

POULTRY IN OUR PAST

Curious Items From Petaluma's Egg Basket Days

by Norris (Bob) Dyer

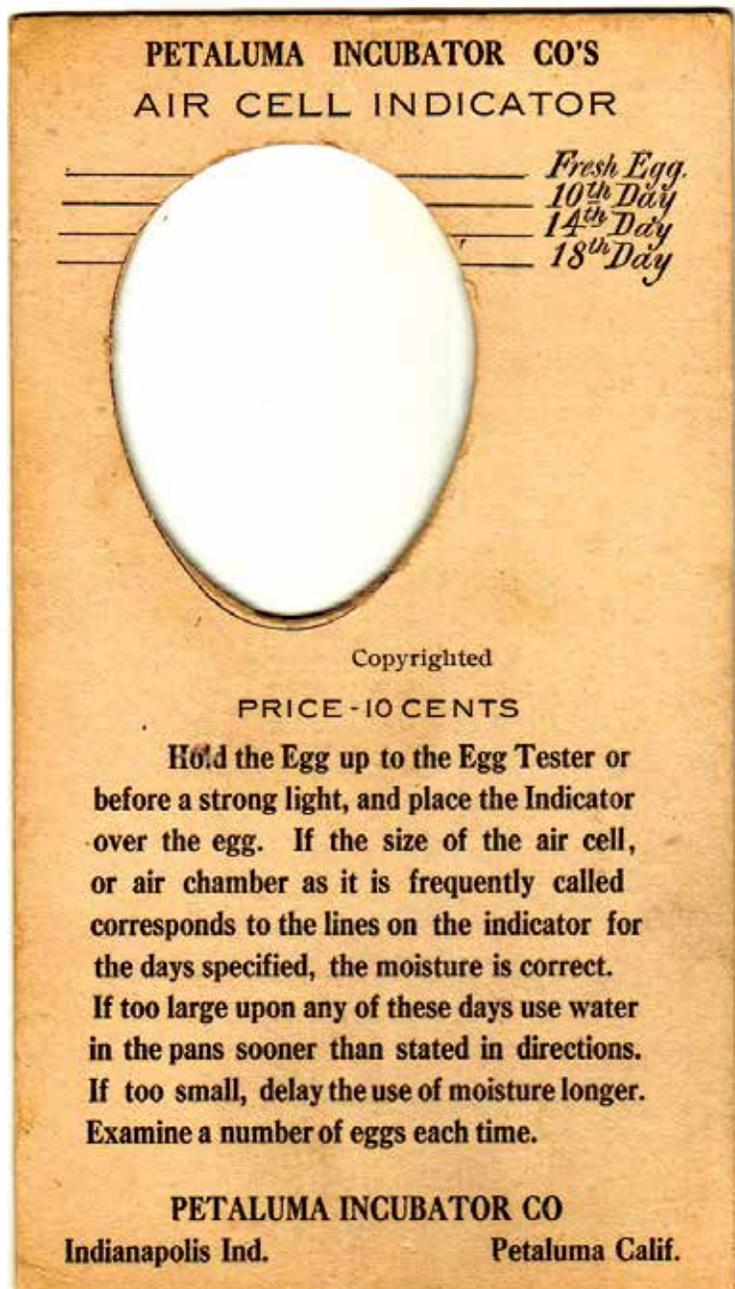


Figure 1. Air cell indicator

Petaluma's reputation as an egg town was firmly established over 100 years ago. In a 1906 article, Frank Snow stated that "It is Chickaluma now." W.S. Harwood titled his 1908 article "A City of a Million Hens" pointing out that the city was known "over the world" for our poultry business.

Petaluma's version of "Thomas Edison", L.C. Byce, had revolutionized the incubator business and employed 62 people by 1904 when he moved into a permanent location at 742 754 Main Street (now "Petaluma Blvd.") No later than 1905, his Petaluma Incubator Company also had an eastern office in Indianapolis, according to a February, 1905 ad in *Country Life in America*. The egg output that year was 3,827,061 dozen per Frank Snow.

Our first item (Figure 1) was a (probable) freebie from the Petaluma Incubator Co. - an "air cell indicator". You could hold up an egg "before a strong light" and measure

the size of the air chamber in the egg from "fresh" to the "18th Day", the latter probably signaling trouble, for the freshest eggs had the smallest air chamber. With limited means for keeping things cool those days, this was probably a handy tool. The item is on the back of a thick postcard. There is no address or date on the front of the card, only a place for a postage stamp and this large hole. Looking at the style of the text on the front, I would estimate the item came out between 1905 and 1910.

Next we have a pair of postcards with "patriotic" slogans boosting Petaluma - "I'm Going Back to Petaluma. It's the Only Town for Me" & "Our One Best Bet is Petaluma. What is Yours?" (Figure 2.) In the lower right are official seals of the 1915 Panama-Pacific-International Exposition, held in San Francisco. It was to celebrate the opening of the Panama

Canal in 1914 and took three years to build. The post cards were produced by the P.C. Co. of Corte Madera, and used black-and-white chicken photos from earlier Petaluma post cards, pasted on.

The left card was used and a hand-written date appears to be "Sept 15th 1913". There is no clear postmark, but "1913?" The Exposition was a grand event and had a publicity committee formed in April, 1912, called the "Committee of Exploitation" The cards could well have been created in 1913 to promote the event. The Exposition turned out to be a success. 250,000 attended on the opening day, February 20, 1915, and 19,000,000 during its run. The Palace of Fine Arts, built for the exhibition, still stands.

Figure 3. shows a jaunty White Leghorn rooster in Uncle Sam togs. The item is a colorful 2" tall label. It provided a countdown

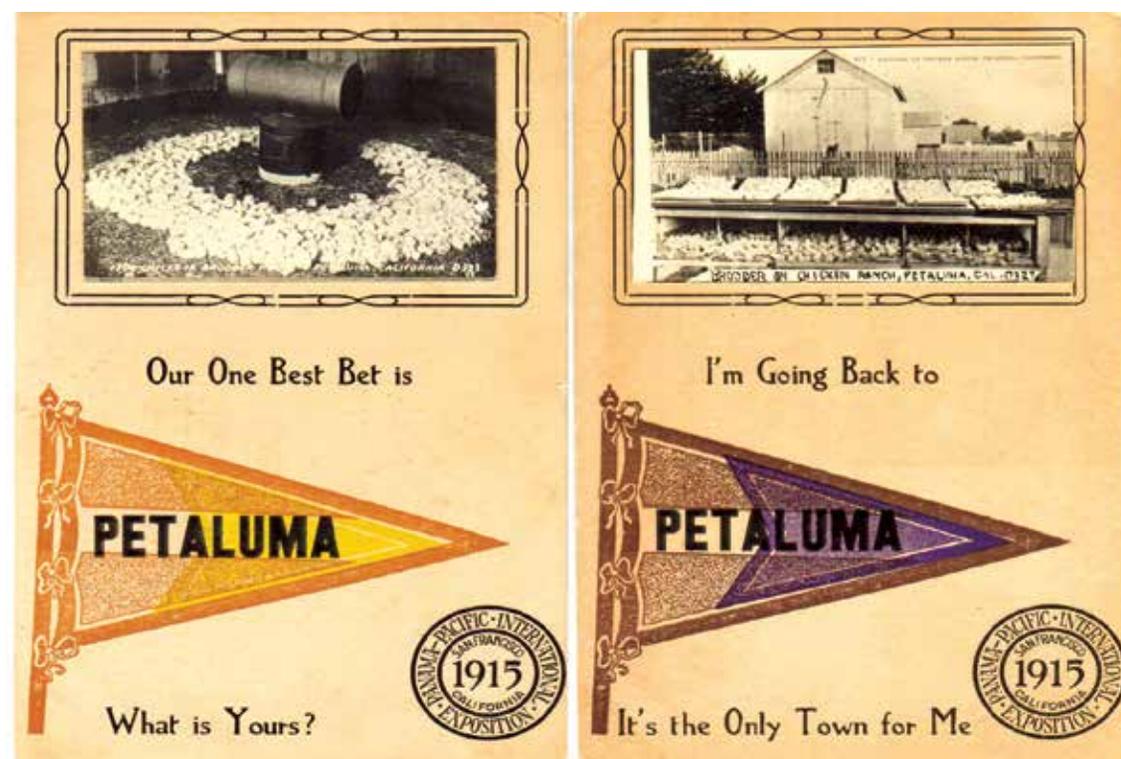


Figure 2. Postcards

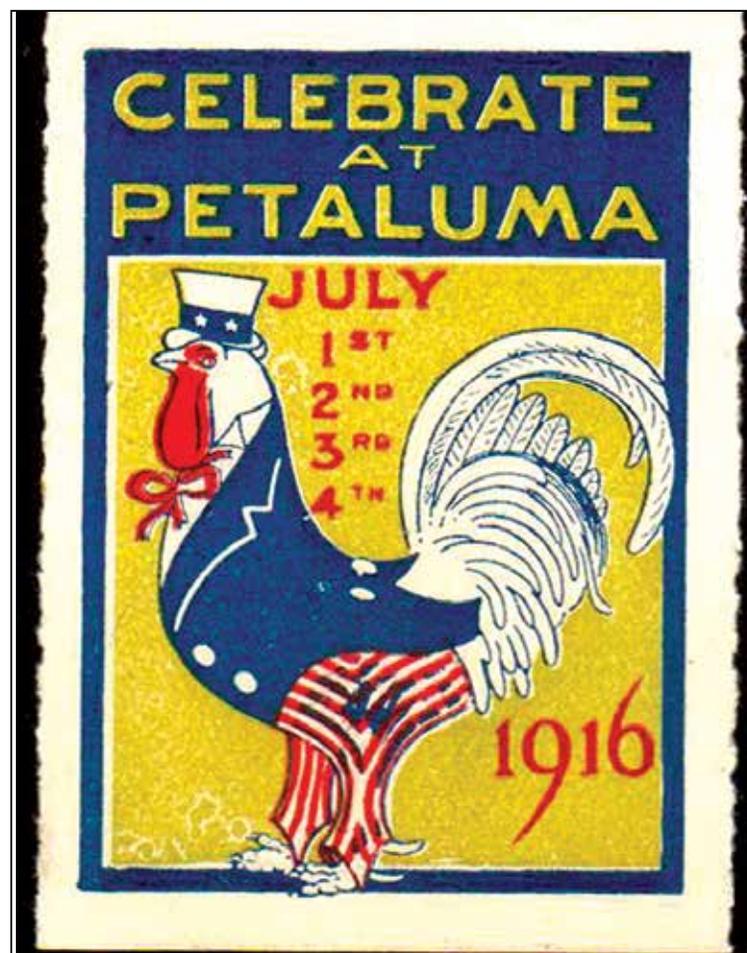


Figure 3. 1916 Fourth of July label