

Foxhunting on Long Island dates from 1770 when a pack of hounds was hunted by John Evers of Hempstead. George Washington, who avidly rode to hounds in Virginia, was one of the subscribers to this hunt. In 1781, there is reference to the Brooklyn Hunt where hounds were cast at the estate of Denyse Denyse, the great grandfather of Henry Herbert of the Meadow Brook Hounds. William "Bull" Smith, founder of Smithtown, is reputed to have foxhunted.

Foxhunting as a sport became more popular during Reconstruction as estates began to be built on what had previously been farmland. The wealth of industry, banking and other enterprises that flourished in Metropolitan New York precipitated a new American gentry. An affinity for English sports such as coaching and foxhunting emerged. Over the next century, the Queens County Hunt, Rockaway Hunt, Meadow Brook Hounds, Suffolk Hunt, The Oaks Hunt, the Smithtown Hunt, The Long Island Hunt and the Suffolk County Hunt were formed to pursue the sport over the unique landscape of Long Island.

Until the years after World War II, Long Island was a paradise for lovers of all equestrian activities. Polo, coaching, pleasure riding, hunting, and horse shows abounded. Children spent their days on the backs of ponies. Horse dealers, saddlers and harness makers, equestrian tailors, trainers, stablemen, kennelmen and hundreds of other people who worked to support this activity abounded. As land became increasingly developed, horse lovers, like purposeful nomads, moved East or moved to other states in pursuit of open country, the indispensable ingredient for all equestrian activities. The story of foxhunting on Long Island is a story of a changing landscape and people who inhabit that landscape with horse and hound.

The Rockaway Hunt

The Rockaway Hunt was formed in 1879 and located at Cedarhurst. It was short-lived due to the rapid development of the area. As described in *Hunt Clubs and Country Clubs in America*, 1928:

People will buy lots and build suburban houses in its country, and as hunting cannot be successively carried on in a country that is all lawn and kitchen gardens, the Rockaway men feel that the days of their sport are numbered.

In 1956, George E. Hart of Wading River remembered the Rockaway Hunt from his boyhood:

I well remember the Rockaway Hunt Club whose members followed the hounds spring and fall. A group of well-to-do residents of Far Rockaway and nearby villages made up the membership including the Hazzards, James Keene and his son Foxhall, the Rhinelanders, Whites, Potters and many more.

On a Saturday afternoon the Master of the Hounds with jumpers and grooms would assemble at or near the Lynbrook railroad station with the hound pack a necessary requirement. The Wall Street gentry would come from the New York Train, change into riding togs and pink coats and be off after the hounds. The pack followed a scent laid down by a man on foot that morning.

The course was usually the same each time: north from the station on either side of a small creek over the farms of Jarvis Pearsall, Bill Davison, Hendrickson & Cornell, and Ackley and Cornwell. They would then cross another stream on the Carman farm, then make a U-turn and ride south over some of the same farms to the place of beginning, in all a distance of perhaps eight miles.

Long Island Forum, July 1956

The Queens County Hunt 1877

In 1877, A. Belmont Purdy, William E. Peet, F. Gray Griswold and Robert Center convened to organize a pack of foxhounds. This was considered the first drag pack in America. A farm house was leased and on October 4,

1877, the first meet of the Queens County Hounds was held. Neighboring Quakers as well as Henry Bergh protested this activity, but the sport survived opposition. In time, farmers prospered from the hunt by supplying hay, feed and bedding.

The next year, the Queens County Hunt moved to Westchester County to Central Morrisania. The area proved to be too congested and unsuitable. In his absence, Griswold's fellow huntsman, Belmont Purdy, began a pack of his own that became the Meadow Brook Hounds. Gray Griswold returned and eventually became the Master of Meadow Brook Hounds.

Meadow Brook Hounds

Hunt attire: Scarlet, robin's egg blue collar

Hunt button: circular in form w/ M.B.H. in center, a huntsman horn above and the date 1881

The Meadow Brook Hounds was formed in 1881. It grew out of the Queens County Hounds, a drag pack that was established in 1877. Its first Master was F. Gray Griswold who hunted the pack until 1880 when it was moved to Westchester County. A subscription pack was organized by A. Belmont Purdy with the assistance of Thomas Hitchcock, Jr. which became the Meadow Brook Hounds. The primary country of the hunt was in Nassau County, which was relatively unpopulated at the time.

In 1882 the Queens County Hounds returned to Long Island and united with the Rockaway Hunt Club. In 1893, Griswold was elected Master of Meadow Brook Hounds, and all three hunts united. The proximity to New York City which had been so convenient during the foundation of the Meadow Brook Hounds, soon posed a long-lasting threat to open country. As described in the Meadow Book Club 1930 and The Field Illustrated, January 1927:

The Meadow Brook Country lies in Nassau County, formerly a part of Queens County, Long Island, and extends twenty miles or more from East to West and about twelve miles from North to South. . It is intersected by the Jericho Turnpike, the main thoroughfare from Jamaica east through the middle of the Island. The hounds at that time met as far west as Jamaica and ran over a fairly open country to the eastward. The character of the country has, however, long since changed owing the steady extension and growth of the City and villages. The North Country has therefor become more used .. the going is very fine--large fields of pasture grass and plough. Formerly snake fences, easily negotiable, were numerous, as well as the post-and-rail, and there was at one time a short stone wall on the north side of Wheatley Hill. At present, the chief obstacles are the strong straight post and rail fences ranging from four to five feet high...

Soon after this date the country began to fill up. Many houses were build, truck gardens appeared, villages all along the line as far as Garden City began to spread along the Sound and the South Shore. The housed were slowly driven further and further away from the settlements to that in 1914 the kennels at Meadow Brook were found inconveniently from the places at which meets were called and the hounds were moved to Syosset.

Regardless of the persistence of population, the Meadow Brook Hounds continued the hunt in country that was comprised of woods, fields surrounded by post and rail fences and large estates. The Meadow Brook Hounds earned a reputation throughout the riding and hunting communities of America as one of the most challenging of all hunts. If you hunted with the Meadow Brook Hounds, you hunted with the best.

`...the Meadow Brook is undoubtedly the fastest pack in America, and the fame of its splendid pasturage country, its five-foot post-and-rail fences, and its hard riders has spread throughout the hunting world.

The Meadow Brook Hounds also gained a reputation by virtue of its members, many of whom were not only recognized for their position in society, by also were ranked among the best horsemen and women in America. Its Masters included Elliot Roosevelt, brother of Theodore Roosevelt, Francis R. Appleton (1882), Edwin D. Morgan, Jr. (1883), Thomas Hitchcock, Jr. (1889), Gray Griswold (1893); Foxhall Keene (1903); Samuel

Willetts (1908) Harry T. Peters; and Devereux Milburn. Huntsmen over the years included Thomas Allison, Charles Plumb and Michael McDermott.

Owing to the popularity among of equestrian sports during the late 19th century to the years just following World War II, there were numerous private and commercial stables throughout Nassau County. The majority of the members of the Meadow Brook Hounds hacked to their meets, rode to hounds and hacked home. After the war, many members of Meadow Brook did not return, and the hunt felt their loss. The post war years also proved to be a boom in housing for those who did return and an accelerated suburbanization began to change the face of Long Island forever. Among the more serious impacts of suburbanization on this hunt were increasingly high taxes, which forced many of the stables to close, and the manifest destiny of suburbanization. (A member of Meadow Brook Hounds explained that the contrast between riding to a meet versus spending an hour or more on crowded highways heading East with your horse in a trailer was one of the reasons that the hunt closed.) As traffic increased on the growing number of roads that divided up Meadow Brook country, it became unsafe for the hounds as well as the riders. The final blow came with the arrival of the Long Island Expressway, which cut through the country like an unhealing wound. The Meadow Brook Hounds was terminated at the close of the 1970-1971 season and a glorious history found its final page.

It was universally held that the Meadow Brook Hounds was one of the most exciting hunts in America. As Betty Babcock wrote in *The Chronicle of the Horse*, "It can be said that, from 1881 to 1924 Meadow Brook offered sport to America's outstanding horsemen and with its great timber fences, scared the daylights out of their visiting counterparts..."

Smithtown Hunt 1900

Hunt attire: Scarlet, purple collar, canary yellow waistcoat

The Smithtown Hunt was organized in 1900. According to Norman Fagan, who eloquently chronicled the history of the Smithtown Hunt, it was comprised of the members of the Bayside Hunt who moved to Smithtown when they ran out of country. The first Master was R. Lawrence Smith. At that time the hounds were bred locally and in an effort to improve the pack, Jimmy Clinch Smith was sent to England to import some English hounds. Unfortunately, Smith and the hounds perished on their return trip on the Titanic.

The next Master was Clarence R. Robbins, who assumed his duties in 1907. At this time, the Smithtown Hunt ran a drag line. He was replaced by Allan Pinkerton in 1913, who was Master until 1916. In 1922, Alice T. McLean of St. James and Edward H. Carle of Millbrook, New York became Joint Masters and began to breed a pack of English and Welsh hounds. He reinstated a live hunt. From 1928 to 1932, Mrs. John Van Schaick (Lida Fleitmann) Bloodgood was the Master of Foxhounds. By this time, Smithtown maintained a drag as well as a live pack. In Fagan's recollections, Harry T. Peters (who was not only an internationally recognized fox-hunting man but also the publisher of one of the seminal works on Currier & Ives prints) was Master during the years following World War I. It was not uncommon during these early years for the Meadowbrook Hounds and the Smithtown Hunt to have highly competitive joint meets.

From 1932 to 1936, Tim Durant was Joint Master with Edward S. Voss and Randall E. Poindexter respectively. Durant was known as the "flying commuter" because he lived in Connecticut and flew to Long Island to hunt. Randall Poindexter shared the title of "Master" with Old Field resident, Frederick L. Johanns, Jr. until World War II. During the War, the hunt was inactive. Following the war, there were no hounds, no subscribers and no money in the treasury. With the assistance of Ward Melville, and with Frederick Johanns Jr. as Master, the hunt was re-established. The kennels were at Wide Water, Mr. Melville's home in Old Field and Gustav Mollet, who worked for him and had been the Huntsman since 1938, worked towards putting together a fresh pack of hounds. From 1949 to 1952, the Masters of the Smithtown Hunt were Mrs. Edward A. Gorman and Honorable W. Royden Klein. Klein continued to serve as Master until 1953. Tim Durant returned as Master from 1954 to 1956. He was followed by Dr. Arthur Fredericks and Edward Gould where were Joint Masters from 1956 to 1964. Dr. Fredericks, "Doc," a Veterinarian from Northport continued to serve as Master

until 1981. A consummate horseman and huntsman, Dr. Fredericks was described by Fagan as "...a tremendous inspiration during his twenty-five years as Master of Foxhounds. It was evident to fox hunters that his heart and soul were devoted to his job. Dr. Fredericks hunted in all sorts of weather, over all types of country, and hence provided good sport to his field."

Smithtown Hunt is the oldest continuing hunt on Long Island today. Its Masters since the 1980's have been Robert Moeller, Dr. Howard Schare, Peter T. Demetriou and Angela Pecora, who was recently appointed Joint Master. The spirit of the hunt lives through the people who love the sport. The endurance of the Smithtown Hunt and its rich history is a testament of its members, past and present., as well as the unfailing leadership of its Masters, Secretaries, Huntsmen and Whippers-in.

Merri Ferrell