

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, June 6, 2016

**The Front Porch at Auburn Heights:** In the days before World War II, this is the time of year when the front porch would be readied for the summer. There were attached year-round trellises between the cornices and the porch railings, and their climbing roses were starting to bloom. (The trellises outlasted the rose bushes, and in the years after the war, I would sometimes climb them late at night and enter a second-floor window when I was locked out). In addition, canvas awnings on metal pipe framework were installed each spring for the summer season.

Rope-type floor mats, substituting for rugs, were put down, and the summer furniture, either wicker or Adirondack chairs, were placed appropriately. The front door was used frequently in those days, especially by strangers and by friends who came for a visit. Before the age of TV, and when the telephone was used mostly for emergencies, those coming for a friendly visit were usually unannounced. They would park on the driveway in front, come to the front door, and if it was on a pleasant summer evening, they would be invited to sit on the front porch. The visit probably lasted an hour and consisted mostly of conversation, with possibly light refreshments signaling the right time to leave.

With no air conditioning in the house, it was the coolest place to sit in the evening, which my father did regularly to smoke his after-dinner cigar. My mother would come and go but was always too busy to sit for long. During the August trapshooting tournament at the Yorklyn Gun Club, we always had house guests (some paid a modest lodging fee) to occupy most of the bedrooms. Dr. I. S. "Doc" Lilly of Stanton, Michigan, who would stay with us with his teenage son Ned (one of the best trapshooters in the country) would join my father on the porch, where he particularly enjoyed hearing the frogs croaking in the creek below (the pond was not built at that time). Ned would usually be "out on the town" with his younger friends, such as expert shooters Joe Hiestand and Hale Jones.

In late summer, when the temperature would dip below 70 degrees before dark, it became more comfortable inside the house. In mid-September, the process of putting everything away took place. The furniture, rope rugs, and awnings were covered and stored in the basement for the winter. Visitors still came to the front door, however, and a large thermometer attached to a window frame showed how hot a summer day or how cold a winter morning could be in Yorklyn. Eighteen degrees below zero was noted on February 9, 1934.

After World War II, probably reflecting the age of my parents as well as the changing times with air conditioning and TV, the front porch was used very seldom, and the front door gave way to the side door and the kitchen door for daily use. When my parents lived on the second floor starting in 1956, a sign near the front porch directed visitors to the side door. I still climbed the trellises until they became unsafe.

Starting in 1986, Ruth and I enjoyed the porch again, but we never seemed to have time to "sit." Wicker furniture with cushions and hanging baskets embellished the appearance. Whereas the front of the porch was used before World War II, we tended to use the portion on the side next to the sunporch and occasionally had our evening meal there. On the rounded portion close to the large scarlet oak, there was always a nice breeze. Governor Ruth Ann Minner and her entourage joined us there for a summer supper when they visited in 2006.

House tours have been given on our public days for about 10 years now, and they all begin on the porch near the front door. While the wooden floor, the railings, and the ornate cornice work are high-maintenance items, Auburn Heights would not be the same without its spacious porch.