

# FOXHUNTING LIFE

*with Horse and Hound*

JOANNE MARSANO PHOTO



Blue Ridge Hunt (VA)

FHL WEEK, Jan. 12, 2016

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## Carol Easter Tribute Draws Hundreds to Farmington

Category: Hunt Reports



Honorary whipper-in Tom Bishop, huntsman Matthew Cook, and honorary whipper-in Kimberlee Morton move off from Springhaven Farm for a memorial meet in honor of the late Carol Easter, MFH. / Cathy Summers photo

On a clear, sunny Saturday morning, December 19, 2015, two days after what would have been Master Carol O. Easter's seventy-seventh birthday, the Farmington Hunt gathered on a grassy knoll at her beloved Springhaven Farm in Charlottesville, Virginia to celebrate her life and legacy.

MFH W. Patrick "Pat" Butterfield addressed a large gathering of fifty-five riders, family members, and guests as a chilly breeze prompted me to adjust the buttons on my coat. Blue Ridge mountains in the distance framed the classic scene of hounds rolling in the grass, horses milling about, and riders exchanging greetings in anticipation of moving off for the morning's sport.

Multiple generations of friends and family, young and old, were there to be part of this special day. The entire Easter family was on hand to welcome a steady stream of visitors--a serious yet jovial field of riders and onlookers that included life-long close friends Carter McNeely and veteran octogenarian foxhunter and neighbor Bobbie Wells; on foot, Phyllis Jones and daughter Robin Mellen, and Ellie Wood Baxter. Bobbie shrugged against the chilly wind and quipped, "I might have not picked this day to come out, except for the day it is."

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W. Pat Butterfield, MFH addresses the field. (l-r) Kay Butterfield, Jennifer Nesbit, Anita Vere-Nicoll, Pat Butterfield, Julie and Pippa Cook / Cathy Summers photo

Farmington Hunt leadership was well represented as Vice President Mark Thompson and wife Shelly rode their spotlessly matched grays alongside President Dr. Reynolds Cowles, greeting former colleague and Keswick foxhunter Dr. Greg Schmidt and many lifetime Farmington regulars like Muffin Barnes, along with Anita Vere-Nicoll, and professional foxhunter Jennifer Nesbit, who had enjoyed Carol's cheerful company since childhood.

Whether riding faithful mounts or borrowed steeds, in dusted off riding gear or top hats, shaggy ponies or spotlessly groomed and braided Thoroughbreds, all of us were united in the shared affection and respect for the memory of a dearly loved lady who passed away too soon on November 3rd. Pat, having served with Carol as Master of Farmington since 1995 remembered his friend with a voice held steady, saying, "We are here today, in her honor, doing what she loved to do best in the place she loved better than any spot on the planet."

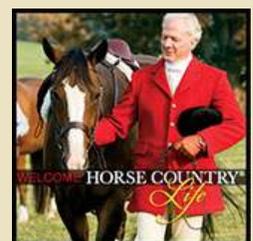
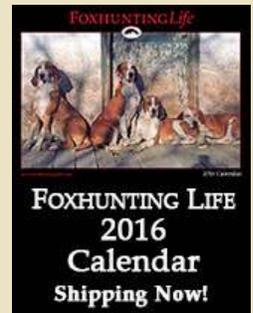


The Springhaven ladies and their guests: (l-r) Sherlock "Stocky" Gillett, Devant Latham, Helen Hilliard, Anita Vere-Nicoll, Joy Crompton, Put Spaulding, Anne Horner / Cathy Summers photo

Huntsman Matthew Cook with about ten couple of Farmington's crossbred hounds rode toward Jumping Branch Farm, drawing a wooded covert along a well-hidden stream, less than a fraction of a mile from Garth Road near the Foxfield racecourse. I was not sure what kind of a hunt to expect this day. With such limited territory, how would we manage? In the heart of the Farmington Hunt, this area is now heavily restricted with residential development. Once a frequent venue for hunt fixtures, this area is less than ten miles from the University of Virginia. Despite open space protected by conservation easements, we have not hunted here in several years.

No sooner had these thoughts crossed my mind when lead hounds opened in full cry after a fox that ran through the heavy woods and thick underbrush and soon went to ground in a thicket behind the Jumping Branch residence. Hounds frantically bayed and scrambled just feet from where the field was standing in the Chestnut Ridge drive, bent on finding the hidden quarry. Whipper-in Kim Morton raced to stop any stragglers from getting to the heavily traveled road just ahead of us.

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Matthew shouted encouragement and praise to the rustling, snapping thicket. It was clear that they had denned a fox. "I never did see the hole," Matthew reported later, "but there had to be something in there." To the fields' further excitement, three deer crashed out of heavy honeysuckle and blackberry thorns into the tightly grouped waiting riders just as the hunt proceeded to move on. With no time to waste, Matthew and staff gathered up the hounds to draw towards the neighboring farm, (Harry and Jeanie Burns') Darby's Folly.

Soon hounds were working every patch of woods and sheltered streambed, steadily checking everything along the ground behind the Burns' house and heading dangerously towards Garth Road again. In the nick of time, to the combined relief of our Field Masters and no doubt the hard working whips, hounds turned back, this time working the opposite side of the stream moving away from the road towards the Carr's farm near the Barracks, (home of Tom and Claiborne Bishop and the UVA equestrian team, located only a few miles from the city limits.)



The first field at Springhaven with (l-r) Shelly Thompson, Joy Crompton, Anita Vere-Nicoll, Stocky Gillet and the field / Cathy Summers photo

Just as scenting conditions seemed to be getting worse, the wind shifted. A hound opened, answered by several others in gathering chorus. I spotted what looked like the shadow of a very large red fox scurrying under a line of cedars only a few hundred yards ahead of the lead hounds. Off in the distance a screaming "Halloah" from a whip indicated what appeared to be a brace of reds heading off behind Burns' cow field to the edge of David Carr's pastures and on the Mercer Garnett's twin silos.

Close behind the pack in full cry, we did our best to keep up, sliding down hills slick with recent rains and cow paths. No sooner had we got rolling than a bottleneck ahead stopped the field on the farm path below Garnett's land. Ahead of us, whipper-in Carolyn Chapman was separated from the pack by one hopelessly entangled configuration of wire and blocked farmyard gates. Kip Holloway, off her horse and wrestling with a gate to try to get us through yet another broken gate, let Carolyn pass as we listened by radio to an excited report from road whips BJ Korol and April Fletcher who had just viewed a fox away crossing Woodlands Road (not far from Jan Spink's therapeutic riding stable and Polaris farm.)

Back behind the Winn property and Garnett Farm barnyard we were running out of options with no way to follow. Rather than risk getting stuck in a field with no known exit, hill-topper Field Master Liz King and second flight leader Kip Holloway opted to wait it out. Farmington Beagles Master and former Farmington Hunt MFH Sherry Buttrick, who had caught up on foot together with photographer Cathy Summers, offered invaluable assistance maneuvering off-hinged gates and downed electric wire gaps. Confusion ensued as a herd of nervous mother cows with calves and a bull bellowed displeasure and crowded close. As Matthew made his way through the Carr property towards us it was getting near the time to head back home for the service and breakfast planned to begin at 1:00 pm.

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 A close-up photograph of a dog, possibly a beagle, lying down on a wooden surface.
 

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 A photograph of a large, rustic wooden barn with a gabled roof and several windows.
 

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 A pair of glasses with purple lenses and gold frames, resting on a dark surface.

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 A painting depicting a scene with several horses and dogs in an outdoor setting, possibly a farm or hunting ground.


 A portrait of a woman wearing a blue jacket and a white scarf with yellow accents.
 

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Heading home: (l-r) huntsman Matthew Cook, honorary whippers-in Carolyn Chapman and Deborah Wray / Cathy Summers photo

With hounds successfully gathered and hunting the familiar route toward home, Matthew and the hounds led the way back to Springhaven, following familiar routes that had been so often hunted by his predecessors. I recognized landmarks along the way that brought back happy memories of Carol's active riding years in the '70s and '80s. It was just as she would have wanted: so many people she had shared this land and this sport with over the decades all came back to life as if she were there. This was a ride home she had undoubtedly followed hundreds of times before us. Through the open hay fields we returned, winding along through the hardwood grove behind her barn sending squirrels skittering away through the leaves as we passed the stable yard. Down the farm road, high on the hill, gleaming in the mid day sun rose an enormous white tent with towering peaks like a cathedral. It was a perfect setting for the service and reception that followed the hunt, with hundreds of friends of the Easters who came to pay their respects.

The Reverend Dale Dealtrey conducted a brief service with an opening prayer and a familiar hymn, "For All the Saints," sung by the congregation and accompanied by local country music notable Duke Merrick and his band. Carol's daughter-in-law Page Easter read a wonderful poem by Elizabeth Frye that reminded all of us that Carol's spirit is still with us in the nature and land that surrounds us. Peter, Carol's husband of fifty-six years, delivered a touching eulogy with memories of their life together, reminiscing how they "sold their souls" to settle at Springhaven in the early '60s and raise their family, appreciating her love and care of their three children, and their grandchildren, as well as reminding us of Carol's many hours of community service and civic accomplishments with the Martha Jefferson Hospital, the Virginia Trail Riders Association, and her decades of leadership with the Farmington Hunt.

"[Carol] had so many friends in so many places, and her life touched people in all her areas of interest," he said, "as you can see just by looking around you." He thanked everyone who had helped take such good care of the farm and her horses during the last years of her life that were challenged by illness, especially her close friend and Joint-MFH Joy Crompton and farm manager Santos Lopez, as he looked out on a sea of familiar faces that included her grandchildren and a multitude of family friends who had traveled from near and far to say goodbye.

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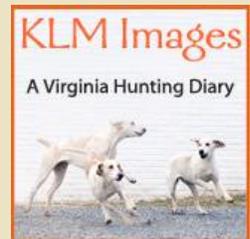
Photo Sessions  
Special Occasions

With a favorite hound "Briar" on a leash sitting obediently at his side, Matthew blew a fitting "Going Home" tribute on his hunting horn. In the silence that echoed, we bowed heads in prayerful respect. Carol's son Doug stepped forward to address the four hundred assembled guests on behalf of his father and sisters Debbie and Brooke, inviting us all to enjoy a hunt breakfast and have a drink inside the warm, welcoming tent. It was just as Carol would have liked it, with all her favorite people remembering her best times in a very special place, her home.

Posted December 31, 2015



Huntsman Matthew Cook and Briar at the service / Elizabeth H. Sutton photo



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