

A LOOK BACK

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The original Constitution and By-laws of the French Bull Dog Club of America, written in 1897, begins: "Its object shall be to encourage the importation and breeding of pure French Bull-Dogs on the part of ladies and gentlemen, it being especially desirable to exclude professional element." As professional handlers did not exist in those days, "professional element" meant professional dog breeders as opposed to "ladies and gentlemen."

All 20 of the charter members of the FBDCA were, of course, men. In those days, women did not even exhibit their own dogs in public venues. The famous first specialty of the FBDCA was held in 1898 in the Waldorf-Astoria hotel in New York City, and was the first dog show ever to be held in a hotel. Accounts of the lavish event in the *New York Herald* noted that "A striking feature was the entrance of prominent ladies into the ring, to display their pet dogs before the judges. This innovation was possible because of the semi-private character of the exhibition."

In the early 20th century, most our club's members lived in or near New York and until 1984 all of the specialties were held in New York or New Jersey. These were often the breed entry at all-breed shows, and it was not until the mid 1980's that independent national specialty shows began to be held routinely, and in various parts of the country.

Early in the twentieth century, a popular fundraiser at specialties was a raffle — with a Frenchie puppy as the prize! It is hard to imagine the outcry that would result if this were to be done today! Early on, Frenchies were a wealthy person's breed, and the prices paid for them were truly astronomical for the times. However during the great depression and again during World War II, the breed and the club suffered a great decline in numbers, and during the years of rebuilding that followed, the breed became more popular with people of more modest means than the early fanciers, among whom were found a Belmont, a Whitney, a Roosevelt and assorted Vanderbilts.

During the club's and the breed's ups and downs, dedicated fanciers and breeders prevailed. And some of the people who served as club officers were truly heroic in the length of their terms of office. John E. Haslam was elected FBDCA President in 1916 and served until 1936, a real test of stamina. More remarkable was Helen Hover's service as club Secretary from 1955 until 1989 ... 34 years! Helen's husband Richard Hover was our AKC Delegate from 1953 until his death in 1989 — 36 years. Although in 1952 our club supported an amendment to AKC rules that would allow women to serve as AKC Delegates, it was not until 1974 that the first women delegates were seated, and not until seventeen years after that that the FBDCA had its first female delegate, Estelle Jurasz, in 1991. Finally, after 94 years, our club had a woman delegate!

Times have certainly changed, and probably will continue to do so.

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