

By Dr. Kirk Neely

The
Dog
That
Doesn't
Rock
The
Boat

**South
Carolina's
Boykin
Spaniel**



“If you want to go to Boykin, you have to start somewhere else. You can’t get there from here,” said Carl Bostick as he kicked back in a rocking chair. Carl, an Irmo surveyor, is a member of the Boykin clan. It was Carl who introduced me to the village surrounding Boykin Mill Pond.

Whenever Carl and I get together, swapping stories is our favorite pastime. Recently, Carl related a story that is an essential part of South Carolina lore.

Near the beginning of the 20th Century, a hunt club in Boykin had a serious problem. Duck hunters plied the tributaries of the Wateree Basin in small skiffs. The boats were fine for duck hunting, but they were not big enough to accommodate a large dog such as a Labrador Retriever. Frequent mishaps occurred when large dogs leapt from small boats, tumbling unsteady hunters overboard into the cold, cold water.

Allen Jones Boykin, Carl’s great-grandfather, and L. Whitaker Boykin, Carl’s great-uncle, deter-

mined that a smaller retriever would be far more suitable. They set about to develop a smaller breed.

Alexander L. White, a Spartanburg banker and avid sportsman, frequently traveled to Kershaw County to hunt with the Boykin family. He had been the victim of several unfortunate spills into the Wateree River. In 1911, departing Sunday morning worship at First Presbyterian Church, he found a stray dog begging for food near the church door. He took the bedraggled brown pup home with him and named him Dumpy. He soon discovered that Dumpy was intelligent and had quite an aptitude for hunting.

White eagerly corresponded with Whit Boykin to tell him about Dumpy. Arrangements were made for the little dog to travel to Kershaw County. Dumpy was put aboard the train at Magnolia Station in Spartanburg. The dog was met in Camden by Whit Boykin.

Dumpy, a male, was penned with a female named Singo. The result was the first litter of Boy-



Raconteurs Carl Bostick (left) and Baynard Boykin have many a yarn to spin concerning our state dog. Two-year-old Rosie (facing page), owned by John Dargan of Spartanburg, has field trial champions for parents.

kin Spaniels. In the 1980s, an attempt was made to trace the Boykin back to Dumpy and Singo. While the search produced a lot of material, none of it assigned a breed to either Dumpy or Singo. Whatever their bloodlines, the merger produced a remarkable new breed.

I made a trip to Boykin to learn more about our state canine. I invited Carl to go along as my navigator and tour guide. My son Kris, who is married to Carl's daughter Patrice, went along as a chaperone. Both our wives thought we needed somebody to keep us out of trouble. Believe me, there is not much trouble to get into in Boykin.

On a muggy August day we set out. Carl was right: We did have to go somewhere else to begin. We started at the home of Beaver Hardy, one of Carl's Boykin cousins.

The Old King's Highway, now State Road 261, is a picturesque route through the heart of the Palmetto State. Historic Boykin is a short detour through expansive farmland. The village is a semicircle of shops situated near a millpond. At Boykin Mill Pond, travelers can visit a 19th-Century restored gristmill, watch as brooms are handmade and enjoy a meal at The Mill Pond Steakhouse. Boykin is the site of the last Civil

War battle in South Carolina; a monument in memory of all soldiers who fought there stands on S.C. 261.

One of the shops near the pond is a combination country store and short-order grill: Boykin Company Store and Boykin Company Grille. It was there we met Dr. Baynard Boykin, grandson of Whit Boykin, the original breeder of Boykin spaniels. He is a former faculty member of Clemson's School of Horticulture. Baynard reminded me of a Wateree Swamp cypress—tall, tan and stately. In crisp khaki pants and shirt, he is pleasant, with a quick wit and contagious smile. He has the strong sense of place of one who knows the land, the water and the history. He impressed me as the epitome of a gentleman farmer.

Baynard recounted the story about the little brown dog that followed White home from church in Spartanburg and how Baynard's grandfather found a suitable companion for Dumpy when the stationmaster at the railroad depot in Camden presented Singo to him. To this day, no one really knows whether Singo was found or stolen.

Baynard's stories included family history. The Boykins lost everything during the Civil War. They got most of it back by marrying Yankee wives. He remembered living through the Great Depression as a boy. His family survived by working as hunting guides for wealthy northerners. He sold some of the first Boykin pups to those hunters for \$10 each.

Baynard had a tale about Dixie Boykin, one of the members of the clan. Dixie lived at Cool Springs Plan-

tation, a 30-room mansion built by John Boykin in 1832. During the Depression, Dixie had to farm the land without help. The story is that he bought an elephant for plowing. His wife allegedly killed Dixie, her third husband. Dixie's ghost, one of the most famous in South Carolina, is said to visit parties in the old mansion and have a discreet glass of wine with the guests.

Baynard told another story about local entrepreneur Alice Boykin, who convinced a fellow from New York that he really didn't want the pick of Beaver Hardy's litter of Boykin pups. She persuaded him to buy the runt of the litter.

Kris and I listened for hours as Baynard and Carl ricocheted yarns back and forth. There were hunting stories, of course, always extolling the virtues of the Boykin Spaniel. The dog's keen nose and eagerness in the field make him an exceptional retriever of upland birds as well as waterfowl. Baynard told how the spaniels were used in the old days to drive deer and wild turkeys through the swamp.

The Boykin Spaniel loves water and is an excellent swimmer. The hunting boats used on the Wateree River were homemade three-piece section boats with a shallow draw. The Boykin Spaniel was bred to be a small retriever. The breed is known as "the dog that does not rock the boat."

Beaver Hardy took a pair of Boykins to Louisiana on a hunt. The guides there asked where they might purchase "some of those little brown poodle dogs." Boykins little resemble poodles; they often have been mistaken for other spaniels. The confusion with the poodle and other breeds actually endangered the Boykin's bloodlines.

Camden veterinarian Dr. Peter McCoy pushed to have the breed recognized, and 65 years after Whit Boykin brought Dumpy and Singo together, the Boykin Spaniel Society was founded in 1977. It became the official registry for the Boykin Spaniel. In 1985, Act No. 31 of the state legislature designated the Boykin Spaniel as the official dog of South Carolina because it is the only dog that was originally bred for South Carolina hunters by South Carolinians.

"The Boykin Spaniel Club and Breeders Association of America have taken on the role of the parent club for American Kennel Club purposes," reports Kim Parkman, a Boykin Spaniel Society member and respected breeder and trainer of award-winning Boykins in Sumter. According to Parkman, the Boykin Spaniel will become a fully recognized AKC breed December 30.

The University of South Carolina Press in December will publish the revised edition of Mike Creel and Lynn Kelley's *The Boykin Spaniel: South Carolina's Dog*. Visit the Web page at www.sc.edu/uscp/2009/3861.html for details.

The Boykin Spaniel has a typical spaniel face with smaller, higher-set ears and a straighter muzzle. It sports a brown coat with generally wavy hair—natural camouflage for a hunting dog. The tail is docked, preventing

enthusiastic wagging from alarming game birds during a hunt. The yellow-amber eyes are a trademark of the breed. Though each dog has his or her own personality, the breed is known as pleasant and obedient, loyal and intelligent. As a hunting companion or family pet, the Boykin Spaniel represents our state well.

Baynard and I shared one more story. I am sure the story is apocryphal, but because I am a Baptist minister, it seems worth the telling.

Years ago, three Presbyterian ministers from the upstate went duck hunting in the Wateree Basin. Unfamiliar with the area, they decided to hire a suitable guide. A fellow pastor from Kershaw County suggested a member of his church. When the pastors learned his fee, they were hesitant. The guide said he could reduce the fee if they were willing to hunt with an inexperienced dog, a newly trained Boykin Spaniel. The pastors agreed.

After several days of successful hunting, the ministers complimented the guide on his retriever. The spaniel had performed beautifully. The guide offered to let the Presbyterian clergymen name the dog. They dubbed him Elder.

Each year afterward, the ministers hunted with the guide and always requested Elder as their retriever. Then one year, the Presbyterian Church scheduled a conference that conflicted with the planned hunt. The three Presbyterians gave their reserved time slot to three Baptist pastors. The following year, when the Presbyterians returned, they noticed Elder was not with the guide. The clergymen insisted, "We want Elder as our retriever."

"No!" said the guide, "You don't ever want to use that dog again!"

"Why not?" the ministers asked in dismay.

"Well, you fellows sent those Baptists down here last year, and they messed up that spaniel."

"But how?" they asked.

"Those Baptists didn't like the name Elder, so they changed his name to Deacon. Now all he'll do is sit on his tail and holler."

Even a fine Boykin Spaniel can be ruined if he runs with the wrong crowd. ❖

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Dr. Kirk H. Neely's latest book is A Good Mule is Hard to Find: Tales From Red Clay Country. He lives in Spartanburg.