

The Death of The AKC Library

By Enid S. Lagree

In the November 1934, issue of the *Gazette*, the first mention of a *Library for the American Kennel Club* appeared on the Secretary's Page. A Library Committee had been appointed by the AKC Board of Directors for the purpose of "...acquiring for the club a large and comprehensive collection of books, including as far as possible, all useful and authoritative publications relating to the various breeds of dogs..." The notice went on in great detail asking member clubs and individual fanciers to support and assist the committee in achieving the aim of the American Kennel Club: "...to compile a great reference library of books treating all recognized breeds, and everything in which the dog is concerned."

From that promising beginning the library developed into a world-class reference and research center dedicated to everything having to do with *Canis familiaris*. So it was a shock to read that the American Kennel Club was closing the library. With little fanfare, in August they simply eliminated the librarian's position. All of the activities that the librarian, Barbara Kolk, performed—reference, research, collection development, cataloging, etc.—just ceased to exist.

According to the AKC, they have "every intention of preserving and maintaining this valuable asset and resource. So it is not being closed but will be available to researchers and to the public by appointment only." The reality is, in order to save the expense of a single librarian's salary, they closed the library—how very shortsighted of the AKC? One wonders if there is more to this than a librarian's salary? With the price of real estate in Manhattan, how long will it be before the AKC quietly packs up the entire collection and finds another use for the very expensive floor space the library occupies.

What about the many fanciers who donated valuable books and other materials worth thousands of dollars to the library for the past 75 years? It certainly never occurred to them that the AKC would decide, "that it makes little sense to maintain a full time operation, which few use only occasionally, when the same level of service can be provided on an as needed basis for a fraction of the cost." Who is going to provide the "same level of service" if there is no librarian?

In 2005, Yvonne Schilla and I were in the process of putting the final touches on our book, *The Giant Schnauzer in the United States 1930-2005*. I unexpectedly ran across a reference in a 1960s *Dog World* magazine that mentioned a head study photograph of Carlo v. Saldern. While the photograph of Carlo that was the breed representation in the *American Kennel Club's Complete Dog Book* prior to 1960 was well known, the head study described in *Dog World* was a mystery—until I contacted Barbara Kolk. She managed to unearth the remarkable photograph and e-mailed it to me in time to use on the front cover of our book. Yvonne Schilla also used the library's reference service when she was researching pedigrees and dogs for our book. So I am skeptical that the "same level of service" can be provided without a librarian. The Board of Directors should have asked the staff member before he eliminated the position of AKC librarian:

- Who will maintain the collection? Publishers have discovered that dog books and related materials are very popular and are printing them in record numbers. It's impossible to visit a bookstore without seeing a display of new dog books, right by the front door. Someone has to decide which are worthy of inclusion in the AKC collection.
- Who will order new books? Who will catalog them?
- What about periodicals—one of the library's best resources?
- Who will keep an eye on *E-Bay* and other book sites for the antique and rare dog books that are missing in the collection? Who knows what is missing?
- What about dog fanciers who have rare books and even entire collections they had planned to donate to the AKC Library? According to the AKC they are still going to accept donations to their *librarian-less* library. No one would be that stupid.

Without a special librarian like Barbara Kolk at the helm, with her unique knowledge of the subject and high level of expertise in the world of dogs, the American Kennel Club's library might as well be auctioned off. Who knows? That may well be their plan. They are looking for money in all kinds of places.

It is interesting that the news bulletin the AKC published regarding the library's closing failed to mention who exactly made the decision to close this jewel of a special library—probably some bean counter, in a suit, with zero interest in the sport of dogs.

My hope is that the AKC's Board of Directors and member clubs' delegates will reconsider this hasty and shortsighted decision and rehire Barbara Kolk, and reopen the library. The library is a jewel in the crown of the American Kennel Club—something that should be preserved and enhanced. If anything, the library's mission should be broadened and its existence should be advertised.

To improve the possibility that the AKC will reconsider their position, please contact your AKC delegate if you belong to a member kennel club or breed club. Robin Greenslade is the Giant Schnauzer Club of America's delegate and I know she would be interested in hearing from you. She is also a member of the South Central Giant Schnauzer Club and her e-mail address is: KGreenslad@aol.com. Contact me for a list of the AKC Board Members and their e-mail addresses: Elagree@htcomp.net.

In 1934 the AKC Board of Directors proudly announced the opening of "the Club's new and handsome Library." Seventy-five years later, instead of throwing a huge 75th Birthday Celebration, they quietly sounded the death knell.

How very sad...