

HISTORY OF BREEDS

“Where it all began”

Researched and written by: D. Robinson,
APA-ABA Youth Program

This is” fun” reading as well as educational!

Where did your favorite breed originate?

Music of Stephen C Foster below.

The first breeders of poultry were the “Game” cockers who bred for the pit. Some of their renowned winners were produced by inbreeding. General color of plumage was of some interest, but detailed feather patterns were not considered. Vigor came first, and after it, a hard compact body, together with good feet and agility of action. A bird whose hind toe turned forward was at once rejected, for such a defect is inheritable, and a bird standing on feet so formed could be knocked over backward.

One feature of the Games was their long life, hens serviceable at 12 to 14 years of age with some cocks living and still used for mating at 20 years old, although this is rare.

The amusement of cock fighting was recorded in the codes of Mana more than a thousand years before the Christian era. The ancient Persians stamped the image of the cock upon their coins; the sport passed to Greece, and later the Romans became great cock fighters, and with them the Fame cock was revered almost as a deity. As the tendrils of civilization moved westward, the French and English fought this fowl of bold alertness.

At last cock fighting was outlawed in England, and fowls bred to feather. That is how exhibition poultry took the stage. Standards were drafted for the different breeds, for the guidance of breeders and judges, and our first American Standard was a reprint of this English work.

In my research I found that some very keen fanciers arose, notably Sir John Sebright, who originated the **Silver and Golden Sebright bantams**. Also a group of artist/breeders made the **Hamburgs** such a beautiful fowl that they at once attract tributes of admiration. The big impetus to fancy poultry came after the British navy threw open the port of Shanghai, China. By sailing ships, the big, feather-legged Asiatics came into Britain and America. (picture #2) These birds were so different and so striking they took the poultry breeding world by storm. There was a scramble to procure some of the stock, prices soared, and magnified tales were told of Shanghai roosters that were tall enough to eat off the top of a barrel (picture #1, and of pullets so tame that they could be kept in the attic like kittens. With the perseverance of gentlemen of the age, every fowl on the ship was purchased and kept in the America's. Eventually, after breeding, a Mr. Burnham of Boston sent some to Queen Victoria in England.

Picture #1



*Some of this Asiatic stock was bred pure, but soon it was being crossed into the common chickens of Western Europe and the United States. The chickens of that day seemed to lack size, and from this union there arose a new type of intermediate breeds. This graced the origins of the **Plymouth Rocks, Wyandottes, Rhode Island Reds,** and **Jersey Giants** in the United States; the **Orpington** and the **Sussex** in England; the **Favorelles** in France; the **Malines** in Belgium; the **North Holland Blues** and **Barnevelders** in Holland.*

After their introduction, our Plymouth Rocks, Wyandottes and Reds were bred for type and color as truly and just as studiously as the Sebright bantams by Sir Sebright. The lacing on his Sebrights was the inspiration and the incentive to breeders of the laced Wyandottes. New comb types were tossed into the mix; rose combs being the most prominent during this time. Then the size of the single combs developed, the cushion comb became prominent in some breeds, the V shaped comb developed and more. Colors were developed that became the mainstay of all of our breeds of today.

The theory of double mating, originated by the Hamburg breeders, was applied with success in the breeding of Barred Plymouth Rocks. The traditions of the fancy swayed the minds and hearts of fanciers across the world.

There were shows developed that needed to be reported and winners to delight the eye of the illustrators. These birds bred to type and color, instigated a period enshrined in the memory of all fanciers who met at these shows and was the beginning of showing our fancy birds of today.

Then came the out and out production breeders, who took the breeds of established types, trap nested the females, and developed a new technique of breeding. They began talking of dominant and recessive factors in their breeding stock. They recognized the principle of inheritance factors and it resulted in new breeding practices. With this new understanding, a new vocabulary followed, they speak of genes, hormones and chromosomes, words that would have been meaningless in the past.

When a serious breeder of any fancy fowl looks at breeding and reproducing his favorite breed he looks at a mosaic of gene factors with each gene behaving independently of the other in the process of reproduction. Tossing your birds out in the backyard and hoping for the best normally does not produce the best prodigy of the breed, especially over a period of several breeding. It takes time, effort and patience to keep a breed true to the traits set forth by the "standards".

When did all of this take place in the history of our poultry fancy? The first standard printed was in 1865 in Britain and was a very small production compared to the standards of today. Our own American Poultry Association was founded in 1873 in Buffalo, NY with our first standard being printed in 1874. I am blessed to have a copy of the 1894 standard and it's completely different than our standards of today. There are no pictures but in each breed section there is a blank page with slots where the breeders of yesteryear inserted a feather from different areas of their bird's body.

The American Poultry Association and the American Bantam Associations are the guardians of our "Standard of Excellence of Exhibition Poultry" today in the United States. It is extremely important that we do not take these associations for granted. If they had not taken on the responsibility as the guardians of fancy fowl and do not continue to be the guardians of our fancy fowl, where would we be today and where will we go tomorrow?

As a point of interest there are many breeds that are recognized in other countries that are not found in our own country. For example, Ixworth, Scots Dumpy, Crod Langshan, Bresse, North Holland Blue are all found in the British Poultry Standard. I found this so fascinating when researching that I hope to procure standards from other areas of the world for more fascinating reading.



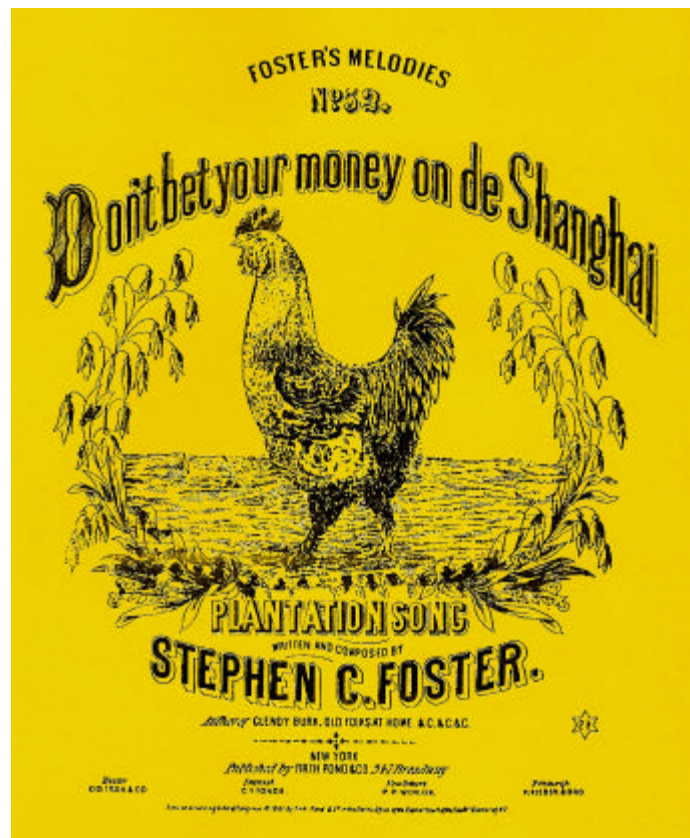
These birds from Shanghai, China are basis for many of our fancy breeds of today including Brahmas, Langshans and Cochins, as well as breeds mentioned earlier in our story.

This picture came from the Illustrated London News and titled "SHANGHAE FOWLS PRESENTED TO HER MAJESTY, QUEEN VICTORIA, BY MR. BURNHAM OF BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS.

There was a song written about the Shanghai's in the early history of this breed. The song was written and composed by Stephen C. Foster a renown composer of the day.

Stephen Collins Foster (born 4 Jul 1826; died 13 Jan 1864)

Among his most popular songs are: *Oh! Susanna* (1848), *De Campton Races* (1850), *Old Folks at Home* [aka *Swanee River*] (1851), *My Old Kentucky Home*, *Good-Night!* (1853), *Jeanie With the Light Brown Hair* (1854), *Gentle Annie* (1856), *Beautiful Dreamer* (1862), and *The Voices That Are Gone* (1865).



Below are the lyrics to this song.

De Shanghai chicken when you put him in de pit

He'll eat a loaf of bread up but he can't fight a bit
De Shanghai fiddle is a funny little thing
And ebry time you tune him up he goes ching! Ching!

Chorus – Oh! De Shanghai!
Don't bet your money on de Shanghai
Take a little chicken in de middle of de ring
But don't bet your money on de Shanghai

I go to de fair for to see de funny fowls
De double headed pigeon and de one eyed owls
De old lame goose wid no web between his toes
He kills himself a laughing when de Shanghai crows

Chorus... ..(above)

De Shanghai's tall but his appetite is small
He'll only swallow ebry thing that he can overhaul
For bags of wheat just as certain as your born
A bushel of potatoes and a tub full of corn.

Chorus... ..(above)