

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, December 19, 2005

Christmas 1929 at Auburn Heights: How did Auburn Heights look during the Christmas period long, long ago? Although the photo displayed near the electric trains in the museum dates from 1927, my first real remembrance was Christmas 1929. Like most women before and since, my mother loved to decorate for special occasions, not the least of which was Christmas. In 1929, she had invited her mother and all her siblings and their families for dinner on Christmas day. The table was set for 22 in the dining room, with a "T" extending into the living room. The front hall, the sun porch, then heated by steam, and the remainder of the living room were "gathering" areas. All guests were asked to take their outer garments to one or two of the upstairs bedrooms. Ida Murray (1866–1953), mother of Clifford, was the main cook, and she was assisted by Mary Simpson, my grandmother's cook from Middletown, Delaware. Ida (and Mary while she was here) lived in the apartment over the garage, quite primitive at that time. Before my bedtime on Christmas Eve, with the table settings just about completed, our electricity went off. Direct current came to Auburn Heights by overhead wires from the adjoining paper mill. I think I went to bed by candlelight, but our power must have been restored shortly thereafter.

When it was our turn to host the family, my grandmother Shallcross usually came a few days before and stayed a few days after Christmas. Since I was her youngest grandchild, we had a special relationship. All others came Christmas morning in automobiles without heaters. My father carved the 30-pound turkey at the head of the table. When most of the guests asked for "seconds," he went at it again. There was not much time for him to eat. A freshly roasted home-grown turkey was a special treat, as we seldom had turkey more than twice a year. That evening and the next day we could expect cold turkey with filling, then turkey salad, and finally, turkey soup. All the women in my mother's family were good cooks, and Ida was special, too. They knew all the tricks in getting the most from a woodburning cookstove. The toy I remember receiving that day was a coupe about 8 inches long that had real headlights, activated by a D dry cell battery.