

# Constable scores on a foul (fowl) tip

The sound of a rooster crowing in the early morning hours and the crackle of a hen as she proudly proclaims to the world that she has earned her keep by laying an egg is rare in Chelmsford today. But it was commonplace at the turn of the century. Although there were few large commercial poultry farms, most families had a chicken coop in the back yard. The small flock assured a ready supply of fresh eggs for the housewife's menu as well as a chicken dinner on Sunday.

Sometimes the birds were equally appealing to individuals who didn't wish to be troubled with raising and feeding them. *The Lowell Weekly Journal* of Jan. 4, 1901 records an example of the latter.

"There was a lively boom in the hen business in this part of town last week, but it lacked the element of profit to the original owners. Monday night George B. Alexander suffered the loss of a number of fowl by hen thieves and Friday night N.A. Glidden's hennery was depopulated to the extent of 125 fine pullets. The selectmen offered a reward of \$50 for the conviction of these and other rascals who may be engaged in similar acts of larceny."

One week later, the newspaper followed up the story: "When Constable George M. Wright sharpens his tomahawk, whets his scalping knife and takes to the warpath, he is pretty sure to return with trophies. His

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## The way it was

By George A. Parkhurst



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latest achievement in proving that the way of the transgressor is hard in the detection of the scamps who, on the night of December 28, made a raid on N.A. Glidden's hennery and bore away 125 choice pullets which the owner had carefully brought up from chickenhood.

"Saturday morning, following the foray, Constable Wright started on an exploring expedition. He took the electric (streetcars) Bostonward via Billerica, having an impression that the marauders might have started out from the Hub vicinity. In the several towns along the line, he interviewed brother officials and the signs finally pointed in the direction of Somerville, where he found the headquarters of a gang who had the undeniable reputation of foraging upon the country round about.

"As a result of the interview with Chief Parkhurst of the Somerville police, officers were instructed to watch the suspected locality and their vigilance was rewarded by overhauling a returning wagon which bore evidence of having been used for the transportation of poultry.

"Following this clue, Sergeant Carter of the Somerville force soon after arrested, in a liquor saloon in Boston, a man by the name of Orrell who subsequently confessed that he and three others were the parties wanted and that they had disposed of the biddies in Nashua and vicinity. Tuesday, following his visit to Somerville, Mr. Wright drove to Nashua and, with the aid of the local police, found several places where the stolen birds had been sold.

"Saturday morning Constable Wright again went to Somerville and brought Orrell to Lowell where he is now in safe keeping till Judge Hadley can have an opportunity to pass on his case. At time of writing, it is expected that his partners in crime will soon be in limbo. The Chelmsford officer deserves much credit for his persistency in ferreting out these chicken thieves whose detection may check other raids in this neighborhood."

Fortunately chicken-napping was not common and the backyard flock, along with the kitchen garden, continued to be popular. However, since World War II, the cheerful cock-a-doodle-doo has become a rarity in Chelmsford.

But that's the way it was in less sophisticated times.

*George A. Parkhurst is a Chelmsford historian whose family has lived in town since 1654.*