

---

## LINES FROM LINDA

---

# THE PIEDMONT KENNEL CLUB CELEBRATES 100 YEARS

---

BY LINDA AYERS TURNER KNORR



**T**his year, as the members of Charlotte, North Carolina's Piedmont Kennel Club celebrate their Centennial Anniversary, let's take a look back at the visionaries who worked to make it the great club it is today. Last year the club lost one of their most admired members, former PKC President and AKC Judge Daniel Fleitis. The following club history was written by Dan:

In 1924, a group of mostly hunting dog enthusiasts formed a club, the Mecklenburg Dog Club, to share information and experiences. Interest spread and people outside Mecklenburg asked to join the club. They began to hold field trials and breed shows for the promotion of their dogs.

In 1932, about twenty couples decided to form a non-profit dog club corporation to be called the Piedmont Kennel Club, Inc., filing for incorporation with the State of North Carolina for a fee of \$44.00 (1). The certificate of incorporation indicated that the purpose of the club would be "to stage, promote, and manage dog shows and field trials and other events of a like venture or nature." At the same time, they decided to join the American Kennel Club. These initial members were issued life memberships.

More and more dog enthusiasts continued to join, and by 1938 membership swelled to more than 300 members! But with the outbreak of WWII, membership began to decline, and the club was unable to hold a show in 1944.



Centennial Year Officers and Board Members Celebrating 100 years.



PKC Past President Lisa Turner with Current President Mallory Ballard

## LINES FROM LINDA AYERS TURNER KNORR THE PIEDMONT KENNEL CLUB CELEBRATES 100 YEARS

After the war years, the club began to flourish again, although meetings continued to be held anywhere where room could be found, including members' homes. At this time (around the late 1940s) about a dozen couples began looking for a permanent home for PKC. They found a barn with 1.3 acres on sleepy hollow road (now Tyvola Road)—a mostly rural area about seven miles south of downtown Charlotte. Because the club had no money in the treasury to purchase the property, these families contributed their own money to buy the land and barn building.

They proceeded to fix up the barn building, holding work parties, creating a large meeting room with paneled walls, a kitchen, restrooms, and a separate room for Board meetings. Piedmont Kennel Club was probably the first AKC-affiliated club to have its own property and club building. Although the Tyvola Road site was ideal as a place for monthly club meetings, it was not large enough for shows. It was used for weekend conformation practice and for matches.

At the time, PKC was part of a four-club circuit holding shows in mid-February and late July. The circuit started on Thursdays in Spartanburg, moved to Greenville on Fridays, then to Asheville on Saturdays, and concluded with Sundays in Charlotte. Among the venues used by PKC were the old radio building on South Boulevard (where radio station WBT was located), the Merchandise Mart, and the original Coliseum (now Bojangles Coliseum) on Independence Boulevard.

The 1962 show at the Radio Building had an entry of 617 dogs. The largest entries were 62 Shetland Sheepdogs, 28 German Shepherd Dogs, and 27 Collies. At the 1967 show at the Merchandise Mart, the entries had grown to 1,000 dogs, with the largest entries being 73 German Shepherds, 45 Doberman Pinschers, 45 Toy Poodles, 40 Boxers, 38 Great Danes, and 35 Smooth Dachshunds.

Eventually, PKC decided on a permanent location at the MetroLina Fairgrounds buildings on Statesville Avenue north of I-85.

By the 1970s and 1980s, entries for the four-show circuit were reaching 2,000 dogs despite having to travel from city to city. The February circuit could be iffy because of the weather. One year, the Asheville show had to be cancelled because of snow. Eventually, Asheville decided to join PKC at the MetroLina Fairgrounds location.

It was at about this time period that the Charlotte metropolitan area started a growth boom. PKC's location (the 1.3-acre lot and barn-clubhouse) found itself much closer to the action, being located at the northwest corner of the I-77 and Tyvola Road intersection. At the same time, George Shinn (2) had obtained a Charlotte franchise for the National Basketball Assn. (NBA), and a new state-of-the-art coliseum was being constructed on Tyvola Road about two miles west of the PKC location. The other corners at I-77 and Tyvola were being developed for hotels and other commercial buildings. Interest in PKC's 1.3-acre lot was obvious, and all the land around the PKC site had been purchased (PKC was in the middle).

A developer from Texas (3) offered to purchase the PKC land for \$200,000. The PKC Board was astounded, but after consideration, the Board decided to wait. We were able to connect with a "wheeler-dealer" in Charlotte who wanted to represent us at absolutely no cost, simply because he enjoyed the politics of negotiating (4).



Picture of the clubhouse, the old barn, was taken on one of the last days while we were packing.



First Christmas party in the new building. Pictured left to right: Terry Mathis, James Reid, and Bud Samples.

With his help, the club, under President Lisa Turner (5) and the Board of Directors, eventually worked out a deal to sell for \$685,000! Interestingly, the Texas developer who purchased the property (which now is a location for an extended stay hotel) went bankrupt shortly thereafter when there was a real estate bust in Texas where that company was heavily invested.

The club now needed to find itself a new location—perhaps one with enough land to put up a show building. We contacted a commercial real estate broker. The sites they showed the club were totally inadequate and, often, in rundown locations. A PKC club member, Jo Fleitas, who happened to be a real estate agent, was also searching for a suitable location. She found a 19-plus-acre site on Choate Circle in the then far southwest part of the county. The land was level, and there were only a few homes around. The property was purchased for \$200,000 and included a ranch-style home which would become the club's new meeting site. Part of the \$685,000 was used to construct the PKC Showplace building, and part was used for road grading and planting of trees, etc.

At the time, a new problem arose when the Steele Creek Neighborhood Association became alarmed at learning that they thought a boarding kennel was being constructed. They planned to oppose the zoning. A group of PKC officers decided to meet with the Steele Creek neighbors at a nearby church to reassure them that PKC was not a boarding kennel. It also helped that the Steele Creek Athletic Association was in the process of constructing some ballfields directly across from the PKC property.

## LINES FROM LINDA AYERS TURNER KNORR THE PIEDMONT KENNEL CLUB CELEBRATES 100 YEARS



Ground-breaking ceremony, July 30, 1986. Pictured left to right with kennel names: Betty Schachner (Plantation), Mary Witherspoon (Boondocks), Anna Renfro (Petrushka), James Reid (Imara), Richard Peillucci, Lisa Turner (Plantation), Dan Fleitas (Seberic), Jan Faulkner (Glenmere), Mary Dolde (Follow Me), and Freya Jones (Forj).

Because the new PKC Showplace was not an air-conditioned building, PKC had to withdraw from the old four-club February and July circuit. Construction took about a year and the club's first show on its own property was held on April 2, 1988. The rest is history (6).

Now the club had to become more than a "hobby"—the Showplace required that the organization operate more like a business. New expenses had to be paid: utilities (lots of overhead lights in the Showplace building), heating during the winter months, property taxes, garbage service, water, telephone, grounds maintenance (cutting nearly 19 acres on a regular basis), repairs to the house and Showplace building, etc.

To meet these new obligations, the club had to rent the building as often as possible. Luckily, a long-term tenant was found with the Charlotte Dog Training Club. Other clubs would regularly rent the showplace for cat shows, specialty shows, some for national specialties (Beagles, Basenjis, English Cocker Spaniels, Dachshunds, Yorkshire Terriers, German Shepherd Dogs, Pomeranians, Pit Bull Terriers, Doberman Pinschers, and Labrador Retrievers, among others).

But in the face of declining entries nationwide in the 2008-forward years, PKC, in 2014, made the decision to end their back-to-back yearly shows on its own property. Instead, the club accepted an invitation from the Greenville Kennel Club to set up a four-show weekend in Greenville on that club's normal July circuit (from which Spartanburg KC and Hendersonville KC had withdrawn to hold their shows closer to their home territory). For PKC, the move to South Carolina proved to be financially successful, and the arrangement continues."

**Current President Mallory Ballard and Past President Lisa Turner took a trip down memory lane, returning to the clubhouse where the club's historic treasures are stored, to share memories with us. Lisa shared stories of her growing up as a second-generation member:**

The early founders of the club were hunters. They gathered to trade training tips, swap stories, and share fellowship. After WWII, the barn was purchased on Nations Ford Road. (Once Tyvola Road was cut through, the address changed.) As Dan stated, the members got busy fixing up the place. Two restrooms were added. One for the men and one for the women, just as you would expect. However, rather than write men or women on the door of the restroom they put a pointer on one door and a setter on the other door. They had a great sense of humor!

As Dan wrote in his history of the club, we could have training classes and matches at the club. The monthly meetings often had a program of some sort or a guest speaker. Once the business and program were over, everyone had a chance to socialize. Members took turns serving

A ribbon from the first show.



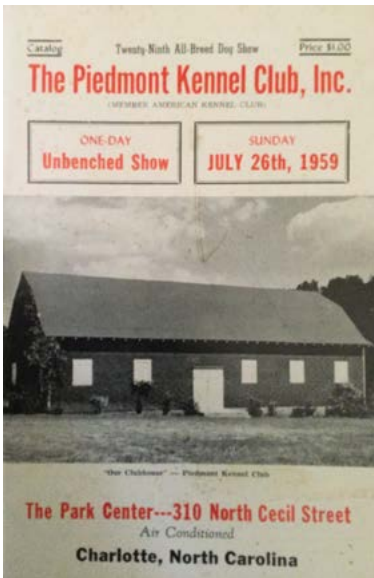
refreshments for our meetings. The ladies had a favorite month they liked to be hostess. My Grandmother always wanted June. I can still remember helping her to make punch, deviled eggs, pound

cake, and assorted other treats to serve. It was quite a spread. Through the years there would be fish fries, covered dish dinners, and Bingo nights. There was always a big Christmas party! One year, Neal Hasty, a member, arranged for a comedian to come entertain us after dinner. Of course, Neal made sure to tell the comedian all about the members. So, his entire act poked good-natured fun at each of us.

From a 1989 membership directory, Life Members were: Mr. and Mrs. J. E. Bennett, Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Bradburn, Mr. and Mrs. Linn Garibaldi, Mrs. Arthur Goodman, and Mrs. P. C. McLain.

At the end of the membership meeting, we began giving members a chance to "Brag" about their wins, new litters, etc. Dr. Samuel Shaver (Billie's Follie) was showing Lhasa Apsos and Shih Tzus that were winning lots of Groups and BIS. With humor, Sam was made to brag last so as not to outshine all the other brags. The "Brag" have continued to this day and are a highlight of the membership meeting.

## LINES FROM LINDA AYERS TURNER KNORR THE PIEDMONT KENNEL CLUB CELEBRATES 100 YEARS



Christmas party 1959 in the old barn on Tyvola Road.

“Years later, when we moved to our current location, Choate Circle was a quiet road in the county. That is no longer the case. We are now surrounded by houses and apartments. The quiet street is busy. We have been swallowed up by Charlotte.

During my years as President, PKC was busier than ever. We were hosting two dog shows a year and promoting dogs. During the matches in the 1950s and ‘60s, we would have a “Country Store” to raise money. Members would donate items to sell. Sometimes we would buy back what we brought. It was all good fun and a good way to earn a little money for PKC.

Members took dogs to visit nursing homes, spoke to 4-H groups, and visited schools just to name a few of the activities members participated in. We were also becoming involved with civic matters. The city council was wrestling with problems that would affect breeders. They wanted to pass some new ordinances. We were very much in favor of a leash law and spaying pet bitches. However, they wanted to pass an ordinance that required all unspayed bitches to pay a \$25 fee each year. That would be a hardship for breeders, so I attended a city council meeting. I signed in requesting a time to speak to the council. I wanted to plead our case and offer a possible solution. As I sat in the audience waiting for the other speakers in front of me to finish, I noticed that the council members were speaking among themselves. The mayor was out of his seat talking with another council member on the other side of the room. When my name was called, I walked over to the podium and quietly waited. When the mayor realized no one was speaking, he looked at me and said, “Oh, you can go ahead and start, we can hear you.” Without even thinking, the schoolteacher in me came out. I replied, “I’m sorry, I can’t

begin until everyone is seated, and all eyes are on me.” Dead silence fell over the room. The mayor returned to his seat, and with all eyes on me I began! I still can’t believe I did that. The good news is they really did listen and there were provisions put in place to help breeders. (By the way, I was about seven months pregnant when I did this.)

Ruth Beam was a long-time member of Piedmont Kennel Club. Her kennel, Great Elms, produced outstanding Pomeranians. She would stay up most of the night and sleep during the day so she could take calls from people all over the world. I still remember the sign that was on her door warning people not to knock on her door until after 12 noon. She bred and raised Great Elms Prince Charming II who won BIS at the Westminster dog show.

**Current President Mallory Ballard updated me on the current state of the club:**

Our taxes have increased substantially, the show building and the clubhouse are both aging and need expensive repairs, and our members want to add air-conditioning to the show building. The power bill would increase substantially with the addition of air-conditioning. So, it’s time to look for a new location. The plan is to purchase some land, build a smaller building with a kitchen, meeting room, storage area, and larger area for training classes, seminars, matches, and small shows. We want enough land to host a Fast CAT.

**With their optimism for the future, it is clear that the forward-thinking members of the Piedmont Kennel Club have a great future ahead! Congratulations from all of us at SHOWSIGHT on 100 years of great accomplishments in American Kennel Club sports! ■**

### FOOTNOTES:

- (1) The names of the signatories on the Certificate of Incorporation were: J. Mcl. Jones; J.E. Bennett; L.B. Hood; and J.W. Reynar.
- (2) George Shinn, along with two minority partners, put Charlotte on the map with the then Charlotte Hornets.
- (3) J.D. Sims and Company (Dallas, Texas)
- (4) Burt Gelman, who also owned Jonathan’s, a restaurant on Uptown’s Tryon Street.
- (5) Lisa Turner, daughter of Betty Schachner, one of the early members of Piedmont Kennel Club.
- (6) Part of this history is thanks to information provided by another early member and club President, Robert Williams, who kept many of the early documents. This brief history was compiled by Dan Fleitas.