

# The Majestic Trees of the Upperville Colt and Horse Show

*Witnesses to History*

By Jane Thery

By the mid-1700s, the grove of trees that would become the horse show grounds were resplendent with black gums that can live 400 years and classic white oaks that can live 200-300 years.

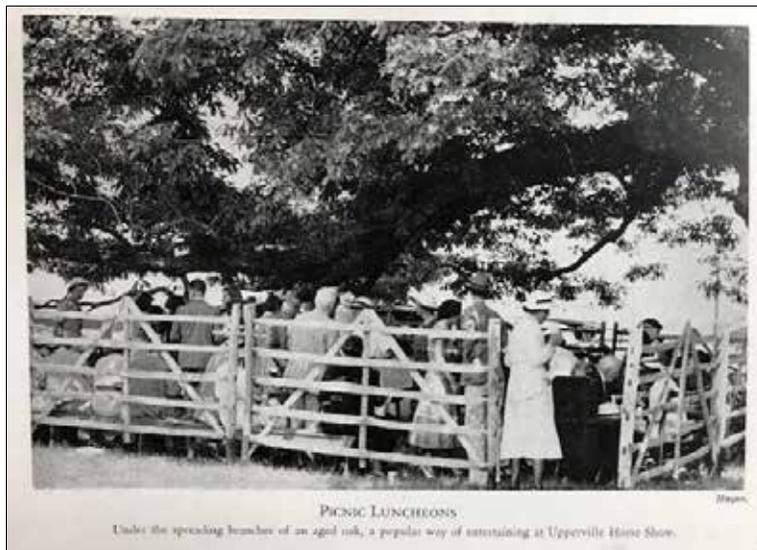
In 1773, a little acorn dropped into the fertile soil of the grove. The white oak that sprouted stood for over two centuries in what became the main hunter ring, as a witness to the history of the Upperville Horse and Colt Show.

In 1820, Richard Henry Dulany was born in Unison, Virginia, ten miles from Upperville. His father had purchased the property that included the grove of trees and extensive acreage along the road. Dulany learned the family business of managing a

plantation, and developed a keen appreciation for a good horse.

Dulany had come to the conclusion that the average horse in the region was not well-suited for either good farm work, transportation or the thrilling sport of fox hunting. He also worried about the general care of horses, a sentiment that was galvanized when he came upon and freed a colt stuck in a wire fence, half frozen and in poor condition.

In 1853, two friends of Dulany's had a dispute over which had the better colt. As a recognized judge of quality horses, he was asked to choose the better colt. So began his efforts to organize a small breed show with judging of conformation and overall condition to help establish a higher standard in the local horse population. The neighboring gentry embraced the idea



enthusiastically as a celebration of the horse and a festive summer occasion. Dulany wanted the best of prizes so he traveled to New York City to meet with Charles Lewis Tiffany and discuss silver cups as show trophies. Tiffany loved the idea and donated the original trophies.

Dulany needed a shaded and accessible place to hold the show. The grove of trees on his father's farm provided the perfect venue. A crowd of over one hundred

came to watch the show under the trees. The festive character of the Upperville Colt and Horse Show began at its inception.

The show's focus was breeding. Dulany wanted to promote a better work horse and a better sport horse. The breed show under the trees was held each year in June and succeeded in raising the standard of equine conformation and care as well as establishing a must-attend social

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**Trees.....from p. 17**  
 event. Our white oak tree saw the first eight years of the show at its age of eighty to eighty-seven. During these show days, the trees roots were trampled, their trunks held horse ropes and their thick leaves were admired. The rest of the year was quiet and peaceful.

This peace was short-lived as the Civil War swept through Virginia. Dulany joined the Confederate army and rose to the rank of Colonel. Farms were raided and crops destroyed. Horses were commandeered for cavalry for mounted soldiers and to pull wagons and cannon. Many died.

The Show was not held from 1861 to 1869 but in 1863, at the white oak's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, the Emancipation Proclamation was signed.

In 1870, the horse show resumed and continued for the next 36 years under the watchful eye of Colonel Dulany. It was a prestigious, premier show with the highest standards of judging. Its social importance grew -- carriages arrived, parties and picnics were held at the horse show. Certain spots under the

trees spreading branches were reserved for elaborate luncheons. Performance classes joined the breed classes in 1902, adding excitement and new sport. In 1906, Colonel Dulany passed away. The white oak reached its 133<sup>rd</sup> year.

The turn of the century and the introduction of cars and mechanized farm machinery altered the role of horses in the community forever. Their importance shifted from work animals to sport and recreation. The show evolved with this change and added classes for sidesaddle, hunter classes on the flat and over hunter courses, with horses jumping out of the ring and around natural fences on the show grounds. Spectators arrived in cars from farther way, and riders and horses traveled to participate, adding value to their mounts for having been shown at Upperville.

In 1917 and 1918 the show was suspended for the First World War. When it resumed, women rode in classes for the first time and, in 1920, they got the right to vote. The white oak tree celebrated its 147<sup>th</sup> year.

The Second World War halted



the show from 1942 to 1945. In 1946, when the horses gathered again under the trees, the white oak was 173 years old and had lived through the Revolutionary War, the Civil War and both World Wars.

During the second half of the 1900s, the show added more performance classes and, in a major change, began to hold jumper classes. The white oak saw one more war – Vietnam – as it reached its 202<sup>nd</sup> year.

In 2008, the white oak died. It had sprouted before the United

States became a nation had stood quietly as history marched below its spreading branches.

Today, the Upperville Colt and Horse Show is as vibrant as ever. A tree committee oversees care of the older trees and carefully plans the addition of new trees the show grounds.

And for the future? The trees of the Upperville Colt and Horse Show are in good hands. The future looks both bright and well-shaded! And new and ancient trees will mark the passage of time over the centuries to come.

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