

The Granite State Shetland Sheepdog Club hosts “The Shetland Sheepdog ~ Then and Now”

Presented by Tom Coen
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Article written by
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It was a perfect early autumn day in New Hampshire. Twenty nine Sheltie fanciers gathered bright and early on the campus of the University of New Hampshire, eagerly looking forward to participating in Tom Coen’s presentation of “The Shetland Sheepdog ~ Then and Now”. Attendees hailed from NH, ME, MA, VT, CT, and NY as well as Quebec, Canada. For some, this was their fourth time attending this program! This seminar was developed by Tom Coen of Macdega Shelties, a well-known and successful breeder of Shelties, a former professional handler of both Shelties and Collies, and now a licensed judge. Tom noted that New England is the “cradle” of the American Shetland Sheepdog history; this is where much of the early development in the US took place.

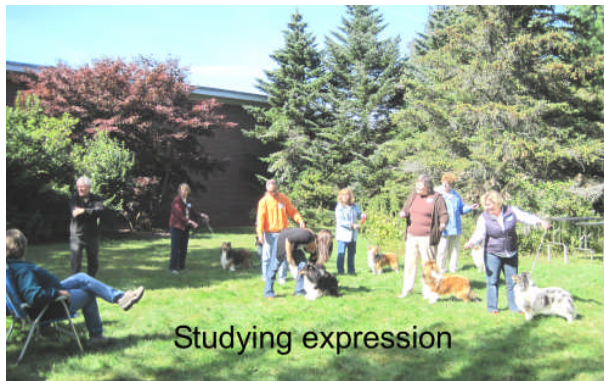


Along with Tom was a panel of judges including Nioma Coen of Macdega, Carolyn Ing of Foxglove and guest judges selected from the participants in the afternoon portion of the program.

The morning was spent with a slide show and history of the beginnings of the Sheltie as we (almost) know it! The earliest “Shelties” were actually mongrels that were “yard dogs”. No, they were not herding dogs, as Tom pointed out “there were no green pastures on the Shetland Islands”. There were no written records of what breeds went into the makings of the early dogs on the Shetland Islands. What is known is that small, fluffy dogs from the islands were crossed with the British Collies of the day and gradually our breed was developed. One of the most famous declared Collie crosses was the Shetland Sheepdog “Wallace” and the Collie “Teena”. The modern American Sheltie is descended almost entirely from dogs imported from Britain between and first and second World Wars. Nate Levine (Page’s Hill) imported 24 choice dogs and is known as the father of the breed in the United States. Catherine Coleman Moore (Sheltieland), the mother of the breed in the US, cleverly deleted “Collie” from the US pedigrees because the American Kennel Club would not recognize the “cross breeds”. There was considerable inbreeding at the beginning, and we owe a great debt to these and other early breeders who took such a significant interest in this breed and began to develop the modern Sheltie. However, all of our current Shelties share the genes of the few early Shelties and we were reminded that there really is no outcross because if you trace your pedigrees back far enough, you will arrive at the small handful of early dogs. At the end of the slide show, Tom presented his ten principles of breeding. Briefly these are: look to the dams of the stud dogs as it is the bitch that provides the complement to the sire and determines distinction among his offspring, look to the grandparents to see the potential of a breeding combination, evaluate the producing ability of a dog or bitch by the BEST offspring they produce, don’t knowingly introduce problems, be realistic, selection is the key, keep your numbers down (keep only the best, not the most), evaluate your dogs by comparing them to the best there is now, don’t add something to the gene pool if you don’t want it to show up. Much food for thought!! Tom also made mention of the threat to all of us by the animal rights extremists and encouraged all of us to be proactive in preserving our rights as fanciers.

We broke for lunch in the nearby café, where we not only enjoyed a delicious selection of sandwiches and accompaniments, but also had the opportunity to talk among ourselves about the morning. Most were amazed at how far our breed has come in less than 100 years!

The afternoon was spent outside on the beautiful grounds of the school where Tom presented his Virtue Match. Puppies and adult Shelties were afforded the opportunity to be "entered" in any of several classes: head profile, skull, muzzle, expression, outline, forequarters, hindquarters, and/or side gait. At the end of the match, Tom added an additional class: most efficient movement. Our volunteer reader, Nancy Everett, read the portion of the standard that dealt with the individual trait that we were looking at. The entrants were then exhibited to the three judges, who commented on how each individual compared to their interpretation of the standard. Participants were invited to go over the dogs themselves to feel what the judges were explaining and to better understand the standard themselves. Breaking down the standard into these small bites enables one to better appreciate the individual parts that go into making the whole. Ultimately a winner from each class was chosen and presented a certificate. We are proud that Granite State SSC members were winners of the best expression (Brenda Abrahamson and Cooper), best hindquarters (Martha Heckman and Toby), and best side gait (Martha Heckman and Toby).



Studying expression

We were pleased to be able to present this educational opportunity to fellow Sheltie enthusiasts. Tom commented that he saw many lovely dogs and that the seminar is about "raising the bar". He certainly challenged us to strive for the best we can. He also noted that just being together and sharing our dogs and experiences is something we all should be doing. One of our club members thanked the committee who worked on this project and said that it was very interesting and a great learning experience. That was our objective while planning this event and we thank all of those who contributed in any way to our successful day.