

THE TWO CAREERS OF HENRIETTA HOOKER (1851-1929)

From Botany to Buff Orpingtons

Robert L. Herbert, 2019

Henrietta Edgecomb Hooker was one of several teachers of Mount Holyoke's faculty who rose to prominence in the last quarter of the 19th century. Foremost among the teachers of science were Lydia Shattuck '51 (1822-89), an eminent botanist, and Cornelia Clapp '71 (1849-1934), an equally esteemed zoologist. Shattuck, already well advanced in botany, attended Louis Agassiz's classes in natural history in Penikese Island, Wood's Hole, in the summer of 1873, and the younger Clapp followed her there in 1874. At Penikese, students absorbed Agassiz's methods of studying animals and plants in their natural environment; observational methods were engaged more than theory. This was, in effect, a more scientific extension of Mary Lyon's way of teaching (Shattuck was her pupil).

Hooker joined Shattuck and Clapp in 1873, sharing with them the study of natural forms from direct observation. She soon made her mark as a gifted and popular teacher of botany. Nonetheless, her teaching has attracted little notice because she was not a publishing scholar.¹ Unlike her colleagues, however, she had a wholly different second career. She retired from teaching in 1908 to give all of her time to the breeding of chickens. She wrote little about teaching but left several lively and confessional accounts of raising chickens. These give us a much better look into her temperament and daily life than we have for her years of teaching.

Part one: teaching

“Study you must but I do not believe in a teacher taking every summer for study.”

Hooker joined the Mount Holyoke faculty in 1873. She was on December 12, 1851, in Gardiner, Maine, a thriving town on the Kennebec

¹ The only helpful publications about Hooker are the following: Florence Purington's memoir of Hooker in the *Alumnae Quarterly*, 13, 2, July 1929, pp. 73-77. This is the nearest thing to a biography of Hooker. Of interest also is another memoir by Olive Sprague Cooper in the same issue, pp 73-75. And Sarah J. Agard, a former colleague of Hooker, included her in a short history, “The Department of Botany,” *Alumnae Quarterly*, 5, 2, July 1921, pp. 82-84.

river. Orphaned at age seven, she was brought up by relatives. In her autobiographical notes,² she said that after graduating from Gardiner high school in 1879, she taught for two years in various New England towns, including Sidney, Maine, and West Charleston, Vermont, before enrolling in Mount Holyoke in 1871. She was obviously a brilliant student for she took only two and a half years to earn her diploma. She was immediately hired by the Seminary to teach algebra and botany for \$193 plus board and room “and washing but no ironing.” She was listed in the school’s annual catalogue as “Etta E. Hooker” until 1878-79 after which her full name was printed. “Etta” hints at a friendly, informal presence. It took her ten years “to pay my debt for education and save enough money to go to Europe.”

In the summer of 1883, she at last went to Europe, joining her age peer David Starr Jordan (1851-1931), already an established ichthyologist who taught natural history at Indiana University (and who was married to Hooker’s colleague Susan Bowen). “This came to be a rather usual way to spend the summer and nine summers in all (or time remaining nearly) I crossed the ocean for study.” One of her autobiographical notes says that she once went to Alaska; otherwise she traveled only in Europe, spending most of her time in Norway.

In a lively travel article published in 1884³, she gave the only résumé of her European summers. It’s mostly a secular account (only the final two paragraphs describe churches) of Norwegian peasant houses, animals, haymaking, and women’s and girls’ clothing described charmingly. “The little girls in their long flannel dresses, with aprons tied about their waists and the characteristic handkerchief on their heads, were miniature grandmothers.” She also wrote about Norwegian wayside inns or “stations.” “These stations are often small and unpretentious, landlording not being the primary occupation of the owner. He is usually either a merchant or a farmer in a small way, who [lays] aside a few cans of prepared veal and onions, plenty of beer and tobacco, and a supply of *flad brod*.” In addition, Hooker sketched

² Among Hooker’s papers in the Archives is a brief four page handwritten memoir, ca. 1923, and five scrappy autobiographical notes that repeat one another with many variations. The earliest is dated “1911,” and the last August 12, 1928. For access to these and other documents, I am grateful to Leslie Fields, Head of Archives and Special Collections, and to Deborah Richards, Archivist. Knowing my interests, they volunteered ideas I might not have thought of.

³ “Among the Norse People,” *Illustrated Christian Weekly*, July 26, 1884.

the houses of better-off farms and their outbuildings, including the *stabbur* which received all the farm's produce and supplies, a contrast with the ordinary peasant barn.

Jordan no longer partnered Hooker after 1884; he must have relinquished these travels when he became President of Indiana University in 1885. Hooker's teaching equipped her well to guide participants in observations of natural history just as she did at Mount Holyoke. Florence Purington, a younger colleague who roomed with her, wrote that "For a number of years she organized European parties and spent her summers conducting them. It was my pleasure to be a member of one of these delightful parties"⁴

Not all summers were spent in Europe. For one summer before 1880, Hooker studied at Penikese, then was at Wood's Hole for laboratory work during parts of two summers. In two of her autobiographical notes, she wrote that she was at MIT a "short time." Closer to home, she and Cornelia Clapp indulged their love of training students in close observation of nature. They took a dozen students on a two-week ramble through the Berkshires in early July, 1885.⁵ Students were charged \$1.25 a day plus \$4 for "directors' fees." Averaging ten to twelve miles a day, they walked to Northampton, Cummington, Ashfield, Buckland (where they visited Mary Lyon's birthplace), Charlemont, Williamstown, then south to Great Barrington. Apparently they took a bus back to South Hadley.

Botany at Mount Holyoke

When Hooker joined Mount Holyoke in 1873, botany was already a privileged subject and was required of all entering students. Mary Lyon taught it herself from 1837 to 1841. Susan L Mills '45, founder of Mills College, wrote to Hooker on November 25, 1907.

I studied botany with Miss Lily Curtis; there was another teacher there but I cannot recall her name now. I taught botany myself for

⁴ "Purington, op cit.

⁵ A handwritten note about the trip, signed by Clapp and Hooker, is among Hooker's papers. It's not dated, but Clara Smith '85 wrote her mother on May 30, 1885, that a company of students was going with Clapp and Hooker for "a tramp among the Berkshire hills."

two years and I had a delightful class. . . . I love the science and enjoyed teaching it. . . . I taught botany two years in '47, but I cannot remember who shared the work with me. I know that I was considered the head of that department. I was also Miss Whitman's assistant in chemistry.

Mary M. Smith taught botany and so did several others until Lydia Shattuck, one of Lyon's last pupils, took over the field in 1851. In 1860-1861, the Seminary's prior three-year regime was supplanted by a four-year course of study. Botany was required for freshmen and sophomores ("junior" and "middle" classes). In 1868, Asa Gray's manual, frequently updated, superseded earlier textbooks, and was used in all courses.⁶ (Shattuck was a friend of Gray.) Until the early 1880s at the Seminary, botany largely involved the identification and classification of the flowering plants. It was taught only for three weeks in the fall, then six weeks in the spring. Between those periods, botany faculty taught chemistry, Latin, and mathematics, and occasionally other subjects. Shattuck taught botany and chemistry, Hooker, botany and algebra, and Clapp, natural history (zoology), mathematics, and gymnastic instruction.

Lyon had right away begun a herbarium for the school. Shattuck likewise collected plants — 7000 of them! — which she gave to the Seminary. She was the first to identify and name a number of them. The first flower beds were formed in 1878 and a glazed plant house built. The school appointed a gardener in 1882, Charles Bates, who collaborated closely with the teachers. Hooker acquired a compound microscope in 1883 and the following year offered the first specialized course, "advanced work" in mosses, undertaken by Martha Goldthwait (subsequently appointed to the faculty). In 1885, Hooker wrote that seventy students were taking botany and sixteen doing advanced work. By this date, students in the required courses were preparing tissues for the microscope, mounting slides, making diagrams and drawings, and delivering papers on fermentation, bacteria, yeast, fibrovascular tissues, mosses and ferns. Courses remained the same, but Hooker gave increased

⁶ Asa Gray, with William S. Sullivan, *A Manual of the Botany of the Northern United States* (Boston, 1848), periodically brought up-to-date..

attention to the more difficult orders of planerogams (seed producing plants) and higher cryptogams (ferns, mosses, lichens, algae, and fungi).

By 1887-1888, Shattuck and Hooker taught only botany; an expanded faculty took up the other courses they taught earlier. Shattuck was elected a corporate member of the Marine Biological Laboratory of Wood's Hole. Hooker reorganized botany in a three-year schedule resembling those of other liberal arts colleges. She did this because the Seminary was being elevated to the college level as "Mount Holyoke College and Seminary." In 1888-1889 Hooker took a year's leave to further her own education. She spent several months in Berlin, studying with Leopold Kny (1841-1916), a leading German botanist. She believed that she was the first woman student admitted to the University of Berlin. Upon returning from Europe, she pursued her studies at Syracuse University where she was awarded the Ph.D. in 1889; she was the first faculty member of Mount Holyoke to have that degree. Her dissertation on the common dodder plant *Cuscuta Gronovii* was published that year.⁷

The department of botany and indeed the whole campus was devastated when Shattuck died on November 2, 1889, aged sixty-seven. In the following weeks, Hooker wrote a heartfelt memoir of her colleague.⁸ "Miss Shattuck was more to us than a botanist. She was a naturalist to whom it was easy, in those field excursions on which she led us, to give us charming glimpses of the food for thought and study in the rocks, clouds, and living creatures, which were as much the subjects of her talks as the plants we sought." With Shattuck's death, Hooker became head of the department. She introduced new courses and extended work with the microscope in histology and embryology, while continuing to emphasize plant identification and field work, exploiting the meadows and wooded grounds near the college.

A new science building was already being planned, and Hooker campaigned successfully to have it named after her late colleague. Shattuck Hall was opened in 1892. Meanwhile, from 1889 to 1891 Clapp took a leave of absence for graduate work; she obtained her Ph.D. in 1896. Her absence made Hooker the campus's leading scientist in those years. Already successful in getting money for equipment in botany, she was increasingly

⁷ "On *Cuscuta Gronovii*," *Botanical Gazette*, vol 14, 1889, pp. 31-37.

⁸ "Miss Shattuck as a Student and Teacher of Science," *Memorials of Mary W. (Chapin) Pease and Lydia W. Shattuck* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1890), pp. 25-31.

enlisted for other college ventures in fund raising. Her energies and acumen led to her being counted upon by the college's administration.



Henrietta Hooker, 1893, detail of visiting card

The most impressive moment in Hooker's teaching career came on September 27, 1896, when Seminary Hall burned to the ground.⁹ The huge structure had housed the living quarters of most of the faculty and students as well as classrooms, offices, the gymnasium, the laundry, the kitchen and dining room, and the power plant. Its loss threatened to end the life of the institution. The best account of the fire and its immediate aftermath was given by Hooker in a long letter of October 3 to Marion Atwell, president of the New York Alumnae Association. It's not entirely a disinterested communication because Hooker was putting the best face on the calamity so that the alumnae would be pleased at the fortitude shown by students and teachers. She hoped that this would lead to generous responses to the college's need. Hooker's twenty-one pages are so full of information that I will call upon them for the following paragraphs, frequently quoting Hooker without giving page numbers of her manuscript.

When the fire broke out, President Mead sent the reliable Hooker—an unofficial member of the administration—into the burning building to check the upper story and attic in order that no students were left there or in their rooms. Thick smoke prevented students from going into the attic where “were most of the winter coats, flannels and thicker dresses as the rooms were too

⁹ I have written a short online history of the fire: <http://hdl.handle.net/10166/4626>.

small to keep anything not in use.” After assuring that no one was left in the building, “I went out and with pencil and paper. Miss [Frances] Hazen and I stationed ourselves at South Gate to take the names of students and assign them places for the night.”

The college placed many girls in three frame houses they owned, and twenty-five more in the local hotel, but that left a goodly number who had to go to private homes. With an amazing proficiency, college people had scurried about among the hordes of onlookers and made a list of those who volunteered to house students, then numbering 339. “And by 10 o’clock every student had a comfortable home and we knew where they were.” Villagers and people in Holyoke offered rooms, “and farmers came from the adjoining towns begging to be allowed to help by taking the girls and their roofless belongings home.”. The college paid homeowners \$5 a week for students’ board and room. As for faculty and staff, temporary quarters were found for them in college buildings and in nearby villagers’ homes (Hooker listed the location of each teacher). In following days Hooker “had the work of going from house to house to see how the girls were—to see that they had fires—to change those who got into ‘inhabited beds’ . . .” (This last phrase makes one itch.)

On Monday, the day after the fire, the whole college assembled in the church at 9 a.m. When Hooker wrote her letter to Atwell five days later, she was still enthralled by the students’ rousing cheers and chants, which she returns to more than once. “There had to be a good many pauses for consultation. These the girls filled in with Rah! Rah! Rah! Holyoke Rah! Rah! Rah! . . .” Even the freshmen were caught up in the overwhelming enthusiasm. They had been on campus only three weeks, hardly “long enough to be Holyoke girls,” but only three withdrew from the college.

Miss [Grace Howe] McKinley received a telegram from her friends advising as Holyoke was burned, that she go to another college (naming Smith). She replied Go to Smith? Not much! The reply came ‘Stay at Holyoke by all means.’ Wm. A McKinley.’

Probably buoyed by the President’s telegram—word of it must have spread quickly—the staff immediately set about a return to classes. “We are

proud to say work is going on. Work has never stopped. We have thought it better to keep the classes organized and meet them at the stated times. Of course we have not expected lessons but we have kept the girls interested and in their places.” Williston Hall and the library were used for classes, and doubtless also the college’s frame houses which were being used to put up students and faculty. In the days right after the fire “I have written the Associated Press reports and written for the [Springfield] Tribune.” She ends her letter with a politic appeal to the alumnae and a surprisingly hopeful note.

And we are so proud of them [the students] and so sure of the alumnae and friends who are coming to our aid that we shut our eyes when we go by the ruins and see visions of the 8 halls to accommodate 50 each that during the year will dot the campus.

Her hopes were fully justified. Before the fire, the college had indeed been planning several dormitories. Money for these began to appear right after the calamity. Within eighteen months, with an astonishing outpouring of donations, Brigham, Porter, Safford, Pearsons and Rockefeller Halls were built as well as Mary Lyon Hall. Most of them had been designed in the year before the fire. What made this resurrection possible? It was the prestige of the nationally known college and the devotion of faithful alumnae and friends.

It’s not surprising that Hooker had a big part in this rebuilding. She made numerous appeals to the alumnae and was not shy in calling attention to each of the future dormitories and Mary Lyon Hall. Additionally, she was one of the principal figures in the founding of the new plant house, Talcott Arboretum, in 1899. She also lobbied successfully for the establishment of the Clara Leigh Dwight Botanical Garden in 1901, and in the following year, she took a leading role in the planning and construction of the Dwight Art Memorial. This new building took over the art that had occupied the top floor of Williston Hall, giving the sciences more space for their workrooms and classes.

Despite her active engagement in college affairs, only once can we hear her voice, as it were, when she addressed the campus. This unique document is a five-page set of notes for “The Courageous Life,” a sermon she

gave in October 1908 at a faculty prayer meeting when she invoked Theodore Roosevelt.

One of the keen delights of vacation away from home is the gathering of news from the papers This past summer has had unusual opportunities because of our being as a nation so much in public affairs. But it has not been so much the nation as the man Roosevelt's wording for the nation that the papers have discussed and always in private speech or public print—the name Roosevelt has stood not for the doings of a nation as for the doings of a man. And while the name Roosevelt has stood for the doings of a nation—and it was everywhere the man Roosevelt as representative of principle in living. Courageous, fearless doing of duty obedient to highest light—and regardless of consequences as far as the personal issue was concerned. I have marveled at the unusual testimony thus given everywhere and it seems to me this is to be a factor in making the true courageous living on a higher plane not only in our own land but among the nations.

What surprises us here is Hooker's recognition of the way Roosevelt revealed his ego as he spoke "not for the doings of a nation as for the doings of a man." This was only a few days before the election. He had promised not to run for a third term and so was campaigning for Willian Howard Taft. Yet, she reasoned, he surmounted his "personal issue" by calling the nation to do its duty by rising to "a higher plane."

In 1909, Hooker performed her final service for the college, a five-page article summarizing the extensive foreign missions led by college women from the earliest days.¹⁰ A mission school was founded in Urumiah, Persia, in 1853 and twenty years later the college established the Huguenot School in Wellington, South Africa. By 1909, 267 former students had been "in foreign service." The Student Volunteer Movement was formed, and "In the room used by Student Volunteers is a world map with gold stars for every station where there is a MHC worker. India, Turkey, China and Japan are

¹⁰ "What Mount Holyoke has done for Foreign Missions," in *The Missionary Review of the World*, 22, 5, May 1909, pp. 353-57.

‘very golden.’” Frequent contact was made with college faculty, and many of the missionaries sent back archaeological and other artifacts that enriched college collections.

Hooker’s work on behalf of the college was well known. In a phrase, she was “a campus fixture” until she retired in 1908. Students said that she was an inspired teacher even outside the classroom. Her conversations revealed “her vibrant personality, sparkling, full of wit and striking anecdote.”¹¹ She had unusually devoted students and kept up with many after their graduation. Among students with a deep attachment to her was Clara Smith ’85. On June 12, 1883, she wrote to her mother about the pending trip to Europe. Her letter and other students’ comments show how close and informal were their associations with Hooker.

It is Prof. Jordan’s party that Miss Hooker goes with. She told me the names of as many others of the party as she could remember & we made a great many prophecies as to how each one looked & what sort of people they would be. Especially Miss Sweeney who is to share the stateroom with Miss Hooker and Miss Sweetser. [. . .] She is going to send us back a note by the pilot boat. We raised \$6.60 for her & we think that is pretty well in comparison with what others have done. When Miss Sessions went, the seniors in all that big class couldn’t raise but 5.50 & now Miss Sweetser’s section can’t to have them get but 8.60. Most of us gave 25 cents. 2 o 3 gave 50. Florence Sturtevant presented it. Her table are each going to give her a little bottle of medicine to keep off seasickness. We had a great time telling her what was good for seasickness & we finally concluded that salt codfish & lemons were the best preventives known. She said Mr. Pomeroy had recommended salt pork but Louise Tining [?] said she would rather be seasick. Miss Hooker had had a present of a jack knife yesterday & we told her that would be just the thing to cut the lemons and codfish with.¹²

One of the most helpful things Purington did in her memoir is to

¹¹ Olive Sprague Cooper, *op. cit.*

¹² From Clara Smith’s folder in the Archives.

quote a number of Hooker's aphorisms that are insights into her teaching and her wit. "To teach students to think for themselves is a rare art." "Be on the lookout for new ways of putting an old subject." "Study you must but I do not believe in a teacher taking every summer for study. Put variety into your vacations. You will live longer and be a greater inspiration." "Be patient with dull pupils. Perhaps my happiest recollections of teaching are of a dull, really stupid, algebra class I once had. Get hold of your students outside the classroom, learn their interests." How many other teachers would so frankly say that they didn't pursue studies during their summers? It's true that Hooker spent parts of three summers at Penikese but this was before 1880, and only once more did she engage in summertime study. This was in 1888-89 when she was preparing her doctorate. Otherwise she devoted most of her summers to travel in Europe.

Purinton gave a charming glimpse into one summer. In 1885, Hooker and Clapp, who close friends as well as colleagues, took students on that hike through the Berkshires already described. Purinton also wrote of Hooker's varied outdoor activities. "I remember, years ago before the days of bicycles, seeing her and Miss Clapp riding their ponderous tricycles over the sandy roads" She observed Hooker one winter "building over an old chest of drawers into a convenient writing desk with pigeon holes and a secret compartment." Bee-keeping was among her interests. She kept her hives, which she built herself, on the slope between Williston Hall and the botanical garden. In her lively life beyond the classroom she had a horse and wagon in which she sometimes drove "well up into New Hampshire."¹³ Among her autobiographical notes Hooker wrote a tantalizing phrase: "Small boarding house – keeper; learned in care of hens." We know that she had student boarders in the early 1890s and for years afterwards. As for "care of hens," this meagre reference points to her second career, the breeding of chickens.

¹³ Agard, *op. cit.*

Part Two: Hooker's Buff Orpingtons

“You cannot carry your worries long in the chicken coops.”

About 1898, the ever-curious Hooker bought eleven hens and a rooster from a neighboring farmer's auction.¹⁴ Always handy with tools, she converted her latticed back porch on Park St. to a temporary henhouse and then built henhouses out in her back yard. Of no particular distinction, her hens nonetheless “made good; they turned our table waste into shekels, in the eggs they produced, and long before they came to our table had paid for themselves and all expenses of their keep.”¹⁵ A cousin who kept breed chickens told her “If I had hens I would keep something my relations are not ashamed of when they come within sight of the house. If you will kill that mongrel lot I will give you six Buff Rocks on condition you will buy a really good male to put with them.”¹⁶ Convinced by this, Hooker gave up her “mongrel lot” and turned to Buff Rocks and White Wyandottes. These she raised successfully until she learned of Buff Orpingtons. In one of her miscellaneous undated notes, we read: “Buff Orpington hens (built a house, made over ours) – to which, as playmates, I still cling and all along my delight in making and re-making houses.”

About the time Mr. William Cook, Sr., was introducing the Buff Orpingtons to the world, I made a vacation pilgrimage to Europe. [1899]. While walking in Kent County, England, on the way to the home of Darwin [with Cornelia Clapp], the way led through the charming village of Orpington. After reaching home I picked up a poultry journal announcing the arrival in this country of some new Buff fowls, named by their originator “Orpingtons,”¹⁷

¹⁴ Hooker published two overlapping accounts of raising chickens, attractively written with touches of humor.: “The fascination of poultry raising,” *Poultry Success*, 23, March 1912, pp. 75-77, and “How I Began to Keep Buff Orpingtons and Why,” *The Orpingtons*, March 1927, n.p. Moreover, she published advertising pamphlets, “Mating Lists,” in 1911, 1912, and 1917. Each of these has a short introduction, illustrations, and extensive notes and pedigrees.

¹⁵ *Poultry Success*, 1912.

¹⁶ *How I Began*, 1927.

¹⁷ *Mating List*, 1917

In the late 1880s Cook had bred the eponymous bird in order to favor both meat and eggs as well as beauty. He was so successful that they quickly caught on. In 1900 Hooker bought a six-month old hen and a cock from an American who had hatched them from Cook's eggs. Lord and Lady Gladstone became the progenitors of her line of Buff Orpingtons. Given her training in close observation of nature, she couldn't simply raise them without learning the various "points" by which the best birds were known. She consulted poultry magazines and went to her first poultry show in 1903 in Meriden, Connecticut. There she paid \$15 for a cock from Cook stock, honoring her cousin's urge to acquire "a really good male." She named him Lord Salisbury and exhibited him that same year in Springfield MA.

Some of my colleagues felt that it was rather beneath the dignity of a Mount Holyoke Professor to patronize shows—rather sporty, etc. I was not quite sure myself. But among the prizes offered was a five-pound box of chocolate creams, and my college girls said, 'Oh, send your hens down to get them for us.!' I did, and they won the chocolates.¹⁸

Salisbury was mated with one of her Gladstone hens. Among their progeny was Pertelotte, who was named the champion hen at Madison Square Garden's Poultry and Pigeon Association in 1907. This show was billed as "the largest and strongest competition in Buff Orpingtons" in the US. Pertelotte earned Hooker's first truly distinguished prize, followed by many others. Until 1927 she continued to enter hens and roosters in poultry shows in Springfield, Holyoke, New York, Boston, Baltimore, and other cities. Perhaps the New York prize in 1907 was responsible for her use from that year onward of printed stationery headed "Single Comb Buff Orpingtons / Miss H. E. Hooker / South Hadley, Mass."

1907 was Hooker's ninth year of raising chickens, and seventh year of breeding Buff Orpingtons. This enterprise, which involved lots of traveling, shouldered aside her teaching, so she retired in 1908 aged 57, having taught at Mount Holyoke since 1873. There survive no comments by students or

¹⁸ *How I Began*, 1927.

teachers about her final years of teaching, although botany must have suffered from all the time spent in her henyard.



Henrietta Hooker and colleagues, 1908 (Asa Kinney photo)

Hooker sold eggs locally and in other states for breeding. “I have several times shipped acceptable birds across the country and sold many in various parts of the United States and Canada.”¹⁹ It’s not known how much money Hooker made from these sales. She had to pay for travel to each of the poultry shows in which she exhibited, more than one a year. She also had to pay for rooms and meals while attending these shows. Furthermore, the costs of publishing three advertising pamphlets, her “Making Lists,” would have been a burden. Her teacher’s pension was certainly very modest. Did her sales of breeding eggs keep her solvent? In the absence of any information about her income, we’ll never understand how she managed.

Hooker’s poultry shows, 1906-1911

Hooker learned right away that prizes won in poultry shows not only gave her pride but enhanced her sales of eggs. She earned prizes and

¹⁹ *How I Began*, 1927.

“specials” for pullets, chickens, cockerels and roosters in every annual poultry show in Madison Square Garden, six of them from 1906 to 1911, and in Boston, four from 1908 through 1911. “Specials” were not prizes but commendations for such traits as best shaped and best colored. She showed her birds in four competition categories, pullet, chicken, cockerel and rooster. A pullet was less than a year old and for showing had to be clearly distinguished from the hen she would become. “Just before a pullet begins laying she is at her very best in beauty; a week or ten days later a certain something is lost that never comes back.” At a Boston show, Hooker entered her New York prize pullets and one younger one. However, on the older pullets “the feathers were changing, making the surface uneven, and the younger pullet won over them.”²⁰ A cockerel is less than a year old. Like pullets, they needed constant observation to see when their tail feathers were changing to those of a rooster. Hooker had based her botany on close observation, so she was well equipped to make these distinctions among her flock.

Like other breeders, Hooker distributed her fowls in “breeding pens,” consisting of eight to twelve hens and a cock or one or more cockerels. In 1911 she had nine pens which held about 100 birds. In her Mating List of that year (the first of three, the others printed in 1912 and 1917), she described how several pens were formed around prize-awarded roosters. Dun Donald, Lancelot and Asquith 2d commanded the highest prices for fifteen eggs from their pens, \$10. They were only outshone by Connaught for which Hooker asked “\$20 a setting.” For other pens she asked \$5 for fifteen eggs, like those from Fighting Joe Hooker. (Henrietta elsewhere implied descent from the Civil War general.) This stalwart rooster “is ever on the alert to protect his ten evenly colored heavy laying pullets against strangers or dogs. They realize that he is there.” Hooker often personified her chickens. On another occasion she commented that Asquith’s mature pullets “have been laying ever since they can remember.”

The 1911 list introduced one entirely new pen, “the New Blue Orpingtons.” In 1912 Hooker wrote that in 1910, “when in England, I first met the Blue Orpingtons and was so impressed by them that I could not be

²⁰ *Mating List*, 1912

contented till I owned some.”²¹ They were so new that “I have no eggs to spare this year but hope to have birds to sell in the fall.” She had acquired Gilbert and Gilberta in 1910, the first Blue Orpingtons, she believed, imported to the United States from England.



Gilbert, Blue Orpington, 1911 (Asa Kinney photo)

She showed them out of competition at Madison Square in 1910. Blues are somewhat heavier than Buffs and of a slaty blue; males have this gorgeous color all over their upper body and tail. The new breed was originated by Captain de Bathe, who brought them from England to Madison Square in 1911. Hooker was bold enough to put three of her blues in competition with him that year. “I won 2d Hen, 3d Cock, 5th Pullet.”

The full title of Hooker’s small advertising pamphlet (4 ½ x 6 ¼ inches) is “*Single Comb Buff Orpingtons, Mating List 1911*. Miss H. E. Hooker, South Hadley, Mass.” A brief introduction to her 1911 pamphlet is followed by a detailed “Description of Pens.” Each pen is given a short

²¹ *Poultry Success*, 1912.

paragraph, like Pen 1: “DUN DONALD, my best cockerel of last year, mated to the hens of the 1st Boston pen, one hen from 4th New York pen and two extra pullets. These birds are all of large size, low and blocky. Some of the hens weigh nine pounds and one pullet weighs eight and on-half. They are a study in harmony in color—an even exhibition buff. Eggs, \$10 for 15.” At the end of these descriptions, Hooker prints her name and address, and the date “Feb. 4, 1911.”

Following the descriptions of her several pens is a “Record of Winnings” in New York and Boston from 1906 to 1911. She won several firsts but more of her ribbons were for birds that placed lower down. The Mating List has a frontispiece photo, and at the end, a sequence of five photos. Each caption names the bird and lists its best showings. At the end of her introduction she wrote “All photographs of my birds, excepting 1st Boston hen, were taken by Mr. Asa S. Kinney of South Hadley.” The photo of Rose, 1st Boston hen, was taken by Louis Paul Graham and made into an advertising card.



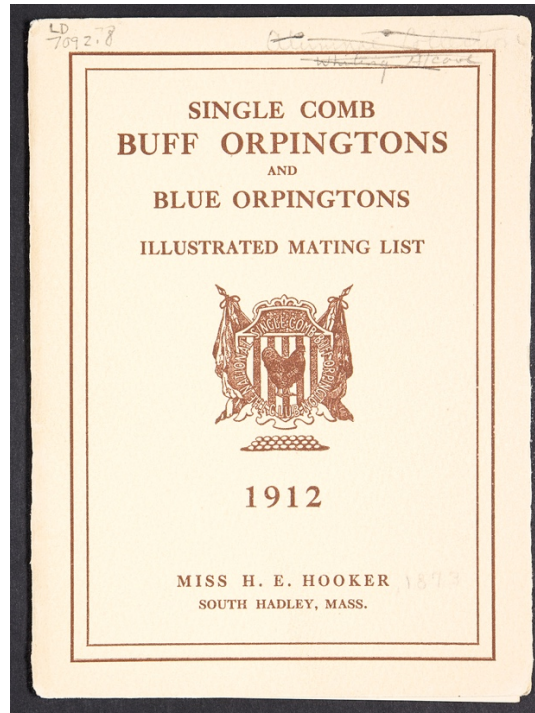
Here a word must be said about Hooker's Mount Holyoke colleague, Asa Kinney, who took the other photos.²² A teacher of plant science and associated every day with Hooker, Kinney was skilled in the use of a 5 x 7 view camera from his first days at Mount Holyoke. He made hundreds of photographs of the greenhouse, gardens, and botanical plants, as well as of college landscapes and buildings. It's his photo of Hooker and colleagues at the time of her retirement in 1908 that we've already looked at. There Kinney is discretely holding his camera's release cord out of sight.

Kinney lived around the corner from Hooker, and also kept bees, so they had friendly relations outside the college's precincts. Beginning in 1909 he took at least eighteen pictures of Hooker's birds. Of these, three appear in Hooker's mating lists, but eight of the lists' photos by Kinney aren't among his view plate glass negatives in the archives. He posed most of the birds against a white cloth but a few, like Henrietta (see below), were taken in the henyard without a backdrop. Both Hooker and Kinney would have learned how to keep fowl motionless with heads raised for a few seconds.

Hooker's poultry shows, 1912-1927

In 1912 Hooker published a second pamphlet quite like her first but with an expanded title, *Single Comb Buff Orpingtons and Blue Orpingtons, Illustrated Mating List, 1912*.

²² I put online a substantial history of Kinney's work: <http://hdl.handle.net/10166/4012>.



The first part of this little catalogue is devoted to Buffs, but a shorter second section follows on Blue Orpingtons. Hooker signed it with her name and address, and the date “Jan. 29, 1912.” There are no descriptions of her two pens of Blues, which held fewer birds than Buff pens because of the difficulty, she wrote, “in keeping them true to type.” Kinney’s photos of Gilbert and Gilberta, posed against white cloth backdrops, have captions naming them as the first Blues imported into the US and listing the prizes they had already won. The catalogue ends with a cumulative “Record of Winnings.” Asa Kinney was again called upon and supplied seven of the catalogue’s ten photos. The other three are on advertising cards by Louis Paul Graham.

Hooker’s 1917 mating list of Buffs and Blues is like the 1912 list. Her introduction, dated Mach 14, 1917, refers to wartime conditions.

It seems to me that now is the time to produce for circulation when conditions shall make food material more plenty [sic] and markets more favorable. Those who had sold because of grain prices or other reasons will have a relapse of hen-fever and you and I will raise what

they will then buy at prices to give us good dividends on our stock.

It shouldn't be a surprise that Hooker reveals herself here as a shrewd businesswoman. She now has six pens of Buffs and two of Blues. Only one advertising card is shown this year (photo by J.W. Thorpe). Eight photos by "Willgy" are printed, all of Buffs taken in the straw ground of henyards. Kinney's photos of Gilbert and Gilberta appear again.

Only four Buff Orpingtons are described this year, although nine have their photographs printed. "Cornelia" is well described. She "is not always ready for showing but when she is fit. She has a way of dropping all her feathers, without notice, and rapidly donning a new suit, in which each feather is like all the others. She was judged the best female in the show at Holyoke and given the gold leg-band."

Blue Orpingtons have only a short section of this year's catalogue. Gilbert's and Gilberta's photos have sizeable captions that list all their prizes. However, Hooker hints that she may soon stop breeding Blues. "They improve every year and are very fascinating to breed or I should have given them up, as I have very little room and the Buffs ought to have it all. Some day I may, perhaps, if some one will take them all at my price—for the Buff's sake—let them go, but they are beautiful birds"

The "Record of Winnings" for both Buffs and Blues extends from 1906 to 1915 and shows just how far-flung Hooker travelled with her charges. She was in Cleveland in 1908, Baltimore in 1912, Holyoke in 1913, Springfield in 1913, 1914 and 1915, Brockton in 1915 and, surprisingly, Hempstead, Long Island, in 1914. These were in addition to her participation each year in New York and Boston. Her banner year was 1915, with four shows: Springfield, Brockton, Boston and New York.

One has to live with the hens to know them, and the outdoor life gives health and vigor. There are those among my friends who would choose a widely different occupation for me, and there are other fields that are fascinating and other work that I can do; but outdoor living I must have and hens I will have, and so at present the matter stands.²³

²³ *Poultry Success*, 1912.

Hooker's prize of prizes was won at Madison Square Garden's poultry show in 1920 when she had a blue ribbon for Henrietta as the best Buff Orpington.



Henrietta (Asa Kinney photo)

Naming the hen after herself fits well with her pride, and President Woolley announced that Henrietta was given the freedom of the campus. A month after her New York triumph, the Boston Globe published a picture of Hooker with her Henrietta whose caption reads “The blue ribbon Buff Orpington, quoted at a price of \$1000 at the New York show, has been raised and is shown by Dr. Henrietta E. Hooker, professor emeritus [sic] of the college, will be sold, the proceeds going to swell the \$3,000,000 endowment now being raised.” In her 1927 memoir, Hooker quotes a sentence from Oliver Wendell Holmes that could be read “before and after poultry shows: ‘To brag little, to show well, to crow gently if in luck—to pay up, to own up and to shut up if beaten, are the virtues of a sporting man.’”²⁴

²⁴ *How I Began*, 1927.

For prizes after 1915, we have no shows' catalogues, but we know their dates from Hooker's pedigree chart²⁵ and from *How I Began* of 1927. In 1919 she sold Margaret for \$150 at Madison Square, where she won "2nd prize there, 1st everywhere else." In 1923, she followed her triumph with Henrietta when her daughter Patience was named Champion Buff Orpington Female at Madison Square Garden. A Philadelphia Sunday paper printed an article about Hooker and the winning daughter of the famous Henrietta.²⁶ It's a long chatty account of Hooker's travels and chicken breeding, with several illustrations, and features the gift of her prize money in 1923 to the college's endowment fund, the second time she had done this.

The student newspaper printed an article in February "Prize Hen Does Her Bit,"

Miss Woolley received the following letter from her ladyship: 'Patience, the daughter of Henrietta, wishes to contribute to the endowment fund, in memory of her mother, her first premium money. It was won at Madison Square Garden late in January, where like her mother, she won first prize with a special ribbon for being the best color of any female of her class.' (Signed) Lady Orpington, nee Patience, daughter of Lady Henrietta.²⁷

Then in 1925, there were three more prizes. Satisfaction, great-granddaughter of Henrietta, got the ribbon for First Buff Orpington Pullet in New York. In Boston, Serenity won first prize and Prudence, third prize. It was in 1927 that Hooker won her final prizes. "The second cockerel at Boston was mine, and the cockerel in the First Young Pen was good enough to win it."²⁸

Preparing for all these poultry competitions must have been a challenge for a woman who turned 70 at the beginning of the decade. And she was showing her age. In August, 1919, she had surgery at the Holyoke Hospital.

²⁵ In Hooker's files in the Archives is a two-page typewritten chart that records the pedigrees of all winners descended from Lady and Lord Gladstone from 1900 to 1925.

²⁶ "Lady Patience Orpington, Queen of Easter Chickens," *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), April 4, 1923.

²⁷ *Mount Holyoke News*, Feb. 24, 1923, p. 3.

²⁸ *How I Began*, 1927.

Have been suffering freq. swelling under my knee. The bunch was removed here, as it was increasing in size & Dr. Clark feared it was of Interculous nature [three illegible words]. It proves to be a cyst containing synovial fluid. It was sent to Harvard for diagnosis. I have taken the matter as philosophically as I cd.: have suffered little & had a pretty good rest.²⁹

Her health was troubled again in a later year. “At Wed. Oct. 29, 19. Operation for appendicitis & ovarian tumor at Hol. Hospital. Cystose [cystocele] not fibroid – doing well.”³⁰ Despite these setbacks, through 1927 she maintained a vigorous schedule of poultry fairs and travels. She still had 100 chickens in 1927. However, in 1928 she had to acknowledge more problems with her health. An operation on her throat left her with a weak and hoarse voice, and a severe sprain of a knee hampered her walking and required often lying down.³¹ She died on May 13, 1929, aged seventy-seven.

One of her friends in her later years wrote “Once in speaking about retiring she said ‘Some people say they want to die in the harness, but I want time to roll in the pasture.’”³² Raising chickens in her back yard was full of pleasures. She was rolling in her own pasture. “Playmates” was the way she referred to her chickens. Even in her years as teacher, Hooker shed the harness each summer, except for the year she prepared her doctorate and for three partial summers studying at Penikese and M.I.T. She went traveling in Europe eleven summers from 1883 onward, and as we saw, she advised colleagues not to take every summer for study. We don’t know what occupied her time besides breeding her Orpingtons. She always boasted of her outdoor life, but she didn’t leave word about what reading she did nor about any of her indoor activities. All her surviving memos and her publications after 1910 are devoted to breeding chickens; none refer to her teaching.

In 1927 in *How I Began to Keep Hens*, Hooker provided her own

²⁹ An undated short memoir.

³⁰ An undated fragmentary memo, with the year not filled in.

³¹ From a fragmentary letter dated August 2, 1928, probably to the Alumnae secretary.

³² *A Doctor in Homespun, Autobiography of Mary Phylinda Dole, B.S., M.D.* Privately printed, 1941, pp. 46-47. Dole was class of 1886.

epitaph. We can easily imagine her speaking to us.

Here, perhaps, is my opportunity to say that my hens have been my lifesavers. They have not made my living for me, but they have added great diversion and recreation and stimulus to many a brain-tired hour. There is always something new in the hen yards, demanding your ingenuity. The hens are individuals and as such, greet you and respond in individual ways. You cannot carry your worries long in the chicken coops. And amusing dilemmas arise constantly to keep you cheerful.

Postscript

To my surprise, after I had nearly completed this monograph, my colleague and friend James Ghert sent me a photograph of his Buff Orpington, Berenice Abbot. I had not known he possessed her.



Berenice Abbot (Marie Curie looking on). James Ghert photo

Alas! Shortly after James took this photo, a fox made a meal of Berenice Abbot. She will be replaced, in honor of Henrietta Hooker.