

## A TRIBUTE TO THE FOUNDER OF M.H.A.

Selfishly, the Metropolitan Horsemen's Association learned with regret that Miss Cornelia Cress has decided, after many years of exceptional activity, to dispose of her stable at Mills College and retire as head of an institution that has done more to promote horseback riding, horse shows and to interest the public in horse events than any other in the Bay Area.

We say "selfishly" because no single individual has done more for the M.H.A. Miss Cress was the founder of M.H.A. She has been one of its staunchest supporters and on more than one occasion Miss Cress came through and helped the organization with seemingly tireless work, helpful suggestions, and fine assistance.

Cornelia Cress was and is a perfectionist. She would have no part in doing things halfway. To Miss Cress there was only one way to hold a horse event, and that was the right way. Perhaps on occasion this perfectionist attitude may have offended those who would cut corners, but the success which she achieved at Mills College Riding School proved only too well that she was right in her attitude.

Cornelia Cress developed more riders, better riders, more horse shows, and better horse shows than anyone in the East Bay Area

In her own words, Miss Cress states the philosophy on which her riding school was founded and conducted.

"To those of serious understanding, riding, schooling a horse, and teaching a rider are considered both a science and an art. The same group recognizes there is nothing new in the science of riding and that there is vast wisdom and skill yet to be learned from our old masters. The military equestrian schools of nations of the world are formed on the teachings of these masters and are responsible for preserving for us the refinement of the sport. Unfortunate indeed the fact that the United States of America dissolved its School of Horsemanship and Horsemastership, Fort Riley, Kansas, thus consigning riding to the guidance of professionals and the 'Nouveau

Equestrienne' aspect of riding: the quickest way is the only way.

"However, Cressmount, Mills College, for 20 years has followed the pattern of our Military School of Equitation, accepting the military balanced seat which allows maximum control by rider with minimum strain to horse and rider. Briefly, this is a deep, firm seat allowing the more erect position for pleasure riding and dressage, and the forward seat for fast riding over cross country jumps and uneven terrain.

"Philosophy of instructing riding, being practical and not philosophical, my approach to teaching riding is guided by sympathy for the problems confronting rider and horse, never overlooking the humorous situations resulting from this strange association. My endeavor is to develop the best possible rider, that is, one with a proven design of position, security, control, and a sympathetic understanding of the horse.

"My chosen vocation of maintaining a riding school presented me with the opportunity of expending effort to create high standards, attractive facilities, sporting discipline, and entertaining equestrian activities for the enjoyment of those striving so diligently to master themselves on a horse's back. Aside from this, the faithful support of the school by its patrons has made it possible to contribute very substantially to wartime activities, the comfort of patients at Oak Knoll, and to community welfare.

"For any success attained in the goal of my riding school—Cressmount—full credit is given graciously to the privilege of operating on Mills College campus, to the faithful support and interest of friends, riders, and parents throughout the 20 years.

"My father, General George O. Cress, U.S.S. Retired, remained active to the end of his life, at 91. He handled bookwork, which included details of labor and deductions; income tax, maintenance and help on the grounds, developed and worked on trails in the hills of Oakland at 65 years of age, taught riding, and cleaned stalls during wartime difficulties.

“Another faithful supporter of the riding school was D. Aurelia H. Rhinehart, President of Mills College, who never failed to recognize the value of riding at the college.”

The Metropolitan Horsemen’s Association hastens to pay this tribute to Cornelia Cress, an outstanding individual, and to wish her well in any venture she may undertake.

To the new owners, Lt. Col and Mrs. Hans Moeller and Mrs. James Tucker, go our best wishes for success. The foundation Cornelia Cress laid will go a long way to bringing about this success.

### CRESSMOUNT—FROM THEN TO NOW

Cornelia Cress has a background that makes many of us envious because, due to her father’s connections with the U.S. Army, she has lived in many places steeped in army tradition. Cornelia was born at Fort Walla Walla, Washington, one November day in 1894. After the Spanish American War, she went with her parents to the Philippine Islands on the U.S. Transport Thomas, which was the first to carry women and children to the Philippines.

Then to Fort Riley, Kansas; Michigan Military Academy, Washington, D.C., and Fort Ethan Allen, Vermont, Cornelia graduated from Emma Willard School in Troy, New York, thence to the Philippines again. She attended Northwestern University in Madison, Wisconsin. In 1918, Cornelia graduated from the Army School of Nursing at Walter Reed Hospital and served as a Red Cross Nurse at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, where she was a ward worker and cared for wounded veterans.

General Cress was then transferred to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and there Cornelia was captain of a Mounted Girl Scout Troop, where she received her first and only formal instruction in riding. At this time, General Cress retired from the Army, and the Cress family went to Birmingham, Alabama. Cornelia then decided to “Go West” and was Riding Counselor at Perry Mansfield Camp, Colorado Springs.

In telling of her experience with the rodeo, Cornelia gave forth with her famous chuckle in recalling the rodeo in which she rode a bucking horse attired in English riding kit. Cornelia is proud that she rode that bronc so hard she didn’t hear the whistle. The bug of The West lured Cornelia into signing up with the Dawson Cattle Company as a “cowhand.” The big event was riding 40 miles overland from Steamboat to Hyden, while changing cattle from summer to winter pasture and holding the herd several hours until relieved by the cowboys.

From Colorado, she went to Jackson’s Lake Lodge, Wyoming, where she was in charge of Horse Camp and was a riding instructor.

On September 14, 1928, General Cress purchased Lake Aliso Riding School, Mills College, and gave it to his daughter. The buildings were in a bad state of disrepair, the horses were thin, and, in general, it was anything but encouraging. However, Cornelia Cress, from that original setup, has produced a fine achievement under her management and assisted by General Cress.

In 1930 Shongehon Drill Team was formed for advanced high school girl riders, and it was the first civilian Mounted Girl Scout Troup in the country. *The New York Times* published a rotogravure picture of the group.

1931 saw the first Alameda County Horse Show held in a very inadequate ring. A Band and Field Picket line was loaned by the California State National Guard, bleachers by Oakland High School, and ribbons and trophies donated by the Piedmont Trails Club.

1932, the First Annual Mills College Horse Show was held and has been one of the most successful shows since that time. In the early days, an Amateur Circuit was formed with Gymkhana Club, Monterey, Sacramento, and Mills College. This was successful, and all clubs pulled together.

The fame of Cornelia Cress and Mills College Riding School spread to the East Coast, and in 1934 *Country Life* published a picture, complete with a double-page spread. *American Magazine* also had a spread on the Riding School, and in 1948, Paramount filmed activities at the Riding School.

One of the big events in the yearly National Riding Center for riders, which was held at Cressmount in 1951 under the National Section of Women's Athletics.

Those who know and appreciate a good horse show all agree that shows at Cressmount are without peer. The annual Holiday Matinee has always been the big "fun" show, and the more serious shows during the year are designed to give the maximum enjoyment to all.

Through the years, the various clubs within the establishment have been kept alive—Upsom Downs, Saddle Bags, Shongehon, Subaltern, Bit and Spur, and Pegasus Patrol. When former members of the groups meet and chat about "the old days," one can hear good, hearty chuckles and many reminiscences of fun on horseback.

No one enjoys a bit of humorous entertainment more than Cornelia Cress, playing pranks on riders and entering into the games and races with a verve that put many a younger person to shame.

Cornelia Cress was the first to introduce the Three Phase Events of Olympic Contest into the shows, and it was she who started the Hunter Trials on the West Coast.

"With the purchase of the Riding School, I gave up riding, believing my obligation was to create riders and horses, not to show them. The policy developed me into a Tanbark Rider." This sums up the ultimate goal of Cornelia Cress. And to her we owe so much: a fine tradition of riding, sportsmanship, and our own M.H.A.

Cornelia has been a loyal advertiser of *The Trail Blazer* and has contributed many interesting articles over the years. At this time, she asked that *The Trail Blazer* be thanked for the loyal support of her riding school through its news columns.

...from *The Trail Blazer*, September 1954