

SHANNON BROOK FARM

ORGANIC • PASTURE-RAISED • LOCALICIOUS
CHICKEN & LAMB

2566 Jennings Road, Watkins Glen, NY 14891-9625 • 607.731.1840 • www.ShannonBrookFarm.com • shannon@ShannonBrookFarm.com

Shannon Brook Farm Newsletter

March 16, 2013

Springtime on the farm is amazing. Changes in the plants and animals come fast and furious as the weather warms up and the snow and ice drain away into the deep crevice called Seneca Lake. The animals are grazing and foraging just as quickly as their little muzzles, snouts, beaks and bills will allow. Try as we may, with heaps of hay, we can't keep the sheep and cows from eating the tiny stubble of green. In fact, nobody around here listens to us!

The lambs are running and jumping for joy - they lope up to the top of a small hillock and buck their way down, looking just about as silly as a lamb can. Their gate is not a walk, trot or canter but a boing, boing, boing! Look at me, see what I can do!



Lamb pile – playing, and getting dirty, in the spring mud

The geese seem just as happy. They spend their days playing in pools of ice water, haggling with one another and eating as much grass as possible. From the first day that we moved onto this piece of land the geese have been teaching us their ways. Clive and Henrietta, a pair of Embden geese, whom we adopted when we bought the property, are most likely fairly old, at least as far as geese go. They could be anywhere from 8-10 years old. Geese typically live to be 10-15 years old on a farm as long as they avoid becoming prey for a fox or coyote.

Clive and Henrietta know the land around the house quite well. They have wandered the farm for years, traipsing up to the pond, through the orchard, down Jennings Road, across to the neighbor's corn field and back again. Each day their routine is yet another iteration of this itinerary. There is a story that is

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told on Jennings Road about the woman who came bombing down the hill towards Seneca Lake. When she got to our house, which was built by Walt Jennings, she crested a hump in the road and discovered the giant white geese on the down hill slope. Swerving to miss them, she drove off the road and into a deep gully. It's a wonder that any of the geese are still alive. According to the story the woman survived but her car did not.



Clive and Henrietta – adjusting to the changes on the farm – us!

Last year when spring arrived Henrietta went off to lay her eggs. We never did discover her hiding spot. During the time she was gone Clive went bonkers – honking and crying and screeching his mournful, tormented calls. It was painful just to listen. He was so distressed. For 24 hours we thought she might be a goner. He paced the yard, went up the road, looked around the pond, came back to start all over again. Finally, I discovered her in the pond, floating serenely on the water, waiting for him to find her.

When I saw her there I herded him up to the pond for a reunion. He saw her floating on the water and walked away – back to the yard. He wanted nothing to do with Henrietta! We were so surprised after all of the drama. On the other hand, she has probably put him through this many times before.

Two years ago we raised some goslings - for fun. Only two of the bunch have survived. Those two were a Chinese White female (Big Bird) and an African male (Joan). Both are beautiful birds. Their temperaments, as noted in poultry catalogues, are “talkative”. Now, we all know what this means...it's not that they are going to sit down and share their day with us...no, they are crazy, loud and hilariously aggressive when intruders/visitors come to the farm. Last year Big Bird and Joan had 3 goslings, one of which survived; that would be Madeleine. This year Clive decided he needed more goslings as Henrietta's eggs never seem to hatch, so he started courting Madeleine.

This is not what was supposed to happen! In our mythical understanding of geese they mate for life. What about Henrietta?! Well, the truth of the matter is that geese may mate *socially* for life...that is different than mating, you know - the other way, for life. If any of Madeleine's eggs hatch, the goslings will genetically link Clive to Joan and Big Bird. So, in a way, all of the older geese, except Henrietta, are pinning a lot of hope on one younger goose, Madeleine, to toe the line. Her offspring will be truly multi-cultural – Chinese, African and German.

Recently we moved all of the geese into the newly fenced pasture with the sheep and the livestock guardian dogs, hoping they would be safer there. Clive and Henrietta, who are very large, can't shimmy

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Madeleine laying an egg near the pig pen

under the gate to escape. Joan, Big Bird and Madeleine can and do. Each time Madeleine is ready to lay an egg she goes out of the pasture over to the gate that leads to the pigs' corral. She sits inches from the inquisitive pigs, who would gladly eat any eggs she has to spare. Then her parents come out to join her. They are a tight-knit group that always travels as a family. Clive is stuck in the pasture with Henrietta by his side as he paces back and forth, eyeing Madeleine. He's lucky that Henrietta puts up with him...and vice versa.



And for the finale - Franklin D. Roosevelt gives Billy Buttonwood a good, swift ha-cha! They are getting ready to meet Hannah & Sophie, their cousins from Cleveland Heights, this summer. They are so excited!