

Rottweilers, Their History and Heritage

By Joan Klem, Rodsden Rottweilers, Reg.
with Suzan Guynn, Cammcastle Rottweilers

In the introduction to her 1984 book, *The Complete Rottweiler*, Ms. Muriel Freeman shares an ancient Plutarchian anecdote about a 5th Century B.C. Athenian general called Alcibiades who paid a fortune for a very handsome dog only to mutilate it for his own notoriety and political diversion. She poignantly wrote, "Man's mentality has changed little in 2,500 years. There are still those who will pay an enormous price for a dog and then, either deliberately through guile or accidentally through ignorance, proceed to pervert the nature of the animal it took so very many generations to develop and for which they paid so high a price" - a fitting lead-in for her larger effort to impart "an appreciation of the Rottweiler's great heritage, a desire to preserve that heritage and the knowledge necessary to pass it on to future generations." Ms. Freeman's prophetic illustration serves well as a siren to those who count themselves as true guardians of today's Rottweiler and his remarkable story.

Perhaps the most senior living guardian of the Rottweiler heritage is AKC and International Rottweiler Judge Joan Klem (see her included bio). She and her niece, AKC and International Judge Susan Rademacher, co-authored the 1996 book, *The Rottweiler Experience*, an extraordinary chronology of Rottweiler heritage and lore. The following breed history is reproduced in portions from this extensively researched and prepared publication:

In the Beginning

We surmise that the Rottweiler descends from one of the "work horses" of antiquity. When the Romans spread into Europe around 74 A.D., they brought along the Molosser dogs — those formidable proto-Mastiffs which fought in the coliseums and then accompanied their masters over the Alps, herding and guarding the livestock. As sites of civilization arose along the legions' roads, so did various types of dogs. One road

led to an army encampment on the Neckar River in what was to become the state of Swabia in southern Germany. This camp flourished as a trading center and was eventually called Rottweil (Rote Wil, after its red-tiled roofs). Here, a remarkable breed of dog developed which eventually became known as the Rottweiler.

An often-repeated story in "Rottweiler lore" holds that the butchers of medieval Rottweil depended on their dogs to assist



with business. These butchers' dogs, or Metzgerhunds, were first used to help the butchers herd cattle to market; then, after the cattle were slaughtered, the dogs pulled the butchers' carts. Finally, when the meat was sold, the purses were tied around the dogs' necks to keep the money from bandits or perhaps from any butchers who might spend too much time in the beer hall!

This favorite yarn illustrates that the Rottweiler developed as a drover, draft dog and guard dog and that with these purposes came the necessary traits of endurance, strength, loyalty and above all, intelligence. Such a versatile dog kept busy in the manner described until about the mid-19th century, when railroads replaced droving for getting livestock to market. And using dogs as draft animals was ultimately outlawed (due in part to abuses).

Our helpmate, the Rottweiler, then fell on hard times as his customary jobs were being eliminated thanks to industrial progress. If instincts, or shall we say talents, are not used, will they be lost? Apparently not, at least in the case of the Rottweiler. More than a century after herding ceased to be a part of the Rottweiler's professional repertoire, American Rottweiler fanciers petitioned the American Kennel Club to allow the Rottweiler to compete in AKC herding events based



not only on the breed's herding heritage, but primarily on documented proof in modern herding trials that the instinct remains strong in the breed. In 1994, the American Kennel Club made the Rottweiler one of the rare exceptions to its rules and allowed a designated breed in the Working Group, the Rottweiler, to compete in herding trials usually restricted to the designated breeds in the Herding Group.

Herding ability didn't save the breed in the late 1800s. Those traits mentioned previously — endurance, strength, loyalty and

intelligence, were found to fit the requirements needed for guard dogs, and the Rottweiler's talents were put to new uses with the police and military. With suitability for those tasks, the more modern Rottweiler was developed.

The Rottweiler we recognize today really began with the formation of the first Rottweiler Club in Germany. We need to remember that the early Rottweiler cubs were organized by practical, hard-working tradesmen whose goal was to develop a similarly practical, hard-working dog that would be fit to serve them in their livelihoods. Initially, function was stressed above everything else.

The first Standard for the breed was written by the first club — a combined club for the Rottweiler and the Leonberger in 1901. The Leonberger is a large, long-coated breed developed in Leonberg, Germany. The characteristic heavy mane in male Leonbergers is supposed to give the dog a lion-like appearance and reflect the city's name. The Leonberger is also probably descended from Roman dogs, making them Swabian cousins of the Rottweiler.

The first Rottweiler Standard was not too different from our present-day Standard. Where the original Standard radically departs from its current counterpart is that colors other than black were allowed as a base. The 1901 Standard stated regarding color: "Preferably and most commonly black with russet or yellowish markings over the eyes, at the lips, and on the inner and under side of the legs as well as on the bottom. Alternatively, black stripes on an ash-gray background with yellow markings, plain red with black nose, or dark wolf-gray with black head and saddle, but always with yellow markings. White markings on the chest and legs occur very frequently and are admissible if they are not too extensive."

The Rottweiler would have been a truly colorful breed had the early fanciers not decided that while allowing the registrations of Rottweilers of many colors, they would primarily breed only from those with our present day black and mahogany pattern (one wonders if this chosen pattern has anything to do with black and brown being the state colors of Swabia). So ingrained is this popular color scheme that in the fifty years we have been involved with Rottweilers, we have never seen any purebred Rottweiler in any other color. In fact, our current Standard states that any base color other than black is a disqualification. In discussing this with fellow fanciers in Germany, we were told

that there have been no colors other than the black with mahogany appearing in over 100 generations in the German stud books.

While the success in eliminating strange base colors is recognized, the mention of white markings in the 1901 Standard is interesting because we still see white hairs in dogs being bred today. This venerable genetic marker is a reminder that the Rottweiler is related to other descendants of Roman cattle dogs, the Swiss Sennenhunds. The most



popular member of this family in the United States is the Bernese Mountain Dog, but the Greater Swiss Mountain Dog is probably more closely related to the Rottweiler.

With a name and a Standard, the Rottweiler could compete in dog shows, and an interesting story is told of a particularly fine specimen that was exhibited at the Heidelberg Kennel Club in 1905. So admired was this dog that fanciers determined to establish a systematic approach to reproducing this dog's exceptional qualities. Because our modern lines descend from the breedings following the Heidelberg show, one could say, perhaps, that Heidelberg is the true birthplace of our modern Rottweiler. The name Heidelberg, however, just doesn't roll off the tongue nearly as well as the name Rottweiler!

The Rottweiler-Leonberger Club, founded in 1899, had a short duration. It was followed by the German Rottweiler Club in 1907, and then by a South German Rottweiler Club in the same year. These two clubs were followed by an International Rottweiler Club, which absorbed the South German Rottweiler Club at about the time that another South German Rottweiler Club was formed in 1919. All these clubs kept stud books, which likely occasioned a great deal of confusion within the Fancy. However, the goal of all the clubs was similar — to locate dogs that were of "Rottweiler type,"

and concentrate on them to establish a Standard of perfection to be aimed for in selective breeding based on ideals for appearance and performance. For the Rottweiler breed there remained only the necessity of establishing one strong club that could be entrusted with the responsibility of progressing and improving the breed. This one club had to be invested with a discipline that gave it control over breeding and registration and the establishment of breeding rules for the protection and preservation of the breed.

Enter the Allgemeiner Deutscher Rottweiler Klub (ADRK) in 1921, whose motto became "The Breeding of Working Dog." Following negotiations in 1920, the Rottweiler clubs that existed in Germany all united into the ADRK with registrations of about 3,000 Rottweilers. This change was an incredible accomplishment, especially when one appreciates that the various stud books were kept through a World War and that the ADRK began its life at a time when Germany was suffering horrible inflation and the after-effects of losing a long and devastating conflict.

The early stud books are full of amusing entries, not the least of which are the dogs' names. Imagine having to write Laskar v.d. Politzeidirektion on every dog show entry! There apparently were no limits to the number of letters that could be used in a dog's name. A short name that appeared quite frequently was "Stumper" (pronounced Schtoomper), which no doubt refers to the dog's short, or stumpy tail. The first Standard mentioned that dogs can be born with naturally short tails, although most "are not." Today, we rarely hear of a litter with "stumbers," but our experience has been that the short tail is still long enough to require docking to meet the current Standard.

In 1924, the ADRK published its breed Standard along with its first stud book. In introducing the Standard, the ADRK wrote:

The Rottweiler is an excellent police, protection, companion and guard dog. We try to achieve a powerful dog (literally: bursting with energy!) of square build, with beautiful red and yellow markings, who is noble as well as powerful in appearance.

And the general description stated:

The dog shows high intelligence, excellent faithfulness, willingness to work, obedience and incorruptibility, as well as great power and stamina. The first look at him reveals naturalness and courage. His quiet

gaze expresses good nature and unchangeable faithfulness. The gaze does not show any restlessness, hastiness or foolishness. Meanness or falseness are never among his properties.

Here then was the “basic” Rottweiler, not all that different nearly ninety years ago from the Rottweiler of today. (Note: Under its strict Breed Warden system, the ADRK would never have come to waver from its development of the Rottweiler as a docked breed but for the imposed and uninvited ban on docking and cropping, as the docked tail of the Rottweiler was and continues to be an essential breed characteristic.)

In the late 1920s, the ADRK was busy refining the Rottweiler while keeping the policy of “performance first, beauty second” well in mind. Membership in the club had increased to 312 members by 1930. Little did these dedicated fanciers realize that when three of their members emigrated to the United States in 1928, the history and fortunes of the Rottweiler breed would be forever changed...

Otto Denny, Fred Kolb and August Knecht all settled on the East Coast of the United States. Denny’s bitch, Zilly v.d. Steinlach, whelped a litter in 1930, but because the breed was not yet recognized by the American Kennel Club, the litter was registered in Germany with the ADRK. It is interesting that an American-born litter was allowed to be registered by the ADRK. It is good to remember that throughout the breed’s infancy in the United States and, in fact, through what we feel was the “Golden Age of Rottweilers,” the ADRK and its fellow European fanciers were a source of invaluable guidance for American enthusiasts.

The first Rottweiler registered by the AKC was Stina vom Felsenmeer, owned by August Knecht, in 1931. The AKC apparently had confidence in the ADRK as it allowed Stina and her contemporaries to be registered four years before adopting a breed Standard in 1935. On January 26th, 1931, Stina whelped the first litter of Rottweilers registered by the AKC. This litter was also registered with the ADRK...

The first Rottweiler to be published as having earned an Obedience degree was Gero v. Rabenhorst. Gero earned his Companion Dog (CD) degree in 1939, his Companion Dog Excellent (CDX) degree in 1940 and his Utility Dog (DD) title in 1941. It

is especially appropriate that the first titles awarded to a Rottweiler were working titles because, even today, more Rottweilers earn working titles each year than earn championships. Ours is still a breed of function!

By the mid and late 1940s, Rottweilers were found across the country. Our family, of course, is most familiar with the early dogs of the Midwest. In 1945, Perrin G. (Pat) Rademacher (the late brother of Author Joan Klem) acquired his first Rottweiler, August der Grosse, from a first-generation breeding. In looking for a bitch to be bred to August der Gross, Pat brought home (along with two bitches, a male Erwin,) a splendid example of the breed at that time (who) had an indomitable character. A favorite family story tells

how Erwin and some members of the Rademacher family were visiting a stable when a



stallion broke out of his stall and came charging down the aisle of the barn straight for the family. Erwin stood his ground, and the horse veered off into a stall just yards before reaching the startled people. You could say that, but for Erwin, you wouldn’t be reading this [book] for one of the authors was a startled, small child in that horse’s path. If we hadn’t understood what indomitable spirit meant before this incident, we did afterward.

There were impressive imports to follow, and their contribution to the American Rottweiler gene pool illustrated how close we still were to the bosom of the ADRK. But the 1950s were a transitional period, as American dogs with American kennel names were beginning to gain notice. Along with Townview, Panamint, Srigo and Rodsdén, we include “von Stahl.” The von Stahl list of champions included Ch. Gerhardt von Stahl. Gerhardt, the twentieth AKC champion, would have been famous if for no other reason than he was the first Rottweiler champion owned by Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Freeman and was the beginning of Freeger

Rottweilers. The late Muriel Freeman, a foremost AKC breeder-judge and our first American Rottweiler Club delegate to the AKC, was a vital force in the breed since the early 60s. She tried, perhaps harder than anyone, to educate American fanciers on the responsibilities of owning and breeding a dog that the Germans had so carefully developed.

We feel that the years between 1960-1980 were the Golden Age of Rottweilers. So what defines a Golden Age? To begin, it was a period in which outstanding dogs made their appearance, a time of many “firsts” for the breed and an era of tremendous optimism about the future of the breed. All this against the backdrop of the establishment and growth of American Rottweiler clubs.

Without the American clubs, the “firsts” would not have been possible. The first American club, organized under the AKC, was the Rottweiler Club of America — an ambitious name for a club mostly on the West Coast that lasted from 1948 to the late 1960s and which really predates the Golden Age. One notable accomplishment was that using the name made it impossible for any later National club to use the same name! More importantly, it held the first AKC-sanctioned matches in 1948-49 and the first Rottweiler Specialty in conjunction with the Oakland Kennel Club in 1950. The first Golden Age American Rottweiler club was the Colonial Rottweiler Club (CRC), formed in 1956 with a membership on the East Coast, primarily centered in the Philadelphia area.

Within the framework of the Specialty clubs and their members, the Golden Age saw the importation of dogs whose influence on the breed during that era was undeniable. One such dog was Int. Ch. Harras vom Sofienbusch, SchH I, Bundessieger. In 1963, Rodsdén Kennels (kennel of author Joan Klem), through the help of ADRK Head Breed Warden Friedrich Berger, imported Harras. “The great dog,” as he was being called with some fondness by the Germans, was almost seven years old and beyond his prime, but was still being trotted around to German shows on exhibition. Harras should be remembered as one of the truly great Rottweiler phenotypes. There were many, many notable dogs (that arrived in the United States during this period): Harras, Dux (Ch. Dux v. Hungerbuhl, SchH I), Falco (Ch. Falco V.H. Brabantpark) and Eppo (Ch. Eppo vd Keizerslanden, CDX, BH, Canadian CD) whose achievements, descen-

dents, and owners defined (the Rottweiler experience) during the Golden Age.

As we have learned, it was the ADRK in Germany that developed, nurtured and wrote the first “modern” Standard for the Rottweiler. You might call it the original parent club. Through wisdom and discipline, a marvelous working dog was developed for the world to enjoy. —*The Rottweiler Experience*.

Rottweiler History Today in the Making

While on countless fronts the world has become a battle for “mindshare” (a corporate term referring to the use of every available avenue for obtaining a space in one’s mind) the dog world has moved accordingly, rendering with this age a tug of war between those who as true guardians strive to respect and protect the Rottweiler heritage given to us by the ADRK in the 1920s (and preceding generations) — and those who demand “choice” as it relates to conventional or convenient standard modifications and not so differently as that accomplished in the indulgent spirit of self as demonstrated by the Athenian general in the ancient Greek story. It is a battle between “rights” and “responsibilities,” with internet and online chats having “gone live” with Rottweiler history in the making as commentary, debate, and reflection salt and divide the once unified spirit of the Rottweiler fancy. Dedicated breeders and exhibitors have raised thousands to protect and defend the standard in face of efforts by a small few in political seats who seek to revoke the Rottweiler’s status as a docked breed. The majority continue to lovingly showcase the breed not only in conformation, but in performance and working events, parades, therapy, and carting, among others, while simultaneously pushing back against detractors and opponents who seek to target the Rottweiler and undermine the heritage through regulatory, anti-dog, and breed specific legislation. It is a significant and challenging period in the history of the Rottweiler.

In their co-authored work, Joan Klem and Susan Rademacher cite the historical essence of the Rottweiler spirit as described by Hans Korn (1939 Rottweiler Expert and author of *Der Rottweiler*): “a dog with unfailing good humor ... with willingness to forget unpleasant events” — or, alternatively, in the words of Herr Pienkoss (former ADRK President and Founder of the IFR, International Foundation of Rottweilerfriends) as he notes the breed’s “refinement”: “Refinement implies in

the dog, descent from forbearers which rose above the average in form and working performance. A dog with refinement is also one which is beautiful, noble and proud looking. Size is not the main feature of the refined dog, but beautiful, clear outlines and a harmoniously proportioned body. Refinement does not express itself only in the form, but also in posture and character. Temperament without pushiness, courage without wildness, friendliness with a touch of reserve.”

Heritage boasts an intrinsic value based on a promise and a tradition transferred



Suzan Guynn, Cammcastle Rottweilers

Suzan Guynn, operating under the AKC registered kennel name Cammcastle, has been breeding and exhibiting Rottweilers for over 25 years. Cammcastle has bred and/or owned over 75 AKC Rottweiler champions including multiple top ten dogs and bitches, multiple Best in Show winners, multiple Best in Specialty Show winners, three American Rottweiler Club Top Twenty winners, and a nationally ranked #2 Working Group Rottweiler. Suzan credits her dogs’ successes to the diverse and exceptional people owned by these dogs, people who routinely dedicate themselves to their dogs’ health, training and general well-being — and who enthusiastically participate in opportunities to showcase the results. Moreover, she credits her husband Doug for his patience with and support of this ever demanding avocation — and her children, for not only the walks, baths and mock Rottweiler shows they conduct with their friends, but the many positive baseball and soccer sideline encounters they have facilitated for Cammcastle puppies.

Joan Klem, Rodsden Rottweilers

Joan Klem registered her first litter of Rottweilers in 1949 from the Rodsden “A” litter, out of Astrid of Rodsden, a gift from her brother Pat on her graduation from Northwestern University School of Speech. She personally trained and competed in conformation, obedience and tracking with her dogs. She shared the love of the Rottweiler with her husband, Dick Klem, who served as Medallion Rottweiler Club (MRC) President in 1962. Their three sons were raised with Rottweilers, and her granddaughter

across successive generations. It does not automatically confer value, but it creates the necessary foundations to do so. One can not adopt a shortsighted perspective on the Rottweiler’s history. His heritage is not only what sets him apart from others; it is his essence and his splendor, fitting for this generation and the next—to be guarded by those who appreciate the breed’s proud lineage. ■

Chandra earned MRC Best Junior Handler, followed by her great granddaughter Brianna winning BJH in 2008, and her granddaughter, Jacalyn Joan winning BJH in 2011!

She co-owned the registered kennel name “Rodsden” with her brother Pat (MRC President 1961) and does so currently with his daughter, AKC Judge Susan Rademacher. She has co-authored five books on the breed with Pat and Susan; the first in 1964, “How to Raise and Train a Rottweiler” and the last, “The Rottweiler Handbook” in 2001. She has written, produced and narrated two videos on the breed. “Let’s Talk about Rottweilers” won the 1990 Dog Writers Association of America Prize for the Best Video, Education/Entertainment as presented to her at Westminster KC show. As an AKC/International Judge, she has judged the Rottweiler in 16 countries.

A Charter Member of the MRC, she served as President for 12 years, Treasurer and Director; Public Education Coordinator, Judges Education Chair and President of the MRC Schutzhund Verein for five years. She served as Specialty Chair for the first Independent and the “Rottweiler Super Bowl” Specialty and many in between. She was the fourth President of the IFR and Coordinator of the 1997 Conference held in Wheaton, IL sponsored by the ARC and MRC, and she was a Charter Member of ARC, MRC’s founding delegate to ARC, first Treasurer, Director, ARC Education Coordinator and Head Presenter and ARC nominee for AKC Lifetime Achievement Award. She was chosen to judge Best in Specialty Show at the 50th Anniversary of the Medallion Rottweiler Club. She indicates that there has hardly been a day in the last fifty years that she and her family have not thought about the breed and the MRC.