

# Gone to the Dogs

## Broomhill's Claim to Fame

In the 1930's, there were a lot of wide-open uncultivated expanses of prairie around Broomhill. In those dry years it was good for pasture at best. Locals called it the Poverty Plains. The very features that made it unsuitable as cultivated cropland, made it ideal for another pursuit: dog training.

Trainers from the southern United States discovered it. Training operations, along with the locally-sponsored dog trials, became an asset and a boost to the economy of southwestern Manitoba, and put Broomhill on the map.

Dog trainers came from the southern states, bringing with them 30 to 90 dogs and, with family and hired help, set up camps that were sometimes made up of anywhere from four to twelve people. The dogs were mostly pointers and setters and were trained for the various field trials held in Canada and the U.S.A. The dogs that did not prove satisfactory for the trials were trained as shooting dogs for the owner's hunting pleasure.

Along with the wide-open spaces, our climate was ideal. The southern States were just too hot in the summer.

Owners such as Mr. and Mrs. G. M. Livingstone of Quitman,

Georgia, had twenty-seven dogs, located at

the small barn on the Kilkenny property near Broomhill. Mr. and Mrs. John S. Gates from Leesburg, Georgia started coming to Manitoba in 1936. They rented for several years before buying property.

The interchange also had other unexpected consequences. Locals who worked for the trainers such as Bill Etchells, started going south with them for the winter months and working there.

The Manitoba Field Trial Club, organized in 1885, was introduced into the southwest area of the province in 1939. Other international events followed through the years.

In 1955 the Broomhill Curling Club received permission to sponsor the All American Field Trails complete with championship stakes. The American Field and other American publications always had reporters on hand for trials.

The drawing for the field trial



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was in Kilkenny's Hall on the Sunday evening preceding the trial. There would be fifty or more trainers, owners, and spectators from all over the United States at the drawing. The curling club sponsored these trials through the years until 1969. The local trainers made

sizeable contributions to the curling club when a canvass was taken to build the rink.

One of the notable visitors was Mr. Billy Carter, brother of

President Jimmy Carter, who spent several days at the camp of John Rex Gates in 1979.

The training of dogs near Broomhill continues to this day, but since the 70's and early 80's, it has been seriously curtailed. Much of the area previously used by the trainers has since been brought under cultivation or fenced for pasture.

While the heyday of dog training was good for the community in a commercial sense, perhaps the most lasting effect was the friendships that resulted, the interaction of people from vastly different backgrounds.

Either way, every town has its unique claim to fame. For Broomhill, it is definitely about the dogs.

▼ The site of one of the many dog training camps near Broomhill.



### Sources:

Kilkenny, Bill. "Dog Trainers and Field Trials" R.M. of Albert History Book Committee. *Reflections of Time: A History of the R. M. of Albert*. Tilston, 1984.

Photos: Ken Storie.