

# UNIT 191 BRIGHT LEAF ALERT

MAY 2015

## SPECIAL EDITION TO HONOR OUR INDUCTEES INTO THE UNIT 191 HALL OF FAME



Lona Ruth Kennedy, Mary Lou Johnson, Peggy Barbee, John Torrey, and Harrison Brooke are the first group of members inducted into Unit 191's Hall of Fame. These members have each made a huge contribution to the success of our unit.

Quoting Unit President Jim Bean, *"The idea of a Unit Hall of Fame was first proposed by Dorothea Wilson, a board member. When the notion was brought up again in 2014, the board approved the concept and its first 5 initial inductees. Since some of the inductees are no longer playing bridge, it was important to make sure they be recognized and honored for their years of dedication and service to the development of Unit 191. A plaque honoring the inductees will be made and prominently displayed. Thankfully, Unit 191 is a far better place due to their sweat and perseverance."*

This edition honoring our Hall of Fame inductees would not have happened without **Liz McGuffey**. Liz had always wanted to interview (in her words) "The grande dames of bridge in our club." This seemed like the opportune time. In between travel, writing her own book, and family concerns, she made it happen! Thanks Liz—you captured their spirit well.

Please enjoy their stories.

## Peggy Barbee



Peggy was born in June of 1933 in Chatham County where her family lived on the banks of New Hope Creek. When she was four years old, the family moved to Durham. Her family had been tobacco farmers for several generations, but with the move to Durham her grandfather, father, mother, and Peggy herself worked at the American Tobacco Company. Her grandfather eventually went back to farming and grew tobacco for American.

Peggy attended Durham High School, graduating in 1951. In the 10th grade, she won an award for her book-keeping skills, in the 11th grade for her short hand expertise, and by the 12th grade, she decided to work a half day at Elkins Motor Company. It was quite a hike from Durham High School at Gregson and Morgan Streets to Elkins, beyond the County Court House on Main Street. She was thrilled when her grandfather bought a new Chrysler when she worked there.

After high school, Peggy took a one year course at Women's College (now UNCG) in Greensboro and afterward earned an office position at van Straaten's clothing store in downtown Durham. But a bridge friend of her mother intervened to get Peggy hired in the office of the American Tobacco Company at the corner of Pettigrew and Blackwell Streets. "I had 34 good years there. I was literally the last person to leave the office when American closed in the late 1980s. I haven't been back there once to see the development of the American Tobacco Campus."

Peggy started playing bridge with her parents when she was in high school. Her aptitude for bridge came naturally after playing canasta, rook, and setback throughout her childhood. Married in 1953, she and husband Lewis played social bridge but he didn't venture into the duplicate world. Her mother Inez Farrell, however, did and one of Peggy's fondest memories is of playing with her mother at the Nationals in Honolulu in 1975 when her mother won her first gold points. Peggy and Lewis were married for 52 years, but sadly, Lewis died while Peggy was playing in a tournament in Charleston in 2005.

Peggy remembers the early days of duplicate bridge in Durham in the 1950s, when it cost 75 cents a game. "Norman O'Briant directed games in those days when winners earned only 0.08 to 0.10 master points. There were no stratifications and becoming a life master was no small feat. Once a month Norman held a 'master point night' when one whole master point was awarded." Peggy notes that at one time the winner won a 5-pound bag of sugar and one director gave S&H greens stamps to winners.

Peggy has played with numerous players over the years, many of them seasoned bridge players, but she readily plays with newcomers to bridge, offering stern admonitions to all. Lona Ruth Kennedy, Mary Lou Johnson, and Sue Lawrence are among her favorite early partners. They traveled all over the country to tournaments, as far away as Hawaii, and enjoyed the camaraderie of the group as much as the games. Peggy recalled, "I always like the games more than the points."

Peggy's proudest bridge accomplishment is winning the Unit 191 Member Championship in 1984, 1987, 1988, and 1993. The award is earned by the Unit 191 member who wins the most master points AND who plays with at least two partners during the Summer Sectional Tournament. The trophy is given in memory of Hugo Germino, a club director in the 1970s and 1980s. Originally an actual trophy that the winner held for one year was awarded. In more recent years winners have been listed on a framed certificate that is displayed at the Triangle Bridge Club. Peggy holds the record for the most championships won.

Bridge has always been a serious endeavor for Peggy and anyone giving her short shrift will surely pay for it, but hospitality rules with Peggy. With her perfectly coiffed white hair, delicately applied makeup, and her fashion-conscious dress, she never fails to greet her opponents with a cordial hello. She has directed, coordinated, planned, taught, chaired, presided, organized, cajoled, and done whatever is necessary to ensure the success and growth of Unit 191 bridge.

## Lona Ruth Kennedy

While it is not always proper to tell a woman's age, after a certain point it becomes a matter of pride. Lona Ruth Kennedy joyfully proclaims she was born in Durham on October 16, 1924 and grew up in the community of Nelson, near Highway 54 East. Her maiden name is Stone and her father ran the famous Stone Brothers and Byrd, a garden and farm supply store still in operation at Foster and Geer Streets in Durham's popular Central Park area. Originally the store was located on Morgan Street, but it moved to the present location when Lona's sister's husband, Byrd, bought into the business.

Lona attended Campbell College where her roommate's boyfriend set her up with one of his friends, Murrell Kennedy. The foursome dated often and impulsively in the spring of her freshman year, they headed to Dillon, South Carolina where the two couples married. Her mother was upset, but her father took it in stride, "It's your little red wagon and you can pull it." Their first daughter Ann was born just over a year later, followed by Linda, and later Jimmy. Lona and Murrell were married for almost 65 years, until his death in 2005. Lona now lives with her daughter and son-in-law in Bahama on a forested hill just above the rush of the Eno River.

Lona started playing bridge in the late 1960s with her cousin Dee. They started by kibitzing a tournament at the Jack Tar Hotel in downtown Durham. "So no one in Durham would know how dumb we were, we played first in Raleigh. The first time we placed, we were so excited we got lost driving home." After that they played in Durham. Lona's early partners were Dee Bryant, Madge Watson, Jenny Crane, Mary Lou Johnson, and Peggy Barbee. Hugo Germino was Lona's favorite director.

"I don't remember any special hands, wins, or losses," Lona said, "but I do remember all the fun I've had at the bridge table, especially at tournaments. My partner and I went with Mary Lou and her sister to Las Vegas once. We played bridge during the day and gambled at night, burning our candles at both ends. On the flight home, Mary Lou's sister said, 'I'm as near dead as I've ever been.' "

When asked her proudest moment at or away from the bridge table, Lona said, "I've always loved babies and I guess my proudest moment was having a baby. My babies were big: Ann weighed 8 pounds 9 ounces, Linda 9 pounds 5 ounces, and Jimmy a whopping 11 pounds and 3 ounces. All were healthy and I had no problems with my pregnancies. Murrell and I were proud of all of our children."





A newspaper photograph captured Lona's engaging smile under the title "Not a Poker Face" at the Palmetto State Sectional Tournament in Columbia SC on August 12, 1984. Compare that to the photograph taken on March 23, 2015.



Thirty years later the smile is the same. Lona has always had a ready laugh, has remained healthy, and has always enjoyed life. A salute to one of the grand dames of Unit 191. May your smile endure forever.

No article about Lona Ruth Kennedy would be complete without some mention of her legendary deviled eggs that she brought to the Wednesday morning games for many years. She learned not to serve them until after the first round of play or else late arrivers would be out of luck. She shared ingredients but, because she doesn't really measure anything, quantities may vary slightly. "My secret for easy peeling is to place eggs in cold water, bring to a boil, turn off the burner and cover the pan. Let sit for 10 or 15 minutes. When eggs are cool enough to the touch, peel, slice in half lengthwise, and separate yolks from the whites. Mash yolks and add a little vinegar, mustard, Worcestershire sauce, mayonnaise, salt, and pepper. Spoon yolk mixture back into the whites." Be sure to serve with a smile.



## Mary Lou Johnson

Mary Lou Johnson used to add numbers *horizontally* on the “big sheet” where individual scores were tabulated for local club games and for local tournaments before the days of the computer. “It’s not really hard after you practice. You get a pattern, do numbers first, then add the plusses.” Her natural affinity for math and problem solving made her a formidable bridge player and her competitive spirit was forged from her childhood.

Born in Charlotte in June 1928, Mary Lou was the third child of the Bostian family, with an older sister and brother and one younger brother. They grew up on Fifth Street, around the corner from the Belk family, of Belk Department Store fame. She came from an aggressive card-playing family, enjoying hearts, Michigan rummy, and rook as a child. They played a cutthroat brand of family solitaire on the dining room table where “you could lose your hand trying to play your heart ten on your brother’s nine.” Mary Lou learned to play bridge with her mother and two aunts and no one could beat her father at gin rummy. She got her competitive spirit honestly.

"I was always interested in sports. We had no TV and we played outside all day. My father cut some hockey sticks out of plywood on his band saw in the basement and he improvised rubber pucks made from old tires. On an nearby street with no outlet, we played hockey on our roller skates. At that time, no one in the South played hockey. We also spent our days in a great park, just two blocks from our house, with a large wading pool. We spent the entire day outside."

In 1948 during her junior year at Woman's College in Greensboro (now UNCG), Mary Lou married Sidney Johnson, someone she had known all her life. Sidney, four years her senior, lived just two doors away in their Charlotte neighborhood and they attended the same church. He attended Pfeiffer College but excelled more in athletics than in academics. With the threat of the draft in World War II, he enlisted in the Navy Air Force and while stationed in the Aleutian Islands he flew gunning missions over Japan, strafing the shoreline. After the war, he took a job with First Union Bank. The family moved to Durham in the early 1960s when a branch office opened there.

Sidney and Mary Lou reared three sons with Mary Lou working as a full-time mother. When the oldest was a senior in college, she took a job in the Boys Department of the Young Men's Shop at Northgate Mall. The family lived in Willow Haven where they agreed that Sidney could play golf and Mary Lou could pursue bridge. Sadly, Sidney was stricken with an aneurysm in 1997 while Mary Lou was playing in a Gatlinburg Regional tournament. She rushed home, but he died the next day.

Prior to the early 1970s, Mary Lou played only social bridge. She discovered duplicate bridge when a local game was played in an office building housing an S&W Cafeteria at the corner of Gregson and Chapel Hill Streets. Around the mid- to late-1970s, the Durham Bridge Club moved to the Forest Hills clubhouse on University Drive. That's where her long-term partnerships with Peggy Barbee, Lona Ruth Kennedy, Madge Watson, and Joann Vann were born and flourished.

Norman O'Briant was the director at Forest Hills, followed by Hugo Germino, with Mary Lou filling in when needed. This writer remembers Mary Lou match pointing the travelers with lightning speed and no errors. In addition to directing and scoring, "I took food — baked a cake or cookies and made sandwiches, just pimento cheese, nothing fancy. One time a Chapel Hill player asked if that was my green cake stand. I said, yes it is. And he said it's an antique and you have no business bringing it here. It was green glass with a

design in relief, a gift from my mother-in-law. I had no idea it was an antique.”

Mary Lou enjoyed club games, but she found road trips “with the girls” to be especially engaging. These A-level bridge players knew how to have fun. Mary Lou, Peggy, Lona, and Madge were playing in a Pittsburgh National Tournament when everyone smelled smoke. “Madge, the big smoker in the group, had accidentally dropped her cigarette into Lona Ruth’s pocket book on the floor and set it on fire. We all got a big laugh out of that.”

Mary Lou played many tournaments with her sister Betty Caddell, who lived in Columbia, SC. Once Mary Lou spent a week with Betty, helping to care for her when she was suffering from metastatic cancer. Mary Lou remembered helping her to clean out a desk drawer. There they discovered Betty’s bridge book where she had recorded the number of tables, her partner, and points won. In a poignant moment, Betty noted, “Most of the points I won were playing with you.”

Once at a local sectional tournament Mary Lou faced a very competitive, boastful man, who shall remain unnamed from a nearby also unnamed town and who enjoyed beating good Durham women players. He reached a 6-club contract and on lead Mary Lou led an ace. She didn’t have a good second lead, so holding the QJ doubleton of clubs, she led the club jack. Declarer took the second trick in the dummy and led a second club finessing her partner. Mary Lou cashed the club queen for down one and a lot of bragging rights.

When asked about special hands that she lost due to poor play or bidding, she said, “There have been thousands. But we never scolded each other. We just wanted to enjoy the game.” Self-deprecating and reserved, belying her innate competitiveness and her bridge expertise, Mary Lou has always been a work horse, doing whatever was needed, to support duplicate bridge in Unit 191.





## **HARRISON BROOKE**

Harrison moved to the Durham area in the 60's and immediately joined Unit 191 and has been a force in the unit for well over 50 years.

Working in the finance department at Duke, Harrison was interested in “numbers”, took over membership in the unit, and was responsible for the first directory. It was important to Harrison to have a directory with addresses and phone numbers. When the unit was smaller, Harrison sent birthday cards to all the members and welcomed each new member to our unit. Harrison was membership chairman for many, many years—constantly providing the board with statistics about the membership. When people weren't attending the annual meeting, it was Harrison who planned the holiday gala followed by the annual meeting. It's been successful ever since!

When Bob Boggs opened the first Bridge Center in Carrboro, it was with the help and support of Harrison. He has directed and offered many classes to beginning bridge students. Harrison has always been mindful that the unit should offer games and opportunities for non-life masters. He still teaches a class on Monday mornings at the Seymour Senior Center.

Harrison was/is always the first to volunteer for any job that needs to be done in the unit. He has worn the “hat” of about any volunteer position within the unit. He is always welcoming and gracious at the tables. Unit 191 is a far better place thanks to Harrison.



## **THE INIMITABLE JOHN TORREY**

John grew up in New Brunswick, New Jersey and at about 15 years of age started playing bridge with his parents, aunts, and uncles, who were “terrific teachers.” He continued bridge in college where he played duplicate bridge at the Harvard Bridge Club. He remained disciplined, restricting himself to a game a week, majored in math, and took a job with IBM upon graduation.

John’s father was a physics professor at Rutgers and his research focused on magnetic resonance spectroscopy and led ultimately to the development of magnetic resonance imaging, a commonly used diagnostic aid in clinical medicine. He actually worked with a team that later won a Nobel Prize for this early research. John said, “My father was proud of the fact that his research helped rather than hurt people.”

Asked about his most remarkable moment, John said he was proudest of his family. Fittingly, John and Sue met at the bridge table. Sue’s first marriage ended in divorce and she found herself with four children and no child support. John and Sue married in 1969 as he was starting his second year at IBM. They had two more children and struggled financially early in the marriage. When IBM wanted John to relocate from New York to NC, Sue resisted until John convinced her that with a lower cost of living, they could have a better house in NC.

John remembers with reverence summers spent at his grandparents' compound on Long Island. Several houses and numerous bedrooms accommodated the large family that gathered there. Although John had no brothers and only one sister, his mother was one of seven children, affording John 20 first cousins! His grandfather had a natural rapport with his grandchildren and they spent halcyon days boating, sailing, and swimming. John continued this tradition of fun in the sun with his own children.

Everyone playing John's and Sue's games has sampled their delicious egg salad sandwiches. As it turns out, John is the one over the years who prepared the sandwiches. In his usual analytical fashion, he developed a unique way to streamline sandwich production. He gently raps each egg against an edge until he hears a "klunk" causing a hairline fracture that enables fast and easy shelling once it is hard boiled. His sandwiches are tasty and fresh and they disappear quickly, as do his chocolate chip cookies and brownies. It is not surprising that John enjoys cooking. His favorite thing to make is loaf bread, but he bakes a mean ham for his special holiday potluck each year.

In the early 1990s John started directing at the Raleigh Bridge Club and in 1994 became an ACBL Director for Regional Tournaments in the middle-Atlantic area represented by Districts 6 and 7. He gives all the credit for his excellent director training to Millard Northway, an ACBL supervisor and facilitator, who recently died. John believes that "all directors are good at helping out what needs to be done. Bad people don't get assignments."

John has used his natural analytical and mathematical ability in many ways to benefit the local bridge realm. He created the Howell Movement used in games with seven or fewer tables and he wrote a program for a computer timer used in club games and local tournaments. He serves Unit 191 not only with his considerable skills but also with his quiet generosity. He personally purchased the card sorter that facilitates pre-dealt boards and permits hand records for each game.

John is dedicated to the promotion of bridge and with directorial authority insures that no one has an unfair advantage over another. He enjoys directing and at 70 years plans to continue directing at local games and tournaments, even though he no longer does long distance tournament directing. He has few health complaints, but with his hearing loss he sometimes misses the ring of a cell phone during a game.

John's sense of humor is alive and well. It is common to hear John announce "one more diabolical round" with a sly grin and a twinkle in his eyes. Players comment that John's hands are always "interesting," with unbalanced distribution, but no one complains. Everyone likes a good challenging game of bridge and John delivers.

Written by Liz McGuffey