

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, August 14, 2006

Two Lawn Parties at Auburn Heights, 1939 and 1955: As we prepare for our Ice Cream Social on the lawn at Auburn Heights (Aug. 18–19), I am reminded of two lawn parties in my parents' time attended by about 30 invitees each time.

The first was at the beginning of September 1939, right when Hitler invaded Poland to start World War II. My mother had advertised her lawn party as a "Hay Seed Party" and suggested that her guests should come dressed as old-time farm people. Most complied with her request, and there were some outstanding costumes among those who attended. I was the official photographer, and a few prints exist from that occasion. The tables for the sit-down dinner were set on the lawn beside and behind the sun porch (part of the area is now the flat-stone patio). Following dinner, there were some games dreamed up by my mother, one of which was a horse race for six players on a wooden board or race track, with wooden horses cut out by my father and painted in bright circus colors. I think the players rolled dice to move their horses. I'm not sure the game was as popular as my mother had hoped. One of the amazing thing about such gatherings was how everyone parked in the yard. A stone wall opposite the large door to the shop ended the driveway, so no one could park below the present garage (the museum building and its parking lot in front were built in 1947). Cars parked around the house and in the driveway, and most people were blocked in. We knew nothing else in those days.

The second party was on August 5, 1955, on my father's 70th birthday (my mother had turned 70 on August 4). We were in an extremely hot spell, and the temperature had reached 100 degrees about three days that week. Again the tables were set in the same general location, and the dinner was served by a Wilmington caterer named James Wright (or possibly James White). I paid him for the full course meal served by his waiters, and the total came to just over \$200. My mother's siblings and their spouses, as well as my father's, were invited, and most were then living and in attendance. As after-dinner entertainment, my father gave an illustrated lecture on Bayard Taylor's *Story of Kennett*, his favorite novel. He was supposed to be followed by his cousin, Pusey Passmore, who had been asked to give one of his humorous travelogues. My dad's part went on for too long, however, and Cousin Pusey was cancelled out. Pusey Passmore was known to many Wilmingtonians as the proprietor of Lythwaite Farm, a popular place near Talleyville for homemade ice cream on hot summer evenings.