

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, November 19, 2007

Spring Cleaning at Auburn Heights, 1930s: Before World War II, my mother usually had live-in domestic help, either a cook/housekeeper or a domestic couple who lived in the apartment over the garage, then much smaller and less elaborate than at present. In addition, Clifford ("Cliffey") Murray, who worked at Auburn Heights for 50 years, was called upon for all jobs, interior and exterior. The place came alive in the springtime.

The heavy rugs from most of the rooms were taken up, carried to the front yard, and hung on a line for beating and "hanging out." Then they were carefully rolled, carried to the cellar of the big house, and stored for the summer on empty wooden shell boxes, of which we had many from the Yorklyn Gun Club. Then light summer "throw rugs" were put down. It was not expected that many visitors would be entertained inside in the hot summer; the front porch was much more inviting. From the cellar were brought out the porch awnings and runner-type rope rugs and finally the porch furniture with all-weather cushions. Plants that had wintered in the sun porch were taken to the nearby lawn and located on low tables made from planks and trestles. The window and door screens came next; they, too, came from their winter storage in the cellar to be thoroughly washed and dried in the yard before installation. There were no storm sash or storm doors in those days. Everything had to be stored in the cellar as the museum and the "back building" had not been built. My mother supervised all this and worked long hours herself, starting early and stopping late.

It was a chore to keep the dandelions and buttercups out of the lawn, portions of which would be "limed" in the spring. Then there was the rose arbor, half again as long as today, the small rock garden on the slope below the present patio, and certain other flower beds containing iris, daffodils, lilies of the valley, and other bloomers, which made quite a spring show. But the big job was getting the large rock garden ready, described in the *News* of March 6, 2006. Between the stone walks and scenic ponds, there was a profusion of color, mostly from phlox and low-blooming ground cover, such as periwinkle, covering the spaces between arborvitae, hews, and an occasional deciduous tree. Leaves had to be raked from around the rocks and plants, and some annual planting and weeding was ever-present. Often my father had to "shore up" the water spillways, always wanting to find some good local clay. In 1938, he changed from hydraulic rams to an over-shot water wheel to pump water from the mill race to the highest point.

There was a flagstone deck at the bank of the mill race, and rough outdoor chairs allowed visitors to sit and view the rustic arch bridge across the tiny stream (this is where the "Kennett Trolley" stop had been from 1903 to 1923). I recall one summer party where hors d'ouvres were served at this location, probably a prelude to a dinner party up the hill in a more normal location. During World War II, of necessity, the rock garden was neglected, and in the years that followed, it was never rebuilt. In 1970, the rocks were removed or plowed under, the small ponds and spillways filled, and the view from the house cut off with the building of the pond.