

## Beagling in the Western Reserve: A Gates Mills Tradition

The Western Reserve, originally settled in the late 18th and early 19th centuries by New Englanders, brought with it customs of land stewardship and outdoor pursuits. Gates Mills, founded in 1826 by millwright Holsey Gates along the Chagrin River, was an ideal setting. Over time, the mills gave way to gentleman farms and country estates, and by the early 20th century, the area had become a haven for Cleveland professionals seeking rural retreat.

In 1908, a group of those sportsmen established the Chagrin Valley Hunt Club, reviving the English tradition of mounted fox hunting. But as time passed, a quieter but no less passionate offshoot emerged—beagling. The Club began to support not only foxhounds, but also a separate pack of beagles trained to hunt Eastern cottontail rabbits, a quarry more suited to the field and forest edges of the Chagrin Valley. Unlike fox hunting, beagling allowed for a more inclusive and accessible experience. It invited young people, families, and those who preferred to walk the landscape rather than ride it.

Today, the Chagrin Valley Beagles founded in 2015, carry on this tradition. The pack, composed of 12-inch beagles arranged in couples, is managed and cared for by devoted members and supporters. The hounds are trained to follow scent trails through brush, meadows, and lightly wooded terrain—land generously made available by private landowners and conservation-minded residents of Gates Mills. As the dogs work the fields, the huntsman sounds the horn, directing the pack and alerting followers to the action ahead. When the rabbit finds cover or "goes to ground," the chase ends and the hounds are gathered with great care and enthusiasm.

The backdrop for these outings is among the most scenic in the region. The gently rolling topography, historic lanes, and open spaces of Gates Mills—many protected by the Cleveland Metroparks and the Gates Mills Land Conservancy—offer an ideal setting for beagling. These landscapes are aesthetically beautiful and provide the continuity of habitat and freedom of movement that the sport requires.

Though beagling may appear quaint or even obscure to outsiders, it plays a quiet role in maintaining the rural identity of the village. It reinforces the values of land stewardship, animal husbandry, and the respectful enjoyment of the natural world. Each meet brings together a community of friends and neighbors, both human and canine, bound by a shared appreciation for the land and the traditions that have shaped it.

As the horn sounds across a frosted meadow and the eager chorus of beagles rises into the winter air, one can feel the living legacy of the Western Reserve stir once again. Beagling in Gates Mills is not just a sport—it is a celebration of place, of heritage, and of the enduring bond between people, dogs, and the land they love.