

1992

Charles Henry Morgan



Charles Morgan with 1950 National Champion Beautywoods Tamarack

Charley devoted his life to retrievers. No other person had competed in retriever trials as long as he had and with the success that he had. Yet he will be remembered, not for the greatest number of years, or the fine record in the book, but as a man who loved retrievers, loved all his dogs. As much as anyone could, he genuinely loved the dogs he worked with, loved every one of them, lived with them night and day, tried to understand them, and it is that devotion which made him the great trainer he was.

Charles Henry Morgan was born in Lamar, MO, on July 29, 1894. He attended school there and in Joplin, MO, and later attended Missouri University from 1914-1917, when he left to join the 32nd division of the 147th Field Artillery. At the University he pitched on the baseball team. All his life Charley was a great baseball fan, and a fan of all sports - football, boxing, basketball.

He became interested in hunting and hunting dogs in South Dakota, where he had gone to work for an uncle in the lumber business after the first World War. In 1929 he returned to Joplin to open a sporting goods store, and he started training a few hunting dogs as a sideline.

In 1935 Charley went east for a few months in the winter to help Tony Bliss train his Chesapeake and he competed in the early trials on Long Island. Then he returned to Joplin and became a full-time professional trainer. In 1939 he moved to Milwaukee, leaving Wisconsin for a year in 1941 to become an instructor in the Army Canine Corps in California. When he returned in 1942, he moved to Random Lake and lived there the rest of his life.

The cold statistics in our record books show that Charley handled three National winners: in 1944 - Sheltercove Beauty, a Golden female owned by Dr. L. M. Evans, in 1945 - Black Magic of Audlon, Labrador female owned by Mr. Mahlon B. Wallace, Jr., and in 1950 - Beautywoods Tamarack, Golden male owned by Dr. Evans.

Charley trained and handled six Country Life Trophy winners in the years between 1942 and 1961, when he won it with his own Rosie (Cream City Co-ed) qualifying her for the National a year later. That year, 1962, she was the youngest dog in the National, and he was the oldest handler. Charley finished many a field champion, Labs, Golden Retrievers and Chesapeake Retrievers, he trained and handled them all.

In 1945 Charley Morgan was awarded the Gaines Award for the Outstanding Trainer of the Year. That year he twice won all four places in licensed Derby stakes with the following dogs: Black Magic of Audlon, Black Market of Audlon (both owned by the Mahlon Wallaces), Firelei's Hornet and Kiska Pete (both owned by H. E. LeGear).

As well as a trainer of dogs, Charley was a trainer of trainers. Eleven different men worked for and with Charley, leaving him to start careers of their own as trainers. Probably no man on earth had more he could teach to the student willing to listen and learn. For Charley was an old-time trainer. He believed that every dog sent to him was worthy of being trained, and he tried to make the best he could out of every dog he worked with. He despised of today's trainers who flunk a dog out when he doesn't fit into their training program, and tell the owner to buy another dog. Charley believed it was a trainer's job to fit his training program to the dog, otherwise he was not worthy of being called a professional trainer.

Charley's dogs were happy dogs - he admits that perhaps they were a "rowdy lot", and perhaps their line manners were not the best, but they worked gaily and showed that they loved their trainer as much as he loved them.

Charley was a great letter writer, and there are many, many people all over the country who will remember him for his written words, often amusing, often eloquent, he could express himself as no one else could with a combination of Missouri backwoods and University educated speech.

Fortunately, many of his words and thoughts have been recorded in his book "Charles Morgan on Retrievers," published by Abercrombie & Fitch. Tragically, Charley did not live to see his book, which was really the culmination of his life's work.

When asked to write, to what he attributed his success, Charley wrote, "I think that as a dog man, I am not especially gifted, nor do I have any revolutionary ideas. I go along with the old ideas that have been proven, adding some ideas I might have picked up along the way. I probably tolerate more unruliness, and punish dogs less, than many other trainers. I have been blessed with good dogs and patient owners, two essentials a professional trainer needs to win."