

COME-HOME

By Ted Slupik

There's no better example of "coming home" than Albert Payson Terhune's love of his Sunnybank home and his beloved collies. Lad, Terhune's first famous collie, was devoted to his owner, was a "come-home" dog. Allowed to romp freely on the grounds of Sunnybank and trained to break loose, he always came home. Most dogs are fairly capable of finding their way home within a three mile radius. Lad and some of his mates always came back to "The Place" at Sunnybank.



Bruce, Lad and Wolf

Lad (the world's first famous collie) and Lady (Lad's mate) had only one descendant named Wolf who was killed saving a stray dog on a railroad track. The event was witnessed by many people and was printed as front page news. This helped to contribute to the legend of Terhune's dogs. Another of Terhune's more famous collies was Bruce, a dog imported from England that continued the Sunnybank heritage line.

Lad's place in the house was in the music room on a cool floor under the piano. He could watch who was coming up the drive as well as the residents of the house. He was the house and guard dog and was the only dog allowed inside. Lad was the hero of the book, *Lad, a Dog*, with his master and mistress secondary characters. As you read the book, you are drawn into almost playing the part of these unnamed characters. It seems logical that Terhune, loving his home as much as he did, started a business that kept him there. On average, there were 40-50 collies on the property. The dogs were brushed daily year around and bathed weekly in the lake from April to November with Ivory soap flakes. Terhune's collies loving water was very unusual for the breed.

This year was the 100th anniversary of the 1919 release of *Lad, A Dog*. The publisher did not expect the book to be successful so they did not insert a title page in the initial printing. As it turned out, the book was reprinted 30 times the first year alone. Audiences could not get enough of Lad. Considering there was no television, internet, or social media to spread the story, this book's success and longevity is quite remarkable.

Collies were originally brought to America in the late 1800's by J.P. Morgan prior to Terhune becoming a breeder of collies. Although Terhune and Morgan probably knew each other, there is no evidence of a connection. Subsequently Eric Knight continued the collie theme with Lassie, another "come-home" dog. He published his story, *Lassie Come-Home* in December 7, 1938 in the Saturday Evening Post. The hyphen was removed for the movie title. This tale focused more on stories of the working class in Britain. Terhune's original Lad story was published in Redbook Magazine in 1915. Both Knight's and Terhune's articles expanded into books and both ultimately became movies; *Lassie* in 1943 by Knight and *Lad a Dog* by Terhune in 1962. Terhune wrote books prolifically in the 1920's and 1930's. In his peak year his earnings exceeded \$60,000 (over \$753,000 in today's dollars). Knight did not get a chance to continue his writings about dogs. He died in 1943 during WWII prior to the release of the movie.



Eric Knight (left) on movie set

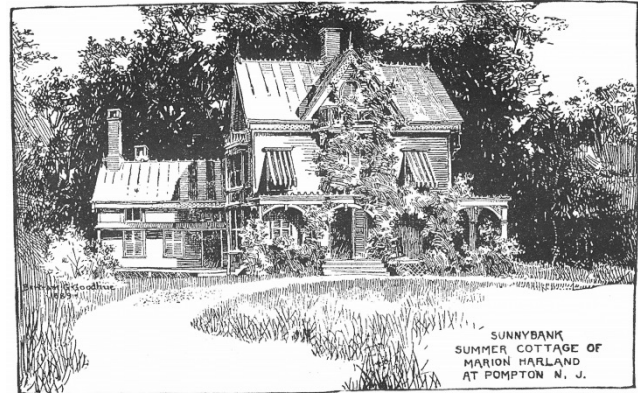
For the 23rd consecutive year, approximately 250 collie lovers with 100 plus collies made their way to Sunnybank to celebrate "The Gathering". The 3-day-weekend celebrates Terhune, his love of his home and the collies that he loved and cared for so dearly. Terhune devotees enjoyed every minute of the event.

One speaker at The Gathering read a letter she had written as a 13 year old girl to a friend. Fifty years later, she recounted visiting The Mistress, then in her 80's. This recently found letter was a very emotional tribute to Sunnybank and an important piece of collie history.

On Sunday, an actual collie competition was part of the weekend. The "Virtues Match" judged specifics including General Appearance, Expression, Profile, Skull, Muzzle, Front, Rear, and Side Gait. It's a good thing that we don't judge our mates on this many categories!

The people who attended this year's 100th anniversary of the book and the "Come-home" dogs were "Come-Home participants", celebrating Terhune, the original "Come-Home Man". Terhune said "*As far back as I can remember, The Place has had a grip on me that I can't explain. It is the only spot on earth where I want to live. Every tree, every foot of its rolling wooded acres is inexpressibly dear to me*". Every time Terhune made a trip to New York or especially overseas, he longed to return to his dear home. Terhune was a come-home man; whenever he traveled, he always wanted to get back to Sunnybank!

What remains of the Terhune Memorial Park is only nine acres, surviving from the original 55. Terhune's house was unfortunately demolished in April 1969. Four stories high, it had 11 rooms and spanned 4,000 square feet and was covered by Wisteria vines. Terhune stood 6'3-1/2" tall with a chest girth of 50" so he required a large home. The dog kennels were only 70' from the house with dog runs 30' long.



Terhune's parents were original owners of Sunnybank

In the nearby Von Riper Hopper House Museum, we enjoyed six short movie reels converted to digital media from 1924-1940, saved by daughter of Terhune's attorney, Bruce Chapman. One film had Terhune narrating in a very deep distinct voice. Another of the reels was colorized which made the grounds of The Place even more stunning as the viewer is immersed back to a moment in time.

The importance of coming home is exemplified at Sunnybank with the comradery of the attending group so evident. The weekend reminded us that dogs are the greatest example of faithfulness that the world has ever known.

Some people say, you can never go home. Anyone who knew Lad or Lassie knows better.