

# HISTORICALLY SPEAKING....

*Once Considered Bantams of the Rabbit World  
The Meek Little Polish Finds Quite a Following  
By Bob Whitman  
Rarebits@ev1.net*

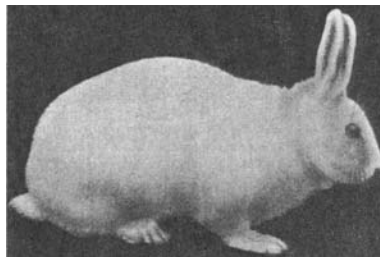
Poland, could be the native home of the little Polish rabbit, but this is quite doubtful, as the breed was not even heard of in Poland when the Polish breed began to emerge in English writings in the last quarter of the 19th century. Could King Richard III (1452-1485) have been the one that introduced the rabbit to the north of England? While on a trip to Europe Richard the Third saw a spirited little white rabbit with pink eyes that weighed in at four to five pounds. He imported 250 of them for his Middleham Castle near Leyburn in Wensleydale. This was Richard's favorite retreat and too the main training grounds for his knights. King Richard's knights had become bored hunting the same old quarry of deer for sport, so the story goes which prompted Richard III to bring in the rabbits. The new imports were maintained in closely guarded enclosed warrens at first, then a few would be released into the countryside. King Richard's white rabbits had been preserved for nearly three centuries in a semi-domesticated state until 1840. Knowing the stronghold of the Polish breed being in Durham and Yorkshire may give some credit to this story.

The breed had to always be shown in the "any other variety" class prior to 1884. It has been well documented that seventeen Polish were exhibited at a show in Hull, England in 1884 and it was at this exhibition that Polish were finally given their own class with Mr. George Hedworth winning. It should be noted that Hedworth's strain of Polish were developed albino wild rabbits. Another leading Polish breeder of the time, Mr. J. Meynell, of Darlington, started his strain from albino Dutch and other strains were selected from the common white hutch rabbit of the day that weighed anywhere from 4 to 8 lbs. It was indeed the drawback of the Polish being accepted as a fancy animal because of the simple association with a common white rabbit.



A prize winning Polish doe from 1888. This is also the oldest known illustration of a Polish from England

Germany, imported some of these that same year, which they named Pole and later given the title of Hermelin (Ermine). The Polish rabbit, may well have been the Prussian rabbit, when a pair of small white rabbits with pink eyes were shown in January, 1858, at Nottingham, England. By 1860, the name Polish was firmly fix in England, although some authors haven't painted a very pretty picture of the little white rabbit. Cuniculus, wrote of the breed in his *The Practical Rabbit Keeper*, 1880, "The Polish rabbit is one of the most pointless, and one of the most delicate animals of the whole tribe. Little wonder then that it has been gradually dying out for the last few years, and that now its presence either in the rabbitry or show-pen is quite the exception. This was not formerly the case, and at one time considerable interest was taken in it, and this must be our apology for devoting a few lines to its consideration."



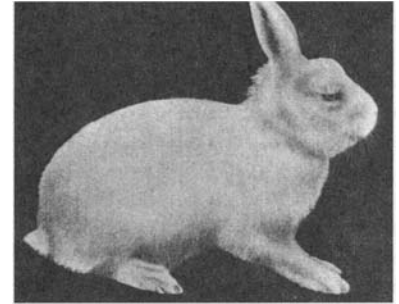
British Polis doe, circa 1905

"It is believed to have come from Poland, and we have no evidence to the contrary. An old fancier once said in answer to a query on the point, 'Come from Roosha? Not it. It's only the common hutch rabbit, and some fools have bred whites in-and-in till they've made a regular breed of them. They're poor sickly things at the best of times.' We would hardly go so far as this, but there is certainly some possibility that the aspersion may have more truth in it than may appear at first sight."

"The Polish rabbit is white and of a peculiarly milky colour, perhaps of the purest white known in the rabbitry, beating even the Angora in this respect. It is very small, compact little animal, seldom weighing more than 4 lbs., and looking even smaller owing to its very delicate organization generally. The back has no rise at all, and from the head there seems a gradual fall to the hips. The legs, the hind ones especially, are weak and diminutive, and the animal quickly tires of using them, the most common position being a reclining one. The ears are short but not very erect, being of somewhat delicate construction. They, however, should not lop, but generally lie down at full length down the back."

"It is of a very timid nature, and runs away very rapidly on seeing any one approach the hutch. The doe is not a good breeder. Hence there is but little to recommend Polish rabbits t the general fancier. They have no prizes at shows, except in the Any Variety class, where we think they stand but little chance. The only good that can be gained from the Polish rabbits is the very pretty fur, which is valuable for tanning purposes. We are afraid we have not

drawn a very inviting picture of the puny breed called the Polish, but we certainly do not recommend it as a profitable breed to keep."



British Polish buck. We can start seeing the elevated stance, circa 1905

The first standard drawn up for the breed was by a Mr. H.E. Gilbert, of England in the 1880's.

## SCALE OF POINTS FOR THE EXHIITION POLISH RABBIT

- |                   |           |
|-------------------|-----------|
| 1. Shape.....     | 20 points |
| 2. Coat.....      | 15 points |
| 3. Condition..... | 10 points |
| 4. Eyes.....      | 5 points  |
| Total.....        | 50 points |

Mr. Enoch Hutton, of Pudsey, England writes of the breed in the 1880 for Leonard U. Gill's 1881 work, *THE BOOK OF THE RABBIT*, "This is one of the most common of domesticated rabbits, its principal characteristic being the purity of its snowy whiteness of coat. It is known in all rabbitries, and is quite common in most warrens; or I may, perhaps, best explain myself by saying that the ordinary albino of the common warren answers all the points required of this breed for successful prize-taking, considering that it is most of all removed from its primitive state in colour, &c. Upwards of thirty years ago I had them in large quantities, the does frequently producing as many as eleven at birth, very few being lost in rearing, and seldom or never any deviation or sport from the parental colour. Many are not more than about 3 lb. in weight, and these, as a rule, are at the present day the best in other points. I have seen then them quite up to 10 lb., but seldom one of more than 8 lb. that was fit to win, so that I should say about 8 lb. as the standard weight, allowing fifteen points for it." Mr. Hutton wrote a 100 point standard for the exhibition Polish which took over Gilbert's 50 point piece. The earliest picture of the Polish rabbit that I have been able to obtain was the color plate by H. White in 1879.

## POLISH IN AMERICA

Polish, arrived from England to the United States, in 1912, having been imported by Mr. W. Endicott Dexter of Boston, Massachusetts shortly after the National Pet Stock Association of America was founded on January 10, 1910 and recognized as a breed,

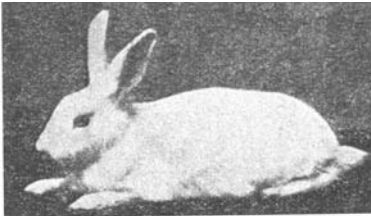
*(continued on page 18)*

(continued from page 17)

although they were seldom seen in the show-rooms, until after 1925. By 1930, the breed had become quite popular amongst fanciers.

**First American Standard for Polish**

- Color: Pure white.....14
- Shape: Short (3 pounds).....14
- Coat.....26
- Ears:
  - Short, set close together, erect, well furred.....16
- Condition:
  - Flesh solid, fur fairly short, good fine, thick, soft, silky.....14
  - 100 Points

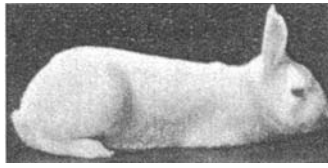


An American Polish, circa 1924

The Ruby-Eyed White (REW) Polish, was the only variety recognized for many years. The Blue-Eyed Whites (BEW), were the brain child of Samuel E. Rice of Saugus, Massachusetts. Rice mated two White Beveren does to a 2 ½ pound Polish buck. The offspring were anything but BEW, yet Rice mated the half brother and sisters together, and by the third generation he was producing about 50 per cent, REW and BEW. His biggest problem with the new variety was selecting for size and ear length. Rice showed the BEW, for the first time at a show in Mineola, when his animal won Best Polish out of 60 entered. He then sent a display of them to the Columbus, Ohio American Rabbit & Cavy Breeders Association Convention and Show, in 1938. It was at this convention that the Standards Committee voted to admit the BEW to the standards.

Samuel E. Rice, would also be credited with the development of the Black and Chocolate varieties. He mated Havana does to a REW Polish buck and a small Black Rex buck. The cross produced both Blacks and Chocolates, which he mated together. The Blue Polish were recognized in 1982, and finally the Broken pattern being accepted.

James Blyth, obtained Polish during the early 1930s, and called a small group of breeders together to form the National Polish Federation at the New Haven, Connecticut Convention in 1935. Blyth was the elected President, and a Douglas Clarke of Long Island, New York as the first Secretary. James Blyth, gave up the Polish breed after becoming ill in 1939, giving his Polish to William H. Kennedy. Interest in Polish waned and the organization regrouped in 1943, changing the name to the American Polish Rabbit Club and re-chartered in January, 1944 by the ARBA.

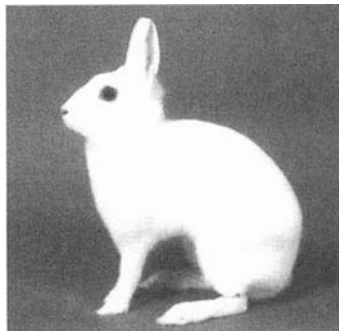


A Champion Polish from England, 1935

**POLISH IN THE UNITED KINGDOM**


The Polish recognized by the British Rabbit Council is indeed a much different creature than found in the United States. The Polish, of the United Kingdom, is the same breed as the Britannia Petite of America. The first importation of the British Polish took place in 1973, when Flo and Ted Gordon from Oregon, along with Wendy and Warren Pocha of Canada, were joined by Charles Chinn of Washington state, imported six animals from Tony Cannell's stud located in Market Drayton, England. Thus began the British Polish movement in America. Just as to when British fanciers began to style their Polish to look like a small hare in type is not known. Many members of the British Belgian Hare Club, were also breeders of Polish, before the 1920's, which was the time that the Belgian Hare was loosing out popularity in England among fanciers. It is believed that it was at this time, the Polish started being bred to a standup arched breed. For many years the only known variety was the Ruby-Eyed White, Blue-Eyed Whites were introduced after World War II. Other colored Polish began making their appearance in the early 1950's thanks to the introduction of Netherland Dwarfs to England. Today the Polish of England are an outstanding show animal, with very high levels of perfection. It is recognized in no less than some 35 possible varieties.

The British Polish have fairly recently been imported into Holland and the Scandinavian countries where they are picking up a dedicated following of fanciers, and is known as the Dwarf Hare.



The British Polish of today.

**S  
A  
L  
E**



**S  
A  
L  
E**

**THE BOOK**  
 Domestic Rabbits & Their Histories  
 Breeds of the World  
 by Bob Whitman  
**"A RABBIT CLASSIC"**  
 480 pages - 128 Breeds in Color  
 61 Extinct & 169 Living Breeds  
 Over 800 Historical Illustrations  
 Plus So Much More  
**Special price at**  
**\$30.00 each**  
**Post Paid**  
**"WOW YOU SAVE"**  
**\$16.00 per book**  
**(No Limits)**  
 Personalized & Signed if Requested  
 Send Check or Money Order  
 Bob Whitman  
 2355 Rusk St.  
 Beaumont, TX 77702-2454  
 Rarebits@ev1.net