

Ruffled feathers

BY EVELYN BYRNE WILLIAMS WITH JANEEN SATHRE

Turkeys! Not my favorite farm animal. Actually, I can't remember seeing very many turkeys on Applegate farms, but my McKee grandmother had half a dozen or so. She always fixed a turkey dinner for Thanksgiving and Christmas and I did not mind their demise for a good reason. To a young child they seemed so big and frightening and, since they were not fenced in, they roamed wherever I might be.

I did not mind crossing the scary foot bridge over the river and the quarter mile walk to grandmother's, but having to escape those turkeys before getting to her front gate was quite a challenge. Those turkeys would chase me, probably thinking I had some food. On one of my visits I had stayed until Grandmother said it was beginning to get dark and I better get home. I took off in a hurry and on the way I walked under some big fir and pine trees. Then I felt some splats on my head. I looked up and saw those darn turkeys roosting on the limbs above. Ohhhhhhhhh, I was so mad!!!

Years later my brother raised the same kind of turkeys on his ranch here in the Upper Applegate. He started with a small flock and found it quite profitable.

He kept the hens, selling the eggs to a hatchery. I helped with some of the egg gathering and there was one old hen who did not like my taking her eggs. When I made the gathering, about every hour, she would bristle up and give me a good peck on my hand. My brother said to throw her over the fence into another area since she wanted to set on her eggs and become a momma. So I then tried to get a hold of her tail feathers before she could peck me, but she would spring from her nest and outrun me.

I became exhausted after each chase around that big nesting area. Finally I managed to grab a part of her tail, which left her with fewer feathers. Eventually, she lost all of them and I still was unable to catch her. That's when my brother couldn't stop laughing at my problem and came to help. He soon took care of it by outrunning her. She would still ruffle her feathers and bristle whenever she saw me coming near. Poor thing—she did look funny with no tail feathers.

In the spring my brother's large brooder house would be full of young ones that were later turned out in his fields to finish growing on a special mix



Morris Byrne and his large flock of turkeys on Upper Applegate Road circa 1942 (from Evelyn Byrne Williams collection).

of grains put in feed boxes. In following years, the boxes were replaced with large metal self-feeding containers, which saved time and energy in keeping the turkeys fed. My brother soon found the turkeys were more profitable than his cattle and began raising large flocks of the white, broad-breasted ones, both for eggs and meat. A truck would come to take the turkeys for processing before Thanksgiving and Christmas.

For many years the turkey ranch on Upper Applegate Road, and even a second ranch on Highway 238 in Ruch, were landmarks well known by locals. Eventually progress put my brother out

of business as it became cheaper to have large operations all in one big building.

Years went by without seeing a turkey in the Applegate, but now I see the same old kind of turkeys that my grandmother and brother first had. I don't know if there really were wild turkeys here in those days; I don't remember ever seeing any. All I can say is that I don't dislike them now, but when they come in my yard I sure get tired of chasing them. Again!!

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