



Origin & Evolution of the Dominique

By Mark A. Fields

For a comprehensive text on the origin and evolution of the Dominique chicken refer to The American Dominique by Mark A. Fields.

One type of reference material that has eluded me for years were the early USDA reports. In the quest to complete my collection of Yearbooks of Agriculture, I have had the great fortune to locate the first, which was for the year 1862. To put this in perspective Isaac Newton was listed as Commissioner of Agriculture and the President was "His Excellency" Abraham Lincoln.

As part of his introduction to the chapter on poultry, D.S. Heffron of Utica, New York wrote: "In this article it is proposed to give a popular description of all the really good and distinct varieties of domestic fowls which are known in the United States." Many breeds were listed; Games, Asiatics, Spanish, Creepers, etc. however only one breed was recognized as unique to America, and his description is as follows:

"The Dominique is the best fowl of common stock that we have, and is the only common fowl in the country that has enough distinct characteristics to entitle it to a name. These fowls are full medium in size, being but little less in weight than the Dorking, have full breasts, roundish plumb bodies, double or single combs, and yellow legs. Their main plumage has a light gray ground color, while each feather is barred crosswise with a darker shade. They are frequently known by the name of "hawk-colored fowls." They are hardy, easily raised, retain their peculiarities with great tenacity, have yellow skins, a color preferred by many for a market fowl; and taking these fowls all in all, they are one of the best varieties for common use."

Here the USDA clearly recognizes the Dominique as America's first breed of poultry. Additionally, the Dominique is given endorsement as a utilitarian breed. While we have always had the written word of

Mr. Darlington's reminisces of Dominiques during the 1820s, it is encouraging to find supporting documentation in these old official documents.