

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society

Charles Samways – Renowned Huntsman

Charles Samways was instrumental to the success of the Camargo Hunt in Indian Hill. Both his diligence and the commitment of leading local businessmen and dedicated fox hunters (and their families) assured that the Hunt became an organization with rich traditions during the early twentieth century.

Samways was born in 1889 in Great Britain, and his father was kennelman to King Edward VII. He lived in Windsor Castle Park and attended cricket games played by the Duke of Windsor and George VI. During World War I, he served in the Mesopotamian Expedition and then in India. After the war, he moved to America, residing for some time in New York and then Maryland.

Julius Fleischman hired Samways to be the second huntsman for the Camargo Hunt in 1929, the year after the Masters of Foxhounds Association of America recognized the group. To meet the requirements, the Camargo Hunt had to pass a rigorous inspection, have suitable kennels, pedigreed hounds, and a top-notch huntsman. Charles Samways was such a man.

The job of professional huntsman for a prestigious foxhunt requires a vast amount of knowledge and experience. It is much more than controlling and directing the pack of hounds on hunting days. The huntsman decides the general plan for each day's hunt. Camargo, in those early decades, hunted on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays from September through April. The huntsman is the only one to use the horn. Excellent horsemanship is required to blow the proper signals on the horn while galloping over land with unexpected hazards. Also, the huntsman is responsible for the welfare of the hounds and the cleanliness of the kennels.

At his 1600-acre Winding Creek Farm, Mr. Fleischmann built the Camargo Kennels and cottages for the residential staff. Samways and his wife lived at the Huntsman's Cottage on Spooky Hollow Road. His duties included maintaining the health, hygiene, exercise, and training for the dogs, as well as feeding and breeding them. Other professionals assisted Samways with these activities. The Camargo pack was fed a diet based on flesh, consistent with traditions established in England. The huntsman supervised the boiling of the flesh (cattle, horses, and sheep) and added oatmeal, barley, vegetables, and sometimes oil to the pudding like broth.

The Camargo hounds originally were English bred, but later became a half-bred pack, with the crossbreeding of English and Welsh hounds. Later Kentucky and Virginia hounds were introduced to the line. Hounds were bred for stamina and scenting ability. The handling of the hounds was a year-round, day in day out occupation. The pack was taken out for exercise and training walks three times daily, which established a rapport and kept them fit.

A native Brit, Samways had to adapt to the American style of foxhunting. Some Indian Hill landowners installed fences to mark property lines, and some of these were barbed wire, which were dangerous. The terrain was rugged, and interspersed with ravines, rocks, and other obstacles. Over time, the Camargo Hunt members, their grooms, and Hunt staff devised jumps over fences, installed gates, and established trails through the Village. These improvements benefitted horses and riders alike.

Charles Samways was admired and dedicated. Recalling him, the late Dr. John Wulsin stated, "Charles Samways... was a short bandy-legged Englishman with a beautiful bell-like baritone. When he called in hounds at a check, his voice rose to a plaintive, tender peal that carried over field and down to the hollow and then faded to a beckoning, almost mournful call. It lured hound and human alike back to the comfort of the huntsman. He seemed to be singing, 'cum, cummy, cum, cum, cum', and they came."

Samways retired in 1958 after 29 years of "providing the sport" for the Camargo Hunt. He and his wife moved to Florida. Not only did he build a bond with his hounds and train them to work together as a pack, he was venerated by Hunt members. He was part of a closely knit group that bettered the sport and continues to make an impact in Indian Hill today.

