

# Eagle man shares love of dogs

by Joan Holman

**TOWN OF EAGLE** - "Select an animal, work with him go into the ring and the performance should be first rate if it's his movements giving action to your thoughts," explains Orin Benson, Hwy 22, Eagle. This man speaks with the authority of more than 60 years with dogs.

He was born on a farm at White Bear, Minnesota. He was not quite 10 years old when he and Coolie, the collie type farm dog, worked together to collect the cows. Benson realized then that words were not necessary. The dog knew what was happening and then tried to duplicate man's action.

There were few books on training animals avail-

able to Benson in those days. He was to form a live, first edition. "Neighbors watched me make sled dogs out of big Airedale type animals and proceed to hunt with a cross breed German Shepherd," commented Benson.

He says a neighbor bought him a registered springer spaniel for hunting when he was 14. "The only thing," laughed Benson, "was that the dog was afraid of guns. So I had to calm him."

He figured the best way was to pop paper bags and get the animal used to noise. Then his father became a customer: wanting decoys trained for hunting.

Benson switched from dogs to birds. He remembers teaching mallards to be live decoys. These crea-



Orin Benson

tures would stay in harness while sitting on the water calling their wild relatives. So named "call ducks" were in demand when hunters did not want to use the old hand mouth horn.

A next natural step was gun dog training. This had to be accomplished in the wide open spaces of the family farm. He recalls the many friends wanting his help training their hunting dogs.

He was earning \$5-10/month, having no idea of charges but happy to receive pay for doing what he liked.

After high school graduation in 1931, he went to work for a friend who owned a kennel near Cleveland. It was there Benson became acquainted with "bench shows." "They were interesting," he remembers, "but after a time I felt sorry for the hunting dogs who weren't allowed into these beauty events."

Benson returned to the family farm at White Cloud where he began his first Dog School. The farm cottage was headquarters. A 1921 model T Ford was his Dog Wagon. His clients were St. Paul industrialists with summer homes in fashionable Dellwood who owned hunting dogs.

He tells of driving out each morning in the Ford to collect the pupils. Near each house, the horn would sound, the door open and the maid would let the dog out for class.

Benson would fill the car and carry the pupils to the training grounds. At the end of the season, the dogs would be turned loose to make their run home.

His career had started. In 1936, he chose Wisconsin because it had a longer hunting season than Minnesota.

With the backing of three Wisconsin businessmen, he began the first retriever kennel in the state. It was located at River Hills (near Milwaukee) and was called Dogs Unlimited.

Milwaukee became a nucleus for the Wisconsin Amateur Field Trial Association. This was Benson's special interest as he had worked field trials in his own state (Minnesota). The trials, as an event, began in New York in 1933 and since then, Benson had followed the events.

He first worked as a bird boy and had progressed to the point of being spokesman to encourage Wisconsin to join the Asso-

ciation. In 1936, the first Wisconsin trials were held at Oshkosh under the sanction of AKC.

Benson continued with the River Hills business until the late 30s when he opened his own kennel near Oconomowoc on Hwy 18. This was the Perkins Game Farm.

The trial participants trailed him through the years and came to his kennels and his final location which has been Hwy 67 & 22 since 1942-43. From this spot, he's helped put the Town of Eagle onto the sports map.

In 1943, he built the first all concrete kennel in Wisconsin within these grounds. The building became a showplace to be used as a pattern when John Olin of Winchester Cartridge, put up NILO Kennel at Alto, Illinois.

Wisconsin Field Trials were held on Benson's 40 acres during the 40-50s. This was when the dogs used Tuohy's Eagle Spring Resort for their water competition and Francis Sasso's restaurant ability when human needs took over.

These famed times for dog and man continued until population put limits on the scheduled outdoor trails and caution claimed large city sport events were not safe. The annual Milwaukee Sports Show was closed.

But man and dog continue hunting. So with his catalytic ability, Orin Benson remains in Eagle helping man and animal work as one.

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