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### The Birth of an American Legend

by Kirk Keene

The year was 1869, and the terrible struggle that had almost destroyed a Nation was finally over. With four years of hardship behind them, the people longed for a positive change. This change was reflected in every aspect of American life, and the infant purebred poultry industry was not unaffected.

For years, the massive Asiatics had been the rage.

Close-feathered Orientals, and flighty Mediterraneans had also been tried, but the American people wanted more.

They wanted a breed that represented their ideals and expectations.

They wanted a breed that had superior economic qualities, yet maintained a regal character.

The breed that would emerge from this era would become the Plymouth Rock.

Mr. D.A. Upham of Worcester, MA was the man who set the breed as we know it in motion. It was he who crossed pullets of Black Java ancestry with a common dunghill cock, which sported a single comb and rudimentary Barred feathers.

The progeny from this cross was severely culled, and only those with clean yellow legs and the Barred feather were kept for future matings.

Thus, Mr. Upham's strain of Plymouth Rocks came into prominence.

His was not the only version of Plymouth Rock, however.

The name of the breed was actually borrowed from an unsuccessful attempt from years before, and other men were in the process of building this strain as well.

A Mr. Spaulding and a Mr. Drake were working separately to build such a breed.

Both men enjoyed some success, but it was Mr. Upham who received the greatest credit.

It was at the Worcester, MA poultry exhibition in 1869 that Mr. Upham unveiled his creation.

In 1873, the description of the Plymouth Rock shape was a far cry from today's ideal. An early illustration from Poultry World shows a very short-backed male, possessing a poor comb and tail structure, along with a female shaped similar to a Dominique.

A mere six years later, the breed was considerably fuller and longer, and not too far off the Standard description of Rocks up to the early 1900's.

In 1910, the American Poultry Association adopted a new Standard for most breeds-the Plymouth Rock included.

The most relevant change was in the back and tail.

The new Standard called for a male to carry his tail at a 45 degree angle, while the female must be at 40 degrees.

Breadth across the back had become a desirable trait, and excess cushion in the females was eliminated.

Since 1910, very little has changed in the makeup of the Standard-bred Plymouth Rock.

The back-line was gradually decreased to its present state, but most other features have remained intact.

This fact speaks volumes, that a breed with such an early origin still maintains the qualities set forth by the pioneering creators.

As stated, the Barred Rock is the original of the varieties. This is the foundation the others would use as a springboard from which to vault themselves into prominence.

The next variety to be bred would be the White.

Some early literature suggests the first known strain of the White Plymouth Rock was, in fact, a strain of albinos bred from Barreds.

In 1884, a Mr. Frost of Maine advertised White Rocks, and such was the case.

Apparently, not all chicks carried this trait, and the strain soon disappeared.

Other White breeds were crossed with the Barreds, and by 1910, White Rocks were prominent features at both shows and on farms.

The creators had achieved the proper type as seen in the Barreds, and their destiny as one of the most popular exhibition and commercial breeds had begun.

At the Providence, Rhode Island show of 1890, a Mr. R.C. Buffington of Fall River, MA exhibited Buff Plymouth Rocks, as did a Mr. Aldrich. These combined strains were created from crosses of White Rocks and Rhode Island Reds.

Several other breeders took the initiative, and added Buff Cochin blood, thus greatly improving color.

Partridge Plymouth Rocks are the subject of a heated controversy concerning origin. At least three strains were developed at roughly the same period, that being the late 1800's through early 1900's.

It is determined that all strains included the introduction of Partridge Cochinchina blood to help secure proper color.

It is interesting to note that in 1910 at the Madison Square Garden show, the Partridge Rocks on display were compared favorably with the Barred and Whites in attendance.

As with the Partridges, the Columbian Plymouth Rock history is also clouded with multiple claims. A probable originator was a breeder of Columbian Wyandottes. His birds were no more than single combed sports, but certainly carried accurate color.

Another party refused the Wyandotte-sport method, and created his strain using Dark Brahmas, Silver Gray Dorkings, and Mottled Javas.

This unknown party was said to have supplied the majority of Columbian Rock blood throughout the country.

Over the years, other non-Standard varieties appeared, then vanished. Both Rose and Pea combed varieties were bred, but the Plymouth Rock head demanded a single comb, and so it remains today. Golden

Barred and Quail varieties were created, but did not fall into favor of capable breeders.

As we enter the twenty-first century, the grand Plymouth Rock is still with us, a reminder of those who came before us and strove to bring forth this Great American Creation.

***Because you have shown an interest in Plymouth Rocks, this would be the perfect opportunity for you to be able to contact people with similar interests. The Plymouth Rock Fanciers Club is a group of dedicated poultry fanciers throughout the USA and beyond. Membership in the PRFC will link you to people with years of experience in many varieties of Rocks. You will receive newsletters during the year with articles about the breed and contact information on the members. If you are interested, please fill out the application on the members link below.***

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