

# THE EVOLUTION OF DOG SHOWS

Excerpts from a talk **by Gerry Hayes, AKC Archivist**,  
on June 19, 2000 to the Somerset Hills Kennel Club

My tenure with the American Kennel Club (AKC) started in March 1997 as the first Historian/Archivist in its then 113-year history. Actually, the terms researcher and detective should be added to this description. Unfortunately, prior to my arrival (and in reality why the need was felt to add this position) not a whole lot was saved. If it was old, it was discarded or “purged.” The position and I have grown and evolved together. I report to Jim Crowley and within, certain limits, his philosophy was, and is, “it's your job, do it!”

One of the first things I did was read ALL the Minutes of the AKC from 1884 to the present. Then I worked on tracing the evolution of the Constitution and By-Laws. (The hardest part of this task was finding the various versions!) After three years, there are still missing segments. Of some facts, I am quite sure; others are based on reasoning, the process of elimination, and intuition.

In the late 1960s, when we first started showing Saint Bernards, it took all of my energy and brain power to learn how to fill out entry forms, select classes, and eventually be concerned about points and finally championships. I didn't question terminology such as “Specials” or “Specializing,” or why premium lists were called Premium Lists. Nor did I have any idea that dog shows, as they were then, had ever been any “different.”

It was not until I joined the AKC and undertook that first project of reading all the Minutes that all this took on a different meaning. What I would like to do tonight is take you back exactly 141 years to **the first organized dog show held at Newcastle-on-Tyne, England in June of 1859**. The operative word here is “organized.” There had been informal matches and tavern “Pot House Shows” for many years prior, but this was the first organized show with pre-show entries and a printed catalogue. There were 60 entries of Pointers and Setters, with one class for each breed. The dogs were unidentified except for kennel names; Mr. Murrel's “Spot” competing against Mr. Brown's “Venus.” Price: 22 shillings.

The following year, there was a show in Birmingham (now the site of Crufts) which drew 267 dogs and included an all-breed classification which was broken down into two divisions. Division 1 breeds being Sporting, and Division 2 breeds including “some workers, non-sporting dogs, a few terriers, some toy dogs and a class for foreign non-sporting dogs.” This was the forerunner of the group divisions that we know today.

The growing interest in dog shows in England led to the formation, by twelve men meeting in London, of The Kennel Club (TKC) on April 4th, 1873. This Committee formulated a code of ten rules relating to dog shows and all societies which adopted this code would be eligible for the Stud Book, the first volume of which covered shows from 1859 thru 1873.

Now, let us cross the Atlantic to where things were a little different. In March of 1884 in *THE AMERICAN FIELD*, there was a report on the Cincinnati show. (Remember, the American Kennel Club was yet to be formed, and the *Gazette* was still five years in the future, so information regarding all dog shows was in this newspaper.) “We have never attended a show of its size where the exhibitors have been at such pains to decorate the stalls of their dogs we attribute the cause to a great extent to the large number of lady exhibitors. Mr. Lincoln, (the manager of the show) has learned that the typical Yankee is a philosopher, and so much interested in matters of fact and usefulness that he is very much wanting in the characteristic poetic nature of the average American...and making good use of this knowledge, he has interested the ladies in bench shows by offering premiums for which their dogs may contest. The result is that instead of a dull exhibition of useful pointers, setters and hounds, there is an increased interest in the useless toy varieties, nearly always shown in stalls handsomely decorated. We say useless toy varieties, because this appears on the face to be so, but it is only patent to the stern American philosopher who will ask: ‘What kind of a dog is that?’, ‘A Pug’ ‘What is it good for?’ ‘Nothing’ ‘Then I don't want him.’ The same man will breed Setters and Pointers, and Hounds and other varieties of dogs, about the use of which he knows nothing...not so with the American lady. When she learns that a dog is absolutely good for nothing, she is not happy until she owns one.”

"Non-sporting dogs grew slowly in the favor of the American public, all because they appear to be of no use. The fact is, however, that the practical American simply fails to see their usefulness. There are today in America hundreds of young men whose existence is made miserable for the want of something to take up their attention; men of means without a hobby. Such men would find all the food for reflection they require, and much that they absolutely need, if they would turn their attention to breeding non-sporting dogs. They would find a subject that would develop their latent energies, and besides interesting themselves, they might discover some of the many hidden laws of nature through their efforts in breeding and thus benefit their fellow man. It is through the poetry of breeding what appear useless animals that much practical benefit is derived.”

During this year of **1884**, there had appeared in this same newspaper many calls for the formation of a National Bench Show Association, and on September 17<sup>th</sup> twelve men, each representing an established kennel club, met in Philadelphia to form the American Kennel Club. The TKC was organized by and for individuals; the AKC was organized by Clubs, as a Club of Clubs. At the second meeting of this fledgling Club, on October 22nd, Rules and Regulations were adopted for dog shows. Unlike the TEN rules adopted by our English cousins, our first document consisted of 34 Rules and Regulations. Significantly more than the TKC, but ridiculously brief compared to the Rules of today!

Then in **May 1885**, another significant step was taken. **The AKC appointed "Standard Committees"** to consider the breed standards for judging at shows held under AKC rules. Now, it should not surprise you to learn that these Rules were (and are) changed regularly, and before the ink had time to dry on previous amendments. Nor should it surprise you to know that most of the changes were minor...a word here...a comma there...and of course, each revision got longer, and longer, and more complicated. Particularly those that dealt with suspension, disqualification and expulsion.

**Now, let's look at the shows themselves:**

The shows were all benched. They lasted three to four days, with the dogs remaining on their benches (or stalls) from 9:00 a.m. to 10 p.m. each day. Each breed was judged only once during the show, and the judging schedules were listed as “Probable-order of judging” so the owners or kennel men had to remain near their dogs. If they were removed overnight, a deposit had to be left with the Manager of the show, and the deposit and any prizes won were forfeited if the dog was not returned for benching the following day. Entry fees, incidentally, included the food prepared and given to the dogs entered.

Dogs could only be entered in the name of the bona fide owner and entries “must be identified by the name of dog, its age, and IF KNOWN, the names of its sire and dam”. If the names of its sire and dam are not known, it may be entered ‘Pedigree unknown’.” To compete in the Champion class, the dog must have won three first prizes in Open classes at recognized shows and having won those three first prizes could not compete in the Open class when there was a champion (or challenge) class for its kind. This requirement was changed to four first prizes in the Open class in 1888. And then, after having won three firsts in the Challenge class, the dog had the privilege of the title of Champion. Acquiring this title was not as easy as it may seem. In 1888, for instance, there were only 11 shows!

Early on, there were six classes: Miscellaneous for dogs of all recognized breeds for which no regular classes were offered; Selling Classes, for dogs to be sold at a maximum price, stated in the premium list; Novice classes; Puppy classes; Open classes and Challenge classes, for all dogs having won the appropriate number of firsts in the Open classes. Then the clubs were permitted to add whatever additional classes they desired, as long as they did not conflict with other AKC rules. (local classes, kennels with the most dogs entered, brace classes etc.)

Dogs affected with mange or other contagious disease were to be disqualified at the discretion of the show's managers or superintendent and removed from the show. In 1888, additional safeguards were added, with the requirement for a “duly qualified veterinary surgeon to be at every show,” and each dog entered had to be passed on by him before being benched, and again he had to inspect each dog before noon of each day the show was open.

Further, dogs shipped by express “must be prepaid and have a label stating from whom shipped, also name of station and express company, that they may be properly returned.” Think about it. There were no RVs, no station wagons, no airplanes and few cars. Dogs that were on the “show circuit” were shipped by rail or Express. They would spend four days being exhibited on a bench, then be crated and packed off to the shipping office, sometimes taking three or four days to complete their journey back to their kennel. There were NO vaccines for distemper or rabies. And, as seen by the rules, mange and other contagious diseases were a constant threat. (Do you remember the problems we had just a few years ago when suddenly our dogs were threatened with parvo and kennel cough?) The life of a show dog was arduous and hazardous.

By 1894, it was ruled that no show could be held at which the prize money was less than \$500; a year later the qualification for a championship was amended to require that one of the wins in the Challenge class had to be won at a show offering not less than \$1000 in

cash prizes. This was the first requirement for a “major” win. The great incentive to competing in dog shows was winning prizes--prizes of money (usually ranging from a low of \$2.00 to \$15.00 in the classes, silver and/or gold cups and trophies, 5 lb. boxes of candy or cigars, “handsome” collars, and in some instances, cases of wine. The list of “Special” prizes in a premium list could be long and complicated. And every prize or premium had to be listed. Dogs could be entered for these “Special” prizes only, hence our champion “Specials” dogs, and the term “Specialing” a dog. Did you ever wonder WHY they were called Premium lists? Because they were, in fact, lists of Premiums, with an entry form incidentally enclosed. In 1967, it was permitted to condense these lists and all prizes offered no longer needed to be included in them. I have to add parenthetically here that I am particularly fond of the candy and wine trophies. They are not being discovered in someone's attic or now appearing on eBay. My email is deluged with requests from people finding old ribbons, rosettes and trophies, and now wanting to identify the winners and history of same. Candy and wine have long since been devoured! The prizes of gold or silver had to be of the purity of United States coin, and in 1897 it was decided to award AKC medals to all dogs becoming champions after January 1898. These medals were of silver and engraved with the dog's name and AKC registration number. They cost \$3.00.

**A winners class was established in 1898**, similar to the Winners class as we know it today. However, great problems arose with THIS innovation. Since the incentive for showing was the prizes, dogs were frequently entered in every possible class. Usually (and hopefully) the judges were consistent. If they had the same three or four dogs in each class, they would be placed in the same order in each class. But sometimes it was not always the same dogs in each class, and a dog which won one class might lose to another dog in a subsequent class. Or there might be only one dog of the breed entered and having won all the classes which he was entered, he would go to the winners class by default and earn one of the wins needed for a championship. This knotty problem kept the delegates arguing for the better part of two years. It would be resolved at one meeting, only to have another question arise and then it would be thrashed out again at the next meeting.

Finally, with the Rules that took effect **August 1905**, a major revision occurred and a **“point” system evolved**. The classes reverted back to Puppy, Novice, Limit and Open, with the winners of these classes advancing to the Winners class. The winner of ten points in this class became a champion of record. However, this point schedule was based on the total entry of dogs benched at the show, NOT the number of dogs in each individual breed. For instance, a show with 1,000 dogs or more, rated 5 points shows with fewer than 250 dogs, rated at 1 point. Specialty Clubs, with classes for only their breed, were rated at 4 points.

If you remember, at the beginning of this I mentioned that at that first show in England in 1859 the dogs were not identified, except kennel names. This issue burst on the American scene in January 1910 when rules, mandating how catalogues were to be compiled, standardized their size and changed their traditional order. Prior to this, catalogues first listed the catalogue number, name of the owner, dog's name, registration or listing number, date of birth, breeder and Sire and Dam, if known. Now, after the catalog number comes the name of the DOG, registration number, THEN the name of the owner, date of birth, etc.

At the Annual Meeting in February, the issue was hotly debated, with James Mortimer, Delegate of Ladies Kennel Association of America and also the Superintendent and Secretary of Westminster, asking: "Is not the exhibitor more important than his dog?" "NO!" replied Hollis Hunnewell, Delegate of the American Fox Terrier Club, "not at a dog show!" The debate raged for more than five pages of Minutes and resulted in a return to listing owners first. And this was the order in catalogs until 1975, when again the dog's name took pride of place.

Also in **January 1910, the American Bred Class was introduced, and the requirements for a championship were increased to 15 points**, under three different judges, three points of which having to be won at one show. The point schedule still was based on the total number of dogs benched at the shows.

Multiple-breed competition became more prevalent in 1911 when those special prizes were designated "classified," a prize which was offered in a single breed, and "unclassified," which was offered in classes involving more than one breed. I have included in your packets copies of the debate from the 1913 September Delegates meeting which, among other things, includes discussions about licensing judges and professional handlers. These motions lost in 1913, but were enacted in **1917 when the AKC did begin licensing judges and superintendents. Handlers were not licensed until 1930.** As you know, these issues are still topics of debate today. Some things never seem to change!

Now, as far as I can tell, and this is where deduction and intuition come into play, **in 1917 there were some definitive changes made in the dog show rules:**

1. At each authorized show the number of points toward a championship for each breed shall be based on the actual number of dogs benched in each breed, according to the schedule of points determined by the License Committee. This schedule was to be published in each premium list. This is where speculation comes in. We don't HAVE any old premium lists. However, this rule was changed, I believe, mandating that the schedule of points be printed in each catalog, which we do have. And, I found a "revised" schedule of points in a 1918 catalog, but I have never found the original schedule it was revised from (if that makes sense).
2. Another section of these new rules required that at least six points for a championship had to have been won at two three-point shows, under different judges.
3. These rules were also the first requiring all judges and superintendents to be licensed.
4. They standardized the colors and designs of the ribbons to be awarded, as they remain today.
5. And they standardized the breeds and arrangement of their order in the premium list and catalogue: large dogs, medium sized dogs, small-size dogs, and cage dogs. In 1924, comprehensive new rules for Groups and Best in Show judging were adopted. Under these new rules, all breeds (except Miscellaneous) were divided into five groups: Group 1, Sporting, which included hounds; Group 2, Working; Group 3, Terriers; Group 4, Toy; and, Group 5, Non-Sporting. The Best of Breed winners in each group were then judged

together to determine the best dog in that group, and the five group winners met to decide the best Dog in Show.

There had been awards for dogs and/or bitches judged best in show over the years, but they were offered at the discretion of the show-giving club, and were not official awards. **Westminster was the first to include Best in Show under the new format in 1924.** Later in that decade, the groups became six as hounds became a separate group.

So, by the late 1920s dog shows were very similar to what we know today. The first Children's Handling Class was held at Westbury in 1932, becoming Junior Showmanship in 1950. Helene Whitehouse Walker was instrumental in establishing Obedience Tests in the mid 30s and in **1936 the AKC published the first official "Regulations and Standard for Obedience Test Field Trials."** Leonard Brumby, Sr. was appointed the first Full-time field rep in 1946, and **in 1947 Tracking was made a separate class.** It had, until that time, been part of the Utility Dog obedience test. The Limit Class was replaced by the **Bred By Exhibitor Class in the early 1950s.** Also, in 1950 amendments were made to the rules which stipulated that no show could extend for more than two days. **The independently judged Best of Winners class was eliminated in 1967, and a system of judging Best of Winners during Best of Breed was adopted.**

**With the addition of the Herding Group in 1983,** we are up to date. There have been changes in the way points are awarded the ability to move up dogs as they complete their championships, and recognizing new breeds.

**Just let me put one fact into perspective:**

In 1884, the AKC was formed by 12 MEN representing 12 kennel clubs. In 1985, 101 years later, those 12 Directors became 11 men and 1 WOMAN! And they say the AKC is not progressive!

Right now, I am embarking on another project which is still very much in the embryo stage. This is an oral history project. Many of us are sort of between two generations. The first judge who ever gave me points on a Saint was Percy Roberts. He was then 84 years old, and although I knew he was "old" and certainly respected, I had absolutely no idea of his past, or how old and respected he was. He was born 5 years after the AKC was formed and literally knew and or handled, and then judged, many of the icons of the sport-- both dogs and people.

At the March Delegates Meeting, I had lunch at a table of eight and I mentioned the upcoming Old Timers Handling Night in connection with the Tar Heel Circuit, ruing the fact that Bob and Janie Forsyth were flying in to compete. Only two other people at the table knew that they had ever been handlers! Their careers overlap Percy Roberts, Alva Rosenberg, Louis Murr, and many other great names of breeders and dogs. They handled some of the foundation dogs of many breeds, they knew many of the people that I, as AKC historian, would give anything to be able to learn about.

Unless we act, we are going to lose great chunks of history. I wish everyone would go around with a tape recorder and talk to their mentors, peers and icons to preserve their memories and knowledge. This is a project for all of us.