

Working Norwich In The United States

by James Fagan Scharnberg

During the early years of the early Norwich and Norfolk Terrier Club, when the breed was recognized as Drop-Ear or Prick-Ear, the author of this article contributed much to newsletters in both articles and cartoons. Jim always had what are now recognized as Norfolk Terriers.

Norwich arrived in the United States on a sporting note, and to this day well justify the appellation '*working terrier*'. Robert Strawbridge of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, brought the first one, a purchase from Frank Jones, home with him in 1914 to use with the Radnor Hunt. This terrier set the pattern for those to follow. He proved a fine worker, and was used by J. Watson Webb, M.F.H. Shelburn Foxhounds, Vermont, in breeding his own strain of small and varminty working terriers. The early arrivals became a fad with the formal-style foxhunting fraternity from Pennsylvania to Virginia. They were first known as the 'Jones' terriers, and one still hears his Norwich called a Jonesy by some people in this area.

The late Plunket Stewart, M.F.H. The Cheshire in Pennsylvania, used Jonesys to bolt foxes. He had them 'on call' and two were brought when wanted from his wife's kennel. The late Eugene Reynal used terriers acquired from Jones to bolt foxes for his privately maintained pack in Dover, New York. Col. Sterling Larrabee, ex M.F.H. Old Dominion, saw his first Jones when Reynal brought his pair down to Virginia in 1923. They were very rare over here in those days, and it wasn't until 1930 that Col. Larrabee was able to get some of his own. He seldom used them because of the difficulty of getting them to the spot when needed. They were effective workers, however. On one occasion his huntsman pulled the terrier out by the tail, it firmly locked on the fox's lower jaw. Larrabee feels that many of the 'improved' Norwich seen at recent shows are too big to be carried by a man on horseback.

Terriers are not presently used in formal foxhunting over here, except in a very occasional way. Louis Murdoch, when he hunted with the Essex in New Jersey, carried a Norwich in a terrier bag and dug foxes with a few diehards while the rest of the Hunt moved on. Donald Fournier (Bethways) has carried the terrier bag Mrs. Warren Thayer, our Club founder, gave him. But these are the exceptions rather than the rule. There are far fewer foxes here and much trapping and shooting for fur and bounty. A fox to ground (or in the case of the gray fox, up a tree!) is considered beaten. Hounds are made much of and moved off to draw afresh. It is a rare pack that accounts for more than three to five brace killed in a season.

As utility workers in the country Norwich are hard to beat. My dog arrived from England a four months puppy, and with no training nailed his first of many rats in the Mayor's park in New York City two months later. My bitch, a shy one, is not so hunting, and soon learned from her mate. These dogs are natural workers. Much enjoyment can be had working them on rats and other 'small deer'. They can trail well and will thoroughly beat heavy cover, telling the truth about any hole they find. Ratting is great sport. They quickly learn to work one near and one far on hedge or stream, and can be handled like a pack in miniature to trail up to one over some distance before killing it in a culvert or in the open. A check of feed storage bins, feeding troughs, and fowl runs after dark will always yield a few.

Woodchuck hunting is the nearest thing we have to badger over here and this tough, deep-burrowing rodent is a good test of a terrier. Weighing anywhere from five to twenty pounds, they can be found in cornfields and orchards all summer. It takes at least two Norwich to kill a full-grown woodchuck, and if he gets to ground he must be dug out. Their earths, the bane of foxhunters, have a main entrance and several exits for escape.

My area abounds with opossum, which are nocturnal and mainly fruit eating, good sport to hunt up on a late evening walk. They have a good scent and the dogs trail and 'tree' two or three a week. The opossum is rather slow-witted, but a good climber with his prehensile tail. Some are caught on the ground, but I am happier when the chase ends in treeing this mild-mannered fellow. When caught fair, he will play dead to fool his enemies, hence the expression playing 'Possum'. He dens up in hollow trees or old chuck earths.

The gray and red squirrel in excess do great harm to the song and game bird population. They are deadly efficient nest robbers. My dogs have become excellent markers. Here the dogs are used to run up and bay the quarry, following him below till the hunter can close up and shoot him or rattle him to the edge of the woods so that can nail him when he makes a dash for it. The grays are great eating, with meat like the dark meat of a chicken.

Terriers seem unstoppable in briars when running rabbits, and I have found Norwich no exception. Our cottontail, really a miniature hare and not a true rabbit, nests above ground unless he can find an untenanted skunk or chuck earth. The dogs usually drive out in the open any rabbits they find. Mine have killed two themselves this summer, one in the midst of a briar patch and one in the open which they outflanked. I have not used them purposely with the gun, but if I did so they would furnish ninety percent of the game shot.

The sport I have enjoyed with my pair has been mainly in walking up the quarry. There has been little formal training beyond a rare lift and cast to view, heaped on praise when they are clever and occasionally cooking the prey for them. My ideal would be three to five a bit later on. To me they are truly 'multum in parvo', grand small dogs.