

HIGH SOCIETY LADY SHOWS IRISH SETTERS IN AMERICA

MRS. GERTRUDE CHEEVER PORTER

[Owner of the famous Champions Milson O'Boy & Rosecroft Premier]

Gertrude Cheever was born on 3rd May 1889 in New York USA , the only child of banker John Dow Cheever and his wife Anna. Her grandfather, John Haven Cheever was president of New York Belting & Packing Co., and the Mechanical Rubber Co., and was amongst the first businessmen to purchase a five acres plot at Far Rockaway, Long Island, an eighty acre gated estate of luxury country mansions for well-to-do New Yorkers.

As a debutante In 1909 Gertrude met Seton Porter, a member of her father's Rockaway Hunt Club. A graduate of Yale and Chairman of the Board of National Distillers the family deemed Seton a suitable suitor and on 3rd June 1911 the two married with the reception being held on the veranda of the Cheever's "Wave Crest", Far Rockaway home. Subsequently the couple resided at 884 Fifth Avenue, Manhattan.



John Dow Cheever's country home "Wave Crest" Far Rockaway, Long Island where Gertrude and Seton Porter held their wedding reception in 1911

Gertrude was a talented skater and member of the New York Ice Skating Club where she partnered Irving Isaac Brokaw. In 1920 they became Champion gold medallists performing the 10 Step, an early set pattern ice-skating dance. In later life Gertrude became the executive director of the Skating Carnival, an annual benefit event that took place at Madison Square Gardens in the 1930's.



1920 Gertrude Cheever Porter and Isaac Irving Brokaw became Champion gold medallists skating the pairs 10 Step. Brokaw later became America's first Winter Olympiad and a World Champion.

In 1924 Gertrude divorced Seton and purchased her first Irish Setter show dogs, later to become Ch. St. Cloud's Fermanagh III "Dixie" and Ch. Lord Palmerston II "The Woods". She never remarried, but continued to use the Porter surname while collecting monthly alimony of \$840 from Seton.

Ch. Peggy Belle joined Gertrude's Irish Setter family in 1926 followed by Red Barney who sadly survived less than a year. But in 1931 Fermanagh IV "Dixie Jr." was born and in 1932 the legendary Ch. Milson O'Boy. Next came Milson Copper Lad in 1935 and the famous Ch. Rosecroft Premier in 1938.

Of them all Ch. Milson O'Boy must rank as the most charismatic Irish Setter Gertrude ever owned.

PEDIGREE OF CH. MILSON O'BOY

Sire: Ch. Higgins Red Coat *Higgins Paddy of Boyne*

Craigie Lea Mona

Dam: Milson Miss Sonny *Ch. Terence of the Cloisiers*

Milson Goldie



Mrs. Gertrude Cheever Porter's Ch. Milson O'Boy aged 16 months

Joan McDonald Bearly wrote this tribute to Ch. Milson O'Boy in her book *This is the Irish Setter* in the mid 1970's:-

‘Once in awhile there is a single dog in a particular breed that manages to capture the fancy so totally as an all-around representative of the breed that he manages to live on in the hearts and minds of everyone that ever laid eyes on him. Ch. Milson O'Boy was one of those dogs. A legend in his own time and a dog that lives on in the heart of his owner, Mrs. Cheever Porter, Ch. Milson O'Boy is still regarded as what an Irish Setter should be – and was!

All the good things that can be said about an ideal dog applied to O'Boy. He was a devoted and loving companion, he was a spectacular showman who commanded the immediate attention of the audience, and his conformation was the Standard personified! The product and result of a twenty-year breeding program, he – and his breeder/handler, Harry Hartnett, were to achieve fame both in and out of the showring. Whelped on March 8, 1932, O'Boy was shown over a five-year period from 1933 to 1938 and during that time amassed a total of 103 Best of Breeds, 46 Best Sporting (Gundog) Groups and 11 Best in Shows. This was quite a record in those days, and he was retired early in 1938 to be used at stud.



Gertrude Cheever Porter's Ch. Milson O'Boy winning Best in Show in 1935 at Morris & Essex Kennel Club show in Madison, New Jersey with his breeder/handler Harry Hartnett

Perhaps O'Boy's greatest moment in the show ring came in 1935, when he won Best in Show at the Morris and Essex dog show. One hundred and twenty Irish Setters were present to compete, and after winning the Best of Breed award O'Boy went all the way to Best in Show over the total entry of 3,175 dogs under judge GV Glebe. That same year O'Boy won Best American-bred Dog in Show at the Westminster Kennel Club event.

Other honours were bestowed upon this marvellous dog as well. He was used to illustrate the Standard for the breed in the American Kennel Club Complete Dog Book, and he was deserving of this honour. Also Dr. Jay W. Calhoon wrote a book which stands as a permanent memorial to the dog and relates much of the story of his life in and out of the show ring.

Ch. Milson O'Boy was also lauded as a prepotent sire. He sired 41 litters which accounted for a total of 163 puppies from the top-quality bitches of that era.

Mrs. Cleever Porter of New York City recognized the greatness of this flashing red dog and enjoyed every moment of his brilliant show career, and especially the years of his retirement. O'Boy died on June 29 1945 after living thirteen happy years as a much admired and much loved and always to be remembered Irish Setter that even today is looked upon as near perfection in the breed.

When I (Joan McDonald Bearly) was editor of Popular Dogs magazine, each June a communication was received from Mrs. Porter placing her annual memorial advertisement in our Sporting Dog issue. It was a simple black-bordered box with just his illustrious name and birth and death dates.'

Upon his death the following lengthy obituary was printed in the New York Sun newspaper on July 20, 1945.:

CH. MILSON O'BOY PASSES ON
Irish Setter With Exceptional Crowd Appeal Dies in His Sleep

'Ch. Milson O'Boy, one of the great show dogs of all times, is dead. The handsome Irish Setter passed away quietly in his sleep recently and now the only visible symbol of him is the stone that marks his resting place beside the other pets of his owner, Mrs. Cheever Porter, in the quiet beauty of the Hartsdale Canine Cemetery at Hartsdale, NY.

It will be a long time, however, before O'Boy will be forgotten by those who saw him in the ring, for seldom has a dog had such crowd appeal as this Red Setter possessed. It is not better typified than by the incident which occurred at the Garden a few years ago. O'Boy was sitting on the bench beside his owner when a man in the blue overalls common to railroad workers approached and asked, "Is that Milson O'Boy?"

Informed that it was, he stood silent for a minute studying the dog and then explained. "I'm sorry I came in looking like this but I haven't much time. I just got in on my run – I'm a fireman on the Pennsylvania – and I had to see him. I've cut his pictures out of the paper every time I've seen them and I've got them all up on the wall at home. I've never been around where he was being shown before, though, and I just had to see him."

There was almost an attitude of reverence in the way he put his hand and stroked the dog's head. He ran his hands over the silky coat and gently fondled the long ears. Then he looked at his watch, said, "Well, I've got to be

going. Thanks for letting me pet him,” and walked down the aisle glancing back to where O’Boy, apparently aware that he had been honoured, stood slowly wagging his tail.

That, of course, was just the appeal this dog had for one man. It was at the Gardens, however, that one of the most striking demonstrations of O’Boy’s appeal to a crowd was given. That was in the final of the 1936 show when the showy Irishman was representing the gun-dog group in the great sextette that came before the late C. Frederick Neilson. O’Boy had captured the crowd when he won his group and they began rooting for him the minute he came into the ring for the Best in Show decision. Every time the judge looked in his direction there was applause and it grew deafening when the big fellow raced up and down the big arena keeping pace with the late Harry Hartnett, who handled him on his ring appearances.

When Neilson passed over O’Boy in favour of the smart little Sealyham, St. Margaret’s Surprise of Clairedale, the crowd made it very clear that it didn’t like it at all. It was the first time in Westminster history that its Best in Show award had evoked such a hostile demonstration. What the crowd did not know was that Neilson was one of O’Boy’s admirers and that, in giving preference to the Sealyham, he was not following his heart but his responsibility to judge the dogs on comparative show standards as he saw them.

Another great demonstration of the way this dog could capture the hearts of a crowd was given at the Morris and Essex of 1935. He certainly was a picture as he paced over the velvety turf on the polo field at Giralda Farms, against the evergreens and geraniums which bordered the judging platform and the bright summer clothes of the spectators. This time the gallery was bigger than at the Garden and its tribute to the great dog even more thunderous. When G.V. Glebe sent him to the centre of the ring to receive the Best in Show trophy the crowd roared approval.

What won the gallery every time O’Boy appeared in the ring was the fact that this dog made it perfectly clear that he knew what he was in there for. If ever a dog was trying every minute to win it was Ch. Milson O’Boy. He would never sleep with his collar on – to him that was the evidence that there was a show battle to be fought – and once the lead was around his neck it was all that Harry Hartnett could do to keep him quiet. He would race from the crate to the entrance of the ring and fidget around until it was time to go in. There was no relaxing for him until the contest was decided and he was back in the crate again. He would keep his eye as steadily on the judge as would his handler and there was no question but that he ate up the gallery tributes.

Arthur Roland

Another great admirer of Milson O’Boy was Al Smith. He followed O’Boy’s show career, even delaying the judging of the Best in Show at the Westchester Kennel Club one year because he wanted photos taken of himself with O’Boy and insisting the photographer take half a dozen shots.

The print he favoured most was subsequently framed and hung over his desk in the Empire State Building. When O'Boy died he wrote the following obituary

For all his ring consciousness there was nothing of the prima donna about O'Boy. At home he was just a pet, devoted to his mistress, with whom he delighted to play special games that they had devised. Attached as he and his handler were to each other, they were pleasures he reserved for his owner. Harry used to say, 'He'll never play that way with me.'

The son of Ch. Higgins Red Coat out of Milson's Miss Sonny, O'Boy was whelped on March 8, 1932. That made him more than thirteen years old at the time of his death, a ripe old age for a dog. Retired at the height of his career he had enjoyed a happy life as a pet marred only by the death of his handler. There are few who saw him in his moments of greatest triumph who ever will forget him.

Al Smith



Mrs. Gertrude Cheever Porter's Ch. Rosecroft Premier whelped 09.04.1938 He retired from the showring in June of 1944 with an impressive record of top show wins. He died aged 13 years on 12.06.1951

Ch. Rosecroft Premier born on 9th April, 1938. was one of 17 Champion Irish Setters dogs sired by Ch. Milson O'Boy, his dam being Rosecroft Fern. Bred in the Knightscroft kennels of Joseph and Henrietta Knight, Jr. Premier was given as a pup to Fred Nielson of Rosecroft Irish Setters, but after an important win at the Gardens Gertrude Cheever Porter purchased him in 1940 for the princely sum of \$1500. Handled by Harry Hartnett Premier had a spectacular show career amassing 124 Best of Breeds, 53 First Sporting (Gundog) Groups and 12 Best in Shows while in Gertrude's ownership to

break the record held by his sire and claim his place in the annals of the history of the breed .in America. He died after a long happy life with Gertrude on 12th June 1951.



Gertrude Cheever Porter buried eight of her precious Irish Setters including Ch. Milson O'Boy who died in 1945 and Rosecroft Premier in 1951 at the Hartsdale Pet Cemetery in Westchester County.

Until 1979 dogs owned by Gertrude, were exhibited in the showing, but these were not Irish Setters. When she died aged 90 on 14th November 1980 The New York Times published a small obituary with no details of her burial, but a gravestone with bares her name stands in Trinity St. John's Cemetery in Hewlett, New York.

In June 1962 Gertrude had the foresight to form The Cheever Porter Foundation, which has since made numerous grants to Schools of Veterinary Medicine, Veterinary Hospitals and Guide dog foundations. The Foundation based in Huntington, New York in 2013 holds assets of \$2.6million.



Gertrude Cheever Porter's grave in Trinity St. John's Cemetery, Hewlett N.Y

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