

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, March 26, 2012

James T. Shallcross Jr. (1879–1972): James T. Shallcross Jr. was Esther Marshall's eldest brother. A highly successful farmer in New Castle County, south of the C & D Canal, his mother called him "Jamie," his siblings called him "Jay," and his wife called him "Jim." To me, he was always "Uncle Jay." Born on Belleview Farm just north of Shallcross Lake, as were all his siblings, he was sent to Friends Central School in Philadelphia, where he met and fell in love with a distant cousin, Elizabeth Shallcross of Byberry in northeast Philadelphia. She was from a prominent Quaker family, and her father, Thomas Shallcross, was president of the all-male Asparagus Club, which met for dinner once a year (about 1900) at a prominent Philadelphia hotel. Jamie and Bess became engaged, but his parents would not allow him to marry before he was 21. Young men from respectable families didn't do that in those days. In the fall of 1900, they were married, and Bess came to live with her new husband and his widowed grandfather, Sereck F. Shallcross (1816–1906), on Oakland Farm, about one mile south of Belleview.

Farm life was new to Bess, and it must have required a major adjustment. Having a distinct knack for farming successfully, Uncle Jay began to increase his farming acreage as his family grew. Elizabeth "Betty" (1903–1999) came first, then Esther (1907–1959), Margaret "Peggy" (1909–1990), Mary Comly "Comie" (1915–1993), and Meta (1919–1999), but there were no sons to carry on the Shallcross name (his two younger brothers were both married late in life but had no children). When the first four girls were married, the receptions were planned at Oakland, although Peggy's, which occurred in February 1935, was quickly shifted to her grandmother's home in Middletown as a blizzard closed all the country roads. Betty married Harry B. Roberts in 1926, Esther married Leigh Magee in 1929, Peggy married John Aubrey Walker in 1935, Comie married D. Drake Coffman in 1935, and Meta married Robert B. Day at Esther's home in Wayne, Pennsylvania, in 1948. All had children, averaging two apiece.

Uncle Jay, like many of the Shallcrosses, had hay fever, or "hay cold" as it was often called. It never slowed him down or kept him from working in the fields during harvesting season. I was invited to have midday dinner with Aunt Bess, Uncle Jay, and Meta one bright August day in the late 1930s. When he came home at noon, his nose was red and swollen and his eyes almost closed, but he paid no attention to it and enjoyed his dinner. In 1938, Uncle Jay and Aunt Bess decided to leave the farm and move into Odessa, where they had a home on Main Street. He continued to farm, however, and at that time owned about 10 farms in the Odessa-Middletown area. His grandson, Harry B. Roberts Jr., continued to work many of these farms and marshes before and after his grandfather died.

During the desegregated school controversy in the 1950s, a town meeting in Odessa was addressing the issue. It seemed there was a 50-50 split on whether the school should admit black children. Finally, Uncle Jay stood and said he had worked with black people all his life, and many were his friends. He thought black and white should be educated together. His thoughts carried the day. He and Aunt Bess enjoyed Grange tours to the West Coast and Alaska in the 1940s. My mother invited their entire family to a celebration of their 50th wedding anniversary at Auburn Heights in 1950. I carried the honorees from the Marshall Brothers mill to the front porte cochere in my 1914 Stanley Model 607.

Aunt Bess died in 1966 after a long illness. Betty Roberts had come to live with and take care of her parents following the death of her husband in 1953. During Uncle Jay's final years, I went to Dover frequently and would stop often at Odessa for a brief visit. These visits were cherished, and I learned a lot. I was on my first "Trans-Con" tour with our Model 87 when Uncle Jay died in 1972 at the age of 92.