

## The Glory, the Glamour, the Garden

**The club's founding members resolved to create an unforgettable show; 130 years later, Westminster remains unsurpassed.**

*Amy Fernandez*

How did a bar on Irving Place come to symbolize dogdom's highest achievement? It's safe to say that the founders of the Westminster Kennel Club could not have envisioned what their efforts would yield as they traded stories and planned their show over drinks at the Westminster Hotel, back in the 1870s.

United by their mutual devotion to hunting, field sports and dogs, the Westminster founders suffered no shortage of dedication or competitive spirit. However, dog shows were just beginning to gain popularity in America during their time. WKC members participated in the Philadelphia Kennel Club's 1876 and 77 shows. Although both were widely hailed as great successes, the New York contingent felt that they could do better, and resolved to hold their own dog show in NYC. They wanted their show to be the best, and were determined to do it right. This philosophy pretty well sums up Westminster's history.

### Starting a Tradition

The First Annual New York Bench Show of Dogs debuted on May 8, 1877, at 26th Street and Madison Avenue, just a few blocks from its present location. By the second day of the first show, it was obvious that it was a runaway success. (In December of that year, The Westminster Breeding Association incorporated as the Westminster Kennel Club, making their second show in 1878 the first officially given by the WKC.)

The founders' innovations laid the groundwork for the modern American dog show. They formulated show rules, breed divisions, judging criteria, and championship requirements. Every show featured substantial prize money, expensive trophies, special exhibits, and some extraordinary demonstrations.

In less than a decade, Westminster had attracted international participation and mainstream press coverage. Long before the first BIS was awarded in 1907, a win at New York clearly symbolized the ultimate acknowledgment of quality. Spectators queued up for blocks, and exhibitors trekked from every corner of the globe to experience Westminster's incomparable glamour and heart-stopping excitement.

This was no accident. Westminster's founders were well aware of the fact that drama and pageantry counted as much as organizational efficiency.

Westminster's allure has grown steadily in the intervening century. The limited entry customarily closes within minutes of opening. Last year, for the first time, the Madison Square Garden box office even sold out of the General Admission tickets.

The logistics of holding a 2,500-entry dog show in midtown Manhattan in the middle of winter make such an endeavor seem inconceivable. Just getting there is incredibly complicated and expensive. And once there, you may start to wonder why. Crowded as the F train at rush hour, there's no place to sit, no place to stand, and you're lucky to get a glimpse of the judging. An indigestible snack at the snack bar can easily set you back \$20. Sub-zero temperatures outdoors contrast nicely with the steam-bath conditions inside. But in spite of these discomforts, no dedicated fancier would miss a Westminster experience for the world. Speculation on next year's likely contenders begins as soon as BIS has been awarded.