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ACROSS THE ISLAND

'Centennial Hen' Is Laying At 15

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I HAVEN'T got a good egg eating story this time, but I do have a couple of yarns concerning Easter eggs that I want to pass on.

The January, 1886 issue of the Weekly Examiner-Argus reported that a Yonkers, New York man had bought some green dye stuff to color Easter eggs for his children. He left the material on a bench in the back yard and forgot about it, then found later that a hen had hopped up on the bench and eaten a portion of the green coloring.

The following day he found a green egg in the nest, the following day the egg was a little paler; there was just a trace of the green coloring on the third day and it had disappeared from the fourth egg, which was natural in color.

That was almost 80 years ago and I thought at first that it was a figment of somebody's imagination of the long ago. But I recalled something Fred Ward told Mrs. Matheson when he was here in the early 1940's during the days of World War Two. She recalled for me that he had told her of a coloring material that could be fed to hens that would color the eggs attractively for children at Easter time.

The impression he had left was that it was comparatively new at the time. If so, the accident of some 60 years previously had not indicated to poultrymen of the 1880's the possibilities of egg coloring the easy way. Mr. Ward was with the Canada department of agriculture here.

THIS ONE'S a bit different but it's also about eggs, or an old hen that lays them at a previously unheard of age.

Mrs. Daniel Shaw, Lorne Valley told me about a hen, Polly, that will be 15 years in June and still lays every summer.

I had never heard previously of egg laying by a hen of that age. And Borden Douglas, officer in charge, Poultry products division, Canada department of agriculture found it so unusual he could scarcely believe it. But the story itself is interesting. Here it is as Mrs. Shaw told it to me.:

"It's on the old Shaw homestead that the late veterinarian, Dr. Neil Shaw, hacked out of the forest more than a century ago. There is no exact date but his eldest son, James, was born on the farm 112 years ago and died in 1912. The farm is the only one bearing the pioneer name in the district, and two sons of the late James Shaw are now carrying on the farming. They are Neil and Ernest; a sister, Mrs. MacQueen is keeping house for them.

Polly Was Hatched In 1949

IN 1949 THE late Walter Shaw, then in charge of the poultry section of the farm, had several chickens that hatched out the way mother nature had intended. As they became old enough to run out on the range, one little chick chose to trail around after Walter, instead of the mother hen. Wherever he went, little Polly, as he named her, would follow peep-peeping, and he would chat back to her, as he did the fencing and other farm chores. This went on for years.

“Polly started quite young to lay eggs and became a beautiful Barred Rock hen, heavier than the others. In 1960 her friend Walter passed away, and the following year Polly had one foot cut off by a hay mower, but she survived the ordeal being well cared for by the lady of the house, and now is nearing 15. She lays every year.

“She started early in May last year and every second day her large egg was laid in a specially built, low nest placed for her use away from the other hens after she lost her foot.

“HER LAMENESS is hardly noticeable, though the foot was cut off close to the ground.

“Polly watches her chance if the back door of the house is ajar, and struts into the kitchen and starts her ‘Cu-cua’ chatter, and soon has Mrs. MacQueen crumbling up some of the choicest food in the house, and placing it on the floor for her. When Polly finishes eating it, she ‘Cu-cus’ her thanks to the lady and walks out again.

“We call her the Centennial hen, as we think a 15-year old hen compares favorably in age with a human centenarian.”

Mrs. Shaw tells me, too, “the original log cabin is still standing on the Shaw farm. It is used as a machine-house and how about this? “Odds and ends of medicine in a chest used by the old veterinary doctor can be found in the upstairs part of the old cabin.”

### This Egg Story Is Different

THIS EGG story has nothing to do with Easter, but I hope some of you may get a laugh out of it.

The time was probably 45 years ago and hens never laid eggs at that time during the winter months. At least not in our locality. But a couple of neighbours, a young lady and a young man who worked at their place, boasted that their hens were laying though nobody else could say the same thing about their flock. The boast became a by-word in the community, and mostly everyone talked about it - there was no radio or TV in those days and precious little to talk about at times.

Later that winter the couple got married and they drove to the manse which was located then at Springton, just east of the old cemetery I have mentioned several times in some of my ghost stories.

The manse was located perhaps 100 yards from the road and the story told all around the Rose Valley community next day was that the bride-to-be held the horse at the entrance to the manse lane, while the intended groom walked up to the minister and asked, “Will you accept eggs in payment for marrying us? We have a crate of eggs in our sleigh.”

Looking back at it now, I imagine the yarn was made up by a clever story teller in the district. But I am sure many people actually believed it at that time.

#### Easter Market Is Recalled

STILL ON the Easter theme, Wally Rodd who is proprietor of the Charlottetown Motel, recalls the large crowds that used to come to town for the Easter Market which was held then on Saturday, just after the Good Friday holiday.

Some of the older folk made the trip on business, but the young folk came just for a lark, Wally recalls. Extra passenger cars would be added to the regular train and people would board the train all along the line. Mr. Rodd got on it at Winsloe. That was before the days of highway snowplows, and train travel was the only kind available in winter, unless horses and sleighs were used.

Easter beef was bigger and heavier in those days, I imagine and I wonder how the meat compared for flavor with the tasty "baby beef" of today's animals. And that reminds me that I visited Canada Packers cooling room last week, along with a great many more people, to view the carcasses of some of the top steers we saw at the Easter Beef Show here earlier in the month.

BECAUSE OF production difficulties caused by some of our staff not being able to get to Charlottetown owing to the storm-blocked roads that night a story I wrote for this paper could not be set in type. I do want to observe, though, that three steers from the farm of Frank Platts, Tyne Valley averaged well over the 60 per cent mark in dressing percentage, and he was the man who had the top dressing steer a year ago.

As Vern Fraser told me, dressing percentage is just one of the characteristics a buyer finds desirable in a beef animal, and it has little to do with the taste and palatability for the consumer. But I thought it was interesting that Mr. Platt's steers should have such a high average in this regard.

The grand champion steer bred and raised by Robert MacLaurin, Belmont Lot 16 also dressed out at well over 60 per cent, so did several others.

Incidentally the buyers play a tremendously important part in the success of the Easter Beef Show and Sale. Our top price of \$1.50 was far ahead of that received at the Maritime Spring Show and Sale at Oxford, N. S. And the all time record of \$2.07 per pound established last year is far ahead of anything ever bid at the Maritime sale.

It costs a lot of money to feed those steers and put them in top fit for the big show. Only the long price received at the sale makes it possible for most breeders to come back year after year.

#### "The Line Gale" Story

TO MOST of us that storm late last week was just another of the many storms we've had this winter. But to the old timers it was "the line gale", something that often hits during the March 20-21 period when the sun is crossing the line. They are not old timers but Vere Beck, Guardian news editor, and Frank MacKinnon, night foreman in our composing room, are familiar with the term as an almost certain thing during the solstice in spring, and again in late September when the sun crosses the line again.

Frank told me about “the line gale” a month or more ago, and this week he reminded me of it, and the gale really did come this year.