

## Early Dog Shows, Part I

**The love-hate relationship that exists between the kennel clubs and large segments of the dog fancy community is certainly not new.**

*Amy Fernandez*

Posted: Thu Jun 23 00:00:00 PDT 2005

The love-hate relationship that exists between the kennel clubs and large segments of the dog fancy is certainly not new. The years following the advent of the first kennel clubs in England and the United States in the 1850s brought notable changes to the dog world, and exhibitors pondered whether these changes really equaled improvements. Progress, in fact, left many dog fanciers feeling frustrated and disenfranchised. Weekly dog papers, such as *The Canine World*, provided a forum for breeders' and exhibitors' anxieties over kennel club policies, which often meant playing the devil's advocate. Part of the problem can be traced to the fact that dog shows predated the establishment of organizations to regulate them. Purebred dogs and dog shows already had large loyal followings on both sides of the Atlantic when the first kennel clubs were founded, and many fanciers felt that clubs were stepping in to take credit for their accomplishments. "The Kennel Club had nothing whatever to do with the institution or growth or success of dog shows, but is, in fact, the offspring and outcome of such shows," said *The Canine World* in the early 1890s. The first dog show was held at the Town Hall, Newcastle-on-Tyne, England, in June 1859. It featured 60 entries, sizeable prize money, and was exceptionally well managed, according to press reports. It was so successful that the organizers immediately resolved to hold another show. Before long, dog shows proliferated all over England. The Islington show of 1863 drew a record-breaking entry of 2,000 dogs. By the 1870s, Manchester, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, Dublin, Nottingham, and London were all home to big annual dog shows, patronized equally by commoners and aristocrats. On the Continent, the Paris and Hanover shows attracted an international contingent of dog lovers. Early dog shows were presented for a variety of reasons: foremost profit and entertainment. Therefore, exhibits were primarily intended to draw public interest. Dog sales and auctions, performing dogs and unusual canine varieties were encouraged. This focus, of course, resulted in somewhat different priorities regarding regulations. Show rules were implemented and revised at the discretion of the show's promoters. These committees became on-the-job experts at show management. Inevitably, problems cropped up. They included the usual bugbears of management, such as bookkeeping errors and scheduling problems. Others were more challenging. The dog world was not immune to the unsavory practices that pervaded every other facet of popular sports, and the founders of the modern dog world saw their utopian dreams succumb to human nature in short order. Dogs were drugged, dyed, painted, and shown under various aliases to increase eligibility for prizes. This was easily accomplished, because rules were vague and enforcement nearly impossible.