

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, February 5, 2007

Cold Winter of '34 and New Kitchen-Recreation Room: February 9, 1934, was probably the coldest day of the 20th century in Yorklyn. When I went out the front door to go to school about 8 A.M., the large thermometer on the porch read minus 18 degrees. I believe the official low in Wilmington was minus 10 degrees. It was an unusually cold winter. On my 10th birthday, a few days after the coldest day, a blizzard caused us to come home from Wilmington via Kennett Square, the only way the roads were passable.

That was the winter our new kitchen was being built on the rear of the original house. My cousin, Mary Comly Shallcross, who liked to be called "Comie," celebrated her 19th birthday at Auburn Heights that same February, as she was living with us through the week while attending Beacom College at 10th & Jefferson Streets in Wilmington. She would go home to her parents' farm outside Odessa on weekends, sometimes by train to Middletown. Comie had lots of boy friends, and one of them would usually bring her back to Yorklyn Sunday night. Within a year thereafter, she settled on one of them, and she and Donald Drake Coffman were married at Old Drawyers Church in September 1935.

I liked having Comie with us. Although a sophisticated young lady, she was a lot of fun for a 10-year-old. In the evening, we would often explore the unfinished new kitchen and watch the progress of its interior design. The rear wall of the house had been cut through, allowing direct access from the small pantry adjacent thereto. Studding for the partitions seemed everywhere, with electric wires being strung in them. Not only were there to be electric lights but a circuit for an electric stove, another for a refrigerator, and even a panel box with call bells and arrows to show where in the house the call was originating. Unfortunately, I cannot remember that call bells were ever used. Their time had passed. In the floor plan was a large pantry with sink at one end, a swinging door from there to the kitchen proper, and a sunny breakfast nook with windows on two sides. A large double window was immediately above a double-bowl sink in the main kitchen, surrounded by long monel-metal drain boards. The stove had three enclosed compartments, from bottom to top: the main oven, the broiler, and a warming oven to retard cooling. Four open burners of early electrical design were part of the stove alongside the enclosed portions. The white Frigidaire had four doors, with its sulfur dioxide compressor in a small room under the kitchen porch.

The new room below the kitchen was to be called a Recreation Room, and it replaced the room over the porte co-chere as my playroom and where I set up the electric trains. Before it was occupied that way, my parents had a party to christen the room, and two long tables were set for a sumptuous turkey dinner. The woodstove from the old kitchen had been installed in the laundry next to the new Recreation Room, and the turkeys were roasted there. At least once in the 1930s, our Christmas tree was set up and trimmed in the Recreation Room, complementing the Lionel standard-gauge electric train layout. In 1937, my parents gave me a small pool table that was set up on one side of this room, about where I am sitting tonight at my computer as I recall things 70 years ago.