

*This article is reprinted from The Spring 2019 Gristmill Gazette, our quarterly newsletter.*

## Jousting

By Joyce Barnett

I am one of the very grateful members of the **Amateur Jousting Club of Maryland**. Our club has been in existence since the summer of 1958. Several years ago, we lost our jousting field and were in desperate need of a new place to meet and practice our sport. Thanks to our friends at **Jerusalem Mill**, we can once again enjoy the sport of jousting and share it with others. We have been warmly welcomed and allowed to joust here on the property. We have set up permanent jousting arches behind the dairy barn. *[Editor's note: This is now known as the Bank Barn.]* We're blessed to be able to continue to participate in this sport in such a beautiful setting surrounded by so many warm and friendly people.



Like Jerusalem Mill, jousting is actually very much a part of our country's history. When people think of jousting they think of the medieval combat on horses, which is how the sport first came about. Although it is not known exactly when jousting for rings instead of jousting against one another was first started, it was known to be practiced by **James I of England**. **Cecil Calvert** was a great fan of ring jousting and it was practiced in Maryland by the Calvert Family. *[Editor's note: Cecil Calvert was the 2nd Baron of*

*Baltimore, and governed Maryland for 42 years, from his home in England.]*

Many ring jousts were held throughout the area over the years. They were especially popular at weddings of the wealthy. It is said that one of the **Ridgely's of Hampton Mansion** had a joust on the front lawn for his daughter's wedding. However, jousting did not remain for the wealthy only.

After the **Civil War**, jousting tournaments were held to raise money to rebuild the south. Often churches would sponsor a joust on their grounds and local farmers would come to compete. People would come from all around to watch the tournaments. Many jousting tournaments today are sponsored by churches in conjunction with their annual fairs or festivals.



In February of 1962, the Honorable **Henry J. Fowler Sr.**, delegate from **St. Mary's County**, introduced a bill into the **Maryland House of Delegates** giving recognition to jousting as the official

state sport of Maryland. *[Editor's note: It still is the official state sport! In 2004, Lacrosse was named the official **team** sport of Maryland.]* The bill was quickly passed and signed into law making Maryland the first state in the country to have a state sport.

Today jousting is a sport which is enjoyed by all types of people. It is still a contest of horsemanship, but it is enjoyed by people from all walks of life. Everyone competes under the same rules. The classes are separated by ability. There may be children competing against adults of the same ability and men competing against women. Often it is a family affair and you may have several generations of riders from the same family competing.

We love spectators at our jousts. As a spectator at one of today's jousting tournaments you will see several skill levels of jousting. There is the leadline class which is our future jousters (usually children still learning to ride), the novice or beginner class, the amateur class, the semi-professional, and the professional class. Except for the novice class, which is not timed, all competitors must gallop down an 80 yard track in under 9 seconds while attempting to spear small rings on a lance.

The rings range in size from 1.75 inches for the novice class to 1 inch for the professional class. The size of the rings is reduced in the event of a tie, so it can get exciting. We also put on a dress parade, usually at the start of the tournament, where our participants dress in medieval attire to pay tribute to the sport's beginnings. Please come join us this summer at one of the jousting tournaments at Jerusalem Mill. Please check our **Facebook page at Amateur Jousting Club of Maryland** for schedule updates and additional information.



**About the Author:** *Joyce began jousting 45 years ago, and has made it a family affair since her husband, two daughters, and now her grandson have also enjoyed the sport. Joyce says, "It has been a great family sport we all enjoy very much. The friendly competition, pageantry and festive atmosphere keep us coming back."*