

# Chips

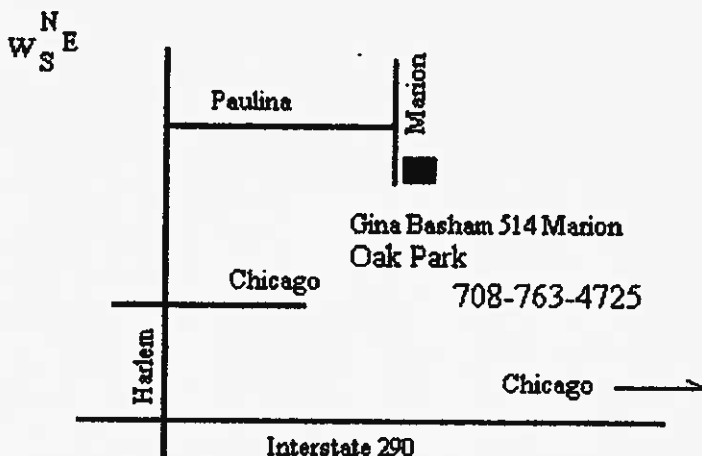
Don't  
Miss The  
Shire's Birthday  
Bash, Saturday October  
10, 10am-Dusk!



October  
1998

# Next Shire Moot

The next shire moot will be Sunday, November 1st at the home Gina Basham. Moot starts at 6:30pm. Call her at if you have questions.



# Shire Party

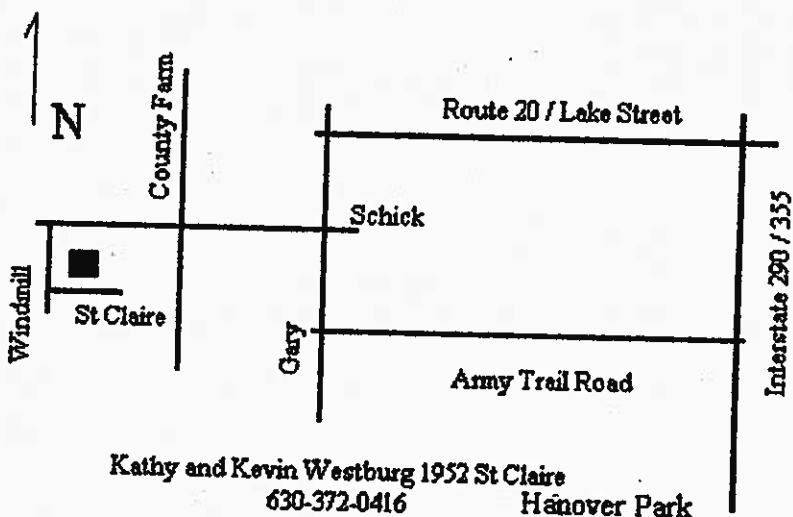
Saturday October 10th, 10am till  
Dusk

All are welcome to come to the party, we'll bring the meat, you bring a side dish, call Max asap if you have not already RSVP'd at 630-351-5802. Afterward we will retire at Kathy and Kevin's house. See map at the end of

these directions.

Blackwell Forest Preserve is located on Butterfield Road (Route 22) Between Winfield Road on the East and Route 59 on the West. It's Northern Border is Mack Road. From 355 Take Roosevelt Road West to Winfield Road. Take Winfield Road South to Route 22. Take Route 22 West to the entrance to the park which will be on the North Side of the Street.

Upon entering the park, follow the one-way road north past Mount Hoy on the left. It becomes two-way and the boat docks will be on the right. Continue on the road towards the campground. At this point you can see the North Pavillion across the water North by North East of your position. Follow the road as it curves around to the parking lot entrance adjacent to the pavillion. There is a brick privy house close to the pavillion. If you make it to the campground entrance, you've gone to far. If you miss it on the way back, go home. (just kidding of course)





# Let the Dice Roll

by Culwyn

Part one of this article (see last month's "Chips") dealt with the Anglo-Norse boardgame Hnefetafl, a chess-like boardgame played by noble and burgher alike. This month deals with the far less lofty — and eternally popular — games of dice.

Dice of some form have probably been part of human culture as long as people have had anything worth gambling over. Four-sided "numbersticks", essentially oblong dice, have been found in Mesopotamia from at

least as early as the third millennium BC. Also, unlike games such as chess, hnefetafl, backgammon, Nine-Men's Morris, or draughts, games of dice always seem to have been wagering games; associated with the common and lower classes, although probably enjoyed by the aristocracy as well. Early Church writers ranging from the treatises of the Venerable Bede, through the *Gesta Dannonum* of the 12th century make references to the immorality and ignominy of dice games in general, and dicing for money, in particular.

#### **Materials and Construction:**

Surviving medieval dice have been made of antler, bone, jet, and (in Scandinavia) walrus ivory. Wooden dice, are commonly seen from the 18th century until the introduction of plastics in the mid-20th, and may very well have been used in period as well. However, no examples have survived the ensuing centuries. Numbering was denoted with pips, hatchmarks, and even Roman numerals. The modern tradition of having opposite faces add up to seven was not standard in Medieval dice, but does appear in a majority of the surviving examples. The exact reason for the development of this tradition is uncertain.

Because traditional numbering methods can be found in period, any wooden or bone die numbered with pips would be suitable for a re-enactor. However, for the true authenticity devotee, an alternate form of die found in the Dark Ages, and common through the 12th century, are rectangular dice. These strange dice have the faces numbered 1 and 2 opposite one another, and are no more than half or two-thirds the length of the other four sides. The exact use of these odd dice is uncertain, but they are usually found in sets of two and three. Since the lowest

numbers are found on the smallest sides, and thus are the least likely numerals to be rolled, it is assumed that they were designed for a game in which low numbers were needed. Some scholars also speculate that these dice were used with hnefetafl, as discussed last month. In this later case, however, no clear theory has been presented as to why low numbers would have been more highly desired.

In an only semi-literate, ecclesiastic society, it is not surprising that the rules of the gambling games of the masses would not find their way into written records. Textual hints in the Norse sagas seem to suggest that these games were probably simple competitions of high rolls, or a series of rolls to see who could reach a total first without exceeding it (not unlike modern Black Jack). More details than this, however, has yet to be found.

### **Knucklebones (Five Stones)**

Pig and sheep knuckles have been used in games of chance in a variety of ways. Shire members may remember the knucklebone competitions that used to be held at our annual "All Souls" event, and which numbered the curves of the knuckles much like the different faces of dice.

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While there is evidence that knucklebones were used as surrogate dice, there were also several games designed specifically with knucklebones in mind. A handful of knucklebones or small, polished stones (thus the name Five Stones) are taken into the palm of the hand. The hand is closed into a fist, knuckles up. The stones are then flicked into the air, with the object of catching as many as possible on the back of the same hand. The winner is the person who catches the most bones.

Another variant seems to have incorporated an actual die. In this version of the game, each participant began with a certain starting number of bones, the exact amount of which is unclear. Each player wagered, and then rolled a die. The number that came up for each person was the additional number of bones they had to add to their "hand." From there the game proceeded as normal, with the bones tossed into the air, and as many as possible being caught.

The Time's Atlas of Games: Of All Ages, For All Ages suggests that there was yet another variant of knucklebones that was nearly identical to the game of Jacks, and that the jacks themselves may have been derived from the bones. Since it does not elaborate further than this, nor have I found any other sources discussing this theory, the reader will have to make of it what they will.

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