The Pointer is believed to be the first breed developed to locate and point game and whose name describes his very mission in life. Paintings and early writings document him throughout Europe, particularly in Italy, France, Spain and Portugal, centuries before his arrival in England around 1700, which marks the dawn of the breed we know today.

British landed gentry enjoyed a sporting lifestyle and judiciously developed their own strains of pointers for wing shooting as firearms improved in the 18th Century. Careful bloodstock records were kept individually for generations before the Stud Book Registry was created in 1880. There were no “pets” among hunting dogs at these great estates, each had to earn its keep or be eliminated. Some kennels tried crosses to other breeds such as Greyhounds, Foxhounds and even Bloodhounds, hoping to improve speed, stamina or scenting ability, but results were mixed, abandoned and bred out in succeeding generations.

Long before the Civil War, pointers from these early strains made their way to America with their masters coming to settle the new country. They soon became the native stock, and subsequent importations were then bred to these “natives” to satisfy the demand for purebred dogs. In 1874, sportsmen gathered in Tennessee to show off their dogs’ abilities (settle arguments) at the first American field trial, limited to pointers and setters only.

Two clubs formed by wealthy sportsmen to advance and perfect the qualities of the pointer in those times were the Westminster KC with their kennels at Babylon, L.I., NY and the St. Louis KC. They, plus other enthusiastic individual fanciers, imported many noteworthy dogs from England for stud purposes during the 1870s and 80s. Names like Sensation, King of Kent, Bang Bang, Croxeth, Sleaford, Bow, Faust and Graphic, to mention just a few, made their contribution here as sires to now mainly native stock bitches. With resourcefulness, breeders can trace their own pointers back to one or more of these famous ancestors. Online, inquiring minds can find a wealth of research and background information at Lyn Topinka’s website: englishriverwebsite.com/Pointer-History/. Dorothy Johnson’s epic work A Century of Pointers, published in 2003, traces modern pedigrees back to many of those dogs and beyond to their renowned forebears, the “four pillars” (Whitehouse’s Hamlet, Garth’s Drake, Brocton’s Bounce and Statter’s Major) of the breed over 150 years ago.

Early pointer fanciers formed the Pointer Club of America and joined the fledgling American Kennel Club in 1888. Some noted members were the Westminster Kennel Club, Hempstead Farm Co., James Anthony, Charles Heath and dog artists J. M. Tracy and Gustav Muss-Arnolt. They adopted the physical standard for Pointers as written by Stonehenge (Henry Walsh) in his “Dogs of Great Britain, America and Other Countries” in 1879, later amending the format and some terminology by the time it was published in the 1929 AKC Pure-Bred Dogs. They left the AKC in 1931 for lack of input for field trial judges’ selection and carried on exclusively as a field trial club for several decades. Pointers were without formal representation at AKC until the American Pointer Club, Inc. was established in 1938. Its members will be celebrating their 75th anniversary in 2013.

It was during the early mid-part of the 20th Century in the U. S. that the division in field and bench types became apparent and irreconcilable. With our wide open spaces, many Americans wanted a wider ranging and faster running dog with the tail held high. It is here the bench people drew the line and came to agree with William Arkwright as he states, “There is nothing for a pointer more necessary than a tail of the right shape, of the right length, of the right carriage and of the right covering. It is more convincing
warranty of pure blood and high breeding than reams of written pedigree.” Knowledgeable old-timers say that a good pointer cannot get his tail above his back.

Though not represented by an official, show-giving breed club for much of the 1930s, pointers flourished on the bench. Two imports during that time, Ch. Pennine Paramount and Ch. Drumgannon Dreadnought, themselves BIS winners on both sides of the Atlantic became legendary sires of bench champions in America.

The 1920s and 30s were to massive importations from all over the British Isles what the 1870s and 80s were to their predecessors. This second “golden age” drew from kennels of Stylish, Mallwyd, Ferndale, Ardagh, Nancolleth, Of Crombie, Pennine and Drumgannon, etc. all playing major roles in this cycle of mixing imports with the now American-bred blood, again refreshing and compound the qualities making up this handsome sporting dog. A case in point would be the first Pointer to win BIS at Westminster. Ch. Governor Moscow, the 1925 winner was the result of an imported Mallwyd sire with excellent field credentials and an American field trial-bred dam. “Govvy” was a splendid personal gundog, a quality his owner Robert F. Maloney insisted every pointer raised at his 100+ “Herewithem” breeding kennel near Pittsburgh possess.

When full British (field and bench) Ch. Nancolleth Markable was imported for Mrs. Geraldine Rockefeller Dodge of Giralda fame, he promptly won top honors at the Garden in 1932 before earning his American championship. Both of these grand gundogs as well as the symbol of Westminster KC itself, Sensation, are in the pedigree of the third and currently final Pointer BIS winner at Westminster in 1986, Ch. Marjetta National Acclaim.

WWII took a devastating toll on kennels in Britain, many never to rise again. Those that were able to carry on or start over were aided by a grateful American breeder who had benefitted mightily from the stock he imported from them in the 1920s. The same Robert F. Maloney mentioned above sent (gratis) five of his best representative bloodstock from those early imports back to Britain and Scotland to help the breeders reconstitute their own programs. Three dogs, Ch Herewithem General Mac, Herewithem Moscow’s Spirit, Herewithem Royal Flush and two bitches, Herewithem Widow Moon and Ch. Herewithem Old Glory were warmly received and began producing some excellent pointers when bred with their British counterparts, particularly Pennine, Dimas and Stonethorpe. Royal Flush (“Yank”) quickly became a full British Champion, and his granddaughter, Sh. Ch. Chiming Bells won BIS at Crufts in 1958. The bloodlines had come full circle. At one point, the United British and Scottish fanciers presented Maloney with the bronze Mene pointer from the famed Wm Arkwright collection as expression of their gratitude. Virtually every pointer in the UK from the mid-1950s onward carries the genes of one of those Herewithem imports and has spread them around the globe, including back to the United States.

The 1960s and 70s brought the next big wave of English imports to America (and Canada) via Crookriske, St. Aldwyns, Querdon, Cumbrian, Daviam and Pipeaway plus influential Scandinavian imports that had a very positive effect on field aptitude. Today, besides the United Kingdom, imports from New Zealand and Brazil in particular have made an impact as the quest for perfection continues in our breed. A renaissance of interest in advancing the natural abilities of the pointer is apparent. Since 1984, eleven AKC registered pointers have achieved their Dual Championships, a feat long thought unattainable for ‘show’ pointers. Dedicated pointer breeders and enthusiasts are participating successfully in record numbers at AKC hunting tests and field events, stirring the genes in their pointers’ long and gloried past. Mission in life – Pointer - accomplished! 

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Karen Blasche is a life member of the American Pointer Club where she serves as the breed historian and bench statistician. She resides in Oregon with her husband Ted and their 11-year old Pointer, Molly. Collecting art, artifacts and information on the breed has been a passion for over 40 years.