

CHICKENS

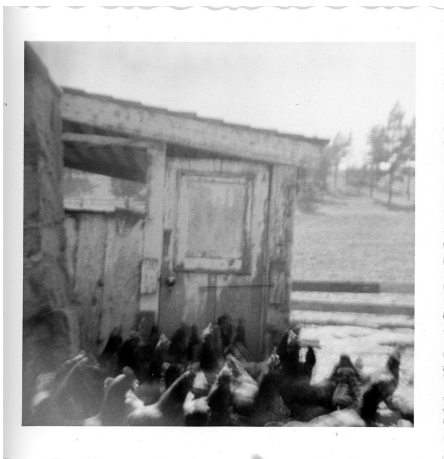
One of the pictures in my mind of my growing-up years was chickens. As discussed in WAL Jr and Being Self-Sufficient, Dad had the notion that we could be largely “off



the grid” and with regard to chickens maybe we were. Every year we would get boxes of baby chicks at the post office (yes, descendants, that was usual) by the fifty or a hundred pullets (little girls) or cockerels (little boys). And they were only a day or two old -

think about sexing them!! The pullets would

grow up to be hens - we usually ordered Rhode Island Reds which laid eggs but were also good to eat; or cockerels, which after a few months got the chop, as it were, and were frozen. All the chickens were kept at the corral at the Big House – folks, there no coyotes in Ojai at that time. At first we kept them in a chicken coop, later they were allowed to run free.



There were always a couple or three roosters which escaped that fate and ran around tormenting the hens. Some, of mixed variety, were quite lovely, with long brassy tail feathers.



The Corral from the Hill

We always carried kitchen scraps over to the corral for the chickens, and there were lots of bugs and so on, but the hens were also given scratch, ground grain and stuff. This came in fabric bags (holding maybe 15 or 20 pounds?) which were printed with nice colors and patterns. Farm people (back in the day) would use the bags for making clothing Mom never

did that but she did use them for dish towels; I still have one or two of them, and I shed a tear for the old days.

We always had wonderful eggs - grade AA - the white was perky, the yolks even more so, and we would, if we were cooking an egg, have to stab the yolk quite vigorously to break it. The baby chicks were sweet, but we were wicked children and I know that we liked to tease the roosters, especially. We would find a few eggs and hurl them at the roosters, the eggs would break and the hens would race up and peck the egg substance from the roosters. Hah!!!



The Corral from the East

We had more eggs than we could possibly eat Mom would box them up and sell them to friends and neighbors. George Meinig, a dandy dentist but something of a food faddist, liked them because they were fertile. Once Mom and friends worked up a scenario at the Ross's in which Alvin Rishel acted as a gloomy butler, and Mom came in as the egg lady to greet the Eastern guests of the Ross's. Well, those of you who didn't meet Mom in those days won't remember how polished, elegant and soignee our mother was - but it must have been an experience for all.

We had a lot of chicken - two or three times a week I suppose, and chicken livers

and giblets and the whole thing. I have never seen anything like what was then ordinary since. When I went away to school at Castilleja and saw their notion of chicken parts - dwarfish to say the least- I could barely eat the result.

One time – I think it might have been when I was 15, at St Catherine's – I collected a WHOLE BUNCH of eggs – unfortunately I didn't understand the timing of chicken egg development – large chick embryos dropping into the frying pan – ugh!!