

## Mary Helen Jessup Recalls Colthurst History

When Mary Helen and Jimmie Jessup took a Sunday drive along Barracks Road in the early 1960's to inspect property recently offered for sale at Colthurst Farm, they knew they had found the right spot. Not only did this wonderfully varied and rolling land offer spectacular views of the Blue Ridge Mountains and surrounding Countryside, but it was also convenient to the center of Charlottesville and rich in local history. The Jessups recognized the land's value and purchased the lots they were to build on.

The Colthurst Farm on the 1990's has a history going back to the pre-revolutionary times, when Michael Holland of Hanover received a grant from King George II of England of "4,753 acres lying on both side of Ivy Creek". These lands included the later sites of Farmington Country Club, Birdwood, St. Anne's-Belfield School, and a number of large farms. In 1758 Mr. Holland deeded his entire holding to Francis Jerdone of Louisa. Jerdone built the pre-revolutionary wing of Farmington.

Because of Jerdone's sympathies the Revolutionary government confiscated all his lands in 1779. An adjustment was reached in 1785, however, and the land was sold to George Divers of Philadelphia. It was under Divers' ownership that, in 1803, Thomas Jefferson drew up plans for the octagonal room that today remains a focal point of the original Farmington house.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the lands comprising the original grant were divided and sold to various purchasers, among the most prominent of which was the Garth family, which at one point owned all the land along Garth Road up to "The Barracks", one of the Garth houses. This farmland became renowned for horse breeding, training and hunting: "Inglecress", with its huge barn and training tracks, and "Ingleside", the famous Billy Garth stud farm, were two of the most well known Garth properties.

Adjoining "Ingleside" was a working farm acquired from one of the Garth by an Englishman, the Hon. William B. Colthurst. IN the early 1940's this farm was sold to two local sportsmen, M. A. Cushman and William Garth Jones. In 1957 the farm was sold again to Nicholas R. Dupont, Robert Sherwin and Peter D. Furness of Wilmington, Delaware, who planned to develop the 131 acre farm into a residential community. They employed the Charlottesville engineer, O. Robbins Randolph to design water facilities and a road system to serve up to 60 house sites, from one to three and a half acre. William T. Stevens of Steven & Company collaborated in the drawing up of the protective covenants, and the firm was designated as sales agent for the sites.

Two and a half miles of winding roads were built to take advantage of the rolling terrain, and the street names chosen to evoke an image of the surrounding hunt country: Falcon Drive is named for the wooded slopes of Mt. Falcon (formerly Stillhouse Mountain) that runs along the eastern section of Colthurst; the names "Reynard", "Tally Ho", and "Cavalier" names whimsically evoke an image of the surrounding hunt country.

The Jessups initially purchased and lived in the spec house that had been built at 103 Tally Ho Drive as well as the site of the original farmhouse, now 201 Colthurst Drive, where they subsequently built their home. The clumps of daffodils which still spring up each season in the adjacent meadow mark the route of the original drive, and Mary Helen still finds remains of crockery at the site of an old ice pit on the property.

It was not long after the Jessups had purchased this house and surrounding lands that the DuPont group, because of other pressing financial commitments, offered all of the Colthurst Farm for pressing financial commitments, offered all of the Colthurst Farm for sale. It was then that Mary Helen and Jimmie, seeing the need to guide the future development of Colthurst, made an offer and bought the property.

Jimmie Jessup was a native of Charlottesville. In 1908 his family had founded the local bottling plant for Pepsi Cola, a business which today is the oldest family owned franchise in the country. Mary Helen grew up in southwest Virginia, and shared Jimmie's love and respect for the area's natural landscape and wildlife.

### **Mary Helen Jessup recalls Colthurst history -Cont.**

As the new owners of Colthurst, the Jessups began where the engineers had left off. They handled all the initial site sales themselves, and Jim kept the meadows mowed. During this time, with the land as yet unoccupied, the Farmington Hunt still proceeded through Colthurst – outward after the foxes, and then back. Mary Helen recalls retrieving many a hound which, during the chase, would take off after a deer instead of a fox.

As Colthurst has developed during the past 30 years, the fox hunters have shifted their courses to the west, and its landscape has filled in with houses, maturing trees and mowed lawns. Mary Helen notes a change in the wildlife here because of this. Where in the early days there were numerous skunks, possums, meadowlarks, whippoorwills and quail, there are now many fewer of none of these, but rather increasing numbers of “feeder and lawn friendly” birds – chickadees, cardinals, bluejays, titmice, robins, mockingbirds, and the hawks that prey on them.

Mary Helen, in addition to her continuing interest and encouragement of our local wildlife, has, for the past twenty years, specialized in the raising of Old English Sheepdogs and Tibetan Terriers. Her two dogs, Tux and Carly, now affectionately patrol her property.

Music has been another of Mary Helen’s lifelong interests. As a student she was trained as a soprano, and sang for many years in the choir at the Westminster Presbyterian Church. The piano in her living room attests to her love for the keyboard. She modestly claims to play “for family only”.

For all these years Colthurst has been Mary Helen’s love. “We didn’t want to live anywhere else”, she says. It was indeed the perfect setting in which to raise a family and to pursue a very full life.

I asked Mary Helen if bringing the hunters back, with their calls of “Tally Ho!” as they galloped across our lawns, would help to ameliorate our current “deer problem”. She and I both agreed to leave that question a moot point.