

Establishing Belgians in America by Mara Lee Jiles

During the first decade of the twentieth century, Malinois and Groenendael exports (the most popular of the varieties in that era) began to appear in the stud books of the Netherlands, France, Switzerland, Canada, United States, Argentina and Brazil. In 1911, two Groenendaels and two Malinois were registered by the AKC as “German Sheepdogs” (changed in the 1913 AKC stud books to “Belgian Sheepdogs,” a misnomer applied to Groenendaels, Malinois and Tervuren from 1913 until 1959, and to Groenendaels since 1959).

Josse Hanssens of Norwalk, Connecticut, imported these first AKC-registered Belgian Sheepdogs. A native of Belgium, Mr. Hanssens did not long retain these dogs; the two Malinois went to **L.I. De Winter of Guttenberg, New Jersey**. Mr. De Winter, also a native of Belgium, produced several litters from the Malinois under his **Winterview** kennel name (later famous for **German Shepherd Dogs**). The Groenendaels were sold to a Mr. Harris on Long Island. No current Belgians trace back to these first imports, although all trace back to their relatives, which remained in Europe.

After World War I, AKC registrations of Belgian Sheepdogs increased dramatically. In 1924, the first Belgian Sheepdog Club of America was formed and soon became a member club of the AKC. Active in this first BSCA were a number of individuals from Belgium: **Pierre Danco** of Englewood, New Jersey; **L.I. De Winter** of Guttenberg, New Jersey; **H.A. Ghislain** of Shreveport, Louisiana; and **Alphonse Geerearts** of Staten Island, New York.

A number of others also were instrumental in developing the breed here. **Peter Michiels** of Hicksville, New York, imported the Groenendaels **Marca de Ranst** and **Dick des Batards** from Belgium, and began his “Lilo” kennel. These two Groenendaels were ancestors of many American-bred Belgians. Calvin Augustin imported the Groenendaels **Jet** and **Marco** in 1923, followed in 1924 by **Pearl** of Belgium from **Georges Domus** “Belgium” kennel in Canada. (All became AKC conformation champions.) **Mr. Augustin**, originally from Canada, did much to popularize Belgians in the 1920s through his articles in dog magazines. **Walter Mucklow**, a lawyer in Jacksonville, Florida, popularized the Malinois through **GAZETTE** articles published in 1924 and '25, and briefly bred Malinois under the “Castlehead” kennel name.

Oliver Ormsby Page began his “Saint-Hubert” kennel in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, with a Groenendael from Peter Michiels named **La Terrible Lionne**. Mr. Page imported **Cesar** (born in 1920) from **Robert Henry's** “Select” kennel in Belgium. Cesar was a fawn color, but we don't know whether Cesar was a Malinois or Tervuren. (Cesar's sire was registered with Saint-Hubert as a Malinois, but his dam has not been traced.) Cesar and **La Terrible Lionne** produced several AKC registered fawns and blacks; both are ancestors of many of our dogs today.

The breed columns in the **GAZETTE** in the mid-1920s cite the Groenendael as the best-known of the varieties in the United States. The AKC stud books record Groenendaels, Tervuren and Malinois imports, and American-bred Tervuren born in Groenendael litters. The AKC standard for the Belgian Sheepdog from the 1920s through June 30, 1959, recognized two varieties of the breed, the Groenendael (strangely listed for color as a) black, b) fawn or c) any other color) and the Malinois. By the end of the 1920s, the Belgian Sheepdog had risen in popularity to rank among the top five breeds.

Then came the Great Depression and its devastating effect on everything, including dog breeding. The first Belgian Sheepdog Club of America ceased to exist. During the 1930s, occasional Malinois and Groenendaels were registered with the AKC as imports trickled into the country, and a few Groenendael litters were bred. But no Tervuren were registered in the AKC stud books after 1934. With so few numbers and such little interest in the breed, the Belgian Sheepdog was relegated to the Miscellaneous Class at AKC shows in the 1930s and '40s.

After World War II, a number of people new to the breed became interested in Groenendaels and developed their stock from descendants of the Tervuren and Groenendael imports of the early 1920s, as well as the Groenendael imports of the 1930s.

In 1949, a second Belgian Sheepdog Club of America was incorporated in Indiana. Also in 1949, **John Cowley** imported two Malinois and began his "Netherlair" kennel (all traces of previously AKC registered Malinois had been lost). Several were shown, and piqued the interest of various individuals enough that in the 1960s, additional Malinois kennels were established.

Rudy Robinson, whose "Candide" Groenendael kennel was started in 1947, is the individual primarily responsible for reintroducing the Tervuren in the United States. Through his correspondence with breed experts F.E. Verbanck and Mme. Aubry, Mr. Robinson became interested in promoting the Tervuren in this country. In 1953, three Tervuren arrived here from Mme. **Charlotte Mueller's** "Clos Saint-Jacques" kennel in France, followed in 1954 by four additional French imports from the Clos Saint-Clair and Clos Saint-Jacques kennels.

Within the Belgian Sheepdog Club of America, Rudy Robinson's numerous Groenendael imports of the late 1940s and early '50s were not gracefully accepted by the club's founders, who considered them inferior to their American-bred stock. Major problems quickly developed as additional varieties were imported. Belgian Sheepdog Club of America newsletters from May 1953 (the club's first newsletter) to July 1958 (when the varieties were separated into breeds) reveal that little was known about the history and genetics of the varieties or the role of past intervariety breedings, and nothing was printed about their common ancestry. The AKC standard, unchanged from the 1920s, listed only the Groenendael and the Malinois as varieties, yet Tervuren quickly began winning over Groenendaels in the show ring. The Tervuren import D'Jimmy du Clos Saint-Clair finished his championship in June 1958, and was the first Tervuren in the United States to achieve this title.

Separating the Varieties

A small but very vocal group of Groenendael breeders began protesting to the AKC that the other varieties were too different — perhaps not the same breed at all. American intervariety breedings of the 1950s became the focal point for the group's demands for separate breed status for the other varieties. The AKC responded by sending out a questionnaire asking Belgian Sheepdog owners for their opinions on intervariety breeding and conformation competition. Less than half of the BSCA's members responded, but in July 1958, the AKC Board of Directors voted to separate the varieties into breeds. Groenendael owners wished to keep the name "Belgian Sheepdog" for their breed; the appellation "Belgian" was added to the Malinois and Tervuren names.

At the time of the separation, Belgian Sheepdog and Malinois imports were restricted to having three generations of the same variety for AKC registration. It was then believed that the short coat of the Malinois, being controlled by a dominant gene, would continue to appear after this number of generations, and the recessive fawn and grey Tervuren colors would not appear in Belgian Sheepdog litters. This has not proven to be the case. In 1980, the three-generation restriction was extended to include the Tervuren imports, as the AKC Foreign Registration Department noted that Belgian Champion Qu'Rack du Bois de l'Emblise, a Malinois, was the sire of several Belgian Malinois imports, and was also the grandsire of several Belgian Tervuren imports.

Since the AKC separation of the varieties into breeds, many changes have taken place. In 1959, the Belgian Sheepdog Club of America maintained its AKC breed club status, and the American Belgian Tervuren Club was started by Bob and Barbara Krohn (AKC breed and obedience judges and breeders of the "Fauve Charbonne" Belgian Tervuren). This club, whose motto "A well-balanced Tervuren has a Ch. on one end and a UDT on the other," is the AKC parent club today.

The Malinois, few in numbers in 1958, was relegated to the Miscellaneous Class (while continuing to have individual AKC stud book registration) until 1965, when sufficient numbers allowed it back into the Working Group. (In 1983, all three breeds became part of the Herding Group). In March 1992, the American Belgian Malinois Club received AKC parent club status.

Three separate AKC standards were approved and became effective July 1, 1959. Almost identical in content originally, modifications made since 1983 have begun to reflect differences, primarily in size, although the dogs themselves are (and should remain) anatomically identical. All three standards describe the dogs as alert, well-balanced, medium-sized and elegant in appearance.

Breeders and owners of the Belgian Shepherd Dogs will tell you that they are not for everyone. Active and intelligent, they are easily trained, but can be a trial for the person who does not have the time to work and play with them. They are aloof with strangers, but should not be fearful or aggressive. Very devoted to their owners, they do not make good kennel dogs.

Endowed with the natural ability to do whatever is required of them, the Belgians are thinking dogs, which means that once they learn something, they want to get on to something else. If forced into repetition, they tend to become "creative." They are eager to please and very sensitive. If you use a heavy hand on them, they will forgive, but never forget.

With the advent of the AKC's herding program, the Belgian Malinois, Sheepdog and Tervuren are being trained to do the work of their ancestors. American fanciers are working their dogs in all three styles of AKC-sanctioned herding: boundary (or tending), fetching and driving.

The Belgian Tervuren, whose parent club has long emphasized multiple achievements, consistently earns the most conformation and obedience titles of the three Belgian Shepherd Dogs. (See sidebar, "1991 Performance Statistics for the Belgian Shepherd Dogs.")

The Malinois has received quite a bit of attention in the last decade through its work in the military (See "The Dogs of Desert Storm" in the June 1991 GAZETTE), drug detection agencies, search and rescue operations and police forces around the country. Consequently, quite a number of Malinois have been imported to the U.S. in the last several years.

The history of the Belgian Shepherd Dogs has been one of closely interwoven ties between the varieties rather than separate or parallel development. The modern Belgian Sheepdog (Groenendael) owes its existence to its Tervuren, Malinois and, ultimately, its Laekenois ancestors as much as to its Groenendael ancestors. The modern Belgian Tervuren can still be traced to M. Corbeel's Tom and Poes, but its Groenendael and Malinois ancestors are predominate. The genealogies of today's Belgian Malinois have remained the most consistent, but still we find they have Tervuren, Groenendael and Laekenois ancestors.

In the rest of the world's kennel clubs, the Belgian Shepherd Dogs have remained one breed. Although the AKC separated the Belgians into three breeds 33 years ago, the ancestry of American imports continues to reinforce interdependency, as is evident in the occasional puppies that more closely resemble one of the other Belgian Shepherd Dog breeds than the breed of their parents.

Recent opinions and recommendations of European breed experts who have judged our Belgians have alerted many American breeders to the need to establish more uniformity of correct breed type. The AKC's new policy on importation of frozen semen provides a marvelous and truly exciting opportunity for American breeders in general, and Belgian Shepherd Dog enthusiasts in particular, to use some of today's top producers. The AKC's three-generation restriction on imports also applies to foreign semen importation, however, and limits the selection drastically for American Groenendael and Tervuren breeders, as most of the world's top producers today, as in the past, are not the result of three generations of the same variety.*

Today, unlike a decade ago, there are more breed-specific books dealing with the history, genealogies and genetics of the Belgian Shepherd Dogs. More individuals are also realizing that, because of their shared genetics, a health problem in one of the AKC Belgian breeds is a problem shared by all three breeds. By working together, the three AKC parent clubs could secure the kind of future the Belgians deserve.

*The three-generation restriction on imports and imported frozen semen was lifted on June 13, 1995 when the AKC voted in a new foreign registration policy for all breeds of dogs. Provided the dog is exported with a certified export certificate accompanied by a three-generation pedigree tendered from a primary country registry, it will be registered by the AKC as the breed (variety in the case of Belgians) it is registered as in its original country. This decision took place after four years of negotiation with the American Belgian Tervuren Club as well as because of a high number of problems with the authentication of pedigrees of the imports of other breeds by the AKC's foreign registration department. Thus while imports can now be registered exactly as they are in their homeland regardless of the variety of the Belgian Shepherd Dog parents, all American-bred Belgian puppies still must be registered under the breed name of their parents regardless of their inherited coat type or color.

Ms. Jiles owns Belgian Sheepdogs and Belgian Tervuren, and has spent over 12 years researching the history and genealogy of the Belgian Shepherd Dogs.
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1991 Performance Statistics for the Belgian Shepherd Dogs

Title	Malinois	Sheepdog	Tervuren
Ch.	36	100	137
CD	21	63	101
CDX	4	26	38
UD	2	8	17
TD	3	10	18
TDX	0	1	3
OTCh	0	1	2
HT	3	13	17
PT	0	9	9
HS	0	3	5
HI	0	2	2
HX	0	1	2
BIS	0	1	6
Group I	7	15	60
Rank (in individual registrations)	100	85	89