

A Club of Their Own

In its 110th year, the United Kennel Club continues to celebrate a wide variety of purebred performance dogs.

Dawne Deeley

It may seem odd to modern-day breeders and fanciers, but recording canine pedigrees was not exactly commonplace in the late 19th century. Certainly the practice was widespread in the bloodstock community; horse fanciers had been keeping up-to-date books for decades. However, many old-school dog men didn't see the need for such nit-picking detail. Furthermore, the few registries that did exist easily confused individuals who were interested in formalized record-keeping. Enter the man who would set the wheels in motion for what was to eventually become the world's largest all-breed performance-dog registry.

Founding father

The United Kennel Club was the brainchild of Chauncey Zachariah Bennett, a traveling salesman and self-employed inventor for Bennett Novelty Works. In addition to volunteering as a fireman during and after World War I, Bennett sharpened his natural mathematical skills working as a track handicapper at local horse races.

On Feb. 10, 1898, Bennett founded the UKC with the simple goals of bringing breeders together under a common umbrella, and subsequently promoting various purebreds. He believed that groups like the then-fledgling American Kennel Club pandered to the conformation-only show dog and what he referred to as "the Big City idle rich." As Andrea Wood wrote in *UKC 1898–1997: The First Hundred Years*, the club began "as an everyman alternative to registries he felt were not open enough to new breeds, or especially too conformation show oriented. His emphasis was on the working dog, a concept known now at UKC as 'Total Dog.'"

Bennett reasoned that people were likely to value their pets and breeding stock less if their parentage was questionable. He theorized that pedigreed dogs were not normally the result of careless or wanton breeding; the offsprings' value would be raised if inquisitive buyers would be able to count on certain qualities. This made particular sense to those looking for specific traits in working or hunting dogs. Today, these ideas seem obvious, but in C.Z. Bennett's time, it bordered on revolutionary.

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