

CHICKALUMA

PETALUMA, THE WORLD'S EGG BASKET



Prior to the commercialization of the chicken industry, most eggs came from small backyard flocks

The purpose of this exhibit is to tell the story of Petaluma, California's chicken industry from the invention of the world's first practical egg incubator until today. Emphasis will be on covers, post cards and some memorabilia representing the companies that grew the chicken business from those backyard flocks to what the city fathers would name "The Egg Basket of the World". Also included is material promoting the industry, including National Egg Day celebrations.

Pages 2-5	Lyman Byce and Christopher Nisson (cornerstones of the industry)
Pages 6-7	Grain and feed businesses
Pages 8-11	Promoting the industry, including National Egg Days
Pages 12-13	Must Hatch, world's largest hatchery
Page 14	Decline during the 1930's
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Page 16	New Beginnings

"Petaluma is the boss chicken town of the Pacific Coast. The man who eats genuine fresh eggs – not the cold storage kind – in San Francisco may thank Petaluma hens..." Petaluma Weekly Budget, 1898

"With all of Petaluma's sources of prosperity, the latest is the biggest and the most prominent. The poultry industry is now that one that outranks all the rest. It is **Chickaluma** now...." Frank H. Snow, 1908

"The [Single-Combed] White Leghorn rarely wants to sit; she lays most industriously; she is hardy; she begins to lay when very young." W.S. Harwood, 1908

"Petaluma is the richest city according to the number of its population (6,000) of any city in the United States."
Bert Kerrigan, Chamber of Commerce Pamphlet, 1921

LYMAN C. BYCE

“His [Byce] inventions laid the golden-egg shaped cornerstone of Petaluma’s prosperous poultry kingdom.”

- Thea Lowry, Empty Shells, 2000

Lyman C. Byce arrived in Petaluma from Canada in 1878. By 1881, the inventor had fashioned the first practical incubator, with Issac Dias. A picture is shown in the *Pacific Rural Press*, of an early version with a capacity of 260 eggs. Byce had found the optimum temperature(103 degrees). Byce and Dias formed The **Petaluma Incubator Co.** in 1882. The incubator shown on this cover is smaller, at 70 eggs. Dias died in 1884, and Byce took over the company.

PETALUMA
SILVER MEDAL 1882

INCUBATOR AND BROODER
TWO GOLD MEDALS 1884

FIFTEEN AWARDED
GOLD MEDAL 1883
FROM 1881 TO 1885.

Victorious Five Years in Succession!
THE SIMPLEST, CHEAPEST AND MOST PERFECT INCUBATOR MADE.

The Petaluma Incubator Co.
PETALUMA, CAL.

*L. H. Bingham
Greenstone Cal*

70-EGG CAPACITY, Price \$20

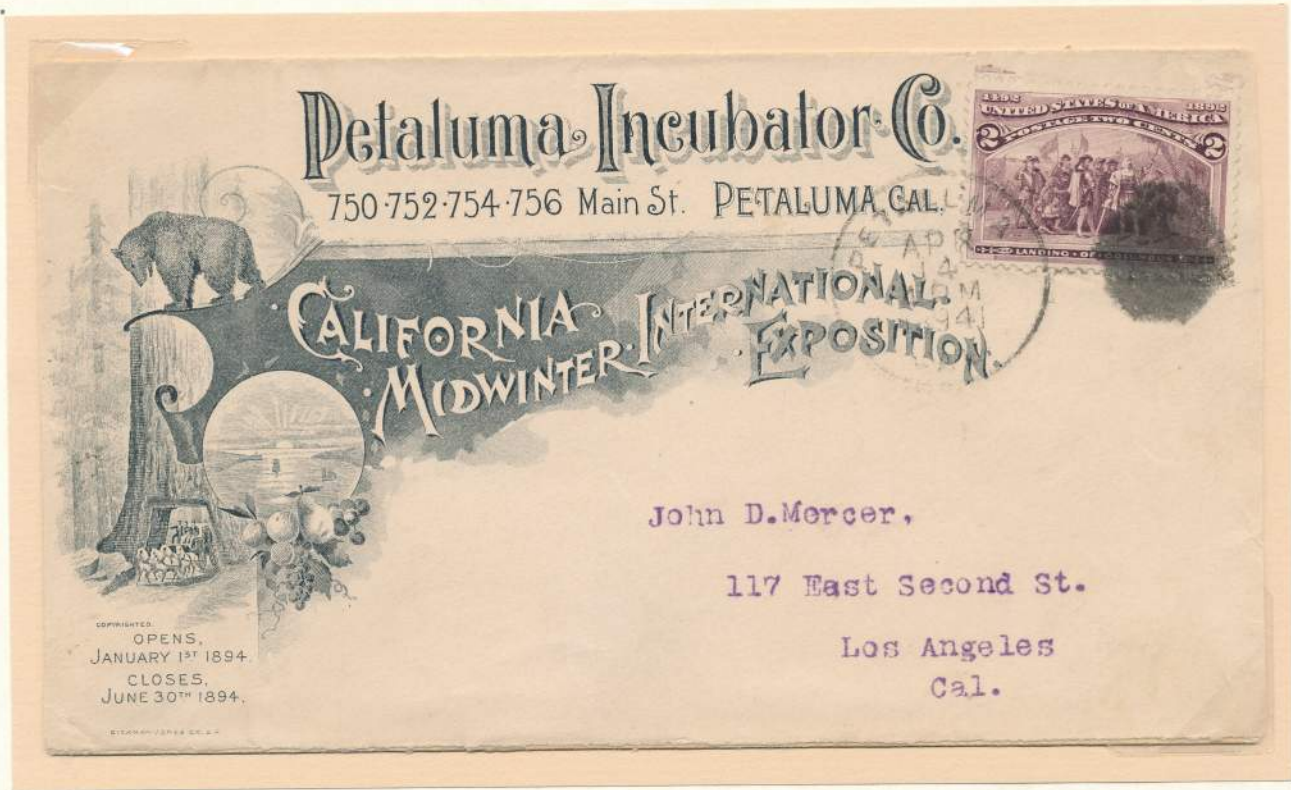
If not called for by the party to whom addressed Postmaster please hand to some other person.

No other Incubator in the United States can show the Record the Petaluma can.

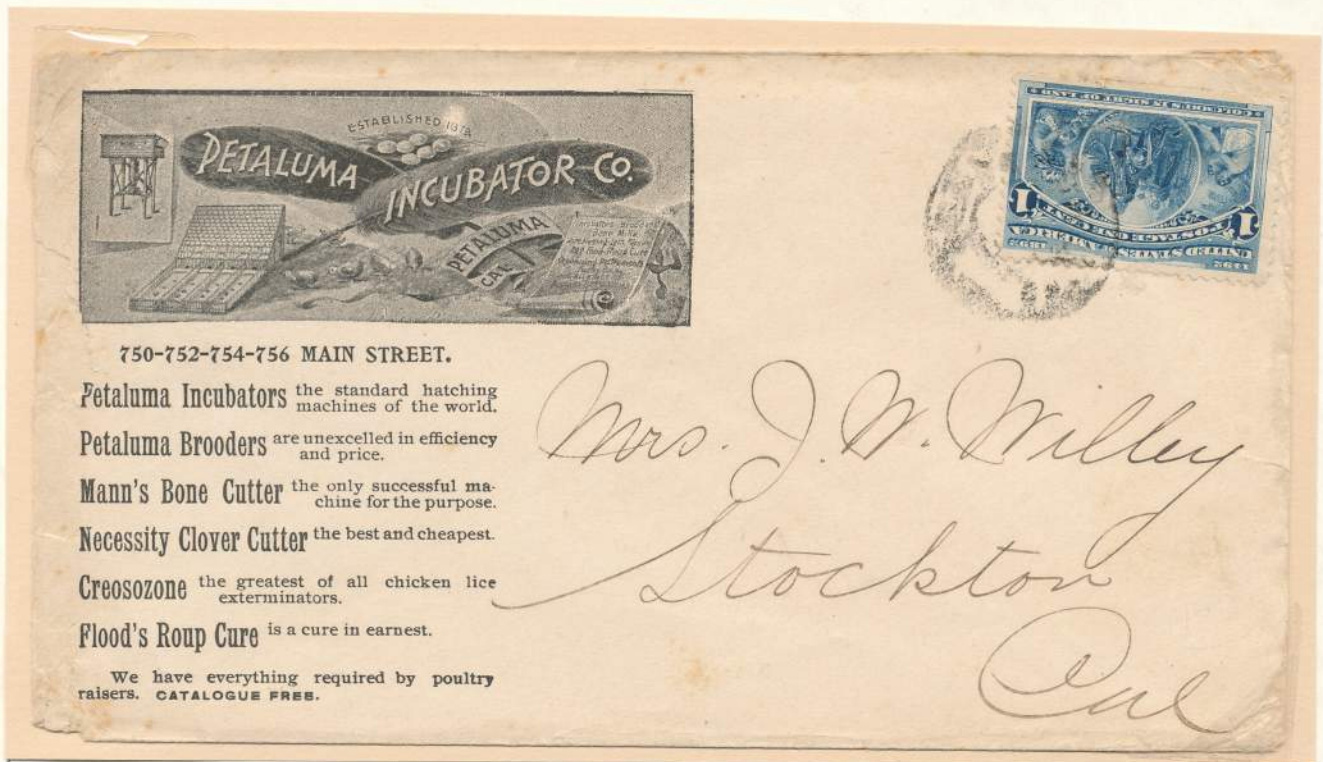
No. 0 BROODER, Price, \$10 00

This advertising cover was mailed around 1886. One cent postage was sufficient as it probably contained only printed matter. It is unsealed. This is one of two known, and the only one in private hands.

BYCE



Byce exhibited at fairs and exhibitions all over the globe, bringing back many ribbons and medals for his Petaluma Incubators. The cover above is from 1894 with the 2¢ Columbian issue paying the one-ounce rate that would be effect for decades, while the cover below (from the same period) has the 1¢ value on a circular. Note the list of products that Byce promoted, at the left. "We have everything required by poultry raisers. CATALOGUE FREE."



BYCE AND CHRISTOPHER (CHRIS) NISSON

Chris Nisson was an eager buyer of Byce's incubators, and formed the first commercial hatchery in near-by Two Rock in the 1880's. In 1905 it became the Pioneer Hatchery. He also invented the first local brooder stove. Nisson and Byce championed the *Brown Leghorn* into the 1890's. His 1895 letter announced "cup winners" for local breeders. Historians credit these two men as most responsible for the success of Petaluma's chicken industry.



California Leghorn Club.

L. Nisson
Petaluma



Mr. E. H. Freeman
Santa Clara
Cal.

C. NISSON,

— BREEDER EXCLUSIVELY OF —

Single Comb Brown Leghorn.

Poultry Ranch—TWO ROCK.

P. O.—PETALUMA, CAL.

Petaluma, Cal., Feb 7 1895

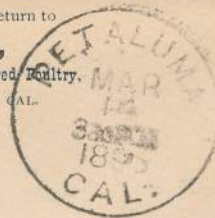
To *E. H. Freeman*

Santa Clara

If not called for in ten days, return to
L. C. BYCE,
Importer and Breeder of Thoroughbred Poultry.
PETALUMA, CAL.



Byce's Brown Leghorn Hen DAISY.



L. R. Orcutt,
Orcutt
Cal.

Dear Sir: All the Leghorns...
ha...
repa...
to...
A.H.
and...
in...
titled...
e...
son...

BYCE AND THE SINGLE COMB WHITE LEGHORN

POSTAL CARD - ONE CENT

United States of America.

PETALUMA, CALIF. FEB 16 4 30 PM '87



"Petaluma" Incubators and Brooders.—Standard of the World.

YES! WE PAY FREIGHT to your nearest Railroad Station or Steamer Landing if you are in the United States



OUR BIDDY holds 50 eggs. Price, \$10.00. The only strictly first class small incubator. WE PAY FREIGHT.



INDOOR BROODER, 100 chicks, \$5.00, freight prepaid in California, Oregon, Washington, British Columbia, Idaho, Nevada, Utah and Arizona. \$5.50 freight prepaid to all other parts of the U. S.

OVER 14,000 OF OUR MACHINES IN USE IN ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD.

130-Egg size, freight prepaid \$30.00. 350-Egg size, freight prepaid \$40.00.

Those having but a few fowls or desiring to start in a small way can now purchase a machine suitable to their wants, as perfect in all details as the more expensive ones.

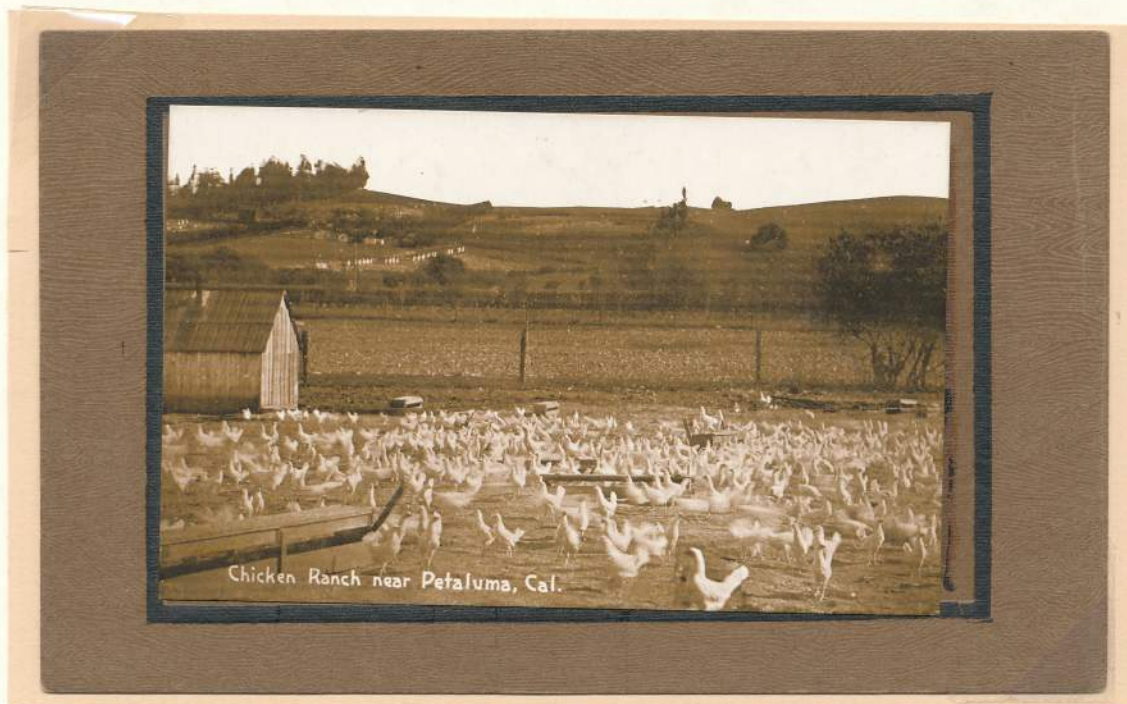
We have sold these small machines to hundreds of poultrymen, to many of the leading Physicians, and to several of the State Agricultural and Scientific Colleges, for use in the study of Embryology and Bacteriology, sciences, which requires the most perfectly constructed apparatus.

The finest Incubator Catalogue ever issued, beautifully illustrated. Free to all who write for it.

PETALUMA INCUBATOR CO.,
750-752-754-756 MAIN STREET. PETALUMA, CALIFORNIA.
WE PAY FREIGHT.—When this offer is made it's ours or an imitator.

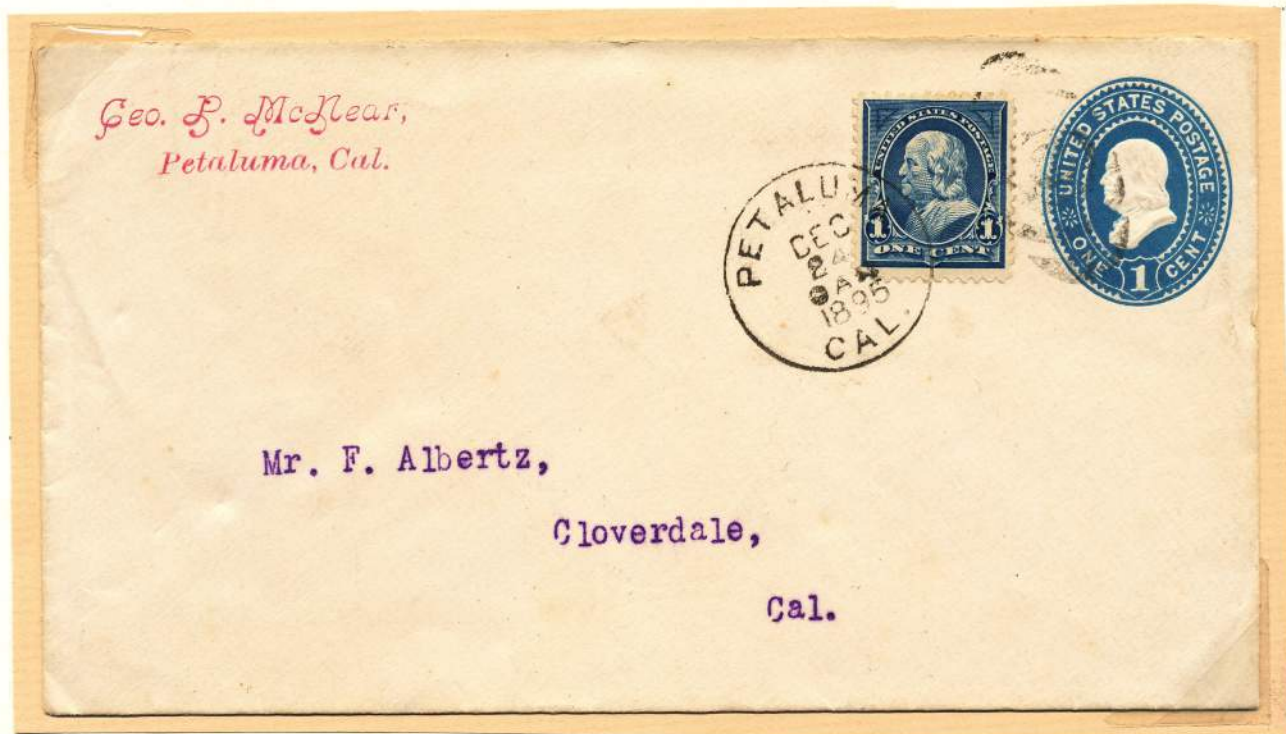
netts
Hardston
Mass.

The reverse (copied at 80%) of this U.S. Jefferson postal card, used in 1897, reports that over 14,000 of Petaluma Incubators' "machines" were being used "in all parts of the world".



This early Fototone card shows a flock of Single Comb White Leghorns (SCWL). Around the end of the 19th century, after much research, "once its [egg-laying] talents become known, producers settled on this chicken as the universal choice." - Empty Shells. It would rule during Petaluma's halcyon days, *in the millions* !.

GEORGE MCNEAR



In 1876, at the age of 19, George McNear took over the family grain business. He was another key player in Petaluma's poultry industry.. He helped Lyman Byce move in next door to his business. From a famous family (McNear Park, McNear Peninsula, etc.), he also went into banking and helped finance a great number of the local growers. Chickens must eat, so as the population of SCWL's grew, so did the family business, eventually filling 25 area warehouses with 8,000,000 bushels of grain. The McNears built the "Great Petaluma Mill" in 1902. This 1895 cover has a 1¢ blue Franklin uprating a 1¢ Franklin envelope to the 2¢ letter rate. The Teich postcard below shows some of the McNear Foods.



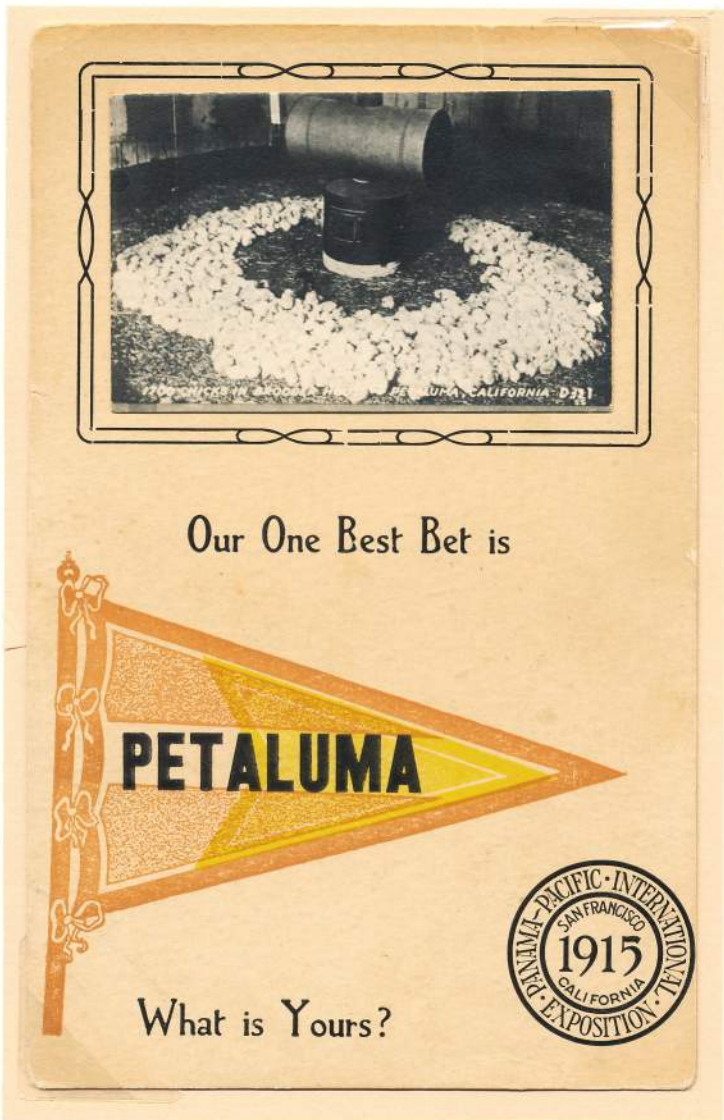
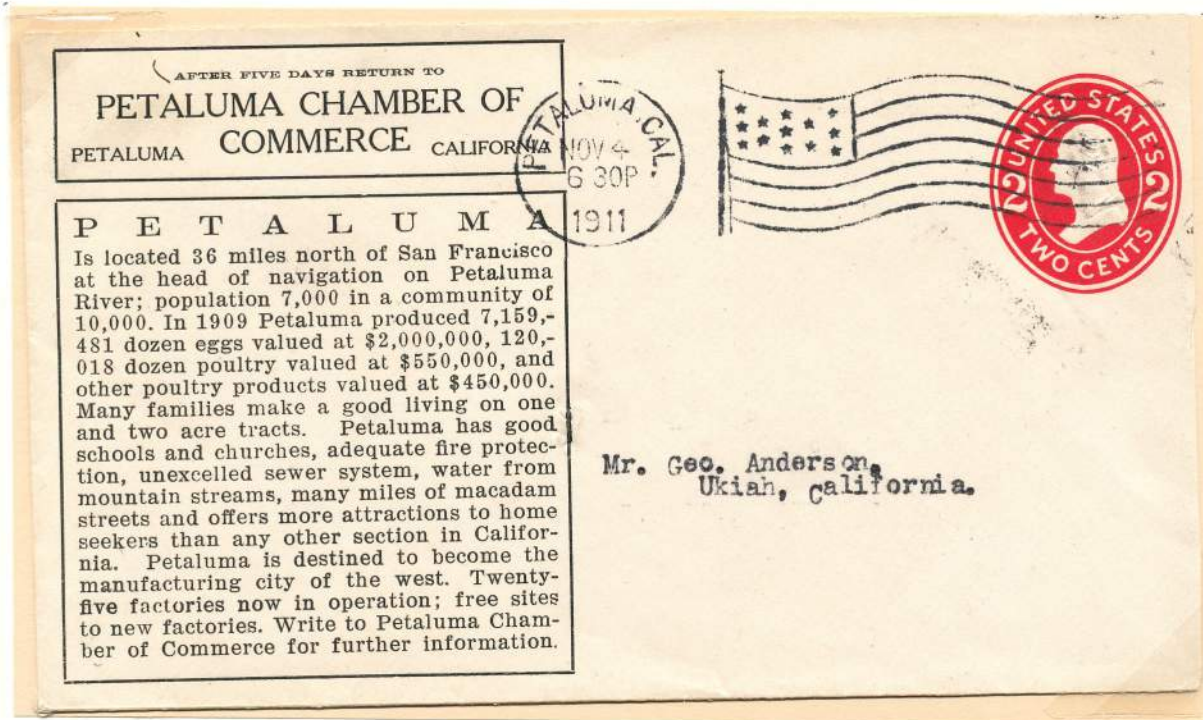
GOLDEN EAGLE MILLING COMPANY



Another large supplier of "Grain and Mill Feed of all Kinds" was the Golden Eagle Milling Company. From very modest beginnings, the company was only ten years old when the 1893 letter was sent on a two-cent Columbus and Liberty envelope. The return envelope below has an early San Francisco machine cancel of August 1, 1899, and a Petaluma receiver of August 4th on the reverse. The flour business was phased out in 1924 after a spectacular fire. At that point Golden Eagle concentrated on a variety of special feeds for the poultry and dairy industries. The McNear company merged with them in 1959, but a second fire in 1967 totally destroyed their 200 B Street location.



PROMOTING PETALUMA AND THE EGG INDUSTRY

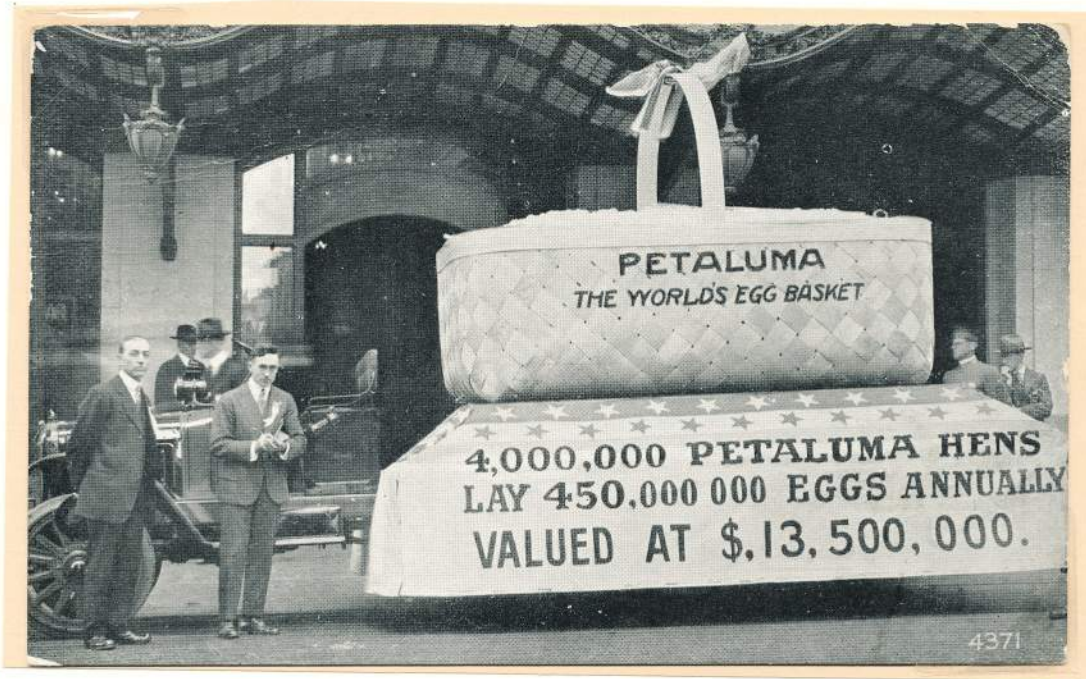


Egg production was already over 7,000,000 dozen in 1909 according to this Chamber of Commerce 1911 letter. That grew to almost 12,000,000 by 1915, per a later report from the Chamber, describing Petaluma as the "The Largest Poultry Center in the World." Production would grow experientially during the decade ahead.



The card at the left promotes the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition and Petaluma. The jaunty SCWL rooster above counts down to the 1916 July 4th celebration

BERT KERRIGAN AND NATIONAL EGG DAY



In 1918 the Chamber of Commerce hired Herbert (“Bert”) Kerrigan to promote Petaluma and its chicken industry. Bert became Petaluma’s P.T. Barnum – but, instead of circuses, it was parades with giant chickens and eggs and an “Egg Queen”. He coined a snappy slogan for the city – “**The World’s Egg Basket**”. Kerrigan’s idea of a “**National Egg Day**” required Washington’s buy-in. The first one was on August 31, 1918. It garnered nationwide publicity and Hollywood cameras. The Pacific Novelty card photo above was taken on that day. Kerrigan is directly in front of the float. The “450,000,000” egg total (37,000,000 dozen) seemed somewhat inflated by Kerrigan, but output did reach 35,000,000 dozen by 1925. Kerrigan produced an epic 63- page brochure in 1921, circulated around the country – a paean to Petaluma and its chickens.

The 1924 envelope of the Hotel Petaluma shows an egg basket illustration that would be widely used. The AZO card shows an Egg Queen from 1920 or 1921.



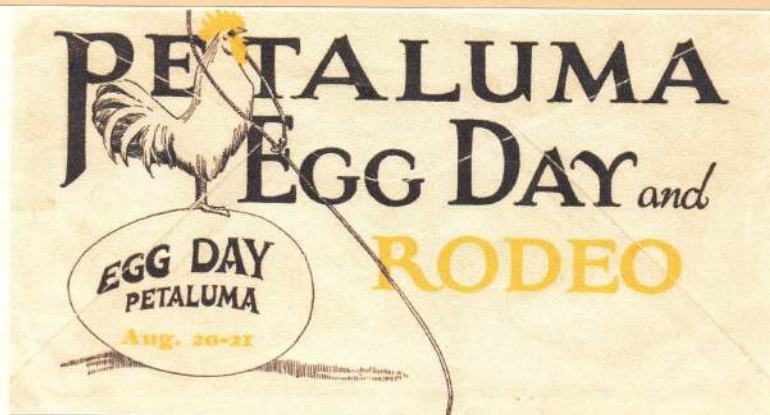
BERT KERRIGAN AND NATIONAL EGG DAY



This Pacific Novelty card promotes the 1920 Egg Day celebration. Note all the related activities listed at the upper right. The AZO card below shows the giant egg float, probably from either the 1920 or 1921 celebrations.



BERT KERRIGAN AND NATIONAL EGG DAY



This Petaluma Chamber of Commerce letter of August first promotes the 1921 Egg Day, especially its rodeo (reverse at 50%).

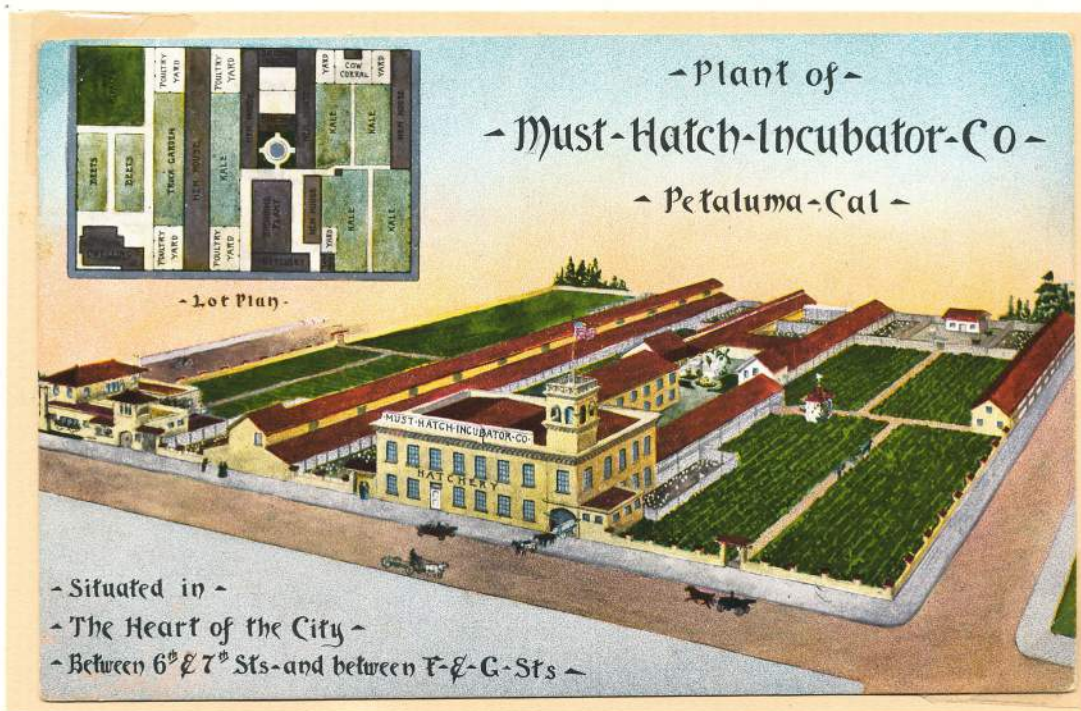
The bookmark at the right shows two eggs sunny-side up plugging the 1923 festival.

“By the end of the decade, however, a Kerrigan project to repair the fairground buildings and grandstands had gone far over budget and the Chamber lost faith in him. He would go, and with him, Egg Day celebrations and the famous parades. It was more than 30 years until the parades returned in a modified form as the Butter and Egg Day Parades.”

----Celebrating Petaluma, 2008



MUST HATCH



Must Hatch would become the world's largest hatchery. This 1912 Mitchell card shows its Petaluma location, boasting of hatching 1,250,000 chicks a year. One-day old chicks could be safely shipped within three travel days of Petaluma. Chris Nissan had shipped some as early as 1892. It was founded in 1898 by Alfonse Bourke and sold in 1912 to his son, Leo. Production would grow to 3,000,000 chicks annually by the early 1920's. The 1923 invoice, signed by Bourke, tells us that live SCWL chicks were selling for \$12 per 100. *Note the logo !*

MUST HATCH INCUBATOR Co.

ESTABLISHED 1898

LEO A. BOURKE
TELEPHONE 326



HATCHERS AND SHIPPERS OF
WHITE LEGHORN BABY CHICKS

Mr. Joe Mastro,
Seattle, Wash.

PETALUMA, CALIFORNIA December 31st, 1923.

Dear Sir:

Your favor of the 28th inst. at hand and wish to advise that we have your order booked as follows:

4000 S.C. White Leghorn chicks @ \$12, \$480, shipment on or about April 2nd, 1924.

We mailed you acknowledgment of this order under date of November 2nd, 1923, but, evidently it has been lost in the mails.

Expressing our appreciation of your patronage, and assuring you that you will be supplied with first quality chicks that will prove profitable in every way, we are,

Yours very truly,

MUST HATCH INCUBATOR CO. INC.

H

MUST HATCH

Must Hatch made it easy as possible to order, shipping C.O.D. by railway express. It continued to grow into the 1930's. A period brochure claimed an annual production of 8,000,000 chicks. The company had 3,780 incubators in aisles 208' long, and a staff of about 500, at its peak..



THIS SIDE OF CARD IS FOR ADDRESS



MUST HATCH INCUBATOR CO., Inc.

PETALUMA,

CALIFORNIA

Gentlemen-

Only good Chicks wanted, so you may book me for—

..... S. C. White Leghorn Baby Chicks, on or about
Number

..... 1926
Date

Name in full

Town County State

Phone No. R. F. D. Box No.

Remarks or special Instructions

Reverse (slightly reduced)

IF NOT DELIVERED IN THREE DAYS RETURN TO
AMERICAN RAILWAY EXPRESS COMPANY
(INCORPORATED)
CLAIM ACCOUNTANT
817 SO. WELLS ST.
CHICAGO, ILL.

(Printed in U.S.A.)

RAILWAY EXPRESS AGENCY
INCORPORATED

(6-A)
(8-29)

C.O.D. \$ _____ On _____
(Number Pieces)

Return Charges to be paid by _____ CONSIGNEE

Employe receiving must enter in above blank space the amount of C. O. D., and whether shipper or consignee is to pay return charge on collection, pasting label on C. O. D. shipment at time of receipt.

Agent at destination must make remittance of C. O. D. collections to shipper or agent at shipping point within 24 hours after collection. Sundays and legal holidays excluded.

Name and Address of Shipper { Must Hatch Incubator Co., Inc.,
PETALUMA,
CALIF.

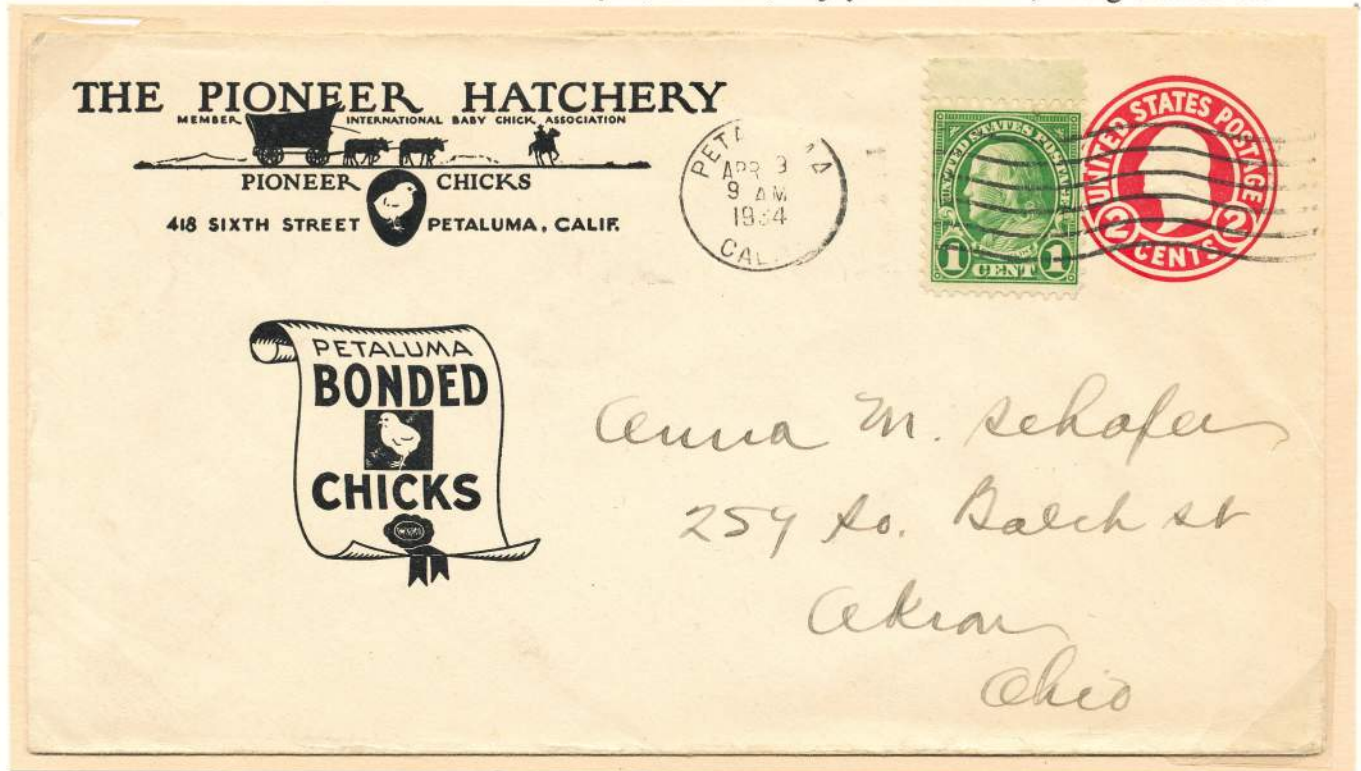
Must Hatch Incubator Company,

PETALUMA,

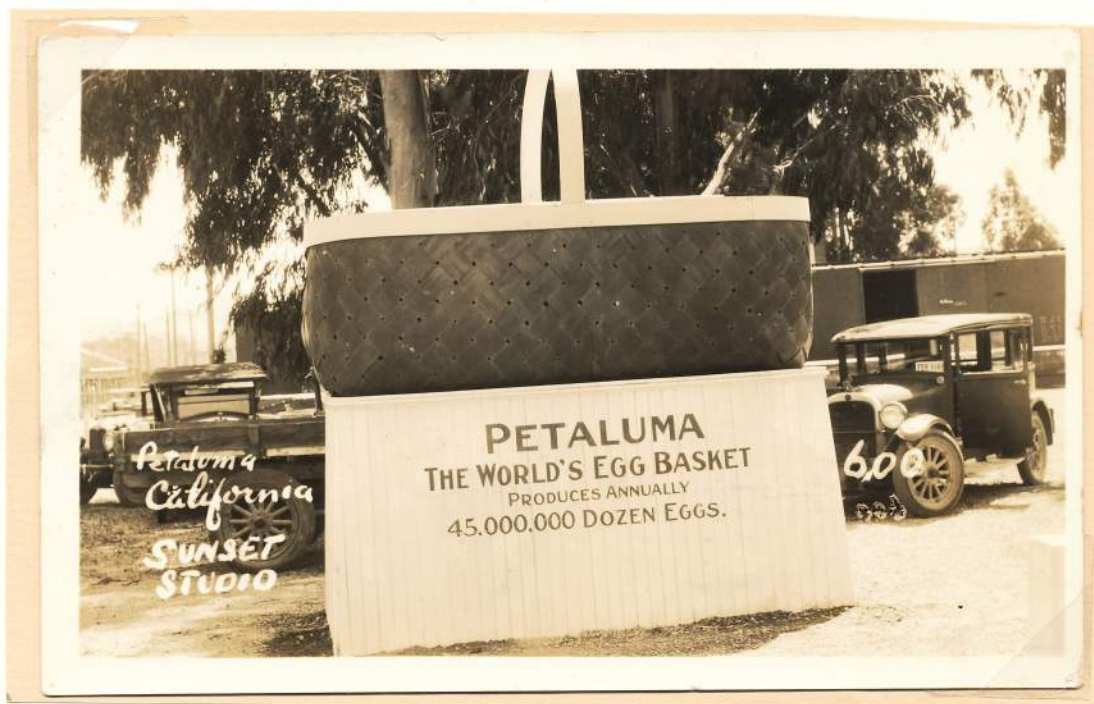
CALIF.

THE 1930'S AND THE DEPRESSION

The 1930's were not kind to Petaluma's poultrymen. Eggs that had sold for as much as 50.5¢ a dozen in 1920, seldom topped 22¢, and fell as low as 13¢ in 1939. Grain costs had also fallen, but margins were small. A number of ranches (especially the smaller ones) were foreclosed. Even the Byce family did not escape. Petaluma Incubator Company had already had one bankruptcy in 1918 related to the wartime lack of transportation and a useless inventory. Lyman's son, Elwood, would start afresh as the *Petaluma Electric Incubator Company* but that too would fail in the late 1930's. The senior Byce, however, enjoyed retirement, living until 1944.



Nisson's Pioneer Hatchery, Petaluma's first large-scale operation, would hang on until 1958, two years after the death of Eric Nisson. This 1934 envelope was uprated to pay the 3¢ rate that went into effect in 1932. The Sunset Studio card below features one of the egg baskets (some with a large leghorn) that would reside around town until at least 1950. This one cites production at 45,000,000 dozen, and is probably from the mid 1930's.



WORLD WAR II AND A REPRIEVE

“World War II brought a renewed vigor to Petaluma’s Depression-weakened poultry industry, peaking in 1945 when its ranches produced 51 million dozen eggs. By the end of the war, Sonoma County boasted of 6000 poultry producers, about three dozen full-time hatcheries with an estimated 7-8 million layers....” Empty Shells In the 1950’s, egg production started to fall. Per-capital egg consumption fell to only 234 by 1990 with the cholesterol scare. Increased costs of land and labor cut margins, and children of chicken producers wanted to escape farm drudgery. Average profits fell to one cent a dozen by 1966, from a University of California study.



*Packing chicks
for shipment
Petaluma,
Calif.
Jan 1130*

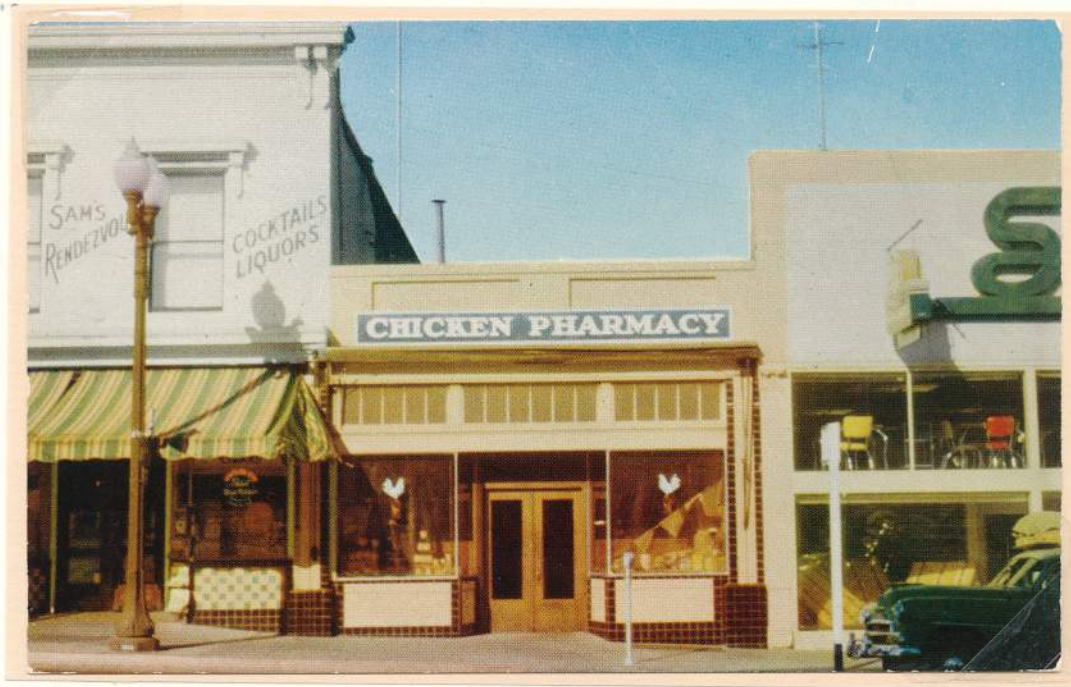
Redwood Empire Assn. Photo

In 1935, Must Hatch evolved into **Sales and Bourke**. It was subsequently acquired in 1958, but continued to operate, at lower productions levels, at its 7th street location until 1989.



Petaluma was still “Chickaluma” and the “World’s Egg Basket’ in 1958. The U.S. stamp from 1948 is a Brahma rooster. The cover celebrates the 100th anniversary of the City of Petaluma

LAST OF THE OLD BUT NEW BEGINNINGS



Petaluma's chicken pharmacy was started in 1923, and featured in Ripley's "Believe it or Not." This Highway card shows it in its prime. It closed in the early 1970's, due to declining demand.

NEW BEGINNINGS

The cost of the 1980's switchover to cages and conveyer belts forced many small producers out of business. but *new* business models arose in Petaluma. Petaluma Poultry started in 1986, and in 1989 "Rosie" became the first chicken certified as "organic". By 2008, the company was famous for "Rocky the Free Range Chicken" and sales reached \$100 million annually. Steve Mahrt (below, in photo by exhibitor) started marketing organic eggs in 1996, and healthy eggs rich in DHA Omega, in 1999. Ironically, the era of "factory chickens" in California will soon be over due to recent legislation, requiring more room and open areas for chickens. Petaluma may no longer be able to call itself the "Egg Basket of the World", but things are still going well for local producers

