

FOCUS

# Hounds, horses and the happy pursuit of scent

BY MANDY MARTIN  
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people assigned to keep the dogs tracked on the main scent rather than bounding after rabbits and other distractions, the group heads off.

First-time or less experienced riders bring up the rear, the better to observe and allow their horses to gain in experience.

With the new club area extending from Newcastle north to Millbrook and east to Kingston, Sunday's riders came from Picton, Millbrook, Bethany, Cramahe Township, Consecon, Stirling and points in between.

"The hunt last from two to three hours," explains Suzanne Dow. "We stop for refreshment part way through and then proceed to the end. Then, a breakfast is served, which is more like a buffet. It's just a great day with really nice people."

The riding is open to all interested, and, even if you don't ride, the social membership is a lot of fun, she notes.

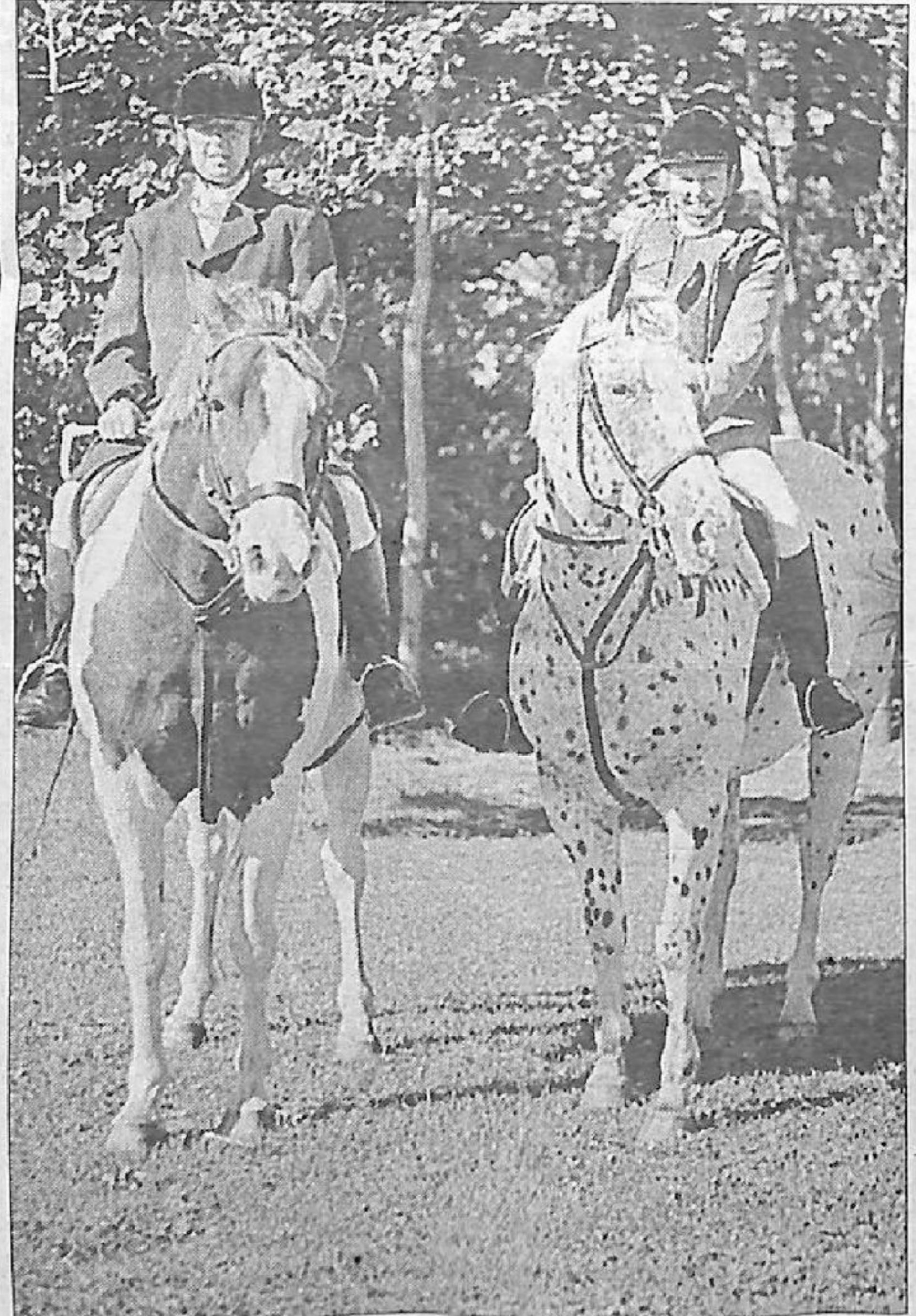
"The annual Hunt Ball is being held October 24 at the Grafton Inn this year. It's a chance to really dress up in formal wear and have an evening out. There are not too many events like that anymore. Anybody can come, can buy tickets."

Suzanne's interest started when her father involved her with the Bethany Hills Club as a young woman, and then at Kingston where she formerly lived. Alex Dow, a farrier by trade, is an avid rider and the couple's young son William, 6, was mounted and riding his pony in last Saturday's event.



LEFT: A "stirrup cup" of sherry is served to all hunt participants before heading out with hounds from the farm of Suzanne and Alex Dow of Cramahe Township.

Photos by Mandy Martin



Gloria and Brigadier-General (retired) Gordon Sellers of Frontenac ready for the first foray of fox hunting for the Bethany Hills and Frontenac Hunt Club in Cramahe Township Sunday morning.

With hounds baying, horses whinnying, hunting horn sounding, south Cramahe Township residents could be forgiven for incredulity as they glimpsed the flash of red-coated riders on the hilltops and in corn fields last Sunday morning. It was, indeed, a Fox Hunt.

Branscombe Road residents Suzanne and Alex Dow hosted the to ready for the first informal fox hunt of the fall riding season of the Bethany Hills-Frontenac Hunt Club last Sunday morning. From 9-10 a.m., trucks towing horse trailers gunned the last steep incline of Branscombe Road to arrive at Branscombe Forge, the home of Suzanne and Alex Dow. As the horses were unloaded, the animals were readied for the ride, the owners transforming themselves into picture-postcard riders resplendent in breeches, boots, jackets and caps.

"We don't chase or hunt a real fox," Suzanne Dow explains. "It's really "drag" hunting. Just before the departure, I go out and drag a scent on properties throughout the area. The scent is a mixture of fox urine, water and glycerine the pack of hounds can pick up and follow."

There is, of course, protocol. Only men can wear the red jackets. They are the "Masters" named by the hunt club's board of directors.

"If you give extra time and effort, above the ordinary, you are then awarded with colours," Mr. Cole explains. "You can wear the red cost and the club colours on your collar."

The Bethany Hills Hunt Club colour was harvest gold, burgundy for the Frontenac Club. With the two groups amalgamating this year, the colour flashes are mixed.

Women must wear a black jacket for the formal hunting events. Otherwise, both men and women are to wear "rat-catcher" jackets - tweeds.

Family membership for the year is \$600, \$350 for adult and \$150 for Junior rider.

"It's quite a good deal. You can go out twice a week during the spring and fall, plus the annual Hunt Ball every year," notes Suzanne. "There are also social members. For \$50 a year, after every hunt, there's a breakfast which is often a real feast, and a potluck event other times. There's always a "stirrup" cup before leaving. You can just come and enjoy the day."

All the membership funds go to cover the cost of maintaining the 30 English Fox Hounds which accompany the riders on their cross-country treks.

"We keep the hounds in a former dairy barn," Master of the Hounds Ralph Cole of Millbrook explains. The hounds, anxious to be off for a run, a yelping from the pen on the back of the transport truck.

"Every one of them has a name. They're trained to come to the different sounds of the horn I blow during the hunt."

Ralph and Elaine Cole have raised and maintained the hounds for close to 40 years now.

"I love it," Huntsman Cole says.

The club hosts hunts twice weekly, Wednesdays and Sundays late September through November and again in the spring. Before each hunt, the group gathers to hear messages from the Hunt Master leading the charge - and to quaff sherry served by helpers to the mounted riders. Thus fortified, the group moved off to await the release of the hounds - 30 baying, excited and eager canines, noses to the ground, circling the Hunt Master. With several blasts from the hunting horn, and help from "the whippers",



Baying and bounding, the 30 English Fox Hounds of the Bethany Hills and Frotenanc Hunt Club lead hunt club members on the scent (real foxes are safe) laid to mark the route of the first informal hunt ride of the fall season Sunday morning.