

A Brief History of the Brittany

The history of the Brittany actually begins some 10,000 years ago for it was then that early man began domestication of the dog but, that is probably too far to ramble in this short space. One of the tasks man looked to the dog to help him with was hunting and one of the dog types developed was the scent hunter. These dogs developed a size suitable for breasting cover, keen noses and a retrieving instinct.

The hunting dog reached a new plateau in Spain in the 15th century. Two separate scent hunting breeds emerged. The short-haired type, which froze rigidly when it scented game, was known as the Spanish Pointer. The smaller long-haired variety, which was taught to drop as it neared its quarry, was called the 'dog of Spain' or just 'Spaniel'.

The Brittany or Brittany Spaniel as it is known in all parts of the world save the United States is derived from early land Spaniels and setters and is generally believed to have been developed in the Bretagne region of France hence the name Brittany. It appears that there is irrefutable evidence that as early as 1850, local French sportsmen were crossing their spaniels with English Setters. One should note that the English Setter referred to here is probably not the dog that we know today. It appears that about 1910, M. Le Comte Le Conte de Canteleu, in drawing up his chart of the French breeds mentions as one of them Chien de Bretagne, the dog of Brittany.

The Brittany was also noted in 1906 by a Major P. Grand-Chavin, a cavalry officer and veterinarian, in that everywhere he went in the region he noticed small spaniels with short tails or no tails, having a rather short ear for a spaniel and having a coloration of white-orange, white-liver, and white-black, with some tri-colors, and a short gait.

Much speculation exists as to which spaniel and which setter form the basis for the breed. Since at the time litter mates could be called by different names, i.e., one could be called a cocker, a couple could be called Welsh Springer and the rest English Springer, it is probably a mute point. The fact is that the French did breed their spaniels to some of the dogs brought over by the English sportsmen. Some of the dogs brought over by the English were spaniels and some setters. The setter being bred to the spaniel to enhance the nose of the spaniel and his staunchness, thereby making him a more useful dog in the field. There is clear indication that there was a tendency to short or no tail and to the white-orange or white-liver coloration. The short tail was preferred as it was less likely to get torn up by the heavy cover of the region. The loose skin was also preferred as it lessened the likely hood of damage in the dense cover. By 1904, the Brittany Spaniel had evolved, with the help of man, into a distinct breed.

The first Brittanys were brought to North America by Senor Juan Pugibet of Villa Obregon, near Vera Cruz, Mexico in 1928. The next individual of note is Louis A. Thebaud who imported Brittany Spaniels into the United States in 1933. Upon Mr. Thebaud's request the French Kennel Club sent him the "Standard of Perfection" for the breed in July, 1934. The American Kennel Club recognized the breed in August, 1934, but did not approve the standard until March 12, 1935, after an acceptable translation of the standard had been completed. The Brittany Spaniel Club of North America was founded in 1936 and it received official membership in the AKC on September 15, 1936.

World War II greatly hurt the Brittany Spaniel Club of North America and caused much confusion as many of the Brittany Spaniel Club of North America's officers could not be located. Because of the inability of people to contact the Brittany Spaniel Club of North America a second organization was founded. This organization was called the American Brittany Club however, since the AKC only recognizes one parent club, the Brittany Spaniel Club of North America was still the recognized breed club. On June 6, 1944, the two clubs merged under the name The American Brittany Club and on that date a letter was sent to the AKC and the AKC quickly approved the merger and gave the parent club of the breed to The American Brittany Club on July 14, 1944.

The war also did a lot of damage to the Brittany Spaniel in France and after the war black was allowed back in as an acceptable coloration because of the much depleted gene pool for the Brittany Spaniel in Europe. It was and is felt that the gene pool in the United States is sufficiently rich that there is no need to change the standard and allow black coloration. A large number of Brittany Spaniels have been imported from France and other parts of Europe since the end of WWII and interbreeding has occurred to the point where it is impossible to clearly delineate a dog by origin.

Even at this early time there were many who wanted the spaniel from the name. This was because the Brittany is a pointing dog and not a flushing dog like the rest of the spaniels. This argument was waged for many years and it was not until April, 1982, in the meeting of the AKC board of directors that the name change was approved. It became official on September 1, 1982.