

Boykin Spaniel
South Carolina's State Dog
By Edmund "Beaver" Hardy

The idea of making the Boykin spaniel the state dog of South Carolina did not originate with the eight Founders or the first Board of the Boykin Spaniel Society. It came as a complete surprise to the BSS board when someone told us in 1978 that Senate Bill 762 co-sponsored by Senator Donald Holland of Camden and Senator Arnold E. Goodstein of Charleston had been introduced to the South Carolina Senate nominating the Boykin spaniel as the state dog. Senator Holland, being from Camden, was well aware of the Boykin spaniel's good qualities and Senator Goodstein's mother was from Camden and he had been around Boykins all of his life and there was a large contingent of Boykin owners in Charleston including Arthur Ravenel, Bob Russel, Frank Ford, Congressman Tommy Hartnett, Dan and Kathy Ravenel and many others.

Senator Goodstein was a good friend of Senator Alex Sanders from Richland County and he signed on to the bill also. Alex's father "Burr Head" Sanders was from Hagood, SC about 10 miles from Boykin, SC. He was an avid hunter and owned Boykins all of Senator Sander's life. So Alex was very familiar with the dogs and had hunted dove many times with me and my Boykins.

The Boykin Spaniel Society was already receiving some pressure to register our dogs with the American Kennel Club. We did not want to do this as it appeared from the correspondence we received from them in May 1977; the AKC was more interested in conformation than in hunting ability. We wanted the Boykins to remain as hunting dogs, not show dogs. We had seen too many fine hunting breeds turned into show pets and we did not want to see that same fate for the Boykins.

So, it was with mixed emotions that our board received the word of the pending legislation. The board thought that it was a pretty good idea and we should support this legislation. But, we were concerned that if the legislation was successful in making the Boykin the state dog, there would be more pressure to register our Boykins with the AKC.

Eventually, we decided it would be better to support the pending legislation. So, we belatedly threw what little influence we had to get this done. None of us had any experience trying to get legislation passed. All we thought we needed to do was make a few phone calls and "it would be a done deal". Who could possibly oppose our LBD's becoming the SC State dog?

Well it turned out a number of Senators opposed it. One of the most powerful Senators against it was Senator Rembert Dennis. He was not opposed to the Boykin; he just didn't think South Carolina should have any state dog. He removed his objection when we told him that the Boykin breed was the only breed of dogs started in South Carolina. With Senator Dennis' opposition removed and the enthusiastic support of Lieutenant Governor Brantley Harvey of Beaufort who owned two Boykin spaniels, it sailed through the Senate in mid-May and then went before the House of Representatives.

The bill died at the session's end having been bottled up in the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee. The Boykin Spaniel Society board's lack of experience in getting legislation passed contributed to its demise.

The BSS board was busy with more important issues than this so with our collective tails between our legs, we let this idea drop with the vow that we would concede this round but in the words of General Douglas McArthur “we would return”.

It turned out it was six years before we got back to this item. By that time the BSS had gone from just over 300 members to over 1,000 members. Also, in 1984 Governor Dick Riley, with the encouragement of the South Carolina Wildlife and Marine Resources Commission Board (later the Department of Natural Resources) declared September 1, 1984 (the opening day of dove season) Boykin Spaniel Day and threw their weight behind the effort to get the Boykin named the South Carolina state dog.

For several BSS board meetings I had been lamenting the fact that we were unsuccessful in getting this designation for our dog. I think to shut me up and perhaps since I lived in Columbia and the other board members erroneously thought I knew the legislative process, they asked me to head up a committee to get the Boykin spaniel to be the SC state dog. I accepted the challenge and that was the beginning of a fun adventure.

The other members of the committee were Kitty Beard of Camden, Dr. Baynard Boykin of Boykin and John Chappell of Leesville.

Since we were all novices in the way the legislature worked, Kitty Beard came up with a great idea. One of the most powerful legislators in our state was Bob Sheheen of Kershaw County. Kitty knew him and solicited his advice on how we could get this done. He was a huge help and someone later overheard him say that if he really wanted to get some legislation passed, he would get all of the Boykin spaniel owners in the state to help him.

He introduced House of Representative Bill #2403 on February 13, 1985. He had 54 co-sponsors and it was referred to the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee chaired by John J. “Bubber” Snow another supporter of this bill. Representative Snow had previous experience with special designation having a few years earlier gotten the Shag named the official state dance of South Carolina.

At Sheehen’s recommendation, the Boykin Spaniel Society asked ALL of our members in the state to contact their Senators and Representatives to ask them to support this legislation. We had members in virtually every district and they really let their folks know what was important to them, these little brown dogs.

In spite of all of our preparatory work, we ran into another serious problem when Representative Larry Koon from Lexington started promoting the Walker Foxhound as the South Carolina state dog. Representative Koon was an avid foxhunter and he felt that since the Walker Foxhound had been a resident breed in South Carolina much longer than the Boykin spaniel; it was only logical that if we were to have a state dog it should be the Walker Foxhound. He was a member of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee and the bill was not going to pass unless he removed his objection, supported the bill, or at least remained neutral. So in light of this new development, Representative Snow chose to withhold a vote and wait for a better time.

The Society under our special committee’s leadership, organized a Boykin Spaniel “walk in” before the State Wildlife Commission in 1984 in conjunction with September 1st (opening day of dove season) being declared Boykin Spaniel Day in South Carolina. This helped to keep our effort in the news.

We repeated the "walk in" again on February 27, 1985 before the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee. John Chappell of Batesburg-Leesville, Meta and Ned Beard of Camden and Nat Gist of Sumter brought their dogs to the Committee meeting. There was some apprehension that some of the dogs might have an accident but our fears were unwarranted. They (the dog and their owners) all behaved beautifully and added all of the committee members to their fan base.

On that day Representative Koon, perhaps recognizing the inevitable, removed his opposition to the bill and it was reported favorably to the floor of the House of Representatives where it had a second reading on February 28th and passed on a third reading March 1, 1985.

There were no problems when it went to the Senate on March 5th and on March 12th it had its third reading and it was ratified on March 20th by the General Assembly and sent to Governor Dick Riley for his signature.

With the stroke of his pen, on March 26, 1985, Governor Dick Riley made the Boykin spaniel the official state dog of South Carolina. It was a hard fought victory for the many Boykin spaniel devotees and a real plus for the state of South Carolina to associate itself with such a fine breed of dogs.