

# Uncovering Our Early Roots

During the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Weimaraners were unknown in America. It was through the efforts of Howard Knight that the first dogs were brought to our shores. Howard Knight was a wealthy, avid sportsman from New England who heard of this incredible silver-gray German hunting breed and became determined to acquire breeding stock. Getting access to these dogs was almost impossible because of their rarity and that the ownership of a Weimaraner was highly regulated by the German Weimaraner Club. To own a Weimaraner a person had to be a member of the German Weimaraner Club and this was a group that was NOT seeking to increase membership. Weimaraners were only owned by a select, protective group of individuals who were determined to maintain the highest quality in the breed.

Howard Knight was on his personal quest to own and hunt over Weimaraners. To accomplish this he befriended a member of the German Weimaraner Club, demonstrated his zeal for sportsmanship and finally in 1928 was granted membership in the German club.

Membership required a pledge to protect the purity of the breed and preservation of its hunting abilities. Howard Knight fit the bill with a long list of credentials as a hunting aficionado. In 1928 he was granted ownership of two Weimaraners. However, these dogs were not breeding stock since they had been sterilized using radiation before they were sent from Germany. These dogs were exquisitely trained, and Howard Knight hunted with them for nine years. Not until ten years later in 1938. did Knight receive foundation stock in the form of three bitches and one puppy dog.

In 1942 the Weimaraner Club of America (WCA) was formed with Howard Knight as its first president. Today the WCA publishes a monthly magazine for its members but in the early days a monthly newsletter was issued to the membership of about 100. The newsletters started in 1946 and have been preserved on the WCA website. Reading the newsletters gives insight into the goals of the fledgling Club and how important the stewardship of the breed was to them.

Here are a few fascinating, eye-opening quotes from the 1946 WCA newsletter.

An appeal for importing “new blood” to the US: “If you know ANY angle that might get us Weimaraner stock through the Russian lines please-advise your president or your editor. It appears that the bulk of Weimaraner stock is held in that Russian zone,”

A connection with a famous person that didn't happen. A message from the President of the WCA: “I regret to advise you that a contact I had established with Gen. Patton in Europe, who has taken a keen interest in our breed and who was to have helped in procuring new stock for breeding, was terminated by his unfortunate and untimely death.”

Patterned after the German Weimaraner Club's tight hold on proliferation of Weimaraners, efforts were made to restrict ownership in the US, “...the rule of the Club demands that a person

be eligible for membership in the Weimaraner Club of America before being allowed to purchase a puppy or grown stock.”

The WCA established a Breeding Committee in an effort to maintain the quality and purity of the lines of Weimaraners which were available as foundation for the breed in the US. It was patterned after the German Club’s policy. The WCA’s Breeding Committee’s recommended, “That no bitch be bred under 20 months of age and that only five pups of this first litter, be given to her to raise.”

Founding officers of the WCA were highly motivated to maintain the Weimaraner as a working/hunting breed. There was implied disdain for use of the breed for purposes other than as a hunting partner as evidenced by numerous editorial comments such as, “While the majority of our members are not bench show conscious, and we aim on not spoiling the working-hunting qualities of the breed for some vain show glory, it is wise that we use the shows for window dressing and here is a chance to let thousands of people see a great number of our beloved Weimaraners.”

Although there were negative comments regarding the popularization and showing of Weimaraners there was also pride in how they were received by US judges and how WCA membership was growing. An annual specialty show was held as a national event and reported as a milestone for the breed in America. “Our annual specialty show was held on the gorgeous Raceland estate of John R Macomber of Framington Center, Mass. An annual meeting was held after the Specialty and members were from 20 states and the District of Columbia.”

The judge of the 1946 Specialty complimented the members on their Weimaraners. President Howard Knight reported to the membership, “Let us keep up that gain and put ourselves in line for high show honors, and at the same time hold the resolve that nothing shall swerve us from the original purpose of the breed of field excellence. Let us not be blinded by show glories, ... there are 10 times as many people interested in the hunting qualities of the Weimaraner, for every one that wants a dog for show or purely pet purposes.”

It is now almost 100 years since Weimaraners were known to be in the US. Reading the 1946 national newsletter gives us a glimpse of how some attitudes and concerns have changed while others have remained the same to this day.

Carole Lee Richards

zarsweimaraners@yahoo.com

Weimaraner Club of America