

Hi, Fred Nelson for Community Comment,

I recently reviewed an article that appeared in the May-June 1992 issue of the Humboldt Historian. The article was written by Elwain Dreyer regarding the poultry industry in Humboldt County. Early in the county's history, turkey production was an important part of the poultry industry. Turkey farms were located in the hill areas of southern Humboldt and the eastern edge of Humboldt Bay. According to the article, turkey drives were a part of the scene. Walter Eich, a former poultry man, remembered seeing a flock of six hundred turkeys, raised on Kneeland, being driven down Harris Street by two men on horseback with the help of a dog who kept the herd together. This was before the advent of the NWP Railroad and commercial refrigeration. All livestock had to be taken to the waterfront and sent live to the San Francisco Bay Area markets on ships leaving Humboldt Bay. Some of these turkey drives went on for days. Large turkey herds kept in one place for any length of time were costly to feed so the ranchers started out their herds in early summer, keeping them on the move until late autumn. Ranchers welcomed the birds and offered to pay the herdsman to come their way to keep down the grasshopper population. As one can imagine, turkey herds being driven from ranch to ranch where the best feed was available did take time. One of the stories I read referred to a herd of five hundred turkeys that originated in Freshwater. They were driven by three herders on horseback and two dogs. There was also a horse drawn supply wagon which included poultry fencing. Two men, on the wagon, would go ahead and locate a camp site where the temporary poultry fencing was set up so the turkeys could safely bed down for the night. The herd consumed grasshoppers as they crossed Kneeland Prairie and were driven as far south as Blocksburg. By late August, the herd was started back, gleaning the fields on the way, following the grain harvest. That distance was at least ninety miles round trip not including the side trips to some of the host ranches. Upon arrival at the home ranch in Freshwater, they were crated and hauled to the dock in Eureka for shipment. As the story goes, turkeys were easy to herd and would only fly when extremely excited. When faced with a river crossing, the birds were then encouraged to take to the air and fly to the other side. Some turkey herds were driven to Humboldt Bay from as far away as Hyampom. Rather than fence them in each night, the birds were roosted in the trees to protect them from predators. The herding procedure took patience, understanding and skill. Yep, we had high mileage turkeys way back then and we still have high mileage turkeys today. Poultry yesterday - politicians today.

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