

# BERNER SENNENHUND

## BREED HISTORY

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The Greater Swiss Mountain Dog as a breed is considered both “new and old”. It is “new” in the fact that it was not recognized as a breed until 1910 in its native country of Switzerland and did not acquire full recognition into the Working Group by the American Kennel Club until 1995, and “old” in that it is also considered Switzerland’s oldest breed, dating back more than 2000 years to the time of the Roman incursions into this region.

It is assumed that the Swiss Mountain Dogs or sennenhund, a group that includes the Entelbucher, Appenzeller, Bernese Mountain Dog and Greater Swiss Mountain Dog, evolved from the dogs that lived in the Alpine regions of Switzerland at the same time the Roman Empire existed. Some of these dogs may have bred with the dogs that travelled along with the Roman legions during their conquests of these regions. This presumably resulted in the Greater Swiss Mountain Dog evolving as a separate breed. However, none of this is certain because records of canine development were not kept until recent history. Regardless, a tri-colored variety of dog developed in the region today known as Switzerland and thrived there for over two thousand years.

Assorted accounts have the Greater Swiss Mountain Dog performing most of the functions required of the Mountain Dogs - farm dog, draft dog, butcher dog, guard dog, war dog or simply a favored pet of the Swiss country folk because of his large size and bright colorful markings.

It is suspected that the Greater Swiss Mountain Dog declined in popularity in the 1800’s due to the mechanization of farming equipment and practices. It is also suspected that with the development of automotive transportation, particularly the invention of trucks, the need for a Swissy around the farm was merely aesthetic and no longer economical. Therefore, the need for the working Greater Swiss Mountain Dog declined in numbers in the rural agricultural regions of Switzerland. But it was not only farmers who used Swissys for the purpose of draft work. Many drawings and photographs from the late 1800’s show the Greater Swiss Mountain Dog pulling carts, wagons and sleds. Small businesses found it much less expensive to keep and maintain a Swissy to pull wagons filled with their wares than a horse.

The success of the Swissy as a draft dog led to the formation of clubs or societies for the promotion and improvement of draft regulations and for the protection and welfare of the dogs.

There is little written information about the history of the Greater Swiss Mountain Dog. However, according to the Greater Swiss Mountain Dog Club of America, Inc., “in 1908, quite by accident, a pure specimen was exhibited at a show Langental. The judge, Dr. Albert Heim of Zurich, was delighted with him and called him an example of the most extinct Grosse Schweizer Sennenhunde (The Americanization of this title has resulted in the name Greater Swiss Mountain Dog), and urged breeders to save the few remaining specimens.” This dog was entered in the Berner category at the show and Dr. Heim is further quoted as saying, “this dog belongs in a different category, he is too gorgeous and thoroughbred to push him aside as a poor

example of a Berner.” Upon his recommendation, several Swiss breeders began a careful breeding program to rescue the Greater Swiss Mountain Dog from virtual extinction.

In 1910, the Swiss Kennel Club officially recognized the Greater Swiss Mountain Dog as a breed and the first breed club was established. Along with this, the first breed standard was officially recognized.

In 1968 the first Swissy was imported into the United States by Patricia and Frederick Hoffman and Perrin Rademacher. The Greater Swiss Mountain Dog Club of America, Inc. was formed with Mr. Rademacher as president and Mr. Hoffman as registrar. However, in my opinion, most of the credit for the quality of the Swissy being produced today rest with the late Dr. Howard and Mrs. Gretel Summons. They were in fact the mainstay breeders for the first twenty years of the breed in North America. Their conscientious effort to improve the structure, breeding stock and temperaments of the American Greater Swiss Mountain Dog positioned them as true mentors for the rest of us involved with this magnificent breed.

In recent years, American Swissys have been exported to Switzerland and other European countries as breeding stock. This is an ambitious tribute to dedication of the Summons’ efforts and diligence, as well as that of the other American breeders who have established successful and conscientious breeding programs here in the United States.

Text taken from “[Greater Swiss Mountain Dog: A Complete and Reliable Handbook](#)” Written by Jim Barton of Barton Manor Kennels.