BREED PIONEER -1911-1933 Claire Knapp Penney Dixon and her Clairedale Chows



1922 Claire Knapp showing at the 3rd Annual Chow Club of America show at Madison Square Garden

In November of 2013 when ChowTales Archive was in its infancy,

I ran across an outstanding website that covered everything you could possibly want to know about one of the leading fanciers in early American Chow history, Claire Knapp Penney of Clairedale Chows. I immediately wrote to the site owner Ken Spooner of Spooner Central and asked permission to share some of his findings, and he graciously responded with this note.

Thank you for your kind words. By all means feel free to add the Clairedale Story

Don't know if you know it or not. but the entire fascinating Knapp saga that took over 8 years of research, all started when I wrote a short story about playing in one of their abandoned mansions as a kid in the 1950's and was accused of setting fire to it.

Regards
Ken Spooner

It took me a couple of years to finally get around to creating this archive page, as there is so much ground to cover on this fascinating woman…it was daunting, to say the least. Instead of procrastinating any further I am going to post a few items from Ken's site here first, then add in my additional findings, photos, articles etc. as I retrieve them from my own files.
Ken Spooner's 3rd book THE KNAPPS LIVED HERE is a fascinating read and a must own for all chow history collectors.



CLAIREDALE KENNEL TIMELINE

FROM SPOONER CENTRAL HISTORICAL WEBSITE:

Thank you from the bottom of my heart Ken for allowing me to display some of your very important Clairedale research at ChowTales

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1889: Oct. 23, Claire Antoinette Knapp is born to Sylvia T. & Joseph P. Knapp

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1894: Joseph Palmer Knapp joins Westminster Kennel Club and attends many of the gun/bird dog meets held at the Babylon LI clubhouse. He remains a lifelong member.

1900's: Claire's mother Sylvia T. Knapp starts entering Boston Terriers at the Westminster Dog Show in NYC & a Joseph P.

Knapp silver cup is offered as a prize.

1910: Claire Knapp is living mainly in Bellport, LI, and breeding & attending dog shows. She is also heavily involved with show horses at this time.

1911 – 12: **Claire starts to concentrate on Chows and moves to Greenlawn, LI. She keeps her riding stable there.**

1916 – 1925: Claire's brother Joseph F. Knapp buys the 200 acre Lawrence estate in Mastic, LI (now known as Mastic Beach)Claire moves there and in the name "Clairedale" appears in print.

1925 – 1928: Claire marries Willis Oliver Penney and moves Clairedale to Yaphank. She starts a family and is rapidly becoming known as an expert on the Chow breed two daughters) & Kennel move to Stony Brook, LI. They also have a Winter home on Johns Island, S.C.

1929 – 1933: The Penney Family (by now there are two daughters) & Kennel move to Stony Brook, LI. They also have a Winter home on Johns Island, S.C.

1933: After her entire Chow Kennel is destroyed in South Carolina due to heartworms, Claire returns to Long Island. She purchases the property at Red Cedar Point on the Peconic Bay in Hampton Bays. There she starts from scratch with a new breed Sealyham Terriers.

REGARDING THE CHOW KENNEL AND HEARTWORM – SOURCE: " I spent some time in Charleston, South Carolina in the 1970's and 1990's and can vouch for what beautiful area it is. Clairedale was located on a plantation there at St. John's Island and I'm sure it was a real paradise. Claire's daughter Margaret certainly recalled it that way too in Kerrin Winston Churchill's article for Dogs In Review, June 2003, " Living there in that country with those Chows in that gorgeous country what more could a child ask for? I was in heaven."

But unfortunately, because of the water and swampy area, mosquitos carrying Heartworm attacked Claire's dogs. Although this could of easily happened back on Long Island too. I know from the experience of dealing with this awful disease there that nearly killed my Irish Setters in the 1970's how hard the cure can be ….but it was much worse for Claire in the 1930's because there was no cure.

Margaret: "Oh, my poor Mother. She lost her entire kennel of Chows except for Son Too and his son Little Pal, Heartworm wiped them out. In those days there was no prevention and you couldn't tell the dogs were affected until the disease was in its advanced stages. You can't imagine the horror my Mother went through."

With her breeding stock gone Claire also was faced with another big decision. The future direction of Clairedale. Of course, she seriously considered rebuilding her Chow line but after looking long and hard at available bloodstock she was very disappointed in what she saw happening in the breed. She felt the correct type was quickly disappearing to fads that focused on exaggerated individual characteristics. This is where her strong Knapp genes of both her father and grandfather kicked in and served her well. She wrote: "Probably I am a hard-headed breeder and fancier, but I do prefer very little variation in type in all breeds. and feel that many different ones harm all of us." *Although she vowed to "* always know and love the Chow *" she turned her focus to a breed she referred to as* "Little varmints and rouges"

1934-40 ARE THE GLORY YEARS FOR CLAIREDALE KENNELS. HER SEALYHAM TERRIERS BRING MUCH FAME TO CLAIREDALE WITH THE BIG WIN OF BEST IN SHOW AT THE 1936 WESTMINSTER KENNEL CLUB SHOW

1940’s: The Penneys divorce and Claire marries Thomas Dixon. Claire starts to expand her breeds most notably with Highland Terriers. Her eldest daughter Margaret who has obviously inherited Claire’s flair with dogs starts her own kennel at Hampton Bays. Pennyworth Kennels will also go into the record books and great success.

Clairedale continues winning with several different breeds. Claire’s marriage to Mr. Dixon, whom she had known since the very early 1900’s, does not fare as well and they separate.

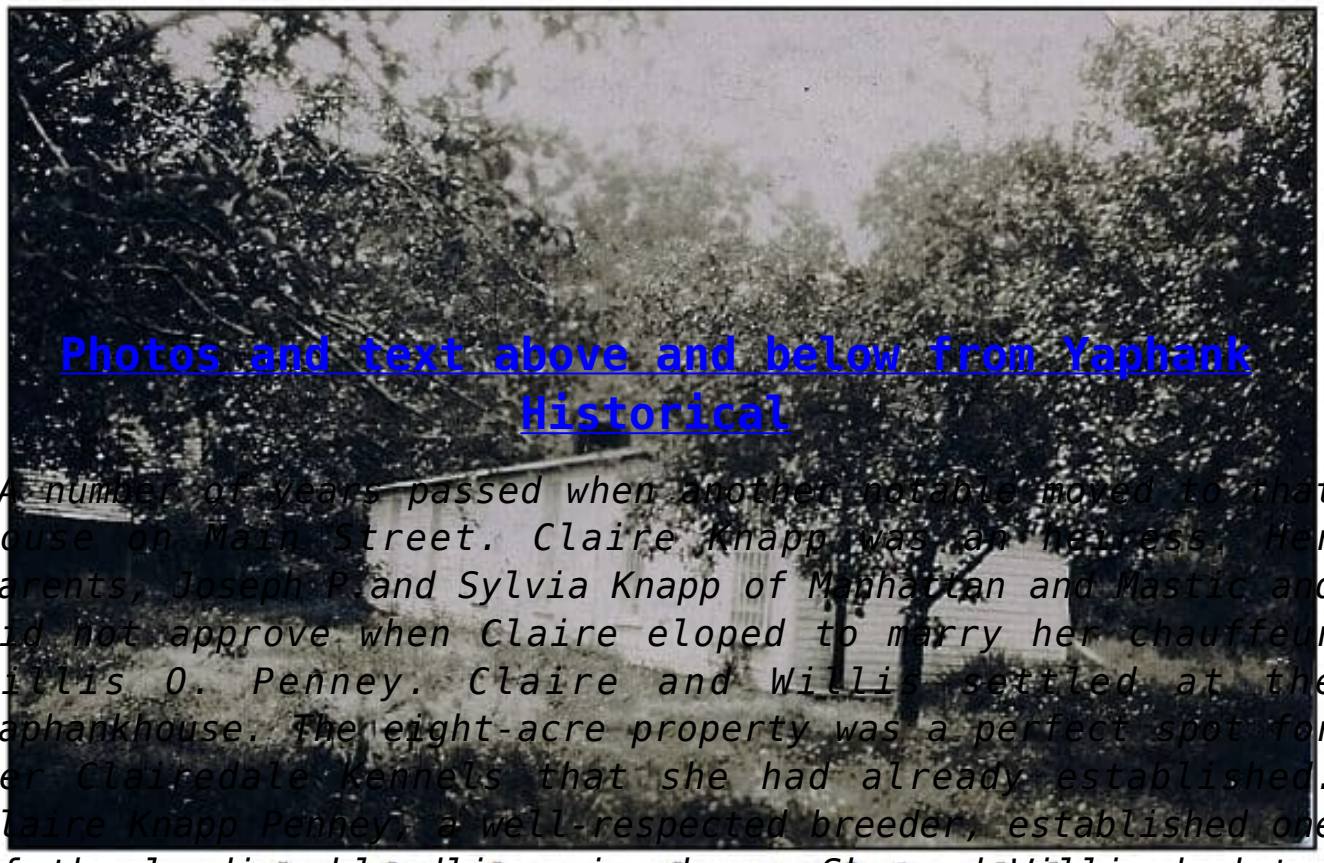
1950’s: Both Clairedale & Pennyworth continue with success in the show arena. By mid-’50’s Claire’s health starts to decline. Some shows are entered with jointly Mother/Daughter owned dogs. After a long illness, Mrs. Claire Knapp Dixon dies October 25, 1959.1960: Clairedale Property at Red Cedar Point, Hampton Bays is put up for sale

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1964: Claire’s daughter Margaret Penney Newcombe wins Best In Show at Westminster. They are the only mother & daughter to have done that in the 128-year history of the show. Pennyworth carries the Clairedale flame with a long and distinguished breeding career.

CLICK HERE – Remembering Claire's daughter, Margaret (Peggy) Newcombe of Pennyworth Kennels. Grand Dame of the whippet world who passed January 2007 at 80 years of age. This is a wonderful website highlighting her years in her mother's Chow kennels and beyond

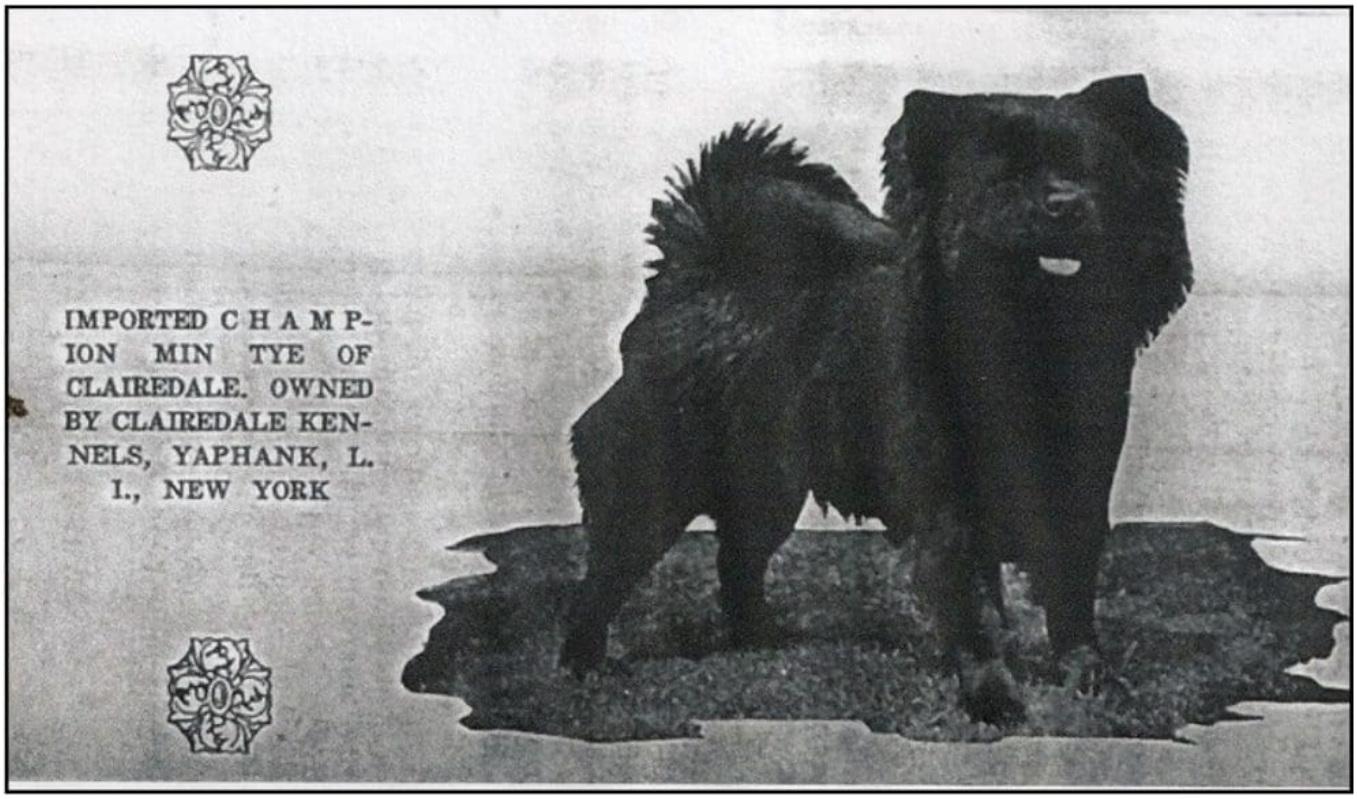
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Photos and text above and below from Yaphank Historical

“A number of years passed when another notable moved to that house on Main Street. Claire Knapp was an heiress. Her parents, Joseph P.and Sylvia Knapp of Manhattan and Mastic and did not approve when Claire eloped to marry her chauffeur Willis O. Penney. Claire and Willis settled at the Yaphankhouse. The eight-acre property was a perfect spot for her Clairedale Kennels that she had already established. Claire Knapp Penney, a well-respected breeder, established one of the leading bloodlines in chows. She and Willis had two daughters, Margaret and Ann, while living at Yaphank. In 1929, Clairedale Kennels moved to Stony Brook. It is interesting to note that later in 1938, Claire’s
chow won “Best in Show” at the Westminster Dog Show. In 1964, her daughter Margaret did the same, making them the only mother and daughter to do so in 128 years.”

The dog kennels at Clairedale



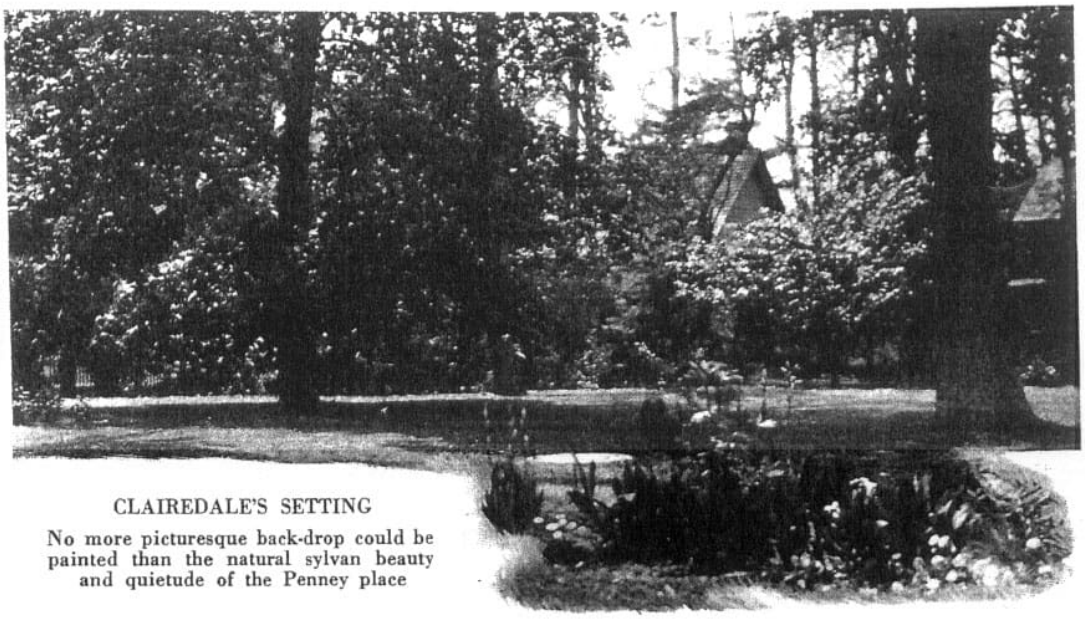
Westminster Champion Chow, Clairedale Kennels at Yaphank, 1938

Below find the outstanding article in the 1926 AKC Gazette about the Clairedale Kennels in Yaphank Long Island

The AMERICAN KENNEL GAZETTE

Edited by Louis de Casanova

Vol. 43—No. 8 August 31, 1926



CLAIREDALE'S SETTING

No more picturesque back-drop could be painted than the natural sylvan beauty and quietude of the Penney place

With Clairedale Chows by the Sea

Mrs. Claire Knapp Penney Has an Ideally Placed Kennel at Yaphank, Long Island

By ARTHUR FREDERICK JONES

Photographs by R. W. Tauskey

THE world is no larger than we make it.

It seems a fearsome place when we contemplate it in early childhood. That is due to the illusion that we are just a tiny speck in a globular community of untold millions. That is really the truth, but as we expand in vision, enlarge our acquaintance, assume new responsibilities, and accomplish things, the earth begins to shrink.

For we are building up in our subconscious mind a place that approaches nearer and nearer to that unknown something called the earth. Therefore, our conscious and subconscious worlds become a matter of resourcefulness, the seat of all happiness.

Happiness is not a thing to be pursued. It is the birthright of every man. If he is unable to sense that vast wealth of happiness always at his command, he will make the resultant error of seeking it in uncharted places, always driving, by forced marches, to goals uncertain at the best.



VERY THOUGHTFUL

This serious chap shows how splendidly coated are Clairedale chows, due in a great measure to the free sea breezes which sweep Long Island

But the happy man falls back on philosophy, for that is the basis of resourcefulness. This philosophy should not be of the scholarly nature, but of a purely workable sort—the kind which enables us to take the bitter with the sweet and shrug our shoulders. Yet it is not cynicism.

Cynicism, possibly, shows better than anything else that we have failed in our resourcefulness. It is an admission of near-sightedness, and partly regret that we have allowed golden opportunities to slip past, due to some error in our scheme of life.

THE great psychologists and philosophers have been trying for years either to establish or to smash that something called happiness. What they failed to do, in most cases, was to take into account their own mental outlook on life at the time of writing. And that brings the natural conclusion that happiness is not something to be gained by too intensive thinking.



SOME TROPHIES

Victory with dogs is something to be expected at this Long Island canine oasis



OH BOY OF CLAIREDALE

One of the best stud dogs in the kennel is this fine red specimen that upholds the best chow traditions

True happiness comes when we are unconscious of its presence. The savages in the dark lands are happy because they do not think. The lowest form of peasants all over the world are happy because they work by day and sleep by night. For man is only an animal, at best, and his brain power is consequently limited.

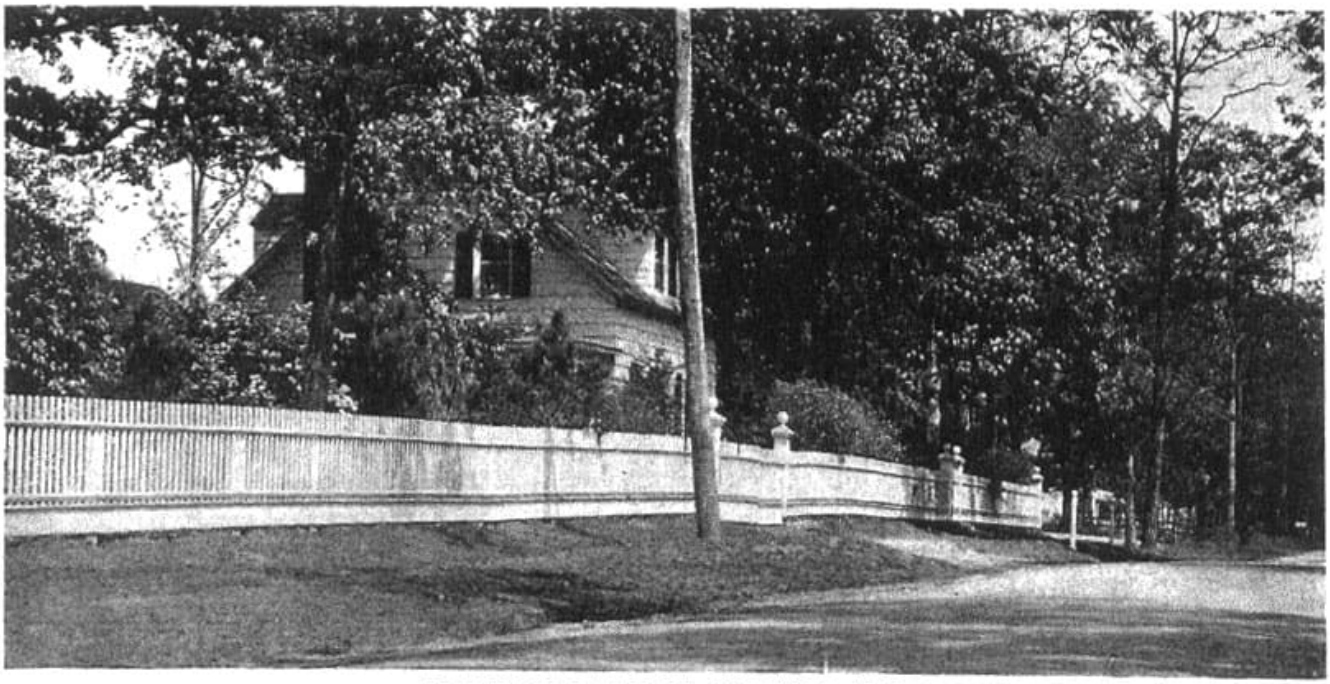
Dogs are happy, yet the happiest kinds are those about whom man worries the least. For the dog likes to be natural, and if his mode of life is radically changed, his natural reflexes are stirred.

That does not mean that dogs must be allowed to run wild, and govern themselves. Some of the finest and happiest canines are to be found in great kennels. One of the biggest of these Eastern breeding plants, the Clairedale Kennels of Mr. and Mrs. W. O. Penney, at Yaphank, Long Island, New York, has some forty of the best chow chows to be found anywhere. And they all seem happy.



CH. FLAME OF CLAIREDALE

A line-bred, red bitch, and one of the really good winning chows



HARKING BACK TO INDIAN DAYS

Modern ideas and the rush of civilization have taken hold at the Penney place, but it still retains a flavor of pre-revolutionary simplicity and original quaintness

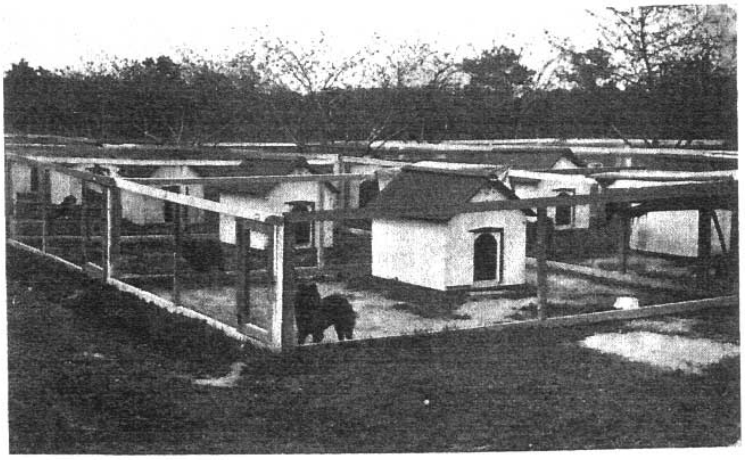
Whatever the cause, happiness is essential. And it brings a satisfactory result. It brings better health, a calm appearance, and an entirely better disposition. Perhaps this is because of a certain effect on the glandular system.

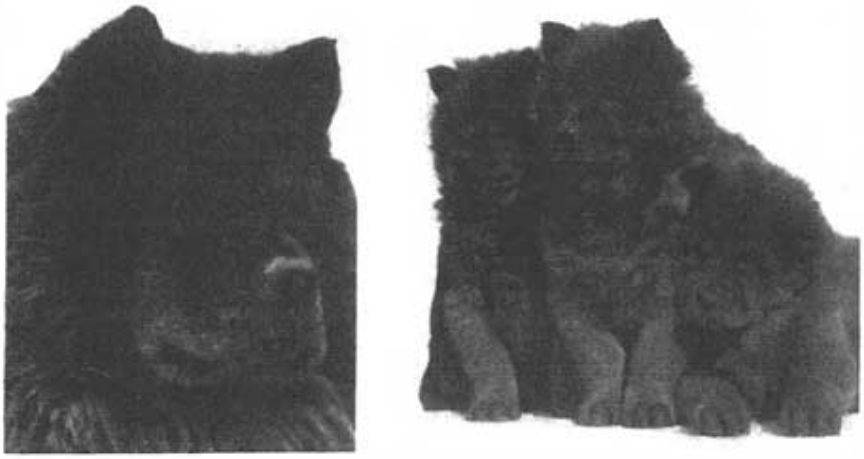
CONSERVATIVE scientists have not placed, exactly, the relationship between the functioning of the glands and the general outlook on life, but the modernist feels sure there is a definite connection.

These salient characteristics of happiness and health rule for all dogs. But they are particularly applicable in the case of the chow, for he is the most temperamental, and the most delicate of all the larger breeds. Exceptional care is important in everything which pertains to his life. His sire and dam must be ideally mated. And after whelping, he needs to be aided over some of the rougher contacts of every-day occurrence.

This does not mean that the chow is a delicate dog, or that he needs pampering. It means, merely, that if quality is to be developed, the chow must be watched very carefully. Even then







Wu Lu of Clairedale, full sister to Ch. Flame, is on the left, and three of her fine looking, six-weeks-old puppies are seen on the right

fences are made of sectional, medium weight, meshed wire, 5 feet high. These are being replaced, as rapidly as possible, by permanent, meshed wire fences of a heavier type. Chows need a strong fence, for they stand against it, and jump upon the wire, causing it to get out of shape.

For exercise, the dogs are turned into large, wire-enclosed fields. The smaller of these is three-quarters of an acre in extent, while the other is in the neighborhood of three acres. As a matter of fact, these are merely the official runs, for the entire place, some eight acres in all, is at the disposal of the dogs on occasion.

the mistress of Clairedale, he believes that dogs should be accustomed to showing long before they go into competition. With that end in view, he has built both a judging platform and a show bench, in the rear of the cook-house.

It is there the dogs receive their combing and grooming, and get their first and succeeding lessons in what a dogs should do in the ring. Sometimes they are left chained to the bench for several hours to get them accustomed to collar and leash.

Ordinarily, the dogs have a great deal of freedom. Naturally, this is inclined to make them dislike restrictions. For the Clairedale Kennels are kennels in the strictest application of the word, some forty small houses taking the place of the customary large building. It is a good way to raise chows, and it is one of the things which make Mrs. Penney's plant different from any other in the East.

THE layout of individual homes is in back of the charming old farmhouse that the owners have remodeled and modernized. Anyone who has ever been to that great, sparsely settled section of Long Island, in which lies Yaphank, will tell you that it is ideal for the raising of anything which demands freedom afoot and blue sky overhead. And the Penney homestead, sitting behind its neat, white, picket fence, gives you the impression of nature untouched by worldliness. It it in such an atmosphere that the Clairedale chows live in their little homes, and develop into championship specimens.

The majority of the houses are square, 2½ x 4 feet, while others are double, measuring 3½ x 5 feet. The older models are entered from the end, and the others have doors on the side. The side-door models are very good, for the entrance is into a small space, not unlike a hallway in a modern newlywed apartment. This feature offers protection from the elements in all kinds of weather.

Being portable, the dog houses may be knocked down for complete scrubbing, and are easily moved to new ground whenever it is deemed necessary. Separate runs surround the houses, some 21 x 35 feet, and others 20 x 42 feet, 16 x 16 feet, and 20 x 20 feet respectively. Due to the shortness of time in which Clairedale Kennels have been assembled, some of the



CLAIREDALE'S COOK HOUSE

The kitchen is an important item, and it helps to bring success

THERE are two fairly large puppy houses. These were formerly chicken houses, but they have been converted for the use of dogs. The larger of these is 68 x 11 feet, and the other is 33 x 11 feet, the pen inside being 11 x 11 feet. No heat is needed for the puppies, nor is it necessary to provide especially warm quarters for the bitches in whelp. The owners of Clairedale believe that a large part of the trouble from disease results through dogs going from overheated kennels into the open.

Throughout the winter, the chows of all sizes pay no attention to the weather. No matter how cold the day, or how blizzardly the snowstorm, some of the dogs will be found out in the open enjoying themselves. Their huge coats protect them under the most severe conditions. Mostly, the puppies and the young dogs are the ones that stay out in the bad weather, for as they become older, chows like the comfort of their cushioned straw beds. If weather of any kind bothers the chow, it is the heat of summer.

The cook-house is an interesting place. This is a small building, 15 x 15 feet in size, and contains bins for food; a range, cutting tables, an electric dish-washing machine, cupboards for cooking utensils and for grooming tools, a sink, a medicine chest, and an electrically operated, 6 x 9 feet refrigerator; racks and hooks for collars and leashes, and, except at meal times, a huge stack of feeding pans. Indeed, the cook-house is the place toward which everything gravitates.

If a brood bitch should be in especial

need of attention while whelping, she could be accommodated in the cook-house. But that is seldom necessary, for the owners of Clairedale try to have the litters whelp in a good time of year, preferably in the very early spring. That affords good weather for early development, the thing so important in this type of dog.

A chow needs attention while he is young. He must build good, strong bone, and be allowed to fill out and harden his muscles. Even then he may change so many times before maturity that it is almost impossible to make predictions. Some of the greatest champions have grown from less than mediocre puppies, while some of the most wonderful youngsters have fallen off to nothing when full grown.

That is what makes the breeding of chows such an interesting problem. And it is the reason why so many fanciers go in for chows. They are always expecting something very good, and the uncertainty adds a greater zest to the keeps such dogs for any length of time, he is bound to become attached to them. Soon he begins to discover their faults. Then, it is only a question of time before he decides that they might not transmit the bad faults to offspring. So he breeds dogs that under normal conditions would not be considered for breeding purposes. And



TWO WONDER PUPPIES

The six weeks' bitch on the right developed into an eight months' ace

leaves little to be desired. In the morning all of her dogs receive eggs and milk. Some cereal—such as shredded wheat or cornflakes—is mixed in with the milk. This is a direct departure from the ideas of certain other breeders of chows, but it has proved very satisfactory for Clairedale.

The big meal, coming late in the afternoon, is varied from time to time. It may contain raw meat, chopped meat or cooked meat. It always includes at least one kind of vegetable. The vegetables mostly used at the Penney place are carrots, tomatoes, garlic, onions, celery, spinach, and lettuce. Ground-up dog biscuit naturally is a basic food.

PUPPIES have a more intensive diet, but it varies only slightly from that of the older dogs. The youngsters are fed as many as six times a day when they are very young, but this is gradually reduced down to the point where they take up the adult diet. Meat is given to the juniors from the time they are

WITH CLAIREDALE CHOWS BY THE SEA

(*Continued from page* 13)

at certain times. For bone they are given ground-up egg-shells, it being the contention that these develop the framework of a dog without harming him. Some of the especially prepared chemical compounds have been known to injure dogs. Cod liver oil is another medium for keeping the dogs in a right condition.

Aside from the Penney system of feeding, the water of Long Island is another thing which helps in the raising of sturdy canines. The aqua pura, running beneath the surface of that attenuated isle, is very hard, and contains a great deal of iron. It is the curse of the laundress, but a blessing to both humans and animals.

It has been said that native Long Islanders never die. They just dry up and blow away. And some people ascribe the longevity directly to the splendid water. That is merely a guess, but it does seem probable. Anyway, the longevity of the true natives is not a myth. I have known many men, long past the prescribed three score years and ten, putting in continuous days for months and months, at day labor. In one instance, a father and son worked side by side for the road commission. The father was nearly 95, and the son was past 65. Another man away out on the eastern end of the island was still a carpenter at 75, and his particular specialty was in building windmill towers. He did a large share of the manual labor.

So the Clairedale Kennels may be especially blessed by their location. In addition to the fine quality of the drinking water, the atmosphere of Long Island is very well adapted to developing the coat of a chow. Thrown out where the full gales of the Atlantic may sweep across its narrow girth, Long Island has a climate not unlike that of England. Great, billowy sea scuds come driving in off the ocean, and drop a dense blanket of fog over the country. This brings out the finer qualities of coat, simplifying the work of the breeder in a remarkable way.

Whatever the cause, Mrs. Penney has produced and developed some excellent chows. They give you a thrill, just to watch them, as they move about in their little dooryards. There is not one that would not look splendid on the front of a limousine, the most aristocratic place that a chow can find. The owners of Clairedale may point out faults—it is true that no one can ever own a kennel of forty perfect dogs—but the majority of the good ones gives even a critical fancier a lot to think about.

Clairedale chows get a lot of attention from the owners, and are consequently almost human in their dispositions. Mr. and Mrs. Penney are usually surrounded by a number of especial pets that are allowed more than the usual freedom. Then, also, the owners make it a practice of traveling with their dogs.

Recently they purchased a new type of trailer, which enables Mr. and Mrs. Penney to camp in out of the way places, without missing a single comfort that they would have had at home. And several of the chows are always present on these motor trips.

Also, that is the way the Clairedale chows go to shows. Instead of trusting to the impersonal railroads, the Penneys load their dogs into the car, attach the trailer, and get under way for another conquest. It keeps the dogs from getting stale through being shipped by rail from point to point. And it removes a large part of the distemper threat, for most of that is due to waiting at the destination in close proximity to ailing dogs.

So far as can be learned, the Penneys are about the only Eastern fanciers who thus travel to shows. Doubtless there are cases of this in the West where conditions are different, but it is a distinctly novel idea for a native-born Easterner.

Mrs. Penney first became interested in chows many years ago. She was then Miss Claire Knapp, and at that time the breeds that held her fancy were the Boston terrier and the Pekingese. But she saw a particularly fine

looking chow puppy in England, and bought the fluffy fellow on the spot. Soon after this puppy died. It was not until later that she again became interested enough to buy a chow.

Then she went to a show at the Grand Central Palace, New York, and there saw Win Sum Min T'Sing, a dog bred by E. F. Hutton. This dog revived her enthusiasm, and she has been breeding chow dogs ever since.

There are half a dozen specimens at Clairedale that claim the especial affections of the owner, and five of them are bitches. The lone stud dog that fits into this select circle is Ch. Son of Min T'Sing. He is a typical dog, always carries good coat, has a wonderful body, legs and feet, and has a good chow expression.

One of the biggest American-bred winners is Ch. Flame, daughter of Chow Mein. Flame has been judged best bitch at fourteen successive shows, and has seven times gone to best of breed. Another daughter of Chow Mein is Ch. Eye You, a most typical bitch. The other fine ones are Ch. Min Tye, an English importation, and Ch. Chop Suey, another great winner.

Satisfied that her children are wonderful examples of the breed, the Penneys are again sending Chow Mein to shows. They have decided to let her continue her career, and try to complete the championship nearly earned when she began to have families. Chow Mein was bred by E. C. Waller, and is the foundation of the kennel, being some eight years old. And Clairedale appreciates the old matron, dogs and owners respecting the whims of this most especial pet.

Had Clairedale no other claim to attention than its appearance and its secluded location in that forest retreat known as Yaphank, there would be still volumes to say about the place. But it has such a valuable stock of dogs that it is a pure delight to anyone

interested in the members of the canine kingdom. And that is the purpose of the dog, to bring joy and happiness to his human friends. For after all, there is little to this life unless we take some enjoyment from our activities, hobbies, and friends.

Clairedale fills the specifications of what a breeding plant should be, and it brings with that specialized completeness, a something called contentment, a thing difficult to find.



Many years after this lovely Clairedale dog was winning in the ring, he graced the Dog News cover

MORE CLAIREDALE CHOW PHOTOS AND ARTICLES ON THE WAY SOON!!