



*This collage of Texas Nicki Teeschaw's picture, championship certificate, and 42 show ribbons was made in 1932 and found in 2004.*

## **A Snapshot in Time**

By Joyce Miller  
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I "met" Nicki, an Airedale Terrier, purely by accident. Just before we were scheduled to leave for Montgomery last year, I was given an old collage that contained a picture, a

championship certificate, and 42 show ribbons. The certificate identified the dog as CH Texas Nicki Teeschaw, the only Texas Airedale to finish a championship in 1932. The picture had hung for many years in a veterinary clinic in Dallas. It spent even more years in storage.

But this is not just a story about an Airedale Terrier. The collage provides a snapshot in time that underscores and illuminates the emergence of new fanciers in areas of the country that were outside the mainstream. These new breeders imported breeding stock from England, cooperated with others to set breed type in their litters, showed their dogs nationally, publicized their dogs in national magazines, and exerted a lasting influence on their breeds.

Until the early 1930s, most of the winning Airedales in the United States came from the large kennels of East Coast, the West Coast, and Chicago. When Nicki became a champion in 1932, he represented the success of these new breeders. Breeders like Elmer Sheaner, owner of Da-Aire Kennel in Dallas and Nicki's breeder, did whatever it took to put good dogs into their breeding programs and to breed dogs that could win in the show ring.

Around the turn of the century, Sheaner, then in his early 20s, moved to Dallas with his wife and first child. In Dallas, he earned his living as a plasterer. During the next 20 years, he developed a passion for Airedales. By the time Nicki finished, Sheaner had been breeding Airedales for at least 10 years. From the beginning, he used English imports, worked closely with other breeders, and bred good dogs under his Da-Aire kennel name.

Imported dogs enabled breeders like Sheaner to have access to the stud dogs and good bitches they needed to lift their dogs onto the national stage. Canadian brokers imported the English Airedales and sold them to kennels in the United States that resold them to breeders nationwide. For example, Nicki's sire, Flornell Walnut King, was imported in 1928 and sold to a breeder in San Antonio where Sheaner bred to the dog in 1929.

In addition to using imported dogs, breeders like Sheaner worked with other new breeders to breed better dogs from the offspring of the imported dogs. In the late 1920s, Sheaner worked primarily with two breeders in San Antonio. Later he provided a new breeder in Plainview, Texas, with bitches sired by Nicki. By the end of the 1930s, a reverse pedigree of Nicki's dam reveals descendants of Sheaner's dogs in the pedigrees of breeders throughout the Midwest.

When Nicki finished his championship, Sheaner sent an announcement to the show dog magazine, *Popular Dogs*. Delpha Ray Blakely, the editor of the Airedale column, reported in April 1932 that only three Airedale champions finished in March: One of them was Texas Nicki Teeschaw. Blakely wrote: "I am not familiar with this dog as he is a Southerner and we do not get much news from out that way. Nicki must be a really good one as he has defeated many fine dogs."

In a letter to Blakely, Sheaner outlined his career showing dogs. His need to write a letter to a magazine columnist illustrates how little communication existed between mainstream breeders and those from outlying areas. It also demonstrates how difficult it was to break into showing at the time.

Getting into showing Airedales has never been easy. But today, newcomers can learn how to groom and handle from experts who also teach. These experts include nearby breeders who mentor new exhibitors and professional handlers who teach grooming and handling seminars hosted by local breed and kennel clubs. In the early 1920s, Sheaner had none of these resources.

In 1923, when Sheaner decided he was going to show his first show dog, Texas Rose, he just took her to a show. She had never been trimmed or plucked but Sheaner did bathe her the night before the show. He also had no idea how to present her in the ring. The judge, Jack Bradshaw, didn't give Rose a second look.

Dog shows at this time were benched shows, where dogs had to be on their benches throughout the show. Benching made it possible for the general public to see different breeds up close, but, more importantly for someone like Sheaner, they provided the opportunity for a newcomer to learn from judges, breeders, and more experienced exhibitors.

After the Airedales showed, Jack Bradshaw walked over to Sheaner's bench and explained that if Sheaner had removed some of Rose's coat, he might have been able to tell what the dog looked like. Sheaner vowed he would come back the next year and show a good dog. He then asked people at the show to teach him how to pluck his Airedales and how to show them in the ring.

The next year, Sheaner went back with two dogs: a male and a female. The female won the puppy class and the male won the novice class, going reserve with 54 dogs benched. After that, Sheaner's dogs started winning: By 1934, he finished five champions, including Texas Nicki Teeschaw.

Sheaner did not handle Nicki. The dog's owners placed him with handler Richard L. Davis, owner of Davishill Airedales in Kentucky. Davis was well known at the time for showing CH Warbride of Davishill to the group win at Westminster in 1925.

Davis showed Nicki for three months: October and November 1931 and March 1932. During those three months, the ribbons in the collage show that the dog traveled more than 7200 miles and showed at 16 shows from San Antonio to Detroit. These were not clusters of dog shows. These were single dog shows, formal evening affairs, held over two or three evenings. Nicki would show in one city Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, and then be at another venue Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Since most shows were evening affairs, Nicki and his handler had all night and the daytime of the next day to travel.

Handlers and dogs covered a lot of ground. The handlers mostly traveled by rail with their dogs in crates in the Railway Express baggage car. During the trips, the handlers, hung out in the baggage car, grooming their dogs for the next show, talking dogs with each other, telling stories, drinking, and playing poker.

The handlers wired ahead to their destination to arrange for transportation to the show sites. When they arrived in town, Model A pick-ups were lined up at the station to collect the handlers and their dogs. For a travel kit, the handlers stacked two wood crates and put a table top with a drawer and a place for a grooming arm on the top crate. If lucky, the handlers might get to spend an occasional night in a hotel, but more often, they slept at the show grounds on folding wood and canvas cots. If they did not bring their own cots, they slept on benches around the grooming area.

Grooming and conditioning a broken-coated terrier has always been important for both show and non-show dogs. As Sheaner learned, an Airedale's coat had to be removed, but show grooming was not as refined as it became later in the century. The differences between the Airedales shown in this period and today are so startling that some think the structure of the dog has changed.



*Texas Nicki Teeschaw in 1932*

This is not so. In July 2001, Airedale breeder and judge, Forbes Gordon, gave a judges presentation, showing that the dogs have not changed. Gordon had artist Chris Crowell, who is an Airedale breeder, exhibitor and judge, put a modern trim on several pictures of early Airedales.

Looking at Nicki's 1932 picture, the dog looks very different from today's Airedales. No one is holding him, and he is not, in any sense of the word, pulled up for the picture: His tail is relaxed, and he is standing informally. Because of the amount of hair on the top of his head, his ears appear to fold off to the side of his head. There is so little hair on his foreface and so much on his cheeks that his face looks pie shaped. The heavy hair on his neck and back makes it difficult to see the length of his neck, his shoulder assembly, his short back, and his flat topline.

To illustrate how much the way we trim Airedales has changed their appearance but not their structure, Chris Crowell put a contemporary trim on Nicki. She took the thick excess hair off his neck and head, and she added the foreface hair and beard along with the well-conditioned leg furnishings that we see today. She cleaned up his backcoat and sides, removed the excess hair from his tuck-up, and lifted his tail the way it would be shown today. Her work shows that Nicki, by today's standards, was a powerful and beautiful Airedale.



Nicki was just one dog who finished a championship in 1932. Without the safe storage of the collage for more than 70 years, we would know nothing about him, just as we know nothing of thousands of dogs that showed that year. Thanks to the wealth of information that a picture, a championship certificate, and 42 ribbons revealed, this dog's experience helps us understand how breeding and showing purebred dogs became a popular hobby nationwide.

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**Biography:**

Joyce Miller is a retired historian, teacher and marketing writer, who earned a doctorate in history from Bryn Mawr College. She is a member of the American Dog Writers Association, the International Association of Canine Professionals, the Association of Pet Dog Trainers, the Airedale Terrier Club of America, and Southwest Airedales. She lives in Dallas Texas, where she and her husband, Gene Wolfe, breed, show and train Airedale Terriers, and Joyce teaches both a six-week conformation handling techniques class and in-home obedience for pet owners.