



The Kennel Club of Philadelphia Dog Shows' Rich History

Since the city first hosted a major dog event in 1876 at the Centennial Exposition, Philadelphia has been at the forefront of the purebred dog world. The Kennel Club of Philadelphia (KCP) and its predecessor clubs have been presenting popular dog shows in the city since 1879. In fact, the Philadelphia club predates the American Kennel Club (AKC), which was organized at a meeting of what was then called the Philadelphia Kennel Club, at 13th and Market Street, on September 17, 1884.

The Philadelphia Kennel Club went through several name changes at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th Century. According to records, the Philadelphia Kennel Club held a benched show in 1896, and from 1899 to 1909, a string of benched shows was held under the aegis of the Philadelphia Dog Show Association. In the years that followed, these groups re-branded to form the Kennel Club of Philadelphia. The KCP held its first

dog show in 1912, and was elected an official member of the AKC in February 1913.

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Philadelphia's are among the oldest benched shows in the U.S. Unlike the more common "show and go" format, benched shows require exhibitors to remain in the building for most of the day, affording the public a chance to meet and greet the canines. The Kennel Club of Philadelphia is proud to host one of only four remaining annual benched shows in the country.

In 1926, the City of Brotherly Love hosted a Sesquicentennial International Exposition at Philadelphia's Centennial Hall, which included in its program of events the AKC's first-ever dog show. At the invitation of then-Mayor W. Freeland Kendrick, heavyweight boxing great Gene Tunney turned out, creating a sensation. Tunney, a dog fancier, was even given a Schnauzer to take home as a gift. Among some 2,000 dogs entered that year were the mysterious Afghan hounds, never before seen in this country, exhibited by Jean C. Manson of Scotland. That year, Mayor Kendrick would present the Best in Show prize to a Sealyham Terrier, Ch. Pinegrade Perfection, before an audience of some 5,000 Philadelphians and dozens of newsmen and photographers. (The AKC credits newsreels of that era for promoting the national popularity of purebred dogs in America, both by covering dog shows and by publicizing the work of war dogs.)

The link between the Kendrick name and the Kennel Club of Philadelphia continues to this day. William L. Kendrick, nephew of the famed mayor, was the longtime president of the KCP. While the former mayor had once carried a string of twenty bull terriers, the William L.

Kendrick Memorial Challenge Trophy, which features a bronze statue of the breed, honors the former president.

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The KCP shows were suspended during the early part of the Great Depression, with no shows held from 1928 to 1932. Since 1933, the shows have been held annually. For most of that period, they were staged in early December at the Philadelphia Civic Center, where the Kennel Club of Philadelphia celebrated its 25th anniversary show in 1937.

In 1984, the AKC Centennial Show in Philadelphia drew 6,000 dogs and 60,000 people over the course of four days. Judges wore formal attire, and crowds were pleased by the colorful field presentation each evening, particularly the Bedlam Beagle Pack. The Dog Judges Association of America presented a day-long exhibition of rare breeds. Handlers wore costumes from the breeds' countries of origin. A breed quiz on two new-fangled IBM Personal Computers at the AKC booth caused a hubbub.

Following the closing of the Civic Center, the KCP moved its shows to the new Pennsylvania Convention Center in Center City Philadelphia in 1995. Since 1996, the KCP has presented back-to-back shows on consecutive weekend days preceding Thanksgiving.

Recent years have brought a new level of excitement to the Dog Shows, with the addition of demonstrations by teams of canine super-athletes, more vendors of dog merchandise and the involvement of sponsors and many nonprofit organizations.

In 2001, the Kennel Club shows moved to the suburban Fort Washington Expo Center, which was demolished in 2006. The shows were held that year at the Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex in Harrisburg, and,

later, in Reading, PA, before re-establishing a Philadelphia presence at the Greater Philadelphia Expo Center in Oaks, PA.

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In another Philadelphia first, the Kennel Club of Philadelphia hosted, in 2002, the inaugural edition of The National Dog Show Presented by Purina®, which formed the basis of a special show that was nationally broadcast on NBC-TV on Thanksgiving Day. The show has since become a broadcasting institution.

Thanks to promotional activity and the huge audience that NBC's parade coverage commanded that morning, the National Dog Show immediately became the most watched event of its kind in the sport's 126-year history, with a total audience reaching 20 million. Combined with the 100-+ year heritage of the Kennel Club of Philadelphia show and the sanction and support of the American Kennel Club, the exposure conferred immediate, major-event status upon the National Dog Show.

Contact: Steve Griffith, 484 433 7757, sgriffith@vziongroup.net

Kathi Graham, 484 888 9981, kgraham@vziongroup.net