

THE MUSEUM OF HOUNDS & HUNTING CELEBRATES 40 YEARS

Written by Shayda Windle

On May 24, the Museum of Hounds & Hunting North America, located in the historic mansion at Morven Park in Leesburg, Virginia, will celebrate its 40th anniversary. The museum was founded in 1985 by Erskine L. Bedford, Master of Foxhounds (MFH) of the Piedmont Fox Hounds; Dr. Joseph M. Rogers, MFH of the Loudoun Hunt; Alexander McKay Smith; and Sherman P. Haight. These founding trustees of the Westmoreland Davis Foundation were not only passionate historians, but also all foxhunters, deeply devoted to the traditions of the sport. Together, they created a space where art, artifacts, and memorabilia of the sport could be safeguarded for generations to come.

Morven Park was once the country estate of

Westmoreland and Marguerite Davis, who purchased it in 1903. A New York lawyer turned Virginia farmer, Davis served as governor of Virginia from 1918 to 1922 and was a dedicated foxhunter. He and his wife built Morven Park into a thriving agricultural hub, home to over a thousand animals, and founded the Loudoun Hunt, where Davis served as MFH — cementing the estate's place in equestrian history.

"It's a true honor to help preserve the tradition of foxhunting," says Daphne Flowers Wood, MHHNA board member and MFH of Live Oak Hounds in Monticello, Florida. Her husband, C. Martin Wood III, carried the horn for 31 seasons and was inducted into the Huntsmen's Hall of Fame at Morven Park in 2017.

The museum owes much of its charming preservation to the Women's Committee, which transformed unused rooms of the mansion into inviting galleries. "We had this beautiful setting and a passion to preserve the legacy of hunting with hounds," shares Nancy Bedford, museum chairman. Today, the museum operates independently of the Westmoreland Davis Foundation and has become a nationally recognized destination for those who appreciate the culture and history of foxhunting. The wives of the founders — Peggy Haight, Donna T. Rogers, and Nancy G. Bedford — assisted their husbands in creating the museum.

Visitors to the Leesburg location, and to its

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Morven Park in Leesburg, home of the Museum of Hounds & Hunting North America. Photo by Callie Broaddus.



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more recent Middleburg branch, can explore a collection of fine art, bronzes, books, diaries, foxhunting artifacts, attire, horse tack, china, silver trophies, and more.

“Both museums are vital, where we collect and preserve the legends of foxhunting — both the individuals who shaped it and the significant works of art connected to the sport,” longtime board member John J. Head says.

The anniversary festivities will commence on May 24, with guided tours of the museum and mansion from 3 to 7 p.m., and continue on May 25. MHHNA will showcase rare artifacts, fine artwork, and special items from the sport’s long history. A gallery and art exhibition featuring sporting art from local crafters will be open, including a stunning exhibition of bronze sculptures — some for sale — by renowned sculptor Charles C. Rumsey (1879-1922), exclusively on loan from New York. One of Rumsey’s works, “The Old Virginian,” is permanently housed in the Huntsmen’s Hall of Fame at Morven Park.

This year’s celebration coincides with one of the estate’s most anticipated annual traditions:

the Virginia Foxhound Club Show, held on the Sunday before Memorial Day, which this year falls on May 25. The show brings together 30 to 40 hunts from across the United States, with kennels full of hounds and representatives from each hunt’s territory. Morven Park itself lies within the registered hunting territory of the Loudoun County Foxhounds, but at the show, staff and spectators from all over the country gather to admire hounds, swap stories, and enjoy a weekend filled with tradition.

One of the highlights of the weekend, the museum’s Huntsmen’s Hall of Fame induction ceremony, will take place at 3 p.m. on Saturday, May 24. Held every few years, the ceremony honors noteworthy foxhunters who have dedicated at least 20 years to the sport and led with distinction. Inductees, if living, or their families are invited to attend, and each is celebrated with a tribute from a guest speaker sharing their life story. Many of these individuals have hunted in multiple regions. From Virginia to Massachusetts and New York to Ottawa and beyond, their stories reflect the widespread impact of the foxhunting tradition in North America.

Guests are invited to enjoy an exhibition of paintings and bronzes followed by a reception, spending an afternoon mingling with fellow foxhunting enthusiasts and friends of the museum. “Despite all that has changed over the past 40 years, especially with advancements in technology, the world of foxhunting remains the same,” Head says. “The attire, the accessories, the customary stirrup cup, the hunt breakfast, among other traditions, have not changed. Foxhunting is a sport that is open to everyone — young people passionate about horses and horse riding, people riding to hounds, people who are hunt subscribers, or people who have retired from hunting and are interested in this rich tradition.”

As the museum marks four decades of education, preservation, and celebration, it invites everyone — riders, historians, and curious visitors alike — to join in recognizing the people and animals who make this tradition so remarkable. **ML**

For information on becoming a museum member or donating, visit mhhna.org. And for more images from Morven Park’s 40 years, visit MiddleburgLife.com.

Left: A display of hunting books and bronzes at the Middleburg location. Right: “The Scurry” by Jean Bowman on display at MHHNA in Middleburg. It depicts several foxhunting legends like Melvin Poe, Bruce Sundlun, Ambassador Charles Whitehouse, Senator John Warner, and Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. Photos by Kaitlin Hill.