

History of the Bulldog

Although the breed has undergone dramatic changes over its history, the Bulldog remains a favored pet dog.

By Michael Dickerson

The Bulldog in the U.S.

Just as the Bulldog has enjoyed a long and colorful history of companionship in its homeland, Britain, so also have Americans embraced this remarkable breed. Sources reveal that Bulldogs were in the US since the moment of its inception (around 1776 or earlier). The breed was counted among the first breeds recognized by the American Kennel Club (AKC), and participated in the first Westminster Kennel Club show in 1877. Ten participants were Bulldogs, and they were owned by fanciers like F. M. David of Montreal; A. Van Cortland, Jr., F. T. L. Lane, J. Matthews and J. B. Miller of Manhattan; A. Van Cortland of Kingsbridge, NY; J. Mortimer of Manhattan; George Raper of the UK; and J. D. Townsend of Manhattan. The first AKC champion of the breed was Robinson Crusoe, who earned the title in 1888. His brother, Britomartis, also a champion, was considered to be another fabulous specimen in the day.

Established in 1890, the Bulldog Club of America (BCA) was incorporated in New York on February 29, 1904. The first president was J. E. Thayer and T. L. Parks was the first vicepresident. The first specialty was held in 1907, under the auspices of the AKC. The official newsletter is called The Bulldogger and is available to all club members. More information about the club can be found online by visiting the website, www.thebca.org.

In the early days of the BCA, the breed was only represented at the major shows by small numbers, perhaps as few as ten dogs. The formation of the new parent club served to organize its members, and breeders more consistently participated in the shows. At the 1891 Westminster Kennel Club show, some 51 Bulldogs participated, in part due to the 16 silver trophies and medals the BCA offered to the winners. For the next few years, the breed became a major force at shows all across the US. The Grand Trophy, originally called the Parke Cup, was the most prestigious of the awards, and the first such victor was "Harper," a recent English import who caused a great stir on the American dog scene. The brindle Ch. Saleni was another Bulldog who won grandly on both sides of the Atlantic.

Another great brindle English import was Ch. His Lordship, who along with Ch. Lord Yarmouth, Facey Romford and Glenwood Queen won consistently at the shows at the turn of the century. His Lordship won the first two national specialties in 1894 and 1895, with Ch. Saleni taking BOS both years. Yarmouth won BOB at the national in 1897.

Richard Croker, owner of the famed Deal Kennels, imported Ch. Rodney Stone in 1901. This highly valuable dog (said to be \$5000, a dear sum for a dog today, no less in 1901!) won the Grand Trophy twice (1905 and 1906) as well as the national specialty in 1901. Other top winners from this early period were Ch. La Roche, Glenwood Queen and Alex Stewart's Strathway Prince Albert, the first Bulldog to win the Westminster show, having done so in 1913.

In the 1920s, Bulldogs were proving most successful, led by such kennels as Silvent White, Warleigh, Sparrow Bush, Ther-E-Aults and Ricelands. The 1930s marked the beginning of the legacy of Mrs. Edna Glass and her remarkable Bulldogs that would win for decades in the ring, including such champions as Sandow's Smasher, Sugarlite's Baby Doll, Ashford Superb, Dwael's Smasherjoe, Cherokee Morgan and others. Dorothy Whipple- Sutcliff began her Charl-Doro Kennels in 1935 and became a force for many decades. Many other breeders entered the arena, including Dr. Edward Vardona, Mrs. Robert Horne, George Hargreaves, John Prescott, Harry Isaacs, as some examples of dedication and greatness.

FEROCIOUS ANCESTOR

Fortunately, the Bulldog is nothing like the ferocious dog that it was several hundred years ago. In ancient times it was a persistent fighter. Some written reports include tales of Bulldogs hanging on the lips of the bull long after their insides had been ripped completely apart by the ravenous animal. Many dogs were killed during this era, and the harsh sports in which they were forced to participate would be considered unethical by today's standards. Charles G. Hopton, a noted Bulldog man from this period, produced many champions under his Rodney prefix, including the aptly named Ch. L'Ambassadeur, the first Bulldog bred in the US to win a Kennel Club championship in the UK. R. W. Lyons, Dr. J. H. Elwin, Bill and Helen Armstrong and C. D. Richardson began their careers in the 1940s. Other influential kennels arose in the 1950s, including Romed, Vardona, Maxmal, Rockledge, Thorn Meadow and Ne Mac.

The only other Bulldog to win the prestigious Westminster show was Ch. Kippax Fearnought, owned by Dr. John A. and Billie Saylor and bred by Bill Lawlor and Harold Dooler, this win in 1955. Vardona Kennels produced the great Ch.

Vardona Frosty Snowman, who became the American-bred Best in Show winner in 1959. From 1958 to 1960 Snowman won the national specialty.

From 1960 on, there have been hundreds of breeders who have made a mark on the breed in the US, far too many to list here, but one is deserving of mention. Bob and Jean Hetherington, who have been breeding Bulldogs since 1964 under the Hetherbull prefix, have produced over 100 champions and obedience titlists, including no fewer than 14 top producers, including the top-winning Bulldog of all time, Ch. Hetherbull Bounty's Frigate. Jean Hetherington earned the distinction of placing the first Utility Dog title on a Bulldog in the 1970s.

Most of the top-winning dogs and accomplished Bulldog kennels have originated from English descent. In recent years, several new faces have emerged in the Bulldog show ring in both America and England. Many reputable breeders are producing quality stock and establishing reputable bloodlines. Several have done exceptionally well both in and out of the show ring. Bill and Margaret Goodwin of Britishpride Kennel have produced several champions. The most famous being Eng. Ch. Ocobo Royal Heritage of Britishpride who won Best in Show at the British Bulldog Club Centenary Show. Pat and Norman Davis of Ocobo Kennel did exceptionally well with Eng. Ch. Ocobo Skipper and Eng. Ch. Ocobo Tully. A few other noteworthy breeders include Brenda Price of Esclusham Kennel, and Peter and Jackie New of New Rock Kennels.

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From Fighting Dog to Show Dog and Family Companion

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