



The city of Apolda is very proud of Louis Dobermann, its widely known son. The city's tourist board brochure shows Dobermann accompanied, as a gimmick, by a similarly dressed Doberman Pinscher.

PART 3:

Karl Friedrich Louis Dobermann and his Doberman Pinschers

Most dog breeds were developed after hundreds of years of evolution and lengthy selection by breeders. However, some breeds owe their existence to just one person, whose name they bear.

Karl Friedrich Louis Dobermann was a German “tax officer, flayer and dog catcher,” whose name will be forever linked with a versatile working breed. Let’s become acquainted with the circumstances in which young Louis lived, in 19th-century Thuringia.

IMPERIAL GERMANY

Dobermann was born in 1834 in the city of Apolda (Federal State of Thuringia). At that time, Germany was divided into 39 federal states. The French Occupation was over, but the Vienna Congress (1815) had not allowed Germany to unify. After the Constitution of 1849, the German federal states were united in a hereditary

German Empire under Prussian leadership. In 1871, when Dobermann was 37 years old, the first German Emperor stepped forward: William I of Prussia.

The federal states retained their own monarchs and governments, however. In Thuringia, for example, the royal families of Sachsen-Coburg-Gotha, Sachsen-Altenhausen and Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach ran the show, with the government of Thuringia responsible for cultural and administrative affairs.

TAX COLLECTOR AND DOGCATCHER

We know very little about the childhood of the man whose name is associated with one of the world’s most popular breeds. Writers and historians have different opinions even about the year of this birth (1834 is correct, but some say 1823 or 1824) and the year of his death (1894 and 1891 are reported). They agree, however, about Louis’ profession: *“Justizangestellter im thüringischen Apolda und darüber hinaus Abdecker, Steuereintreiber und Hundefänger für das Amt Niederrossla.”*

So many words for such a humble function: collector of dog tax, catcher of stray dogs and flayer for the region of Apolda, appointed by the judiciary in the Federal State of Thuringia. Aside from collecting dog taxes, Dobermann had to catch and skin stray dogs. His second job was that of *Nachtpolizist* – a night watchman, traversing the city in search of unsavoury characters.

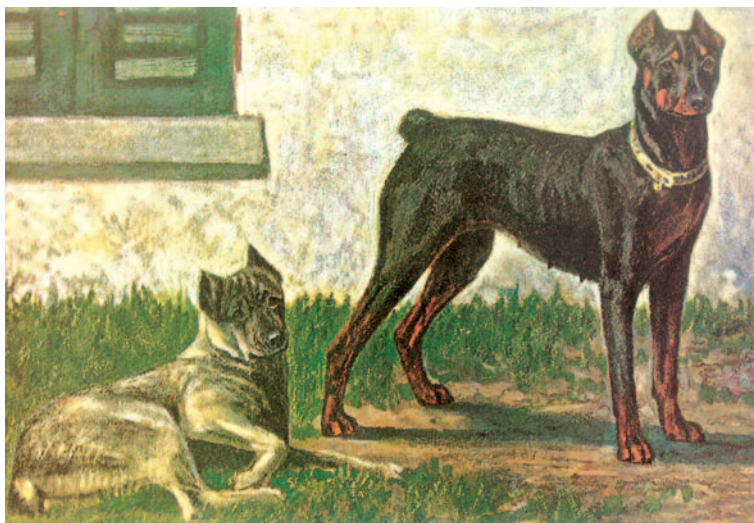
Dobermann would certainly have benefited from a dog's protection as he collected taxes and patrolled at night. As a dogcatcher, he could choose the best dogs for his purposes. From the beginning, his dogs were known regionally as *Dobermann's Hunde* (Dobermann's dogs).

PINSCHERS AND SHEEPDOGS

We know that Dobermann crossed several types of dogs to get a "harsh dog," but there are different opinions about the dogs he bred. The famous German dog writer Richard Strebel stated: "I very much doubt if we should place the Dobermann Pinscher in the Pinscher group. Maybe he belongs in the Sheepdog group." Strebel claimed that the first dogs bred by Louis Dobermann were Pinscher/sheepdog crossbreeds. But he noted: "It is quite possible that other breeds contributed as well."



This well-known photograph of Louis Dobermann (left) dates from about 1870. The other two men could be the tower guard and the county policeman. The seated dog is 'Schnuppe.'



Richard Strebel drew these two Doberman Pinschers in 1903, nine years after Dobermann had died.

BREED ORIGINS

In his book *Die Deutschen Hunde (German Dog Breeds)*, published in 1904/05, Strebel wrote that the city's "stray-dogs catcher and dog skinner started breeding harsh dogs, together with two other men, a *Turmwärter* [tower guard] and a *Fluhraufseher* [a kind of county policeman]." For their first litters, the three men used stray dogs that were destined to be skinned.

Without a doubt, Dobermann's profession impacted his decision to breed guard dogs. However, there were other reasons to breed this type of dog. The farmers in the Apolda region used guard dogs to deter intruders and tramps, and the dogs bred by Dobermann were also used for several jobs in the police force.

'SCHNUPPE'

It's not easy to establish the origin of the Doberman Pinscher. There are several stories, particularly about the first years.

The version of Louis Dobermann's contemporaries is that the first litters were bred from Dobermann's favourite bitch, a mouse-grey smooth-coated Pinscher named 'Schnuppe.' The sire's breed and name are unknown, but it could have been a Thuringer sheepdog or Black and Tan Terrier.

Looking at the photograph (circa 1870) of Louis Dobermann with two dogs, one must admit that these dogs show no similarity to the present Doberman Pinscher. However, the 1903 drawing by Richard Strebel clearly shows two Dobermans. In the intervening years, breeders had succeeded in developing a type immediately recognizable today.

1863 DOG MARKET

The dogs bred by Dobermann from the middle of the 19th century were certainly not mongrels. Both Strebel (1905) and Seegers (a Dutch dog writer, 1912) argued that these dogs were very much the same as smooth-coated Pinschers, with perhaps a trace of sheepdog. Dobermann, however, never showed great interest in the appearance of his dogs, and he didn't keep stud books. His first requirement was to create a watchful, sharp, brave and intelligent dog. We know he succeeded. Several of his dogs were shot by hunters because they were too sharp and keen on game. In a way, this behaviour obstructed the breed's popularity in its first years. Not infrequently, the life of such a dog ended on a chain. So in a certain sense, Dobermann didn't derive great pleasure from his dogs' tremendous qualities as guard dogs and watchdogs. On the other hand, the presentation of Dobermann Pinschers at the first dog market in Apolda, in 1863, when Dobermann was 29 years old, was joyful and a success. This event became so important that it is officially recorded in the history of the city of Apolda.

OTTO GÖLLER

Reading the literature about Dobermann and his dogs, I almost come to the conclusion that his successor, Otto Göller, hardly credited Dobermann and his success. Göller owned a distillery in Apolda. He began buying quality Dobermanns and, by the turn of the 20th century, was keeping about 80 dogs in his villa at Stegmann Strasse 33.

A salesman with a good eye for a dog, Göller became a well-known promoter of the breed. Dogs from his kennel von Thuringen were exported abroad. In the Netherlands, for example, the first Doberman Pin-

scher entered as a separate breed was shown at the Nimrod Show in Amsterdam in 1901. Göller's love for the breed was far reaching: he produced *Echte Dobermanns Bitter* (Real Dobermann Bitter) in his distillery.

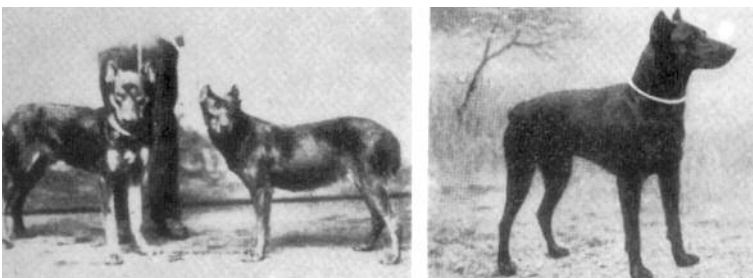
A DIFFERENT STORY

Otto Göller tells a quite different story when it comes to the breed's early history. He knew Dobermann personally and in 1910 wrote about him in *Der Dobermannpinscher in Wort und Bild* (*The Dobermann Pinscher in Word and Picture*). Göller reduced Schnuppe to "a cross bred between already existing dogs in Dobermann's time in Apolda." Nothing about a real Pinscher. According to Göller, Schnuppe had been mated to a "butcher's dog." He does not explain what a butcher's dog was, but we can be reasonably certain that Göller was referring to the ancestor of the present-day Rottweiler crossbred with a sheepdog. It is known that these types of dogs existed in Thuringia at that time. Göller further states that Pinschers and hunting dogs were also used, not purebred. At the end of his story, he wrote, "Dobermann has bred with a mixture of these dogs in the years around 1870." As a token of admiration, Göller and his friends named these dogs after Louis Dobermann.

BLUE GREAT DANES?

Göller had more to tell. He stated that the origin of the Doberman Pinscher went back to the ancestors of the German Shepherd Dog, to blue Great Danes, smooth-coated Pinschers and short-coated hunting dogs. His opinion is opposed by others, including the well-known Austrian scientist and dog fancier, Prof. Dr. Emil Hauck. The discussion continues today, the most important question being: Were Louis Dobermann's foundation dogs purebred or was Otto Göller right about the mongrel Schnuppe and the ancestors of the German Shepherd? The Dutch author Seegers (1912) wrote that Göller's opinion was not valid and Strebel (1905) claimed that Louis Dobermann deserved all the credit.

However, there is one subject on which they all agreed: Göller was the one who promoted the breed. It was he who, in 1899 and in cooperation with Oskar Vorwerk, founded the first breed club in Apolda. In the same year, the first *Spezialzuchtschau* (specialty for Dobermanns) was organized, with an entry of 12 dogs. In 1905, Karl



Left: Two of Louis Dobermann's homebred dogs, pictured about 1894. The breed type is recognizable. Right: One of Otto Göller's homebred dogs, about 1904.

Meyer, a pharmacist in Apolda, published the breed's first stud book.

HAUCK'S THEORY

Dr. Hauck's view on the origin of the Doberman Pinscher is important. In his opinion, the smooth-coated Pinscher was the breed's most significant ancestor. If hunting dogs were used, they must have been hounds. He doubted the influence of sheepdogs, but admitted that Black and Tan Terriers could have contributed. There had been Dobermans with Greyhound blood and, finally, Hauck believed that crossbreeding with Great Danes or Rottweilers was likely. Perhaps Hauck's opinion was based on the fact that Dobermans are sometimes born tailless. From the beginning, Doberman Pinschers had cropped ears and docked tails.

BREED RECOGNITION

The breed club was founded in the pub *Zum Bergschlösschen* during the Apolda Dog Market of August 1899. At the same time, breeding rules were determined. Around 1900, other breed clubs were founded in Frankfurt, Hamburg, Mannheim, Hanover and Berlin. Goswin Tischler (kennel Von Grönland) arranged for the breed's recognition in 1895. If Louis Dobermann had only lived one more year to see this.

It is said that the first Doberman Pinscher entry was at the dog show in Erfurt in 1897. But what about the Apolda Dog Market of 1863? Dobermann presented his new 'breed' amidst all sorts of dogs. A romantic engraving shows market stalls with dozens of small and big dogs. Delighted children are looking at the dogs and the difference between lap dogs and working dogs is obvious. The strongest recommendation for buying Dobermann's dogs could have been that they stood up for themselves. Although the Doberman Pinscher is no longer a "harsh" guard dog and killer of game, the CKC standard states that the breed is "Energetic, watchful, determined, alert, fearless, loyal and obedient." Louis Dobermann would no doubt be pleased to learn that his creation still possesses the characteristics he envisioned more than 100 years ago.

Louis Dobermann died in 1894, leaving four dogs in his legacy: 'Rambo,' 'Lux,' 'Landgraf' and Schnuppe. If these names are correct, last mentioned is Schnuppe 2, because the first Schnuppe is pictured in the photo



A coloured print from an old Dutch magazine, *Avicultura*.

dating from about 1870.

In his home country of Germany, Louis Dobermann has not been forgotten. A bronze statue of three playing Dobermans has been erected in Apolda. In addition, a street has been named after him and his birthplace is marked with a plaque – a salute to the son of Apolda whose name became known worldwide.

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