

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, June 16, 2008

Summer at Auburn Heights, 1914: The large framed photograph hanging in the front hall of Auburn Heights shows Auburn Heights and its grounds during the summer of 1914. A tramp photographer took the picture from the hill opposite, just above the present parking lot for our on-site events. T. Clarence Marshall's 1913 Stanley Model 78 roadster is on the driveway in front of the big house. At that time, his mother, having been widowed in 1911, was still running the house, with her daughter and son-in-law, Anna and Norman Mancill, and bachelor Clarence living at home with her. Several trellises for roses or Virginia creepers were attached around the front porch. Clarence worked in the mills everyday, along with his brother Warren, his uncle Elwood, and his cousins, Albert and Henry. Clarence may have been the only one of the five to get his hands dirty, however, as he loved the steam machinery and all it entailed.

Perhaps to a lesser extent than in her husband Israel's time, "Lizzie" Marshall (1854–1930) had to be prepared to feed an unknown number of family and visitors for the main meal at noon. She did have help in the kitchen, however. One such loyal helper was Martha Peterson, who lived with her husband and her four small children in a tiny house owned by the Marshall Brothers Paper Company on Auburn Mill Road. Martha's husband, Dorsey, drove a one-horse mill cart and later became a truck driver for the paper and fibre company. At least two of their children, Eliza and Dorsey Jr. (often called Edward or "Pete"), would come to Auburn Heights with their mother, as she had nowhere else to leave them. When the clock neared 12:00, little Pete would go to the front gate, hoping that Clarence, coming up from the mills in his Stanley steamer, would stop and give him a ride up the driveway. That summer it must have been in the Model 78 shown in the 1914 picture, and the youngster was never disappointed.

My father, Clarence, was also a Stanley dealer, and sometime that summer, he had a mechanic working on a car in the carriage house, then of frame construction inside the stone walls. A torch set some hay on fire, and the interior of the building was destroyed by the flames. Gone forever was the frame partition between the stable and the carriage room, the latter used for a Stanley garage and repair shop. Insurance on the building was carried with a 35-year-old Wilmington agent named William J. Highfield, who came to assess the damage. He said that nowhere in the fire policy did it mention automobiles. My father was concerned whether the claim would be paid, when Highfield said: "We'll pay the claim, because if we don't, you would never insure with us again, and besides, if you went to court, you would collect anyway." So the building was rebuilt with heavy steel beams and a concrete deck and became about as fireproof as a 1914 building could be. It was never clear to me whether this fire was before or after the photograph, but the pristine appearance of the property in the picture suggests the fire must have been later.

During that summer of long ago, Lizzie was looking forward to the birth of her second grandchild, as her daughter Anna was expecting in the fall. As has been mentioned earlier, Norman Clarence Mancill was born on November 28, 1914, in the northeast bedroom, the only birth to occur at Auburn Heights. The year 1914 in the United States was similar to 1939 in that a World War was brewing in Europe, but most Americans believed our country would not become involved.