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THE MAINE COON CAT

by Earl Eugene Eminhizer, Th.D.

CAPTAIN JENKS OF the Horse Marines is a name that brings to mind something that must undoubtedly be different from the ordinary. Captain Jenks was different. He was the first Maine Coon cat of record and in 1861 was the pet of F.R. Pierce and his brother.¹ Maine Coon cats were known, however, before Captain Jenks came along.

The cat fancy actually received its start with the Maine Coon. The Maine people, proud of their unique cats, began in the 1860's holding the first American cat shows in conjunction with fairs.² The first cat show, as we now know them, was held in Madison Square Garden in 1895, where Cosie, a brown tabby neuter, owned by Mrs. E.N. Baker, was best cat. Cosie was a Maine Coon purchased by Mrs. Baker from Mrs. E.R. Pierce of Detroit. It appears that Mrs. Pierce was the first person to scientifically breed them. Mrs. Pierce was an active cat

fancier in the early days of the fancy. That same year her white Maine Coon male, Dot, unseated a well known silver tabby, Richelieu, at a show in Bangor, Maine. Richelieu had been Best Cat in show for some years prior to the appearance of Dot. Mrs. Pierce had other Maine Coons that did equally well in the early shows. King Max, a male brown tabby was top cat at the Boston shows of 1897, 1898, and 1899 only to be defeated by his son, Donald, in 1900.³

In the years just after the turn of the century, the imported cats with long pedigrees became popular and the native American Maine Coon disappeared from the shows.⁴ However, interest did not die in Maine and in 1953 the Central Maine Cat Club was formed to again hold shows in Maine for the breed. The shows were generally held at Skowhegan in May.⁵

My own interest in the Maine cat developed, not from personal experience

with them in Maine, but from pictures and descriptions of them given me by a friend, Mrs. Ruth Kelly, whose husband was minister in the Methodist Church at Castine following World War I. It was in the early 1940's that I became acquainted with Mrs. Kelly, a natural born storyteller. She would keep me spellbound with tales of her experience in Maine. Her cats were an important part of that experience. The impression she made on me by her description of their size caused me to decide that, should I ever have a cat, a Maine Coon was what I would want. I cannot recall all the stories she told, but I do remember her describing their ability to catch mice and to fish off the wharf at Castine.

It was not until the fall of 1964 that I obtained my first Maine cat. My wife and I became interested in cats while in graduate school in California. After reading all we could find about cats we

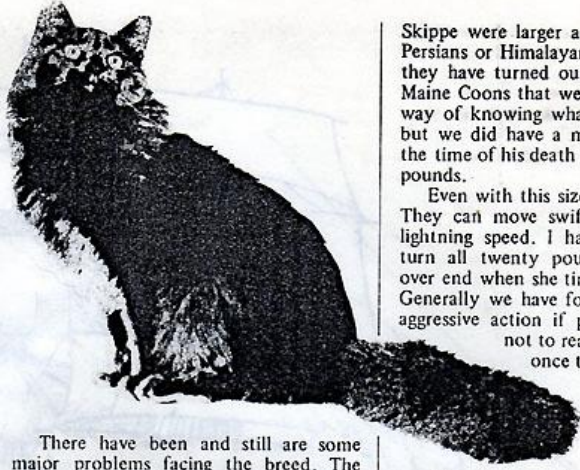
decided that our interest would be in solid color Persians. However, the first time I came upon Mrs. Robert Whittemore's advertisement for Maine Coon kittens, my former interest was revived. Mrs. Whittemore is responsible for the breed still being available today. Dawn Dee was our first one, followed a year later by Skippe. By this time we were showing Persians and began to inquire about the necessary steps to get the Maine Coons recognized for championship showing. By showing Dawn Dee and Skippe AOV (Any Other Variety) for one season we were able to create some interest in the breed. In fact, we found there were other people interested in them, many more than we imagined there could be.

At this point our first goal was to find an association willing to register the stock we had. We found that three were willing to do this; CFF (Cat Fanciers Federation), ACA (American Cat Association), and CCA (Canadian Cat Association). Later ACFA (American Cat Fanciers Association) and NCFA (National Cat Fanciers Association) joined the group, and now we are able to register Maine Coons in all the leading associations. Once registration was established, recognition for championship showing was closer to being a reality. The problem now was to obtain a standard. Since we were not trying to get a new breed recognized, but an old breed brought back into the fancy, the problems were not as great as they might have been.

Not being able to find a copy of the Central Maine Cat Club standard, we developed one from observation and reading. This standard was adopted by CCA in the winter of 1966-67 and later by ACFA. In the spring of 1967 ACA accepted the Maine Coon using a standard based on the Central Maine Cat Club standard, which Mr. Robert Ford, an ACA judge, had located. As it turned out the two standards were parallel in all areas except the matter of polydactylism (six front toes), which we rejected.

With the acceptance of the breed by CCA, Dawn Dee and Skippe became the first of the breed to make championships. As other associations recognized them we began showing in places other than Canada. At the present time only NCFA and CFA (Cat Fanciers Association) do not allow them in championship competition. The Maine Coon breeders are hopeful of meeting the requirements of these associations soon.

Although the early work to regain recognition was done by a few persons, the effort has been taken over by the Maine Coon Breeders and Fanciers Association, which has as members nearly all the breeders of Maine Coons and a good many pet owners. Through this united effort, it is hoped that breeding procedures can be unified and problems facing the breed be resolved.



There have been and still are some major problems facing the breed. The matter of color classification has been a problem in the past, but now seems to be resolved. Many people showing Maine cats have had little or no experience with other breeds, and we were having all kinds of colors being entered. Most of the confusion was caused by many Maine cats being parti-colors. Once the new breeders came to understand that parti-color was a class in itself the problem moved off stage to make way for some more important issues.

The most important problems facing the breed are polydactylism and foundation registration. On the first matter there is considerable difference of opinion. Some breeders wish to eliminate polydactylism by selective breeding, while others feel that it is a characteristic of the breed, known throughout its history. There are also some of us who have not made up our minds on the issue. At present, none of the show standards allow for polydactyls.

The problem of foundation registration is a bit more knotty. Since foundation registration has been the only way we could get started, we have had no choice. As long as Whittemore's stock was being used, or cats from the coast of Maine, who were known to be of the breed, were being brought in there were no problems. We are now faced with cats off the streets of New York City with long hair and with poor quality Persians being foundation-registered as Maine Coons. The problem is magnified in that most do not look like Maine cats. Actually the problem is created by many judges having never seen a good quality Maine cat to know how the standard is to be interpreted. This will be corrected, hopefully, as more of the better cats are shown.

Although our own cats from Maine do not have impressive names as did "Captain Jenks," they are still different from the other cats that live with us. We have found them to be large, as we expected them to be. Both Dawn Dee and

Skippe were larger and heavier than the Persians or Himalayans we have had. But they have turned out to be the smallest Maine Coons that we have had. I have no way of knowing what the record size is, but we did have a male, Frosty, who at the time of his death weighed about forty pounds.

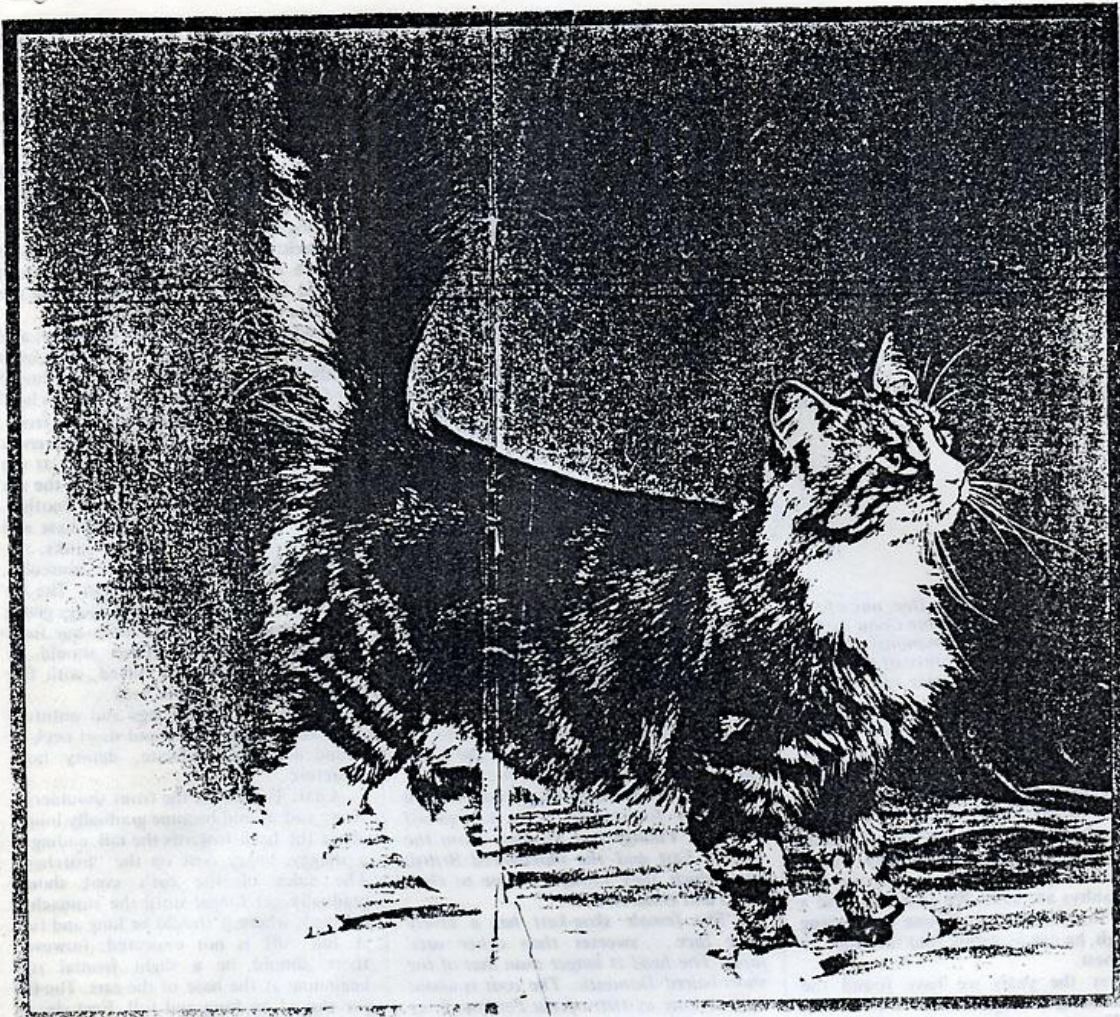
Even with this size they are very agile. They can move swiftly, and react with lightning speed. I have seen Dawn Dee turn all twenty pounds of Skippe end over end when she tired of his attentions. Generally we have found they will avoid aggressive action if possible. They tend not to react as other cats, but once their minds are made up they are not easily deterred.

Their intelligence is, I think, superior to other breeds of cats. They seem to understand what is going on around them. In rearing kittens they have very definite ideas about what kittens should be taught. Skippe enjoys kittens very much. If given a chance he will teach them things he feels important. For instance, we have watched him take over a litter of Himalayans and spend hours teaching them how to go through a window into the outside run. He would also bring them back into the house when he thought they had been out long enough. Our adults will teach the kittens to hunt even though substitutes have to be found for the natural outdoor prey.

Another difference we like about the Maine Coons is the way they care for their young. Our Maine females are the best mother cats we have. They seem to have little problem kittening, although their kittens are generally the size of week old Persians when born. The kittens are kept immaculately clean and well fed. The kittens are usually so well fed by their mother that they remain dependent long after Himalayans and Persians are on their own. Although I have no scientific evidence, it appears to me that the Maine Coons' milk is richer than that of other breeds. When we have had them raise Persian or Himalayan kittens, these take on the same fat, lazy characteristics of the Maine kittens.

The young Maine cats tend to eat more than other breeds at the same age, and the adults will sometimes consume more food. On the basis of weight it seems that they eat about the same as other breeds, and possibly less than some shorthairs.

Although Maine cats are longhaired the problem of matting has not been, in our experience, as great a problem as it is with Persians. We have had only one or two who have had to have as much grooming as a Persian. Since the coat is not as long as that of the Persian and tends to be of a different texture, combing is not needed as often.



Many persons who have purchased Maine Coon kittens from us expect them to get as large as lions by the time they are nine months old. Although they are larger than most domestic cats, they are not all of the forty-pound class. I do not think we will average that weight any time soon, although size is one thing we are trying to obtain. Generally, it will take a male at least three years to reach full development. They will reach full bone development between one and two years of age, but much more time is needed for muscle to fill in the large frame. Frosty, the largest we have had, was very heavy, but never fat. The females tend to be very muscular also, but not as large. They also take about three years to fill out. The heaviest female I have known of is one owned by Mrs. Betty Ljostad of Port Chester, New York who has reached twenty-eight pounds.

Breeding Maine Coons is somewhat different than breeding other longhairs. Generally a Persian or Himalayan cat can be bred twice a year. The larger Maine Coon will breed about once every nine months to a year. We hope for a litter a year from each of our females. They generally run all the time with the male we want to breed them to. We have found this necessary since most of the time they do not go through the antics of being in season as most other cats. We average about four kittens each litter.

Like most other breeds, there are several legends concerning the origins of the Maine cats. The most popular is that of their being a cross between cats and raccoons. We have someone make reference to this nearly every time we show a Maine cat. Actually such a breeding is impossible biologically, so this legend has the least merit of the group. Some of the other legends have a good deal of probability. One is that Maine Coons are descendants of cats owned by Marie

Antoinette and brought to Maine by Captain Clough, who expected to bring the Queen to Maine at the time of the French Revolution. After she was beheaded, he turned the cats loose on the Maine coast where they bred with the native cats.⁶ Another version of the Captain Clough story is that he brought the cats from China.⁷ A similar story concerns a Captain Coon, who is credited with bringing the ancestors of the breed from China. However, the Captain Clough story is the better of the two for we know he did live in Maine, but Captain Coon's existence on earth is not well established.⁸ That the breed could have been brought from foreign lands is not without some merit. There are cats in Norway who have a strong resemblance to the Maine Coon.⁹ Although no one knows for sure, it is probably most likely that the ancestors of the Maine Coons were brought to Maine by early fishing or trading ships.



Above: A Maine Coon female kitten and a Seal Point Himalayan male kitten, born on the same day, graphically demonstrate the unusually large size of the Maine Coon cats.



Right: Dawn Dee, one of the first Maine Coon cats to achieve championship status since reacceptance of the breed by registering associations.

We have not had the problem of the raccoon legend with our odd-eyed white, that we have had with Dawn Dee, who was marked like a raccoon. Many people expect to see a tabby when they see a Maine Coon. Of course such markings do occur; Maine cats come in many colors. The most that are shown are parti-color, and tabbys are next. We generally have a solid in every litter. If one looks long enough, he can probably find the color he likes best.

Over the years we have found the Maine Coon a delightful cat to have with us. They are quiet, clean and loving, requiring very little care for a longhair. If you are interested in cats that are large, quiet, calm, and have "a splendid sense of their own dignity and worth..."¹⁰ then the Maine Coon is your breed.

1. Simpson, Frances; *Book of the Cat* n.p. Cassell, 1903.

2. Lockridge, Frances and Richard; *Cats and People*, Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1950, p. 263.

3. CFA Year Book, 1959, p. 49.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Ramsdale, Jeanne; *Persians and Other Longhairs*, TFH Publishers, 1964, p. 260.

6. Maine, *Federal Writers Project*, 1937, p. 264-265, and Tenent, Rose; *Persians Cats and Other Longhairs*, London: W.H. Allen, 1965, pp. 66-67.

7. Maine, loc.cit. and Rich, Louise Dickenson; *The Coast of Maine*, New York: Thomas Crowell, 1962, p. 209.

8. Simmons, Elenor; *Cats*, Whittlessy House, 1935, p. 134.

9. Mrs. Jack Bjonness, in a letter to Mrs. Betty Ijostad, describes the skog-katts of Norway in these terms: "Here in Norway we have big shaggy cats we call skog-katts-forest cats. . . . It is supposed that the Vikings had Persians from the middle East and the shorthaired British cats which they brought home to their wives and children . . .

"The female skog-katt has a lovely little face . . . sweeter than other cats' faces. The head is longer than that of the short-haired Domestic. The coat is about half as long as that of the Persian. They come in all colors, and if I should make the standard, I would insist on white front . . . people like cats with white fronts, and one breed ought to be allowed to have it. The ears are high, with lynx tufts, and with Persian tufts. The whole cat is 'tall,' not cobby like a Persian. But no one could say it is a slender cat. They are hardy—have to be to live out in the kind of winters we have—and this may have something to do with the development of the breed."

10. Mitchell, Edwin; *Maine Summer*, Coward-McCann, 1939, p. 69.

STANDARD FOR THE MAINE COON CAT

Head Shape: Medium in width, except in the older more developed studs, where it should be quite broad. Cheek bones high. The nose and face should be medium long, with an appearance of squareness to the muzzle. Little or no break in nose

Ears: Large in size. Tufted, pointed, and wide at base.

Eyes: Large, round, wide set. Slightly oblique setting.

Chin: Firm and in line with upper lip and nose.

Undesirable: Short flat face, or long pointed nose. Undershot chin. Short rounded, narrow set ears. Narrow, slanting eyes.

Neck: Medium long. In the older more mature cats, especially studs, the neck should be thick and muscular, giving the appearance of power and strength.

Body Shape: Muscular, powerful, and long. The chest should be full and from medium to large in size. The body should be level, but in stance, the hind legs hold the body slightly lower than the front. There should be a definite squareness where the hind legs join the body at the rump. All the physical aspects of the cat should be in proportion to one another.

Tail: Long and full. Wide at base and should taper to its end with no kinks.

Legs & Feet: Substantial, muscular, wide set, and of medium height. The cat should stand well up on its forelegs giving the impression of an unbroken line from shoulder to forepaw. Paws should be large, round, and well tufted, with five toes in front and four in back.

Undesirable: Short legs and untufted feet. Short cobby body and short neck. A rounded rump. Delicate, dainty bone structure.

Coat: The fur on the front shoulders is short and should become gradually longer along the back towards the tail, ending in a shaggy, heavy coat on the "britches." The sides of the cat's coat should gradually get longer until the stomach is reached, where it should be long and full. A full ruff is not expected; however, there should be a slight frontal ruff beginning at the base of the ears. The tail fur should be long and full. Feet should be tufted. Coat should be fine, heavy, lustrous, and should fall smoothly. A slight undercoat may be carried. This is the optimum coat and will vary with climate.

Coat Color: The coat may be any color or any combination of colors. Winners are not to be withheld for buttons, lockets, or spots.

Eye Color: The eye color may be the same as that required for that color in other longhairs, or green. Clarity of color is desirable.

Condition: Solid, firm, muscular. Should be presented in well-groomed manner.

POINT SCORE

Head	20
Body	30
Coat	20
Coat Color	10
Eye Color	10
Condition	10
	100