

# Retrievers of the Past...

By Joule Charney

## *FC-CFC Ace High Scamp of Windsweep*

MANY OF US have gone from the field to a cocktail party or dinner, usually with the opportunity to change attire in between. Dog trucks, pickups and SUVs containing dog crates parked outside the social venues is no big deal..... now-a-days. We have experienced the quizzical looks by patrons who have no clue why such a strange parking menagerie would materialize.

Now picture a formal affair at a private estate in the 1950s or 60s, surrounded by a multitude of appropriately 'stately' vehicles. A dog truck pulls up in front of the house and the driver is greeted by, who else, the butler.

The ensuing scenario was one of renowned retriever trainer William 'Billy' Wunderlich's favorite memories involving his client of thirteen years, Mrs. Grace Lambert. This professional trainer-owner pair was one of the most

“  
Affectionately  
known as RUM...  
”

successful in retriever history. Mrs. Lambert acquired her first field Labrador, Ace High Scamp of Windsweep, callname 'Rum,' in 1957, after already establishing herself as a prominent show breeder.

Mrs. Lambert liked to attend field trials, frequently accompanying Billy in his dog truck. On one occasion, a cocktail party following a The Labrador Club trial on Long Island, Mrs. Lambert insisted that Billy take her in his truck. They pulled up in front of the home of A.P. and Sarah Loening, who owned some successful derby and field trial dogs. Mr. Loening was an early leader in the aircraft industry, a founder and director of the company that would become Grumman Corporation, and former Mayor of Southampton.

Billy was informed by the butler: "Deliveries in the back." Ignoring the hint, Billy exited



This page, Rum (second from the left) with the four other Lambert-owned, Wunderlich-trained dogs who qualified for the 1966 National Open. Right, photo courtesy the Wunderlich family.

his truck and walked around to the passenger side. Again, he was told 'where to go,' in the same words as before. Continuing to tune out the guidance, Billy opened one of the dog boxes and removed a small stepstool he had made to help Mrs. Lambert in and out of the truck. "Mrs. Lambert emerged very elegantly dressed, asked Billy to pick her up in a couple of hours, and went into the cocktail party," as the story is told in *The Official Book of the Labrador Retriever*. "When Billy returned and Mrs. Lambert came out of the house, the butler preceded her, and, without a word, walked to the truck, opened the dog box and put the stepstool in front of the truck door."

Billy finished three dual champions and ten field champions during his tenure as Mrs. Lambert's trainer, including Rum, who completed his career with 101 Open Points. Rum established himself early as Co-High Point Derby Dog in 1959. He qualified to run in six consecutive Nationals, in 1961 through 1966, and was a Finalist in 1962, 1963, and 1965, according to retriever historian Sue Reynolds, who also is a field

trial dog owner. "Rum was inducted into the Retriever Field Trial Hall of Fame with a group of 'oldtimers' in 1996, and was one of the very stylish Labradors," points out David Smith, Executive Director of The Bird Dog Foundation, Inc.

None of the dogs acquired by Mrs. Lambert had titles at the time of their purchase. Both Billy and Mrs. Lambert believed that "a Labrador should look like a Labrador," according to *The Official Book*, which factored into the dogs that were purchased. Even the field dogs in the Mrs. Lambert's Harrowby Kennel reportedly were good representatives of the breed. Mrs. Lambert purchased Rum before he was six months old from Scott Fennell of Ontario. His sire was 1955 NFC-AFC-CFC Cork of Oakwood Lane, who was an exceptionally prolific and successful sire. Rum's dam was Queen Ace, owned by Harold Coward, who was out of his bitch, Canadian Dual Champion Blyth's Ace of Spades. According to retriever historian Richard Halstead, Rum was bred only four or five times.



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Mrs. Lambert founded her kennel in 1950, in Princeton, New Jersey. Her first Labrador was given to her by a friend because he ran away repeatedly. One of the first three dogs she purchased was Ch. Harrowby Rupert Channel Point, after whom, possibly, she chose the kennel's name.

Mrs. Lambert died in 1993, at the age of 93, and was a philanthropist and breeder of champion horses, as well as dogs, according to her obituary in *The New York Times*. She was the widow of Gerard Barnes Lambert, her second husband, whose family fortune was built on Listerine mouthwash and the manufacturer that became part of the Warner-Lambert family. Mr. Lambert died in 1967.

Billy and his second wife Ruth, nicknamed Pert, were inducted into the Retriever Field Trial Hall of Fame in 1994 and 2003, respectively. Pert was very much involved in amateur field trials with her first husband, the late Roger Vasselais, according to Billy's son Mike.

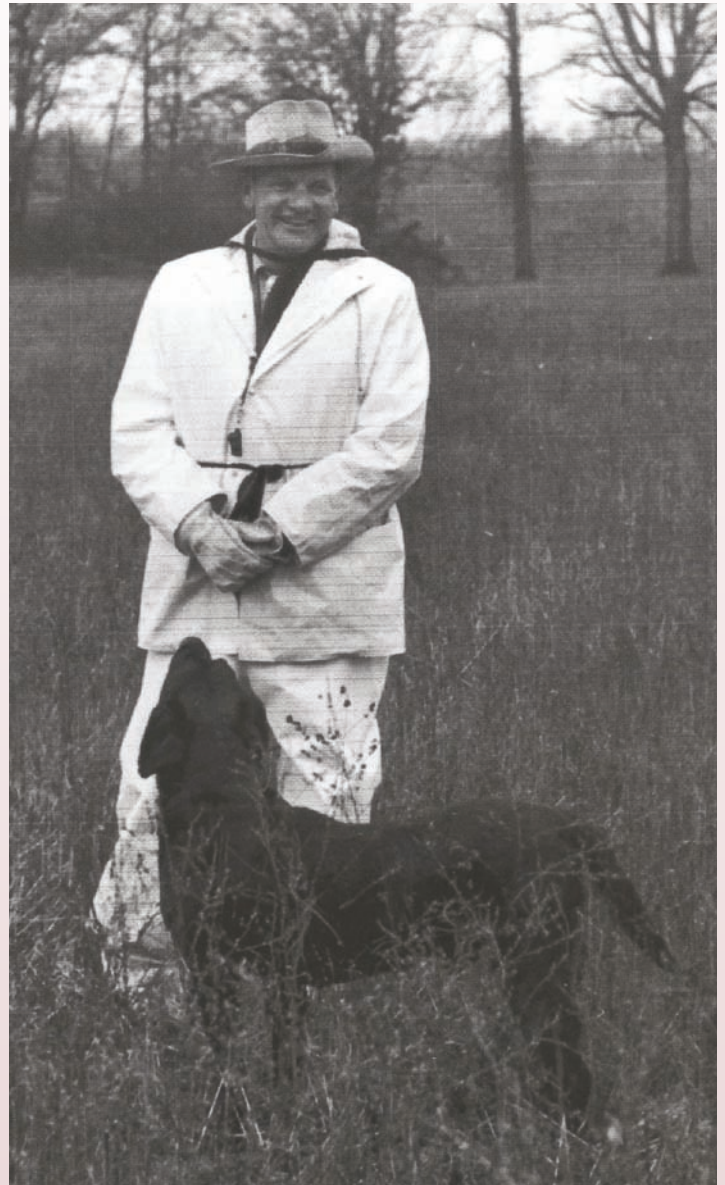
Billy's name lives on in retriever record books but also within the name of an existing business 'Bill Wunderlich's North Oaks Kennels' in Hugo, Minnesota. Billy's son Skip took over the kennel, which now is devoted primarily to boarding and grooming, and runs it with his wife Charlene. Although not involved in field trials, Skip does some obedience and gundog training.

Skip's older brother Mike was the one of Billy's three children who was most involved in their father's retriever work and also the one most closely connected to Mrs. Lambert. He didn't get to spend much time with his father after his graduation from high school in 1964 until 1971, when he moved to Philadelphia. While living there in his 20s, Mike was close enough to Mrs. Lambert's Princeton estate to visit regularly, on his own and with his Dad.

His father went to Princeton every Spring and Fall for six to eight weeks, when he was not on the field trial circuit or back at his home in Minnesota, explains Mike. "He would run field trials out East so Mrs. Lambert would have a chance to see her dogs work." Mike went on the road several times with his Dad and did a lot of the gunning during training and the trials. Billy's program utilized about twenty-five to thirty live pheasants and about the same number of live pigeons, every day. "Money was not an issue for birds, travel, equipment" or anything else needed to do the best job, Mike remembers. His father was under contract to Mrs. Lambert, who paid for everything he needed.

"Mrs. Lambert had a whole strong of black Labs," Mike recalls, estimating the number at six to eight "very good looking Labs." But, his father's reputation and start in the retriever world began with Golden Retrievers, he notes. "He probably was the top Golden trainer in the world," at one time. Billy was the trainer behind the 1951 National Field Champion, a Golden named Ready Always of Marianhill, owned by Mahlon B. Wallace, Jr. His first retriever was a Golden puppy, given to him by an amateur field-trialer named Ralph Bolt, when he was around sixteen or seventeen. "He was pretty much self-taught," but, he also was mentored by the famous professional trainer Paul Bakewell. Billy was the trainer and handler of a second National Field Champion in 1958, Nilo Possibility, owned by K.K. Williams.

Although the Wunderlich-Lambert trainer-owner relationship did not yield a National Field Champion, it did yield nine field champions, in addition to Rum, all of whom qualified to run in Nationals. Duxback Scooter qualified for six, as did Rum, and Happy Playboy qualified for seven. Others who qualified for Nationals were Lord Beaver of Cork,



Top, William 'Billy' Wunderlich and Mrs. Grace Lambert at the 1962 National Open. Right, William 'Billy' Wunderlich and Rum. Both photos courtesy the Wunderlich family. Opposite page, watercolor by Sheila Cunningham courtesy Retriever Field Trial Hall of Fame, Grand Junction, TN.

Nethercroft Nemo of Nascopie, Flint's Nifty Arrow, Nassau's Nar of Minnewaska, Danny's Coal Black Slate, Markwell's Rambling Rebel, and Bel Air Lucky Boy.

Mike describes his father as a "great people person," both with clients and friends. Ironically, Mike describes his relationship with his father as 'not close,' which he believes partly is because his Dad was gone for months at a time, traveling in the dog truck. "He was very good at what he did," adds Mike, pointing out he was "very demanding on the dogs."

Although Rum was one of Mrs. Lambert's favorite dogs, Mike does not know how he obtained his callname. After Rum was retired from competition, Mike personally witnessed how close Mrs. Lambert was with this dog. "She used to feed Rum right off the table, from her plate. She would take a bite. He would take a bite." Would she actually use the same utensils? Yes, recalls Mike. "She would use the same silverware. Same fork. Same spoon." ■

### Tenacular Dogs – Joule Charney

Joule resides in Paradise, California. Joule has been a contributing writer for Retriever News for five years. The *Retrievers of the Past...* feature series is published four times a year: May, July, September and October. Visit Joule Charney online at [www.tenacular.com](http://www.tenacular.com).

