

January 1963

50 Cents

Down East

The Magazine of Maine



H. Martin



DOWN EAST DOGS

By Georgia C. Reed

AMONG the many things for which Maine is famous are her beautiful Chinook sled dogs. Fifteen thousand people a year visit the dogs, owned by Perry Greene and his wife Honey, at Chinookland in Waldoboro, the only kennels in the world where the Chinook breed is raised.

When Honey came to her front door to greet us on a recent visit, Zembla — a tall, tawny Chinook and Mrs. Greene's special pet — was with her. Like most full-grown Chinooks, Zembla measures twenty-six inches to the shoulder and weighs about 115 pounds. She has a thick, springy coat, a lovely plume for a tail and ears surprisingly adorned with aquamarine

earrings. "Of course she has earrings!" said Mrs. Greene, quick to notice a visitor's astonishment. "Why not? I have them. Her ears are pierced for them."

This sense of the Chinooks as individuals is quickly communicated to strangers, both by the gentlemanly, alert dogs themselves, and by Perry Greene, the only man now living who knows the lineage of the loveable, brave and loyal Chinook breed.

Perry Greene — tall, lean and rugged as befits a lifelong Maine woodsman — had been friends with the Chinooks for a long time before he bought them

and the secret of their ancestry, twenty-one years ago. Greene, who is now seventy years old, got to know the Chinooks at the Boston Sportsmen's Show, when he competed in contests as a woodcutting champion.

"One day back then," he relates, "I was just killing time and wandered into the Chinook show. I knew old Chugash a little, so I patted him and sat down. His old head came up and he looked at me with a question in his eyes. 'He'd love a run,' I told the demonstrator, and he told me to take him for one."

So Perry, with Chugash on a leash, started for a walk. "He loved it," Perry recalls. "But first thing I knew he was right out straight, with me on behind. We hit some ice and my shoes went for the moon. Down I went. The old dog stopped like a shot, came back and nuzzled me to see whether I was hurt." From then on, Perry and the dogs grew to know and to understand each other.

Perry still has a special affection for the memory of old Chugash. One of his favorite stories is of how Chugash led his team home, after the driver went snow-blind during a mountain trip and the dog, with typical Chinook intelligence, sensed the man's plight.

"That old dog," says Perry, emphasizing his words, "came down the slopes of the mountain like an artist, zigzagging the sleds to brake them against themselves,

until the team reached habitations and help for the driver."

There were five of us around the Greenes' big, open fire, listening to Perry's yarns on his favorite subject. A young couple from Pennsylvania (complying with Perry's rule that no Chinook is ever shipped) had arrived to call for a puppy they had bought. The puppy, Raluk, played at our feet with Zembla. The big dog fondled the little one until her patience began to run out; then she moved quietly to seclusion behind our chairs. Raluk, eager and excited, tumbled over his new owners' shoes, delighted in their intention and snuggled into their arms when they picked him up. The Greenes ignored the puppy completely so as not to confuse him.

"He's their dog now," said Perry, "and he knows it."

THE Chinook breed, Perry Greene told us, was originated by Arthur T. Walden of Wanalancet, New Hampshire. On his way home from the Yukon in 1900 "with a couple of pokes of gold," Walden had noticed a sport in a litter of Alaskan sled dogs. He felt sure that the pup was something special, played his hunch, and bought it. Having mated it, Walden found himself the owner of a litter of puppies with all of the good characteristics of his original purchase.

Photos by Kosti Ruohomaa







Except for this vague outline, the origin of the Chinooks has remained a well-guarded secret, although it is emphasized that they are pure bred, without a trace of wolf or of husky in them.

Walden was an expert sled dog driver, who accompanied Admiral Byrd on his first Antarctic Expedition. He took his own handsome animal, called Chinook after a tribe of Alaskan Indians, with him as lead dog. On his return from the Antarctic, Walden continued the breed, which became fixed and was named in honor of the Chinook Indians. Walden developed the animals to become unexcelled sled dogs. With more than usual strength, they can pull a load four-and-a-half times their weight, as compared to the usual accepted pay load of one-and-a-half times the ordinary sled dog's weight.

Chinook was lost on his twelfth birthday. He had led a team hauling freight all day and then — in celebration of the day — was allowed to run. A blizzard came up suddenly and he was never seen again. It

was supposed that the winds swept him into a crevasse, where he was trapped. He was wearing his collar, but his harness hangs, today, on the Greenes' office wall.

When the Wanalancet Kennels were sold in 1939, the site and buildings went to another purchaser, but Perry Greene bought the Chinooks. He took them to his old home place in Maine, and began looking for larger quarters. Finding a suitable site in Waldoboro, he purchased a thousand acres of woodland, and put up the buildings where the kennels are now situated.

The Chinooks' training had been allowed to lapse, and they were not sled dogs any more when he bought them. So Perry threw himself into the task of breaking them to harness. One of the biggest thrills of his life came in 1940, when he drove his Chinooks diagonally across the State of Maine, from Fort Kent to Kittery. With his team of seven dogs, and eight hundred pounds on the sled, he covered the distance of 502 miles in ninety hours, to set a record of six-and-a-



*Mr. & Mrs. Perry Greene with Zembla at Chinookland.
Photo by Howard F. Reed*

half miles an hour. During the cross-country trip, the sled traveled over the bare pavements of city streets by lowering wheels which Perry invented.

The sway of the driver's body guides a dog sled, and the dogs respond to "gee" and "haw" as oxen would. In general Perry uses the traditional way of driving, but has some methods of his own. He never uses a whip when off of the road. He talks to his dogs and, when he wants them to hurry, he sings. Whether his singing encourages them or impels them to run away from it, he doesn't know. But it makes the dogs hurry.

The Chinooks make excellent watch dogs, although they do not bark or bite. Their method of guardianship is to stand in the way of an intruder and, if he persists, to knock him down and hold him. Trained to be gentle, the dogs are very intelligent guardians of children. Perry told of one quick-witted dog, which

seemed to be disobedient when it suddenly dashed out into the road one day.

"He knew better than to run into the road," Perry said, "so I was sure he had a reason. It turned out that he had! When he came back he carried, in his mouth, a baby kitten that had strayed out into the traffic!"

"They're not just pets," Perry continued. "They're proud individuals and should be treated with respect. So we never ship them, or sell them to strangers."

A prospective purchaser, who is unknown to the Greens, is invited to spend at least twenty-four hours at Chinookland, so that the dogs and Perry can decide about his qualifications for ownership. The would-be owner is given quarters in a charming guest cabin next to the Greens' home. There is no charge for the accommodations but, since there is a waiting list a year in advance for yet-unborn Chinook puppies, a \$50 deposit is required when one orders a dog.

"That doesn't necessarily mean they'll get a dog," Perry says. "We refund their deposit if I decide they won't make good owners."

Actually, it is the dogs' decision that is final; Perry merely passes the news along to people whom the Chinooks turn down as owners, and there have been very few mistakes. But there was an error once, which came to light when some owners asked Perry to board their Chinook because of a trip they must take. When they came back to reclaim her, the dog's hair began to rise on her back.

"Look! She doesn't know us!" one of the owners exclaimed.

"She knows you too well," Perry replied — and the dog stayed at Chinookland.

THE log buildings comprising Chinookland were planned by Honey and built by Perry himself. Before the present kennels were built, the dogs had individual houses and often chose to sleep on the slanting roofs in the snow. Though they like the cold, protection was provided against the possibility of a rugged winter by a sturdy center house, with pens opening from it so that the dogs can run. The kennels are surrounded by high wire fencing.

"The fence," Perry explained, "is not to protect guests from the dogs, because the dogs aren't dangerous. It is to keep people far enough away to avoid the possibility of spreading germs among the Chinooks."

The dogs seldom bark, although they sometimes "sing" in the Chinooks' peculiar way of howling; so usually the only sound to be heard near the kennels is the patter of the animals' feet.

"Hear their feet?" Perry asked. "They have wonderful feet! The toes are webbed so that they seem to be wearing snowshoes all of the time, and they have hard, non-porous pads, so that they are never footsore."

Feeding time at the Chinook kennels. Buz Winchenback dips out the servings.

*Photo by
Howard F. Reed*



The Chinooks have a life span of fourteen to sixteen years. There are today about 150 — all born and raised to the age of six to ten weeks at Chinookland — living in Canada and the United States. A wall map keeps a record of their whereabouts: green pins indicate owners of one dog, and red pins denote a family that has two dogs. Only the Greens have more than two Chinooks, and other owners cannot breed them, because all females are spayed before leaving the kennels.

The house dogs at Chinookland come and go at will. Often they let themselves in and out of rooms by unlatching the door with their paws and teeth.

All the Chinooks are addressed by the Greens as if they were human, and Perry never raises his voice. He says the dogs mind better that way. The dogs are never whistled to, because anyone can imitate a whistle; but an owner's voice is not easily imitated. Perry doesn't teach his dogs any tricks, nor does he train puppies before he sells them.

"I provide people with dogs that have brains, and with rules for training them," Perry Greene says. "By following these instructions, owners in all parts of the United States and in Canada have trained their own Chinooks most successfully." 