

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, June 18, 2012

**The Early Years of Rehoboth Heights:** The Rehoboth Heights Development Association, headed by Henry W. Conant, was established in 1925 to develop approximately 30 blocks south of the old section of Rehoboth. The area was about 10 blocks north-to-south along the ocean and extended three blocks back from the beach, which area contained only about eight dwellings. Streets were laid out, and concrete curbs and sidewalks were built, with connections to the town's water supply. Only the two north-south streets (King Charles and Bayard Avenues) were paved; all others were sand and gravel. In the boom times of the late 1920s, the area developed rapidly.

My father bought approximately two blocks of land about 10 blocks south of downtown Rehoboth and in 1927 constructed an ocean-front "cottage" on the north side of Queen Street. Except for five years, 1946–1951, this property was in the Marshall family until 1983. Also in 1927, three other houses were started in the same block, one of which was sold to Harry Bonham of Newark before it was finished. The other two, on St. Lawrence Street just to the north, were rented by my parents (and cleaned by my mother) until this became burdensome, and they were sold at auction on Labor Day 1937. Just one-half block from the ocean, one brought \$6,000 and the other \$6,650. They were bought by A. Dolphus Short of Georgetown and Mrs. George Carson Boyd of Wilmington, respectively. It was not a good time to sell.

Our house on Queen Street was named by my aunt, Helen Shallcross, "Clarestom by the Sea" (for Clarence, Esther, and Tom), but the name didn't stick, and it was known for many years simply as "#1 Queen." It contained eight bedrooms and four baths, with two of the bedrooms and one bath intended for servants (but seldom used that way). Mrs. Watkins of Odessa bought the lot immediately behind and built a summer cottage, used not only by her and her friends but also by her daughter, son-in-law, and grandchildren (S. Rodmond Smith, Rebecca Watkins Smith, Rod, Jr., and Frances called "Sister"). Next came the Harry Bonham property and then one developed by Reese Layton of Bridgeville. Finally, on the corner of Queen and King Charles and facing Silver Lake, James Archie Finley and his wife, Frances, a distant cousin of my mother, built their summer home in 1928. The three Finley boys were slightly older than I, and the two younger ones, Jonathan ("Jont") and Len, were my favorite playmates. Their sister, Patty, was slightly younger than I. The Depression hit some families hard, however, causing the Finleys to rent their house, starting in the mid-1930s, and Layton to sell his property to Harry Richardson of the Richardson & Robbins family in Dover.

On the south side of Queen Street, the ocean-front property was bought and developed by Harry L. Cannon of Bridgeville, whose daughter Sally Spotswood and her husband owned it until the late 1970s. Cannon, a prosperous canner who ran unsuccessfully for Governor in 1936, and his wife, Isabelle, had two children, Henry P. II, born about 1912, and Sally (mentioned above), born about 1918. Next to the Cannons was a smaller house owned by a Mrs. Smith of Washington, D.C., whom we never saw as she rented it each year. On Prospect Street, a short one south of Queen, Howard and Edith Seaman, both classmates of my father at Wilmington Friends School shortly after 1900, built the closest house to the ocean, but there was a large undeveloped lot closer thereto. They had a daughter Emily, two years older than I. Howard Seaman was president of the Lobdell Corporation in Wilmington, builder of steel wheels for railroad cars. Just south of Prospect Street on a private lane was the large cottage of R. R. M. Carpenter, with the ocean on one side and Silver Lake on the other.

During the Depression followed by World War II, very little building took place in this area, but soon thereafter many additional lots were developed. Today, probably three times as many houses are crowded into the first block from the ocean on St. Lawrence, Queen, and Prospect Streets, but several of the 1927–29 houses remain.