



## **Brief History of the Greyhound**

The greyhound has its origins deep rooted in the lands that created earliest civilization. He first flourished in a desert-like environment with little herbage, where he hunted and relied on speed to hunt and escape enemies.

Murals and paintings suggest that a dog strikingly similar to the greyhound of today was around some 4,000 years ago.

As a vital hunter, the greyhound had been the subject of art and lore throughout the ages. He was the source of sport and entertainment in the ancient civilizations of Egypt, Persia, Greece and Rome and later England and Ireland. Pharaohs rated them first among all animals, both as pets and hunters.

The birth of a greyhound in early Arabian culture was second in importance only to the birth of a son. Persians believed they were the only dogs allowed in the next world and privileged enough to give information and evidence against mankind.

Cleopatra fancied them as much as she did her lovers, perhaps to the chagrin of Marc Antony and other Roman suitors.

They are the only breed of dog mentioned in the Bible (Proverbs 30:29-31), and it's a most complimentary reference at that.

The Roman Empire was no less impressed by greyhounds, making them the subject of much art. Before that, the Greeks carved greyhounds on their coins, which was only fitting because they coined the name "greekhound" from whence the word "greyhound" may have come. The name certainly did not derive from the animal's coat color, which can be black, white, fawn, ticked, blue any of the half-dozen shades of brindle, or almost any combination of these-but never gray.

As civilization migrated to the British Isles, the greyhound lost none of his stature. There is documentation that greyhounds were in England as far back as 3,500 years ago, and a 1959 uncovering of the Avebury Stone Circle, Europe's largest prehistoric monument, revealed a skeleton of a greyhound-like dog. An Old Welsh proverb proclaimed that you might know a gentleman by his horse, his hawk and his greyhound. Saxon tribal chiefs often were given greyhounds among state gifts of honor.

Greyhounds even became implications in military politics. When King Richard II was captured in the Castle of Flint, his pet greyhound Mathe, immediately ran to Richard's bitter rival, the Earl of Lancaster (later Henry IV), and licked his hand – a positive gesture of betrayal.

The darkest chapter of the greyhound's history unfolded in medieval times, when in the year 1014 Canute became King of England and enacted the Forest Laws. These statutes included a clause that said only noblemen could own and hunt with greyhounds. Merry Old England was hardly merry for the poor commoner who heretofore had relied on game caught by greyhounds to feed his family. Every 40 days violators were brought to special courts where they were fined or, if they refused to snitch on neighbors, flogged and tortured.

Sometimes a peasant's silence cost him a hand or a foot at the chopping block. His greyhounds were then either mutilated so they could no longer hunt or, if royal color (white or predominantly so), given to the nobility.

These brutal persecutions somehow endured for centuries. The more hideous section of the Forest Laws were finally abolished in the 1700's by Queen Elizabeth I, a die-hard fan of the breed who would later initiate the first formal rules of greyhound coursing. Little wonder that greyhound racing championed its fundamental form of hunting and coursing by such female royalty as Cleopatra and Queen Elizabeth, is known as the Sport of Queens.

Greyhounds found their way to America pretty much the same way we people did-out of necessity more than anything else. Millions of pesky jackrabbits, with appetites bigger than the Midwestern breadbasket they scourged, were eating farmers out of house and home back in the late 1800's, until someone wisely suggested that greyhounds could be the farmers salvation. Ireland and England soon after exported all the four-legged exterminators the farmers needed and the greyhound quickly, as in its nature, took his rightful place in American history for helping tame the West. Thus, the greyhound became a common sight on farms in Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma and Texas.

America's competitive spirit led to the discovery that greyhounds were also a great source of sport and entertainment. General George Armstrong Custer was among the many of his time to own a string of greyhounds for sport and hunting, and had he stayed with his pooches and chased rabbits instead of Sioux warriors, he might have saved his scalp.

Modern technology and this marvelous, ancient breed joined hands and gave rise to a brand new sport; in 1919, an engineer named O.P. Smith perfected a mechanical lure and successfully demonstrated it at Emeryville, California.

Since then, greyhound racing blossomed into a major spectator sport worldwide conducted in such countries as Ireland, England, Australia, Spain, Italy, Mexico, Indonesia, Macau and Guam, with many other nations.

At its height in the United States, greyhound racing was a national spectator sport. Over the past two decades, however, commercial racing has experienced an economic decline, and now represents less than 1% of all wagers made each year in the United States. Oregon, Connecticut, Kansas, Colorado, and Wisconsin have closed their racing tracks, while seven states still hold pari-mutuel racing: Arizona, Iowa, Arkansas, Texas, Alabama, West Virginia and Florida.

The first track to promote greyhounds as pets may have been Seabrook Greyhound Park in New Hampshire. The American Greyhound adoption movement, however, is really considered to have started in 1982 when Ron Walsek of St. Petersburg, Florida, who worked on a greyhound farm and local track, started REGAP (Retired Greyhounds as Pets). This first all-volunteer, non-profit Greyhound placement organization in the United States was formed to educate the public about the true nature of the greyhound and to find homes for the greyhounds that retired from or failed to qualify for the racetrack. The idea caught on and other groups started forming across the country. As the adoption movement began to spread, newspapers and magazines published a plethora of articles and slowly began to change the public's perception of the greyhound breed. The adoption movement has certainly been a success, and more and more greyhounds are now being placed as pets.

Greyhound adoption is becoming a worldwide effort. Hopefully someday soon, every adoptable greyhound will find a loving home.