

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, January 2, 2012

Ye Olde Game Groupe: Most who know me would not think I had anything to do with a social club or activity. Despite this impression, in the mid-1950s, Lindsay Greenplate and I decided to invite several couples our age to join us, usually on Saturday evenings, to share experiences and play children's games. If the response was positive, we would meet six or eight times a year at someone's home, have light refreshments provided by the host couple following the games, and there would be no prizes. A few of the couples we had in mind already knew each other, but at the beginning, only Lindsay, his wife, Marge, and I knew everyone. The first meeting took place on December 27, 1957, at Auburn Heights with 19 in attendance. Since it would be 28 years before Ruth and I were married, I was the odd man out; the others were married except for Joe Mitchell and Kathy Schulz, who were married the next year.

The second meeting was at the Greenplates' in Limestone Acres early in 1958. During the summer months, we sought other entertainment and would sometimes meet where there was a swimming pool. Paul and Kathleen Nelson dropped out, probably in 1959, but the other 17 stayed together and enjoyed each other for the next 40 years. In the 1950s and 1960s, several had expanding families. Over Labor Day weekend 1959, the Game Groupe, plus two or more other invited guests, met at the Marshall place on Queen Street in Rehoboth Beach. This tradition continued annually until the sale of the property there in October 1983. For 21 years after that, we gathered for the late summer weekend at Drayton Manor, a Methodist retreat near Chestertown, Maryland, thanks to the efforts of Willard and Eleanor Robinson. In addition, at least once each summer, a family day was planned. Activities included scavenger hunts, canoe trips on the Rancocas and the Brandywine, and annual visits to Bob and Kay Way's pool. It was a tradition to celebrate New Years' Eve together for many years, and the hostess provided a sumptuous meal.

For about 30 years, the Game Groupe took a spring weekend trip and often a second smaller "one-nighter" in the fall to Philadelphia or Washington. We went to Williamsburg twice and to other places in Virginia, such as Charlottesville, Richmond, Fredericksburg, Alexandria, Chincoteague, Tangier Island, and the Skyline Drive. We visited Hagerstown, Cumberland, and Annapolis in Maryland, and Easton, Lancaster, Bucks County, Raystown Lake, Elkmont, and the Poconos (twice) in Pennsylvania. We went to Atlantic City just before gambling arrived, spent a weekend in New York City, and did the Sleepy Hollow country of the Hudson Valley including a visit to Hyde Park.

In 1985, Ruth joined the group when she and I were married, and Donald and Bertha Pratt were invited to join. In the 1990s, Walter and Frances Anderson dropped out. Bob Way died in 1998, and his wife, Kay, died 10 years later. Hannah Parrish died in 2009, Amos Bassett in 2010, and Lois Bassett in 2011. The Robinsons have lived at Cokesbury Village for eight years, the Greenplates for five years, and we have been there for three years. Larry Parrish lives at the Friends Home in Kennett, and the six other survivors live in their own homes. The average age of the 13 living Game Groupe members is now 85. The only members not mentioned in the text are Pownall and Peggy Jones, who travel a lot, enjoy good health, and live in their own home in New Garden Township.

An invitation to a Game Groupe December party at the Bassetts' in West Chester featured an earlier New Years' Eve *Saturday Evening Post* cover by Norman Rockwell. It was December 30, 1944, during the last year of World War II, and it pictured the exterior of a small Vermont country church, with bright lights shining from its windows and several well-used cars and a one-horse sleigh parked outside in the snow. One was a "woody" station wagon from the 1930s, one was a step-side Model A pick-up with the tailgate missing, and one had a blanket covering the radiator ("permanent" antifreeze was scarce and expensive), and all had chains on the rear tires to navigate the snow-covered hills. The clock in the church tower showed 12 o'clock midnight. That scene said everything: Country people with very limited means were worshiping inside, full of patriotism and praying to God that the war would end in the coming year.