

## **58 Blawenburg Couples Club**

**By David Cochran**

In the days after World War II, entertainment and socializing with friends and neighbors was quite different from today. TV was in its infancy and travel was not as likely, especially in a farming community like Blawenburg. Movies took place in theaters and listening to the radio and reading newspapers were still important ways to get news. There were no computers, social media, or other ways to connect with the world easily. In short, you had to create your own entertainment, and that was often with other people...live... in person!

In the village of Blawenburg, some social events were held at Blawenburg Church, while others, such as card parties, were held in private homes in the community. John and Martha Van Zandt, who now live in North Carolina, remember their house on the corner of Route 518 and Hollow Road that they bought from Cassie Stryker in 1946. The second floor of their barn had a nice dance floor, and the Van Zandts invited couples there for square dancing, foreshadowing the events of the Blawenburg Couples Club. Bernice Crawford Van Nostrand remembers going to a dance in the Van Zandt barn when she was in high school.

### **Couples Club Formed**

The Blawenburg Couples Club was established as an informal organization in the early 1950s to provide social events for the community. It quickly became a popular event that took place periodically throughout the year, bringing together local residents for an evening of food and entertainment. While many events were held at Blawenburg Church, the club was open to anyone and was a separate organization from the church.

Club events usually took place on Saturday nights, with each event having a different theme. One month there might be a square dance in the Woodacres barn, located where the Cherry Valley homes are today. The original Woodacres house and barn still stand on this property just off Great Road near Bedens Brook on land once owned by Frederick Blaw.

At other times, the club members traveled to a local theater and sometimes returned to a club member's home for dessert. Early in the club's life, members attended plays at McCarter Theater in Princeton. In later years, they went to the Off Broad Street Theater in Hopewell, where they had dessert followed by a play presented by local actors.

Jane May remembers going to a winery near the Delaware River in the 1970s. She also recalls a scavenger hunt that had members driving all over Montgomery Township.

Ginny Doremus recalls one event where things got political. 3M had applied for a permit to develop a quarry on Route 13 (now Route 601). It was controversial because of the feared environmental damage the quarry operation might cause. A debate about whether the permit should be approved began, and it consumed the meeting. The matter was ultimately resolved in the courts in favor of 3M. Today, the quarry still operates as Gibraltar Rock of Belle Mead.

The Couples Club generally held four events per year—a fall event to welcome new members, a Christmas social, a theater event, and a food event such as dining in a restaurant or eating a meal at the church.



*Blawenburg Couples Club dinner at Lavender Hall in Bucks County, PA, 1950s*

*Outside, left table, front to back: Norman and Myrtle Hoagland, Parvin and Tootie Stryker, Mr. Wilson*

*Outside, back table, L-R: Mrs. Wilson, Spud and Mary Musselman, Johnson Moore*

*Outside, right table, back to front: Florence Moore, Dick and Grace Kirk, Marvin and Margaret Hunt, unknown man.*

*Inside, left side, front to back: Everett May, Sr., Virginia and Dix Skillman, Dot May, Bill Terhune, Grace Terhune*

*Inside, right table, back to front: Ed and Betty Terhune, Unknown woman, Charlotte and Enos Parsell, L. Reynolds*

Sometimes they would go out to dinner at a local restaurant. Ginny Doremus remembers going to dinner with the Couples Club at Mimi's, a popular eatery that became Black Bart's, then the Foolish Fox, and now the Tiger's Tale.

When the Blawenburg Church Christian Education Building, now known as Cook Hall, was built in 1959, the Couples Club started having events in the lower-level meeting area. There was a full kitchen there, making it easier to serve meals.

As the organization evolved, the premier food event always took place in early June. It was known as the Progressive Dinner, and as the name suggests, it was a dinner with several courses that took place in several locations. Everyone "progressed" from one place to another. They would have soup and salad at the first stop, come to the church for the main meal, and progress to someone's house for dessert. Over the years, people felt they had too much to eat, so the dinner menu changed to hors d'oeuvres, soup and salad, and dessert.

The Couples Club functioned because everyone pitched in to organize and implement the events. In any given year, about half the members were assigned to committees to plan and implement each event. Modest dues of \$2.00 per couple were collected to cover mailing expenses. The Couples Club ran until the mid-1980s. The Club had expanded its membership beyond Blawenburg, having 34 couples in the club when it ended. Not everyone would attend every event, but when they did, it became a bit unwieldy in people's homes.

The Blawenburg Couples Club had a good run, 30+ years. Hundreds of Blawenburg and Montgomery residents had many evenings of enjoying each other's company over the years. But like many other organizations, the change in membership and lifestyles made the social events less important in people's lives than when it started. People became busier and had many more entertainment options than in the 1950s. No one wanted to take up the leadership of the group, and it quietly faded away. The old proverb that "for everything there is a season" applies to many things in life and certainly to the Blawenburg Couples Club. The club had a great season, and now it's a pleasant memory for those who enjoyed it.

Do you remember the Blawenburg Couples Club? Did you participate in any of its events? Share your memories in the comment section below this blog, or send your thoughts to [blawenburgtales@gmail.com](mailto:blawenburgtales@gmail.com).

### **Interesting Facts**

1. The exact start date of the Couples Club is not known. Some people think it was started in the late 1940s, while others feel it was the 1950s. The last year that we have records for the club is 1985.
2. At one dessert held at Don and Miriam Thiel's home after a play at McCarter, people noticed a couple enjoying dessert, but no one knew them. They apparently followed the group from the theater. When people asked them who they were, they quickly left. No one ever knew who they

were, whether they came to the wrong post-theater party, or if they just thought dessert sounded like a good idea.

3. People remember going to the home of Ginny and Hal Miller, who lived in what had been the carriage house on the Covenhoven Farm on Mountain View Road. Ginny had a flower business and maintained very nice gardens that club members residents liked to visit.

## **Sources**

### **Information**

Email and phone conversations with:

Ginny Doremus

Jane May

Bernice Van Nostrand

Dick Van Zandt

John and Martha Van Zandt

### **Photo Credit**

Dinner at Lavender Hall – shared by Peggy Querec from the estate of her parents, Bill and Grace Terhune.

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