

= Algonquin Round Table =

The Algonquin Round Table was a celebrated group of New York City writers , critics , actors and wits . Gathering initially as part of a practical joke , members of " The Vicious Circle " , as they dubbed themselves , met for lunch each day at the Algonquin Hotel from 1919 until roughly 1929 . At these luncheons they engaged in wisecracks , wordplay and witticisms that , through the newspaper columns of Round Table members , were disseminated across the country .

Daily association with each other , both at the luncheons and outside of them , inspired members of the Circle to collaborate creatively . The entire group worked together successfully only once , however , to create a revue called No Sirree ! which helped launch a Hollywood career for Round Tabler Robert Benchley .

In its ten years of association , the Round Table and a number of its members acquired national reputations , both for their contributions to literature and for their sparkling wit . Although some of their contemporaries , and later in life even some of its members , disparaged the group , its reputation has endured long after its dissolution .

= = Origin = =

The group that would become the Round Table began meeting in June 1919 as the result of a practical joke carried out by theatrical press agent John Peter Toohey . Toohey , annoyed at New York Times drama critic Alexander Woollcott for refusing to plug one of Toohey 's clients (Eugene O 'Neill) in his column , organized a luncheon supposedly to welcome Woollcott back from World War I , where he had been a correspondent for Stars and Stripes . Instead Toohey used the occasion to poke fun at Woollcott on a number of fronts . Woollcott 's enjoyment of the joke and the success of the event prompted Toohey to suggest that the group in attendance meet at the Algonquin each day for lunch .

The group first gathered in the Algonquin 's Pergola Room (later called the Oak Room) at a long rectangular table . As they increased in number , Algonquin manager Frank Case moved them to the Rose Room and a round table . Initially the group called itself " The Board " and the luncheons " Board meetings " . After being assigned a waiter named Luigi , the group re @-@ christened itself " Luigi Board " . Finally they became " The Vicious Circle " although " The Round Table " gained wide currency after cartoonist Edmund Duffy of the Brooklyn Eagle caricatured the group sitting at a round table and wearing armor .

= = Membership = =

Charter members of the Round Table included :

Franklin Pierce Adams , columnist

Robert Benchley , humorist and actor

Heywood Broun , columnist and sportswriter (married to Ruth Hale)

Marc Connelly , playwright

Ruth Hale , freelance writer who worked for women 's rights

George S. Kaufman , playwright and director

Dorothy Parker , critic , poet , short @-@ story writer , and screenwriter

Brock Pemberton , Broadway producer

Harold Ross , The New Yorker editor

Robert E. Sherwood , author and playwright

John Peter Toohey , Broadway publicist

Alexander Woollcott , critic and journalist

Membership was not official or fixed for so many others who moved in and out of the Circle . Some of these included :

Tallulah Bankhead , actress

Noël Coward , playwright

Blyth Daly , actress
 Edna Ferber , author and playwright
 Eva Le Gallienne , actress
 Margalo Gillmore , actress
 Jane Grant , journalist and feminist (married to Ross)
 Beatrice Kaufman , editor and playwright (married to George S. Kaufman)
 Margaret Leech , writer and historian
 Neysa McMein , magazine illustrator
 Harpo Marx , comedian and film star
 Alice Duer Miller , writer
 Donald Ogden Stewart , playwright and screenwriter
 Frank Sullivan , journalist and humorist
 Deems Taylor , composer
 Estelle Winwood , actress and comedian
 Peggy Wood , actress

= = Activities = =

In addition to the daily luncheons , members of the Round Table worked and associated with each other almost constantly . The group was devoted to games , including cribbage and poker . The group had its own poker club , the Thanatopsis Literary and Inside Straight Club , which met at the hotel on Saturday nights . Regulars at the game included Kaufman , Adams , Broun , Ross and Woollcott , with non @-@ Round Tablers Herbert Bayard Swope , silk merchant Paul Hyde Bonner , baking heir Raoul Fleischmann , actor Harpo Marx , and writer Ring Lardner sometimes sitting in . The group also played charades (which they called simply " The Game ") and the " I can give you a sentence " game , which spawned Dorothy Parker 's memorable sentence using the word horticulture : " You can lead a horticulture but you can 't make her think . "

Members often visited Neshobe Island , a private island co @-@ owned by several " Algonks " ? but governed by Aleck Woollcott as a " benevolent tyrant " , as his biographer Samuel Hopkins Adams charitably put it ? located on several acres in the middle of Lake Bomoseen in Vermont . There they would engage in their usual array of games including Wink murder , which they called simply " Murder " , plus croquet .

A number of Round Tablers were inveterate practical jokers , constantly pulling pranks on one another . As time went on the jokes became ever more elaborate . Harold Ross and Jane Grant once spent weeks playing a particularly memorable joke on Woollcott involving a prized portrait of himself . They had several copies made , each slightly more askew than the last , and would periodically secretly swap them out and then later comment to Woollcott " What on earth is wrong with your portrait ? " until Woollcott was beside himself . Eventually they returned the original portrait .

= = No Sirree ! = =

Given the literary and theatrical activities of the Round Table members , it was perhaps inevitable that they would write and stage their own revue . No Sirree ! , staged for one night only in April 1922 , was a take @-@ off of a then @-@ popular European touring revue called La Chauve @-@ Souris , directed by Nikita Balieff .

No Sirree ! had its genesis at the studio of Neysa McMein , which served as something of a salon for Round Tablers away from the Algonquin . Acts included : " Opening Chorus " featuring Woollcott , Toohey , Kaufman , Connelly , Adams and Benchley with violinist Jascha Heifetz providing offstage , off @-@ key accompaniment ; " He Who Gets Flapped " , a musical number featuring the song " The Everlastin ' Ingenue Blues " written by Dorothy Parker and performed by Robert Sherwood accompanied by " chorus girls " including Tallulah Bankhead , Helen Hayes , Ruth Gillmore , Lenore Ulric and Mary Brandon ; " Zowie , or the Curse of an Akins Heart " ; " The Greasy Hag , an O 'Neill

Play in One Act " with Kaufman , Connelly and Woolcott ; and " Mr. Whim Passes By ? An A. A. Milne Play " .

The only item of note to emerge from No Sirree ! was Robert Benchley 's contribution , The Treasurer 's Report . Benchley 's disjointed parody so delighted those in attendance that Irving Berlin hired Benchley in 1923 to deliver the Report as part of Berlin 's Music Box Revue for \$ 500 a week . In 1928 , Report was later made into a short sound film in the Fox Movietone sound @-@ on @-@ film system by Fox Film Corporation . The film kicked off a second career for Benchley in Hollywood .

With the success of No Sirree ! the Round Tablers hoped to duplicate it with an " official " Vicious Circle production open to the public with material performed by professional actors . Kaufman and Connelly funded the revue , named The Forty @-@ niners . The revue opened in November 1922 and was a failure , running for just 15 performances .

= = Decline of the Round Table = =

As members of the Round Table moved into ventures outside New York City , inevitably the group drifted apart . By the early 1930s the Vicious Circle was broken . Edna Ferber said she realized it when she arrived at the Rose Room for lunch one day in 1932 and found the group 's table occupied by a family from Kansas . Frank Case was asked what happened to the group . He shrugged and replied , " What became of the reservoir at Fifth Avenue and Forty @-@ Second Street ? These things do not last forever . " Some members of the group remained friends after its dissolution . Parker and Benchley in particular remained close up until his death in 1945 , although her political leanings did strain their relationship . Others , as the group itself would come to understand when it gathered following Woolcott 's death in 1943 , simply realized that they had nothing to say to one another .

= = Public response and legacy = =

Because a number of the members of the Round Table had regular newspaper columns , the activities and quips of various Round Table members were reported in the national press . This brought Round Tablers widely into the public consciousness as renowned wits .

Not all of their contemporaries were fans of the group . Their critics accused them of logrolling , or exchanging favorable plugs of one another 's works , and of rehearsing their witticisms in advance . James Thurber was a detractor of the group , accusing them of being too consumed by their elaborate practical jokes . H. L. Mencken , who was much admired by many in the Circle , was also a critic , commenting to fellow writer Anita Loos that " their ideals were those of a vaudeville actor , one who is extremely ' in the know ' and inordinately trashy " .

The group showed up in the 1923 best @-@ seller Black Oxen by Gertrude Atherton . She sarcastically described a group she called " the Sophisticates " :

Groucho Marx , brother of Round Table associate Harpo , was never comfortable amidst the viciousness of the Vicious Circle . " The price of admission is a serpent 's tongue and a half @-@ concealed stiletto . " Even some members of the Round Table disparaged it later in life . Dorothy Parker in particular criticized the group .

Despite Parker 's bleak assessment and while it is true that some members of the Round Table are perhaps now " famous for being famous " instead of for their literary output , Round Table members and associates contributed to the literary landscape , including Pulitzer Prize @-@ winning work by Circle members Kaufman , Connelly and Sherwood (who won four) and by associate Ferber and the legacy of Ross 's New Yorker . Others made lasting contributions to the realms of stage and screen ? Tallulah Bankhead and Eva Le Gallienne became Broadway greats and the films of Harpo and Benchley remain popular ; and Parker has remained renowned for her short stories and literary reviews .

The Algonquin Round Table , as well as the number of other literary and theatrical greats who lodged there , helped earn the Algonquin Hotel its status as a New York City Historic Landmark .

The hotel was so designated in 1987 . In 1996 the hotel was designated a national literary landmark by the Friends of Libraries USA based on the contributions of " The Round Table Wits " . The organization 's bronze plaque is attached to the front of the hotel . Although the Rose Room was removed from the Algonquin in a 1998 remodel , the hotel paid tribute to the group by commissioning and hanging the painting A Vicious Circle by Natalie Ascencios , depicting the Round Table and also created a replica of the original table . The hotel occasionally stages an original musical production , The Talk of the Town , in the Oak Room . Its latest production started September 11 , 2007 and ran through the end of the year .

A film about the members , The Ten @-@ Year Lunch (1987) , won the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature . The dramatic film Mrs. Parker and the Vicious Circle (1994) recounted the Round Table from the perspective of Dorothy Parker .

Portions of the 1981 film Rich and Famous were set in the Algonquin and one of the film 's characters , Liz Hamilton (played by Jacqueline Bisset) refers to the Round Table during the film .

In 1993 , The Algonquin Round Table was featured in The Young Indiana Jones and the Scandal of 1920 where the titular character meet the group and attend at least two lunches . Wonderful Nonsense - The Algonquin Round Table is a documentary produced for the DVD release of that film in 2008 .

In 2009 , Robert Benchley 's grandson , Nat Benchley , and co @-@ editor Kevin C. Fitzpatrick published The Lost Algonquin Round Table , a collection of the early writings of the group .

In the 2015 Hollywood movie " The Martian " , the NASA JPL engineer Tim Grimes refers to the Algonquin Round Table when describing the crude communication JPL had established with stranded astronaut Mark Watney : " Thirty @-@ two minute round trip communications time , all he can do is ask yes / no questions , and all we can do is point the camera . This won 't exactly be an Algonquin Round Table of snappy repartee . "