

HACHIKO AND HIROKICHI SAITO

AN ANALYSIS OF THE AKITA DOG, PART 1 (AKITAINU KAISEKI, 1)

By Mutsuo Okada

From 1977 (52nd Year Of Showa) to 1985 (60th year of Showa), I presented a series of monthly articles with many photographs under the title, “Akitainu no Arubamu kara (“From My Akita Dog Album”)” in the Aiken Journal.

The Akita dog was then at the height of its popularity, and dog magazines of that time had as many as thirty pages of ads from the dog kennels. However, the Akita dog is now in a state of decline in Japan. This may be attributed partly to the Akiho’s judging scandals in the news, and also to environmental changes that now make it more difficult to raise dogs, especially in large cities. Membership in dog organizations and numbers of those who raise Akita dogs have also dropped greatly.

On the other hand, Akita dogs that went to the United States that are now known as the “American Akitas” continue to increase in numbers. More recently, the Japan Kennel Club (JKC) put these dogs into a separate classification as the “Great Japanese Dogs.” These dogs seem to be gaining popularity also in the rest of the world.

The Akita dog first caught the world’s attention with the story of the faithful dog, **Hachiko** that was born in 1923 (12th year of Taisho)]. Since that time, the Akita dog went through a period of popularity, followed by the current period of decline in Japan. This is indeed a sad situation. Therefore, I have decided to continue my writings, hoping that these writings into past history may be preserved for the future. Nearly all of those responsible for the advancement of the Akita dog are now deceased, while others are now involved with things other than dogs. When I see these happenings, I begin to develop a sense of sadness.

About fifty years have gone by since I first became involved with the Akita dog. When **Kongo-go** came to Tokyo years ago, and with the establishment of the **Akikyo** [Akitainu Kyokai (Akita Dog Society)], many Akita dogs began to appear in Tokyo. About the only person remaining to talk to me about those bygone days and of the enthusiasm once seen at the dog shows in places such as the Gorakuen Stadium is **Mr. Tamejiro Ishibashi** of Yuzawa in Akita.

I am hoping that my recollections will be of some value in the future.

After a lengthy introduction, I will now begin with the story of the faithful dog, **Hachiko**.

Hachiko became known through stories of his faithfulness. This led to the erecting of his statues. These statues were melted down during the war and then rebuilt after the war. This is known universally. Due to the efforts of **Mr. Hirokichi Saito**, who was the founder of **Nippo** [Nipponinu Hozonkai (Japanese Dog Preservation Society)], the fame of this Akita dog was spread by the newspaper media. This is a historical fact.

In 1987 (62nd year of Showa), **Mr. Tatsushi Nakadai** played the leading role (although the star was a dog) in a movie called “**Hachiko** Monogatari (“The Story of **Hachiko**”).” During the year of the dog, the story of **Hachiko** appeared as a special program on TV as well as in special editions in the magazines. I had many news reporters come to my home to interview me for information on **Hachiko** during that time. I was astounded by the sensationalism by the TV media. However, about a year ago, a long TV series with the title, “Shitteru Tsumori” (“This You Should Know”) under the direction of Mr. Hiroshi Sekiguchi on **Hachiko** was shown. I believe many have seen this program. This was an excellent program. The latter half

of the program went into the discovery of **Hachiko** by **Mr. Hirokichi Saito**, who later established the **Nipponin Hozonkai (Japanese Dog Preservation Society)**, also known as **Nippo**. This was a fortunate event. Toward the end of this program, a scene depicting the bedridden emaciated Mr. Saito, due to cancer, was shown. A narration with the framed motto, “hengaku” (“a fool”) is then introduced. Mr. Saito then narrates his involvement with the beginnings of **Nippo**, This is followed by his resignation from **Nippo**.

Mr. Saito was into the fine arts. His contributions as director of the Dobutsu Aigo Kyokai (Society for The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) were also mentioned. I then came to the realization as to why he referred to himself as the “fool.” This brought tears to my eyes. The late **Mr. Katsusuke Ishihara** of **Akikyo** [*The Akitainu Kyokai (Akita Dog Society)*] also told me about this attitude of referring to himself also as a “fool.”

I then came to the deeper realization of the attitudes of these two gentlemen about themselves. This again brought tears to my eyes. The city of Tsuruoka in Yamagata, now recognizes Mr. Saito as one of their local celebrities due to his accomplishments. Seminars have also been held in his honor, Students from Tsuruoka’s Number 1 Middle School under direction of Mr. Masato Katsuki, the school’s principal, have written a book with the title, Saito Hirokichi Sensei no Ashiato wo Tazunete (Tracing The Footsteps of Our Mentor, Mr. Hirokichi Saito).

Mr. Shintaro Sasahara, son of the late wealthy farmer and also a dog fancier, Mr. Yujiro Sasahara, and Mr. Sachio Obiya, a local businessman, have led out in these activities and even suggested building a statue in honor of Mr. Saito. This program, “This You Should Know,” had a rerun this past summer. I sent this video to Mrs. Yoko Kyono, who now lives with the Ishibashi’s in Yuzawa in Akita. I regard her as my elder sister. Yoko-san is the daughter of the late **Mr. Hyoemon Kyono**. Mr. Kyono was a large landowner, who was regarded as one of the authorities in the dog circles. He also gave much financial support to Mr. Saito’s projects with the dogs. When Seiko-san (Hoshiko-san), Mr. Kyono’s first daughter came of age to attend girl’s middle school, the Kyonos moved to Tokyo and built a house in the neighborhood of Mr. Saito. As a result of this, a deep relationship developed between these two families.

Yoko-san told me in her letter she cried when she saw in the program the emaciated form of Mr. Saito, whom she regarded as her uncle. She also went into some of the details of both families when they were living in Tokyo. She also wrote that she was now as old as her father was when he passed away. Time and people have gone by with the flow of time.

Hachiko was invited as one of the reference dogs at the Nippo’s Second Headquarters Show on November 3, 1933 (8th year of Showa) in Tokyo. While at this show, careful body measurements of **Hachiko** were taken under the supervision of **Mr. Shinichi Komatsu**. Measurements were also made on thirteen other excellent dogs from various areas that were shown. These measurements were used as references for the Nippo’s Japanese dog standard that was in the making. I was also amazed at how carefully these measurements were taken.

A section of the measurements obtained from **Hachiko** are as follows:

1. Head region. From the tip of the nose to the occiput = 25.2 cm (9.9 inches). Length of muzzle = 9 cm (3.54 inches). Length of frontal bone = 9 cm (3.54 inches). Space between the ears = 12.5 cm (4.92 inches). Width of muzzle = 6.8 cm (2.68 inches). Circumference of muzzle = 24 cm (9.45 inches). Length of ear on inner side 11.5 cm (4.53 inches). Length of ear on outer side = 14.2 cm (5.6 inches).
2. Neck region. Thickness of upper neck region = 46 cm (18.11 inches). Thickness of lower neck region = 62 cm (24.41 inches). Length of neck = 26 cm (10.24 inches).
3. Trunk region. Height at shoulder blade = 61 cm (24.01 inches). Depth of chest = 27 cm (10.63 inches). Circumference of chest = 73 cm (28.74 inches). Body length = 69.1 cm (27.20 inches). Shoulder width 22.2 cm (8.74 inches). Height at the back = 67 cm (26.38 inches). Height at the hips = 61.2 cm (24.1 inches). Length of tail = 6.2 cm (2.44 inches). Width of tail = 7 cm (2.76 inches).

4. Coat. Coat length at the shoulder bone = 6.2 cm (2.44 inches). Coat length at the neck region = 6.2 cm (2.44 inches). Coat length at the chest region = 3.8 cm (1.50 inches).

I have omitted parts of this report on the measurements for the sake of convenience. After the death of **Hachiko**, with the assistance of Mr. Saito, the remains of **Hachiko** were sent to Mr. Sakamoto, who was the foremost taxidermist in Japan at that time. **Hachiko**'s restored form is now on display at the Ueno Park's Kokuritsu Kagaku Hakubutsukan (National Science Museum).

The body measurements of the living **Hachiko** has turned out to be of great value. According to Mr. Saito, when he attended the dog show in Kansai (Kyoto-Osaka area), no one suspected that the photograph of **Hachiko** by **Mr. Toju Hirashima** was of the excellent re-creation of **Hachiko** by the taxidermist.

This was during the prewar (World War 2) period when many Akita dogs lacked the appearance of the Japanese dog.

This was due to the crossbreeding that occurred earlier during the fighting dog era that resulted in the impure Akita dog that came to be called the "Shin-Akita" ("New Akita"). During this prewar period, droopy ears and uncurled tails, lacking the height of 2 shaku (60.6 cm, 23.9 inches) were problems of much concern to the informed Japanese dog fancier.

The ancestors of **Hachiko** also had the bloodlines of the "Shin-Akita." (The one droopy ear seen in **Hachiko** was acquired after the onset of a severe skin disease.) **Hachiko** was born at the home of the wealthy farming family of Saito (*Note by the translator: This family is probably not related to Mr. Hirokichi Saito.*) of Oshinai in Niida Village in Akita. This family had an excellent line of Akita dogs. Akita dogs from this house after **Hachiko** were of excellent quality (especially with their female dogs). This led to a great contribution to the progress of the Akita dog.

According to **Mr. Katsusuke Ishihara**, the stuffed remains of **Hachiko** was used by informed Akita dog breeders as a model for breeding the Akita dog at that time.

During my boyhood days, when I saw the stuffed remains of **Hachiko** at the museum, his coat color was yellow. I also saw bits of hair that had fallen near his feet. □ When I checked the documents for the body measurements later, I found that the coat color was recorded as being a very light brown.

Many stories of **Hachiko** as to his birth and life history come to my mind. **Mr. Hirokichi Saito** first drew the public's attention to **Hachiko**. This led to the Akita dog's becoming well known throughout Japan and eventually to the rest of the world. **Mr. Saito's great contribution was using Hachiko as the model for the future breeding of the Akita dog.**

I believe that to **Hachiko**, much of the ado by man over him were annoying. For example, one layman, appeared on TV with his dog, claiming this dog was one of the descendants of **Hachiko** going back to more than ten generations. The TV media is often guilty of allowing such programs to be aired. **Hachiko had no offspring.** **Nippo** was established in 1928 (3rd year of Showa) and its registry shows no records of any offspring from **Hachiko**. **Hachiko** was limited to one generation. I have also heard a ridiculous story of someone who advertised an impure dog as being a pure Akita dog and was an offspring of **Hachiko**. On the other hand, the Saito family from Akita went on to produce, during the early part of the Showa Period (1926-1989), a main line of female Akita dogs such as **Oshinai-go, Saiken-go, Moku-go**, etc.

As a postscript, the mother of **Mr. Yasushi Akashi** of the United Nations hailed from this Saito family in Akita. An article describing the coming and going of dogs and chickens on the wide dirt floor of this Saito family's original house was in the April 1999 issue of the Nihon Keizai Shinbun (Japan Economy News).

Photographs

1. **Hachiko** at age 10, when he was invited to Nippo's

First Headquarters Show at the roof top of the Matsuya Department Store in the Ginza District in Tokyo.

2. The faithful dog **Hachiko** of bygone days.

3. A year before his death, on February of 1934 (9th year of Showa), **Hachiko** becomes critically ill.

4. Stuffed remains of **Hachiko** on the day he was sent to the National Science Museum.
June, 12, 1935 (10th year of Showa).

5. Stuffed remains of **Hachiko** at the National Science Museum.

6. Social gathering of the board of directors of **Nippo** of those earlier days. Center: **Mr. Hyoemon Kyono**. **Mr. Hirokichi Saito** in Japanese clothes is at his immediate right.

Reference: Okada, Mutsuo, "Akitainu Kaiswki, 1 ("An Analysis Of The Akita Dog, Part 1")," Aiken Journal, pp. 25-27, November 1999, Snin Journal-sha, Tokyo, Japan.

Note: *Italics* within parenthesis by translator for clarification. **Bold** letters by translator for emphasis. Translated for educational purposes by Tatsuo Kimura with permission from Mutsuo Okada. Translated on 4/26/2006. Edited on 4/30/2006.

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COMMENTS ON MUTSUO OKADA'S "AKITAINU KAISEKI" ("AN ANALYSIS OF THE AKITA DOG")

By Tatsuo Kimura

Mutsuo Okada says this may be his final writing project on the Akita dog. He is referring to a series of thirty-four articles, with the title, "Akitainu Kaiseki" ("An Analysis of The Akita Dog") (available in Japanese only) on the history of the Akita dog that appeared in the Sports dog magazine, Aiken Journal, beginning with the November 2000 issue through July 2003.

These articles contain information that Mr. Okada has accumulated for the past fifty years. He was acquainted with many of the Akita dog pioneers who are now deceased. Much of this information is new, even to many people in Japan.

Although these Japanese dog pioneers had their own opinions on the Akita dog, their common goal was to preserve the Akita dog as one of the Japanese dogs as a natural monument.

Informed Akita dog fanciers do not take their wins or losses in the show ring too seriously, but will try to see which Akita dogs of the past, present or future comes closest to the Japanese dog type based on history and the Akita dog standard.

In the United States not much information on the Akita dog were available until the 1970s and into the 1990s. Translated information from Japanese sources were scarce. During the 1970s, translations into English from the late Mr. Naoto Kajiwara's book, My Thoughts on the Akita Dog began to provide us with some historical information on the Akita dog. It was not until the 1990s, when more information on the Akita dog became available from Mr. Okada's articles on the Akita dog. These articles supplemented the earlier information from Mr. Kajiwara. Both of these writers obtained their information from Akita dog

pioneers who were still living at that time. They also did much studying and observing on their own for information from other sources, including those from the Nippo Bulletin of earlier years. Much of the historical information on Japanese dogs, including the Akita dog came from those who were involved with Nippo.

Mr. Okada has gives us information on the history of the Akita dog that were previously unknown to us with articles by providing us with many photographs of people and Akita dogs that go back to the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries . Many of the his translated articles on the Akita dog have appeared in the Akita World.

He has also authored two books that are recognized as important references for the Akita dog fancier. One of these is the Keito, Akitainu (Pedigrees of The Akita Dogs) of 1991 (ISBN4-416-79113-5) and the Okonihonken Shashinshu (A Photo Collection of The Primitive Type Japanese Dogs) of 2001 (ISBN4-416-70243-4). Both books were published by the Seibundo Shinkosha of Tokyo. Much of the contents in the latter book were translated into English with his permission and published in issues of the Akita World.

In Part 1, Mr. Okada opens with the discussion of Hachiko, the famous faithful Akita dog of the 1930s, and of Hirokichi Saito, the founder of the Nippo (Nipponinu Hozonkai, Japanese Dog Preservation Society). Body measurements on Hachiko that were taken under the supervision of Mr. Shinichi Komatsu at the Nippo's second headquarters show in 1933 is mentioned.. Hachiko is considered a good representative of the Akita dog as seen in with his stuffed remains, even to this today. The names of Toju Hirashima, the animal photographer, and of Hyoemon Kyono, the close friend of Mr. Saito, Mr. Okada's mentor, and also one of the Akita dog pioneers are mentioned.

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