A History of the Dalmatian Club of America National Specialty Show

By Cheryl Steinmetz

"At the instigation of Mr. [Franklin J.] Willock," wrote Mrs. Flora Bonney in a short history of DCA in the 1955 membership book, "and due in large to his work and support, the first Specialty Show of the Dalmatian Club of America was held in May, 1926. The entry was composed mostly of dogs from Gladmore (Mr. Willock), Head of the River (Mrs. Sanger) and Tally-Ho (Mrs. Bonney) but we managed to get some entries from people to whom we had sold dogs, and a very good turnout greeted the judge."

Mrs. Bonney, who was DCA Secretary from 1915 to 1967, goes on to write, "Had it not been for the unflagging support and interest of Mr. Willock, and the work of Mrs. [Orr] Hornill [Tattoo Knls] during the late 1920s and early 1930s, Dalmatians would have suffered greatly and the club shrunk down to midget size. While others did their bit for the breed it is to the efforts of these two devoted fanciers that the Dalmatian and the Dalmatian Club of America stand where they do today."

And while Mrs. Bonney credits herself only with entries, Evelyn Nelson White, president of DCA in the 1950s, wrote in the 1980 Specialty Commemorative Keepsake in an article called "The Men and Women Behind the Dogs" that, "one name...one leader...(was)"

Mr. Franklin J. Willock with his bitch Ch Gladmore Gaylass. Gaylass was WBBOS at the first specialty in 1926. According to notes in a scrapbook called "Some Famous Kennels of the Past," she was whelped in 1923 and had two blue eyes. Mr. Willock is credited with being the driving force behind our annual specialties.
that of Flora MacDonald Bonney (Tally-Ho), without whose help, knowledge and friendship the breed wouldn’t be what it is today. Her financial help (unpublicized) brought many a specialty to a successful conclusion.”

After that first DCA Specialty in 1926, the show became an annual event (except for 1929, 1934 and 1942). Some shows were independent, some were held with all-breed shows, and except for 1940 when a second specialty was held in Chicago, every national specialty from 1926 to 1957 was held on the east coast – in New York, New Jersey or Pennsylvania.

From 1958 on, the show began to rotate around the country, and regional clubs or groups of DCA members applied to the DCA Board to host the National. Now, almost 50 years later, we start a new page in Specialty history, and in a three year experiment our national Specialty Show will remain in a central geographical location using a national show committee.

Over the years new ideas were tried. In 1947, 1948, 1949 and 1950, three judges handled the assignment – one for class bitches, one for class dogs and one for the intersex competition. In 1951 we were back to a single judge and the one-judge panel remained until 1975 when an entry of 197 required a second judge be hired.

In the July 1966 Spor,er proposed Futurity Stakes rules were published for review by the membership. Chairwoman Virginia L. Prescott wrote, “There was some discussion at the Annual Meeting as to the advisability of starting with a Puppy Sweepstakes and then, if interest is sufficient, to a Futurity at some later date. Due to the extensive involvement of bookkeeping, advance preparation, and complicated procedure involved in establishing and continuing a Futurity it would seem to your writer that we should walk before we run and that we should start with a Puppy Sweepstakes, which can be established and put into effect immediately. However, this is a matter that must be decided BY THE MEMBERS.” The first National Sweepstakes was held in 1967.

The first National Futurity Stake was held at DCA in Chicago in 1977. Chairmen John V. Whic, DVM and C.E. Flock, Jr. wrote in the Fall 1975 Spor,er a “Futurity Stake – Preface to the Proposal”; “When one reviews the purposes for which the Dalmatian Club of America has been established, two specific goals relate to the breeding and exhibition of Dalmatians. A futurity stake has as its primary purpose the encouragement of the breeding of the best possible Dalmatians. This encouragement results when monetary awards and recognition are given to the breeder for his effort.” The committee goes on to argue, “It
is the feeling of the futurity committee that it is a propitious time for a further effort to be made on the part of the Dalmatian Club of America toward the Club's purposes. A futurity stake offers an excellent opportunity to move forward.” Mr. Flock went on to serve as the first Futurity Chairman.

Performance events have also been added to the National Specialty over the years. Obedience classes have been held every year since 1972, with the 81 entries in Michigan in 1997 being our largest competition. We also have the excitement of a Road Trial, tracking trials and beginning in 1996, agility competition.

At the height of breed popularity, the largest number of Dalmatians in breed competition occurred at the 1992 Specialty in Reading, PA. That year, 667 Dals were exhibited in breed with a whopping 1228 entries in breed and obedience. With a regional specialty added, and meetings and dinners, competition in Reading lasted a very full seven days.

Over the years our National Specialty has truly become a National convention of Dalmatian activities. As the authors of The Official Book of the Dalmatian wrote in 1997, “With activities such as the annual DCA meeting, educational programs, ID tattooing and hearing test for the dogs, judges' seminars, and a variety of social events, the DCA National Specialty week offers something for everyone.”

In 1967, at Whitehouse, New Jersey, Judge Ruth Sayes presents the first DCA Sweepstakes winner ribbon to Zodiac Midemoch. Handler Barbara Partridge showed the dog for owners Richard and June Price. Presenting the trophy is Mary Barrett. The trophy was in memory of her husband, DCA member Alfred W. Barrett.

The year was 1977, and Judge John (Jack) Austin awarded the first Best in Futurity ribbon to Melody Kiss Me Kate. Kate had been bred by Jack and Beth White, and was by Ch Sugarfront out of Ch Melody Crimson and Clover CD. Pictured in the photo, left to right, are C. E. (Ed) Flock, Jr., the first Futurity Chairman, co-owner Sharon Rucksdale, Judge Austin, and handler/co-owner Dr. White.