

Bourbon Red turkeys. Artwork by L.A. Stahmer.

Strokes Of Genius



Mille Fleur Booted Bantams. Artwork by L.A. Stahmer.

Heritage Breed Artwork Is Protected, But Rarely Seen

BY CHRISTINE HEINRICHS
CALIFORNIA

Back in the 1920s, J.W. Watt, publisher of the *Poultry Tribune*, decided to commission oil paintings of important poultry breeds. Today, those 72 paintings, produced between 1928 and 1952, are carefully preserved but seldom seen, and their owners are looking for a place to display them all.

Only four are easily seen, at Watt Global Media's headquarters in Rockford, Illinois: Rhode Island Reds and Lamonas, both painted by A.O. Schilling in 1941; Old English Games by Schilling in 1946; and S.C. Black Leghorns, by F. L. Sewell in 1946. The rest, some painted by L.A. Stahmer, are carefully packed away.

The company got its start when 18-year-old J.W. Watt, a Scot from the Orkney Islands, came to America to seek his fortune. He arrived in Chicago in 1907 and learned the print trade. As he gained expertise in the field, he found

work with the Kable Brothers, where he became a foreman of the composing room in their Mount Morris, Illinois, printing plant, just south of Chicago. The *Poultry Tribune* was printed at Kable Printing, which was how J.W. learned it was struggling to survive. Convinced he could turn it into a success, J.W. and a partner bought it.

The magazine prospered, even through the Great Depression of the 1930s, selling mainly on newsstands. The company even operated its own research farm until the mid-1940s.

During those years, J.W. commissioned these oil paintings. He converted the paintings to breed pictures and used one each month in the pages of *Poultry Tribune*, *the Chicken of Tomorrow*.

"They were like pinups," said Charles Olentine, former publisher for Watt Global Media's poultry publications from 1987 to 2004.

The year 2017 will mark the 100th anniversary of the company, and the artworks will be part of commemorating that achievement. Retired CEO Greg Watt and his son, current CEO Greg Watt, are determined to keep the collection together, despite occasional offers to purchase one or more of the paintings. For these paintings to be available to the public to enjoy, they need a museum or gallery to allow them a permanent display.

"They are all wrapped up in paper in an office at Watt," Ms. Gantz said. "It's a shame to keep them tucked away."

Christine Heinrichs is the author of How to Raise Chickens and How to Raise Poultry, published by Voyageur Press. Both focus on raising traditional breeds in small flocks. Order her books, and find more that you might like, in our Bookstore section, pages 28-32.



Dark Cornish. Artwork by F.L. Sewell.

The Collection, In Part

The complete collection has never been on display at the same time, although in 2011, 18 were exhibited at the Rockford Art Museum in Illinois. Watt associate editor Andrea Gantz arranged that exhibit through connections she made in college when she worked at the museum.

Current CEO Greg Watt, great-

grandson of founder J.W. Watt, approached her to organize the exhibit, called, "Hatching History."

"I chose the prettiest ones," she said. "I picked my favorite breeds."

The museum promoted the exhibit with a "Guess the Breed" contest, posting individual paintings with clues to invite people to guess.

(*Backyard Poultry* readers will easily know which breed is the official state bird of the 13th state!)

Exhibiting works by all three artists together allows the viewer to appreciate the differences among the artists, as well as the beauty of the birds.

— Christine Heinrichs



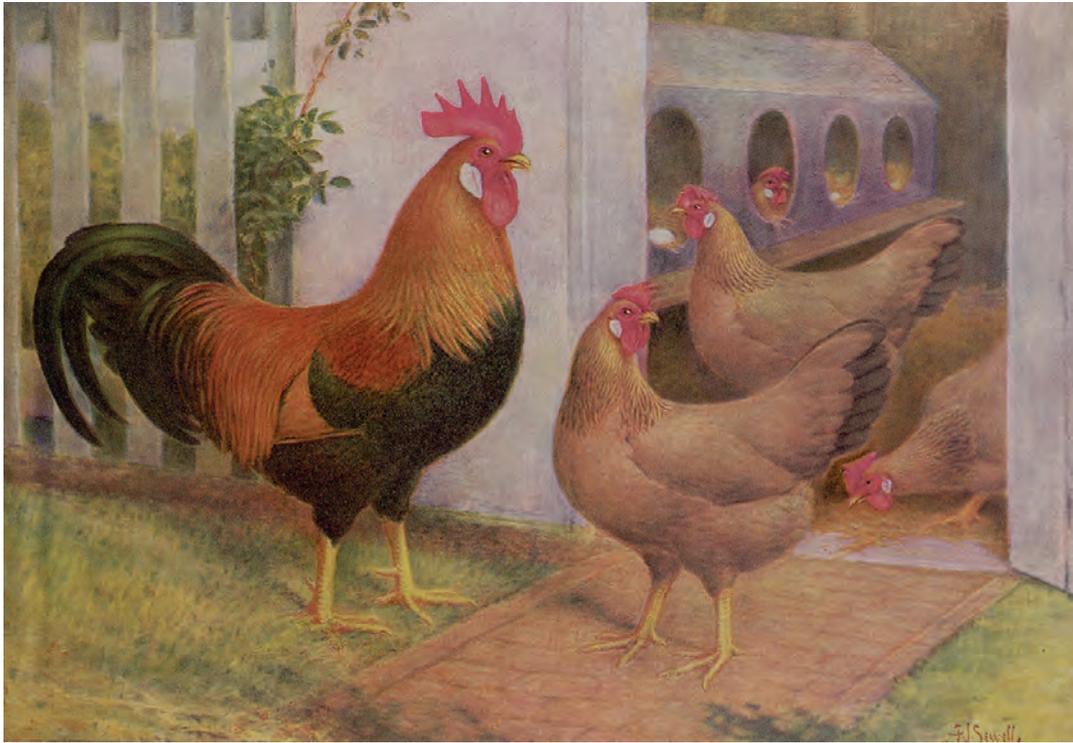
Emden and Toulouse geese. Artwork by L.A. Stahmer.



Buff Laced Polish. Artwork by A.O. Schilling

The Collection, By The Numbers

The paintings commissioned by J.W. Watt between 1928 and 1952 included: 57 of chickens, 2 of geese, 5 of turkeys, 6 of ducks, and 2 of chicks and ducklings. The owners are looking for a permanent display, so all 72 can be shown to the public.



S.C. Brown Leghorn. Artwork by F.L. Sewell.

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