

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, December 19, 2011

**Christmas 1935 at Auburn Heights:** Stories of past years have mentioned Christmas remembrances of 1929, 1934, 1944, 1945, and 1946. I can remember vividly only one more, so this story is about Christmas 1935.

My grandmother Shallcross was considered *very old* at 83, and her three daughters were overly protective. She would chuckle and let them do their thing, but around her home in Middletown, there was no question who was in charge. When either of her married daughters entertained the family for Christmas, however, it was a cherished time for the Marshalls of Auburn Heights and the Fergusons of Ridley Park. Grandmother usually stayed about a week, and her three grandsons (the Ferguson boys and I) cherished her visits.

Although our new kitchen, den, and recreation room at Auburn Heights were first decorated and shown off to the family for Christmas 1934, grandmother was ill at home that year and could not attend, so all looked forward to her visit when my mother entertained the family again in 1935. To make sure the traveling would not be bad, my father went to Middletown in his 1932 Packard Eight Club Sedan about December 22 to pick up grandmother and bring her to Yorklyn. He had a Tropic Aire hot water heater in the car, which was a normal accessory for high-end Packards of the time. On the front seat behind the heater, grandmother could keep warm. I was looking out the window toward the porte-cochere when they pulled up; my father turned around so grandmother would be on the side toward the front porch to get out. She entered the house where all visitors did in those days, via the front door. I never quite understood it, but when Shallcross women met around Christmas time, they would say to each other: "Christmas Gift, Christmas Gift" and then giggle. There was something wrong with "Merry Christmas," but I'm not sure what it was. Naturally, grandmother brought presents that were placed under the tree until Christmas morning.

We had a tree in the alcove of the front hall and another (I think) in the recreation room under the new kitchen surrounded by my Standard Gauge Lionel trains. For weeks before, I had been looking at the bicycles in the Sears Roebuck catalog, and naturally I wanted the most expensive one, which was \$44.95. Their most reasonable one was \$26.95, and there was one in between. All the Sears bikes of that period had 26-inch balloon tires, and they were heavy, not too practical for the hills around Auburn Heights. The one I wanted had a shipping weight of 77 pounds. Nevertheless, on Christmas morning, under the tree in the front hall was the bike of my dreams, and it was a beauty! It had a built-in headlight and speedometer, lots of chrome, including the wheels, and a small tool box for a dry cell battery in the enlarged horizontal section in front of the seat, which replaced the conventional horizontal bar (girls' bikes did not have this bar). It was painted a light blue with red striping and had white sidewall tires!

The four Fergusons and the three remaining Shallcrosses from Middletown arrived about midday for Christmas dinner, and my mother usually invited two or three others as well. My father always carved the large turkey at the table, the plates with turkey and filling were passed down, and from the other end of the long table, my mother served most of the vegetables of which there were usually five or six. By the time my father got his plate, it was time to carve again for seconds. Two kinds of pie were offered, one of which was homemade mince meat. Uncle Bassett Ferguson and I always chose mince (our birthdays were one day apart), although pumpkin or pecan was probably more popular. Then came the mints, cookies, and nuts. As the adults moved into the living room to open gifts and talk, one was missing. When my mother went to the kitchen, Gene Ferguson, age 19, had washed all the dishes (there were no dishwashers in those days) and stacked them neatly on the counter. Grandmother was sent upstairs to rest while the others continued to talk or play games. About 7 P.M. we ate leftovers before our visitors left for home. A couple of days before year's end, my father took grandmother to Middletown after her week's visit. Although she lived until January 1944, this was the last time she visited Auburn Heights.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS TO ALL!