

Origins and History

I have heard much discussion and read a great many books from people who concern themselves with the art of civil courtesy. If they knew Camden, they would know something not very far from the ideal exists.

William F. Buckley Jr. (1925–2008)

This book is about canines—the species *Canis lupus familiaris*, domestic dog—and specifically about that breed now known as the Boykin spaniel. The story of this little brown dog has been linked to humans since its unexplained appearance outside a church in Spartanburg, South Carolina. From that point onward, people have recognized the little brown spaniel’s exceptional field ability, its problem-solving personality, and its affection for people.

A Boykin spaniel is unmistakable, if a person knows what to look for. It is a little dog with a spaniel’s floppy ears and a liver-brown coat, often with sun-bleached reddish fringes. The coat may vary from kinky to straight, and eye color may range from dark brown to copper to bright yellow. Docked tails are a breed standard. Even more distinctive is this spaniel’s master-winning personality. Adapting so well to the needs of different family members, the Boykin spaniel becomes everybody’s favorite pet.

In large part the history of this breed is a history of the human owners and breeders who, since the dog’s appearance among them, have realized they have been graced with something special in their lives—a hunting dog that the warmth of the home fires will not spoil, a hard-charging retriever that curls up on the couch, and a trick artist that seems to teach itself.

“Boykin” is the surname of one of South Carolina’s oldest and most widespread families. It is also the name of a small settlement on a mill pond between Camden and Sumter in the state’s Midlands region. And “Boykin” is the name given to an increasing number of aristocratic, but spirited, little brown dogs that are gaining fame and growing in numbers

across America, far beyond the breed's original realm, where it has been "knighted" as the official dog of the state of South Carolina.

The Wateree Created a Reason for Boykin Spaniels

Throughout history water has played a central role in the stories of humankind and the animal kingdom in general. The great Wateree River, which flows through the Midlands of South Carolina, created a primeval environment lush with fish, game, and forests—a lure to hunters and a haven for the hunted. In the early 1900s sportsmen such as the extended Boykin family and their friends in the Camden area sought constantly to improve their access to the waterway, their hunting methods, and their hunting success. Dogs gave hunting parties a needed edge in hunting ducks and geese in this watery environment. These conditions set the stage for discovery of the Boykin spaniel's progenitor and spurred development of the breed.

Hunting parties with dogs grew out of Camden society as naturally as the cypress and tupelo trees had emerged from the surrounding swamps. Since colonial times the hunt has been an institution in South Carolina. Camden, the oldest interior city of the Carolina colony—and to many the most gracious—was and remains the heart of Carolina hunt country. The hunt was a noble way for some young gentlemen to supplement the family's fare; for others it was just pure sport.

Like all South Carolina, the Camden area experienced an economic catastrophe after the end of the Civil War, which continued until the coming of well-heeled Yankees as seasonal tourists. Eager for mild winters in a place where they could spend their newly earned industrial dollars, northerners came in increasing numbers from the 1870s through the 1940s. This winter migration ushered in an era of great Camden hotels, where whole families stayed for weeks at a time. While the women shopped and took care of the children, the husbands engaged in commercially arranged hunts along the Wateree. The local planter class included families with names such as Boykin, Cantey, and Chesnut, who established a mannerly ambience that charmed the northern vacationers, making them want to establish their winter homes in Camden. The Buckleys of New York were among this group of northern families who wintered in the Camden area.

In the early 1900s wagons and wooden boats—not the four-by-fours sportsmen use today—afforded hunters access to rugged river landings along the game-rich corridor of the Wateree River, a slow-moving stream with high banks that wends its way through the rich farmlands of Kershaw County and beyond. Boat travel limited what hunters could carry. Carrying the typical heavyweight retriever—primarily a Chesapeake

then—was awkward in a craft loaded with men, guns, provisions, and other gear, particularly if that dog had to jump into the water and reboard the boat with a downed duck.

Hunters along the Wateree at that time sought an able dog that would not “rock the boat” and could handle all the work in the water as well as flushing turkeys and retrieving and tracking a variety of game on land. L. W. “Whit” Boykin, his kinsmen, and his friends were involved in that search for a dog that would be perfect for hunting on the Wateree.

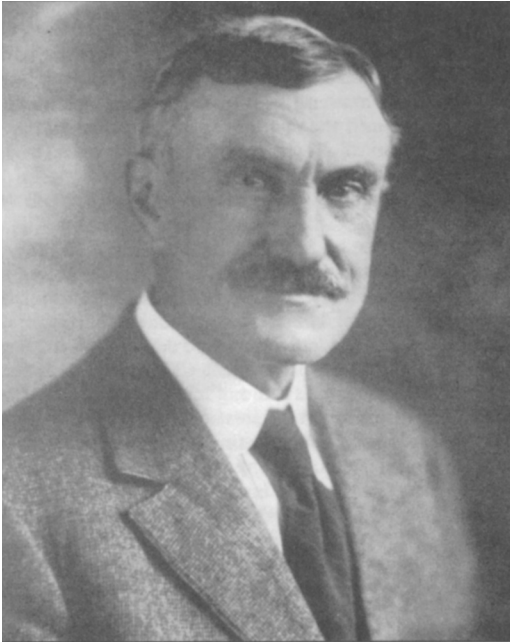
The Forerunner of the Boykin Spaniel

The much-circulated story of where the first Boykin spaniel came from is simple. In the early 1900s a little stray dog—a spaniel of some type—was found along East Main Street in downtown Spartanburg, South Carolina, by Mr. A. L. White during a brief Sunday walk between his home and church. He took the dog home as a pet, and it apparently displayed some aptitude that he considered useful in hunting. Mr. White decided to send the dog by train to his good friend Whit Boykin, who lived near Camden. Boykin had long sought a smaller retriever to carry in a boat for duck hunting. As Boykin applied his training know-how, the little stray soon developed into a superb waterfowl retriever and turkey dog. This dog is said to have been a male and the forerunner of all Boykin spaniels in existence today.

Until Mike Creel began his research in 1974 for an article that appeared in the September–October 1975 issue of *South Carolina Wildlife* magazine, authentication of the Boykin spaniel foundation story and details about it were lacking. Creel sought to fill this void by uncovering every written record available. He studied the lives of the two men involved, interviewing their relatives, friends, and contemporaries. He was also able to locate and assemble related photographs from the period. In the process the story developed verifiable substance as a few people were able to remember the first dog’s name and to establish the relationship between White and Boykin.

Whit Boykin and Alec White

Known to friends and kin as “Mr. Whit,” Lemuel Whitaker Boykin, was the son of military hero Alexander Hamilton Boykin and Sarah Jones deSaussure. Grandson of the first Boykin to come to the Wateree River area, Whit farmed Pine Grove Plantation, which had been cut from the original land grant and had been tilled by Boykins since the 1700s. Born on November 26, 1861, at Plane Hill, ten miles from Camden, Whit came into his majority in the early 1880s and became a land appraiser and



Lemuel Whitaker "Whit" Boykin Sr., founder of the Boykin spaniel breed.
Photographic copy by James A. Monarch, courtesy of the Boykin family

farmer in Kershaw and Sumter counties. As many Camden families did during the time when Whit was growing up, the Boykins vacationed in cooler parts of the state during the sweltering summer months.

Whit Boykin's youngest daughter, Ellen Cantey "Wrennie" (Mrs. T. L. Alexander), said Alec White, whom she called "Uncle Knox," became a friend of her father's when both were young men courting the same girl, Lavolette McGowan (who later became Mrs. White). Miss McGowan and Whit Boykin had apparently known each other from the time they were teenagers because the Boykins and the Laurens County McGowans vacationed each summer at the same spot in the North Carolina mountains.

Born on March 11, 1860, Alexander Lawrence White had moved with his family in 1864 from his birthplace in Charleston to Spartanburg County. He was the son of John Thomas White and—according to *Men of the Time: Sketches of Living Notables* by J. C. Garlington (1902)—a great-grandson of one of the original settlers of South Carolina, John White. Alec, his sister, Sarah Carolyn "Carrie," and his two bachelor brothers, Thomas J. and Parker White, were raised in Spartanburg. His two brothers later resided at White's Mill, outside Spartanburg. Alec White, who

entered the labor market as a railroad worker, eventually became president of Farmers and Merchants Bank at 117 Morgan Square in Spartanburg and secretary-treasurer of Peoples Building and Loan Association.

Records of the First Presbyterian Church of Spartanburg show the marriage of Alexander White to Miss Lavolette McGowan on May 20, 1885, by Rev. Thomas Hart Law. Also recorded there are the dates of the baptisms of sons Homer and Alexander in 1888 and 1890 respectively and the death of Mrs. White in June 1934.

A town about 130 miles from Camden by railroad, Spartanburg sits at the base of the Appalachian Mountains. The time it took to travel between Camden and Spartanburg was considerable in South Carolina's prehighway era. Yet, despite the physical distance between Whit Boykin and Alec White, their friendship persisted throughout their lives. In 1975 Whit Boykin's daughter Wrennie said that "Uncle Knox" and "Pappa Whit" wrote each other once a week and hunted together every time they got a chance. These two were united not only by friendship but also by a common commitment to preserving the game environment. Ahead of their time as hunters, they could be called game conservationists. In 1919

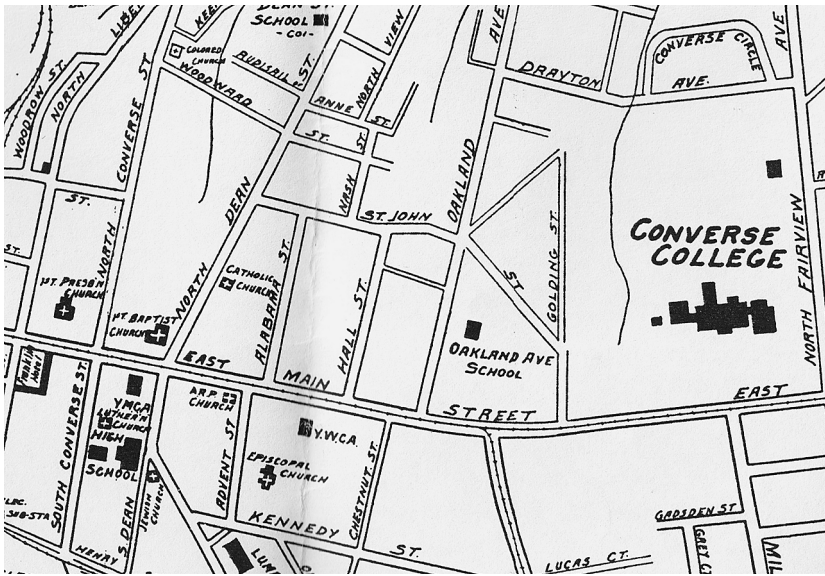


Alexander Lawrence "Alec" White. Photograph courtesy of Mac White Jr., Wilmington, North Carolina

they were founders of the South Carolina Sportsmen's Association, which demanded daily limits on quail, bag limits on tom turkeys, and no shooting of hens.

Tom Moore, a Spartanburg native who had known and admired Alec White, stated in 1975 that "Mr. White was the grandest old Chesterfieldian gentleman I have ever known, a breed which has since passed from this earth. I was a teenager when I duck hunted with him in the 1930s. He always made a point of wearing his coat and tie. Even when hunting, he didn't neglect to wear one, at least a small black tie." The grandson of Alec White, Homer McGowan "Mac" White Jr., lived for a long time in Wilmington, North Carolina. Many years after his grandfather's death, Mac White remembered the first time he took his wife, Mary, to meet his grandfather: "My grandfather was sitting on the porch, but when he saw us coming, he immediately went back into the house. At first we couldn't quite figure out what happened. In a couple of minutes he was ready to greet us, of course in a clean shirt and tie."

Alec White died in 1942 at the age of eighty-two. Mac White remembered him as vital late in life: "At age eighty my grandfather could walk me into the ground when he took me hunting. He took me hunting regularly with his friends down in Boykin, and we rode the train making a



A 1914 map of the area of downtown Spartanburg where Alec White met the little brown dog he named Dumpy. Courtesy of Spartanburg County Public Library

couple of connections and taking a wagon ride before we got there. We had some outstanding goose and duck hunts in the drainage canals down there. My father, Homer, didn't go with us since he was strictly a quail hunter.”

In 1997 Mac White described his grandfather's house in the center of Spartanburg; the big backyard held chicken coops for his game chickens, a glass greenhouse, and a dog pen for his Chesapeake Bay retrievers and other large dogs. The Whites and the Boykins were related distantly, recalled Mac White. “My great-aunt Rose, my grandmother's sister, married Boykin Cantey and another sister's son, Mac Holmes, married Sarah Boykin, Whit Boykin's next eldest daughter.”

A Little Brown Dog

By 2008 the landmarks in downtown Spartanburg were very different from those A. L. White encountered the day he and a capable little brown dog met one another. In the early 1900s the fifteen-minute Sunday stroll along this route would have been a most pleasant outing for man or dog, as they would have been in an area of town dominated by large, white clapboard houses.*

At some point in his walk, White noticed he was being trailed by a little reddish-brown dog. He leaned over and petted the dog, which—according to some accounts—acknowledged this treatment by accompanying White all the way to the church doors. While it may seem improbable, some raconteurs would have it that the little dog waited until

*If someone today retraced Alec White's walk from his home to church, they would find entirely new landmarks. The walk begins on the sidewalk along the east wing of the AT&T Building at 461 East Main Street, just down from the College Inn motel at 491. In 1905 the A. L. White home place was at 459 East Main Street, but the number was changed to 481 after 1925. Converted into apartments in 1942, the Whites' Victorian home was razed in 1972. From here the walker proceeds downtown toward Morgan Square and crosses over to the north side of East Main, ending in front of Price's Store for Men at 196 North Main Street. In the period when Mr. White met the little brown dog, the third building occupied by the First Presbyterian Church of Spartanburg was located at 200 East Main Street. At the time the church was on a block of East Main by itself. Later that block was divided into three by two streets—East Dunbar and Commerce—and renumbered. The highly regarded Aug W. Smith Department Store was in business at the old church site from 1926 until 1981; today the church block is occupied by Price's Store for Men at 196 East Main Street and the Bishop Furniture Company at 174 East Main Street. The present-day First Presbyterian Church was built at 393 East Main Street in 1925.

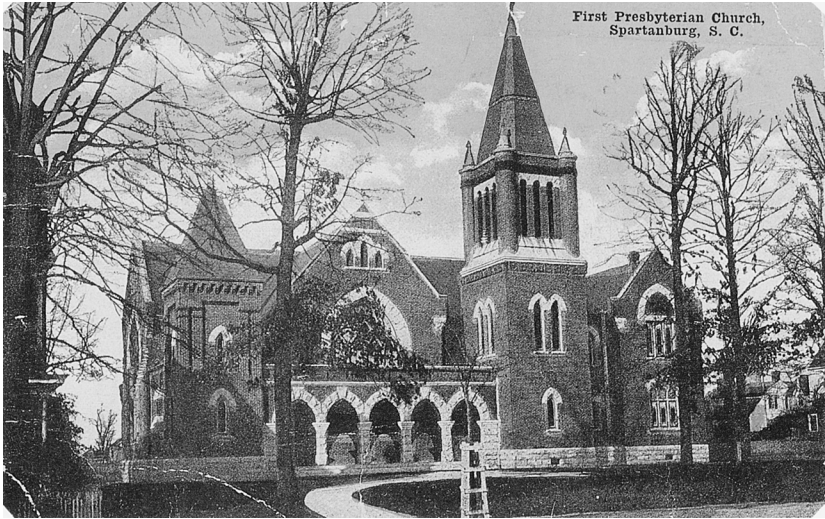
White had entered the church and then bolted down the aisle toward him—only to be ejected by church ushers. White did enter the assembly, find his family, and take part in the church service. Whit Boykin’s daughter Sarah Holmes, who exchanged visits with the Whites to see their daughter Mary and two sons, thought the walk on which the stray dog followed Alec White may have occurred in a summer between 1905 and 1910, certainly before Mrs. Holmes’s mother died in 1912.

As is true of all oral histories, different spins are placed on stories by different storytellers. Where the dog went to church became over time a matter of which church the storyteller wanted him to attend. Published accounts offered several variations of the story. Even the Boykin Spaniel Society printed in an early brochure that the dog appeared at the First Methodist Church of Spartanburg. Such discrepant accounts led to considerable good-natured joshing between Methodists and Presbyterians about the dog’s religious persuasion. Not to be outdone, Southern Baptists have also gotten involved in this debate. As one Southern Baptist wag put it, “Let the Methodists and the Presbyterians carry on all they want to about the religious preference of this dog, but I’m telling you that any dog in South Carolina who loves water as much as a Boykin spaniel *has* to be a Baptist.”

When Alec White left the church service at First Presbyterian, he discovered the little dog was waiting for him outside, and it then proceeded to follow him home. It is thought that White may have left services a little early to get a head start home and to avoid the exiting crowd of worshippers. Maybe he also did so to check on the dog. The little brown dog became an instant favorite with his new owner, who dubbed him “Dumpy,” because of his small size in relationship to the much larger Chesapeake Bay retrievers and bird dogs in White’s kennel.

A Boykin on an Old Postcard?

In 2008 Mike Creel was shown a century-old photograph album that had belonged to Mrs. Reynolds Marvin Kirby-Smith from Sewanee, Tennessee, which included photographs of Spartanburg in the early 1900s. In the album was an early-twentieth-century postcard bearing a photograph of an unknown location that features a Boykin spaniel-like dog. Other photographs in the album are of traveling circuses somewhere in the South. Postcard photographs of traveling circuses appeared a lot in Spartanburg and other towns after 1907, when the technology of placing these local scenes on cards for mailing had become very popular. According to Brad Steinecke of the Spartanburg County Historical Society, Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus appeared in Spartanburg four times



The third building of the First Presbyterian Church of Spartanburg, near which Alec White encountered Dumpy. Photograph courtesy of George D. Malone, First Presbyterian Church, Spartanburg



A Boykin spaniel-looking dog featured on vintage postcard, possibly from Spartanburg in early decades of the 1900s. Photograph courtesy of Mariah Kirby-Smith, great-granddaughter of Mrs. Reynolds Marvin Kirby-Smith

between 1908 and 1914; and Robinson's circus appeared three times from 1908 through 1910.

Although it is very unlikely that we will ever know for certain, it is entertaining to speculate that Dumpy was a circus-performing animal that wandered away from a circus parade in downtown Spartanburg—or was lured away by a female in heat—and was left to his own devices once the circus left town. Such a hypothesis might help explain why the dog eagerly sought out Mr. White's affections and why he was so easy to train. The Boykin's trainability and its tendency to be a trick artist might—just perhaps—all stem from an early relative who was a circus performer.

Dumpy's Trip to Camden

Though Alec White found Dumpy to be a quick study, willing and able to retrieve anything, he did not have the time to train him properly. While hunting with Chesapeake Bay retrievers, Dumpy so distinguished himself that Alec White decided to send the dog to "Mr. Whit" for master training. Dumpy seemed to be a good start toward the small retriever that Whit Boykin had been trying to develop for his style of boat hunting on the Wateree River. Besides, White figured that his friend would probably get more use out of this little dog than he would, since White already had several good retrievers in his kennel.

The dog was crated and placed on the train bound for Columbia, where Dumpy would have been switched to the Seaboard Line, which ran directly to Camden with a stop at the rural community of Boykin, just outside Camden. Ellen "Duck" Boykin—wife of Whit Boykin's son J. W. C. "Stew" Boykin and mother of Camden architect Henry D. Boykin—said in 1975 that Alec White sent Dumpy to Whit Boykin at the end of a duck-hunting season. She explained how White gave a train conductor explicit directions that this dog was to be delivered directly to Mr. Whit Boykin.

On Dumpy's arrival at Pine Grove Plantation in Boykin, Whit quickly began to share his Spartanburg friend's belief in the dog's extraordinary ability. Years later Whit's youngest daughter, Wrennie, recounted that Dumpy not only was viewed as a superior hunting trainee but was also the only dog in her father's kennel ever to gain house privileges.

The Search for Dumpy's Mate

The early 1900s were a time in the American sportsmanship tradition when a hunting dog's breed name was secondary to its hunting abilities as a flusher, tracker, and retriever. The critical question was not "What kind of a dog do you have?" but rather "Can that dog hunt?" Whit Boykin's delight in the dog's skill levels quite naturally led him to look for



A hunting party camped at Motley's Duck Roost on the Wateree River, February 1904, including breed founder Whit Boykin Sr. (second from left), friend and fellow hunter Edward Richardson "Toot" Sanders (center foreground), Baltimorean George Mordecai (second from right), and Baltimore banker J. Bernard "Legs" Scott (far right). Photographic copy by James A. Monarch, courtesy of the Boykin family

acceptable bitches with which Dumpy could be bred for producing even better hunting stock. Whit and his friends are said to have widely advertised for a suitable female through local church bulletins and a flier that was distributed among railroad workers. A porter found a small curly, reddish-brown dog in a small crate at the Camden railroad station and notified the Boykin family. This little bitch, whose owner apparently shipped her to Camden but never claimed her, was identified as a likely partner for Dumpy.

Whit gave her the name "Singo." This bitch and Dumpy produced at least one litter. All Boykin spaniels are said to have originated from Dumpy and Singo's first litter. Stories from Boykin family members and friends testify to the intensity of Whit's dedication to developing a line of hunting dogs from Dumpy and Singo's stock, breeding Dumpy and Singo's offspring to good hunting dogs from other breeds. Whit bred for several qualities, including small size, good temperament, strong swimming desire and ability, and a strong desire and ability to retrieve on land and in water.

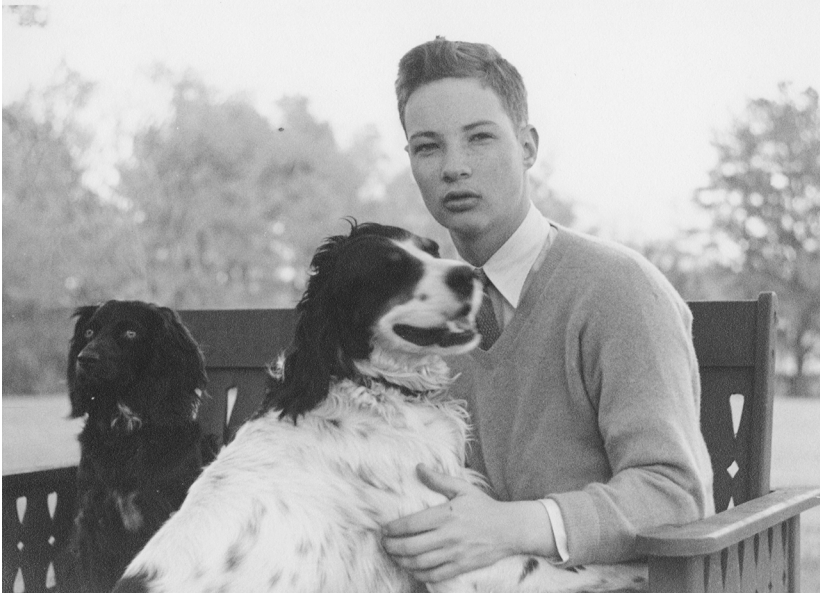
Early Boykins

An April 29, 1997, letter from Donald H. Buhrmaster Jr. of Mount Pleasant offers some early evidence of the Boykin family's interest in turkey-hunting spaniels, probably no more than ten years after Dumpy's appearance in Spartanburg. Buhrmaster found a February 13, 1915, hunt record from Millbrook Plantation in Charleston County. According to this record Allen J. Boykin of Camden (an older brother of Whit Boykin) had brought his two water spaniels to trail turkeys on a hunt with J. Ross Hanahan Sr. and his two sons. Whether the dogs in this report were early Boykins cannot be confirmed, since no one is left who might confirm the tale—or the lack of tails.

In a November 11, 1975, letter, DeVore Andrews of Greenwood, South Carolina, recounted his 1918–20 prep-school days with Whit Boykin's son Stew. Andrews remembered going to Stew's family's home whenever possible to hunt and taking wagon trips to the river with "five, six or seven real pretty and smart dogs. They were not called Boykin spaniels then." Andrews described turkey drives, jump-shooting ducks, and pass-shooting geese on moonlit nights. There were also nocturnal raccoon hunts using these spaniels.



A Wateree Swamp hunting party in the mid-1920s: James Willis Cantey (with a Boykin spaniel at his feet), unidentified hunter, Bolivar D. Boykin, Deas Boykin, and Whit Boykin Sr. Photographic copy by James A. Monarch, courtesy of the Boykin family



McKee Boykin Sr. in the mid-1930s with an English setter and a bright-eyed Boykin spaniel. Photograph courtesy of McKee Boykin Jr.

Through a combination of chance and Whit Boykin’s selective breeding, by the mid-1920s little brown retrievers are said to have begun showing up frequently in hunters’ boats that traveled South Carolina’s Wateree River. The fruits of a search for the perfect dog that began in the 1880s, the dogs were known just locally then and were called “Mr. Boykin’s spaniels,” “Boykin retrievers,” or “those hunting spaniels from Boykin.”

In a February 1975 interview, L. W. Boykin III of Yonges Island—Whit Boykin’s grandson and son of Whit’s eldest son, Buck—spoke of two dogs named Patty and Singo born right after World War I. In his father’s opinion, he said, these two dogs were “the first with all the characteristics now considered Boykin.” At least one photograph of a Boykin family hunting party during the 1920s era shows what appears to be at least one Boykin spaniel with members of the Boykin family after a hunt. In 1932, the year his grandfather Whit died, L. W. Boykin III remembered “quite a movement was made to get them registered and recognized as a dog breed.” A photograph dating to the mid-1930s, shows McKee Boykin Sr. as a teenager with an English setter in his lap and a dark-haired, yellow-eyed spaniel waiting his turn to be petted on the same bench. By the early 1930s the term “Boykin spaniel” had become known well beyond South Carolina’s

borders, a recognition that has grown worldwide since the formation of the Boykin Spaniel Society in 1977.

A Boykin in Home Movies?

An old home movie may well contain the earliest motion-picture footage of a Boykin spaniel. Walter M. Dunlap III of Sumter, South Carolina, grandson of the dog's master, Walter Dunlap Sr., says the black-and-white film of a dog displaying a Boykin's typical crowd-pleasing antics, was taken at a 1939 family gathering by his father, Walter Dunlap Jr. The dog, named Mr. Jones, had been purchased for Walter Dunlap Sr. after his previous dog was killed by a train.

Walter Dunlap Sr. was a Rock Hill attorney who had served in the South Carolina Senate and House of Representatives. According to a July 2008 interview with his ninety-four-year-old daughter, Mrs. Dora Dunlap Gaston of Rock Hill, he carried his dog every day to his law office in a bank building in Rock Hill, South Carolina. The solid-brown spaniel was "really too large for a cocker, though we called it that."

Backtracking Boykins

Since the early 1930s Boykin enthusiasts have tried to reconstruct the little dog's origins back to that little stray mutt that Alec White befriended outside a church on Sunday morning in Spartanburg. Written records of the very earliest breeding do not exist. In fact Kitty Beard of the Boykin Spaniel Society found references to breedings going back only to the 1940s. The dog-by-dog specifics of the early era of Boykin breeding, while entertaining to explore, have been pursued many times before by people who were chronologically closer and had more resources at hand than are available today. There are, however, some interesting early histories of the Boykin spaniels, as the following stories suggest.

Early Breeding and Subsequent Myths

One look at early Boykin spaniel breeding is the result of a 1948 project by the late James L. Sweet, a former New Yorker who married a Camden woman and settled in Boykin to be a farmer for the remainder of his years. He named some dogs for dances, including Two-Step and Rhumba. (Matilda "Tillie" Sweet Boykin, the wife of Whit Boykin's grandson Baynard, is James Sweet's sister.) Through many interviews with dog owners, Sweet assembled notes on eight individual dogs going back for two to three generations. The earliest dogs in Sweet's lists were probably whelped in about 1940.

Sweet's notes were not as complete as he would have liked. His records did, however, reveal several interesting things about the dogs that were bred to early Boykin spaniels. Richard B. "Dixie" Boykin bred his dogs to a Springer spaniel owned by Mrs. Walton Furgerson. Bolivar D. Boykin owned a registered American water spaniel, which he bred to Boykin spaniels in the 1940s to counter the ill effects of too much close breeding. In at least two instances a "small, well-bred pointer bitch" became part of the Boykin spaniel family tree. The owner of this dog, however, is not recorded.

Most of those instrumental in working with Whit Boykin to assure compatible early breeding matches of the dog were gone by the time Sweet did his work. However, a few people such as Baynard Boykin recalled years later that his grandfather and father brought about a number of important crossbreedings to create the modern Boykin spaniel's genetic makeup.

Baynard remembered that his father, Deas (pronounced "Days"), took over the breeding of the Boykin spaniels to a great extent even before his grandfather Whit retired to Columbia in the mid-1920s. In Baynard's opinion at least eight breeds were selectively used to develop the Boykin spaniel. These included the American (hunting) cocker spaniel, the springer spaniel, the Brittany spaniel, the relatively rare English field spaniel, the Chesapeake Bay retriever, the English pointer, the English setter, and the American water spaniel.

Chesapeake Bay retriever blood was introduced into the lines before Boykin spaniels were ever referred to as such. The account of this cross has been passed down from generation to generation. The cross was said to have been for the purpose of enhancing the dogs' scenting and retrieving abilities and to give them stronger bone structure. Writers have often commented on the Boykin spaniel's noble head. Jeff Griffen described it in his *Hunting Dogs of America* (1964) as "spaniel-like but with something added." Many people think this trait is related to the putative Chesapeake Bay retriever crossing. The Boykin's amber eyes are ascribed by some to the Chesapeake and by others to the American water spaniel.

According to tradition, a white spot on the chest, which appears often at birth on the Boykin spaniel puppies (and can be a fault if it is too large) is probably the result of the crossbreeding with springers. Likewise white spots on puppies' feet—a breed fault not allowable for registration—are thought to result from the crosses with Brittany spaniels.

In the late 1980s, J. Marion Wooten of Orangeburg, South Carolina, completed a massive undertaking to trace the origins of the Boykin spaniel,

compiling all known breeding records in chart form. While his effort was admirable, exact linkage of the earliest dogs to their breeding records has proved elusive. Some hope that somewhere there might exist a yet-to-be discovered cache of letters between Whit Boykin and Alec White that will shed light on the Boykin's early history. Boykin spaniel lore also includes reference to a "lost chart" of breeding parentage done by Mrs. George (Katherine) Herrick of Washington, D.C.

The American Water Spaniel Debate

Perhaps the most controversial issue to arise from the interest in Boykin spaniel breeding is the historical relationship between Boykin spaniels and the American water spaniel. The latter breed's recognition by the American Kennel Club (AKC) has heightened this issue's intensity and made comparisons between the two breeds more invidious. The developments



Rich Evans and his wife of New Palatine, Illinois, with their American water spaniel Sparky (left) and their Boykin spaniel Babe (right) at the April 1997 Boykin Spaniel Society field trial. Photograph by Mike Creel

of these two breeds show remarkable similarity. The Boykin spaniel's progenitor, Dumpy, may be traced through stories to around 1905–10. The American water spaniel is said "through stories" to have been used by Menominee Indians in the Fox River and other river valleys of Wisconsin during the 1840s. In fact the first known breeder of American water spaniels was Dr. F. J. Pfeifer of New London, Wisconsin, who in 1920 successfully demonstrated to an all-breed registry that these dogs were breeding true to type. In 1938 they were accepted as a breed by the Field Dog Stud Book, and in 1940 the AKC followed suit in recognizing them as an official breed.

The Internet home page for the American water spaniel characterizes the dog's temperament, coloration, and retrieving ability. Although in traits such as size and color (liver to dark chocolate) the American water spaniel appears similar to the Boykin spaniel, there are significant differences, especially in their personalities. Promoters of the American water spaniel call it a one-person dog that matures slowly, bores easily, and is not as eager to please as some other spaniel breeds. The Boykin spaniel makes many friends fast, starts young, and retrieves incessantly.

Though the two breeds may share some genetic history, over the years breeders have taken them in different directions. In the American water spaniel yellow eyes are a breed fault, but they are a breed standard in the Boykin spaniel. While the coat of the American water spaniel may be only curled closely or in a loose undulating pattern called a "marcel," Boykin spaniels may be curly, wavy or sleek. Least important for breeding, but noticeable for conformation, the Boykin's tail should be docked, whereas the water spaniel's is to be natural.

In 1988 Richard Wolters wrote an article on the Boykin spaniel's development for *Connoisseur* magazine. As a footnote to that article, he included a piece titled "The Real Origins of Boykin Spaniels." The story made him persona non grata among Boykin spaniel promoters, who felt it was unfair and poorly researched. Wolters pointed out that Boykin breeding records do not go back before the 1940s and then referred to a breeder of American water spaniels, who said that many yellow-eyed American water spaniels were shipped to the South in the 1940s, had their tails docked, and were redubbed "Boykin spaniels."

People close to the breeding of Boykin spaniels freely acknowledge that Boykin lines include American water spaniels some time back. In 1987, when Dave Duffey interviewed Whit Boykin II, a Boykin Spaniel Society founder, for an article in a 1993 issue of *Gun Dog* magazine, Whit acknowledged the role of the American water spaniel in the Boykin's past. Nevertheless Boykin spaniel aficionados take vigorous exception with

Wolters's conclusion that there is no such thing as a Boykin spaniel. In addition to the differences between the Boykin and the American water spaniel, the Boykin's defenders point to the variety of other breeds that are known to have been bred into the modern Boykin spaniel as evidence of distinctiveness.

The "real origins" or complete understanding of the Boykin spaniel's genetic heritage will remain shrouded in the mists of the past. Some believe that both Boykins and American water spaniels have a common ancestor in the rare English field spaniel. That Boykins and American water spaniels probably share some common past should not obscure the fact that the water spaniel was not a registered breed until the 1920s, after as many as fifteen years of breeding crosses in Boykin spaniels. It is conceivable Dr. Pfeifer and perhaps others were making additional crosses at that time, further distancing its lines from the Boykin. Even some of the faults in the Boykin breed—for example, the white spots on the body—do not seem to occur in the American water spaniel, suggesting again that considerable genetic differentiation has occurred between the two, regardless of some possible common ancestors. Whatever the backgrounds of these animals might have been, their distinctions have now been "frozen" on both sides through the establishment of breeding societies and distinct registries for both dogs.

It should be noted that the Boykin spaniel is the incontestable winner of number one "bragging rights" competition with its cousin, the American water spaniel. The Boykin became the state dog of South Carolina in 1985; it took the American water spaniel another year to achieve the same distinction in Wisconsin.

Decline in the 1930s

Bad economic times often signal the demise of much dog breeding. During the Depression of the 1930s, this did not occur with Boykin spaniels, in large measure because the wealthy northerners who visited Camden continued to hunt and the Boykin family was able to provide them with a good hunting dog. "If it hadn't been for these folks who continued to vacation and hunt in Camden during the winter and who wanted those little spaniels, the Boykin families might have been more hungry," remembered Baynard Boykin. "The sale of those dogs put a lot of food on Depression-era tables." He continued, "I expect there are lots of descendants of Dumpy and Singo and others all up the East Coast. We didn't have any difficulty, even during the Depression, selling those pups for ten dollars apiece, and that was big money in those days."

In that early period no effort was made to market the breed in any systematic manner through print advertising or to register the breed in a national association. As Whit Boykin aged and his health began to decline, he moved to Columbia, South Carolina, from his Camden farm and lost daily touch with farm work and dog breeding. Nevertheless he remained actively interested in the dogs that his son, Deas, the father of Baynard Boykin, continued to raise.

Deaths of Whit Boykin and Alec White

On June 4, 1932, Whit Boykin died at his retirement residence on 3208 Hunter Street (now 3208 Heyward Street) in Columbia, where he had lived with his second wife, Lulie Harvin, a Manning native. (His first wife, Ellen “Missy” Cantey, mother of their nine children, two of whom died in infancy, had died in 1912.) The day after his death, Whit was eulogized on the front page of the issue of the *State*.

The article described him as a conservationist, sportsman, farmer, and land appraiser. The list of pallbearers, including friends from the South Carolina Sportsmen’s Association, read like a *Who’s Who* of South Carolina for the day. “Few other men in South Carolina could boast as many genuine friends as did Whit Boykin,” the obituary read. “Himself the most open hearted and generous and hospitable of men, he drew others to him and held them with his frank and charming nature. Anything that was his was also the property of his friends, or of anyone who might need it.” No mention was made of the dogs that bore his name and today number in the thousands.

In a May 1975 interview with Mike Creel the legendary outdoor writer for the *State* newspaper, Harry R. E. Hampton, remembered Whit Boykin as a “hail and hardy fellow, always the life of any party, one who knew all the songs, skilled and ethical sportsman, and a man who could tell a hunting story better than Technicolor. He acted them out.” Hampton said he went on his first hunt with the Boykins in 1909 at age twelve and from that time on “every Christmas and every summer” he revisited the Boykins in their great outdoors.

In 2009 two of Whit Boykin’s granddaughters, Jeanie Holmes Martin and Ellen Holmes Wright, were living in Columbia. Born in 1924, Jeanie Martin was only eight when her grandfather Whit died. “Still, he is a vivid soul in my mind,” she told Lynn Kelley. “For one thing he was our only living grandparent. We loved him and loved visiting him and his second wife on Heyward Street in Columbia. He’d sing us little songs, I remember.” Mrs. Martin remembers visiting in Camden and at the Boykin settlement and even living there for a while as a child. Mrs. Martin also

remembers that when she and her first husband married, they moved to 3119 Heyward Street. “I think it’s so interesting—and special—that as a young, married woman I was living so close to where my grandfather lived his last years,” she said.

A decade after Whit Boykin’s death, Boykin’s lifetime friend Alec White died on April 12, 1942, in Spartanburg, where he and his wife are buried in Oakwood Cemetery, not far from where he met Dumpy on East Main Street. In articles on April 12 and 13, 1942, he was eulogized in the *Spartanburg Herald* as a “pioneer Spartan.” It was said that “he was associated with the Spartanburg, Union, and Columbia railroad during its construction, and until organization of the Merchants and Farmers bank here. He was president of the bank for more than 50 years and he was well known in this section.” With both men gone and no significant written records of “their dog” having been kept, the first chapter closed in the history of the Boykin spaniel breed, leaving unsolved mysteries about the early years of this dog.

Boykins in the War Years

The Boykin spaniel began spreading in South Carolina from its Camden area home to a triangular area defined by Camden and Sumter at one point, Charleston at another, and Newberry at the third. There were also pockets of interest in Texas, Louisiana, New York, and other states. Although there are breeders in many areas of the state and beyond today, the rough triangle in the South Carolina Midlands has always been acknowledged as the Boykin spaniel breeding heartland.

A year after Alec White’s death, the Boykin spaniel got its first taste of national attention in the press, when newspaperman Jack Foster, then editor of the *Columbia Record*, wrote a one-page article about the Boykin for the July 1943 issue of *Esquire* magazine. The article appeared in the middle of America’s involvement in World War II, a time when hunting was confined largely to the very oldest Americans and to young boys because so many young men were at war. It was a time when bullets were being made for battle, not for sport.

According to the stories old-timers and insiders told to several authors, when World War II ended—for unknown reasons and despite earlier successes—the breed’s popularity waned considerably. It is generally conceded that from the 1940s through the 1960s the Boykin spaniel went into a kind of eclipse. The breed was maintained to a great extent only through efforts of Boykin family members, relatives, and close friends, who bred Boykins for their own hunting purposes.

Boykins in the 1960s

This quiet period for the breed was interrupted by the publication of several articles about the Boykin and mention of it in two major books. The August 25, 1961, *New York World Telegram's* "Breed of the Month" feature carried the headline "The Boykin Spaniel Great as a Retriever" and told the breed's history, using quotations from the 1956 edition of Henry P. Davis's *Modern Dog Encyclopedia*. Another Boykin book appearance was a three-page section in Jeff Griffen's *The Hunting Dogs of America* (1964). In the *State's* November 1, 1964, "Woods and Waters" column, South Carolina writer Harry Hampton reported on a story about Northam Griggs's Boykin spaniel King that appeared in John McClain's October 31 "Man About Manhattan Column" in the *New York Journal American*. Hampton wrote at least two more columns on Boykins in the 1960s, and in 1969 Bud Seifert wrote an article about the Boykin spaniel as part of a *Spartanburg Journal* series on family pets. These articles sparked only slight flurries of interest.

Though the breed may have been experiencing a popularity slump in most of South Carolina during the 1960s, it certainly had a committed core of admirers, especially in the Camden area. Edmund "Beaver" Hardy, a Columbia insurance executive and great-grandson of Whit Boykin's brother Allen, recounts an incident around 1960, when, as a recent college graduate, he was invited to a garden party in Camden by another member of the extended Boykin family, who was entertaining a group of people from around the country. The hostess specifically asked Hardy to bring the litter of puppies that his Boykin spaniel had whelped several weeks before and that he was preparing to sell.

"I pulled up to this lovely homestead in my little Nash Rambler not expecting much of a party and thinking it would be kind of informal and low-keyed," Hardy said. "But the people there were all dressed to the nines and looking like New Yorkers out of *The Great Gatsby* or something. And there I was dressed in my jeans and an old, beat-up shirt. One of these New Yorker types wandered over shortly after I'd placed the puppies in the middle of the dining-room table and immediately spotted what to my mind was the prettiest, smartest, most willing to please of the puppies. In an instant he bought it for top dollar.

"But the hostess was a dog lover too, and she had other ideas about this dog's future," Hardy recalled. "She sized up the situation real fast and said to the New Yorker, 'Oh, what a cu-u-u-te little pup. Except for that fault with the nose and the undershot jaw, his head is almost perfect.

It'll probably be better when he gets older, just as the disproportionate length of the body and the crooked front legs will probably right themselves somewhat more. But, he sure is adorable—no wonder you chose him.' Then, she walked into the kitchen. Well, the new owner became instantly flustered, saw another pup he liked, and asked if he could trade. I allowed as how that was really no problem, and he walked away with a great big smile on his face to show his partying friends this great little pup. While I was watching all this with amusement, the hostess came up behind me and, pointing to the originally sold pup, whispered, 'Now *that one* is *my* dog. Get him out of here now and I'll pay you later. You can sell all the rest.' And I did. I sold every one of them that evening." A successful young Boykin salesman, Hardy later became a founding member of the Boykin Spaniel Society and served as its president for a term.

To the outside world things were temporarily quiet on the Boykin front, but the bloodlines of eager hunting spaniels were sustained among a scattered network of Boykin relatives and friends up and down the East Coast and in remote places such as Brownsville, Texas, all linked back to Camden. The subject of breed registration cropped up, but it was promptly silenced when Boykin owners failed to agree on a definition for the breed (known as the "breed standard"). However, calls and letters continued to connect Boykin spaniel masters with prospective breeding mates, and stories were passed along of outstanding hunts by particular dogs and the new tricks they had learned. But this was only the quiet before the storm of national interest that came in the 1970s.