

**Creation
Of
The American Giant Homer
And the Rise of
The American Giant Homer Association
1918 – 1928
By Marion L. Graham**

The year 1918 marks the actual documented beginning of the Bird --- eventually named the American Giant Homer.

The “American” Giant Homer Association was organized in the year 1928; however, the historical “roots” go back a lot of years before that. In the beginning of the Giant Homer Association, the word “American” was not a part of the organizational name. Some years later, when the Association members realized that they had created something truly American in every respect, did the word “American” appear as part of the Association’s name.

Some years after 1928, Stanley Stout, one of the earliest Giant Homer Association Pioneers, wrote to Paul Steiden thanking him for sending in his Giant Homer Association dues (\$1.00). Paul Steiden had asked Stanley Stout some questions about the crossing of breeds to produce “Giant” homers. Stout wrote back to Paul and informed him that the “colored Giant Homers (that existed at that time) were bred from flying Homers only, and the large breast area of the bird was built by selectively mating bigger and bigger birds together.” Stout stated that as far as her knew, “there was no other blood in the ‘first’ Giant Homers but big, flying, Racing Homers.”

Utilizing the above mentioned breeding concept (generally), the first strains of Giant Homers were begun by two earlier Giant Homer Association pioneers, R.W. Keene and Wm. P. Gray in the year 1918. This “documented date” was only the continuation of their breeding work which had really started some years before 1918 --- and continued for many years following. The two of them worked together as “co-pioneers” in the creation of the “American” Giant Homer --- but each on a somewhat different project. Gray worked to produce a strain of “pure white Giant Homers. They were bred ‘straight’ from big, white, flying, Racing Homers.” Stout further Stated that “the ‘colored’ Giants that Keene produced were from Racers and English Show Homers ---crossed.” Keene continued to breed his birds carefully for the first twelve years to get them pure white and eliminate the “recognizable” evidence of the Show Homer out of them. Only then did Keene consider his birds a new “strain” of Giant Homers without too much conscience about their being cross-breeds. They became known widely (at that time) as “the best strain of Giant Homers in the world.”

The average weight of Gray and Keene’s Giant Homers was about twenty ounces (and increasing) somewhat lighter than some of the others that were generally considered BIG breeds.

So --- if Keene and Gray started (openly) on their Giant Homer projects in (about) 1918 --- and they continued working on their individual breeding projects for “at least” twelve years --- this would bring the “new” Giant Homer to recognizable status somewhere around the year 1928, the year that the “American” Giant Homer Association was organized.

The pioneers in the creation of the Giant Homer also became pioneers in the establishment of the Giant Homer Association. R.W. Keene was the first Charter President, C.F. Hober became Vice President, and Wm. P. Gray became Secretary-Treasurer.

Between 1918 and 1928 many pigeon breeders were trying to develop bigger and better Homers --- as during those early years the squab was a most popular table delicacy and profitable economic product. The early Squabbing Homer was not always known as the "Giant Homer". In 1919 and 1920, the Wilson Pigeon Farm, in Wilson, Kansas, called their best squabbers, the Homer, just a "Squab-breeding pigeon." In 1921, the Quality Pigeon Lofts, in Marinette, Wisconsin, called the Squabbing Homer the "Classy Flying Utility Bird." Also in 1921, the Marksacre Pigeon Lofts were selling Homers as "Squab Breeders" and "Exhibition Birds." W.C. Osterwisch, in New Memphis, Illinois, was selling "Squab Breeding Homers." At the same time, in Butler, Pennsylvania, the Ideal Squab Company Inc. was starting to produce a larger squabbling Homer cross. So here in 1921 we can mark the beginning of a completely new movement in developing larger utility squab breeders ---Cross-Breeding.

Beginning slowly after 1918 --- picking up momentum in 1921 --- many squab producers were raising flying, working Racing Homers along with one or more breeds of the "BIG SIX" utility group --- trying to combine the prolific production ability of the Working Homer with the larger size of the "BIG SIX" utility breeds. The "BIG SIX" utility group consisted of Hungarians, Runts, Maltese, Carneaux, White Kings, and Registered White Swiss Mondaines. The Homer breeders were seriously beginning to use these "BIG SIX" breeds solely as tools to make their Giant Homers bigger and more prolific producers of heavier squabs.

It is general scientific knowledge that "Hybridization" of compatible breeds of plants and animals increases the capacity for improved production. In 1920, the Cedar Lawn Poultry Farm, in Morristown, New Jersey, were raising White Swiss Mondaines, Carneaux, and Working Homers together --- cross-breeding. H.N. Webb, of Springfield, Missouri, was also crossing Homers with Carneaux and Mondaines. L.N. Simons, of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was crossing Carneaux and Working Homers. It was here during these years of the flourishing squab industry that the flying Homers became known as the "Working Homer", --- and it was out of the "Working Homer" concept that the new idea of the "Giant Homer" came forth.

In 1922, a new "twist" entered into the objectives of the "Cross-Breeders". The Dalton Pigeon Lofts, of Joplin, Missouri, was still crossing Working Homers with Carneaux and White Kings with a new objective. Floyd Baker, of Hereford, South Dakota, also had this "New Vision" in his crossing of Runts, Carneaux, and Working Homers. These Breeders, and many others like them, were, of course, interested in developing the Homer as a "Super Squab Producer", but, with others, were also beginning to develop their "Prize Birds" as Show Birds and Squab Producers. Here --- the Giant Homer began to emerge as a Dual Purpose Bird.

As the satisfaction of competition began to outweigh the dwindling profits of selling squabs, the Homer slowly became more and more a popular Showbird. The squabbling industry lost popularity because of rising production costs and shipping fees which produced lower and lower profit margins. Keep in mind now that this article is dealing with the history of the American Giant Homer as it originated in 1918 --- and how it developed up to 1928 when the "American" Giant Homer Association was organized.

Following 1928 --- new efforts to build the Giant Homer into a more beautiful Showbird by crossing it with other breeds were begun changed. These efforts following 1928 will be dealt with in further chapters of A.G.H.A. history.

1922 was one of the greatest years in the history of the “American” Giant Homer Association. For the first time, the N.P.A. divided the entire Grand National Pigeon Show into two big divisions --- Utility and Fancy. Sixteen breeds were listed as Utility --- those breeds that could be used for squab raising; however, should any specialty club or group representing a particular breed desire to have their breed transferred to the fancy classes, the N.P.A. would be glad to accede to their wishes. It is right here that breeders of Homers began to believe that their favorite breed could Be Fit For The Show Room and also out-Produce Any Other Pigeon On Earth.

In the first year that the Homer was classified as on the top utility breeds, its specific National Show Class was called the Jumbo Squab Homer --- and was divided into seven color classes: White Jumbo Homers, Black Jumbo Homers, Blue or Silver Jumbo Homers, Red or Yellow Jumbo Homers, Black or Blue Cheques, Red or Yellow Cheques, and AOC Jumbo Homers. This action by the N.P.A. represents the first time that the Homer possessed a color classification status. NOW --- we have thirteen color classes with multiple variations within each class --- except White.

Following the naming of the Homer in 1922 as the Jumbo Squab Homer by the N.P.A., a number of other names for the same bird began to appear --- all stressing “SIZE” and high-production capabilities. In 1923 and 1924, the Springfield Squab Farm, in Springfield, New Jersey, called the Bird the “Large Homer”. Paul Hemple, of Bellview, Illinois, was starting to sell Mammoth White Homers as “Super Squabbing Birds”. Then, finally, in 1925, a former name arose again --- the Jumbo Homer. P.H. Kipp, of Chicago, Illinois, was selling Jumbo Homers and saying, “If you want good, fast breeders --- the kind that raises large squabs, I can supply you in mated pairs.”

The names for the Bird of this article, during the first eight years of its life, were actually all relatively short-lived: Squab-breeding Pigeon, Classy Flying Utility Bird, Squab Breeder, Squab- Breeding Homer, Large Homer, Working Homer, Super Squab Producer, Jumbo Homer, Jumbo Squab Homer, Mammoth Homer, and some others thrown in from time-to -time as individual breeders praised the qualities of their birds --- trying to advertise the super characteristics of this purely American creation.

Eventually, the pigeon world settled on a descriptive term for the Bird which carried more of an “air of respectability” without the exaggeration expressed by many of the other names it had been called. In 1926 and 1927, one more term came into common use which has remained to this day --- the Giant Homer.

C.F. Hober, a charter officer of the “American” Giant Homer Association was selling his Giants --- not specifically as squabbers, but simply as Giant Homers. From this point on the Bird began to assume a new nature --- that of being a bird for Exhibition purposes, instead of being solely a big bird which produced big squabs.

Wm. P. Gray, first “American” Giant Homer Association Secretary-Treasurer, a White King breeder for many years, continued to breed his White Kings for five years after beginning to develop his world famous strain of White Giant Homers. Then, in 1923, her sold his whole loft of sixty White King breeders for \$250.00 and went wholeheartedly into Giant Homers.

About the same time a Gray, W.E. Kain, of Middletown , Pennsylvania, sold all of his Carneaux, Maltese, and Mondaines but continued to raise Giant Homers exclusively. W.E. Kain was to become one of the outstanding pioneers of the more “Modern: Giant Homer.

Many breeders of squabbling Homers who did not “go along with” the Giant Homer movement retained some of the old names to identify their birds. Breeders such as the Springfield Squab Farm in Springfield, New Jersey --- and individuals such as Everett C. Miles, of Greenwich, Connecticut, kept the name Large Homer for their birds and eventually faded from public view. Many breeders of the ‘old school’ met this same fate.

There were some breeders of squabbling Giant Homers who were becoming so confident in the ability of the Giant Homer to produce good squabs that squab-breeding contests were proposed. Wm. P. Gray had for several years proposed holding a squab-producing contest in Connecticut. Egg-laying contests in the poultry industry had been conducted for many years --- why not do the same for the product produced by the pigeon?

During these ten years (1918 to 1928) the Country was still quite unsettled following World War I --- and progress was slow. However --- as National Recovery was achieved, efforts to conduct Pigeon production contests were regenerated. Gray felt that such contests would be a “good ad for the squab business.” However, he unsuccessfully tried to interest the poultry department of the Connecticut State University in squab-raising --- there was “never available funds.” Gray even offered eight pens of Giant Homers out of twelve he was operating for the use of the National Competition. Eventually --- squab raising contests were held, and the Giant Homer slowly worked its way to the “top” in several respects of breeding and production. It is out of these production contests that the saying “The Giant Homer Can Out-Produce Any Other Breed On Earth” was born. For many years this ‘winning production aspect’ of the Giant Homer remained an important part of the A.G.H.A. Logo --- finally being combined with the ability of the Giant Homer to perform in the show room. Gray stated, “I hope I have made an offer that will start something. If anyone else has a better scheme, let’s have it.” Well, no one came up with a better scheme and such contests were eventually held --- continuing for several years. And Gray was still advertising for better and larger, pure whit Homer youngsters --- still working on the improvement of the new Giant Homer something he himself had helped to create over the past eight years.

These are the years preceding 1928, the year the “American” Giant Homer Association was organized. During these ten years the Homer progressed from being just another fast flying-fast producer of good squabs --- to a magnificent bird called the “American” Giant Homer, a bird worthy of being the rallying point of a great fraternity of people --- young and old --- who believe in the new strain of Homer as “A Breed Fit For The Show Room That Can Out-Produce Any Other Pigeon On Earth.” This new pigeon was --- and still is --- a pigeon created in America ---by Americans --- the AMERICAN GIANT HOMER.

Since the year 1928, the Standard Concept adopted by the AMERICAN GIANT HOMER ASSOCIATION of the Ideal Giant Homer has changed four times: The McNinch Standard --- 1934 to 1948, the Fowler --- 1948 to 1958, the Deal Standard --- 1958 to 1982, and the Hobbs-Jacky Standard --- 1982 to the present time. Each of these periods of Concept Stability is quite worthy of being treated as a distinctly separate Chapter in the History of the evolvement of the MODERN AMERICAN GIANT HOMER. Even now there are strong “vibrations” of desire to re-evaluate the present Standard Concept of what the ideal Giant Homer should be like --- and produce a new image of a new concept which will guide our breeding and showing and judging. This is good! It is progress! The AMERICAN GIANT HOMER ASSOCIATION IS ON THE MOVE!