

A Bit 'O History

These Dogs Rule Belgium's Canals

By Isabel Ormiston

They call him the "Little Skipper of the Belgian Canals," and it is not a misnomer by any means. For the schipperke, one of the most popular breeds on the other side of the ocean, has a certain something about

his bearing which gives him the right to command. And his word, or rather his own special "woof," is respected in those lands of watery transportation.



No one seems to know just where, and how he originated, but it seems to be the accepted opinion that the schipperke (pronounced in good form, skeeperkay) first broke into the lineup of national and international dogdom some three or four hundred years ago.

Even the name's origin has been lost in the scuffle of many years of unrest and wars. But the Belgian mind is very fond of the diminutive, and it is to be expected that they should call him something whose ending denotes smallness, yet dignity. And since his particular practice, in the past especially, has been to ride the boats and barges of the Belgian and Hollandish canals, his present appellation has a direct relation to his station in life.

The Schipperke Club was founded in 1888, and it is from that time that the official name of the breed comes down to the present. Up to that period in history this dog was known by a number of names, the more popular of these being spitzke, [little spitz]. But that was too often confounded with the German dog of the same name. So far as known there is no relationship between the two breeds, so the name surely was wrong when applied to the little fellows of Belgium. There is not even a similarity in appearance between the schipperke and the spitz.

If the schipperke bears a resemblance to any dog it is to the much larger shepherd, but even then, there are great differences to be noted. But the little captain has the same sharp expression, this being

induced by the peculiar set of the ears, and the shape of the snout. His hind quarters, and the slope of his back are not unrelated to the same parts of the shepherd.

Perhaps this comes from the fact that the schipperke was used for herding many years ago in his native Belgium. It is reasonable to imagine that this work developed in him certain muscles that distinguish the shepherd from all other breeds.



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This is the dog whose sons and daughters have been reclaiming to Europe a breed always popular with common folk

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At one time the schipperke was known as the "schapocke," meaning little shepherd. That was about sixty years ago (abt 1866), and the dog then weighed about thirty pounds, being much smaller than the accepted sheep dog, and quite some larger than the largest schipperke of to-day, which weighs no more than eighteen pounds.

Possibly there might be some records by which to locate the little skipper, but he was a dog of the peasant folk, and consequently his presence was overlooked by the historians of the dog world. The nearest approach to anything authentic lies in the scant knowledge that it was in the Louvain region that he was used to herd sheep, and that he bore a very striking resemblance to the Belgian sheep dog of Gronendael.

The status of the schipperke as a fashionable pet dates only from the year 1885, when Queen Marie Henriette, the wife of Leopold II, visiting the Brussels dog show, was so charmed by a schipperke named "Black" that she then and there acquired him. In time she became very attached to him, and as she went driving with him beside her, the ladies of Brussels soon adopted the schipperke. Previously he had been, essentially, a dog of the people, with whom he had been long popular. Although small, he is a most efficient watchdog, vigilant, ferocious and watchful as a shepherd.

A few schipperkes still are to be seen on the Dutch canals, as the boats go to and fro between the two countries. If Holland originated anything in the way of the schipperke, it is the large brown specimens, not admitted to registry anywhere but in Holland. They are larger and coarser than the black.

The word schipperke is always mispronounced in this country and in England. Over here it is misspelled, also, in nearly every catalogue of a dog show. The word is Flemish, and I had it correctly pronounced for



me by Flemish people. Here it is generally pronounced skipper-kee, and is so given, even in books. The correct pronunciation is skeeper-que (que as in French).

Sometimes we hear it said here with "sh" instead of "k," but the Flemish "k" is hard like our own. In fact, the two languages, as written, are not unlike. The English solve the pronunciation problem by referring to them as "skips"--- not a bad plan. Certainly this dog is the skipper of his class.

*Most of us old timers know the story of the schipperke but I thought our new members would be interested in learning a little history on our breed. I hope you will enjoy this article because it was written in **1926** by the leading founder of the Schipperke Club of America, Miss Isabell Ormiston for the American Kennel Gazette.*

Submitted by: Paula Steen