



## Nancy Penn Smith Hannum, MFH

On Tuesday, March 30, Nan Hannum died after a short illness. Some might say that her passing marks the end of an era, but that is not the case. The successes of her incredible efforts as Master for 50 years of Mr. Stewart's Cheshire Foxhounds to preserve open space in Chester County have given us an awesome legacy. The protecting of the King Ranch property and the creation of the Lenfest Preserve which became the even larger Cheslen are the jewels in the crown of the Cheshire's hunt country. Her passionate efforts over the years inspired friends and family and the hunt, and have given conservation groups a core to build on that has made it easier to convince others of the value of the land and the quality of life it gives to a community.

### *Hounds, Horses and Horn*

Nancy Penn Smith Hannum was rarely away from her home. Her working days began and ended in the Cheshire kennels where she supervised the breeding and raising of some of the finest English hounds ever to provide sport in this country. For decades, their performances in the field and at hound shows set a high standard. The training regime she put the hounds through made them a remarkable, responsive pack. By five in the morning, no matter what the weather, she was always in the kennels. The hounds knew her well, and learned to respond to her commands and her hunting horn as they trained, the new entry early-on coupled to older, more experienced hounds.

While others might follow the hounds on horseback to, as she often put it, "shake up their livers," foxhunting was indeed Nancy Hannum's career. Her focus in working the hounds as they followed the scent was so intense that she was as close to understanding how they worked as any

human might— and was almost completely unaware of the vagaries of the mounted followers out for a day of sport. Occasionally, at the end of the day, she would hear of a rider coming to grief over a fence or into a brook, oblivious of the event when it happened.

In much the same way that her stepfather worked to establish the hunting country, Mrs. Hannum often bought properties as they came on the market. Then she searched for buyers who supported the idea of hounds and horses riding through and, perhaps, wanted to actively participate. An important facet of her informal preservation activity involved the local (non-foxhunting) farmers, for she has worked hard over the years to create good relationships with them. Some of these are Century Farms, land farmed by the same family for over a hundred years.

Nancy Hannum's career path was no less demanding than the diligent lawyer, or the stockbroker upon whose judgment fortunes rise and fall. The hours were long, emergencies more the rule than the exception, and like the postman, weather rarely held her back. She expected no less of herself than of the families she encouraged to move to the rolling hills and valleys of the Cheshire Hunt Country. Even when the accumulation of injuries brought her days on horseback to a close, she planned each day's hunting and followed in her battered blue Jeep, over hill and dale. Her abiding sorrow was that the Jeep could not be taught to jump.

In her eighties in retirement she was still in demand as a speaker about the history of foxhunting and the training of hounds. In relation to the broader community, she served for many years as a member of the Chester County Park Board and West Chester University's library board. Her determination and strong opinions have often launched her into controversy. It was not possible to fault her passion for that in which she believed. In 2002, she received a lifetime award from the prestigious Bryn Mawr Hound Show.

The very fact that the hunting country was there – open, beautiful, unspoiled – up to the time when it became possible to permanently preserve it through conservation easements, and that the community cared enough to want to participate in the saving process is a remarkable statement. Today, the land that Nancy Hannum knew and cherished deeply still echoes to the cry of hounds. The water that flows from faucets in Wilmington, the fish that the angler catches in the Brandywine Creek, the bald eagle on the old dead tree overlooking the Buck & Doe Valley would not be the healthy resources they are without these protected, rolling hills and stream valleys.

Land does not stand alone in beauty. It is a resource to use wisely or foolishly, and Nancy Hannum helped preserve its value in perpetuity.

—Nancy Mohr, President, Chester County 20/20