

ABOUT PLYMOUTH ROCKS AND
THROWING ROCKS

Second Thoughts

By J. B. Leftwich

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A rooster has one function in life, and that is to – well, you know what a rooster is expected to do and what a rooster does, so it would be redundant to explain it to you.

A boy in the era of the Great Depression had several functions, but the one I want to address is his bent on throwing rocks at telephone brackets in the rural area of Putnam County where I grew up and where I threw plenty of rocks at brackets but with a lamentable degree of inaccuracy. The telephone company much preferred my throwing rocks at their brackets than at some other target.

There was a knot hole in the side of our barn, the goal of many rocks. I can't remember ever tossing a pebble through it. But once I hit a cow. Never mind that I was throwing at a horse. Once I tried to throw out a runner at third base and hit the shortstop covering second base.

So much for rocks. Let us now talk of Plymouth Rocks. More specifically, Mama's Plymouth Rock rooster. Mama swapped a dozen eggs to the neighbor for one of her young roosters which Mama believed would improve her flock and ultimately increase egg production.

As the rooster grew through frying size into broiler size, it became apparent Mama had a prize fowl in her flock. Plans were made to sell off the older roosters and leave the thing that roosters do entirely to the young Plymouth Rock. Some way, Mama communicated her pride to the rooster, and he became an arrogant, strutting cock of the walk. He spent as much time preening himself as he did doing what is supposed to come naturally with roosters.

Mama's rooster developed an annoying habit. At daybreak he wanted everybody to admire his plumage and his posture: he started crowing at the crack of dawn. This mattered not six days of each week because we were up early anyway. But on the seventh day, I wanted to sleep. Here was this strutting, bragging rooster outside my bedroom window boasting to the world about his status in life.

I would shoo him away, but he came right back to continue his heralding of the coming of day. One Sunday, I rolled out of bed, went outside, selected a rock, and let fly at the rooster. A 20-game winner in the major leagues could not have thrown more accurately. A dead center hit. Right in his neck.

As I stood admiring my pitching arm, reality set in. There was Mama's prize Plymouth Rock rooster flopping in the dirt and making gurgling noises. Mama was going to kill me, that was for sure.

Fortunately for me, he was only stunned. He lived to continue his mission which, as explained earlier, was to propagate the breed. But his crowing was reduced to a croak and his head was askew for the rest of his life. Instead of rendering a rousing cock-a-doodle-doo at daybreak, he would squawk a miserable "cor-ra-roo" in a hoarse voice that awakened nobody. Then he would stand puzzled, wondering about his raspy rendition.

He continued to preen and strut, but with his head forever titled, he often unintentionally strutted into the creek. He would aim for the feeder and run into the fence. You would have thought that his handicap would have humbled him, but he was as arrogant as ever. He was still cock of the walk.

He continued to perform his assigned function in life, but sometimes he ran past his target, leaving a Plymouth Rock hen puzzled about what didn't happen.

One happy consequence: I slept later on Sunday.

(J.B. Leftwich is a veteran journalist and a columnist for *The Lebanon Democrat*.
Email: leftwichjb@charter.net)

<http://www.ajlambert.com>