





Celebrating ICONS of the CAT FANCY

Richard H. Gebhardt



BY KAREN LAWRENCE

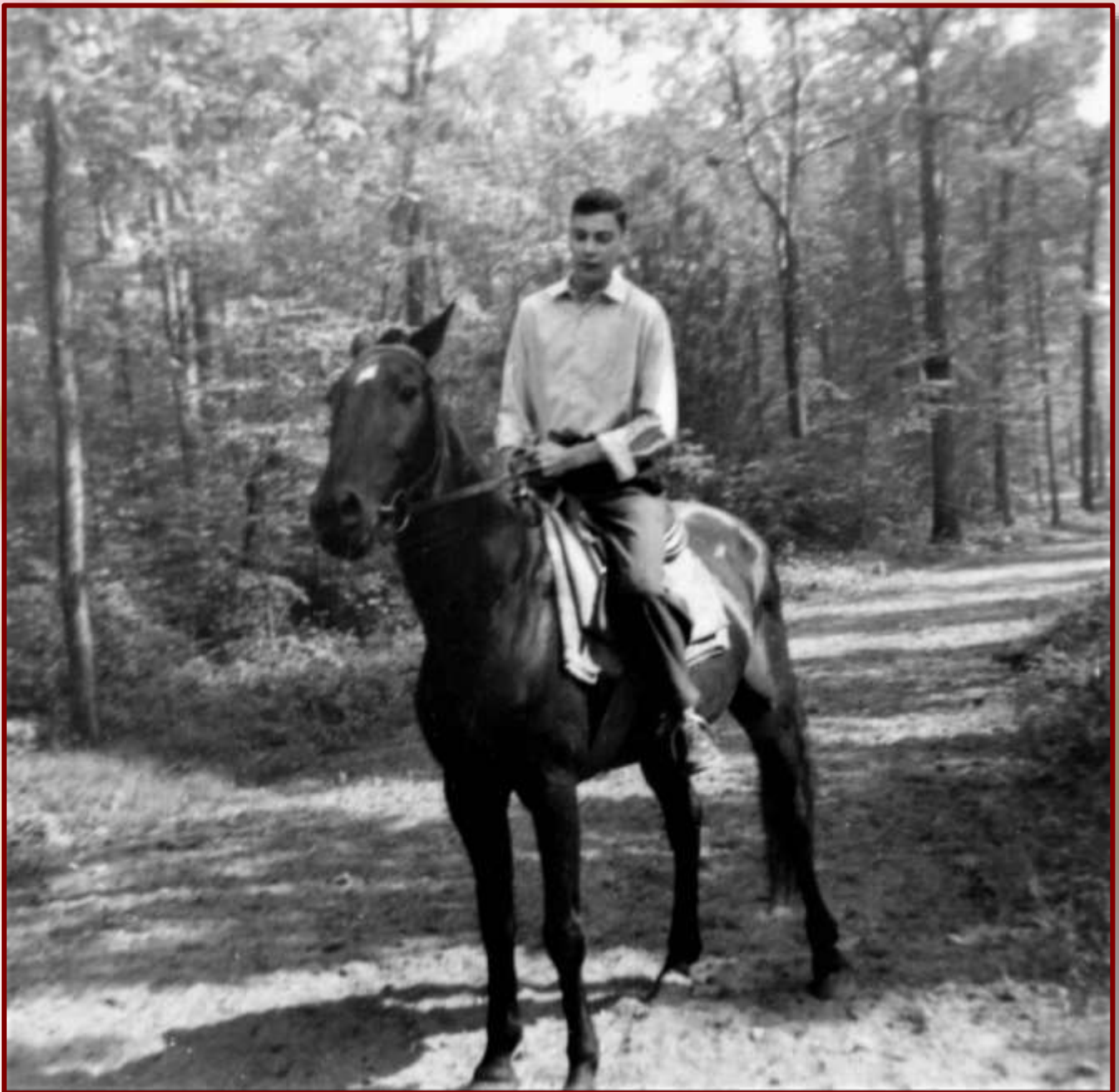
RICHARD GEBHARDT – A VISION BEYOND ALL ELSE

When 14-year old Richard Gebhardt purchased his first black Persian for \$10 in 1945, who knew that he would have such a great impact on the cat fancy and CFA in particular. Here's his early history, covering his first 25 years in the cat fancy, in his own words: -

"Times were still bad. World War II was still going on. Living quarters were getting smaller and restrictions tighter. My love for all animals had not changed and I was in my early teens. Keeping pets presented a problem. Dogs were usually not allowed in most apartments. After living in a 14-room home, my mother and twin brother faced some hard times. We then made the drastic change of moving to a three-room apartment. No dogs were permitted. I had \$10 which seemed like \$100 then. Without any advice or help from anyone, I purchased a black Persian kitten from a pet shop with my \$10. She had no pedigree. I called her Smokie. It did not occur to me that she would eventually become shiny and black.

"I was 14 years old and she really impressed me. Even then, I can recall that while I loved her and enjoyed her, I knew Smokie lacked certain qualities in her make-up. Never was I so blind as to believe Smokie to be worth more than was paid. My mother knew Mrs. Louise Del Marais was a member of Garden State Cat Club of New Jersey. I might add here that a Siamese was my first choice, but I would have needed \$15.00 more, a large sum for me to raise. Mrs. Des Marais also helped me to register Smokie as "Smokie Girl" with particulars unknown. All I had to have in 1946 was an affidavit signed by a notary that to the best of my belief she was a purebred.

"Then came the Garden State show on November 7-8, 1945. It was on a Thursday and Friday and my first show. This was a big event naturally, and soon to be the debut of events in my life that would exceed any of my wildest dreams. It was Garden State's Fourth Annual Championship Show, managed by Elsie Hydon herself. Miss Maud Lantry of O'the Mist Silvers, and Anthony De Santis of Longhill were aisle stewards. The All-Breed judge was Miss Dorothy Hunt of Rosedere. Mrs. Julia Hunter was the solid color Specialty judge. There were 149 entries and 66 exhibitors. Eighteen of the entries were Siamese adults with Amdos and Newton the big names. Only Blues and Seals were recognized at that time. In the Persian Class it was blues leading the way with 25 adults.



Gebhardt was an experienced rider, and owning a horse was one of his wishes as a young man.

Photo from Gebhardt Archive of The CFA Foundation, Inc.

“Best in Show went to the exquisite white Periwinkle White Christmas. His copper eyes were like orange peel and even I could see he was a stand-out. My little Smokie only took two red seconds, but it was as though I had Best Kitten. I was so sure I would get nothing. Needless to say I caught the fever. What I did then and ventured into was entirely on my own initiative. All assistance came from those within the Fancy as my need arose. My family enjoyed the cats, but beyond that it was my interest. When children have a sincere interest, a family should not stop or discourage them. Children with talent will almost be forced to put it to work. The buildup of the desire becomes so great it must be released.

“My next step was to join the Garden State Cat Club. This was in May 1946 when I bred my little cat. What an exciting experience! I had great success with the five kittens resulting. The stud fee was \$15.00; this was for a fine stud at that time. I sold those kittens, which I realized I had to do, to improve future breedings. With this money I purchased a Shaded Silver and a Blue eyed White. This led to the naming of my cattery --- Silva-Wyte.



Prior to moving to the apartment, the Gebhardt family had owned pedigree dogs – Airedales, German Shepherds, and Wirehaired Terriers, and they were his first love.

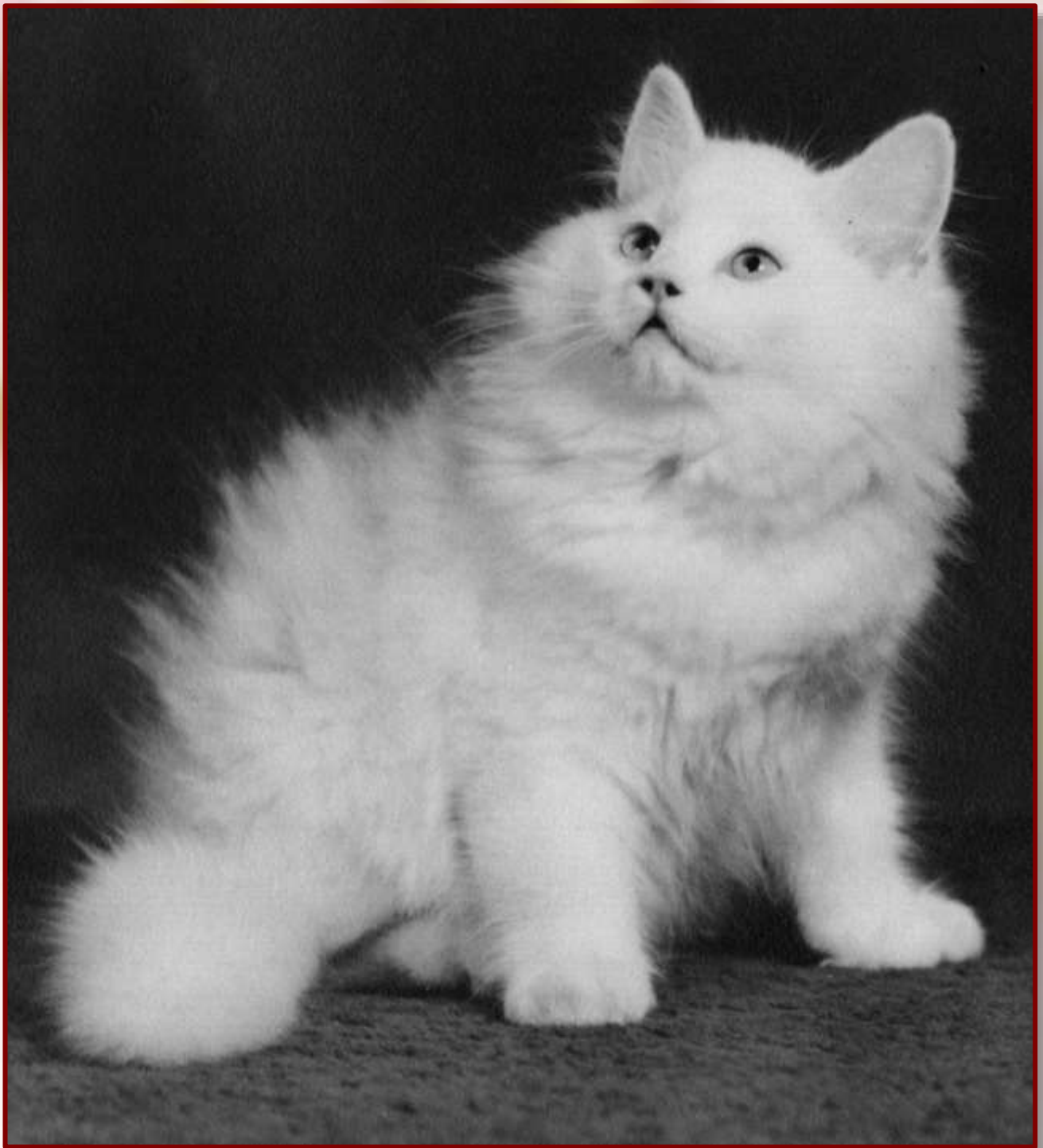
He is shown here in 1957 with his imported Maltese.

Photo from the Gebhardt Archive of The CFA Foundation, Inc.

“One joy I am grateful for today is that I found pleasure and interest in all breeds of cats. I was very close to many of the top Siamese breeders and through Imperial Siamese Cattery became acquainted with Fanciers in other countries beginning with Prestwick, Southwood and Oriental in England. Elsie Hydon’s guidance and friendship helped instill invaluable lessons about cats which I have profited by all of my life.

“At my third Garden State show, Matil Rotter quickly caught my eye. She had a manner of judging that was truly inspiring. There was no feeling of uncertainty in the exhibitor’s mind when she handled a cat. By this time, Anthony De Santis was hitting the shows with as many as 21 entries in every color, and with quality that made you well aware of his presence.

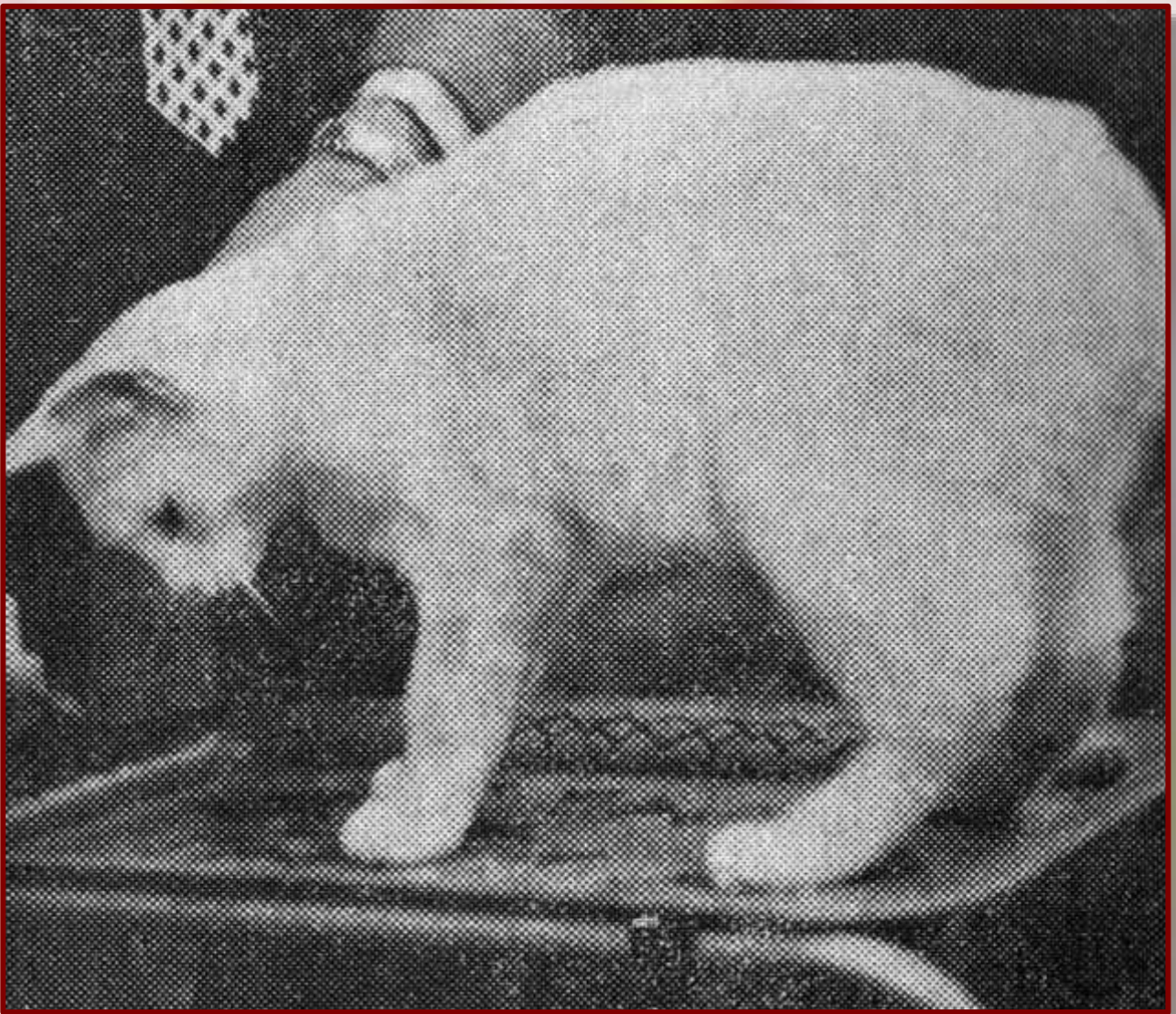
“I began to take on many of the club jobs, such as stewarding and publicity. I arranged for TV and radio programs – always to promote interest in cats and shows. I learned a great deal about cats and fanciers. There are some areas where there is no change, yet the Fancy itself has come a long way.



'SILVA-WYTE'S AMBASSADOR' – Blue-eyed White Persian male born March 30, 1953
Sire: DCH. Tally-Ho It Dam: Ch. Silva-Wyte's Fleur-de-Lis. Bred by Richard Gebhardt.
Photo: Gale of East Orange.

"I served in every capacity from the ground up. I wanted to have the experience of all the various tasks. I tried to create new interest in the club. I also learned that to accomplish anything worthwhile, it was best to confine one's efforts to just a single club.

"At 22, I was elected President of the Garden State Cat Club and served for 13 years in that office. During this time, I managed what was one of the largest shows in the county at Asbury Park Convention Hall for four years. This was the same year that I was accepted on the Judge's List. At that time, there were fewer breeds and colors of cats. You were accepted on your breed knowledge especially if you knew best and were closely associated within your own home. Rarely were you accepted for all longhairs. For some, it might be only a solid color specialty or only Siamese. Often I was called upon to handle cats and condition them.

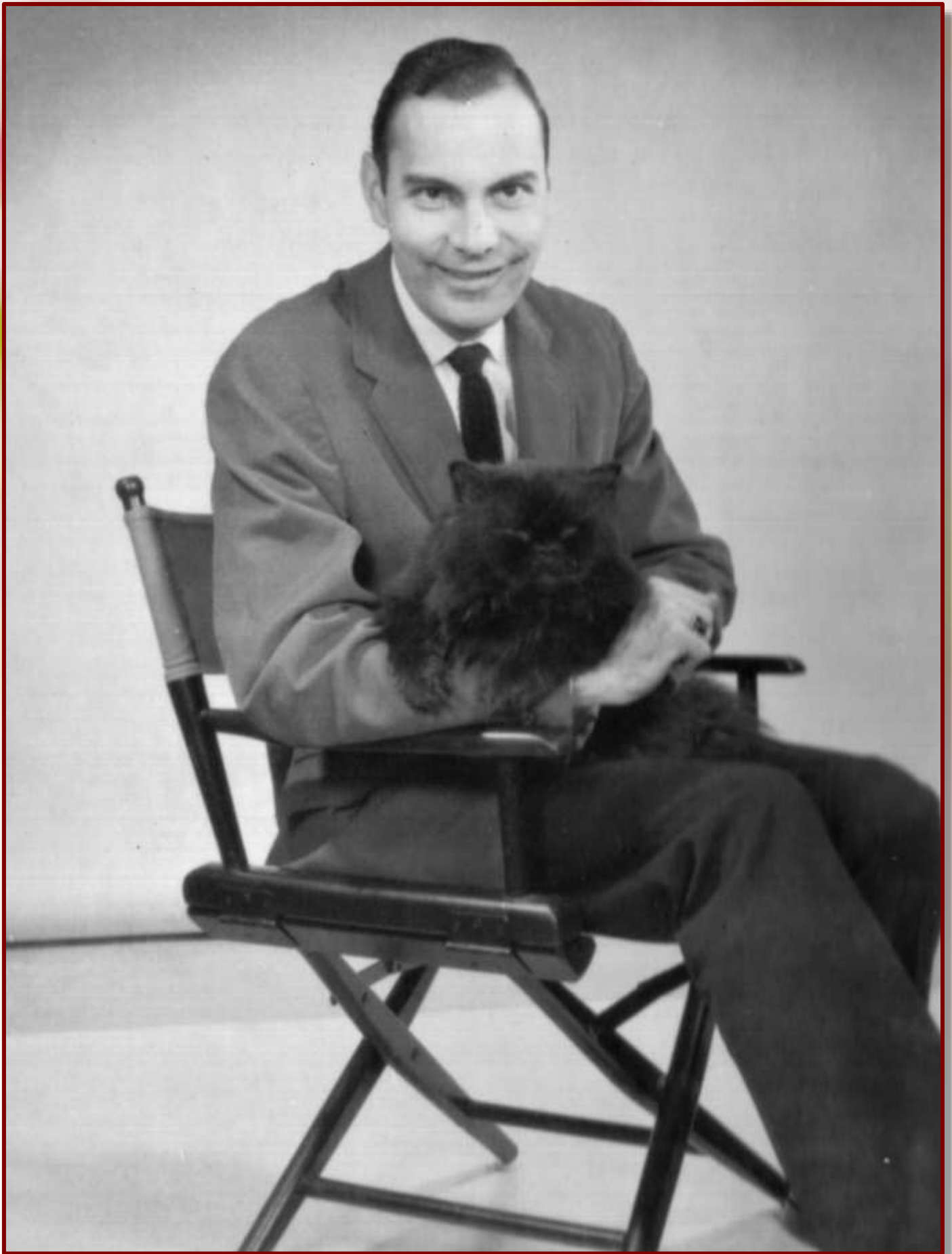


'GC. WILA-BLITE POLA OF SILVA-WYTE' – CEW Manx SH female born April 22, 1958
Breeder: Bettie R. Collins. Owner: Richard H. Gebhardt. Later owned by Muriel Slodden.
Image from the Gebhardt Archive of The CFA Foundation, Inc.

"Frequently a fancier would call me to his home to select the best of a litter. This experience greatly helped when I started to judge. Usually my choices became top winners later.

"As I started my judging career, a whole new concept of shows began. To glamorize the show became important. Exhibitors and Judges alike began to get away from white coats and work clothes. To be particular about one's attire now became a thing. Good taste in dress became fashionable and other Judges began to follow. A new pace had been set. Fanciers began to enjoy social activities and more color and flair was added to the shows. Exhibitors themselves became better groomed.

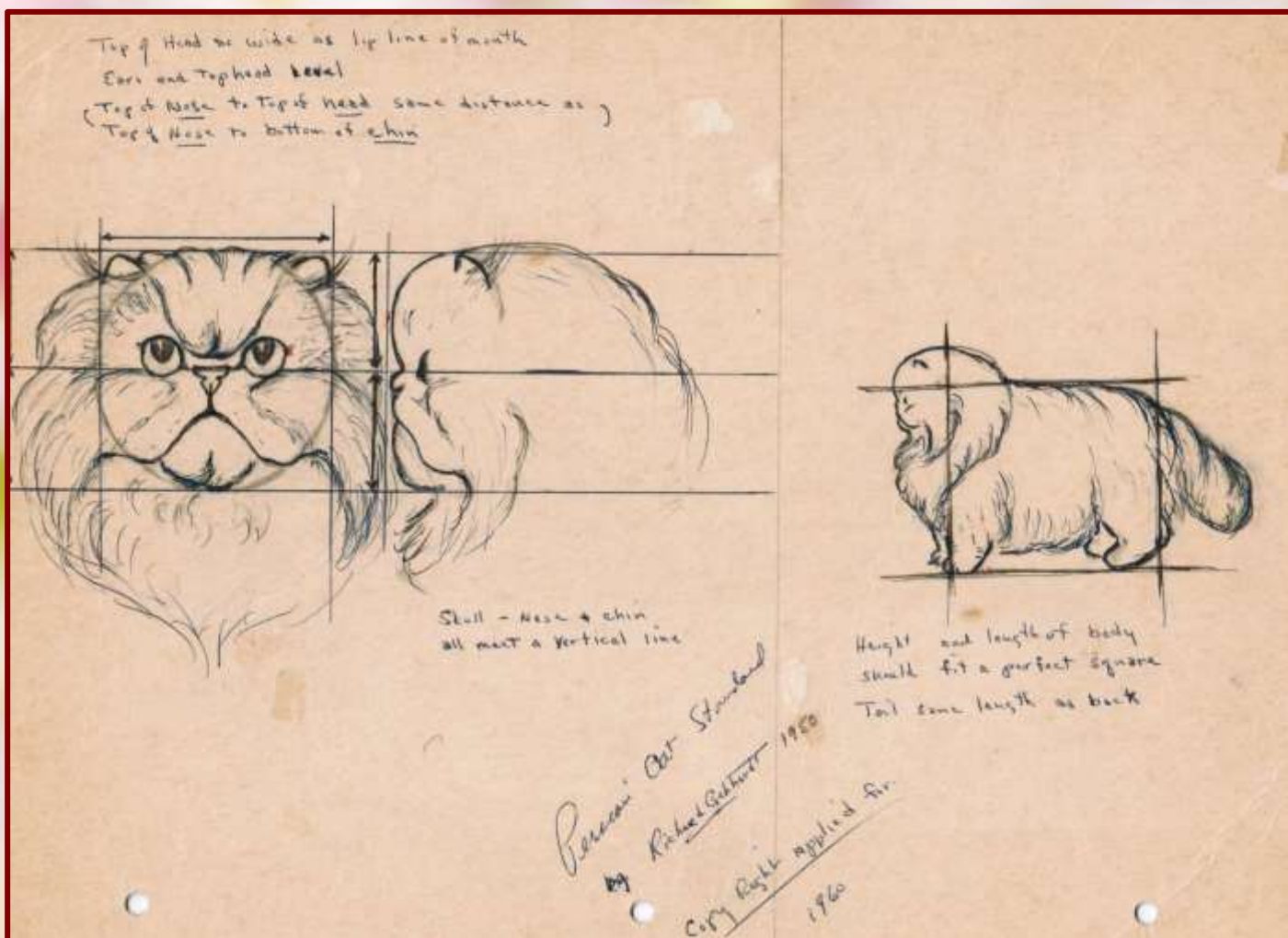
"I was a premature candidate for no less than CFA President in 1959. I never really thought I would win, but I surely worried about how it would be if I did. Mrs. Lillias Bloem was then President. Like many, I was easily convinced I should run for office, and my youth gave me the ego to believe I should. Time, work, experience and several defeats are of great value in growing up and I suffered lots of experiences through the years. One point I want to make, however, I never ran away from a problem or backed down. I stuck with anything I took on and never deserted the causes I felt were right because of pressure groups. I fought for my beliefs, but when they lost, that was it. I never carried a grudge. Yes, I was nominated for the Board a year later and was again defeated. From this, I learned the only votes you can count on are the votes you cast yourself.



RICHARD GEBHARDT WITH 'GC. VEL-VEVE VOO DOO OF SILVA-WYTE'
Black Persian male, born July 2 1956, bred and exhibited by Robert and Lois Green,
owned Richard Gebhardt.

CFA CAT OF THE YEAR 1959

Photo from the Gebhardt Archive of The CFA Foundation, Inc.



Richard Gebhardt's now iconic drawing for the Persian breed standard, drafted in 1950, with copyright applied for in 1960. This set the benchmark for judge training and still holds true to this day.

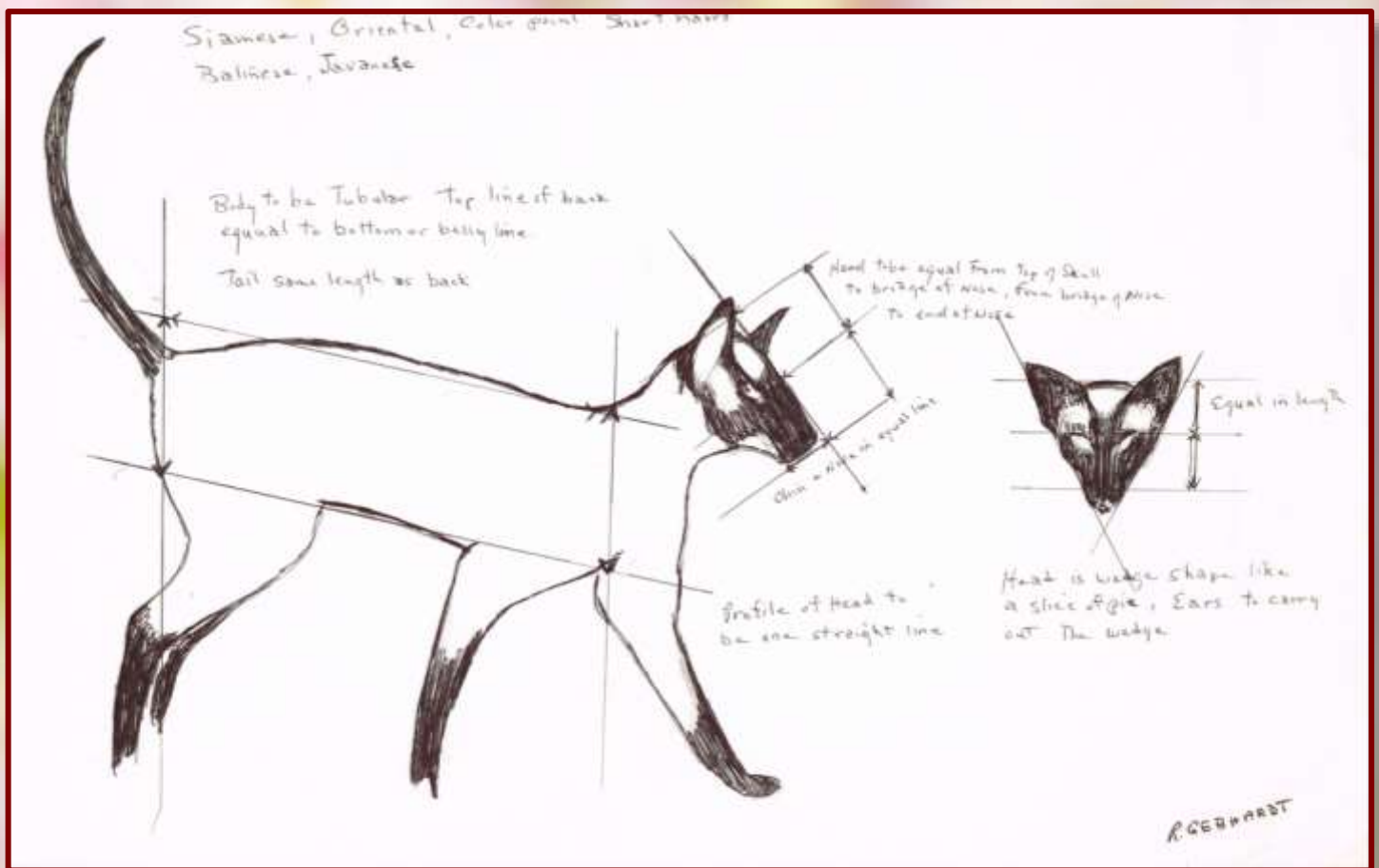
Now in the Collection of the CFA Foundation's Feline Historical Museum, Alliance, Ohio.

"I never really felt defeated, however – always it seemed for the best. People knew what was best for CFA and things seemed to right themselves. Along with each defeat something much more desirable and good followed. It made me feel that the only shame in a defeat was not in losing but in the failure to learn something from it.

"I wrote many articles about cats for magazines, both here and abroad. Perhaps many can recall those for All Pets Magazine. Then I was honored to be recognized as consultant to National Geographic magazine's special edition on cats in April 1964, and also Woman's Day, May 1965. The Fancy was hungry for truly authoritative publications on cats and some of the books I can honestly say have something of value to offer are those written by Soderberg, Wolfgang, Naples and Vera Nelson.

"In 1962, I was elected as a Director-at-Large for the CFA Board. At that same annual, I was elected President of the CFA Judges' Association. From there, I thought that the annual judges dinner detracted from the regular meeting because it got to be a big affair, yet it excluded delegates. So, I proposed a single annual awards banquet that would be attended by delegates and judges, and honor award winning cats. I also helped to create the International Division committee. We wanted to work with other countries because so many good quality cats were being imported.

"In 1968, I ran unopposed for CFA President. I was not as eager as the first time around. My eyes had been opened; I knew what was involved and the thought of becoming commander-in-chief of a national organization of CFA's size and complexity was a little bit intimidating.



Richard's equally iconic drawing for the Siamese and related breeds standard. Developed from experience judging for many associations and in many countries. Another critical judges' training tool.

In the Collection of the CFA Foundation's Feline Historical Museum, Alliance, Ohio.

"However, once elected I was determined to live up to my principles. One of my first appointments was of Robert Winn to be the parliamentarian of the annual meeting. Elsie Hydon and I had discussed the merits of registering litters, and this was one of the first programs that I initiated. The proposal passed, although with much opposition, and it turned out not to be foolproof. I very quickly learned how brilliant fanciers could be at manipulating registrations.

"I continued to breed Persians, but had also developed an interest in Manx. I didn't know much about them, so I got two little sisters, Pola and Boette, from a cattery in Ohio. Of the two, the white Pola had all the qualities I liked to see in a show Manx -- tremendous coat, conformation, and style, and these set her apart from other cats. She had a great show career.

*"Of all the cats that I have known and loved over the years, the 1959 Cat of the Year, the one and only **Grand Champion Vel-Vene Voo Doo of Silva-Wyte**, a black Persian male, was the best. I believe him to be the greatest sire of all times. Voo Doo, sired by the 1950 Cat of the Year, **Grand Champion Lavender's Liberty Beau**, produced for me the lovely black female, **Grand Champion Silva-Wyte Trafari of J.B.** She was also a CFA Cat of the Year.*

"Now, after 25 years with cats, it is hard to think what my life would be without them. The travel, the honors, the many friends, the rivals and all the depressions, heartaches and fears, are all necessary to round out one's life.

"I feel I have lived and loved every minute of it. I can now look at it all, from the widest viewpoint. It is a great feeling to know you have something to offer and give to others. It is an honor to be given the opportunity to do so. I am dedicated to a single cat society -- a great society that will serve the Fancy well and protect our efforts.



**'GC. SILVA-WYTE TRAFARI OF J.B.' – Black Persian female, born November 9 1964, Bred by Richard Gebhardt.
Owned and exhibited by John Bannon.**

CFA CAT OF THE YEAR 1964

Photo from the Gebhardt Archive of The CFA Foundation, Inc.

"I have little respect for large and poorly run catteries, and for those who conduct catteries in an unfit environment. Choose wisely your cats for breeding and insist on neutering and spaying of those that are best suited as a loved and cherished pet. Think of the future of the cat and what is to become of the life for which you are responsible. Do not lose sight of the kindness and protection you owe those kittens you raise."

Richard H. Gebhardt



RICHARD GEBHARDT JUDGING 'SHAWNEE ANTISEPTIC' IN 1965

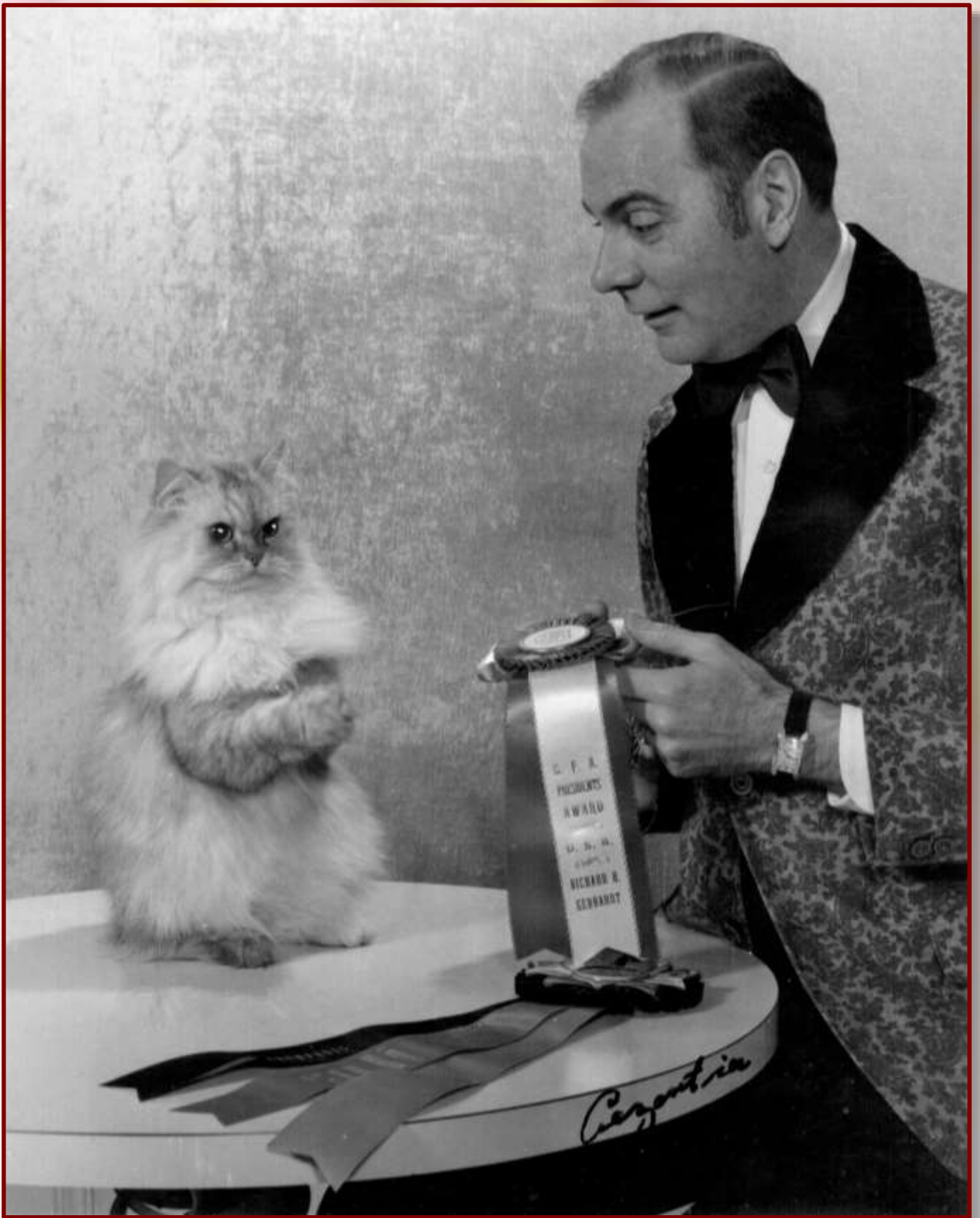
Photo from the Gebhardt Archive of The CFA Foundation, Inc.

If Gebhardt's first 25 years in the cat fancy were remarkable, his work as President of CFA was outstanding. His greatest contribution was through his vision of what CFA "could be" and, as President of CFA for 12 years (1968-1980), he quietly guided CFA through an era of its largest growth. He initiated the litter registration, eliminated registration by affidavit, and introduced a policy that prevented owners from putting their cattery name as a prefix on cats they had not bred.

Under his guidance, the scoring system that we know today was introduced, as were the National Winner awards that replaced the Hydon-Goodwin All-Star Awards.

Gebhardt can also be credited with putting an end to veterinary inspection lines at shows. He said: *"All the cats crossed the same table, and germs were so easily spread while everyone stood in line"*, so they served no purpose. In place of veterinary inspections, a show rule was added that allowed judges to disqualify an entry if a health problem was discovered, and show management was granted authority to have entries removed from the showhall.

One of his most insightful moves was to establish a committee to focus on heading off proposed restrictive legislation in the United States.



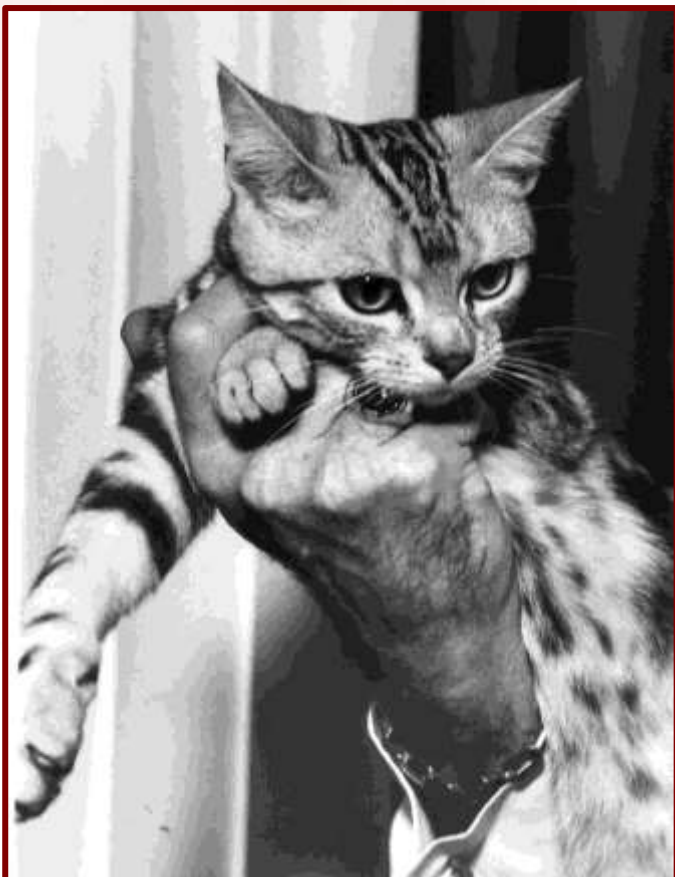
RICHARDT GENHARDT PRESENTING THE PRESIDENT'S AWARD TO A CLEARLY JUBILANT WINNER!

Photo: Creszentia. Courtesy of The CFA Foundation, Inc.

While there are any number of excellent judges in CFA, there may never be another judge of Gebhardt's caliber. When he became a CFA judge in 1953, it is agreed that he forever changed the atmosphere in a judging ring! He firmly believed that it was important to make the cat show glamorous, so immediately he broke the trend of judges in white lab coats and wore a vibrant sports jacket for his first judging assignment in Boston.



Left: Richard Gebhardt with Blanche Wolfman Smith and 'SHAN-AN-SHAH-BEL AKHANEH' OEW Persian born in 1962. Right: Richard with Willa Hawke and the winning Siamese at the Denver Show, 1971.
Photos from the Gebhardt Archive of The CFA Foundation, Inc.



Left: 'SILVA-WYTE NIGHTLINE' (1985) Silver Tabby American Shorthair.
Right: Richard Gebhardt presenting his Best Cat at the Santa Monica Show
Photos: 'Nightline' by Richard Raska. Both from the Gebhardt Archive of The CFA Foundation, Inc.



‘CH. SILVA-WYTE LINDE STAR OF CHAR-FAE’ – OEW Persian female, born June 14 1970.

Bred by Richard Gebhardt and owned by Charles-Fae Afflerbach.

Photo from the Gebhardt Archive of The CFA Foundation, Inc.

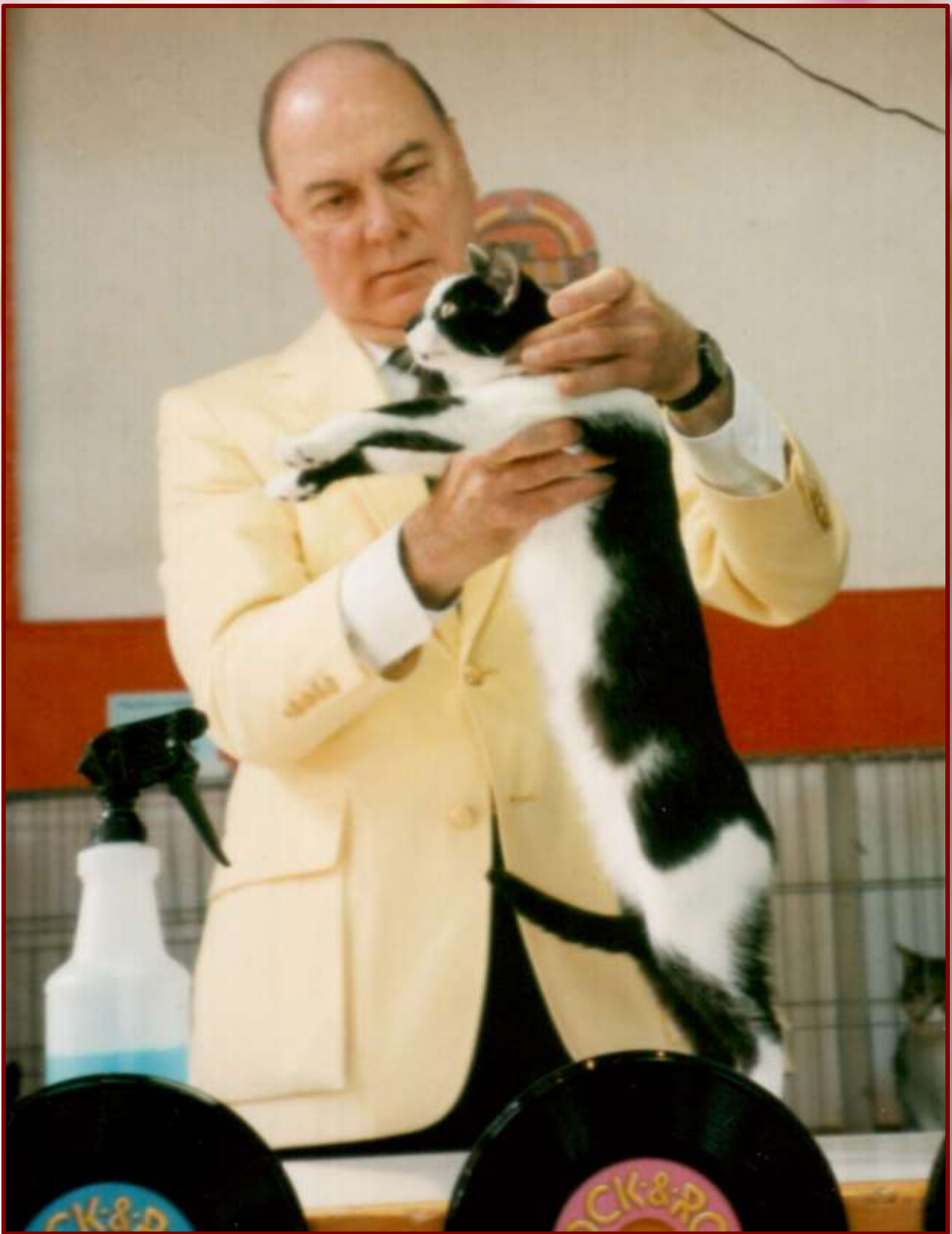
From this small step, his judging ring grew to be a place of interest, fashion and showmanship. And, oh, how he could handle a cat with flair and finesse! His friend, CFA Executive Director Jean Rose, wrote him after seeing him judge for the first time.

"I had my first chance to see you at work on a championship show, and it was a joy to see first-hand that my feelings about your abilities as a judge are not misplaced. There are judges and there are judges, but only a few of them have the inborn touch. You're one of them."

Gebhardt's handling and judging skills resulted in invitations to judge, and represent CFA, throughout the world. He was the first American to guest judge at a show in Europe, at Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen followed by a show in Paris. Phil Magitti wrote about Gebhardt's judging skills for the 1995 Madison Square Garden show catalogue:

"He does not merely evaluate a cat. He presents it with the elegance and flair of a figure skater... lifts the cat high above his head in one hand and studies it momentarily before whisking it back to its cage. So skillfully does Gebhardt manoeuvre a cat when he judges it, you are convinced he could make it disappear, if he wanted to, without ever putting a wrinkle in his gloriously pressed jacket or disturbing the dazzling shine on his shoes."

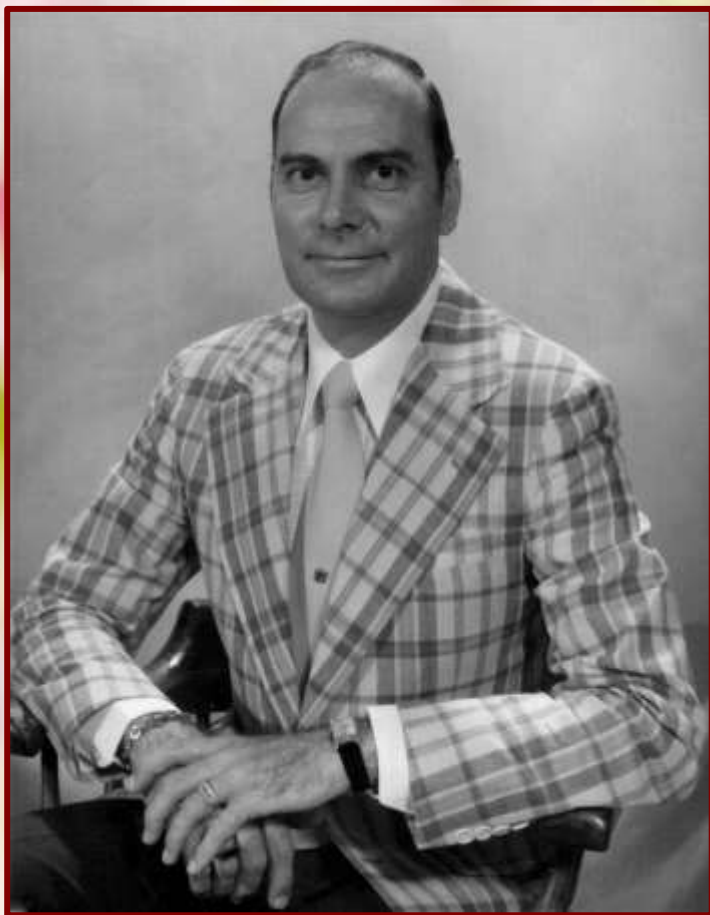
Helena Thom, in a 1995 article, caught Gebhardt reflecting on his many years as a judge, wherein he concluded that *"it's much more difficult now. The quality is so high. Many breeds seem to be as good as they could possibly be. Then too, there are so many colors -where does one begin, another let off?"*



**RICHARD GEBHARDT JUDGING AND SPORTING ONE OF HIS COLORFUL JACKETS
for which he had become justly famous.**

Photo from the Gebhardt Archive of The CFA Foundation, Inc.

Above all, Gebhardt believed in sharing. He once said “I have the willingness to give freely and share the things I have worked for, whether they be bloodlines or the wisdom of experience. The person who selfishly keeps to himself his knowledge and shares nothing will never enjoy the respect of others, for if one gives nothing, one is quickly forgotten. No greater honor could come to me than to know that I have given something which has benefited others.”



Official photos of Richard Gebhardt as CFA President.
Photos from the Gebhardt Archive of The CFA Foundation, Inc.



DOING WHAT HE DID BEST

Richard Gebhardt engages and captivates his audience, at Madison Square Garden Show, New York, in 1986.
Photo from the Gebhardt Archive of The CFA Foundation, Inc.



Left: Don Williams and Richard Gebhardt with Garden State Cat Club's Gebhardt Memorial Trophy.

Right: Richard Gebhardt at the launch of his book, 'The Complete Cat Book'.

Trophy and photos from the Gebhardt Archive of The CFA Foundation

For years, he shared through meetings, presentations, interviews and judging, but mostly through writing as a well-known writer and author, with his most noteworthy book being *The Complete Cat Book*, published in 1992.

Most importantly, Mr. Gebhardt shared his knowledge of breeds and their standards through *The Standard Guide to Cat Breeds* by Grace Pond, *The Complete Cat Encyclopedia*, *Champion Cats of the World*, and *Cat Catalog*. He and his partner, John Bannon, published *The Allure of Cats*. The Complete Cat Book was selected for the Book of the Month Club even before its publication, the book featured many cats owned by members of the Garden State Cat Club.

His writing was sometime controversial as in his 1985 article for *Cat Fancy* titled "Why Himalayans are Persians" which began "*Regardless of the color of a building, its architecture never changes*" and continued on to make an excellent argument to prove the point.

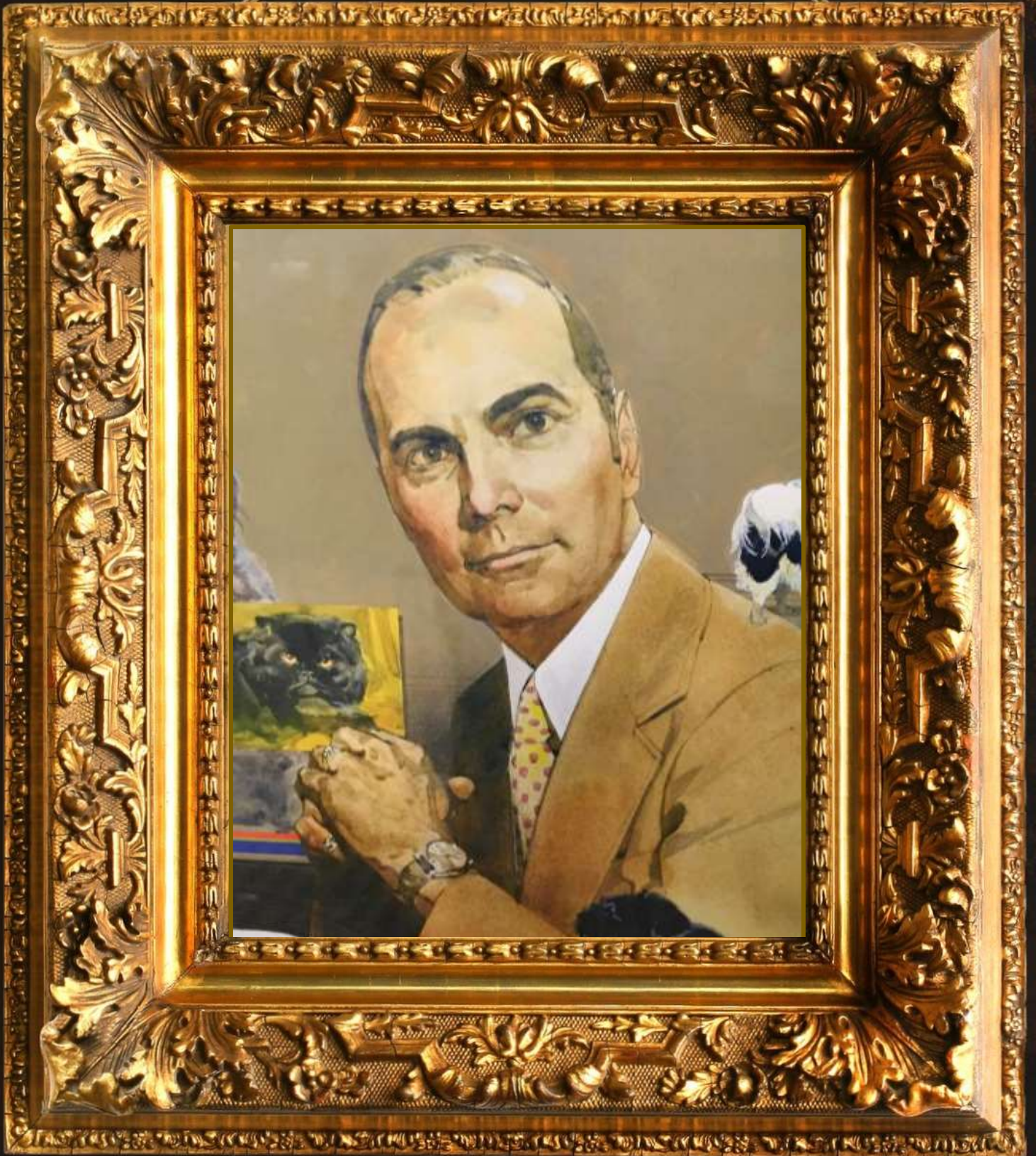
To this date, Mr. Gebhardt's vision of the ideal Persian stands. His original drawing of both the body and head structure of the Persian (and the Siamese) is on display in the CFA's Foundation's Feline Historical Museum in Alliance, OH.

Born on April 7, 1931, Gebhardt passed away on September 7, 2018 and he was mourned and eulogized worldwide. In 2008, CFA had awarded Gebhardt the CFA Medal of Honor for his service to CFA, the cat fancy, and the lives of cats, over the years. His death was truly the end of an era.

References:

1. "Twenty-Five years in the Cat Fancy", the personal notes of Richard Gebhardt
2. "Gebhardt Director-At-Large Candidate for CFA Unity", by 'Friends of Richard H. Gebhardt'
3. 'Richard Gebhardt: Memories of Fifty Years in CFA', by Helena Thom, *CFA Yearbook*, 1996
4. "Richard H. Gebhardt: Best-in-Show", by Phil Maggitti for Madison Square Garden show catalog, 1995
5. "Why Himalayans are Persians", by Richard H. Gebhardt, *Cat Fancy*, April
6. "Richard Gebhardt – A True Visionary", by Karen Lawrence, *Cat Tracks*

IN MEMORIAM



RICHARD H. GEBHARDT (1931 – 2018)

'The Greatest Showman' - CFA Judge (1953-2005)

President - The Cat Fanciers' Association (1968- 1980)

from the painting by Roy Andersen.

Image courtesy of The CFA Foundation, Inc.