

Introduction

ON the occasion of the 75th Anniversary Yearbook, it would be a good time to look back to the first yearbook and see what has come to the breed in the intervening years. Although the Russian Wolfhound of America Club was founded in December of 1903 and published yearbooks from 1905, the Club was not recognized by the AKC until 1908. In 1936, after years of debate, the official name became the Borzoi Club of America. The moving forces of the Club in the early days were Joseph B. Thomas, Jr. and Dr. John E. DeMund. Thomas and DeMund organized the Club, Thomas serving as Secretary/Treasurer and DeMund as Delegate. Why the AKC recognized a delegate in 1905, three years before they recognized the Club, is a mystery, but things must have been a bit unstructured in those days. The 1908 yearbook was a very small volume about 5" x 8" and contained just 12 pages printed on both sides. The title page showed the drawing of the idealized Borzoi by D. King. Following the drawing was a listing of the officers, and then the Club approved judges (15) "whom the Club recommends and whose selection by show officials the Club will appreciate by offering specials." You can see those folks had their act together.

On the following pages there are a few sentences entitled "Progress of Shows." The last reads "Exhibiting has increased one hundred-fold, culminating at W.K.C. Show, 1908, with one hundred and three entries - the largest entry of all the big breeds."

There follows a short article on "Hunting with Russian Wolfhounds" and "The Principal Challenge and Other Trophies", the By-Laws and the Standard. The American Standard adopted by the Club September 1, 1905 remained virtually unchanged until 1971. Under Color, "Self black to be discouraged" was dropped somewhere

along the way. Finally, a listing of the 55 members of the Club closed the book.

It was probably in 1926 that advertising was first introduced to our club's yearbook and its form is little changed today. But what of the breed in these same seventy-five years? Has it been improved, remained static or has it lost? In order to form any basis for comparison one must first look at photos of the dogs as they were, both in Russia and America, at the time. And when you look at these old photos remember that the dogs are untrimmed, often out of coat and never sat for the photos. Look at your own candid photos when thinking about the comparison.

After long thought and study it is this author's opinion that the very best Borzoi in the world today exist in the truly American bloodlines, and further, that the best of our breed today would stand very well, if not great, not only with the best that the United States had to offer, but with the best in Russia at that time. These strong words can be supported. One must remember that those unposed photos were no doubt the very best Borzoi in Russia and that some of them were rather poor specimens in conformation. Many examples of today's breeding have excellent conformation and many would be, if they are not already, great hunters. If you think about the spirit of the breed, it's intelligence and aristocracy today, how could the best be excelled? Who says the mature male is not a handful today?

Let's not be fooled by many of the paintings or drawings that were done at the time. These drawings were, for the most part, done by artists that did not know the breed, and they exaggerated what they thought were the breed's outstanding characteristics. We in turn should not be fooled into thinking that all this breed has today came easily.

From the breed's introduction in America until the forties or fifties the large kennels of the East dominated the winning and thus the producing. Today the breed is much more numerous and almost exclusively bred in moderate sized kennels. The many more people breeding Borzoi should insure its continuing success, yet we often have people worried about "the fact that the breed is getting popular."

These same folks give the unnerving statistic that, "every other breed that's grown popular has been ruined." Can it be that popularity alone spoils a breed? Popularity should increase the gene pool and result in better stock. Perhaps, if true, it is a result of changes in the Standard, which is something our breed's owners have stood fast against. Perhaps these other breed's ruination might have resulted from a memory loss of the ideal type.

One often hears today that there are far too few good dogs.

Louis Murr said that, "Thomas said the bitches are always better than the dogs." So there has probably always been too few good dogs. Poor shoulders, rears, toplines, et cetera, did not just appear today. Missing teeth were always a problem, as witness the weak passage on teeth in the old Standard, and on and on. Yes, there are problems, but they are better known today than ever before and little is wanted in the very best of the breed today.

Perhaps the best advice for the next twenty-five years would be to remain fixed on the original type and resist any change. Rather, make the present improvements widespread in the breed and remain open and self critical. Louis Murr said he would breed his bitch to a dog owned by the devil if it were the right dog and Murr, remember, was a God fearing man.

Robert A. Harvey
18643 Fruitport Road
Spring Lake, Michigan
49456