

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, November 16, 2009

**The Trucks at Auburn Heights:** In the late 1920s, when I was very small, my father had a Model T Ford touring car of about 1925 for a "hired man" to drive when he went for the mail twice a day and to Cousin Albert Marshall's farm to exchange our milk cans. Sometimes this was "Bate" Dennis, whose full-time job was at the paper mill; sometimes it was teenager William Johnson, member of a large Hockessin family. One evening "Bate" left the "T" at the kitchen door to deliver the milk inside; when he came out, the car was resting against a tree just above the mill race. I think it cost \$5 for a new fender. There was also a Graham Brothers truck, built on a 4-cylinder Dodge chassis of 1926 with a starter-generator and 12-volt system. In brass letters on each side of the panel-bodied truck body (with heavy wire mesh like a mail truck of that period) the weights were indicated: 3750, 2250, 6000 (lightweight, tare, and gross). It seemed it was used only when we moved to Rehoboth in early summer and home again in the fall. I have never driven another car or truck that steered as hard as that one.

In 1929, my father bought a slightly used '29 Ford Model A Station Wagon. In the early '70s, these became known as "woodies." It had side curtains and two removable seats behind the front seat. It was used by Clifford Murray and others as a pick-up truck; the seats were never in the car. I learned to drive in this station wagon, beginning on the grounds of Auburn Heights when I was eight (1932). It served us well, even with my practicing, until my father sold it in 1936 to make way for more modern things.

In February '36, he bought a 6-cylinder Chevrolet light truck chassis for \$409 and sent it to York, Pennsylvania, to have a station wagon body without rear seats installed for \$230. This station wagon had wind-up glass windows instead of side curtains, but it was used as a pick-up truck in the same way as the Model A Ford. It never seemed to have much power, and during World War II gasoline rationing, when someone at the mill needed transportation, it left Auburn Heights about 1944. In 1937, we had acquired a '31 Packard Standard Eight sedan from Sara Bowers and her mother as a "school car," one in which "Cliffey" could take and pick up my cousin Eleanor and me to and from school in Wilmington. My father had plans for that car.

At the end of the war, the '31 Packard was converted into a pick-up truck with a dump body. The sedan body was cut away and made into a close-coupled coupe configuration, with the open dump body behind. Although the weight distribution was too far to the rear and the dump feature never worked, it provided a solid pick-up truck for several years with the lettering "Yorklyn Gun Club" on each door. In 1954, my father bought a new Dodge ½-ton pick-up from his friend Bob Ferguson in Kennett Square for \$1,400. We used this little truck very hard, as I carried rail, switch parts, and the like for the beginning of the Wilmington & Western Railroad (W & W) in the mid-1960s. In 1967, I bought a small Chevrolet El Camino pick-up, which was a dandy little 6-cylinder car, but not heavy enough to do all that was required. At the end of 1968, I traded it for a new '69 Chevy Longhorn ¾-ton pick-up with V-8 engine, which was also used hard, and more miles (about 90,000) were put on this pick-up truck than any others at Auburn Heights before it was sold in 1987. I drove it to the locomotive plant of GE at Erie, Pennsylvania, to pick up two air reservoirs for Wilmington & Western Locomotive #92, to Wisconsin Dells to pick up the steam paddle-wheel engine for the river boat in our pond, as well as to Latrobe, Pennsylvania, to take delivery of two steel tires for Locomotive #98 on the W & W.

In 1983, I bought a heavy-duty Ford F-250 with 4-speed manual transmission and 460 cu. in. V-8 engine for towing my new closed trailer. I sold this to Jim Keith in 1987 after buying my first Suburban for towing, a 1985 GMC. Finally, in 1987 I bought a new Ford F-150 ½-ton pick-up with no frills for \$9,000. This truck has been driven 1,000 miles per year for 22 years and was sold to the Friends of Auburn Heights Preserve and then donated to the State of Delaware.