



Albert Poe with the Piedmont hounds in 1961

Foxhunting has been a tradition on the Eastern seaboard for many generations. Since the mid-1900s two of the most famous names in the foxhunting world have been Melvin and Albert Poe. The brothers were born into a family of 10 children in Hume, Virginia—Melvin in 1921 and Albert in 1931. Their childhood was spent working on the family farm where they kept six to eight “multipurpose” hounds. Sunday was the day for fox hunting, as you could not shoot game on the Sabbath. Their father rode his hunter, but they were left to ride the family work horses. Albert says his father would get on his hunter, let the hounds out, move from one hill to another and listen to the hounds run. He knew the way the fox would travel, so he covered only a few miles while Melvin and Albert would end up riding many more miles behind the hounds.

Growing up in the small community of Hume had the greatest influence on their lives. The Poes were related to most

THE BROTHERS POE

by
Jane Porter Fogleman

Melvin (L) and Albert Poe (Photo by Jane Porter Fogleman)





Albert Poe on Mail Order Andy winning the Southern Pines Point to Point in 1990 on the course he built (Photo by Catherine French)

of the people in town and friends with the rest. They rode ponies, bikes, or drove a buggy to get where they had to go. There was a strong sense of community in Hume and great hospitality. Albert fondly remembers an uncle from Warrenton who took him to the race track in Charlestown because he knew Albert loved horse racing. Melvin was in the Army during World War II and had a “good time,” which he attributes to growing up as an outdoorsman and being a Boy Scout. Albert, too young to go off to war, carried on the hunting tradition at home.

When Melvin returned from the war, he heard that Old Dominion Hunt was in need of a huntsman. Melvin had always wanted to hunt the Old Dominion hounds, and many of the hunt’s members were

remount officers stationed near Front Royal. Melvin started hunting with Old Dominion as an apprentice to the huntsman. He credits the whip (the huntsman’s assistant,) Guss Riggs, for teaching him a great deal. Melvin soon took over the pack, and his legendary career began. He hunted the Old Dominion Hounds for 16 years.

In 1962 he and Old Dominion parted ways, and he put his feelers out for a new position. Mrs. Mills of the Orange County Hunt in Middleburg saw his ad in the *Chronicle*, called the master of Orange County and told him, “Go hire that man.” Melvin was hired right away. He was huntsman for the famed Red Ring Neck Orange County Hounds for 30 years. When Melvin retired from the Orange County Hunt in 1992, a celebration was held and

luminaries from all over the hunting world, including the likes of Ben Hardaway and Sen. John Warner attended. At 87 years young, Melvin continues to hunt a pack of hounds on Bath County land owned by George Ohrstrom. He keeps the hounds at his home in Hume and travels three hours to Bath to hunt.

Albert’s career in hunting hounds began to blossom while Melvin was away during World War II. Having accumulated a few hounds from the huntsman at Old Dominion he began breeding his own. On Sundays, the Old Dominion pack and Albert’s hounds would hunt together. When Melvin came back from the war and took over the Old Dominion pack, Albert whipped-in for Melvin on Sundays. Albert had a job in Mr. Hinckley’s stable that

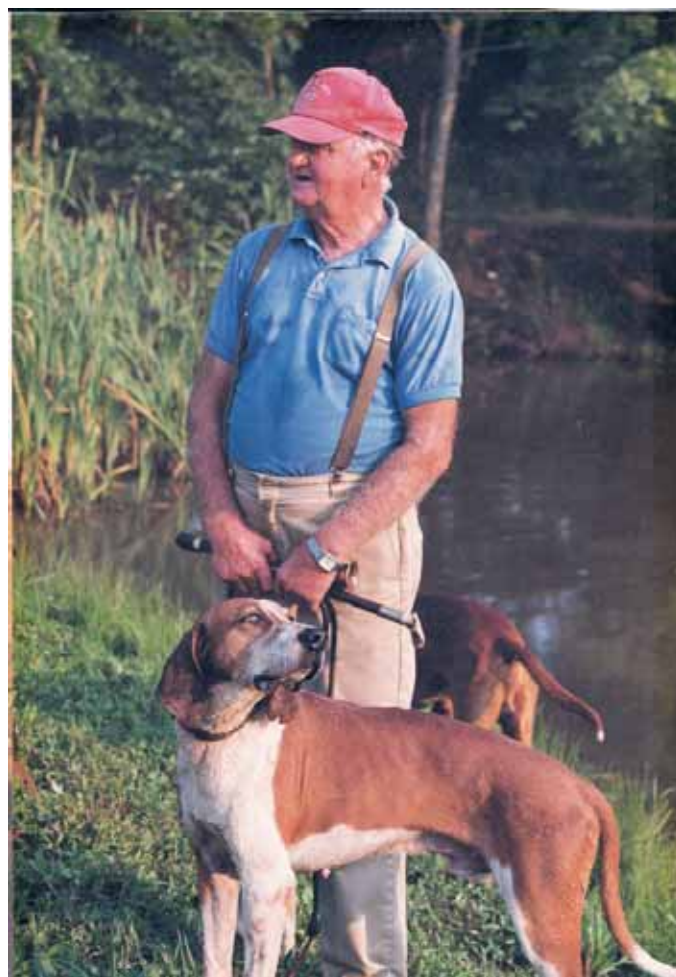
provided hunt horses to Washingtonians. He trained the horses and this reinforced his love of horses, both hunting and racing.

One of Albert's other jobs was artificially inseminating cattle around the area. While on a farm one day, he heard that Piedmont Hunt in Middleburg needed a huntsman, as theirs had been badly injured in a traffic accident. Albert immediately applied and in 1954 Joint Masters Mrs. A.C. Randolph and Mr. Paul Mellon hired Albert as the huntsman. This was a real honor as there were 28 other applicants, but Albert's history of working as whip to a by then-well known Melvin, won him the job. He was, at 23, the youngest professional huntsman in the U.S.

Albert hunted the Piedmont hounds and managed Mrs. Randolph's farm Oaklee until 1972, when he and Mrs. Randolph had a parting of the ways over his increasing interest in horse racing. Experienced and well known fox hunters will tell you that during that time Albert developed and bred the finest and most athletic pack of foxhounds they had ever ridden behind. Retired huntsman Oliver Brown of Rappahannock Hunt says that Albert had good sound theories on pack maintenance and breeding to maintain good hunting lines. Retired huntsman Jake Carle of Keswick Hunt believes that Albert was a purist in pack development. They both regard Albert as the most outstanding breeder of American Foxhounds of our time—incredible praise from men who know their business.

When he left Piedmont, Albert turned his full attention to his already successful race horses. He had won major steeplechase races, such as the Iroquois in Kentucky. He began training, race-riding and outriding at the track. He had great success in racing, but his horses kept getting claimed. He was getting low on race horses, and about this time Randy Rouse of Fairfax offered Albert the huntsman position at Fairfax Hounds. He hunted the Fairfax Hounds for four years, during

Melvin with one of his confirmation winning hounds
(Photo by Janet Hutchings)

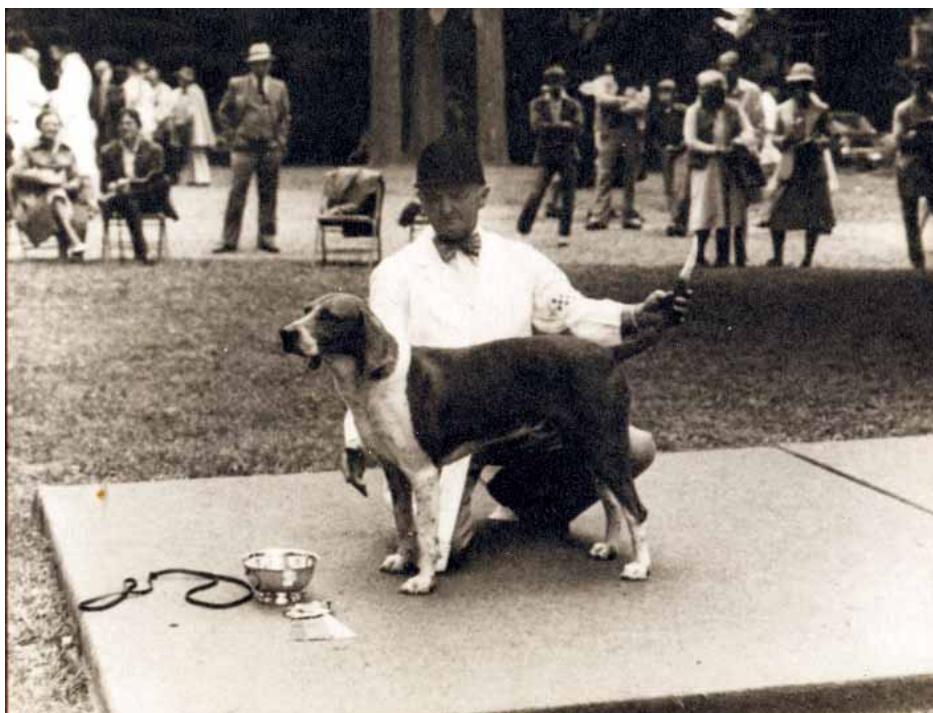


(Below)
Melvin showing an Orange County Hound

which time he started their point-to-point and built the course.

In 1980, after hearing that the Middleburg Hounds huntsman had quit, Albert applied and was hired immediately. He stayed with Middleburg until 1995. At that time he had 35 hounds of his own, 10

horses and 20 cows. He spent his free time raising yearling horses and cows, make hay and, as always, hunting his own pack on Sundays with permission of the landowners in the Middleburg country. Though Albert is now officially retired he rarely misses a point-to-point, steeplechase race, or hound





Birthplace of Melvin and Albert Poe in Hume ,Virginia

show and when hounds go out, he is there listening.

So what makes these two men from Hume, Virginia, literally world famous as huntsmen? They both say it is their longevity, but other houndsmen insist it is their methods of training a good hound. The Poes believe that starting hounds as puppies is important for teaching good fox-hunting skills. Their packs were not separated by sex in the kennels, as both men feel that the dogs and the bitches have to get along when they hunt together. Their experience has taught them that 40 hounds is the number they like for a day of hunting. These men can tell you what those hounds are doing by their voices—running the track, tailing, or just babbling. They both feel that a hound with any faults should not go into the breeding program, and neither is averse to breeding outside of their pack for specific attributes. They would sell or give hounds to other hunts to help enhance their pack. They train their hounds that the “top dog” is the huntsman, otherwise you cannot get them to do what you want them to do. Both

men say that they could take a pack of up to 100 hounds out by themselves and have no problem.

Melvin considers conformation a hound’s most important attribute, and then nose. He kept puppies good enough to show and then worked them into the pack. He was always successful at the hound shows, and one year at Bryn Myr his hounds won every class on the bench and also the pack class. Albert breeds for nose, and his packs have always been known for their speed and their ability to hold the line of the fox scent. Today, neither man misses many of the hound competitions.

The Poe brothers’ legacies as huntsmen are manifold, but Melvin feels that helping develop good landowner relationships was most important. Albert says his legacy is that he helped hunt clubs across the country to develop their packs and their hound-breeding programs. He says, “Anybody can hunt a good pack of hounds, but it takes years to develop a good pack.” Indeed both men’s hound lines can be found in packs all over America.

The brothers have an obvious devotion to one another and the sport they have loved, shared and enhanced for so many years. Today, just as they have for decades, they call each other in the morning to discuss the scenting possibilities for the day. If you have not had the privilege of riding behind either man in the pursuit of the ever-elusive fox, then make it a priority because as Albert warns, “You better hurry; Melvin’s not getting any younger.”

Don’t look now, Albert, but . . .

Jane Porter Fogleman is a lifelong fox-hunter. She was born and raised in Charlottesville and lives there today, where she hunts with Farmington Hunt Club.