

*A house is built.  
A family is created and  
it prospers. There are  
children, marriages,  
deaths, more children,  
and more deaths.  
The graveyard  
fills. While people  
do not last forever,  
miraculously, through  
many generations of  
stewards, the house  
still stands strong...*

# *Preserving* THE MEADOWS

Marion Poynter's Fauquier horse farm, whose origins date back to a land grant from The Crown, is thriving — and now saved for another generation.  
*By Greg Huddleston*



# The lives of houses,

like the lives of people, often unfold in chapters, one chapter following another through the years of narrative making up history. This is the story — a very few chapters, really — of Marion Poynter and her farm, The Meadows, about five minutes from Warrenton in Fauquier County.

The Meadows in earlier, less pristine, condition.



Poynter recently placed The Meadows and its nearly 50 acres, part of an original land grant from The Crown, in conservation easement with the Piedmont Environmental Council, an organization she is quick to praise. “I can’t say enough about the folks there,” Poynter says. “They were so professional, working hard to make everything so easy.”

Located in the Warrenton Cedar Run watershed, and laying claim to playing a significant role in the history of Fauquier, The Meadows will now be protected from future development, a move that Poynter credits to the persuasive powers of local preservationist Hope Porter.

All stories have to begin somewhere, and according to an article by Louise Evans who wrote as the “Old Timer” in the *Fauquier Democrat* in 1953, The Meadows began with an old frame house built prior to 1800. Re-

PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
*Dennis Brack*



cords indicate that at one time the house was owned by Joseph Blackwell, the first sheriff of Fauquier County who died in 1737. There is no record that he actually lived there, however. The next owner of the farm was his son, Major Joseph Blackwell, who moved into the house around 1800 living there until his death in 1826.

Major Joseph’s son, James, followed. He gave a plot of land nearby for the Bethel Academy that included a little chapel. At first a “free church” according to Evans, it ultimately became Methodist in 1836 and remains the Bethel United Methodist Church today.

“One cannot discuss The Meadows without speaking of Bethel, since the two evolve almost as a unit. Bethel Academy is less than a ‘dog bark’ from the homestead and is built

on a part of The Meadows received by Elizabeth, the eldest daughter of James. She and her husband Major Albert Smith lived at The

Meadows during the early days of construction [of the academy]. The incredible energy and spirit of Major A. G., as the Bethel boys called him, and his wife in building a truly fine school while owning little more than the clothes they wore, make them among the great characters of Virginia. . . .The little church was used as the cadet chapel. . . .” (from early records).

In 1935, James’ daughter Lucy inherited the property from her mother, and she and her husband Alexander Fontaine Rose bought out the other heirs and began the long process of restoring the residence.

The original structure, its exterior covered in clapboard, had two large rooms and was, in the words of an early Blackwell writer, “never intended to be a showplace.” The house was constructed to last with beams shaped by hand with an ax, shingles attached individually with hand-hammered nails, floorboards and paneling of red Georgia pine, each hand-planed to conform to any unevenness of supporting joists. All framing was done

*The house was constructed to last with beams shaped by hand with an ax, shingles attached individually with hand-hammered nails.*





with mortise and tenon joinery — throughout, the sort of hand-crafted construction seldom seen today. In the mid-1800s, a stone extension was added. It housed two very large rooms including what is now the living room.

A tour of The Meadows should include a visit to the family graveyard on the property where more than 100 members of the Blackwell family are buried. While a few graves have proper headstones carved with name and dates, most are marked with small slabs of uncut and un-engraved sandstone leaving the visitor to wonder whose remains rest underfoot.

In 1984, Marion Poynter purchased The Meadows. After graduation from Vassar,



**“I went to St. Petersburg to write editorials, but ended up marrying the boss, so they had to fire me,” Poynter says. Her journalism career included a stint at Henry Luce’s Time Inc. during its golden era.**

Poynter had worked in journalism in New York City and later in government in Washington, D.C.. In her self-described “salad

days,” she was employed at Time Inc., led by Henry Luce. She seems to view her work at Time as interesting and great fun. “You would get on the elevator never knowing what well-known person or celebrity might be sharing the ride with you,” she says. “And what a place for parties! Everything was celebrated — comings and goings, of course, as well as weddings, births, whatever. Always a party!”

Her job in the photo library brought her in contact with many well-known photo-journalists, including Alfred Eisenstaedt and Margaret Bourke-White. Eventually, following work in government, she headed to Florida where she was hired by Nelson Poynter, the founder of *Congressional Quarterly* and



Clockwise from top, the garden, old corn crib, the back patio, and pool.

*A tour of The Meadows should include a visit to the family graveyard on the property where more than 100 members of the Blackwell family are buried.*



## Horses from the House of Hanover



Over the years and under the guidance of Maxine Mickel, Marefield Meadows has built a solid reputation as a first-class breeder of Hanoverians.

The English kings of the House of Hanover had an important influence on the development of Hanoverians. Their intent was to breed an all-purpose

horse, one that could pull a plow or carriage, or carry a rider over field, fence, or stream. Classified as warm-blooded horses, Hanoverians aren't as large and sturdy as draft horses (known as cold-bloods) nor as low to the ground and as fast as the hot-blooded thoroughbred so familiar to racing enthusiasts throughout the Piedmont. Not actually a breed but a registry, the Hanoverians were further developed and nurtured by German breeders, farmers who enjoy the horses as "a passionate hobby" in Poynter's words, and explore all sorts of ways to have fun with them often teaching them the precise Spanish Walk and other ways to show them off at local fairs

and festivals in Germany. As testimony to the success of the breeding program at Marefield Meadows, their horse Dauphin is the first U. S. Hanoverian to ever stand for stud in Germany.

Excelling at dressage and as jumpers, Hanoverians are frequently seen in competition. In fact, Lars Petersen, the Olympian, Grand Prix dressage rider and trainer from Denmark, will be riding Rohannah from Marefield Meadows in the upcoming Olympics in Rio, a source of excitement and pride for Poynter and Mickel. They were also justifiably pleased when the U. S. Equestrian Federation named Marefield Meadows the Leading Breeder for Dressage for 2012. —G.H.

the owner and publisher of the *St. Petersburg Times* (now the *Tampa Bay Times*). "I went to St. Petersburg to write editorials, but ended up marrying the boss (in 1970), so they had to fire me," she says.

Having seen too many examples of newspapers failing because of family disagreements, Nelson Poynter was adamant about not hiring family members to help run his newspaper.

In 1975, Nelson Poynter established the Modern Media Institute in St. Petersburg. When he died in 1978, his will determined that the Institute would own controlling shares of the St. Petersburg Times Company.

In the years following his death, Marion served on its board, and in this capac-

ity played a key role in working to insure the future of the Institute. She supported changing the name to The Poynter Institute to honor her husband's life work and principles, something his modesty would have prevented. "Nelson was a true genius," she says. "He could put things together in a way no one else could." Smiling, she recalls that

"he would often jokingly say, 'I'm never wrong, only premature.'" Today, the Poynter Institute ([www.poynter.org](http://www.poynter.org)) remains a major force in journalism and media studies.

When Nelson Poynter died, Marion decided not to retain her home in Florida. She lived part-time in a townhouse on Capitol Hill, but, like many of us "come-heres," she wanted an escape from the city and was look-



Nelson Poynter



The stables at Marefield Meadows.

ing for a place in the Virginia countryside.

A realtor showed her three properties in the Marshall area as well as The Meadows. Recognizing the potential of The Meadows, Poynter purchased the farm. The former owners had enlisted Warrenton architect Albert Hinckley to re-design and more properly marry the main existing structures, so she hired Hinckley to add a pergola across the back of the house.

Guests enter the home to a spacious foyer in what is the oldest section. To the left is the living room, a large space that, with the grand piano in one corner, has at times eas-

ily accommodated more than 75 people for house concerts. The large dining room is on a lower level from the living room and leads to the kitchen, a comfortably warm space at the back with dining offering views of the grounds. "There are actually five levels," says Poynter, acknowledging that there are lots of stairs to negotiate.

Barry Starke of Earth Design Associates,

Inc. worked to bring harmony to the landscape defining three distinct levels beginning with an existing ha-ha. The new plan included a lawn for games, a pool, and gardens. The pool is adjacent to what was in early days a corncrib in the vernacular architecture of the farms of the region. Retaining the original gray siding, Hinckley re-purposed the structure as a marvelous pool house offer-

ing changing stalls, a banquette for al fresco meals, and a place to shelter in storms. The views from this lookout are of the pond and lush countryside of the farm.

While it may never have been intended to be a showplace, The Meadows, its house, and grounds, is today one of the most beautifully restored properties in a region known for great houses and estates. There is, however,

*Like many of us "come-heres," Poynter wanted an escape from the city and was looking for a place in the Virginia countryside.*





Looking toward the main house at The Meadows.

nothing pretentious or showy here — just a beautiful and comfortable home in lovely surroundings. And some horses.

Shortly after purchasing The Meadows, Poynter, along with Maxine Mickel, began Marefield Meadows, Inc. as a breeding farm for Hanoverian horses. Their decision to go with Hanoverians was influenced by several factors. “The Hanoverian registry has more than 200 years of records,” says Poynter. “We also knew that the Hanoverian registry was the dominant registry of the warm-bloods and that the American Hanoverian Society was one of the best organizations,” added Mickel.

Borrowing a title from her journalism days, Poynter refers to Mickel as her “managing editor.”

The horses are bred at The Meadows under Mickel’s supervision but are actually trained elsewhere, mainly at a facility in Orange. “Training the horses is a highly specialized art requiring specialized skills, so we don’t do that here,” says Poynter. The Meadows is home to 23 horses; however, counting the ones being trained in Orange and the 15 currently in Germany for training, there are 70 horses now a part of the Marefield family.

The Hanoverians of Marefield Meadows have won many ribbons and trophies since the business was begun, but there is no trophy room at The Meadows. “We just don’t have enough space to keep the ribbons, so we donate them to youth equestrian organizations that are able to recycle them,” says Poynter. When you know you’ve done a good job, you don’t need reminders.

To learn more visit [www.marefield.com](http://www.marefield.com).

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