

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, July 3, 2006

**Tribute to Ida Murray (1866–1953):** Several months ago, I wrote up her son Clifford, a special pal of mine. Ida was born in Wilmington, and as a child, she sledded on 4th Street hill, next to the Quaker Meeting House and the old Wilmington Friends School. Unfortunately in her time, the only occupation available to a black woman was domestic work of some kind, and in this she had few equals.

She married Albert Murray, and they lived for a time in a small frame house close to the present Route 41, where the entrance to the Wilmington & Western parking lot is today. Here their two children, Elsie and Clifford, were born. Albert pulled out, and Ida was left to raise her children. They both did her proud. She took a job with Darlington Flinn, a fixture around Price's Corner whose family owned a farm that included all of present-day Greenbank County Park, the Greenbank Mill, much of the Price's Corner Shopping Center, and on the southeast extending almost to the former General Motors plant. Darlington Flinn (a bachelor or a widower) had an adopted daughter Margaret, and Ida raised her. Margaret, later McVaugh, became one of Wilmington's most respected travel agents.

In 1928, when Margaret was grown, Ida needed a job, and my parents hired her as a cook, laundress, house cleaner, and anything else that had to be done around the house. She was a large, good-natured woman who called both my parents "honey chile," and she always wore a white apron tied in the back. I loved to tie hard knots in her apron strings, and when I was told by my mother not to do it, I continued; it was so much fun. Ida never got mad. It took more harsh means by my mother to eliminate the practice. Ida was a master at handling a wood cookstove as that was what we had in the kitchen in her time. She ate in the kitchen and lived in the apartment over the garage, only about half its present size.

In 1928 or '29, my father, then taking many 16 mm. home movies, made a four-minute film entitled "Ida and the Snow Man." It should have been titled "Ida Building a Snow Man, with Tommy Marshall in the Way." As was mentioned in a previous story, her son Clifford came here to work in 1929 (she would not recommend him), and he stayed for 50 years. In 1933, Ida was 67 and wanted to retire from everyday work (then at least six days per week), which she richly deserved, but we were so sorry to see her go. Years before, she had befriended two old black men, possibly distant cousins, who lived in a shack at the corner of Route 41 and Hercules Road. The men died and left Ida the property, about ¾ of an acre. Clifford, his wife Lula and daughter Reba, were renting from Lula's father, and they wanted a home. So they fixed up the little house and provided a two-room apartment for Ida on the second floor. Ida continued to come to Auburn Heights to help with special parties, and she became a trusted babysitter for families near her home.

The last two years of Ida's life, she lived with her daughter Elsie on East Ninth Street in Wilmington, where she died in 1953 at the age of 87. At her funeral service, held in a Walnut Street undertaker's parlor, nicely dressed men and women paid tribute in extended silence. The men sat with their felt hats on, a common practice among black church people of those days. My parents and I were honored to be in their presence and to participate in the last tributes to Ida Murray. She was a special person.