

# Three Foxhunting Museums: Some Confusion

By Norman Fine

*Norm Fine's Blog*



*Original pencil sketches of Mountain and Muse by Samuel Ogle (c.1814) / Collection of the Museum of Hounds and Hunting NA*

Three museums—the **Museum of Hounds and Hunting North America**, the **Masters of Foxhounds Association and Museum**, and the **National Sporting Library and Museum**—all located in Loudoun County, Virginia, seem to be a cause for confusion amongst some North American foxhunters.

With a "Museum" sign on the new MFHA office building in Middleburg, Virginia, Museum of Hounds and Hunting members have asked if their museum is now a part of the MFHA. The short answer is, "No." But there's a longer answer.

The Museum of Hounds and Hunting NA is an independent 501c3 institution, exercising control, ownership, and responsibility (taken over from the Westmoreland Davis Foundation, trustees of Morven Park) to protect all the precious art and historic artifacts that have been donated over the years by foxhunting families. Irreplaceable objects which, once lost, are forever gone. Objects which, as the years pass, grow more and more precious to the history of foxhunting in North America and our heritage. No other institution fulfills this responsibility.

## Museum of Hounds and Hunting North America

MHHNA was first opened in 1985 through the efforts of a handful of farseeing foxhunting men and women with a sense of history and tradition. It is the only museum of the three dedicated solely to preserving the history, art and artifacts of hunting with hounds.

MHHNA was born of an idea suggested by Sherman Haight, ex-MFH, and enthusiastically endorsed by Dr. Joseph Rogers, MFH, a board member of the Westmoreland Davis Foundation. Dr. Rogers enlisted the support of two more board members, Erskine Bedford and Arthur McCashin, MFHs, and the MHHNA was born. It occupied space on both floors of the Morven Park mansion.



*Tom Seabright, Huntsman of the New Forest Hounds and Jasper by Ben Marshall (c.1800), gift of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon / Collection of the Museum of Hounds and Hunting NA*

When the Westmoreland Davis Foundation embarked on a major renovation of the mansion some years ago, the building was emptied of all contents and shuttered. MHHNA holdings were placed into storage. When work on the mansion was finally completed a few years later, less space than previously occupied by the collection was available to the

MHHNA. Thankfully, the hallowed Huntsman's Room was set up again at Morven Park, and another room was set aside for art exhibits. However, much of the art and many treasured artifacts are not currently on display.

#### **Masters of Foxhounds Association and Museum, Middleburg, Virginia**

The sign, "Museum," hanging on the new MFHA executive office building refers to the portraits of past presidents that now adorn the interior wall spaces. The oldest of these portraits go back to the early twentieth century, and the collection was assembled over the course of many years.

When the original MFHA executive office was relocated from Boston to Virginia in the 1990s, the portraits were moved and hung in the Vaughan Room in the Carriage House at Morven Park, where MFHA Board Meetings were held henceforth. However, there wasn't sufficient space in the Vaughan Room to hang all the portraits.

Today, with the MFHA in its own office building, there is sufficient space for the portraits of all past presidents to be hung. They are memorials to the enormous contributions of these men and women to the sport of North American foxhunting. Thus, the sign, "Museum," on the new MFHA office building refers primarily to these portraits.

#### **National Sporting Library and Museum, Middleburg, Virginia**

The National Sporting Library and Museum started out as a library. It was established in 1954 by Alexander Mackay-Smith, MFH and George Ohrstrom, president of the Orange County Hunt.

Before the current building was constructed, the National Sporting Library began life in the basement floor of historic Vine Hill, the old Chronicle of the Horse building. Eventually, new buildings were constructed to house both entities separately—the sporting library and the Chronicle.

Vine Hill was then refurbished with a major addition, and became the new museum associated with the library. There, major art exhibits and other programs have been presented for devotees of all field sports—hunting with hounds, polo, angling, and shooting.

#### **Conclusion and Food for Thought**

All three entities—Museum of Hounds and Hunting NA, Masters of Foxhounds Association and Museum, and National Sporting Library and Museum—are separate organizations with their own unique missions. Each is worthy of the support of all foxhunters.



*Copper and brass hunting horn, owned by Samuel Ogle, inscribed 1731 / Collection of the Museum of Hounds and Hunting NA*

The MHHNA has a magnificent collection, much of which is in storage. Objects like a pre-Revolutionary curved hunting horn owned by Samuel Ogle, the colonial governor of Maryland (c. 1731); a valuable Ben Marshall oil painting (c.1800) donated by the Mellons; the original pencil portraits of Mountain and Muse, drawn by Benjamin Ogle (c. 1815); General Patton's hunting diaries; President Ronald Reagan's letter of resignation from the West Hills Hunt;

paintings, sketches, and rare prints by renowned artists of days gone by; and so very much more. These and other artifacts beg to be on display for all foxhunters to see.

In this writer's opinion, the Museum of Hounds and Hunting NA needs a home for its large collection, which, with its future secured, would only expand and improve. We close in the hope that the leaders of our sport will take the necessary steps to fulfill the vision of the founders of the MHHNA. The museum continues today in the hands of a capable board of directors and an advisory board still dedicated to preserving the art and artifacts of hunting with hounds in North America before they are lost. MHHNA needs the support of all foxhunters. It is the responsibility of every one of us.

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