

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, July 24, 2006

The Flag Pole at Auburn Heights: About 1920, my father decided to erect a flagpole on the east lawn about 100 feet from the circular front porch. It was not to be an ordinary flag pole but one 108 feet tall with a light on top. The large 48-star flag would be much higher than any of the trees then standing in the lawn and therefore visible from a great distance, even from Gun Club Hill nearly a mile away.

Heavy iron pipe in many sizes was available in those days, and the bottom length, about 6 feet in the ground surrounded by concrete and 14 feet above the ground was 7-inch (inside diameter). At the first joint, a 6-inch pipe was slid inside and the joint "leaded in," providing an early-type weld. Twenty feet higher, a 5-inch pipe went inside the 6-inch, and above that, 4-inch inside 5-inch, and so on, with each length being approximately 20 feet long. The top length, perhaps slightly shorter than 20 feet, was either 2½- or 2-inch pipe. The light on top was encased in a small watertight dome, with the wire running down through the pole to below ground level, where a small hole in the side allowed it to run underground from there to the house. A vertical pulley was mounted at the top, large enough for a fairly heavy hemp rope. In those days, there were pole painters who would climb the pole like electric linemen and install the rope and paint the pole.

I can't remember that the light ever worked after I came on the scene. We would put up the flag on major holidays, however, and I learned to do this at an early age. Sometimes the rope would break, and that meant the flag could not go up again until a pole painter came around, and he would replace it when he painted the pole. One time the rope got caught with the flag at the top and "Cliffey" and I couldn't get it down. We were always betting each other we could do something, and I bet him I could get it down. I got my "22" rifle and shot at the rope near the top. I cut the rope, but the flag lodged in a tree high above the ground, and then we did have a time, but somehow we finally got the flag down undamaged. We never had a 50-star flag for this pole.

About 1982, after a lapse of many years, a pole painter surfaced and said he would paint the pole and install a new rope. He told me to go to a boat store and buy the rope and the necessary fixtures, and he would be back the next day to do the job. I got the supplies, and he arrived on schedule, but I was away for a short time. When I returned, he shook his head and said he was old enough to die but he was not ready. He had gone up to the first joint and thought water had gotten into the pole and rusted it, thereby making it unsafe. I made the decision to take down the pole and asked Wade Arnold, a local jack-of-all-trades, to do it for me.

Wade came with his Case 580 tractor and front bucket, which he could extend nearly 20 feet, and chained his bucket to the pole as high up as he could reach. Then he wisely cut four holes through the pole near the ground and fastened a chain through the holes above and below where he planned to cut it off. This was to prevent the bottom from "kicking." I told Wade that I had calculated the center of gravity of the pole to be about 38 feet above the ground, and there was no way he could hold it once it started over. Despite this non-professional warning, with his tractor and bucket lashed tight to the pole, he cut it off with his torch. The pole started toward the hedge and Route 82, and no Case tractor with bucket was going to stop it. When the higher portions of the pole hit the tree limbs near the road with some force, the pole bent at a 45-degree angle. The top was suspended above where we enter our present parking lot, with the pole high enough over the road for traffic to pass underneath. Although Wade had no control over the situation as the pole went over, he was not hurt, nor was his tractor damaged. Subsequently, he cut up the pole to remove it, and it was as strong as the day it was erected.