



Thanksgiving Meet - Horses, Hounds and Foxes Before Turkey - A Countryside Tradition

Posted on November 15, 2025

Views: 11,148



President George Washington proclaimed Nov. 26, 1789, the last Thursday of November that year, to be a “day of public thanksgiving.”

What is known as the “Gentry”, in New Jersey they held fox hunts on Thanksgiving Day. Fox hunts were not exclusive to the holiday — the horses and hounds trained all year long, and fox hunting was very much a fall sport. In Montclair, the Hunt Club had to pay property owners for any damage the horses and hounds did to their property.



Thanksgiving Meet – Horses, Hounds and Foxes Before Turkey – A Countryside Tradition



The Essex Fox Hounds hunt at Fro Heim on Thanksgiving day in 1910. The following can be identified in the photograph: Mc Alpen Pyle, Ogden Hammond, C. Nicoll, M. Kellogg, George Messeny, C. Thenot, Ken B. Schley, and Richard Stevens, among others. (Masters of the Essex Fox Hounds.)

The First Essex Fox Hounds hunt in the Somerset Hills – The Fro-Heim estate of Grand Schley. The property is currently owned by the Far Hills Race Meeting Association of Far Hills, New Jersey and the current site of the Far Hills Race Meeting.

It was practical to wait until after the harvest to “run the hounds” so there wouldn’t be any damage to crops. Just before the hunt started the riders and hounds would go to a point about a mile away from the fox’s cage, where they would be given the scent, taken from the fox’s paws.

Before the Turkey, you have to go stroll in the New Jersey countryside to the Essex Fox Hounds annual Thanksgiving Day Meet.

We saw the post on Instagram from Turpin Realtors last night reminding me of the story that was written by the late Jack Turpin on an event that has been going on for over a century. Back in 1910 – Charles Pfizer and his wife Nana E. purchased the John S. Miller farm, a 128-acre farm and Miller house, just off Holland Road near Vlietown, in Peapack, New Jersey. The farm had once been owned by John Honeyman, the grandson of John Honeyman, a noted spy for General Washington during the Revolutionary War. FYI, Honeyman also had another farm on Long Lane in Bedminster.

Many don’t know that Peapack was once part of Bedminster. Every year since, the annual Thanksgiving morning event has happened near what is now the home to the Essex Fox Hounds. That same year, Charles Pfizer and Ken Schley brought out the hounds for their first event in the new location – The Somerset Hills.



Ellistan Estate and the Essex Fox Hounds Thanksgiving Meet



Held every year since 1910, the Thanksgiving Meet is a holiday tradition that has been held at various properties over the years at places like Hamilton Farm, Burnt Mills Road, Holland Road. Since around 1931, the event has been hosted at the Ellistan Estate near the EFH clubhouse up the road in Peapack.



Thanksgiving Meet – Horses, Hounds and Foxes Before Turkey – A Countryside Tradition

Take Holland Road to Fowler Road, it's immediately on the right – can't miss it!

Today, the annual Essex Fox Hounds (EFH) Thanksgiving Day meet, a festive local tradition is held at Peapack's Ellistan estate, currently owned by Hank and Sarah Slack. While riders, neighbors and spectators prepare to gather and send off the pack, hot toddies in hand, let's look back at the history of its elegant host estate: Thanksgiving morning is filled with family traditions, one of which has become the annual Essex Fox Hounds hunt held at or near the Ellistan Estate every Thanksgiving morning since at least 1910 when once neighbor Charles Pfizer relocated the Essex Hunt Club from Montclair to Peapack.

Completed in 1931, Ellistan was built for the family of Francis Edgar Johnson (1883-1968), whose avid interest in equestrian activities, particularly polo and foxhunting with the Essex Fox Hounds, brought them to the area in 1927.

Eventually, the estate came to comprise nearly 150 acres, which were developed as a working farm, as well as stables filled with polo ponies and hunters. Outbuildings included a nine-stall stable with attached two-story groom's house and a five-car garage with chauffeur quarters above.



Designed by Musgrove Hyde and constructed in 1930 of topaz-colored stone, Ellistan was the residence of Frank Johnson, partner of M.W. Kellogg, who hired Percival "Dobie" Keith to design the Oak Ridge Project. The property is now owned by Henry Slack, the grandson of Drew Mellick. Mr. Slack married the daughter of Harry Oppenheimer, chairman of De Beers Consolidated Mines, Ltd., and head of the London Central Selling Organization of the diamond cartel. (Turpin Real Estate.)

Source: In the Somerset Hills-The Landed Gentry



Thanksgiving Meet – Horses, Hounds and Foxes Before Turkey – A Countryside Tradition



Ellistan, the storied estate designed by Musgrove Hyde and constructed in 1930 of topaz-colored stone. Ellistan South facade showing the white garden. The garden was designed in the mid-1980s.

Sited on largely open rolling pastures that stretched northward toward the Essex Hunt clubhouse and stable property, the Norman-style residence known as Ellistan features a high, steeply pitched roof, large dormers and tall chimneys, and is faced in mottled brown stone from Preen's quarry near Whitehouse, New Jersey.

Original interiors were furnished by E. Louise Vanderbilt, a Johnson cousin, with many of coming from a castle in Austria. Subsequent decor was undertaken by the illustrious New York firm of Parish-Hadley, founded in 1930 by Far Hills-native by Sister Parrish. The grounds at Ellistan have been enhanced over the years by design that is both thoughtful and serendipitous. During the Great Depression, an unsolicited visit to the Johnsons by a man with a truckload of young trees resulted in what is today an apple orchard.

The estate is located on Fowler Road, named after Arthur Fowler, the first secretary of the Essex Hunt Club and one of Charles Pfizers partner bringing the Essex Hunt Club to Peapack. At the Far Hills Race Meeting, the New



Thanksgiving Meet – Horses, Hounds and Foxes Before Turkey – A Countryside Tradition

Jersey Hunt Cup is actually called the Arthur Fowler Trophy, who was actually the first winner of the New Jersey Hunt Cup back in 1915. Arthur was also the first Secretary of The Essex Fox Hounds, which became incorporated in 1913.

More recently, formal gardens and garden rooms were installed to incorporate the wider landscape and create spectacular views of the open countryside.

Thanksgiving Meet Photo Gallery - [Click to Enlarge](#)



Thanksgiving Meet – Horses, Hounds and Foxes Before Turkey – A Countryside Tradition



Jackie Onassis rides at the traditional Essex Fox Hounds Meeting, the annual Thanksgiving Day hunt in Bedminster, N.J., Thursday, Nov. 27, 1980. (AP Photo)



Thanksgiving Meet – Horses, Hounds and Foxes Before Turkey – A Countryside Tradition





Thanksgiving Meet – Horses, Hounds and Foxes Before Turkey – A Countryside Tradition





Thanksgiving Meet – Horses, Hounds and Foxes Before Turkey – A Countryside Tradition



The Essex Fox Hounds were captured on film at the Fowler's Middlebrook Farm in November 1932. From the left, the people are: Betty Thompson, Vera (Mrs. Charles) Scribner, Virginia Brice, Miles Valentine, George Brice (the huntsman), and Ken Schley (Master of the Essex Fox Hounds). (Kenneth B. Schley Jr.)



Thanksgiving Meet – Horses, Hounds and Foxes Before Turkey – A Countryside Tradition





Thanksgiving Meet – Horses, Hounds and Foxes Before Turkey – A Countryside Tradition





Thanksgiving Meet – Horses, Hounds and Foxes Before Turkey – A Countryside Tradition





Thanksgiving Meet – Horses, Hounds and Foxes Before Turkey – A Countryside Tradition





Thanksgiving Meet – Horses, Hounds and Foxes Before Turkey – A Countryside Tradition





Thanksgiving Meet – Horses, Hounds and Foxes Before Turkey – A Countryside Tradition



The Essex Fox Hounds will have a fox chase on Thanksgiving Day, starting from Burnt Mills, near here, at 10.30 o'clock in the morning, following the hounds back to the kennels at Peapack.



Thanksgiving Meet – Horses, Hounds and Foxes Before Turkey – A Countryside Tradition





Thanksgiving Meet – Horses, Hounds and Foxes Before Turkey – A Countryside Tradition





Thanksgiving Meet – Horses, Hounds and Foxes Before Turkey – A Countryside Tradition





Thanksgiving Meet – Horses, Hounds and Foxes Before Turkey – A Countryside Tradition





Thanksgiving Meet – Horses, Hounds and Foxes Before Turkey – A Countryside Tradition



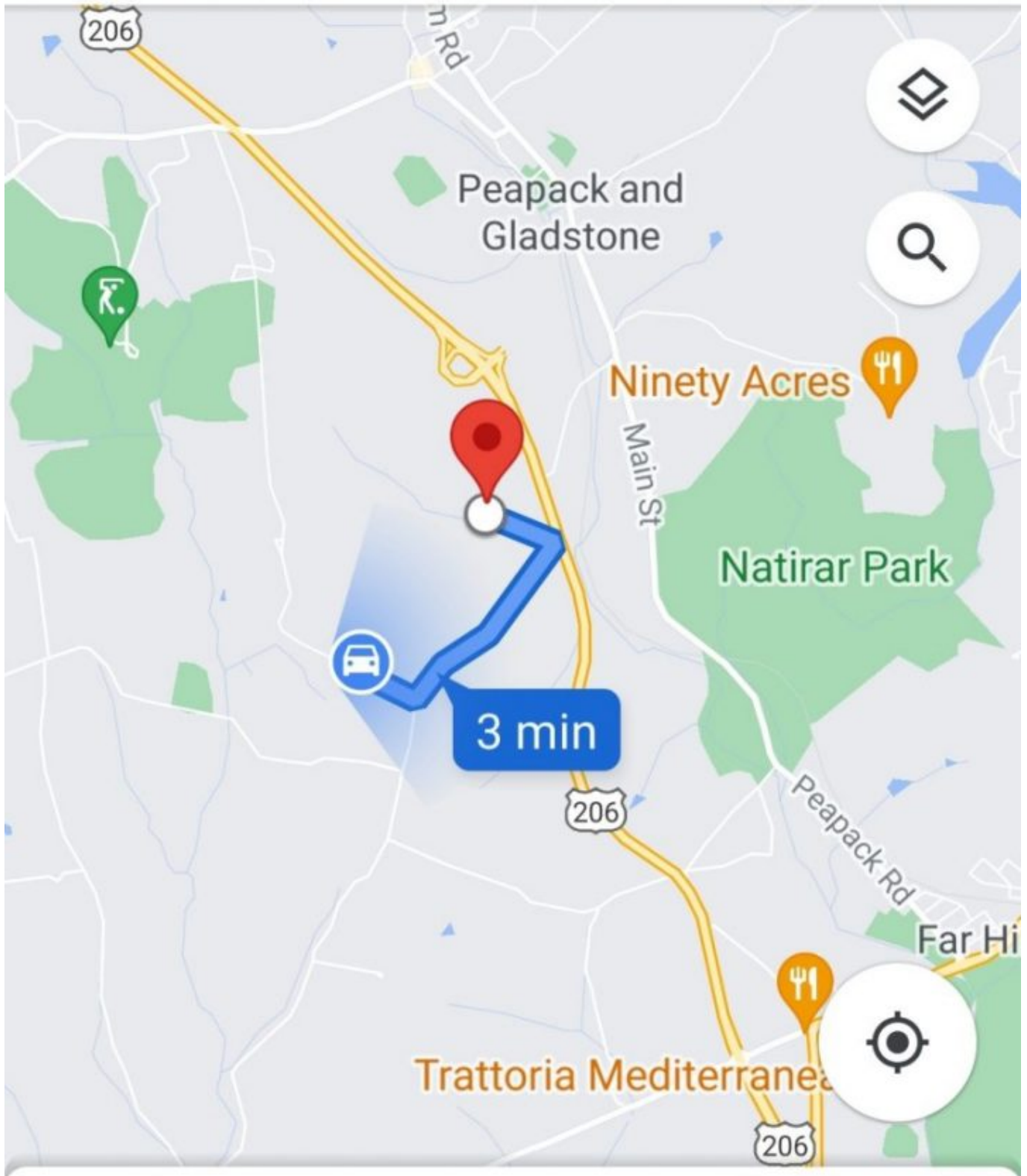


Thanksgiving Meet – Horses, Hounds and Foxes Before Turkey – A Countryside Tradition





Thanksgiving Meet – Horses, Hounds and Foxes Before Turkey – A Countryside Tradition



Over the years the Essex Fox Hounds Thanksgiving Meet has grown to a full blow tailgating social fest. Scenes



from past meets include Jackie Kennedy, who used to love attending the meet.

Additional Information

[The Blessing of the Hounds – A Countryside Tradition](#)

[History of the Far Hills Race Meeting](#)

Fox hunts were first organized in Montclair by the Montclair Equestrian Club in 1876. They maintained their horses and dog kennels on Orange Road. In 1880 they changed their name to the Montclair Hunt and moved the stables and kennels to the Sadler farm on Grove Street. There continued to be strong representation from Montclair in its membership and on the board. In 1910 the organization moved out of the area completely. It became known as the Essex Fox Hounds, with headquarters in Bernardsville.

- [@essexfoxhounds](#) on Instagram
- [History of the Essex Hunt Club](#)
- [The Essex Fox Hounds Centennial Celebration Video](#) – Vimeo

A special gift collectible for the Far Hills Race fan 100th Anniversary Wooden Collectible

A limited edition keepsake made by the famous Cat's Meow Village of Wooster, Ohio made exclusively for the New Jersey Historic Wooden Village Collection – [Get yours today – Online Exclusive](#)