

The Cardigan Comes to America

In June of 1931 the first two Cardigan Welsh Corgis were imported into the United States. The first bitch to arrive in this country was the famous Cassie who was already a well established producer of high quality Cardigans in England. She was, in fact, mismarked being white with brindle patches, but her ability to produce excellent stock superseded her unfavorable coloration. The first champion of the breed was a red and white bitch, Ch. Megan whelped in 1933. Today, the Cardigan Welsh Corgi Club of America, Inc. holds an annual contest for champions only, named the Megan Competition.

The following passage was written by one of the early influential breeders of Cardigans, Marcia Lopeman, who bred under the Kencia prefix:

Mrs. Roberta Bole imported the first pair of Cardigans to this country from England in 1931. About five years later, they were first recognized by the American Kennel Club and a group of interested friends formed a club which became a member of the AKC.

One of my earliest memories was a meeting in the early 1940's with Mrs. Bole, Mrs. Peter Jay, Kendrick Lopeman and myself at the Hollenden Hotel in Cleveland. Although we had a corner table, there was an orchestra and the "Old Red Head," Arthur Godfrey, was performing and Mrs. Bole with her back to the stage could care less, but my husband who was one of the gentleman's greatest admirers was trying to catch the act and concentrate on our deliberations. Well, we did make future plans and decided as a nucleus club to bring our breed to the forefront and some recognition. Our club consisted then of the officers - Kendrick Lopeman as president; Mrs. Peter Jay as vice president; me as secretary-treasurer; and Mrs. Bole as Chairman of the Board of Directors; the other board members being the aforementioned officers.

Mrs. Bole who was well versed not only in art and music but also in genetics was determined that the breed not be commercialized and in consequence inferior specimens be bred. We decided to start a breeding schedule and to place only the quality animals in the hands of prospective owners who would exhibit them or breed conscientiously. To do this we would give, without papers, the less promising pups to farmers for use on farms or to owners for pets.

Lest I forget to mention it, Mrs Bole was adamant that no dogs with a poor disposition be used for breeding or exhibited. Also, she felt that since the breed was a working dog, there should be no alteration of its coat - no cutting of whiskers, no stripping or clipping or coloring of coat and certainly no fabrication of quality by Novocain in tails, etc. We believed that in so doing, we might make the limelight for the moment, but it would be detrimental as the end result.

By Marcia Lopeman, CWCCA Handbook, Volume I, 1975

From that brief but colorful introduction, Mary Nelms (Brymore) brings us up to the late 1960's:

We were all very much isolated in those early days. My husband and I lived in Texas in 1938, when I bought my first Cardigan from Mrs. Bole. She was never bred. To reach a stud she would have had to be shipped two thousand miles, and there was no passenger aircraft in those days. In the mid-forties, after Mrs. Bole's death, the Cardigan stock became even more scattered. Some of Mrs. Bole's Cardigans went to Mrs. Marcia Lopeman in up-state New York; some to her niece, Mrs. Peter Jay in Maryland; some to Dr. Peterson of Virginia; and to Mr. W. B. French in Georgia. Fortunately, at about this time, new enthusiasts entered the scene. Dr. Peterson was breeding his Bole stock and they were being handled in the show ring by Mrs. Margaret

Douglas. She acquired a Cardigan of her own in 1946 from Dr. Peterson, a little bitch named Jess whom she showed to her championship. Jess's son, Ch. Swansea Jon C.D., won three consecutive Best of Breeds at Westminster and more than one Specialty show. Another Swansea dog, bred by Mrs. Douglas, was Jim Churchill's Ch. Swansea Busy, the first Cardigan ever to win a Working Group.

In Philadelphia, Mr. Joseph Frutchey was breeding and showing. In Minnesota, Mr. George Reed had formed a nucleus of breeders and exhibitors. In the far west, in California, Mrs. Genevieve Anderson was a pioneer breeder and a dedicated missionary for the breed. Her friend, Mrs. Marguerite Farley, bred the first American blue merle, Ch. Farlesdale Silver Pay Day, in 1952. Things were definitely looking up, but judges, in the main, ignored us; professional handlers avoided us. And indeed the Cardigan ring, in the late 1950's showed what may politely be called "diversity of type". With the exception of Mrs. Douglas, we had no large scale breeders. And for the occasional litter, the stud used was, in most cases, the handiest. For over a decade no fresh stock had been brought in from Great Britain.

Then in 1957, Mr. Hal Nelson imported a tricolor bitch, Kentwood Dilys, from Miss Sonnica Godden. At about the same time Mrs. Michael Pym brought in Ch. Parmel Bryn. Bryn was bred by the Parkinsons, and was the son of the great Eng. Ch. Kentwood Cymro, whom he once beat in the ring. When Mrs. Pym bought him he had just won the Breed at Crufts. But these two imports looked lonely in the American Cardigan show ring.

They were so different from all the others. The judges didn't seem to know what to do with them, so they placed them alternately at the top and at the bottom of their classes. The difference in appearance led to careless talk about "an American type", a concept that would have spelled disaster for the Cardigan in the States.

At this critical and dangerous point in Cardigan history, rescue appeared in the form of Mrs. Pym, herself an Englishwoman and a lady who never does anything by halves. Her heart was in the breed, and the situation frightened and annoyed her. So in 1962 she went to Great Britain and chose eleven Cardigans for breeding stock, bringing eight of them back with her in the Queen Mary, to the delight and edification of passengers and crew. Subsequently, some of these were given to other breeders in various parts of the country to improve the bloodlines.

In the meantime, Mr. Nelson's Dilys, now a champion, had not been idle. Bred the first time to Kentwood Helgi, she produced a daughter who was subsequently bred to a Swansea stud, Ch. Swansea Punch. From this litter came Ch. Lord Jim's Lucky Domino, one of our truly greats, winner of groups, of Westminster (and of 5 National Specialties - ed. note). When bred back to his grandmother, Dilys, he sired two of the outstanding dogs in American Cardigan history: Ch. Springdale Droednoeth, and Ch. Domino's Beau Jester. Dr. Ed McGough took his Ch. Springdale Droednoeth all the way to the top, to win the first Best in Show award at an all breed show in the history of American Cardigans...

By Mary Nelms (Brymore), Cardigan Welsh Corgi Association 1976 Year Book

Although still comparatively rare, the breed has gained public recognition by appearing in TV and movies. Today there are over 500 members of the CWCCA. The Cardigan of today holds his own in all breed competition with several specimens having received Best in Show awards.

From the website of the CWCCA with their kind permission.