

FOXHUNTING

Remembering Its Origins, Mells Foxhounds Celebrates 50 Years

By Stephen K. Heard, ex-MFH • Dr. William Kenner Photos

Colonel John L. Hornor, Jr. was a highly decorated World War II veteran. He participated in the landing at Normandy (Utah Beach) and served in General George Patton's Third Army. Before the invasion, Colonel Hornor was dispatched by President Roosevelt to England to help prepare for the United States' entry into the European conflict. In this role, he worked directly with Prime Minister Winston Churchill and General Dwight D. Eisenhower. Despite the demands of his assignment, he found time to visit his English cousins at his forebears' estate of Mells Manor in Somerset. It made a lasting impression.

One of the great joys of Colonel Hornor's life prior to World War II was foxhunting in Northern Virginia where he hunted extensively with a number of hunts but particularly Old Dominion Hounds. After the war, in 1949, Colonel Hornor met his third and last wife, Ann Eidson Hornor, who also had a history of foxhunting, mostly with the Rappahannock Hunt, where, at the age of four, she reportedly hunted with General Patton.

In 1964, Hornor purchased a farm in Giles County, Tennessee, which he named Mells after the ancestral estate in England. He acquired hounds, erected kennels, obtained permission to hunt adjacent lands, and founded the Mells Foxhounds. He enlisted his 9-year-old daughter, Lou Hornor (now Mahr), and her best friend Karen Kressenberg to serve as his whips. In 1966, Mells Foxhounds became registered and in 1971 was recognized by the Masters of Foxhounds Association. Colonel Hornor passed away in 1989 but his legacy endures. Mells has hunted continuously every season since its founding.

Lou has fond memories of hunting with her father. However, she confessed that she never really figured out whipping-in. Fortunately, her best friend, Karen Kressenberg, did. Most of all, Lou remembers her father's love for tradition, hard work, competence, and commitment, and his kindness to both people and animals.

On Saturday, October 18, 2014, under luminous blue skies and in the midst of tri-colored Penn-Marydel hounds, the Mells Foxhounds celebrated its 50th Anniversary at Opening Hunt. Lou Hornor Mahr traveled from her home in Maryland to participate in the celebration. She brought along her father's hunting horn, which at the "Blessings of the Hounds" she presented to Karen Kressenberg, now Mells Joint MFH and Huntsman. Flanking Karen before the assembled crowd were her Joint Masters, Stasia Bachrach and Bill Haggard (who also serves as Huntsman). With moistened eyes glistening, Karen gratefully accepted the horn, thus completing the circle from the inception of Mells by Colonel Hornor to the present.

With the Opening Ceremonies completed, Karen, followed by three flights of foxhunters, dispatched her whips and put the pack into the first covert. Ninety seconds later hounds erupted in full cry, hot on the line of a nimble coyote. The quarry and its pursuers led the Mells foxhunters throughout the country in a spirited chase. Two and half hours later, horses and riders spent, Karen and her staff returned the hounds to the kennel. The field then headed back to the Meet for a sumptuous mid-day repast.

The three current Masters—Kressenberg, Bachrach, and Haggard—have stated that they intend to build on the considerable efforts of those who have gone before them and have already committed resources resulting in the construction of a new state-of-the-art kennel. These Masters

have additionally established relationships with adjoining landowners adding greatly to the Mells existing country. Bill Haggard, voicing the sentiments of his Joint Masters, stated, "We believe that Mells is something very special and we're intent on making it more so."

Following a day of joy, reflection, and excitement, in which, happily, nothing went amiss, the consensus was that this Opening Meet of Mells was an auspicious beginning for the next fifty years.

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