around." John went home to see and sure enough, there he was. John put it in a box and began caring for it. He had hamburger on New Year's Day. John said that if the rooster wanted to live that bad then he didn't feel like eating him.

News of John's headless rooster spread fast. It got national media attention. But a little too much attention from some radical animal rights people of the time. They marched up to John's house with two sheriff deputies and demanded that the bird be killed in a humane way. John then took the bird to the local vet who examined it and performed a little surgery to make it easier for it to eat. The vet squelched the jabberings of the animal rights people by stating that since the rooster had no head, he also had no brain, and since he had no

brain, he could not feel any pain.

John took the bird home and kept it alive by feeding it a diet of scratch, grit, water, and oatmeal. It either stayed in the box or walked around the basement. John said that he never saw the bird sit down and that it seemed unaware of whatever was going on. The rooster would allow people to touch him and pick him up. John's vigil of care continued for 39 days when the rooster finally died. John was so attached to that headless rooster that he had it stuffed and mounted.

About 6.5 million chickens are slaughtered in the United States every year. C.R. Parkhurst, a professor at North Carolina State University's Poultry Science Department, said that the method that the poultry industry uses for slaughter pretty much prevents the birds from living very long.

Processing plants shackle the chicken and hang them from their feet on a moving conveyor belt. The birds are passed through a tunnel where they are sprayed with a mist of salt water. Salt water is a good conductor of electricity and the birds are then electrocuted into unconsciousness. While still hanging upside down, the birds are passed by a buzz saw. The saw makes a cut about 1/4 inch into their neck, severing the carotid artery and jugular vein. The chickens are killed by allowing them to bleed to death before being scalded and processed. About one in 1,000 chickens will not die in this manner and will have to be finished off by a knife-wielding worker. "But none of them walk off the processing line headless", said Parkhurst.

That just makes John Marrison's rooster all the more amazing. "I never killed another chicken since then," John said, "It just took that urge out of me."

Fair Plants

Brenda of Brenda's Bloomers has agreed to do the plants again for the tent next year. She has some good ideas about some plants that we can use on our float. In keeping with the fair theme of "Florida", the float may include such things as a citrus tree and a banana tree.

Exciting News!

At the November meeting there will be an important club document that all members should sign. Make sure you are present.

Chicken Handbook

As you may have heard, the club will be producing our very first edition of the PBCPFA Chicken Handbook. This handbook will be given to people who visit the poultry tent at the Fair next year. Because of the high cost of production, the club must sell advertising space. The advertising form is on the back page of this newsletter. Please help out the club and pass copies of it out to your favorite businesses who might wish to advertise with us. The rates are printed on the form and are comparable to similar publications.

THE DEADLINE FOR ALL ADS IS THE END OF THIS MONTH! THERE IS NO TIME TO WASTE.

September Meeting

At the September meeting we held our annual elections for club officers. In a surprise last minute nomination, Mike Robinson won the Vice Presidential race over incumbent Rick Okerson by just a few votes. The two had no hard feelings toward each other and Rick even said he was going to vote for Mike himself. Even still, the race was close with Mike emerging victorious by just a few votes. We would like to thank Rick for his many years of service. The remaining offices will continue to be held by the same people. These are, Lee Salmon as President, Arvis Okerson as Secretary, and Rose Greggs as Treasurer.

Although it is not an elected position, Wakeeta Schwartz was given the job of being our new club historian. The club historian is responsible for maintaining the club's newsletter history. Mr. Greggs has been our previous club historian and has done a great job for many years. He was, in fact, the club's first historian and started the position. We would like to thank him for a job well done.

The salary that each officer receives varies. The Vice-President receives a salary equal to three-fourths of what the President receives, but twice what the Secretary receives. The Treasurer is the highest paid and gets an amount equal to 110% of what the President gets, and is exactly seven times what the newsletter editor gets. The editor and the club historian receive the same salary. Both of these positions pay double what the club's property manager gets. The property manager is the lowest paid person because it is a volunteer position and doesn't pay anything.

Previously, Kim Belvin told of the very real dangers of rooster spurs. Last month, Arvis demonstrated how to remove them painlessly. Within a few seconds, she removed a rooster's spurs with nothing but a pair of pliers. There was no sawing and no snipping or cutting. The most interesting thing was that she did it without letting the rooster lose even one drop of blood and without causing him any pain. Immediately afterward, the rooster was back on his feet and ready to crow. Arvis said that occasionally you will find a rooster that will bleed a little bit. This is really the only humane way to remove their spurs. Although a rooster may be friendly, and no danger to humans, his spurs can still accidentally rip the flesh from the backs of your hens. Hens that have raw and bloody skin on their backs just might be the victim of a rooster's spurs.

Mike and Jeanette Robinson brought the refreshments to the last meeting. Jeanette brought her prize winning cake again. It is called the "Better than Sex Cake" and consists of multiple layers of perfection. If you missed that meeting, you also missed out on getting a piece of that cake. Jeanette also had many other dishes including salads, meats, chips, and cheeses. It was all very delicious.

Photography Contest

The premiums have changed this year for the photo contest. Prizes in each category are now \$10 for first place, and \$5 for second place. The third place prize has been eliminated. The photos are due at the Christmas party meeting on Friday, December 19, 1997. Please submit your photos to Arvis Okerson at that time. Winners will not be announced until the South Florida Fair where they will be displayed.

Photo Categories

1. Chicken in natural setting
2. Best dressed chicken
3. Best saying to accompany a poultry photo
4. Best Color - judged on composition, subject, and color
5. Overall most original
6. Best baby

Photography Contest Rules

1. ALL entries must have the photographers name and category written on the back of the photo.
2. A single photograph may be entered in all categories, however you must supply a separate print for each category.
3. All photos must be submitted on or before 12/19/97.

Club Poultry Show

Our 6th annual club poultry show will be held during our October meeting. Dr. Dale Porcher will be on hand to judge and answer our questions. This year we will have 7 categories: Best Cock, Best Hen, Best Cockerel, Best Pullet, Best Waterfowl, Best Exotic, and Best of Show. Each family may bring up to six birds. Birds must check in by 7:00 pm so that we can be completely set up by 8:00 pm when our judge arrives. We would like to extend a big thanks to Richard and Rose Greggs for their donation of trophies for our club poultry show.

Chicken Costume Patterns

Mike Robinson has located a 16 foot flatbed trailer that we will be using as a float at the next fair. It will be pulled by a 1930 John Deere tractor. The club asks that those who ride on the float wear either a costume or overalls. Maryann VanHeusen has located a pattern for chicken costumes. It comes in three sizes; small child, medium child, and adult. Maryann and Wakeeta Schwartz have volunteered to make the costume for those that supply the raw materials. Contact Maryann for a list of materials at (561) 795-5745.