

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, November 5, 2018

**Mary E. Shallcross (1852-1944):** Grandma Shallcross was really the only grandparent I knew. I was nearly 20 when she died. I was the youngest of her eight grandchildren, so maybe we had a special bond. It started when I was a few weeks old.

Mary Ellen Vandegrift was born on a farm at the edge of the marsh east of Odessa, but soon her family moved to another farm, also overlooking the marsh, near Bayview on the Delaware Bay. This house and barn were still in good condition 30 years ago, when they were pointed out to me by my Uncle Ned Shallcross. She was the eldest of several children, most of whom predeceased her. On December 18, 1872, at the age of 20, she married James Thomas Shallcross in the brand new Drawyers Presbyterian Church in Odessa (not to be confused with Old Drawyers, built in the 18th century, which the congregation abandoned at that time -- in the 20th century, Old Drawyers became a favorite wedding spot for numerous Shallcross family members, my mother being the first in 1921).

Nicknames were popular, and my grandmother was known as "Molly" or "Dolly." She and her new husband settled on a farm known as Belleview, northwest of Odessa, one of several adjoining farms owned by her father-in-law Sereck (pronounced "Seerick") F. Shallcross. Between 1876 and 1891, six children were born to James and Dolly, all of them at Belleview, the eldest, Mary, married Bassett Ferguson on the lawn there on June 6, 1906.

My grandfather, James Shallcross, dabbled in Democratic politics and held several county jobs in Wilmington starting in the late 1880s. In addition to running the farm, he commuted by train daily from Mount Pleasant to Wilmington. I have an 1892 document, covering an easement next to the Marshall Brothers Paper Mill, granted to my other grandfather, Israel Marshall, signed by James T. Shallcross, Recorder of Deeds for New Castle County. They never knew each other, as both died in 1911, 10 years before my parents were married. Grandma Shallcross never liked politics and convinced her sons to stay clear of it, although Uncle Ned was postmaster at Middletown in the 1930s.

Uncle Jay (James T. Shallcross Jr.) was settled on a neighboring farm called Oaklands when he and Aunt Bess were married in 1900. Uncle Jay's grandfather Sereck lived with them until his death in 1906 at the age of 90. Five daughters were born to Uncle Jay and Aunt Bess at Oaklands between 1903 and 1919, and three of them had their wedding receptions in the big house there.

About 1908, my grandfather, grandmother, and the four children still living at Belleview moved into a 4-acre property on the edge of Middletown that they named Flowerdale. The comfortable frame house had been built in 1876, and there were also a barn, corn crib, tiny tenant house, and an ice house on the grounds. On the south side of the property were the streets of Middletown, on the north side just open fields. It was typical in those days for prosperous farm families to move into town in their later years and supervise their country farms with tenant farmers. Uncle Jay did the same thing about 1938, when he and Aunt Bess moved into a historic home on Main Street in Odessa. Since the women didn't drive, it was certainly nice for them where neighbors could visit easily and they could walk to the local stores.

My grandfather died with pneumonia in January 1911 at the age of 63 (Israel Marshall, my other grandfather, died five months later at the age of 60). Grandmother Shallcross inherited about four large farms (she had six at the time of her death), and she managed them well. When she was in her early 90s and physically infirm, her sons still relied on her advice. In the early spring of 1924, when I was two or three weeks old, Flowerdale burned. It could be rebuilt, but it was thought best that grandmother not be around during demolition and reconstruction. She spent six weeks at Auburn Heights with her new grandson and six weeks with the Fergusons in Ridley Park.

Starting in the summer of 1925, my parents rented houses on Maryland Avenue in Rehoboth, first the Bradford cottage and then the Handy cottage, before they built #1 Queen Street in the new development of Rehoboth Heights in 1927. Grandma Shallcross, and usually her favorite cousin Gertrude Whittock, were invited to join the Marshalls for several weeks each summer, which was a highlight for them. The new house on Queen Street had two bedrooms called "Grandmother's Room," and "Cousin Gertie's Room," and the spool beds from these rooms, having been stored for many years upstairs in the steam car museum, are just now being disposed of.

Christmas was always spent with my mother's family. Sometimes the big day was held at Flowerdale, sometimes at the Fergusons' home named Whitehall in Ridley Park, and sometimes at Auburn Heights. Grandmother's visits (when Christmas was not at Flowerdale) usually lasted about a week. I remember well her last visit to Auburn Heights in 1935. My father went to Middletown about December 22 in his '32 Packard Club Sedan with a heater and brought her to Yorklyn. She was on hand when the rest of her family arrived on Christmas day. Just before New Year's, she would return to Middletown. Having her with us was very special.

The week before Christmas in 1943, I was home from M.I.T. and the Air Force Meteorology program for a few days, and we buried Cousin Gertie at Old Drawyers amid snow flurries. Then we visited Grandmother, who had been bedfast for several years. As I said good-bye, she said, "If I had an old shoe, I'd throw it at you." A few minutes later, I asked my mother what she meant. I was told that was the old way of saying, "Good Luck." She died a month later and is buried at Old Drawyers. My mother is the only family member not buried there.