

THE ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB

By Vicki Allen

Today it is difficult to believe that the gigantic machinery of registration and regulation that the AKC has become, was ever what the name implied — a kennel club.

But on that night of September 17, 1884 when ten men came together in a small, smoked filled room at 13th and Market Street in Philadelphia for the purpose of forming a club; surely not even the mostly wildly optimistic or imaginative of them could ever have foreseen even a small portion of what their kennel club would grow to be.

The progress from that beginning to the present has taken over three quarters of a century and has involved the lives and work of many men. It has altered irrevocably the history and the future of the purebred dog. Whether it has been for the better or for worse may take another long span of years to assess.

The founding of the AKC followed by only a few years the first recorded dog shows and the beginnings of systematic attempts to improve breeds.

The first recorded dog show seems to have been held in 1859 in Newcastle, England, and by 1880 the annual bench show in New York

boasted a benching of 29 breeds. By the time the AKC came into being, dog shows were prevalent enough and in some cases fraudulent enough, to cause real concern. The thirteen clubs who sent delegates to that first meeting hoped to form a coalition devoted to the proper regulation of the new sport.

During the next year similar meetings were held, at intervals, at several locations. A constitution and by-laws were drafted and proposed. Officers were elected and discussion was begun on what important issues should first concern this embryonic organization.

By late 1885 two important projects were underway. The first involved holding show in a circuit which replaced the previous haphazard scheduling of shows.

By far the most important act of that first year was the appointment, for each breed, a committee of three to compose and present a written standard for their breed to be used by judges at AKC sanctioned shows.

Having made a beginning toward the organization and standardization of dog show, in the next year the AKC turned its focus toward the acquisition of a stud book. At that

time there were two important stud books, both published by private concerns. When the New York based book refused to sell, Dr. N. Rowe of Chicago offered his. Called the American Kennel Club Stud book, it was donated because Dr. Rowe felt that the true purpose of a stud book could only be served if it was in the control of a national organization rather than in one man's power.

At the time of transfer the stud book consisted of Volumes I, II, III, and represented a total registration of around 3,000 dogs. In that year this venture was a brave undertaking; the club welcomed it with a balance on hand of \$49.15 in the treasury.

Another step taken in 1885 was the establishment of a procedure to handle complaints, which in these early days were numerous and often volatile.

It was not until 1887 that the club found a pressing need for an office. So in March of that year the first meeting was held in their newly acquired lodgings at Number 44 Broadway, New York City.

1888 saw the passage of a rule requiring all dogs exhibited at AKC sanctioned shows to be registered and the Club established a simple registration procedure.

The GAZETTE had its beginning in 1889 as a small sheet containing club business. It remained in pretty much the same form until the appointment, in 1898 of James Watson as editor. From that time it grew and took on more duties and importance to its present form.

Registrations reached 17,-

884 in 1905. This year, too, membership in the AKC reached 110 clubs with 50 associate members. In the next ten years registrations climbed slowly but steadily to 22,127. And in 1915 there were 105 AKC sanctioned shows held.

With the installation of new president John E. DeMund in 1923 the AKC entered a new era of harsh enforcement of rules and frequent suspensions of judges as well as handlers and exhibitors. During this nine year administration there was much conflict. Many felt that the enforcement was much too strict and often unfair. Others believed that this period was necessary to establish the AKC as a regulatory organization and proved that previous dubious practices would no longer be allowed to continue. In the midst of the furor, registrations declined for the first time.

The AKC itself continued with business as usual, including another move into larger quarters. During this period many of the rules we compete by today were implemented including a logical method of choosing Best In Show by Groups and the criteria of 15 points, two majors for a championship. Provisions for show veterinarians came into being in response to the distemper epidemics of the time. Late in the term registrations reached 59,500 with over 577 champions of record.

The final accomplishment of these years was the collection of all the standards with much additional information and some pictures into a book Purebred Dogs.

Charles T. Inglee took office as president in 1932 with

his objective to restore goodwill towards the AKC and to continue the sport in a new spirit of true sportsmanlike conduct. He set up a grievance committee to allow appeals for those who had been suspended and in many cases valuable contributors to the sport were reinstated.

1934 saw the fiftieth anniversary of the AKC with 250 member clubs and registrations passing the one million mark. This year saw the acceptance of Obedience in AKC sanctioned show and the beginnings of a national publicity campaign for the club. AKC took over the entire floor of the building and installed an assembly

method of work handled by a staff of 80 employees. An appeal for books was made to begin the now famous library.

This completes the early history of the AKC. It is not so very many years until the one hundredth birthday of the AKC. With the constantly changing lifestyles of today and the beginnings of talk to legislate dogs entirely out of cities, one realizes that it is going to take the combined work of the AKC and each individual exhibitor to insure that by the time that anniversary rolls around there are still fine dogs left to exhibit.

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