

## Best Longhaired Black? An Interesting Trophy

by Lyn Ayers

Here is a 3-handled pass cup to end all pass cups. It is large, nearly 1½ liters, or more likely, 1½ quarts. It was manufactured by the St. Louis Silver Company and has a patent date of 1905.

The metal-work is astounding and in nearly perfect condition considering that it is now more than 100 years old (although the silver plating has almost entirely worn off).

I was in California wandering through a lower-end antique/second-hand store and saw this piece sitting on a table by itself with a highly visible price tag. Because of its size I picked it up to examine it. (Recall how David Harr says that he always handles a stein to let it talk to him? This piece talked to me.) Looking closely I noted several inscriptions on the flat metal bands. The three sections of the upper band encircling the cup read “Challenge Cup”, “Offered by Mrs. J.L.Byrne” and “Atlantic Club”. The corresponding sections of the middle band read “For Best Longhaired Black”, “Johnnie Fawe II – 1906 – Strongheart – 1906”, and “Columbia Patrick – 1907 – Columbia Patrick.” One further inscription appears on the band encircling the base – “Black Lynx – 1908.”

What did this all mean? I was intrigued! Fortunately I was able to hide my interest from the owner and we struck a deal that was acceptable to me. I felt the historical value of this pass cup was worth a few dollars and some time on the internet.

After my return home, I could hardly wait. I Googled the words Atlantic Club and found several websites referring to cat shows. More searching with the name Johnny Fawe II resulted in more hits. At this point I felt I was on to something, and since Janine and I have three cats and she is a dedicated cat lover, I knew I would have to continue my research. So I searched using the other listed “cat” names and found nothing. But overall I did find enough to piece together a rough outline of what this pass cup was about.

Here I will break in to provide some historical background so that you can better understand the significance of the pass cup.

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, breeding became popular across many animal species. Cats were no exception and competitive shows became very popular in England in the late 1800s. Interest developed in the US shortly thereafter as winning

cats were brought to America, encouraging similar contests here. The first cat show of general interest in America was held at Madison Square Garden in 1895. In 1896 an American Cat Club was organized, and another was started in Chicago a few years later in 1899. Competition for the best was keen and so were the awards. In 1904 the Hofstra Challenge Cup was valued at \$125 for best cat in show. Mrs. Hofstra was the President of the Atlantic Cat Club.



In addition to the organizations, there were many cat shows. In 1906 the Cat Fanciers Association replaced the Cat Club. Still active today, it oversees breeding records of pure-bred cats across that industry.

In these early years of breeding there were primarily five breeds of cats entered in competitions. There were two longhaired varieties, the Angora and the Persian (often referred to as “doll-face”), and three shorthairs, the Siamese, the Manx and the “shorthair” (domestic shorthair), though the shorthair came in nine color varieties.

This brings us to identifying Johnnie Fawe II. Blacks were the first of British solid colors to attain popularity. Johnnie Fawe II was a black Persian bred in England by a Dr. Roper at the turn of the century and was



Johnnie Fawe II  
Best Longhaired Black, 1906

then exported to the US. I found no further reference to him.

While preparing this article I attempted to contact the Cat Fanciers Association Foundation to see if they could shed any light. This organization has as its mandate “the collection, preservation and exhibition of works of art and literature related to the cat.” Vice-President Karen Lawrence responded as follows:

- Johnnie Fawe II is in the first studbooks of the CFA and ACA, born 3/1903
- Strongheart was born 7/1904, also in the first ACA and CFA studbooks and was quite an influential cat in the early days of the Persian breed.
- Columbia Patrick was born 7/8/1902, also in the first CFA studbook and the fourth Beresford studbook. Sire of Cyrus The Great.
- Black Lynx was an ACA registered cat out of Kewlocke and The Beadle's Psyche.

As for Mrs. J.L. Bryne, the only clue I have uncovered is of a James Lewellen Bryne, born in 1873 in Truro, MA who married Ella Frances Whidden about 1897. The age is about right, but still not nearly enough information to go beyond this point.

Here are my thoughts about how this pass cup came to be. A wealthy cat lover (Mrs. J.L. Bryne) decided to create her own Challenge Cup specifically for long-haired black Persians (possibly in competition to the Hofstra Challenge Cup?). It was offered at the 1905 cat show and the three ensuing competitions but then dropped out of sight for nearly 100 years.

From the photos I am sure you would agree that it has been well taken care of, although most of the silver plate has worn off. It appears that much of the information it carried with it has been lost

Hopefully you were intrigued at the beginning of this article and now feel that the time you spent reading about cat history was worthwhile. Even now I wonder about the identity of Mrs. J.L. Bryne, why she made this cup, and even more intriguing is the question of where has this pass cup been for nearly 100 years.

One final thought – you might wonder why I have not had the silver-plating restored. Actually, it's simple self-preservation. Janine refuses to polish silver, and I would rather not. So today this pass cup sits on an end table in our living room, just as you see it depicted here. Janine won't move it anywhere else, and of course, I can't sell it either.

