

SHEEP DOG TRIALS AT FRYEBURG FAIR



Gabe Merrill, Superintendent of Fryeburg Fair's Sheep Dog Trials & Lynn Deschambeault, Assistant Superintendent

Fryeburg Fair's sheep dog trial experts and organizers are Gabriel "Gabe" Deschambeault Merrill, 87, of Brownfield and her niece, Lynn Deschambeault, 59, of Denmark.

Lynn says, "Sheep dog trials are competitive events where dogs and their handlers herd sheep. We use obstacles and timing to judge their success. Actually I think trials started when a couple of guys got together and one said my dog's better than yours!"

Gabe Merrill says, "I grew up on a farm and we had dogs that would round up the cows and bring them in. Morris MacGregor was a local Scotsman who sold farm products. He was an experienced handler and told us we ought to get into it. That's where we started. It's a real talent and my brother is a natural."

Roger Deschambeault, 81, Gabe's brother & Lynn's father, lives in East Conway, NH and trains and runs dogs daily. He and his wife, Krys, have six dogs at their home - Nearfield Farms. Roger started working with sheep dogs when he was 9 years old. He is a renowned dog trainer and has been in Scotland, England, Wales and all over the U.S. participating in trials.

Gabe says, "Sheep dog competitions started in the mid-1800's in New Zealand, the British Isles, Ireland and England. Waine Bartlett, of Denmark started them at Fryeburg Fair in the 80's. He was the sheep superintendent at the time. Back then a few women did some demonstrations of sheep herding. This eventually led to what is now a full day of events. We have an average of 30-40 dogs who participate with their handlers. Some handlers have more than one dog."



Lynn Deschambeault with a few of her border collie puppies.



Roger Deschambeault with Tess, 8 years old, at Nearfield Farms in East Conway, NH

Trials are open to any dog but it's mostly border collies that participate. Success is as much about the handlers as about their dogs who love to work herding sheep.

Roger Deschambeault participated in Fryeburg Fair's trials as well as provided the sheep from 1986 til 2014 - approximately 50-60 horned dorsets. Tim Molinero of Heartstone Farm in Milton, NH has provided the sheep since 2015 numbered still about 60 for the day. Each dog works with 3-5 randomly selected sheep.

Lynn Deschambeault is also a breeder

of border collies. “These dogs are very smart and have a great instinct for herding. They absolutely love it. I’ll bring out a young puppy and that instinct is already there. These dogs can read sheep. They understand each other.”

Fryeburg Fair is one of only three Maine fairs hosting sheep dog trials - always the first Sunday starting at 9 a.m. at the infield near the grandstand. This year’s trials will be a qualifier for the 2020 U.S. Border Collie Handler Association (www.usbcha.net) events which are being held in Middletown, Virginia. Top dogs win over \$40,000. Lynn Deschambeault and her father will attend this national event.

Thanks to the Deschambeault Family, the crowds at Fryeburg Fair are growing each year. Lynn is the emcee of the event and Gabe is running the show. Carroll Goodwin of Alfred, ME is the judge. His wife, Polly, is the scorekeeper. Goodwin says, “The skill of the handlers and the dogs together is amazing to watch. You get to appreciate the depth of the human and dog connection.”

For more information on sheep dog trials go to the North East Border Collie Association at www.nebca.com. For more information on Fryeburg Fair go to www.fryeburgfair.org.

Written by Rachel Andrews Damon



The Sheep Dog Trials at Fryeburg Fair