

*Dogs in paintings run, play, follow the prey, take care of their puppies and look at us.
Such paintings are indispensable for unraveling the history of dogs.*

Dogs In Art

Sacramento Indian with Dogs

text and illustrations by RIA HÖRTER

Portrait of a Sacramento Indian with Dogs (1867)
by Charles Nahl

This intriguing oil-on-canvas painting depicts a seated, smartly dressed man – a “Sacramento Indian” – two Dalmatians, a cock and a hen, in a charming landscape with a river and mountain in the background. The liver-spotted dog watches the man; the black-spotted dog is looking at its kennel mate.

Spots and Patches

Fanciers will immediately notice that, according to both the AKC and FCI standards, the recumbent dog has disqualifying faults. The AKC standard says, “Patches are a disqualification.” The FCI standard says, “Monocle (patching around one or both eyes) or patching elsewhere is a disqualifying fault.”

Both breed standards specify the size of the spots. “Spots are round and well-defined. The more distinct the better. They vary from the size of a dime to the size of a half dollar.” (AKC)

“The size of the spots should preferably be even, with a size of 2-3 cm in diameter. In the brown variety, the spots are a little smaller, around 2 cm. The spots on the head and on the legs should be proportional[ly] smaller than on the rest of

the body. It is desirable the tail is spotted too, with spots also proportional[ly] smaller than those on the body.” (FCI)

An Intriguing Painting

The man turns his head as if to look at a photographer, which makes him appear somewhat stiff. Notice the dogs’ nice collars on which their owner’s name – Latham – is engraved.

What is the story behind this colorful painting from 1867, depicting a “Sacramento Indian” in a landscape with two dogs, a cock and a hen?

Grandeur

William Eustace Barron built Thurlow Estate in Menlo Park (California) in 1864. In 1871-72, it came into the possession of Milton Slocum Latham (1827-82), who renovated the building, rebuilding the mansion into a magnificent estate that he renamed Thurlow Lodge.

Milton Slocum Latham was an American politician, governor of California, member of the U.S. Senate, head of the London and San Francisco Bank Ltd., and one of the financiers of the California Pacific Railroad and the North Pacific Coast Railroad. In 1879, he



Portrait of a Sacramento Indian with Dogs, 1867
by German-American artist Charles Nahl (1818-78)

*It was known that the Lathams had dogs at Thurlow Lodge.
Were they the canine subjects of the painting?*

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became president of the New York Mining and Stock Exchange. To put it briefly, he was a railroad baron, immensely rich, who associated himself with European royalty and aristocracy. Latham's first wife, Sophie Birdsall – known as “Belle of the Prairie” – died in 1867, the same year the Sacramento Indian was painted.

ThurLOW Lodge was a gift to Latham's second bride, Mary McMullin, but the estate burned down before its completion. Nevertheless, it was entirely rebuilt in 1873, the interior designed by the prestigious New York firm Herter Brothers.

The dining room's carved wooden fireplace surround – now in the de Young Museum in San Francisco – was designed by the Herter Brothers and executed in Paris by the cabinet-making firm Guéret Frères. The elaborate surround includes a pair of life-size, carved, male and female hunting dogs, one rough-coated, one smooth.

Latham's fortune gradually evaporated in the depression of 1875. In 1879, he moved to New York and became the director of the New York Mining and Stock Exchange. When he died in 1882, ThurLOW Lodge got a new owner, Henrietta Dwight, who renamed it Sherwood Hall. In 1906, the mansion was heavily damaged in the San Francisco earthquake.

Native American

It was known that the Lathams had dogs at ThurLOW Lodge. Were they the canine subjects of the painting?

The “Sacramento Indian” could have been a Latham employee who looked after the dogs and poultry. This is purely speculation; there is no evidence.

California was admitted to the Union as a free state in 1849, although slavery of indigenous peoples persisted until the

Do any Canine Chronicle readers recognize the breed of the cock and hen? Owners of pedigree dogs at the end of the 19th century often owned and exhibited poultry breeds as well. Maybe the cock is a fighting cock? The Canadian Kennel Club publication Kennel Gazette, which eventually became Dogs in Canada, originated as a February 1889 supplement to Canadian Poultry Review. (eco.canadiana.ca)



Detail of the liver-spotted Dalmatian, cock and hen

rush, the Nisenan and Plains Miwok tribes lived in the Central Valley, between the Sacramento River and the Sierra Mountains. Do the river and mountains in the background of the painting refer to the origin of the Native American depicted?

The Artist

Carl Christian Heinrich Nahl (1818-78) – a.k.a. Charles Nahl or Karl Nahl – was born in the German city of Heidelberg to a family of artists. He was educated at the *Kunsthochschule* (art school) in the German city of Kassel, and at the age of 12 was already a creditable painter.

Dissatisfied with the political situation in the federal state of Hessen, he went to Paris in 1846 where he worked with Hippolyte Delaroche and

Emile Vernet and exhibited his paintings in the famous Salon de Paris.

During the February Revolution, one of a wave of revolutions in Europe in 1848, Nahl and his mother (his parents divorced in 1826), his half-brother and other family members, emigrated to Brooklyn, N.Y. It was the time of the California Gold Rush (1848-55). In 1849 he moved to Nevada City, California, in the Sierra Nevada mountains, then settled near Deer Creek in Nevada County, California, in the mining town of Rough and Ready. Having no luck mining, Nahl moved to Sacramento, where he worked as artist, photographer and engraver for a local newspaper. The grizzly bear on the California flag is his best-known commission. In the U.S., Nahl is regarded as California's first important artist.



The carved wooden fireplace surround in the dining room includes two hunting dogs.

Other Works

Other works by Charles Nahl are in the collections of the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington; the Oakland Museum of California; The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Crocker Art Museum of Sacramento; and the Huntingdon Art Gallery in San Marino.

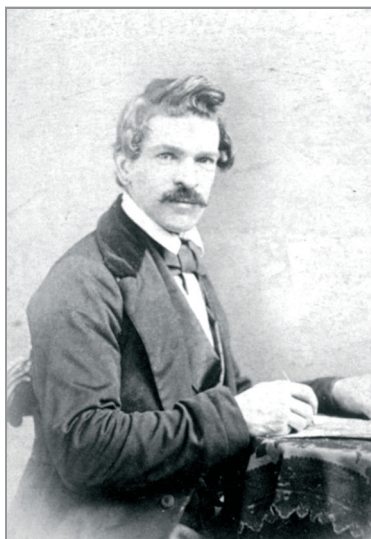
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*Charles Nahl and Friedrich August Wenderoth in 1841.
Both worked in the gold mines.*

Searching For Gold



Carl Christian Heinrich Nahl (1818-78) aka Charles Nahl of Karl Nahl, was born into a family of artists in the German city of Kassel. (photographer unknown)

Together with Arthur, his half-brother and traveling companion, and brother-in-law Friedrich Wenderoth, Nahl opened a studio in Sacramento, the capital of California. Their business card reads: “Nahl Brothers, art and photographic gallery.” In 1852, after nearly 85 percent of the town burned down, Nahl moved to San Francisco. His paintings *Miners in the Sierras* (1850/51), *Sunday Morning in the Mines* (1872) and *The Dead Miner* (1867) are reminders of his time searching for gold, and of the region where the German family settled. *The Dead Miner* is a sentimental image of a miner who has died in the snow, mourned only by his loyal dog.

As well as miners, cowboys and pioneers, Nahl painted portraits with animals – dogs, cougars and horses. *Portrait of a Sacramento Indian with Dogs* is an example.

Nahl died of typhoid fever in 1878 and was buried in Laurel Hill Cemetery in San Francisco; his body was later moved to Cypress Lawn Memorial Park.

Firehouse Dog

In England, the Dalmatian was known as the companion of

Endorsement

In 1916, Mrs. Mary Latham-McMullin donated *Portrait of a Sacramento Indian with Dogs* to the M.H. de Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco. The museum advises that, “The man pictured is Native American, presumably from the Sacramento Delta region.” If you happen to be in San Francisco, the painting is on view in Gallery 20 of the de Young Museum.

horse-drawn coaches. In old books, the breed is also called “coach dog” as it has a natural affinity with horses. In 19th-century America, Dalmatians accompanied horse-drawn fire engines, hence the name “firehouse dog.”

Various sources suggest that the breed originated in the eastern Mediterranean, then spread to India and across Europe. The FCI uses the Croatian name for the breed: *Dalmakinski Pas*. It is tempting to conclude that the breed was named after the coast of Dalmatia, a historical region of Croatia on the Adriatic Sea, but historians have found this not to be the case. The name “Dalmatian” was mentioned in the late 1790s, but there are earlier records of spotted dogs in paintings and artifacts.

The Origin is Obscure

Thomas Bewick’s book *A General History of Quadrupeds*, published in 1790, refers to the breed as “Dalmatian or Coach Dog.” In his book *British Dogs*, published in 1879, Hugh Dalziel more or less agreed with his contemporaries: “The origin of the Dalmatian is quite as obscure as that of any other breed.”

The 1881 first edition of Vero Kembell Shaw’s (Cassell’s) *The Illustrated Book of the Dog* contains a beautiful color plate of Shaw’s Bull Terrier Ch. Tarquin, with a black-spotted Dalmatian



*The M.H. de Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco.
Portrait of a Sacramento Indian with Dogs is in Gallery 20.
This Museum owns American art from the 17th to 21st centuries.*

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named Captain. Shaw wrote: “Captain is the dog we have selected for illustration, as he is indisputably the best specimen now for the public.” It is striking how well Captain resembles the breed of today, 134 years later.

The Dalmatian was first shown in England in 1862. In 1882, an unofficial breed standard was introduced by dog fancier and dog writer Vero Shaw. In 1890, the standard became official with the founding of the first Dalmatian Club in England. The English breed standard is available at thekennelclub.org

Dalmatians in America

The Dalmatian was recognized by the American Kennel Club in 1888. However, the 1867 painting of the Sacramento Indian proves that the breed had existed in the U.S. decades before recognition.

The Dalmatian Club of America was founded in 1905; it now represents nearly 1,000 breeders. The first national specialty show was held in June 1926.

Breed clubs have been established all over the world. From New Zealand to Finland to South Africa, the Dalmatian is a popular breed, its popularity having increased dramatically with the publication in 1956 of *The 101 Dalmatians*, a children’s novel by Dodie Smith. In 1961, Disney adapted the novel into the animated film *One Hundred and One Dalmatians*, then made a live-action version in 1996. This had the unfortunate so-called “Lassie effect”: Every child wanted a “spotted dog.” Today, the Dalmatian is valued as a smart companion dog and performance dog.



*Nahl painted *The Dead Miner* the same year he painted the “*Sacramento Indian*” portrait. Was he inspired by Sir Edwin Landseer’s *Alpine Mastiffs* (1820)? The resemblance is striking.*

We have tried to find the names of all photographers. Unfortunately, we do not always succeed. Please send a message to the author if you think you are the owner of a copyright.



In the States, the Dalmatian’s use as a carriage dog was transferred to accompanying horse-drawn fire engines. Dalmatians were also historically used by brewers to guard the wagon while the driver was making deliveries. This photo of an antique steam fire engine was taken in Lake Forest, California, at a Fourth of July Parade. (Photo: Wikimedia Commons)

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