

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, June 20, 2011

Cities vs. Country, 1900: Today it's hard for us to see why anyone would seek the country in the inland Delaware-Pennsylvania area during the hot and humid days of summer. Why not seek out the seashore or the nearby mountains, where natural breezes made it much more comfortable most of the time? There were two main reasons: cost of room and board and cost of getting there. The country air, even though hot, was highly preferable to the stench and stagnant air in many cities, such as Philadelphia.

If a city dweller was lucky, he or she had a friend who lived in the country and who would issue an invitation to come and visit for a week or two, or more. A number of city women had such a friend in Elizabeth (Lizzie) Marshall, who lived in a big new house called Auburn Heights. I don't know who they were, but many such guests were entertained in that way during the first 20 years of the mansion's existence. We have photos of some, but they are unidentified.

If someone with limited means sought a reasonably priced vacation, there were country boarding houses, often near a railroad, to fill the bill at \$2 or \$3 per day for room and board. One such place was Woodward's Boarding House on Hillendale Road near Rosedale in southern Chester County, Pennsylvania, about 4 miles from Yorklyn. It was in the edge of the woods up a slight grade from Norway Station on the Philadelphia and Baltimore Central Railroad, 30 miles by train from the big city (Norway became Rosedale about 1905, and the railroad became the Octoraro Branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad). The building was two or three stories tall and resembled a small hotel with a total capacity of 30 to 40 guests. There may have been one bathroom on each floor, but more likely one for the whole place. A station hack would meet the trains for the convenience of the guests. Woodward's probably went out of business about 1930, and the building stood vacant for many years. It was finally razed in the 1960s.

On a small lake about 8 miles south of Lebanon, Pennsylvania, was developed a religious community of tiny cottages called Mount Gretna. This, too, was served by a small railroad that connected with the Reading Company's main line at Lebanon. On June 22, 1889, a new locomotive for this line was ordered from the Baldwin Locomotive Works, with the request that they needed it before July 4. It was delivered on June 28. Mount Gretna is still a thriving community, mostly of very modest 100-year-old cottages, but the railroad is long gone.

The mountain ridge west of Reading, Pennsylvania, was another early resort area that began with a sanatorium and several reasonably priced boarding houses, such as Sunset Hall, up the hill from Wernersville, also on the Reading Railroad. However, about 1900, on the other side of the ridge there was developed a fancy hotel with a dozen or more large cottages called Galen Hall. A one-mile walk through the woods connected Galen Hall to Sunset Hall. For several summers in the 1920s, Lizzie Marshall rented one of the cottages for a month. Adlai E. Stevenson, Grover Cleveland's Secretary of State and grandfather of the 1952 and 1956 presidential candidate of the same name, had a summer home called Binden Wood about a mile from Galen Hall. In the 1930s, it was operated as a high-class guesthouse with beautiful antique furnishings. Ruth and I visited the ridge about six years ago. Sunset Hall looked like a corporate recreational center (with new buildings); Galen Hall, which tried for a revival in the 1950s (the Historical Car Club of Pennsylvania had a weekend outing there in 1955), had burned to the ground; and Binden Wood looked like a somewhat rundown private residence.