

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, February 18, 2013

**Treasure Hunts of Years Ago:** About 80 years ago, whenever my mother had a dinner party at Auburn Heights, and she had several each year, she always had to have a theme or fun activity following dinner. In most cases, serious and very conservative adults would become children for an hour or so until the activity was over. One favorite game was a treasure hunt inside the big house. A participating guest would usually have to find about 10 clues hidden on the three main floors and in the cellar. Finding the first clue would lead you to the second, and so on. It was quite a job to correctly hide all these clues, which were usually an instruction written on a small piece of paper, prior to the party. I enjoyed helping my mother in hiding them. If there were 12 dinner guests, for example, 120 pieces of paper would be well hidden all over the house. We would always make one or more mistakes, but we tried not to.

After dinner, guests were informed of what they had to do. I suppose most were in their 40s and 50s and had no trouble climbing steps, which was necessary to participate. One clue might be in a clay crock in the third-floor store room, the next under a small shovel for the bucket-a-day coal stove in the cellar, and possibly a third in a certain coat pocket in someone's closet. Obviously, the house, the cellar, and the store room had to be clean enough so the guests did not soil their best clothes. That never occurred to me as I was hiding the clues.

After 45 minutes to an hour, the hunt concluded with everyone exhausted. I'm not sure whether there were prizes, but it was soon time to go home. All guests would climb to the second floor again to reclaim their top coats and hats (women needed a mirror). I think the hats and coats were segregated, with men and women asked to place their outerwear in separate bedrooms.

If the party was in the summer, and there were a few, a treasure hunt was sometimes on the grounds with clues hidden in a rose bush, a depression in a tree trunk, or in a glove compartment of one of the Packards in the garage (the carriage house). I don't recall the guests having to go as far as the large rock garden down the hill, as that would have taken its toll in time consumed and human exhaustion.

When I was young and gay (in the 1950s), a social group to which I belonged would have treasure hunts using numerous automobiles and covering an area of up to 50 square miles. Teams of two or three would compete against each other in a race against time. I think each team had the same six or eight clues, but their instructions were to find them in a different order; for example, not all would hunt for a clue under a headstone in the Unionville Cemetery at the same time. The top speed of the car had little to do with a team's success, but a driver's prowess in knowing short-cuts and local geography improved a team's chances to win. Most cars averaged less than 15 miles per gallon with this type of activity, and gasoline cost about 25 cents per gallon. We never thought about or knew of fuel shortages or environmental issues in the 1950s. It was important to win the Treasure Hunt! I don't think I was ever on a team that won one.