

A History of the Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier in Canada

by Alan Fox

When I was asked to write up a history of the Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier for the Anniversary of 25 years of being a recognized breed here in Canada I really wasn't sure about where to start. After some thought I figured the best place was probably at the beginning - at least the beginning as far as I was concerned. So it is that we turn back the clock, not 25 years but rather 29 years. Since the history of the breed is very closely tied to the history of the Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier Association of Canada this story will trace that development over the years. Here is my story of how we arrived where we are today.

As some of you may be aware, my love affair with the Wheaten began way back in 1974. My wife, Carolyn, and I had decided it was time to get a dog. I had my eye on a cute little puppy of questionable origin but Carolyn, being the wiser of the two of us, managed to talk me out of it. Her rationale was that if we looked at a pure-bred we would at least know what we were getting. Thus began our search for the "perfect" dog ... for us at least.

We made a list of things we wanted. Medium sized, non-shedding, no odour, no yapping, good with kids - these were the top items on our list. Now, could we find a dog that met all our criteria? We drew up a list of dogs we liked, did some investigation and eliminated a few to come up with our "short list". One day my brother gave us a copy of a dog magazine and in it was an ad for the Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier. The ad read "No shed, no odour, no yap" and showed a picture of this wonderful shaggy looking dog. A letter was soon in the mail to Donna Henseler of Riverrun Wheatens in South Dakota asking for more information on this pretty well unheard of breed. We received a very nice letter back from her telling us that she had recently shipped a dog to some people in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and she was sure if we wanted to see a Wheaten in person they wouldn't mind us getting in touch with them.

Labour Day weekend we found ourselves heading to Saskatoon. We met Gunther and Ruth Appl at their home and saw their two Wheatens, Radar (Riverrun's Canadian Hope) and Pampootie (Butterglow's Blithe Spirit). I must admit, it was love at first sight and our search for the "perfect dog" ended right there.

Gunther and Ruth knew of one other Wheaten in Canada, Berdot's Casey O'Brien, and were planning on breeding him to their Pampootie. Puppies expected early in 1975. We made an agreement there and then to get a puppy from that litter. Thus began our lives with the Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier.

The time between then and the arrival of our puppy was spent writing to just about every Wheaten owner in the world whose address I could find. Through this correspondence I discovered a few more Wheatens had been shipped to Canada and by the time our puppy was born in February of 1975 we had a total of 13 Wheatens (Gunther and Ruth's litter of seven bringing us up to that number). If there were more, they were well hidden.

Since information about the breed was pretty scarce we found ourselves having many discussions and visits with the Appls - after all, where does one go for help with their Wheaten but to their breeder. During one of those meetings we came up with the idea of forming some kind of association to help keep Wheaten owners in touch with each other as well as working towards possible breed recognition sometime in the future. That was the birth of the Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier Association of Canada and plans were formulated to put out a newsletter.

June 1976 saw the publication of Volume 1 Number 1 of the Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier "Bulletin". Somehow I found myself in an "Executive position" where I seemed to be the complete executive - including being the editor of the newsletter. It is interesting to note that the first issue was mailed to the by then, twenty known Wheaten owners in Canada - four each in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario and the remaining eight here in Saskatchewan. In that issue I wrote "The purpose of this newsletter is to try and band Wheaten owners together towards some common goals -- the recognition of the breed by the Canadian Kennel Club and the advancement and betterment of the breed". Gunther wrote about how indiscriminate breeding of other breeds that became popular lead to many unhealthy genes in some breeds - hip dysplasia, blindness, reproductive problems and so on. He also talked about how we would have to decide which type of coat we wanted (Irish or American), size, colour and coat trim. Seems things haven't changed all that much in 27 years. He also discussed some of the characteristics of the breed and how they can become excellent cattle dogs, good bird dogs and excellent ratters. Those today who are just discovering how well the Wheaten adapts to herding must realize what a visionary Gunther was for his time.

By the time November had arrived and Volume 1 Number 2 was mailed, we had received membership fees from eleven of the original twenty who had received the first issue. These eleven people owned a total of 24 Wheatens. My records showed there were now about 35 Wheatens in Canada. Our numbers were growing. Christine Wilson from Toronto (Duffy MacPhearson and Holmenocks Helitma) was doing a great job of making our presence known to the people at ***Dogs in Canada***. Anne Goodsell, Delta, BC (Lustig's Bodor Smoky Topaz) had volunteered to help with our bid for breed recognition and we had received encouraging notes from Jackie Gottleib and Gay Sherman (now Dunlap). I also noticed that there was a plea for articles for the next issue. Things really haven't changed have they?

Canada's first "Wheaten picnic" was held in Saskatoon during the summer of 1976 starting a tradition that has continued all across the country. We had a total of five Wheatens in attendance. That summer Carolyn and I spent our holiday in Colorado where we met Jackie Gottleib, her daughter Cindy and Dorothy Goodale (Berdot Wheatens). Somehow we even managed to bring home a puppy ... Carrie C's Peppermint Patty. We were now a two Wheaten household!

Spring of 1977 saw our first club listing in ***Dogs in Canada*** plus the discovery of a couple more Wheatens - one in Ottawa and the other in Montreal. I had made contact with the Canadian Kennel Club regarding recognition and we now knew exactly what we needed to do. All we had

to do was get it done. That summer Anne Goodsell paid us a visit and we began work on the first draft of our proposed Standard.

Carolyn and I experienced, as competitors, our first dog show that spring when we drove down to Minot, ND and entered their "Sanction A Match". That weekend we also met for the first time Linda Wolter (Elfinstone) and Jan and Jim Linscheid (Finnigan) although I had been corresponding with Jan for some time before that. Somehow our Patty ended up with the Best of Breed ribbon that day and of course we were hooked. To top it off, we were also awarded the Best in Group ribbon also. Not too shabby for two total amateurs who had never been in a show ring before. As is the custom the number in competition will remain unknown but suffice it to say Patty was not the only one there!

By the fall of that year our membership had grown to over thirty, representing fifty Wheatens. Here in Regina, our local all-breed clubs were being very accommodating and including a Miscellaneous Class at their shows. They even managed to have a judge present to look us over - something that is not always done in Miscellaneous Class. In Manitoba, Jan and Linda were doing their best to help push our cause by entering two of their Wheatens along with our two in the Manitoba Canine Association's show held that summer. I assure you Linda and Jan were not impressed with Miscellaneous Class!

Meanwhile work was proceeding on the first draft of the new Canadian Standard. Between Anne and I, neither of us had any experience at all in writing a Standard but, we forged ahead blindly hoping we'd get it right. Both of us felt that we should keep it fairly similar to the US Standard since there would obviously be a lot of cross border showing. We didn't want our Wheatens to be too different from those south of the border. Writing a Standard back then was probably an easier task than today since we didn't have to try to make the Standard fit what was being bred. Our goal was to describe, as best we could, the perfect Wheaten - something future breeders could strive to reach.

By the time Volume 2 Number 3 was mailed, we were about ready to make an official request for recognition to the Canadian Kennel Club. I had thirty-three completed forms and, other than a completed Standard, had met all requirements for recognition. We had decided to wait until the new board of directors was in place before making our formal bid for recognition since we thought they might be more enthusiastic about welcoming a new breed than the outgoing board might have been.

That issue also included our first Montgomery Report courtesy of Susan and Chris McCann of Ottawa (Finnigan's Summer Holiday). Those of you who attended Montgomery in 1999 will appreciate one line of her commentary. She wrote: "How could I best describe Montgomery? How about - mud, mud, mud mixed with a lot of rain!" As stated before, things really haven't changed! Along with Susan and Chris' report, another first was reached with that issue - our first picture page. Looking back, it was pretty crude but, those were the days before computers.

The Spring 1978 issue brought news that our application for recognition had been sent in and received by the Canadian Kennel Club. Our Standard had been completed and submitted so all we had to do now was wait. Two new members had joined our ranks ... one in Ashburn, ON and our first from Nova Scotia (Halifax). Our breed truly did span from coast to coast in Canada. Also included in that issue was a copy of our first Code of Ethics.

May 22, 1978 was a VERY exciting day for those who were entered in the Regina Kennel and Obedience Club's show. With what is believed to be the biggest Wheaten entry to that point (six on Saturday and eight on Sunday) John Ross, then CKC Director for Saskatchewan, announced that at that week's meeting, the Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier had been officially recognized and would be eligible for competition in Group 4 as of May 1, 1979. Another highlight of the weekend was that the show giving club had arranged not one but three judges to look over our entry. It was a pretty exiting weekend for all concerned and our breed certainly got some well-deserved attention.

The final issue of 1978 brought a suggestion for a new name for the "Bulletin". Anne Goodsell suggested "Wheaten Wags". Seemed like a pretty good name at the time ... still seems pretty good! Having published eight issues of the newsletter I was beginning to run out of steam. It was time to pass the baton to someone else. I felt it only fitting that 1979 start out on a totally new foot, at least as far as our newsletter was concerned. Our breed was now officially recognized, the Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier Association was off to a good start, the newsletter had a new name and, it was time for a new editor. We had accomplished a lot since that first meeting back in 1975 - probably due to the one-person executive we had. Things move rapidly when they don't have to go through several committees.

Although we did get a new look, a new logo and a new editor in the form of Kim Hunter from Barrie, Ontario (Legenderry Babe in Arms), somehow I was "elected" president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer of the SCWTAC. For whatever reason, I was still the "executive member" - a role I wasn't too sure I really wanted. Our membership continued to grow and the volume of mail we were receiving requesting information about the breed had skyrocketed. Our fall issue of "Wheaten Wags" included our first show results. As far as is known the first Wheaten to be shown at an official CKC show was Waterford Panama Gold, owned by Gail Gordon, Shelagh Kelsey and Paul Wettlaufer, on May 4, 1979. Dr. Lee Huggins of Denver Colorado also awarded Panama Gold the first group placement for a Wheaten that day ... a Group First! May 19 saw the first Best Puppy in Show going to Andover Expressivo owned by Leslie Loader and Donald Hunt under judge Mrs. Jean Fletcher. The September issue of *Dogs in Canada* listed the first Wheaten Championship. That honour went to Gleanngay Moon Marigold owned by Shelagh Kelsey. November's issue listed the first Obedience title, Glenkerry the Phantom owned by Linda Wolter. The first CANADIAN bred obedience title went to Lustig's Brae Amarah owned by Diane Christie from Regina. December of that year saw the first Booster Show at the Credit Valley Dog Show with an entry of 14 Wheatens. It was quite year to say the least.

The following year saw Kathy Whittington step into the role of co-editor of Wheaten Wags. The biggest story that year was *Dogs in Canada* publishing a cover story on the Soft-Coated Wheaten

Terrier which featured two Wheatens, "Gold Star" and a puppy named "Collin". Due to other commitments, Kim Hunter was unable to continue in his role as co-editor and we saw Sue McCann from Ottawa step in to fill his role.

1981 saw more changes. Sue took over as Editor while Kathy became our first "official" secretary. April of that year saw Dr. Lee Huggins award Best in Show to a Wheaten - Ch. Lontree's Borstal Boy owned by B. Behan and G. Vlachos. We'd pretty well covered most "firsts" at this point with the exception of one - we had never elected a real slate of officers. In the June issue of "Wheaten Wags" my official resignation as executive member was published and a call went out for nominations and/or volunteers for a new executive. The year ended with our first official slate of officers. President: Michel Lockquell, St. Denis, QC, Vice-president: Cheryl St. Dennis, Thunder Bay, ON, Secretary: Sheila Teichreb, Melfort, SK, Treasurer: Sue Luchuck, Regina, SK, Editors: Lise Moffett-Lockquell and the Executive Officers of the SCWTAC. It was pretty evident that our association was in very good hands. The fall issue of "Wags" included a point by point listing of the new direction we were heading. There were major changes on the horizon. Our loosely knit organization was to become a much more formal organization in the next few years. The time had come to "grow up" and become "official".

By early 1982 the new executive already had a proposed constitution and by-law ready to be voted on. A judge's seminar\grooming seminar was held that year with Gay Sherman Dunlap, Margery Shoemaker, Lynn Penniman and Gary Vlachos as speakers. The first Stud Dog and Brood Bitch Book was published and the CKC gave approval for recognition of the SCWTAC (August 3, 1982). Local section clubs were formed with Kathy Mclaughlin of BC becoming the first director. "Wags" was being published six times a year! It was also that year that a contest was held to design a new club crest with Cindy Wamback from Moorhead, MN submitting the winning entry which appeared for the first time on the December issue.

1984 saw the introduction of several fund raising items. Available for purchase were pewter pins with the SCWTAC's logo, doodle pads, reprints of the beautiful cover pages by Lise Lockquell that had been appearing for the past ten issues and were to continue for another nine. Also available was a publication by the BC Local Section Club entitled "Meet the Irish Ambassador - Voici un petit Irlandais pure laine". It should be noted that this fine publication was written, translated, printed and made available to the public in less than a month. Typical SCWTAC sales contracts were also made available as well as Wheaten bumper stickers. By April of that year, membership in the SCWTAC had climbed to over 100. Two new faces appeared on the executive - Susan Perry, Leduc, AB as vice-president and Denis Brosseau from Sherbrooke, QC as secretary. The first National Specialty was sponsored by the Quebec Local Section Club. There were 24 Wheatens judged by James G. Reynolds, Ottawa, ON with BOB going to Brenmoor's Hide and Sneak owned by G. Vlachos and B. Behan, BOS to Angelica's Hanz Solo owned by Bill and Sylvia Hamilton.

In 1985 the Association made available to all champions and obedience title holders (past, present and future) a beautiful 2½" pewter medallion with the club logo on the front and the dog's name engraved on the back. These were made available free of charge to anyone who submitted a minimum 4x6 inch colour show picture, a five or six generation pedigree and any

other information the owner might wish to share. I'm not sure how many people have actually taken advantage of this tremendous offer but those of us who did sure have a nice "trophy".

Before we knew it, plans were being made to celebrate ten years of "Wheaten Wags". Michel and Lise went to work and in June 1986 published a 100+ page issue of "Wags". This issue covered the highlights of the previous ten years and is certainly another "must have" addition to the club's archives. Also that year a committee to review the existing standard was drawn up under the leadership of Ardelle Darling. By the end of the year a revised standard was ready to be voted on. Not sure how Ardelle and her committee managed it but it was a pretty impressive effort. The revised Standard was approved on the first vote - maybe just as impressive!

The following year saw the first "all obedience" issue of "Wags". Great fun reading the stories from those who had been in the Obedience Ring --- successful and not so successful. It was wonderful to see so many sharing their stories - even if some of them were a bit embarrassing at the time. Those who have been through obedience probably know what I am referring to.

1987 saw another new executive elected. Susan Perry took over the reigns as president, Jocelyne Paul, Brossard, QC was secretary, Sue Luchuck remained in her role as treasurer, Michel Lockquell took over the positions of past-president and editor. Four new positions on the executive were filled by John Rogers (BC Director), Ardelle Darling (Ontario Director), Benoit Chenette (Quebec Director) and Sylvia Hamilton (Toronto Area Director). This was the first time local section clubs were represented on the executive.

I think it was around this time also that some of the "festering" problems within the association started to surface. I think of them as the tumultuous years - and I do mean years. Sue Perry wrote in her president's column about much of the correspondence she had received and how it was "full of criticisms of the National Club as well as personal attacks on past and present executive members." There were times during the next few years when I really had to wonder about the future of the association ... and the breed ... here in Canada. Any time egos and personal agendas take precedence over the betterment of our Wheatens is a sad time for our breed. Sue (and those who followed her) did an excellent job of holding things together but eventually felt it was time to let someone else take over. Our association was losing a lot of very talented people - some never to return. It was proving that being on the executive of our association was an extremely trying position - it would be nice to think things have changed a bit over the years. Sometimes people forget that the SCWTAC is not a multi-national company but simply a dog club run by VOLUNTEERS. Let's never lose perspective.

1988 saw the adoption of the revision to the breed Standard. (I wonder if we will ever get it "right"?) The 3rd National Wheaten Specialty Show was held in Quebec on June 26 with an entry of 28. Best of Breed was awarded by Judge Kay Guimond to Am. Can. Ch. Broussepoil Capucin owned by Lise Moffett-Lockquell and Gerald Cote. Interestingly enough, according to "Wheaten Wags", that same year saw the 4th National Specialty being held in Toronto on August 30th. Judge Margaret Young made her selection from an entry of thirteen Wheatens and chose Ch. Holweit's Sunflower owned by Sylvia and Bill Hamilton as her Best of Breed. That same issue

published the new guidelines for National Specialties that were to take effect the following year. There we find that from then on, “only one National Specialty per year shall be held”.

The last issue of “Wheaten Wags” for 1988 contained the first references to what is now our major concern - PLE/PLN and kidney disease. Peggy Strankman reported that the Kidney Survey had been stalled due to a shortage of funds. Response had been extremely poor to that point - only one breeder had submitted a puppy list. Peggy reported about an article on Protein Losing Enteropathy that had appeared in the Fall 1988 issue of “Benchmarks”. As far as I can see, this is the first time this issue had been raised. Little did we know what the future was to hold for our beloved breed.

1988 also proved to be a year of new records. This time in Obedience. Records were set both in entries as well as results in all classes but Utility. Top Novice Wheaten was Kelly’s King Fergus Murphy CD owned by B. Dunnigan and top Open Wheaten was Ch. Broussepoil Soupcon de Canelle CDX owned by B. Chenette and J. Paul. Four separate teams also broke the previous record of most points earned in a year. These results certainly showed that the Wheaten is not just another pretty face! Of course we all knew that anyway.

The next few years continued much the same. Participation and membership in our association was dropping although the number of Wheatens being shown in both Conformation and Obedience continued to grow. In fact, by the end of 1993, there were at least 614 Wheatens who had completed their Canadian Championship and 88 who held at least one obedience title. Obviously enthusiasm for the breed was alive and well even though club participation was suffering. Cries went out for both volunteers to act on various committees as well as people to submit articles for “Wheaten Wags”. As time went on, more and more articles concerning the health of our breed began to appear. We had finally realized our Wheatens were in trouble.

Spring of 1994 saw our first issue with Jolijne Ubbink starting a trend that will be hard to beat. Under Jolijne’s editorship “Wheaten Wags” just kept getting better and better. To this day I wonder where she got the energy and dedication to keep going for all those years - especially since I know some of them were extremely trying for both her and the executive. Health issues were almost a regular column by now. It is interesting to read some of the early articles and see how far we have come in our battle against PLE/PLN and Kidney Disease. Lots of studies, lots of articles and sadly to say, lots of deaths.

The years from then on continued in much the same way. At times it was a very bumpy road for both our Association and our breed. Both have changed immensely since it all started so many years ago. Looking back on the Association, it has gone from a loosely knit group of people just wanting the best for our Wheatens to a fairly regimented club with far more rules and regulations than any of us at the beginning could even imagine. However, for the most part, the basic cause has remained unchanged ... the betterment of the Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier here in Canada.

Our dogs have also changed. I look at some of the pictures I have from “way back when” and realize what an improvement we’ve made in the breed. Structurally they are hardly the same

dogs - fronts, rears, toplines and coats are all FAR better today than back then. The only question is at what cost did we achieve this "better dog"? Our early Wheatens all lived a full and healthy life. Was the penalty we had to pay for a better structured dog the health of that dog? Only time will tell what the future holds. I think we as owners and breeders of Soft-Coated Wheaten Terriers have some major hurdles to jump in the coming years. Will the future see two Wheaten "breeds" - the Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier and the Irish Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier? Will we see a solution to our health problems of today? Questions I am sure none of us has the answers to. The future of our breed is in our hands ... let's do everything in our power to make that future a bright one for all concerned.