

SHANNON BROOK FARM

ORGANIC • PASTURE-RAISED • LOCALICIOUS
CHICKEN & LAMB

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Shannon Brook Farm Newsletter

June 8, 2013

What is a Pekin Duck, anyway?!

Since 2,500 B.C. the Pekin duck was raised in the Imperial City of Pekin, China, now called Beijing. They were introduced to Long Island, New York in the 1870s by a Mr. McGrath, who had come across them during his travels in China.

Mr. McGrath learned that Pekins don't hatch their own eggs particularly well so he placed 15 eggs under broody chickens while in Shanghai. Once the ducklings hatched and were growing well he entrusted them to a Mr. Palmer, an American poultry fancier, for their journey to New York.



The Long Island Duck: advertising a duck egg & meat company founded in 1931

The agreement was that Mr. Palmer would keep half of the ducklings upon their safe arrival. Only six ducks and three drakes survived the journey, the rest were lost at sea to a storm. The ducklings arrived in New York City on March 13, 1873, after a 124 day voyage. Half the surviving ducklings were crated up and sent to the McGrath Family but the ducks were eaten before they reached the farm.

Mr. Palmer, caring for his share of the ducks, grew them into the first real flock of Pekins in America. More ducks were eventually imported from China and the Pekins quickly became the most

popular meat duck in this country. Long Island duck farming developed into a significant enterprise between 1880-1885. A detailed account of the early Long Island duck farming industry can be found here: <http://suffolkcountyny.gov/Portals/0/planning/EnvPlanning/LIDuckHistory/AppA.pdf>

Pekin ducks in America are fairly horizontal in stature while European Pekins are more vertical with short necks, like Runner ducks. Feeding a diet high in corn and alfalfa renders the beak and legs bright orange. As the hen begins to lay eggs the coloration in her beak and legs tones down as the pigment is used in the coloration of the yolks. On our farm the ducks are raised on a consistent diet of high-quality, organic feed, fresh water and pasture. The ducks have access to water for wading and swimming and are grown more slowly than on a typical large-scale duck farm.