

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, November 24, 2008

Sunday Evening Musicales: In the mid-1930s, about six families would gather for summer evening sit-down dinners, usually on the lawn if the weather was cooperative. At least three of the hosts were the Woodwards of Mendenhall (Pennsylvania), the Mancills (also of Mendenhall), and the Marshalls of Auburn Heights. While all six participating families may have brought food, the host family was in charge and did most of the preparation and work. To a 10-year-old, this group of possibly 25 people seemed like a very large gathering, and my cousins, Eleanor Marshall and the Mancill twins, joined me in creating numerous discipline problems for our parents.

It seemed that this group expanded to include a local musical program following dinner. Then it got so large that dinner was not possible, so it was a Sunday evening musicale. How many of these were held and for how many summers they occurred, I am not certain. However, I remember one at Auburn Heights when nearly 70 people attended. All cars were parked along the driveway, in some places two abreast, as the drive then ended opposite the door to the shop, and there was no "loop" around the east side of the house. Neither was the lot across the road accessible, as it was owned by the Snuff company and was cut off from Route 82 by a barbed wire fence to keep Joe DeStafney's grazing cattle out of the road.

The guests sat mostly in the big living room, with the audience spilling over into the front hall. In the living room's round alcove with five bay windows was my mother's Baby Grand piano, used by the performers doing recitals or performing piano accompaniment. A quartet of the barber shop variety seemed to sing from the other end of the room, however. Paul Hannum, a building contractor in Kennett Square (and a second cousin of my father) sat in the leather-covered arm chair still in the front hall. Isaac and Edith Wetherill from Chester (Edith was a Mitchell) also attended. His family built the Wetherill Corliss steam engines, very choice today. There must have been about six acts in the evening's musicale. Two of them I remember well. One was a men's quartet from Kennett Square. Two of its members with good voices were Scott McMurtrie (baritone or bass) and Monroe Nute (tenor). Scott was active in local theatrical productions and ran the House of Flowers for James B. D. Edge Jr., and Monnie Nute owned the Chrysler-Plymouth dealership in Kennett. The other feature of my recollection was a piano solo and accompaniment by the Passmore sisters of Mendenhall. Helen played the piano, and Lydia had a very good soprano voice. I don't know how we snuck in, but the Mancill boys and I were on the front row. When Lydia would hit the high notes, we would burst out in laughter. Since the room was crowded, our parents could not get to us to shut us down. If the Division of Parks ever has a musicale in the living room, I promise to behave better.