





'COSEY'

AT

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN

(126th ANNIVERSARY IN MAY 2021)

BY KAREN LAWRENCE

PHOTOS:

Left: 'COSEY'
the Maine Cat
who was a big winner
at the 1895
National Cat Show at
Madison Square
Garden
Photo by
Julius A. Gross
Brooklyn.

Above:
Silver Medallion and
Winners Collar
from the
National Cat Show
Madison Square
Garden, 1895.

Photo: Larry Johnson

Both images
courtesy of
The CFA Foundation

England had the iconic Crystal Palace as the setting for its first cat show in 1871. The United States had Madison Square Garden as its iconic site, with the first national exhibition, dubbed the "National Cat Show", being held there on May 8-11, 1895.

The 1895 "National Cat Show" wasn't the first show held in the United States, nor was it necessarily the biggest. It was, however, the first show in New York, dedicated totally to cats. Previous agricultural shows had included cats as a group, among with the dogs, chickens, pigs, cattle, mice, etc., but they weren't the main event in New York, until this 1895 show. The show itself is very memorable because we have a show catalog available as well as the silver collar and medal awarded to one of the major show winners, in addition to several book articles describing individual entries, plus newspaper reports and illustrations from that era.

John Smithson, in his upcoming book 'A Persian Rhapsody in Blue', says "The Fancier shows, which catered for a variety of animals were a well-known event, but the concept of a show which specialized only in cats, was new to the New York public and brought with it a great deal of publicity."

'Leslie's Weekly' promoted this novelty event on May 9th, 1895:

"... on May 8th all, or most all, of the really beautiful, charming, exquisite cats of this city, as well as of several other more distant localities, will appear before the public in a manner as novel to them as it will be to all the cat admirers who may frequent the Madison Square Garden."



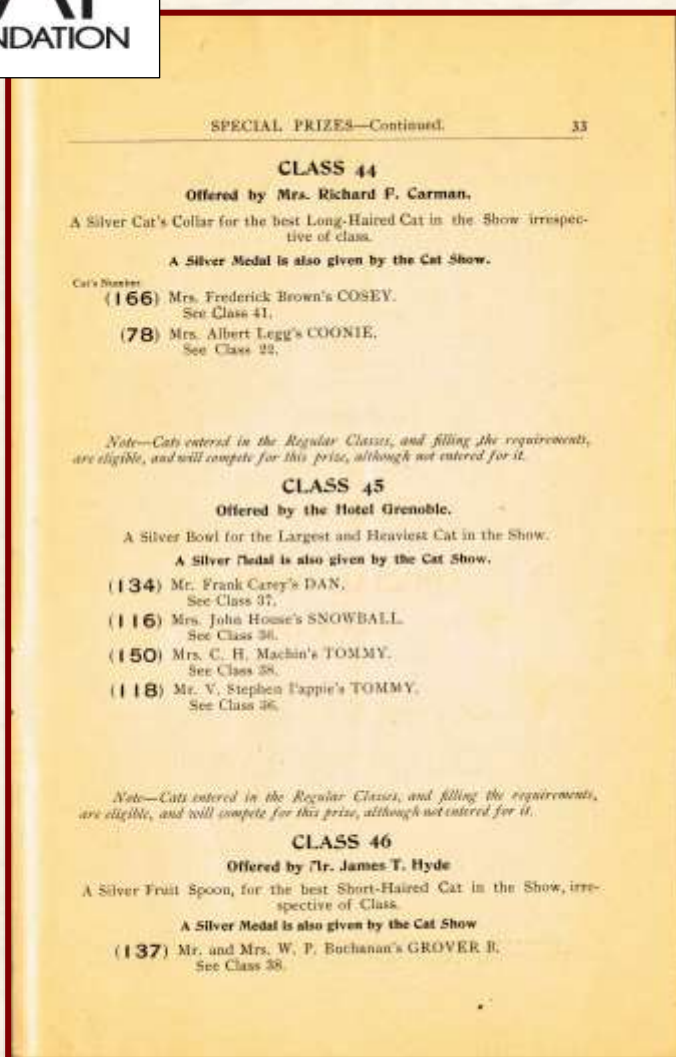
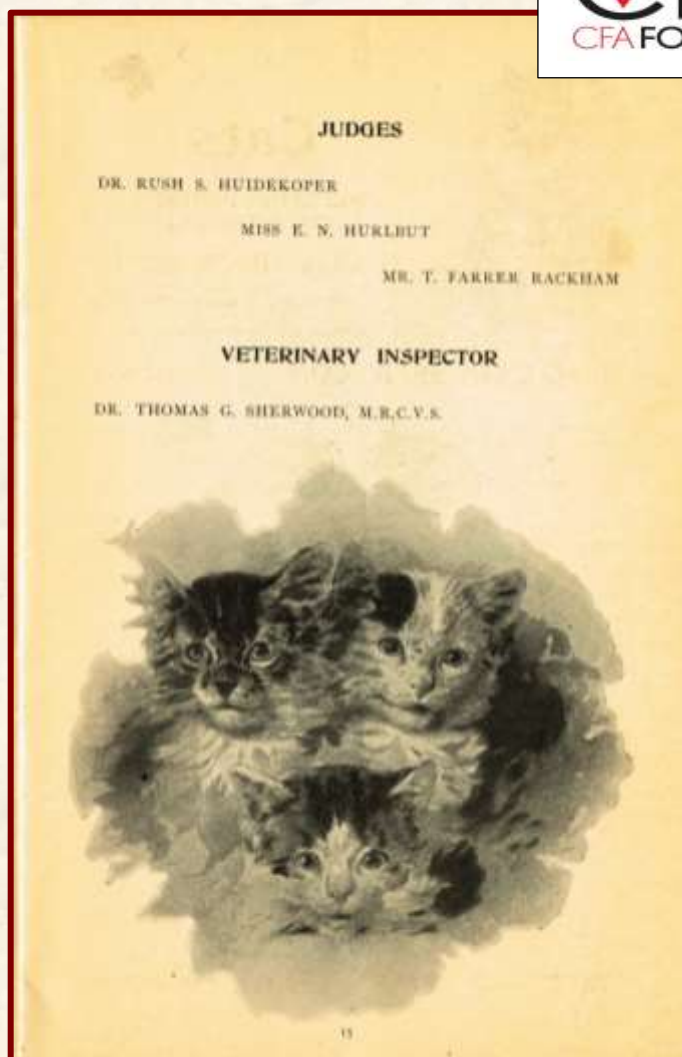
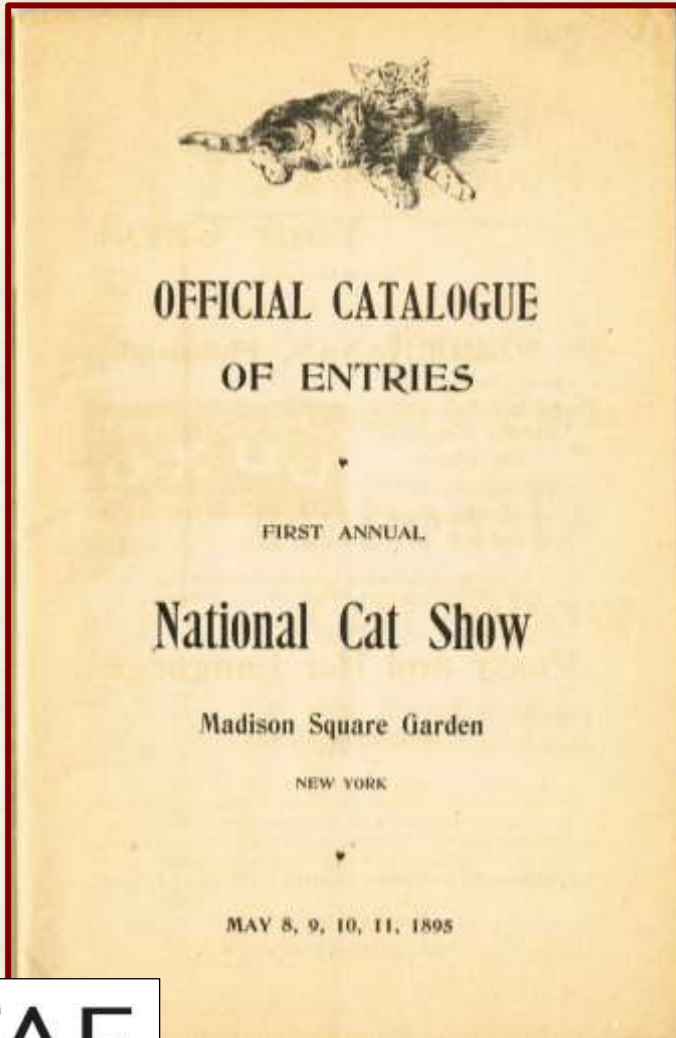
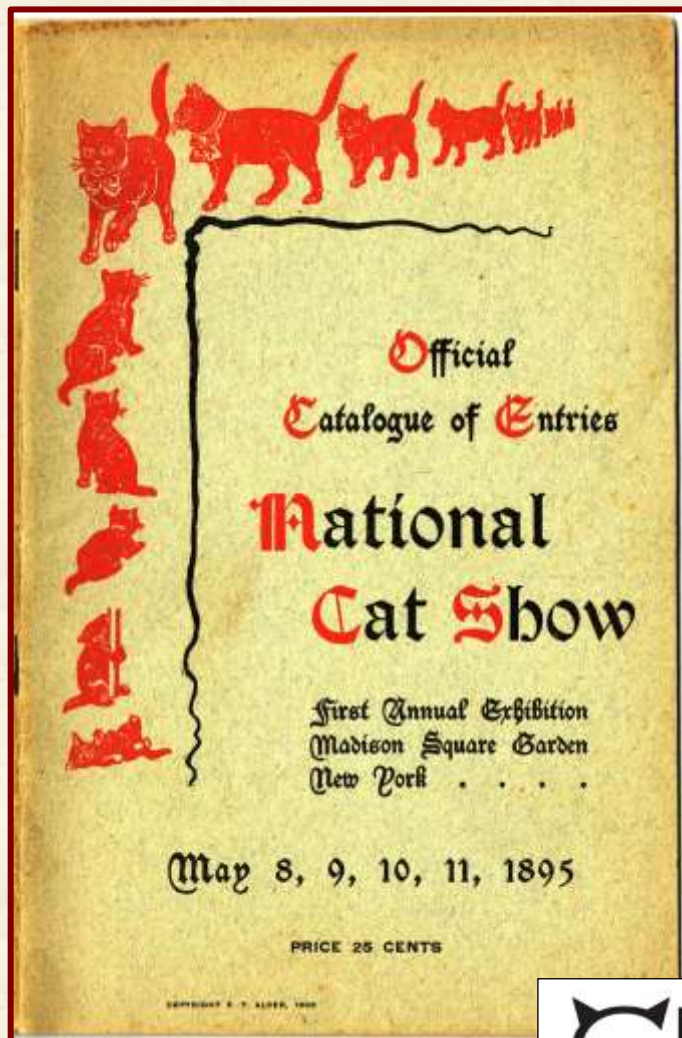
MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, as it looked circa 1879.

Image: Public Domain, Wikimedia.org

The Show Manager was Mr. Frank W. Sanger, and judges listed were Dr. Rush Huidekoper, Miss E.N. Hurlbut, and Mr. T. Farrer Rackham.

The 1895 show attracted 183 feline entries, numerous of which are mentioned in 'High Bred Cats in America', a chapter in Helen Winslow's 1900 book, Concerning Cats. Among them are:

- * **PERSIA**, a dark chinchilla owned by Mrs. Fabius M. Clark, described as "one of the finest cats in this country", took "first prize at the National Cat Show in 1895."
- * **SYLVIO**, a long-haired male silver tabby imported from England, "took a first prize at the New York show in 1895, but unfortunately was poisoned before he was a year old."
- * **ELLEN TERRY**, an orange/white Angora female, about which is written, "Another one which has won several prizes, and took the silver bowl offered for the Best Cat and litter of kittens in the 1895 cat show of New York is Ellen Terry." It should be noted that one of her kittens at the 1895 show, PRINCESS DINAZARDE, show "won second prize for long-haired white female in New York in March 1896."
- * **AJAX**, a white Angora, "one of the finest in this country," was owned by Mr. D.W. Stevens of Massachusetts. "At the New York show in 1895, and at several other shows, he has won first prizes."
- * **CHICHO**, "an imported Persian of great beauty" was owned by Miss Ethel Nesmith Anderson, and "took second place after Ajax".



CLASS 41

Tabby—any color, but with no white.

FIRST PRIZE, \$5

SECOND PRIZE, \$3

THIRD PRIZE, \$2

166

Mrs. Frederick Brown's COSEY.

Black and gray Tabby Angora.

1 year and 9 months.....Not for sale

COSEY'S entry in the Show Catalogue. Cosey was a Black and Grey, possibly Black Silver Tabby (with white)

Image: The CFA Foundation, Inc.

- * **SNOW**, an imported Angora belonging to Mr. George A. Rawson, was the third prize winner.
- * **MUSTAPHA**, a "magnificent brindled Persian gelded cat" was entered on exhibition only by one of the show's judges, Dr. Huidekoper.
- * **TOMMY**, "a white Persian, imported in 1889 and valued at \$500" was an entry owned by Master Edwin J. Pettet. "He was brought from the interior of Persia, where he was captured in a wild state."
- * **COLUMBIA**, an imported fawn Australian, owned by Dr. H.L. Hammond of Connecticut. "They are very sleek cats, with fur so short, glossy, and fine that it looks like the finest satin. Their heads are small and narrow, with noses that seem pointed when compared to other cats."
- * **GROVER B**, a white Maltese, was the mascot cat of photographer William P. Buchanan. He "took the twenty-five dollar gold medal in 1895, at the New York show, as the heaviest white cat exhibited."
- * **DICK**, a tiger cat weighing twenty-two pounds, was owned by Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett. He "attracted a great deal of attention at the first New York show."
- * **TAFEE, THE LAIRD**, and **LITTLE BILLEE**, "a trio of black cats that were the centre of attraction at that first New York show belonged to Colonel Mann. They took a first prize but two of them have since come to an untimely end."
- * **KING HUMBERT**, a Brown Tabby Persian, owned by Mrs. E.N. Barker.
- * **MUSJAH** (aka MOUSZAH), an "Algerian" Persian, owned by Mr. Ferdinand Danton. "He was a magnificent pure blue Persian, brought over from Algiers in 1894, and of uncommon size and beautiful coloring."
- * **COSEY**, a black and grey tabby Angora, gelded, owned by Mrs. Frederick A. Brown of Long Island.

ABOUT COSEY AND HIS WINS

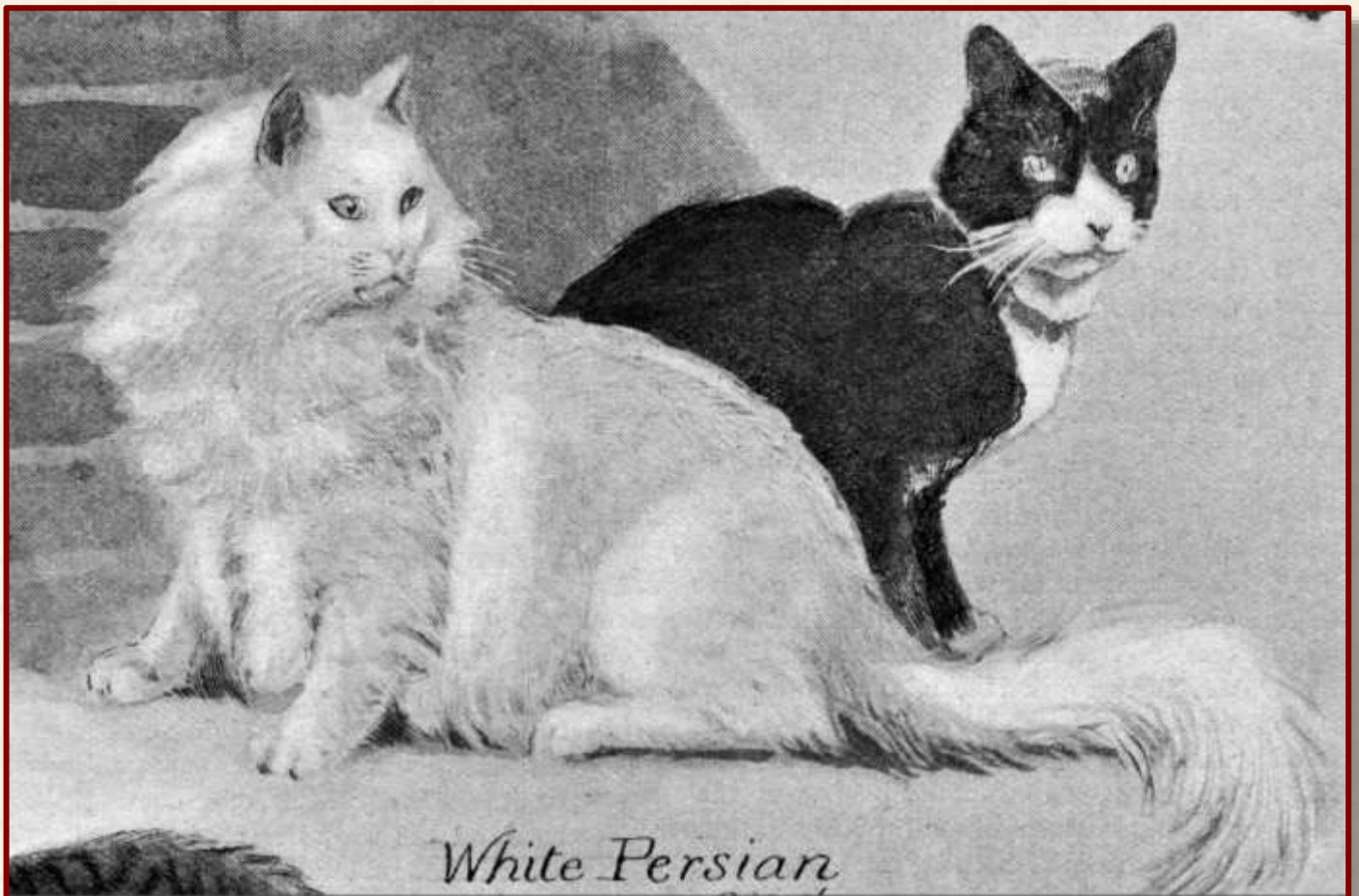
The story of 'COSEY', a winner at that first MSG show will forever be enigmatically linked with his historic win as Best Longhaired Cat in Show, 'irrespective of class', at the first National Cat Show, held at Madison Square Garden, New York, in May 1895. Cosey, we have learned from the show catalog, was entry number 166 in the "gelded" class at the show which attracted 183 entries.



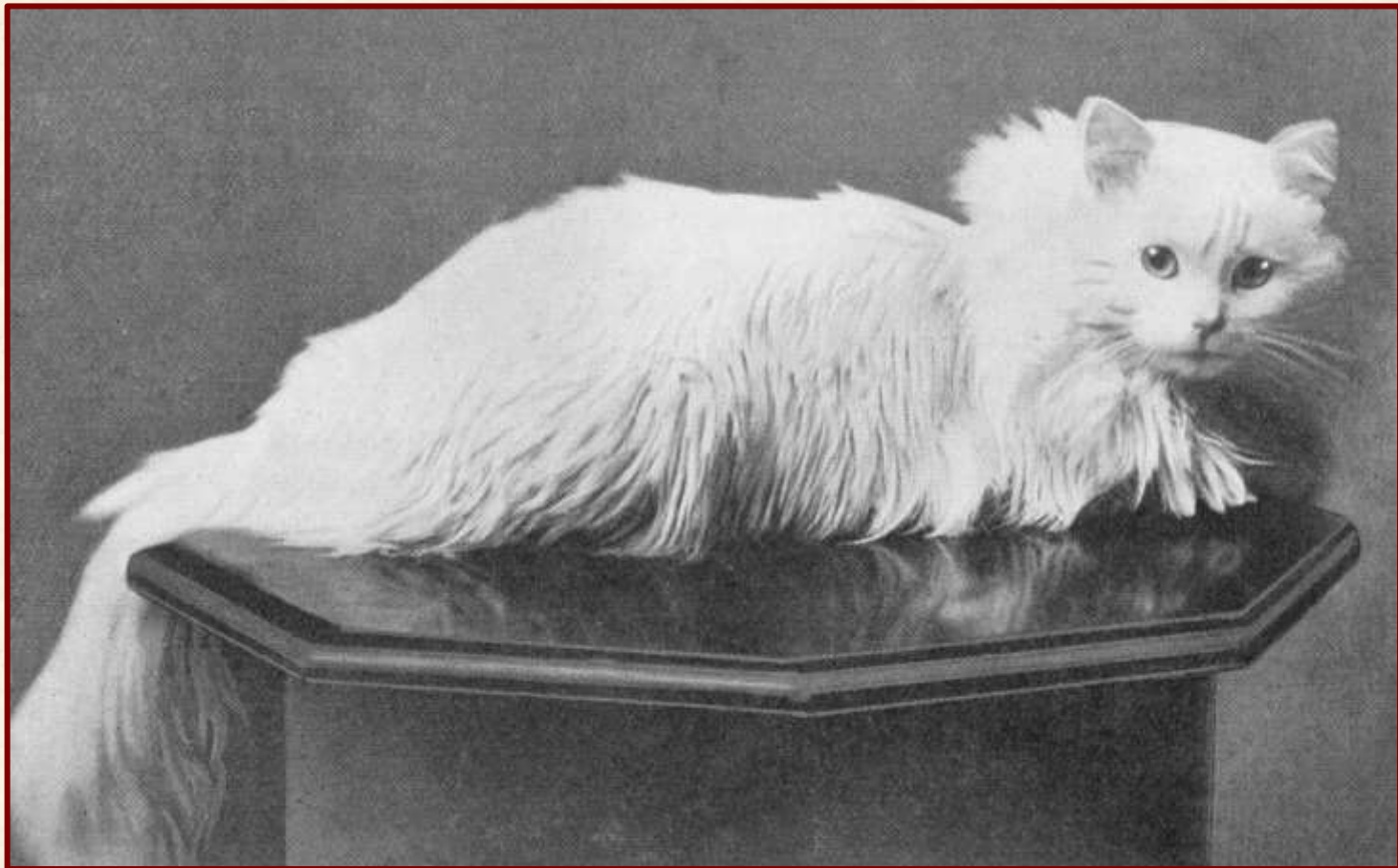
Above left: Mr. Ferdinand Danton's 'Algerian' Blue Persian cat, 'MUSJAH' imported in 1894.

Above right: Mr. George A Rawson's White Persian 'SNOW' a winner at the Crystal Palace, England.

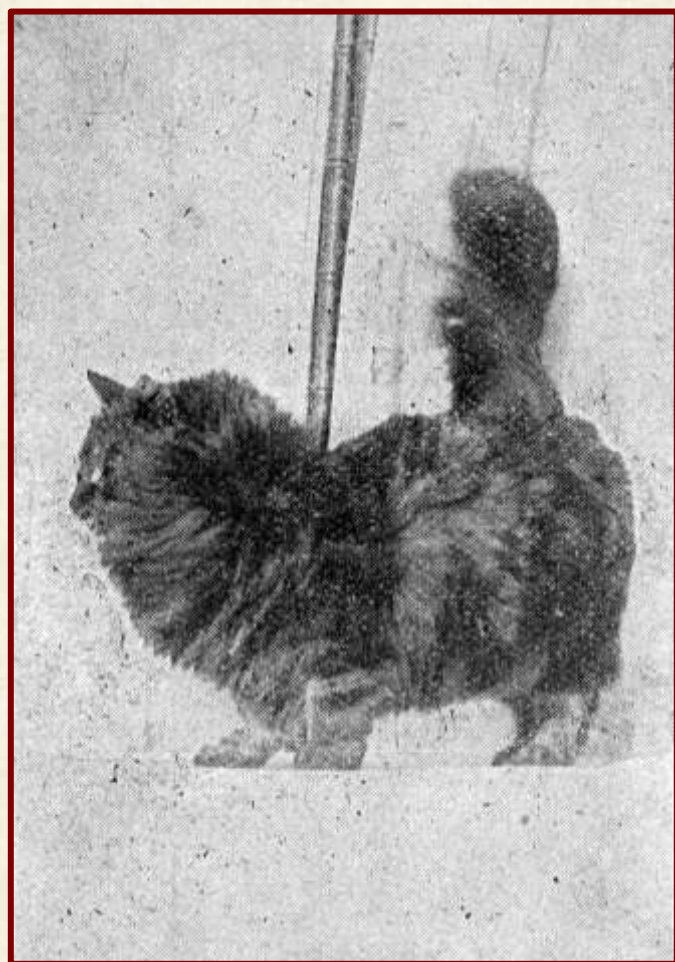
Images from 'Iroquois' Magazine, August 1, 1897. © The Harrison Weir Collection.



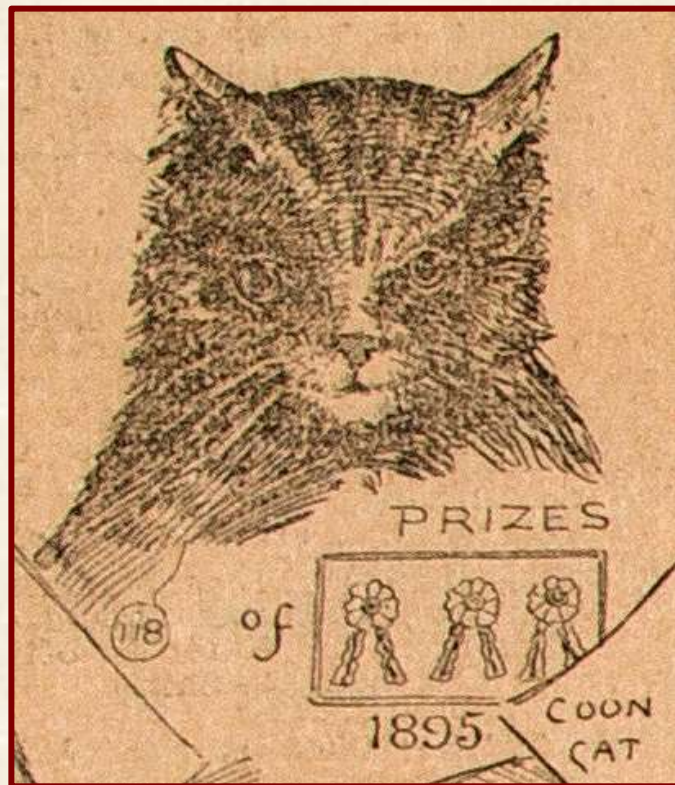
This glamorous White Persian is likely to be an image of Miss Ethel Nesmith Anderson's 'CHICHO' Illustrated by J. Carter Beard, for 'Leslie's Weekly', May 9, 1895. © The Harrison Weir Collection



Mr. D.W. Stevens of Massachusetts, Blue-eyed White Angora 'AJAX' a first prize winner.
Photo: by Coleman. 'The Book of The Cat' (1903) by Frances Simpson.



Above left: Dr. Huidekoper's brindled Persian gelded cat 'MUSTAPHA' (not in competition).
Above right: Mrs. E. N. Barker's Brown Tabby Persian, 'KING HUMBERT'.
Images from 'High Bred Cats in America' by Helen Winslow' (1897)



Above left: A COON Kitten entry at the 1896 Madison Square Garden Show. From the March 1896 issue of 'The Press'. Photo: From the Samuel C. Perkins scrapbook, in the collection of the CFA Foundation.

Above right: An artist's sketch of 'Cosey' as entry No. 118, in the March 1896 Madison Square Garden Show. Note the mention of three prizes from the wins taken in 1895.

Photo: From an article published March 5, 1896 in the Samuel C. Perkins scrapbook, in the collection of The CFA Foundation.

For years, Cosey had been assumed to be a female (probably because of the "gentle" name) so discovery of the show catalog and the listing of entries provided the real information that "she" was actually a neutered "he".

We also learn from the catalog listing that he was a "black and grey Tabby Angora", and was 1 year and 9 months old at the time of the show. This places his date of birth at some time in 1893. It also brings into question whether he was actually a "Maine" or "Coon" cat as has been assumed for numerous years, and in several publications.

Perhaps, being listed as an "Angora" meant instead that he was one of the very early Longhairs (Persian) to be shown in North America. Angora was the generic name given to most long-haired cats, including those from Persian or East Mediterranean origin, and in particular to the many thousands of 'Angora' cats being bred on farms around Boston, most of which had their roots in long-haired stock out of the state of Maine. Folklore prefers to accept Cosey as one of the first Maine Coon cats, and indeed an illustration from the 1896 show has a "Coon Kitten" as one of the exhibits. Another shows a "Coon Cat" with their awards from the 1895 show - this can only be Cosey. Regardless of what breed the cat actually was, we do know that Cosey was a major winner at the 1895 show.

THE COLLAR AND MEDAL FROM 1895

The discovery of Cosey's silver collar and medal is a story in itself. We do learn, again from the show catalog, about the award donors. The silver collar, to be awarded to "the Best Long-Haired cat in the Show irrespective of Class" was donated by Mrs. Richard F. Carman. The silver medal, also awarded to Cosey, was donated by the cat show itself. Their discovery, almost 100 years later, is due to a Persian cat fancier.



The Silver Collar won by 'COSEY at the National Cat Show, Madison Square Garden, in May 1895, duly engraved with his name.

Photo: by TETSU. In the collection of The CFA Foundation, Inc.

In 1990, Bobara Pendergrast, a Persian breeder and antique dealer, got a tip from a friend about several unique pieces at an antique shop in Central New Jersey. When she got there she found three stunning items: a silver medal marked "National Cat Show, 1895," with a cat face in the middle, a silver cat collar with "National Cat Show, 1895, Won By Cosey," and a picture of a cat wearing a collar ribbon marked "National Cat Show." Unbelievably, all of them were in perfect, mint condition. The antique dealer said that they had been found packed safely away in the attic of a house near Lambertville, New Jersey where they were discovered during an estate sale. Naturally, Ms. Pendergrast recognized the items for what they were - beautiful silver pieces, valuable cat fancy artifacts - and purchased them.

Ms. Pendergrast began displaying the items in her jewelry booth at cat shows and everyone who saw them had theories about their significance. A friend, Donna Wiley, found a reference to a 'Cosie' in a book titled *That Yankee Cat*:

"In May of 1895, when the most famous and largest of the early shows was held at Madison Square Garden in New York. The show was won hands down, first place and best of show by a brown tabby female Maine Cat named Cosie. It must have been a spectacular show, numbering 176 animals in all and including two ocelots, two wildcats, and three civet cats."

A visit to the New York Public Library resulted in the finding of a New York Times article that confirmed Mrs. Fred Brown's 'Cosey' had been named Best in Show.

Mrs. Brown must have been very proud of Cosey's victory as shown in the care she obviously took to preserve the awards and photograph. We owe her a debt of gratitude for that!

In 1990, The CFA Foundation became the proud owner of this wonderful set of historical artifacts. These important pieces of cat fancy history were purchased from Ms. Pendergrast by the Foundation thanks to a generous specified donation from the National Capital Cat Show.



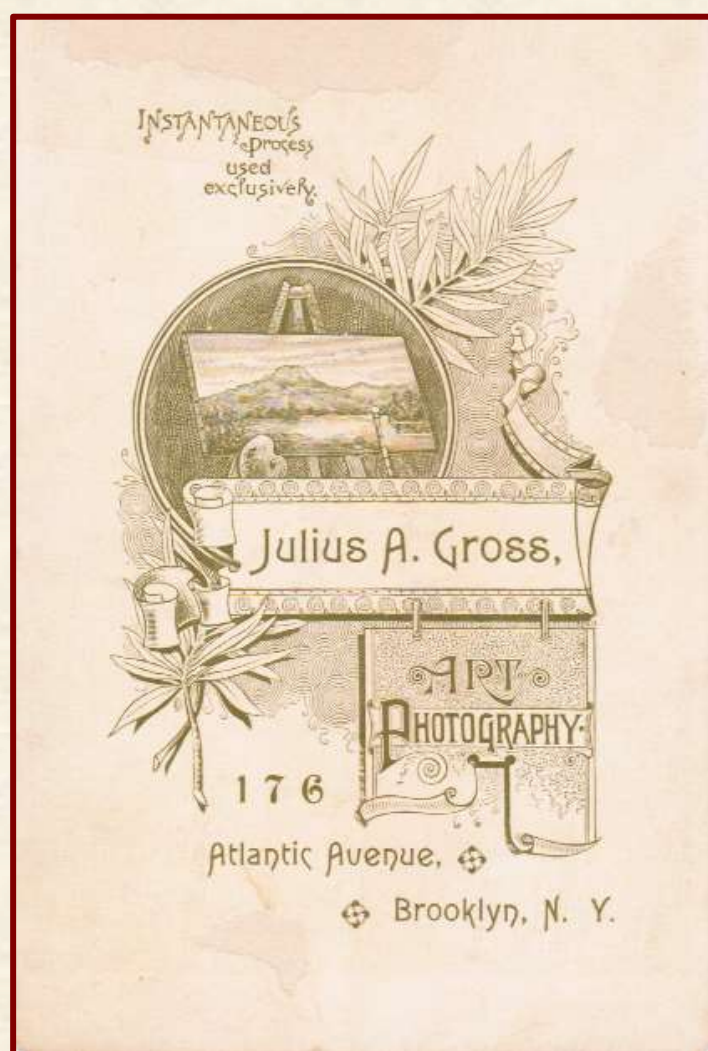
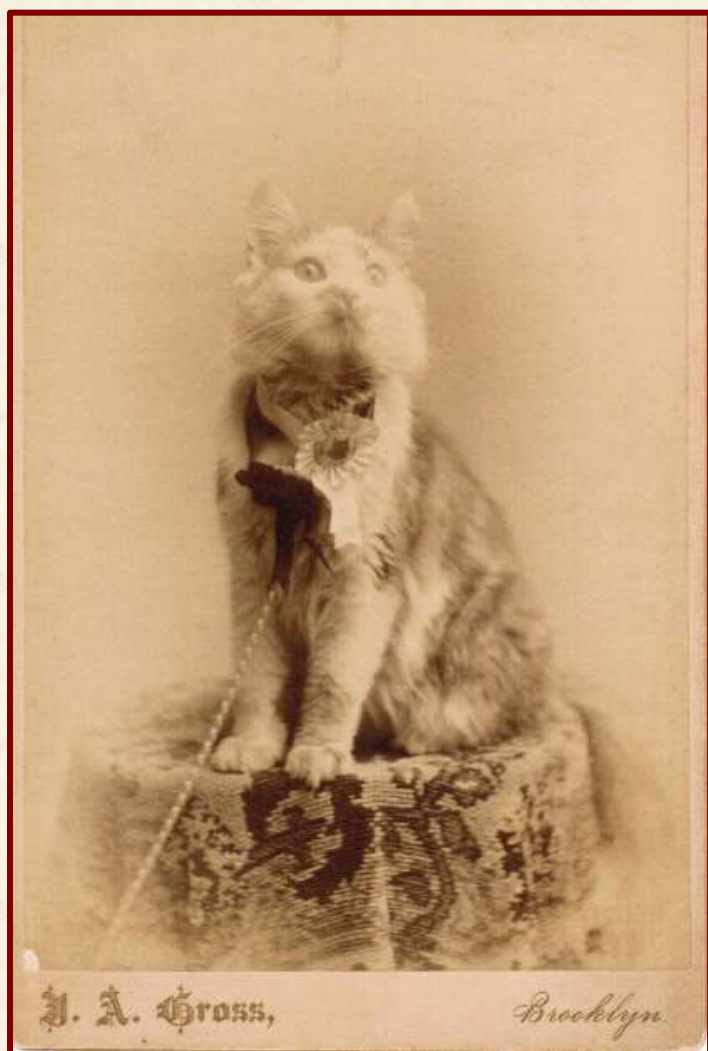
The Silver Medal won by 'COSEY at the National Cat Show, Madison Square Garden, in May 1895, duly engraved with his name.

Photo: by TETSU. In the collection of The CFA Foundation, Inc.

THE NATIONAL CAT SHOW CATALOG

Discovery of the National Cat Show catalog was an equally interesting and surprising find by John Smithson, noted feline historian in New Zealand. During a routine process of purchasing feline-based antiquarian books, John unwrapped an item that had been delivered and found a hand-written note from the seller asking if he would be interested in a 19th century show catalog. He responded by email and asked the seller to send details about the catalog, plus one or two images related to it. You can imagine his surprise when he discovered it was the catalog of entries from the 1895 Madison Square Garden show!

Then it became a case of simply choosing not to dilly-dally or quibble about price, but to close a deal on this item of feline historical significance! Consequently, an agreement to purchase was struck that same day! The catalog has, in turn, been purchased by The CFA Foundation so that it can be displayed alongside Cosey's photo and awards.



The original photograph of 'COSEY' by Julius A Gross, 176 Atlantic Ave, Brooklyn, showing front and back.

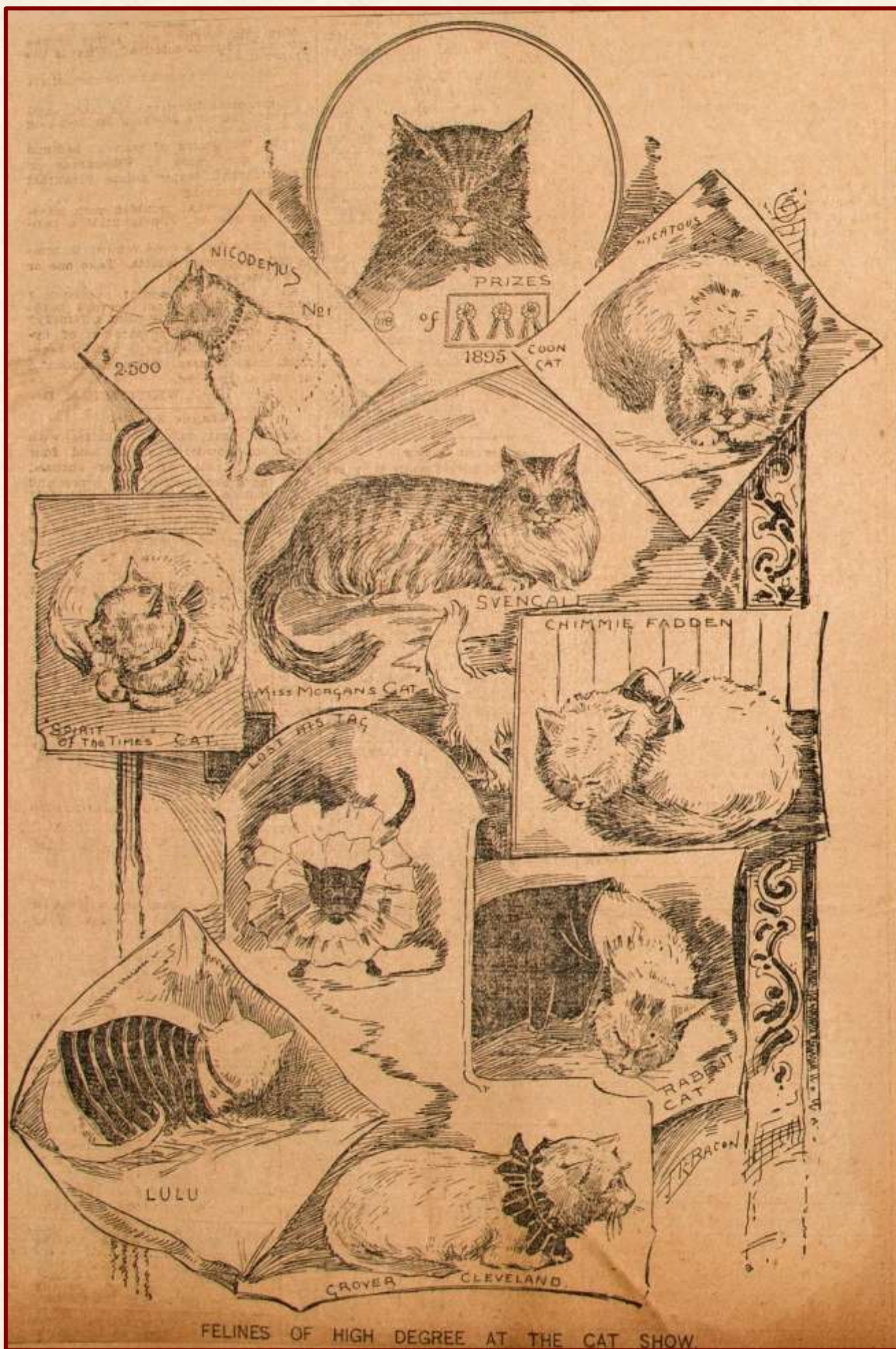
This photograph came with the Silver Collar and Silver Medal.

Photo: In the collection of The CFA Foundation, Inc.

THE SAMUEL C. PERKINS SCRAPBOOK

Additional details about the 1895 show have come from a scrapbook donated to The CFA Foundation by Peace Bridge Aby Fanciers. In 1999, Karen Lawrence attended the Cat Nation Fanciers cat show in Erie, PA and during a break in judging perused through the vendor booths. Always interested in old books, Karen was particularly drawn to a bookseller's booth, and thrilled to find an old scrapbook on sale. Upon opening it, and flipping a few pages, she knew that it was a "must have" for The CFA Foundation. A discussion with the vendor indicated that he either sold the scrapbook whole that weekend, or he intended to pull it apart and sell it page by page on eBay. Karen knew that selling it piecemeal couldn't be allowed to happen and, after a brief discussion with members of Peace Bridge Aby Fanciers about the possible importance of the scrapbook's content, the scrapbook was purchased on the spot and sent immediately to be included in the CFA Foundation's holdings at CFA's Central Office in Manasquan, New Jersey.

It was months later before Karen got to the New Jersey office of CFA, which was housing the Foundation's collection at the time. Impatient to take an extensive look at each and every page of the scrapbook, it had been an excruciating six month wait. Once opened and explored, it was discovered that each and every page of the scrapbook contained article after article about cats and their activities, of all sorts, during the period between 1880 and 1897. In addition, each and every article also had the source newspaper and date handwritten written on it!



COSEY'S 1895 wins headlines this 'Felines of High Degree at the Cat Show,' – in an illustration by J.K. Bacon, printed in the March 5, 1896 issue of 'The World'. From the Samuel C. Perkins Scrapbook, in the collection of The CFA Foundation, Inc.



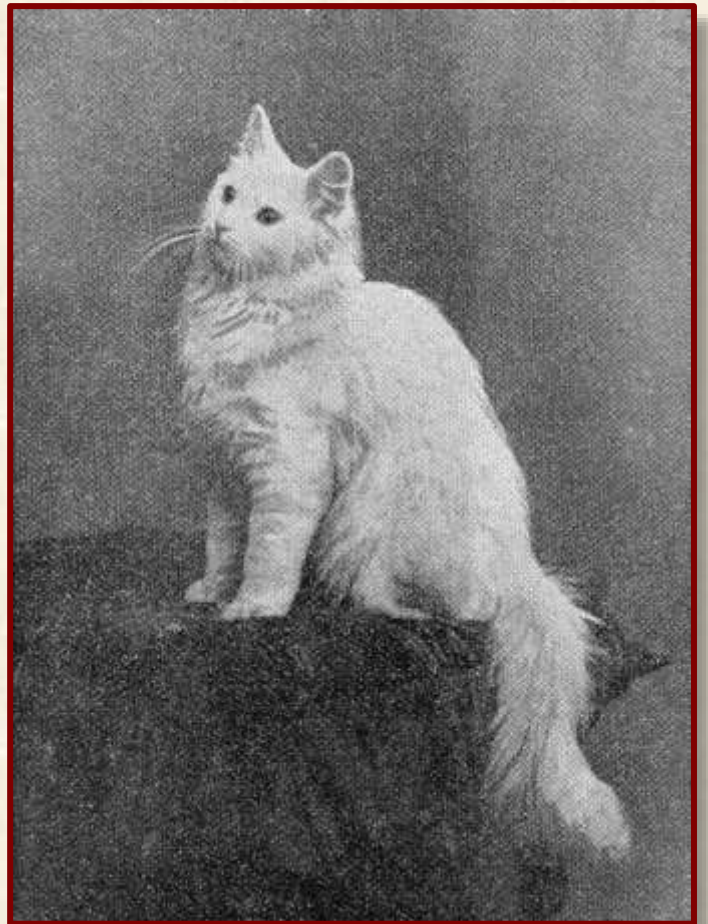
RIVALS with their entries at the 1896 Madison Square Garden Show.

Printed in the March 5, 1896 issue of *'The Press.'*

From the Samuel C. Perkins Scrapbook, in the collection of The CFA Foundation, Inc.

It took a while to determine just who had compiled such an interesting history, but several clues were found throughout the book, including a photo of the pet cat, appropriately named "Sam", plus letters addressed to "Mr. Perkins". References to Sam being the pet cat at the office for the Commissioner of Public Buildings in Philadelphia was an important clue.

A quick search took us to the City of Philadelphia where it was discovered that Samuel C. Perkins (1828-1903) was a noted lawyer and Masonic Lodge Grand Master. He served as President of the Commissioners for the Erection of Public Buildings from 1871 to 1891. A great deal was learned about Mr. Perkins from the Philadelphia Historical Society, including that he was responsible for planning and building of the Philadelphia City Hall. It was also noted that the Historical Society owns thirty-one scrapbooks, compiled by Mr. Perkins, confirming that he was indeed an avid scrapbooker. In a short biographical piece, "The Cats on City Hall" by Roger Butterfield, published in *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, we found what we were looking for - Samuel Perkins was a known cat lover!



TWO images of 'PRINCESS DINAZARDE' First Prize winner and Silver Bowl winner, 1896.

Left: Illustration published in March 5, 1896 'New York Daily Tribune'

From the Samuel C. Perkins Scrapbook, in the collection of The CFA Foundation, Inc.

Right: Photo from 'Iroquois Magazine' August 1, 1897. Courtesy of The Harrison Weir Collection.

"Samuel C. Perkins was fond of cats. When he was not attending to his large law practice or his duties as President of the Commission for the Erection of the Public Buildings of Philadelphia, Mr. Perkins was likely to be found at home, pasting up clippings about his new City Hall in leather-bound scrapbooks, while a feline pet or two arched against his legs, or nestled happily in his lap. "

Additional authentication of Mr. Perkins' love of his cats can be found in the Hall of Justice in the Philadelphia City Hall, where a permanent reminder of Mr. Perkins' cats remains, carved into the granite frieze of the walls. Butterfield writes:

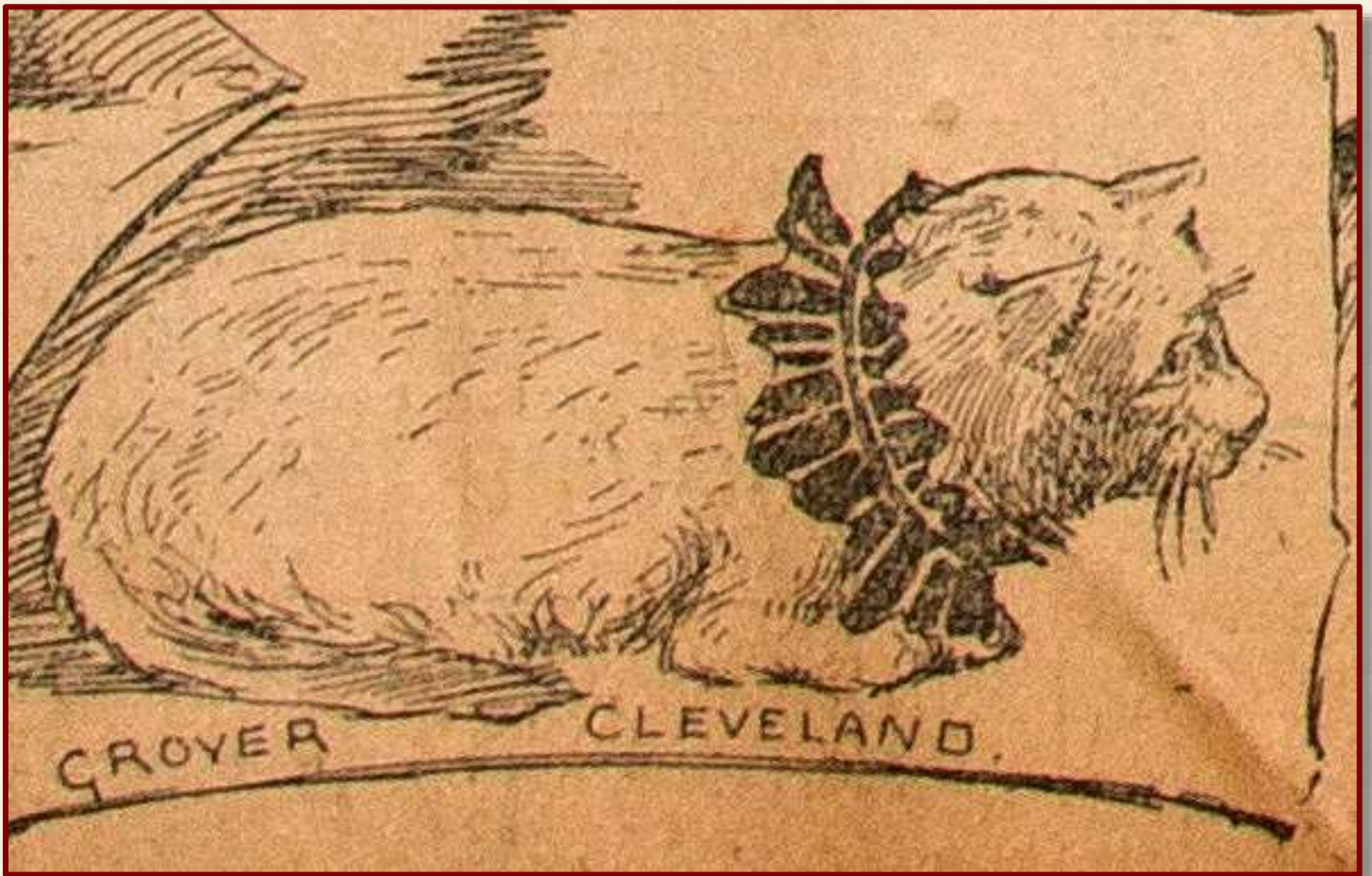
"That is why today one can walk into Philadelphia's City Hall from the south and see Mr. Perkins' cats-eight of them-carved out of stone around the walls of a chamber which bears above its doorway the single word 'JUSTICE'."

The scrapbook itself is in fragile condition, and hence not on display in the Feline Historical Museum. We extend our sincere thanks to Larry Johnson, for his incredible patience in photographing each page of the scrapbook, so that its contents are preserved and allowing the content of its pages to be devoured without further damage to this very valuable artifact.

Within the pages of the scrapbook, we find newspaper articles giving us details of the 1896 cat show held at Madison Square Garden, with references to Cosey and his wins at the 1895 show.

A tidbit about Cosey's temperament is gleaned from this Mar 5, 1896 article in The World: -

"And all these cats behaved with the greatest decorum. Some posed as consciously as men and women are wont to do on parade; others stretched out gracefully and blinked lazily at the spectators."



This illustration shows Miss Rose Beckett's 'GROVER CLEVELAND' another entry at both the 1895 and 1896 shows.

Printed in the March 5, 1896 issue of 'The World'.

"Only the very young and the very foolish cats deigned to take notice of the straws and strings that were dangled before them to play with.

"Cosey, a big Angora, stood the flippant insults of the crowd until patience was exhausted, and the next gloved hand that was poked through the bars of his cage received a sharp blow."



The photo at left is of 'GROVER B' who was described as a White Maltese cat, and a mascot cat of his owners Mrs. & Mr. William P. Buchanan, who was a photographer based in Philadelphia.

His name appears in the Show Catalogue as an entry into the 1895 Show, in cage no: 137 (valued at \$1,000).

He won the 'twenty-five dollar' Gold Medal in 1895 at the New York Show, as the heaviest white cat exhibited.



An illustration of entries at the 2nd Madison Square Garden Show in 1896. Printed in *'The Press'* on March 4, 1896.

From the Samuel C. Perkins Scrapbook, in the collection of The CFA Foundation, Inc.

The March 4, 1896 issue of *The Press* confirms Cosey's 1895 wins and gives clues about his diet:

"Miss Rosa Beckett's shorthaired tabby, Grover Cleveland, No 33A, who wears two necklaces and sleeps on satin, received as much of this sort of adulation as any of them. He took a first prize last year and is used to it. But Mrs. Frederick A. Brown's dark grey Angora, Cosey, No. 118, was admired a great deal also. He won three special prizes last year. He is a peculiar sort of cat and prefers vegetables to eat."

The history of early cat shows in North America is becoming clearer as more and more pieces of that history are discovered and purchased. Where, previously, all we surmised about this 1895 Madison Square Garden show were tidbits lacking in clear evidence and actual documentation, the discovery of Cosey's awards, the show catalog, and the Perkin's scrapbook has all provided a clearer picture of the cats and shows of this very early time in the US cat fancy history.