

## "A CHICKEN'S LIFE IN REDRIDGE"

By Elias F. Messner of Jackson, MI

Back in the early 1920's, in Redridge, Michigan, Mom raised chickens and sold eggs for pin money so she could buy a few personal items for herself. She had a sign that stated "Eggs for Sale" on the road coming into Redridge from Houghton with an arrow pointing to our house. I had a sign next to hers that said "Worms for Sale." I could buy a few items of my own - mostly candy.

Our chicken coop was a building about 20 feet long by 10 feet wide and 12 feet high, constructed of pine and fir boards with tar paper and cedar shingles on the outside walls and the roof. It had a dirt floor and a loft above which made the room where the chickens lived about seven feet from the floor to the ceiling.

There was a room at one end where we stored chicken feed, tools and such as hoes and shovels, etc., and also kindling wood for the kitchen range.

In the loft was stored straw, some old furniture and empty trunks and boxes. We kids played up there. We got there by crawling up a ladder in one corner of the coop and lifting a cover that was over a small hole that we could crawl through. There weren't any windows up in the loft, but we could let light in by opening a door at one end.

We had a small school black board up there and we would play school. Eleanore Lieppa was the teacher as she was a couple of years our senior and her students were Vincent and Vivian Morin (the twins), Clarence and Brunolf Alaniva, Lucille Brinkman and myself.

The walls down in the part where the chickens lived were lined with boxes containing straw and in front of the boxes were perches made from small trees around two inches in diameter. The chickens could roost on these. That part of the coop also had a door leading out into a yard fenced in with chicken wire attached to the coop.

Every year Mom and Dad would lock all the chickens out and mix up a couple of pails of white wash (made from a lime powder purchased at the store for just a few pennies a pound) and water. They would go into the chicken coop and with big brushes apply that white wash on everything from the ceiling to the floor. By the time they came out they had as much white wash on themselves as on the inside of the coop.

Mom would gather the eggs daily. She usually wore a sweater with long sleeves so her arms wouldn't get bruised from a chicken pecking on them because sometimes she had to pull a chicken out of the box in order to get the egg the hen was sitting on.

At the sound of "Here chick! chick!" those hens would fly out of the coop as Mom would be spreading feed around in their yard. Mom had names for almost all of her chickens and there was one in particular, a large white hen that she named Greta and she was Mom's favorite. She would allow Mom to pick her up.

Greta would get the urge, however, in the spring to leave the confinement of the pen and go out on her own, make a nest and raise a family. She would fly over the fence and nonchalantly walk through Couch's

back yard (as we did not have any fence between ours and Couch's yards). Then she would go under Couch's wooden gate and onto a path into the gully and woods. If she knew someone was following her she would turn right and go through a thornapple and hazel nut thicket, around Couch's under their rail fence and back home. However, one day we let Greta go and didn't follow her and we later found where she was nesting, about 200 feet from Couch's gate in a bank under the trunk of a fallen tree and was well protected from the weather. She came home to eat.

One day after she had been gone for a while we were picking potato bugs in the garden and hear a ruckus, looked up and saw Greta walking past the pen that held two of Couch's hunting dogs. She had six little chicks with her and was bringing them home. Dad made a special little shelter for them against the shed of our house until they grew up and could join the rest of the chickens. They spent the summer in the area between us and Couchs. Greta was very protective and could whip her weight in wild cats. Sometimes Morin's dog, Don, would come over and Greta would fly at him, land on his back, pecking his head and flapping her wings until Don would run for his life. Our cat "Tillie" was so afraid of Greta that she wouldn't go out that way at all.

It wasn't long after that Dad started to reduce our number of chickens to nothing and sold them all to a farmer in Liminga. He made a garage out of the chicken coop. it was a very pleasant experience having those chickens and I shall always remember Greta for the rest of my life.