

"A Brief History of the Westminster Riding Club"
Carroll County Times article for 5 December 1999
By Jay A. Graybeal

Horses have played an important role in local life since the settlement period in the Eighteenth Century. Settlers and later residents used horses for personal and wheeled transportation, agrarian pursuits and for sport. Westminster has had racetracks in different parts of town and racing was done informally on farms and in communities throughout the county. One of the greatest horse trainers in American history, Robert W. Walden, established "Bowling Brook Farm" near Middleburg in the 1870s.

During the early twentieth century, automobiles, tractors and trucks replaced most horse drawn vehicles and horse lovers turned to more recreational pursuits. Strong interest led to the founding of the Westminster Riding Club in 1935. The Historical Society's collection contains a brief history of the club written by Ann S. Reifsnider in 1940:

"Someone has written that 'Horse sense and common sense are synonymous terms, and that the man who treats his horse as he would treat human beings will seldom be amiss in his judgement. Horse tact is that rare quality that enables a horseman instantly to put himself on the best of terms with whatever horse he may bestride. Both of which may be acquired with study and experience by one who has a love of horses.' In view of the truth of this statement, a group of horse lovers under the guidance of Mrs. John L. Bennett and the writer, organized the Westminster Riding Club on March 14th, 1935. This group of horse lovers make up the Charter membership list of the Riding Club and they are, as follows: the two aforementioned persons, F. Kale Mathias, Eleanor C. Babylon, John L. Reifsnider, Jr., Joseph L. Mathias, Sr., Dr. Charles H. Kable, George R. Mitchell, Ralph S. Reifsnider, Catherine Baumgartner, Mrs. Paul M. Wimert, Albin N. Duvall, Sidney Hausman, and Bruce T. Blair.

The strides and paces of the Riding Club have been those of extreme activity and success, in that since its organization, it has held six successful horse shows which have brought beautiful horseflesh from the states of Virginia, Pennsylvania, Delaware, the District of Columbia, and other states as well as our own state of Maryland. Besides our annual shows which are always held, as a matter of tradition, on the second Saturday in August, we have held three Carroll County Horse Shows and on May 13, 1939, we very proudly opened the doors of our lovely Club House. Mr. Frank Myers, the Mayor of Westminster, dedicated the building which stands like a monarch on the hill overlooking Westminster and surrounding Country. A view that is, indeed, unsurpassable.

The Club House has been the scene of many lovely and well attended dances since its opening last year, 1939. Nothing but the best can be said about any of the social functions held by our Club and we are happy to welcome any of our friends at any time. The members are extremely interested in the welfare of the community and county and are ever-ready to do their share.

The Westminster Riding Club is a charter member of the Horse Show Association of Maryland and both the President, Mrs. Bennett, and the writer serve on the Executive Board of that organization.

The present officers of the Westminster Riding Club are the following: President - Mrs. John L. Bennett; Vice-President Raymond L. Benson; Treasurer - Roger T. Brown; Recording Secretary - Mrs. Paul M. Wimert; Corresponding Secretary - Eleanor C. Babylon; Horse Show Secretary and Historian - Ann S. Reifsnider. These together with the following compose the Executive Board of the Westminster Riding

Club; Dr. Charles H. Kable; Carroll L. Crawford; Ralph S. Reifsnider; Stanford Hoff; Robert K. Billingslea and Joseph L. Mathias, Sr.

I would like to close this article with my favorite quotation -- that of James Whitcomb Riley -- and one which in my humble opinion is a very fitting ending--"I love the horse from hoof to head; From hoof to head and tail to mane; I love the horse as I have said, From Head to hoof and back again."

This year the Historical Society held its annual dinner in the Club House, built in the same year the Society was founded. And although the Riding Club no longer sponsors horse shows, equine ownership and events remain popular in the county.

Photo caption: Mr. and Mrs. John L. Reifsnider posed in c.1890 with horses, donkey and a goat at the family home, Terrace Hill, located at the intersection of W. Main Street and Uniontown Road, Westminster. Their granddaughter Ann wrote a history of the Westminster Riding Club in 1940. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of Ann S. Reifsnider.