

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE OF THE PROVINCE OF QUEBEC

POULTRY BRANCH.

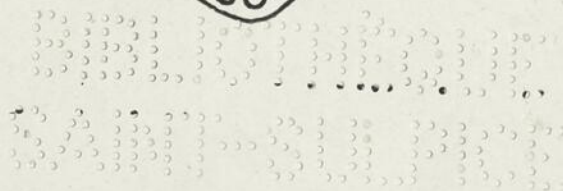
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The Production of Capons for the Market

— BY THE —

Manager of the Poultry Department of the Oka Agricultural Institute.



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Students of the Oka Agricultural Institute packing Capons for the market

“Caponizing” and its importance.

Many people have very false ideas regarding this branch of poultry culture, and judging by the questions which are often put to me, it is very easily seen that, to many, the capon is a mystery. I am asked sometimes if I can supply capon eggs? Do the hens of this breed lay better than others? And so on.

The Capon is simply an emasculated male, a cock bird from which the organs of reproduction have been removed by an operation called “caponizing.”

Whilst this operation has been carried out in Europe for centuries, here in Canada it is still in its infancy. In the United States it has developed so much as to have formed a new branch of commerce and a source of big revenue to the poultry yard.

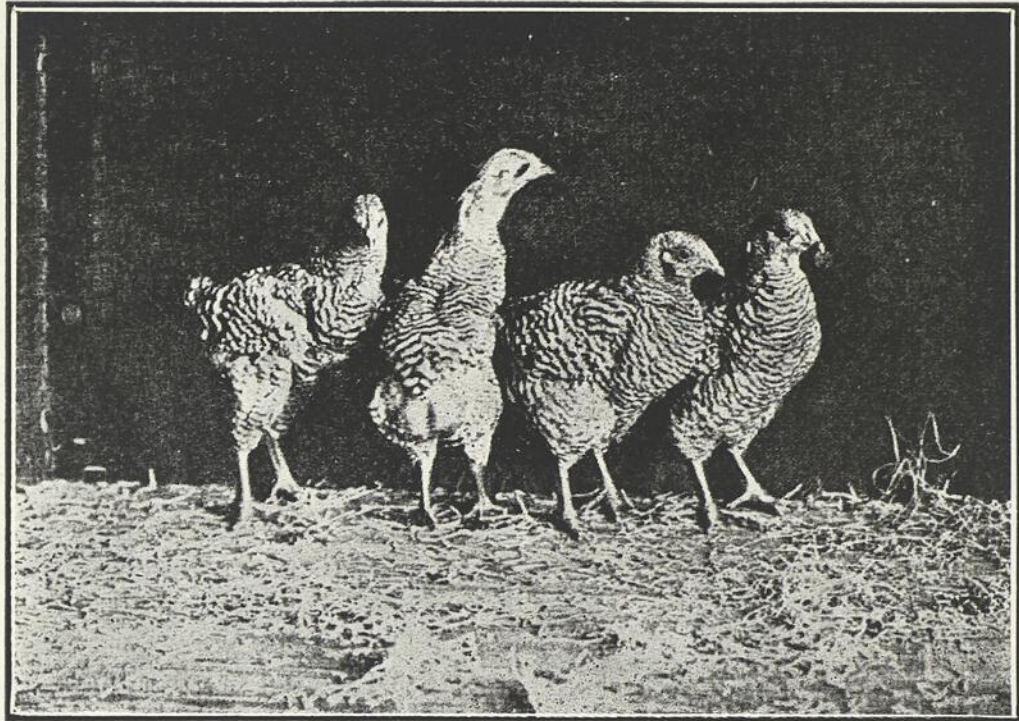
The capon, having lost in the poultry yard his prominent position, through being emasculated, has become nevertheless an important *personnage* amongst his feathered mates, and not only can he boast of being tender, juicy and succulent at eight and ten months of age, but, besides this, he is running in close competition with the hens in the art of raising a family, for once a capon, his fatherly instincts are soon transformed into those of a mother, a quality with him which is very interesting when seen looking after, leading and fostering a flock of fluffy chickens.

The chief aim in caponizing is to prolong in the bird the quality and fine texture of meat which is to be found only in a chicken. In short, we lengthen his chicken days, whilst if left unoperated, he would after a few months become less tender and less tasty.

Sometimes the Capon will weigh more than a soft roaster. In december 1915, I weighed one which moved the scales at 12½ lbs, live weight and 11½ lbs., plucked. This was really a capon, for apart from its head which, in a certain sense, may be called his “Trade mark”, the market insists that he weigh at least seven pounds.

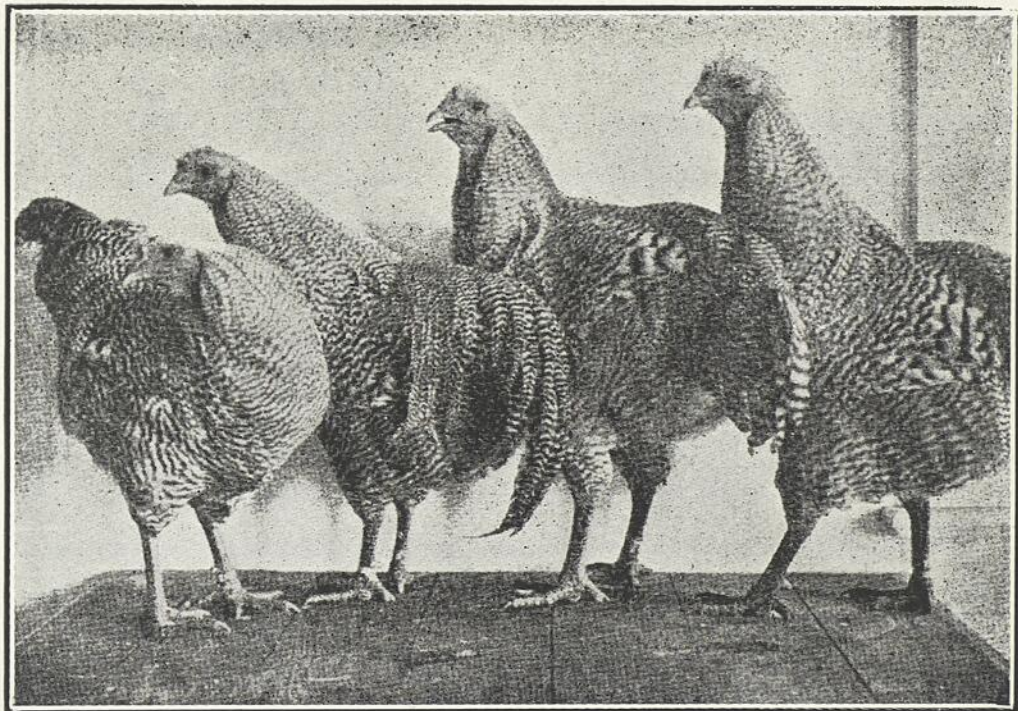
AT WHAT AGE SHOULD BIRDS BE CAPONIZED ?

Formerly the operation was done when the bird was 3 or 4 months old; but experience has taught that from 6 to 8 weeks is the right age. When the operation is to take place, the birds must be in “good condition” and should be made to fast for 36 hours and shut up in a pen by themselves.



Four cockerels, six weeks old, when caponized.

When caponizing was first started in France, a few centuries ago, the farmers' fingers were practically the only instruments for we are told that the farmer used to allow the nail of his right hand little finger to grow to such a length as to be able with his nail to remove the organs from the bird. In fact the nail of the farmer's finger represented the forceps



Same birds at 7 months. Real capon type.

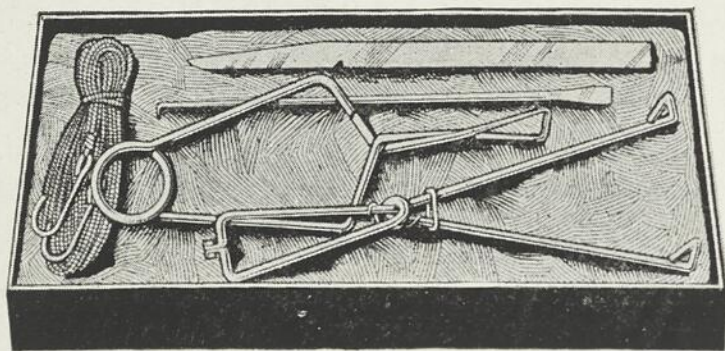
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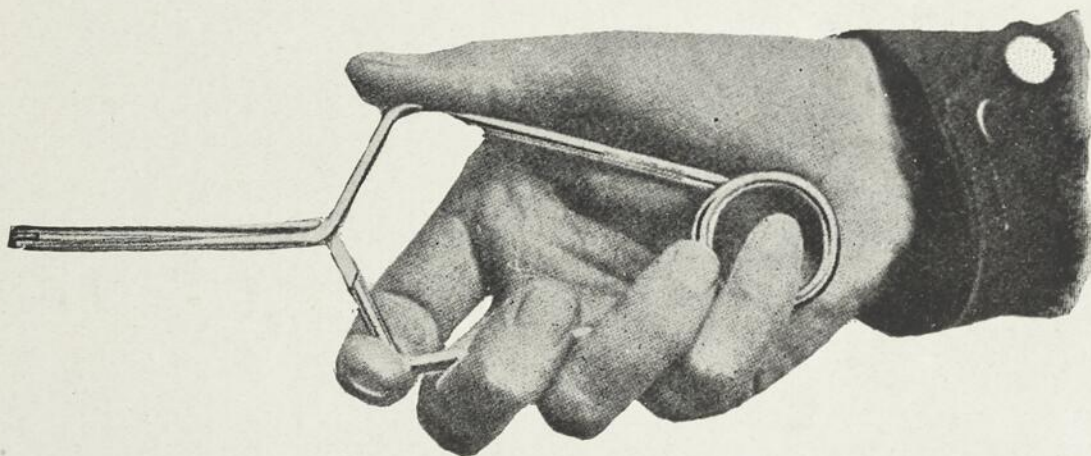
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which we use to-day. The instruments used, it must be remembered, add greatly to success or failure and though we are enclined to smile when the French farmer's nail is mentioned, it must be said that some of the instruments on the market to-day are far from being perfect, and many of them remind us of the nail trick mentioned above.



Caponizing tools.

I have tried, for a number of years, about a dozen different makes of forceps (the main tool), and I must say that as far as now none of them is superior to the one invented by Mr. George Beuoy, of Cedar Vale, Kansas, U. S. I have adopted Mr. Beuoy's instruments and they have proven to be very satisfactory, I believe his Set N.-10 is about the best known at the present day.



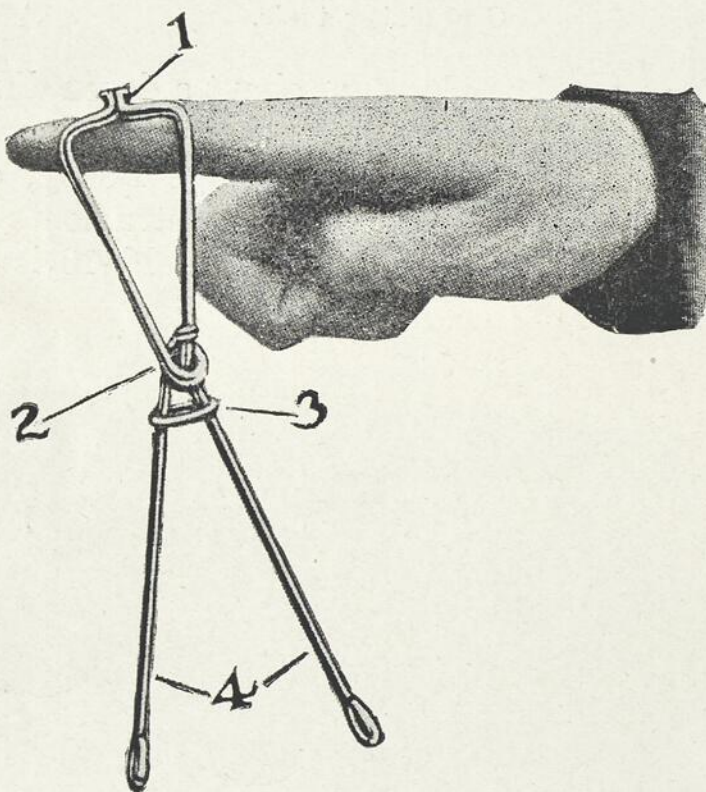
How to hold the Forceps.

However it gives me pleasure to say that Mr. S. K. Burdin of Toronto, formerly of Ottawa, a poultry fancier of high reputation, offered me a new model which he has invented and placed on the market. I have tried these forceps and am pleased to say that I have succeeded to make very good caponizing with them; but unfortunately these instruments are more expensive than those of Mr. Beuoy. Though these two makes have attained a high degree of perfection future might bring us new improvements.

A prominent surgeon of Quebec, aided by his son (one of our former students), now engaged in the poultry business, and who has made a real success of the capon industry, is presently adding a finishing touch to the forceps of his own make. The results obtained by using this new set of tools shall decide if they are to be considered as the standard of perfection for caponizing.

The work of the forceps is to grasp firmly and surely the organs to be removed, a detail of the operation which is very important, for failing to do this the result will be a number of "slips" or birds but partly castrated. Now, failure is, of course, often due to the inability or lack of skill of the operator, but oftentimes the instruments themselves are to blame, as they largely determine success or failure. In fact, without good instruments the most skilful caponizer fails to produce a good sound capon.

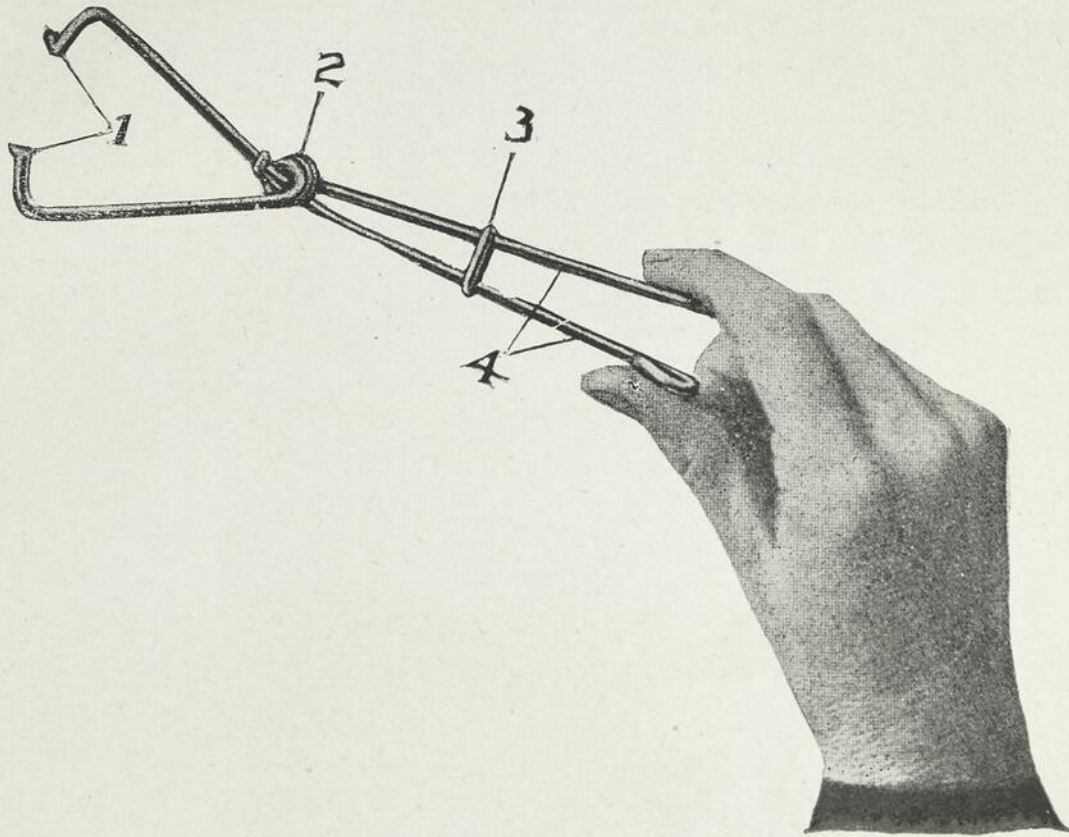
Apart from the forceps, the following instruments are needed :



Spreader, folder. 1.—Flanges, to be introduced, after the incision is made, between the two ribs to keep them apart. 2.—Automatic spring holding the instrument. 3.—Sliding ring holding the handles of the instrument. 4.—Handles of the spreader.

1.—A good operating knife; 2.—A spreader which serves to keep the ribs apart when the incision has been made; 3.—A steel hook, to tear away the thin membranes which cover the intestines, and, 4.—A flat probe to push aside the intestines in case they should cover and hide from view the testicles. A small sponge, or a piece of absorbant cotton together with a

few drops of carbolic acid in a quart of water as an antiseptic complete the requisite. With these and a little skill you are a surgeon ready to caponize.



The spreader when extended.

A beginner, when first performing, would be very lucky if he did not put an end to some of his patients, and should not expect to be entirely successful at the start. It is prudent, and I should advise him to perform the operation on a few dead birds in order to become quite familiar with the very spot where the organs are located. By doing so, he will be more sure of success when operating on a live bird.

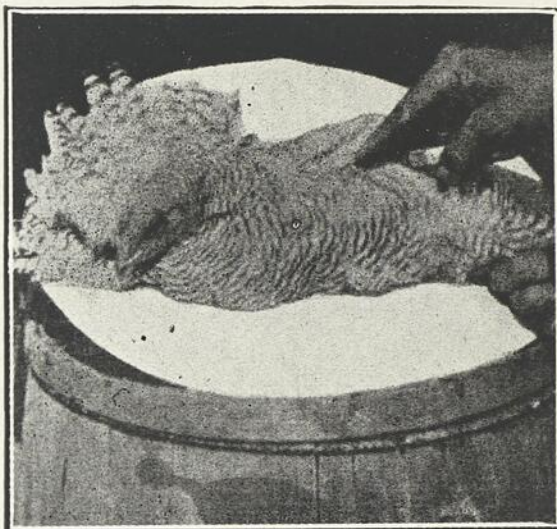
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Though it seems very cruel to the beginner to perform such an operation on an innocent little chick only six weeks old, once the operation is over, he will have come to the conclusion that after all it is not so very painful, and causes very little suffering. As for genitals, they are not indispensable to the life of a bird, and when the operation is performed skilfully, no vital part of the bird is attacked nor injured. The slight incision made in the skin soon closes up and heals very rapidly, being quite a contrast when compared to other animals having undergone a similar operation, and whose wounds take weeks to heal.

THE OPERATION

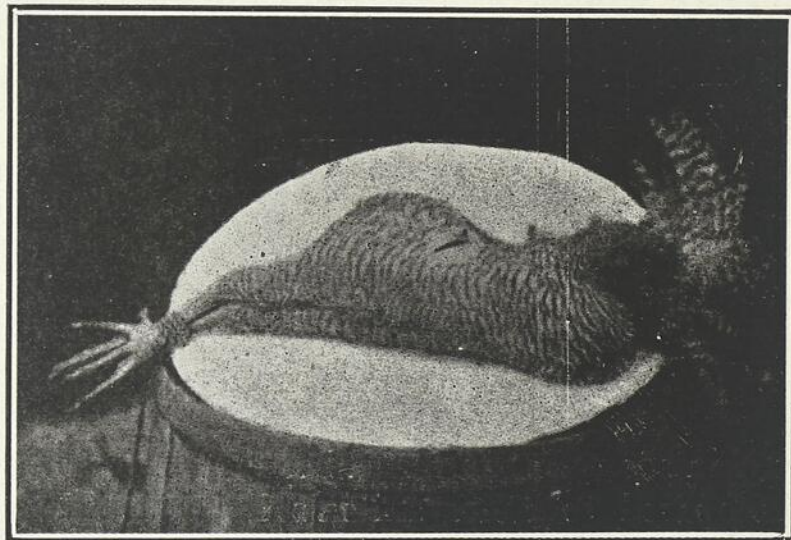
For the operation, I use a table 30'' high, 40'' long and 20'' wide. In the middle of the table is placed a small box 6'' high and 14'' wide. The tools may be kept in this box. Now, take two pieces of strong twine about 12'' long, at one end of each piece of twine a hook is attached, and at the other end a weight of about 5 lbs.

The bird is now placed on his left or right side upon the small box in the middle of the table, one of the pieces of twine is tied around the bird's legs by means of the hook, the weight left hanging. The same is done for the wings, in front of the second joint, taking care to extend the weights in order that the bird remains well stretched out.



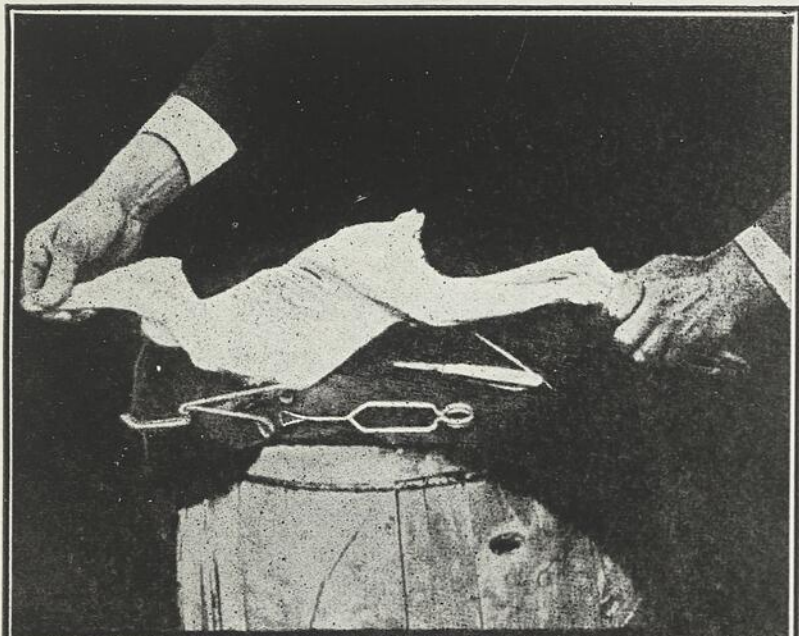
Operating on a barrel.

The big feathers covering the last ribs are now cut off, and with a wet sponge the other feathers in the spot are flatted down whilst the center of

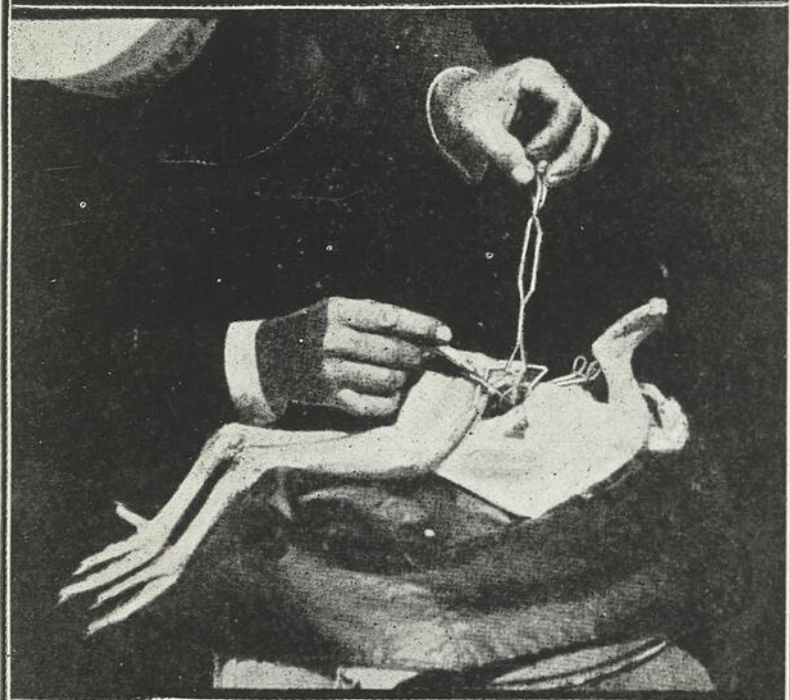


The bird in position.

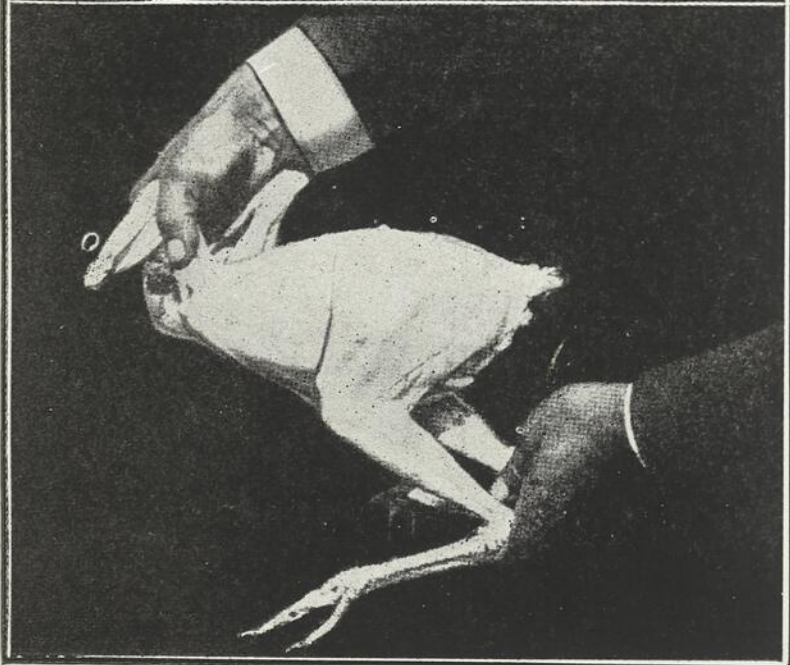
PRACTICING ON A DEAD BIRD



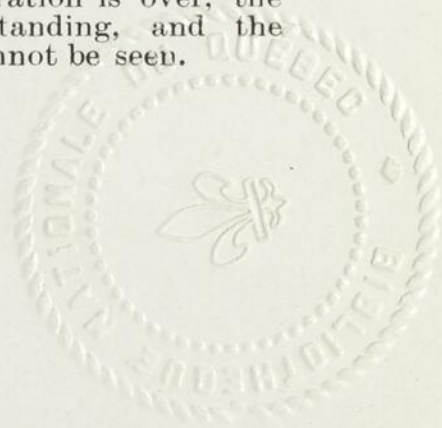
See the position of the bird.



See the position of the operator's hands.

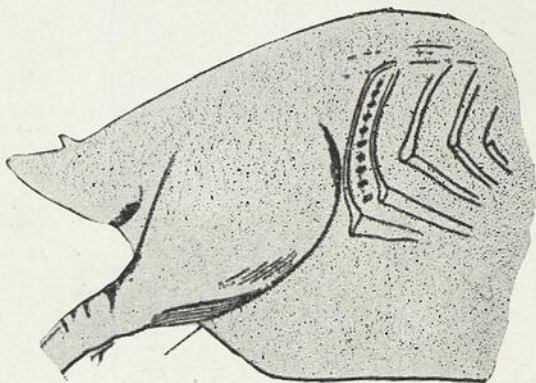


The operation is over, the bird is standing, and the wound cannot be seen.



the operating place is somewhat washed with some desinfectant, such as diluted carbolic acid.

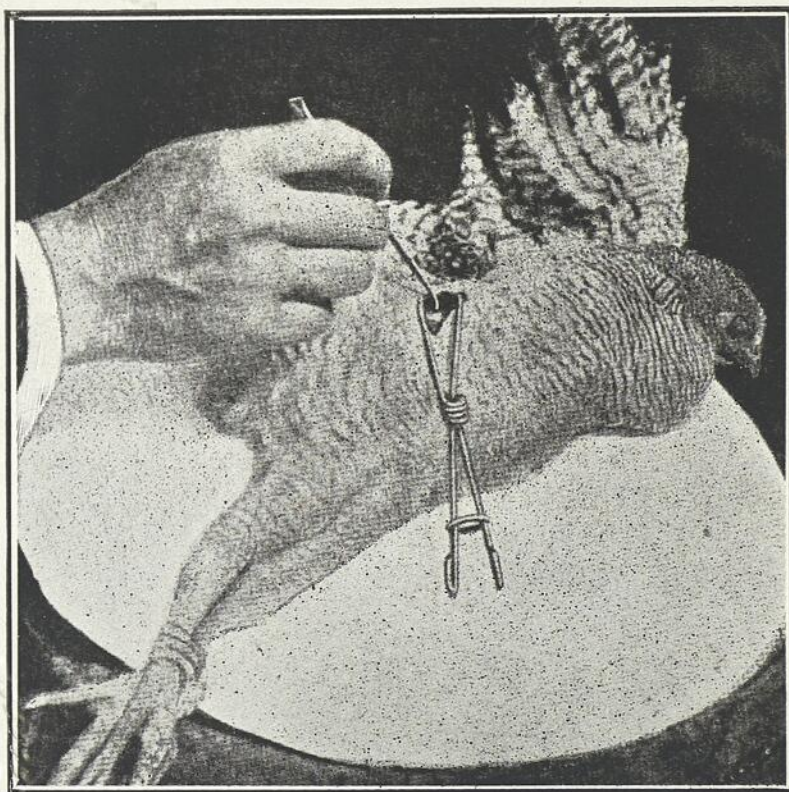
Now the two last ribs must be located and the blade of the knife placed between the two, care being taken to stretch the skin before making the incision, so as when the operation is over, the skin will fall



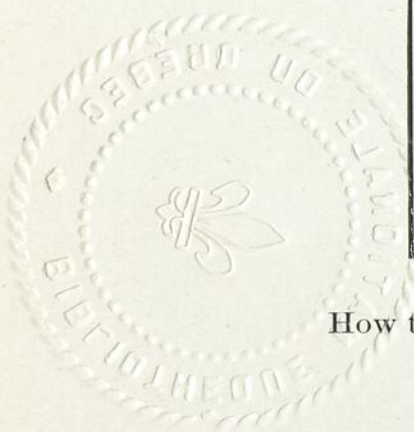
The dotted line shows where to make the incision.

back to its natural position and cover the wound. When making the incision, the back of the bird should be in front of the operator, the latter inserting the knife about a quarter of an inch and making an incision in one stroke about an inch long.

The incision having been made, the spreader is now introduced,

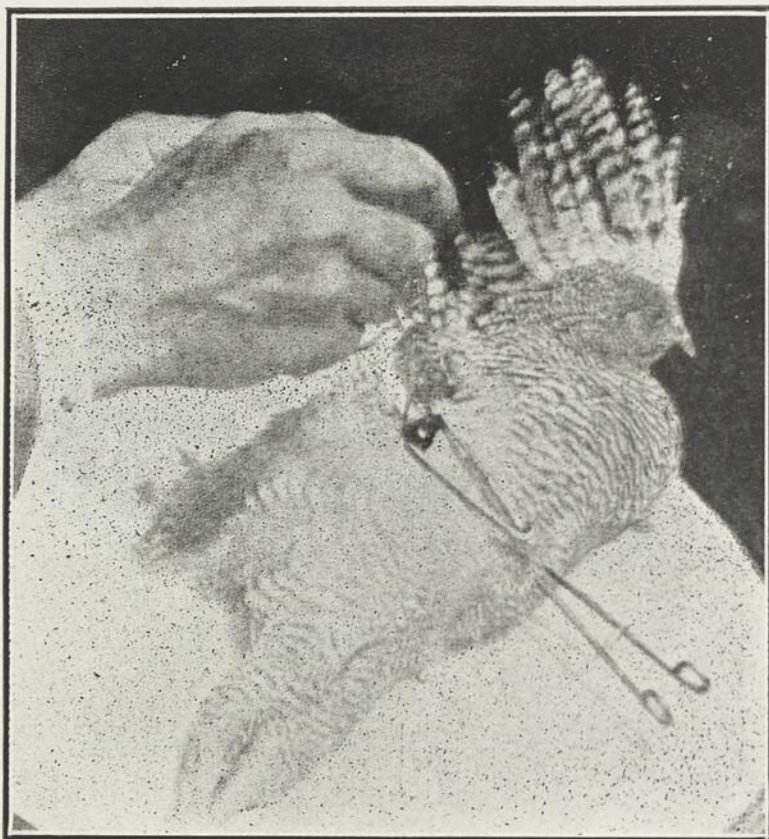


How to use the hook to tear the membrane and find the organs.



which gives the operator room to proceed. The first thing to be seen when the spreader has been inserted, is a very thin skin, which covers the intestines; by means of the hook this skin is torn and the testicles are immediately seen underneath. As the thin skin which covers the intestines is in two sections, in order to see the organs, both these skins must be torn, as sometimes, if only one of them is torn, the testicles are invisible.

The testicles are generally of a yellowish tinge. They are about the size of a bean and are to be seen lying near the ribs. Whilst extracting the testicles, every precaution must be taken not to injure or cut the arteries

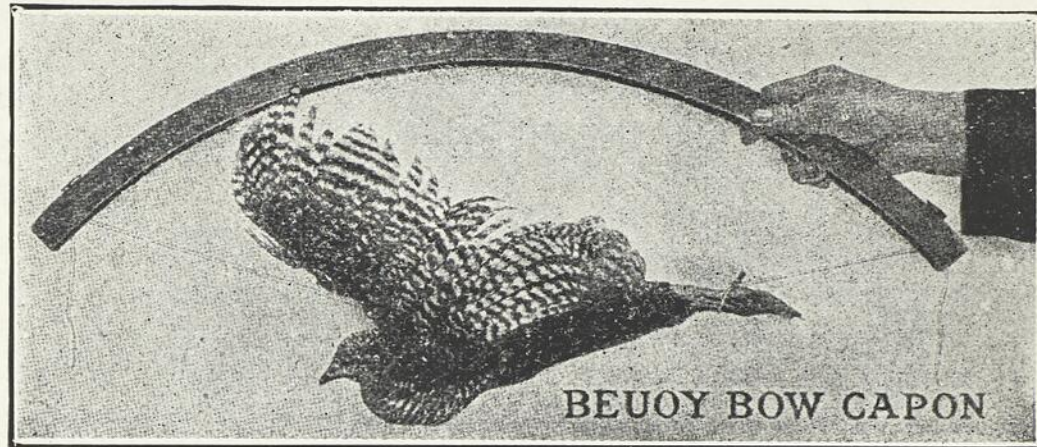


Cutting the testicles

which come immediately behind the testicles; otherwise sudden death would occur.

The forceps having been introduced and held firmly, the intestines should be gently pushed aside by means of the probe, as very frequently the intestines will hide the testicles. The forceps are now opened up and the testicles seized, care being taken not to seize nor touch the artery in close proximity. Now gently close the forceps and pull gradually, making at the same time two or three twists of the forceps, in order to dislodge the tiny strings which hold the latter in place. Once the testicles are just above the incision made, the twisted strings formed by turning the instrument can be severed about half an inch from the testicles. The

operation is now over, and has to be repeated on the other side of the bird. Sometimes it is possible to remove both testicles from the same side; but I cannot recommend this process as it is very difficult and consequently dangerous, often resulting in the death of the bird.



Bow used by Mr Bueoy to hold the bird during the operation.

As a rule, it is not necessary to sew up the incision made in the skin, as in a few days the latter will have completely healed up and joined again.

Very frequently, after the operation, wind puffs will appear. These puffs are caused by the accumulation of gases under the skin. This is not serious, and with the point of the operating knife these air bags can be pierced, the gas escaping at once.

The young capons should now be watched for a few days.

HOW TO DISTINGUISH A REAL CAPON FROM A "SLIP"?

It must be said that it is impossible to pass a "slip" for a real capon, as the difference is very easily detected by the experienced buyer.

When the operation has been successfully carried out, the comb and wattles of the bird cease to grow and do not take on that fiery red colour, so prominent in a cockerel, but, on the contrary, the whole head, wattles and comb, become pale and the head remains rather small. Although the spurs continue to grow, they do not attain the proportions of those of a cock-bird. The tail hangs low and the feathers are very long and glossy.

FOOD FOR THE CAPON.

The capon needs no special food. He can be fed the same food as ordinary breeding stock.

AT LIBERTY

If the capons are at liberty and separated from other poultry, it is better to give them a larger proportion of lucerne (alfalfa) and corn meal in their mash, also boiled potatoes; enough to satisfy their appetite. When the cold days of fall come, the green food should be diminished, whilst grain and especially cracked corn should be given more freely. Once the temperature becomes too cold, the birds should be put in pens 6 x 10 feet, this space being large enough for from 15 to 20 birds. The feed now changes and should consist of mashed potatoes, mixed with meal, and is generally served three times a day, but giving no more than the birds can eat up clean. The potatoe proportion however should be gradually diminished and more meal added.

A month before killing, mixed meals should be fed and this meal is mixed with skim-milk, the use of which results in a very white flesh.

IS CAPONIZING PROFITABLE ?

Were it not profitable to raise capons, it would be impossible to put on the market a bird so widely sought for and possessing such fine flesh and delicate flavour as that which capons only can boast of. If young cockerels are left unoperated, what becomes of them after a few months? In the first place, a great deal of their energy is taken up fighting amongst themselves and mating with the young pullets. In short, they become a regular nuisance. Now, take the capon, here you have a bird which has lost the distinctive instincts of its sex, a bird which ceases to run around the poultry yard, wasting its energy, and whose sole aim in life seems to be to eat and rest. Now, such a bird is bound to develop and fatten easily, and at the same time retains its "chicken age" with regard to flesh until quite old, thus becoming a source of extra profit. On the other hand, the flesh of the young cockerel has become rather hard and the meat is of a poorer quality, lacking nearly all the good qualities of its brother the capon.

The capon produces a first class meat even as much appreciated as turkey flesh.

In the event of the operation not having been successful, still you have a better article than the ordinary chicken, for it can be truly said that the "slip" takes the first place after the capon.

The fattening of capons does not require any more trouble nor costs than that of other poultry. As a rule, they cost less and produce more meat. Capons, as I have said before, are not fattened in crates, but in pens.

Just allow me to give the results obtained in 1915, in our poultry department, with capons: 300 capons gave us 2,400 lbs of meat, sold at 28

cents per lb., realizing \$672.00. The same number of roasters, under ordinary conditions, would have produced at the most 1,800 lbs of meat, which, sold at 20 cents would mean about \$360.00, one half the returns of our capons. Surely this speaks for itself.

In 1916, I had 600 capons, weighing each 7 to 9 lbs., sold at 30 and 32 cents.

Amongst poultry keepers, you will find a wide difference of opinion. Some claim that it is more profitable to sell broilers at two months; others are in favor of the roaster at four months, and so on. For a number of years, I have been selling broilers, roasters and capons, and I can make the following comparison.

100 Broilers return from.....	\$40 .00 to \$50 .00
" " cost from.....	15 .00 to 20 .00

Net profit.....	\$25 .00 to \$30 .00
100 Roasters return from.....	70 .00 to 80 .00
" " cost " 	25 .00 to 35 .00

Net profit.....	\$45 .00

Let us now figure out the costs and returns of the same number of capons after a period of eight to ten months.

Under ordinary conditions, 5% of the operated birds are killed on the operating table; they are nevertheless good for eating, and so, worth a certain amount of money. Moreover 10% of the remaining 95 either turn out to be slips or do not attain the minimum weight for saleable capons. We have still 85 sound capons to deal with.

	Costs:		Returns:	
5 dead through operation.....	\$.75 to \$1 .00		\$1 .25 to	\$ 1 .50
10 slips sold at 18 to 20.....	4 .75	6 .65	10 .26	11 .40
85 capons, 7 to 9 lbs, at 25 to 28.	48 .25	67 .50	175 .50	196 .50
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Total.....	\$53 .75	\$75 .15	\$180 .01	\$209 .40
Total returns			\$180 .01 to \$209 .40	
Total costs.....	\$53 .75		75 .15	
Net profit.....			\$126 .26 to \$134 .25	
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SUMMARY :

Profit from 100 Capons.....	\$126 .26 to \$134 .25
" " 100 Roasters	45 .00 50 .00
" " 100 Broilers	25 .00 to 30 .00

Which is the most paying proposition?

Note.—The above quotations are for birds marketed 2 or 3 years ago.

At present Broilers would sell at least \$1.25 a pair; and Roasters from 20 to 25 cents a pound.

In 1915 in our poultry department we had 300 capons which gave 2400 lbs of meat selling at 28 cents per lb.

In 1916, we had 600 capons weighing each from 7 to 9 lbs; they sold 30 and even 32 cents per lbs.

The capon being still unknown in our Dominion to the majority of the people, the market is naturally limited. However, even now, a first class bird, well dressed, is easily disposed of. When the practice of caponizing becomes more common amongst our farmers, and especially when they will have learnt by practical experience of this source of revenue which lies in their hands, the time will have come when other fat poultry will hold but a second place in the market.

It must be borne in mind however that it is hardly possible to obtain a good capon before the bird has attained at least eight months, and even be it a slip, we still get more than 20 cents a pound for it.



