

How Giving Up Nest Eggs Made More Jobs

by Lynne Belluscio

Before Orator Woodward parlayed his \$450 investment in Jell-O into millions for the Woodward family, he tried his hand at several other innovative products. Born in 1856, he never completed school. As a young man he was described as “full of ideas, energy, talk, brimming over at all times.” When he was barely twenty, he decided he would try making a new kind of target trap ball. These balls were the forerunner of clay pigeons used for trap shooting. Originally, trap balls were made of glass. The Borgardus glass ball that was patented in the United States in 1877 was filled with feathers. But the shattered glass was a real hazard on the fields. In 1878, Orator Woodward and Allen Olmsted began making Plaster of Paris trap balls. They were cheaper to make and disintegrated in the fields. Woodward was making several thousand a day. He held two patents on his trap balls. (Believe it or not, there are trap ball collectors out there. Maybe some day, we’ll have a Woodward trap ball.)

While Woodward was making the trap balls, he decided to try making plaster of Paris nest eggs. Nest eggs are used in a hen house to encourage hens to lay eggs. Woodward’s eggs were medicated and killed lice on nesting chickens. According to an article in the June 6, 1879 *Courier*, the first egg was produced on April 15, 1878. During the first year they sold over 7000 medicated nest eggs. The *Courier* article mentioned that, Woodward had an agent, G.V. Georgias in Theresienfeld, Austria, who was selling the eggs in Europe. Woodward’s Medicated Nest Eggs were advertised in all the poultry magazines. Production of the medicated nest eggs reached almost

3000 a day. It’s not clear when production ended, but one story I heard was that when they excavated for one of the factory buildings, they discovered thousands of the eggs buried in the foundation. We have a salesman’s sample box on exhibit at the Jell-O Gallery.

In 1946, after World War II, General Foods created a very unusual ad. It showed the front porch of a general store, with a poster for Woodward’s Medicated Nest Eggs. The article went on to talk about the problems with creating jobs after the war. “Today a lot of people are working because a young man who made medicated nest eggs had an eager restless mind. . . . Today everyone agrees that America faces a serious problem in postwar employment. There must be steady jobs by the millions. . . . There is no equivalent for this American way of making jobs. It has made this nation the most prosperous of all nations. . . . The freedom that has made this possible – freedom to start a business, expand a business or hang out your own shingle. It is not a freedom to be taken lightly, or for granted. Americans want it. Americans need it, for making jobs and building prosperity in the peacetime future - -For you are part of the public. Your opinion is part of public opinion. And public opinion is what shapes a country’s destiny. . . . sets the pattern of its people’s lives. . . . determines what freedoms they may enjoy. . . . You owe it to yourself to be aware of this at all times. To let your voice be heard and your opinion be known on how you want your job to be made in your country.”

Recently on Ebay, an original watercolor Jell-O ad was offered for sale, which is rare enough in its own right,



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but on the back was an original Woodward Medicated Nest Egg poster. Just like the one in the ad. So I bought it. When it arrived. I was surprised to see that the two pieces, were mounted back to back on a piece of cardboard and it appeared that the cardboard had been used as a backing for something else. There are huge amounts of glue all around the edges. I asked the

seller if he knew anything about where the piece came from and he told me that it was part of an estate of a man who formerly worked for General Foods. In the meantime, I will take the piece over to Skaneateles to have the folks at Westlake Conservators look at it to see if they can remove the glue and perhaps separate the two pieces of cardboard.