

Tiki-Tiki’s Story

The Beginning in Africa

From the African Stock Project

Dr. James P. Chapin was an ornithologist for the American Museum of Natural History who has known and admired the Basenji for fifty years. On his first expedition to Africa he helped procure a stuffed Basenji which was put on exhibit at the museum with a group of pygmies. In 1956 while in Africa, he went on a three week trip up to the eastern margin of the upper Congo near Mt. Hoyo and picked up Tiki Tiki (which means Pygmy in the dialect of the Uelle District) in a forest camp of the Mambuti Pygmies. Dr. and Mrs. Chapin kept him for two years at their home in Bukavu. Mrs. Bettina Belmont Ward heard about Tiki and asked if she could have him.



The First Record of the Planned Safari...

Bettina Belmont Ward
Excerpted from an undated clipping from the AKC Gazette

This will be my last column for a few months as I will be in Africa on Safari with a group in connection with The American Museum of Natural History. Even though specimens for museums are the main purpose of the expedition I am naturally most interested in acquiring a Basenji and will leave no stone unturned to bring back a representative and typey dog.

1958 from the New York Times

"Dog That Can't Bark Yodels ..."

January 25, 1958, Saturday Page 13

“A Basenji dog that snarls, growls and yodels — but never barks — has arrived from the Belgian Congo as part of a plan that fanciers hope will put new blood into his degenerating American cousins ... Dr James P. Chapin of the American Museum of Natural History found him in a forest camp of the Mambuti Pygmies, near Hoyo in the eastern margin of the upper Congo. He named the little hound Tiki-Tiki, which means Pygmy in the dialect of the Uelle District of northeast Congo” ...

...”When Dr. Chapin read an opinion that the breed had all but disappeared in Africa, he was almost affronted. ‘The best Basenjis I have seen,’ he said, ‘were in the Ituri forest and the savannahs to the north of it, right up to the Sudan frontier.’ ... In a letter Dr. Chapin described his prize as a ‘spirited little animal’, not at all obedient, but sure to be of value in breeding good little Basenjis for the future.”

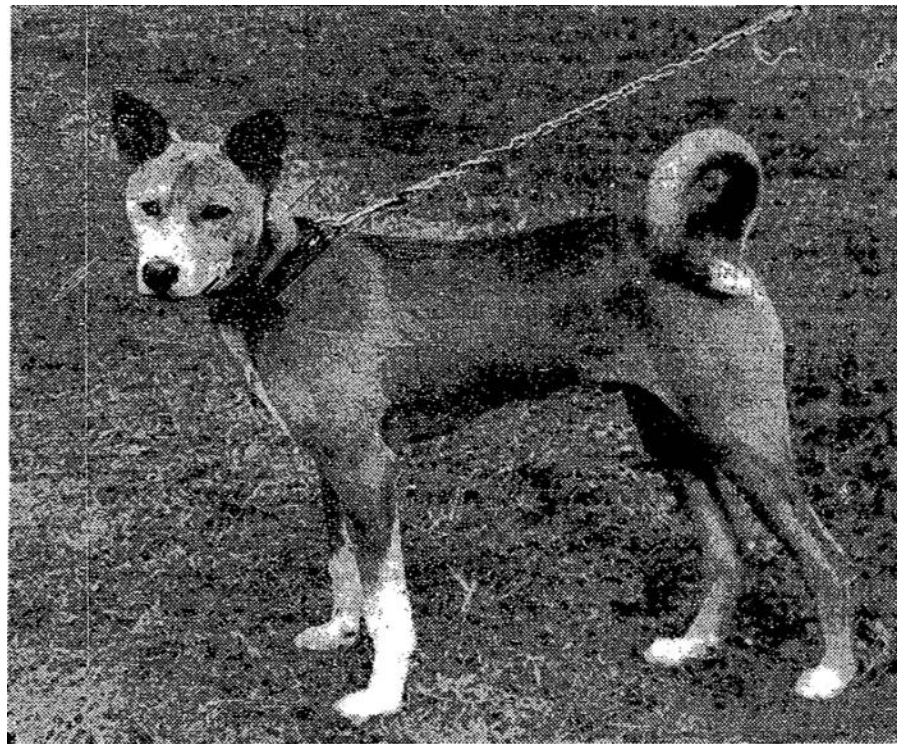
Tiki-Tiki at the Bettina Kennels

Damara Bolte recalls Tiki-Tiki’s time at the Bettina Kennel

While I was working for Bettina, she wanted to bring back a native basenji. She and Buddy (husband) went on a trip led by Dr. Chapin of the Museum Of Natural history in N.Y. The Chapins had gotten Tiki-Tiki from the Pygmies and kept him more or less as a housedog.

Tiki seemed like the best candidate to send back. Poor fella was fastened into a huge crate with 3" thick planks as flooring. I believe he started in Bukavo then to Stanleyville then to Amsterdam, then to NY and lastly to Washington, D.C. by rail no less. I went to get him. His crate was clean, but as he stepped out he started to “pee” copious amounts. No way could I put his crate in my Chevy sedan nor would he have gone back inside. I let him jump in my car where he did more copious amounts! I drove back to the kennel in Middleburg, VA. It was winter like January or February so too cold for him to be in a run. I opted to put (try) him in one of the stainless steel cages. He wasn’t going to get in any enclosed space. He was a big boy. (I used to have pictures, but haven’t seen them for years.)

He was about 19” at the withers, loose tail bent upwards and sort of around. He had quite a prominent umbilical fatty hernia. He wasn’t real red, but tan with minimal white. He had dark eyes and hooded ears. He was pretty pleasant considering what he had been through. I had him loose around the office and workroom (since he didn’t want to get into anything like a crate. When I sat down in the office he jumped into my lap. All well until I wanted to get up and he growled meaningfully. His face was just about at mine. This didn’t make me want to push him.



Tiki-Tiki, the Basenji that was sent here from the Belgian Congo by Dr. James F. Chapin

When Bettina returned from their trip and found a blank wall in trying to have him registered she found that Dr. Chapin's nephew on Staten Island would take Tiki and did. I never heard anything further.

And Then What Happened?

Gilbert Chapman emails BCOA member Linda Siekert in 2007

My name is Gilbert Chapin. I am a great nephew of James P Chapin, whose dog Tiki Tiki is described on your web page: <http://www.basenji.org/african/Tiki/htm#chapin>, which my son happened to stumble across. He'd heard me speak of Tiki.

"Tiki" as we knew him (we, of course, knew his full name) came to live with my family on Staten Island, New York when I was a teenager. My father was Elliott Chapin, James Chapin's nephew. My recollection is that "Uncle James" as the family knew him, couldn't keep the dog in his Manhattan apartment, so the solution was to have him come live with us. We had quite a nice house on a large property that was mostly woods, so a dog still in New York City, could have done a lot worse. He slept in my room. I recall that he had an umbilical hernia, which I was led to believe was also common and considered desirable among the pygmies where he originated. I can't remember how long we had him, but I suspect it might have been until 1963-64. I recall that my mother had to take him to the veterinarian because he had been slightly injured by a car (not ours). When they got a good look at him they realized there was more wrong than met the eye and ultimately after some exploratory surgery, found him to be "full of cancer," as I recall my mother's expression for his condition. The only real choice they had was to put him down.

I knew why he was unique, but, perhaps unfortunately, he was just a nice dog to me (although not as affectionate – to us anyway – as had been my experience with other dogs), so he undoubtedly didn't get the attention or distinction from outside our family he may have deserved. I recall how he'd yodel (that may not be the proper basenji term) at the noontime siren and other similar sounds. We had another dog as well, a black Labrador retriever, who apparently taught Tiki how to bark (well, sort of...). It is perhaps true that may have been the only thing he actually learned during his stay with us... The most special times for him were those infrequent occasions when Uncle James and his wife Ruth would come to visit. They had a little blue Volkswagen Beetle and I think Tiki could hear it coming. You never saw such a happy dog as when they visited (he would always have a significant episode of social incontinence up their arrival!) It's too bad their circumstances didn't permit them to keep him with them. I know we took good care of him and loved him like any other family pet, but we couldn't compare to Uncles James and Ruth in his eyes.