

FOREWORD

HISTORY OF GREYHOUND RACING IN THE UNITED STATES

The first recognized commercial greyhound racetrack in the United States was built in Emeryville, California in 1919 by Owen Patrick Smith and the Blue Star Amusement Company.¹ The track was oval in design and featured Smith's new invention, the mechanical lure, thought to offer a more humane alternative to the live lures used in traditional greyhound field coursing.² By 1930, sixty-seven dog tracks had opened across the country – none legal.³

The first of the new tracks used Smith's lure running on the outside rail, while other tracks used an alternative lure running on an inside rail.⁴ Dogs at Smith's tracks wore colored collars for identification, while dogs at other tracks wore the racing blankets still used today.⁵ Due to the scarcity of greyhounds, two-dog races were common; later the number of dogs was increased to as many as eight.⁶ Some dogs had to race several times in one afternoon.⁷



Tampa's Greyhound Race Track in the 1920's. Photograph from the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce Collection, City of Tampa Archives

Despite schemes to hide betting, such as the purchase of "options" or "shares" of winning dogs (or even pieces of the betting stands themselves), tracks were regularly exposed as venues for illegal gambling and related criminal activities. Individual tracks would run for a day or a week before being raided, and then open again once the coast was clear.⁸ This was referred to as "running on the fix" and failed tracks were called "bloomers."⁹ One owner of dogs during this early period commented, "In some towns you had to be faster than your dogs to get your kennel cages out of town ahead of the law. If you ran second, they had their own kind of cage for you."¹⁰ It is believed that Smith originally envisioned basing his profits entirely on 99-cent gate receipts, but soon realized that gambling would attract bigger crowds.¹¹ Rumors of drugged dogs and fixed races became common, and early tracks gained "unsavory reputations" because of their perceived involvement with mobsters.¹²

These perceptions aside, a bid to recognize dog racing as a legal activity was brought before the U.S. Supreme Court in 1927.¹³ Following the passage of a statute authorizing so-called "regular race meetings" in the state of Kentucky, O.P. Smith and his partners had opened a 4,000-seat, \$50,000 facility in Erlanger. The Court found that horse tracks qualified under the state statute, but dog tracks did not.¹⁴ Similarly, it would be future Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren, then the attorney general of California, who would block the growth of dog racing in his state. The original Blue Star track in Emeryville had been shuttered after fewer than three seasons in 1922, but multiple tracks had succeeded it, all of which Warren successfully worked to close down by 1939.¹⁵

The first state to allow dog tracks to operate legally was Florida.¹⁶ In 1931, lawmakers there passed a pari-mutuel bill over Governor Doyle E. Carlton's veto.¹⁷ By 1935, there were ten licensed tracks operating in the Sunshine State.¹⁸ According to the *Tallahassee Democrat*, the Governor had refused a \$100,000 bribe to sign the legislation.¹⁹ Oregon and Massachusetts became the next states to authorize dog racing, in 1933 and 1934 respectively.²⁰ Bay State Governor Joseph Buell Ely, a Republican, signed the emergency bill in Massachusetts authorizing horse racing – despite the fact that dog racing was also included. Setting his "personal objections" to the latter aside, he chose to ignore the clear objections of his party in hopes of finding new sources of revenue during the Great Depression.²¹ New York Governor Herbert H. Lehman was also no fan of dog racing, and vetoed the dog racing bill presented to him in 1937. The State Racing Commission had advised that dog racing was an invitation to fraud, "anti-economic and opposed to the best interests of sports," and particularly detrimental to the existing enterprise of horse racing.²² In the neighboring state of New Jersey, lawmakers approved a "temporary" or trial dog racing authorization in 1934, but the state Supreme Court struck it down as unconstitutional one year later.²³ In 1939, Arizona became the fourth state to legalize dog racing during the Depression era.²⁴

Although church groups, civic and humane organizations rallied in opposition, the new industry of greyhound racing

continued to grow, with Colorado and South Dakota both legalizing it in 1949.²⁵ Arkansas legalized dog racing in 1957 and that state's Southland Greyhound Corporation was among the six new American tracks to open during the 1950s. Southland's debut was marred by the electrocution of a greyhound during a promotional race, which added to the bitter opposition of local media to the new track. For years, Memphis newspapers would not accept paid advertisements from the facility.²⁶

Greyhound racing was legalized in the twelve additional states of Alabama, Connecticut, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, New Hampshire, Nevada, Rhode Island, Texas, Vermont, West Virginia and Wisconsin through the 1970s and 1980s. Now legal and operational in nineteen states, dog racing had reached its peak.²⁷ However, despite this pro-industry trend, lawmakers in states like Montana resisted and were never to authorize the activity.²⁸ Similarly, voters in the state of California rejected two initiatives intended to legalize dog racing. The last 1976 ballot question was brought by George Hardie of the Golden State Greyhound Association and lost by the significant margin of 25%-75%. In an open letter published in *The Greyhound Review*, he had urged the national industry to support his campaign, but to no avail.²⁹

Referred to as the "Sport of Queens," perhaps in reference to Queen Elizabeth I's promotion of greyhound coursing in the sixteenth century, dog racing sought to promote itself as elite, glamorous and on a par with its traditional competitor, horse racing.³⁰ Even before legalization, Owen Patrick Smith created an organization to market dog racing. The International Greyhound Racing Association, though never actually international, was formed in 1926 in Miami.³¹ In 1946, Florida track owners united to form the American Greyhound Track Owners Association, which later welcomed owners from across the country. It published the *Greyhound Racing Record* and released the *American Greyhound Racing Encyclopedia* in 1963, both intended to deliver good news about dog racing and to provide a "clear narrative" to the American public.³² In 1973, the National Coursing Association renamed itself the National Greyhound Association and opened its doors in Abilene, Kansas. To this day, a racing greyhound must be registered with the NGA in order to compete; the trade group maintains official breeding records and publishes *The Greyhound Review*.³³ Perhaps the most well-known promotion for dog racing is the Greyhound Hall of Fame, a museum and exhibit center also located in Abilene.³⁴ At its height, dog racing was rated as the sixth most popular sporting activity in the country.³⁵

Proponents of dog racing in Florida were perhaps the most enthusiastic of all in emphasizing the "sun and fun" to be had at its facilities. Beauty pageant winners, baseball stars, and famous celebrities like Joe DiMaggio, Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Burt Reynolds, Janet Leigh, Tony Curtis, and even Old Blue Eyes, Frank Sinatra, made multiple appearances at dog tracks in the Sunshine State. In 1958, Sinatra filmed a movie about a dog track gambler at the Flagler Kennel Club and one year later, he appeared on the cover of the *Greyhound Racing Record* along with a woman newly crowned as the "Queen of American Greyhound Racing." Beside them was the winning dog in a race named after the famous singer.³⁶ Tracks in other states also attracted celebrity visits. Talk show host Merv Griffin was pictured at the Multnomah, Oregon track and both John Wayne and Paul Newman made appearances at Tucson Greyhound Park in Arizona.³⁷

Early dog tracks, starting with Emeryville itself, offered hurdle racing as well as races of different lengths to attract audiences.³⁸ Florida, Kansas and Texas tracks, as well as some of the shuttered California, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, and Oklahoma tracks, even used monkeys as jockeys to try and pique interest.³⁹ The animals were sometimes shaken to death during performances, causing local humane societies to put a stop to this particular gimmick.⁴⁰ Dog tracks also offered musical entertainment, live radio broadcasts and cross-promotions with other entertainment venues, including movie theaters and even horse tracks, both to boost their popularity and to ward off complaints from neighboring businesses.⁴¹ However, later greyhound racing proponents would reject the opportunity to broadcast races on television, for fear of losing on-track bettors. This decision put dog racing at a competitive disadvantage with horse racing, which was coincidentally legalized in the major media markets of New York and California and eagerly capitalized on the new medium.⁴² Lacking a mainstream audience, individual dogs were never to achieve the acclaim of champion horses like Seabiscuit or Seattle Slew. Winning greyhounds such as Mission Boy, Rural Rube, Downing, and Keefer would remain unknown to the general public, celebrated only in the record books of the NGA.⁴³



A monkey riding a greyhound. Photograph by the Buffalo Times, 1935

In the backdrop of its push to build popularity, dog racing was still challenged to distance itself from organized crime.⁴⁴ Joe Linsey, three-time president of the AGTOA and also a convicted bookmaker, owned the original Taunton, Massachusetts track, five Colorado tracks, and the Lincoln, Rhode Island facility.⁴⁵ Gangsters Meyer Lansky, Bugsy Siegel, Lucky Luciano and particularly Al Capone were said to have interests in tracks such as the Hawthorne track in Illinois and the Miami Beach and Hollywood Kennel Clubs of Florida.⁴⁶ In 1950, the U.S. Senate Special Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce looked at these connections and charged that Chicago mobsters had infiltrated Florida dog track operations, controlled the state racing commission and funneled illegal contributions to politicians.⁴⁷

More conflict arose within the industry itself when “dogmen,” the breeders, handlers, kennel operators and others working at dog tracks, went on strike several times.⁴⁸ In 1935, 1948, 1957, and again in 1975, they demanded greater fairness in bookings and a higher cut of the bets made on their dogs. The 1948 strikes were led by the short-lived Greyhound Owners Benevolent Association, modeled after similar groups working successfully in the horse industry.⁴⁹ In 1975, multiple strikes were tried in several states, none successful. The “Flagler 18” was a group of dogmen associated with the Miami track. The court ordered them to return to work; they refused and found themselves locked up in jail.⁵⁰ Twenty-three greyhound owners also struck in New Hampshire, and in Arizona, dogmen threatened to kill twenty-five dogs a day until track management would agree to their demands. State Attorney General Bruce Babbitt obtained a restraining order to block the killings and described the failed ploy as “senseless, repulsive, inhumane, unjust [and] immoral.”⁵¹

These strikes attracted public interest, and the media responded with intense coverage beginning in the 1970s. While questions had always been raised about the underfed appearance of racing greyhounds, increased media attention would now focus on the humane issues surrounding racing itself.⁵² In September 1975, the *National Enquirer* published an article, “Greyhound Racing – Where Brutality and Greed Finish Ahead of Decency,” causing alarm among industry proponents such as Gary Guccione, once a writer for the National Coursing Association and now Executive Director of the National Greyhound Association.⁵³ The first major televised report came from young investigative reporter Geraldo Rivera. His first-hand look at the training and coursing of Kansas greyhounds with live lures aired in June 1978 on the ABC program *20/20*.⁵⁴ Concerns were raised in Washington DC, where U.S. Senator Birch Bayh introduced a bill to make it a federal crime to engage in live lure training. His proposed amendment to the Animal Welfare Act was never to become law, amid promises from the industry to police itself.⁵⁵ Despite this pledge, state officials continued to uncover live lure training in the years to come. In 2002, Arizona greyhound breeder Gregory Wood lost his state license when state investigators found 180 rabbits at his kennel, and as late as 2011, licensee Timothy Norbert Titsworth forfeited his state privileges when Texas authorities caught him on tape training greyhounds on his farm with live rabbits.⁵⁶

Exposés continued to air on programs like *Inside Edition* and *National Geographic Explorer*, while national magazines including *Life*, *Reader’s Digest* and *Ladies’ Home Journal* featured full-length articles on the cruelty of dog racing.⁵⁷ The discovery of one hundred ex-racing greyhounds, shot and buried in an abandoned lemon grove in Chandler, Arizona was brought to light by the *Arizona Republic*.⁵⁸ A greyhound burial ground serving the Hinsdale track of New Hampshire was uncovered by Fox News.⁵⁹ The *New York Times* broke the story in 2002 that a security guard working at Florida tracks had received thousands of unwanted dogs over the years, shooting them in the head and burying them on his Alabama farm. Robert Rhodes, who died before he could be brought to trial, reportedly charged \$10 apiece for his services.⁶⁰



The Alabama farm of Robert Rhodes. Photograph by the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation, 2002

Overbreeding of greyhounds had become a problem in the dog racing world very early on.⁶¹ A 1952 article in the *Greyhound Racing Record* calculated that less than thirty percent of greyhounds born on breeding farms were usable for racing.⁶² A May 1958 article published in the popular men’s magazine *Argosy* quoted one kennel operator-breeder as explaining that there were three types of greyhounds in a litter: those who race, those who breed, and

those who are destroyed. The cover featured four racing greyhounds with the question, “Must these dogs die?”⁶³ Later, in the 1970s, as more and more states authorized dog racing and the industry grew, the NGA’s approval of artificial insemination techniques facilitated greyhound breeding, making it easier and less expensive to produce more and more litters.⁶⁴ Small farms had about forty breeding dogs, medium-size facilities averaged about one

hundred, and the larger facilities housed many times this number.⁶⁵ Thousands of racing dogs were dropped off at the Massachusetts SPCA as late as 1985, humanely destroyed for a fee of \$3 each.⁶⁶ In 1990, the director of Arizona's Maricopa County shelter reported killing up to 500 greyhounds each year, the dogs dropped off by greyhound breeders and racers who ordered them destroyed. Her plans to build another county pound to save the greyhounds fell through.⁶⁷ Worse still, some kennel owners continued to feel that it was "not only expedient, but humane" to just shoot unwanted greyhounds between the eyes and be done with them.⁶⁸

Other media coverage exposed the use of ex-racing greyhounds for experimentation.⁶⁹ In 1989, the *Associated Press* reported on the illegal sale of twenty young greyhounds to the Letterman Army Institute of Research in San Francisco for bone-breaking protocols.⁷⁰ Then, over a three-year period between 1995 and 1998, 2,600 ex-racers were donated for terminal teaching labs at the Colorado State University veterinary school. The *Rocky Mountain News* reported on the public outcry that led to the end of the program.⁷¹ In the Spring of 2000, the *Wisconsin State Journal*, the *Des Moines Register* and the *Chicago Sun-Times* were among the newspapers that reported on the sale of one thousand greyhounds to the Guidant cardiac research lab in Minnesota. NGA member Daniel Shonka, who accepted the dogs on the premise of placing them for adoption, instead sold them to Guidant for \$400 each.⁷² Eight years later in 2006, history repeated itself when the *Denver Post* reported that licensee Richard Favreau, who had also released dogs to CSU, received \$28,000 to place approximately two hundred additional greyhounds, but could only account for a handful of them.⁷³ The *Tucson Weekly* confirmed that Favreau would provide no documentation for the one hundred and eighty greyhounds he had received from Tucson Greyhound Park. As with all of these cases, Susan Netboy of the Greyhound Protection League worked to expose the situation, creating a "public-relations nightmare" for the entire dog racing industry in the process.⁷⁴ Netboy was a regular contributor to the national anti-racing newsletter, *Greyhound Network News*, which had been launched in 1992 by Joan Eidinger.⁷⁵

With media attention intensifying, the industry formed the American Greyhound Council in 1987 to promote the adoption of ex-racers and lead damage control efforts. A joint project of the AGTOA and NGA, the AGC also put in place the industry's first inspection system for racing and breeding kennels.⁷⁶ A "Greyhound Rescue Association" had been launched the year before in Cambridge, Massachusetts by anti-racing activist Hugh Geoghegan, and the AGC followed with its own "Greyhound Pets of America" chapters, requiring members to be "racing neutral."⁷⁷ Independent organizations like USA Defenders of Greyhounds were opened in 1988, followed by the National Greyhound Adoption Program in 1989, Greyhound Friends for Life (1991), Retired Greyhounds as Pets (1992), and Greyhound Companions of New Mexico (1993).⁷⁸ Where there had been just twenty adoption groups nationwide in these early days, by 2004 there were nearly three hundred.⁷⁹ Greyhounds were welcomed into homes all across the country, many adopters pointing out that their dogs were "rescued."⁸⁰

As interest in greyhound racing declined, greyhound racing produced fewer and fewer tax dollars and some states reportedly began taking a loss on the activity.⁸¹ According to the Association of Racing Commissioners International, the amount of money wagered on live racing has been more than cut in half since 2001.⁸² The 1990s closure of tracks such as Key West, Interstate, Green Mountain, Black Hills, Yuma, Fox Valley, Sodrac, Coeur D'Alene, Biscayne, Greenetrack, Wisconsin Dells and Waterloo across nine states precipitated this decline. Thirty more tracks were to cease live racing over the decade that followed, and by 2014 only twenty-one tracks remained in just seven states.⁸³ The closure of one of the nation's original tracks, Multnomah Greyhound Park in Oregon (Christmas Eve 2004) was particularly "demoralizing" for the industry.⁸⁴



Closed Waterloo Greyhound Park in Iowa.
Photograph by GREY2K USA, 2010

All these closures resulted in the end of dog racing in the states of Connecticut, Kansas, Oregon and Wisconsin, although no legislation has followed to make commercial greyhound racing illegal *per se* in these jurisdictions.

Since the early 1980s, track owners had been allowed to share signals and take wagers on each others' races. "Simulcasting" was one tool that helped the industry, but once more the dogmen felt left out. In 1989, they attempted to pass a federal bill to secure a greater share of wagering proceeds and to have veto power over inter-track agreements. H.R. 3429, the Interstate Greyhound Racing Act, was modeled after the successful Interstate Horse Racing Act of 1978 but was doomed to fail once the AGTOA came to oppose it. Track owners challenged the measure as unnecessary federal regulation and criticized it as a "private relief" bill for greyhound owners.

Representing the NGA, Gary Guccione testified that less than one half of his members could even cover their costs of operation – but relief was not to come.⁸⁵

Worse for industry proponents, new competition for live racing also presented itself in the form of state lotteries, Indian casinos and casino-style gambling opportunities at the tracks themselves.⁸⁶ During hearings for the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988, the NGA expressed interest in joining forces with Native American Interests; but again the AGTOA stepped in and testified before Congress that the combination would allow unsavory elements to infiltrate Native American communities and provide a powerful “magnet for criminal elements.” Track owners seemed more than willing to remind lawmakers of old-time dog racing’s association with organized crime in order to insulate their business.⁸⁷

Beginning in the early 1990’s, states also began turning back the clock on the industry. Seven states and the U.S. Territory of Guam repealed their authorization of pari-mutuel wagering on live dog racing during this period, and some also banned simulcast wagering on greyhounds. Vermont (1995), Idaho (1996), Nevada (1997), Guam (2009), Massachusetts (2010), Rhode Island (2010), New Hampshire (2010) and Colorado (2014) all passed dog racing prohibitions. Additionally, South Dakota allowed its authorization for live greyhound racing to expire as of December 2011 and the five states of Maine (1993), Virginia (1995), Washington (1996), North Carolina (1998) and Pennsylvania (2004) all passed preemptive measures.⁸⁸



Cloverleaf clubhouse and track in Colorado. Photograph by GREY2K USA, 2009

In fact, the campaigns to pass prohibitions in Maine, Virginia, Washington, North Carolina and Pennsylvania were prophylactic in nature, designed to stave off attempts to introduce dog racing to these jurisdictions. The anti-racing newsletter *Greyhound Network News* documented the efforts of women such as Evelyn Jones, Sherry Cotner and Ellie Sciarba in leading these campaigns through successful petition drives followed by legislative action.⁸⁹ Vermont’s “Gator Bill” passed after shelter manager John Perrault offered photographs of a room full of dead greyhounds to lawmakers. The dogs had been among the truckloads he was asked to destroy once the dog racing season ended at the Green Mountain track each year.⁹⁰ Scotti Devens of Save the Greyhound Dogs! and Greyhound Rescue Vermont lobbied for the bill that was ultimately signed by Governor Howard Dean.⁹¹ Lawmakers in Idaho acted after documentation surfaced about the electrocution, shootings and throat slashings of unwanted dogs. Both the Greyhound Protection League and Greyhound Rescue of Idaho advocated for Governor Phil Batt to sign a racing prohibition into law. An avowed dog lover, he signed the bill with his poodle-schnauzer on his lap, remarking, “Dog racing depends upon selecting a few highly competitive dogs out of a large group. It hardly seems worth it to me to go through that process of breeding and killing the ones that can’t compete, just to have the sport.”⁹²



Opponents of dog racing rally in Massachusetts. Photograph by GREY2K USA, 2008

In Massachusetts in 2000, after years of unsuccessful legislative bills, grassroots opponents of dog racing filed a ballot question to repeal the dog racing laws there. The Grey2K Committee’s referendum failed by a margin of 51%-49%. In 2008, a similar measure, Ballot Question 3, was led by successor group GREY2K USA in partnership with the Massachusetts SPCA and the Humane Society of the United States.⁹³ This time, Massachusetts citizens voted 56% to 44% to shutter both of the Bay State’s dog tracks. The last race was held at Raynham Park on December 26, 2009.⁹⁴ Lawmakers in Rhode Island and New Hampshire followed suit and opted to make dog racing illegal as well, resulting in the denouement of dog racing in all New England states by 2010.⁹⁵

Slot machines were thought to offer new hope for remaining tracks, but this has truly been a double-edged sword, pitting track owners against dogmen. As tracks in states like Iowa, Rhode Island, and West Virginia were initially granted casino-type gambling, they were also

required to share their profits with live racing interests. This enhanced a divide that has now resulted in track owners joining with greyhound advocates to pass bills to repeal statutory racing mandates and separate live racing from other activities at the tracks.⁹⁶ Thanks to the passage of such “decoupling” legislation in 2014, and in exchange for a cessation payment of \$65 million from track operator Caesars Entertainment to its greyhound owners, Iowa’s Council Bluffs dog track has been released from offering live racing as of December 2015. The second track in

Dubuque may also choose to wind down under the new law.⁹⁷ An earlier bill, filed in 2010 by GREY2K USA in Arizona, failed to pass when track owners there hesitated to support it. The measure never left committee.⁹⁸ Two sessions later, Tucson Greyhound Park filed and passed its own version of the legislation. SB 1273 of 2012 called for live racing to be reduced to one hundred calendar days, with an opportunity for full decoupling with the consent of the dogmen. No further reduction has occurred since that time.⁹⁹

Over the last several years, GREY2K USA, now allied with both the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the Humane Society of the United States, has been working actively to phase out greyhound racing in Florida. Since 2011, the *Associated Press* and newspapers across the state including the *Miami Herald*, *Broward Palm Beach New Times*, and the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* have published repeated stories about the politics and problems of dog racing. Reporters have described the injuries and deaths suffered by racing greyhounds, the discovery of drugged dogs, and the lax regulations allowing convicted criminals, including animal abusers, to work in the industry.¹⁰⁰ Television stations have interviewed lawmakers, track owners, greyhound advocates and breeders alike.¹⁰¹ Additionally, multiple editorials have been published against dog racing and in favor of decoupling – but so far no legislation has passed.¹⁰² Home to twelve of the remaining twenty-one American dog tracks, Florida remains the heart of the dog racing industry and the center of this debate.¹⁰³ In 2014, dog racing also continues in the states of Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Iowa, Texas and West Virginia.

TIMELINE

