

December 26, 2006

Hello, Steam Team:

When we were driving home from Clayton, DE, last night, after a sumptuous dinner at Ruth's brother Phil's home, it reminded me of the times my parents and I had driven home from my grandmother's home in Middletown on Christmas nights in the 1930's. "Flowerdale" on North Broad Street was a favorite place to go on Christmas Day, second only to the times the greater Shallcross family came here on December 25. The year 1933 stands out particularly in my memory; perhaps it was easy for a special event to make an impression on a 9-year-old.

December 25, 1933, was warm and sunny in Delaware. When we arrived at grandmother's home about mid-day, her greater family was assembling in her sun porch. The sun was streaming in from this southern exposure, and it was very pleasant while awaiting the call to dinner. Aunt Helen and Uncle Gene Shallcross, both single and living with their mother, always had a toy or a short game to entertain a 9-year-old. I enjoyed my first cousins, the Ferguson boys, as Bassett, Jr., called "Jimty" was 22 and Gene was 17. Associating with them made me feel grown up. My dad always enjoyed conversation with their father, Bassett, who had married my mother's eldest sister in 1906. The women, including my mother and Aunt Mary Ferguson, were busy in the kitchen, and grandmother, age 81 at the time, was supervising the overall operation.

We were called to dinner at the elongated table set up in the dining room. Grandmother was at one end in a bay window of the room and Uncle Ned, who was to carve the turkey at the table, was at the other end with his back against the outside door. In between were the Fergusons, the Marshalls, Gertrude Whittock (a cousin of grandmother's, whom we all called "Cousin Gertie"), Aunt Helen, and Uncle Gene with his special friends Mabel Allen and her daughter, and possibly one or two more guests. I never saw such a variety of food, some of it seemingly for the first time, and I enjoyed sampling all of it. Finally, two or three kinds of pie were offered for dessert, and probably mints, nuts, and other candies. Not long after leaving the table, I had a terrible stomach ache, but fortunately it was short-lived, and everything was fine again.

Grandmother's 3 daughters insisted she should rest for an hour or so, and she obliged. Uncle Gene took his namesake, Gene Ferguson, on a short tour of some of the farms. My father, Uncle Bassett and "Jimty" were engaged in a conversation about the future, and the latter commented that when we assembled for Christmas, 1938, we might know the answers. When darkness came, Aunt Mary and my mother thought their mother and Cousin Gertie would enjoy seeing some of the lighted trees around Middletown, and since both my father and Uncle Bassett had

7-passenger Packard sedans (ours was a '32, and the Ferguson's a '29) on the scene, there would be plenty of seating for all who wanted to go. A few but certainly not all homes had electrically-lighted trees in their front yards, and this was a marvel to someone born in 1852 as was my grandmother (Cousin Gertie in 1856). The trees would not have more than 3 dozen lights, and they were always multi-colored.

About 7:30, it was time to have "left-overs", so those who were still there sat around the table again. I have always liked left-overs. Middletown, like many small communities, had an annual dance on Christmas night (Kennett Square's was mentioned last week). Uncle Bassett joked that he was going to the dance if he could find a date- the Ferguson boys did not seem to have an interest in it. When we finally left about 9:30 for the drive home, he was still talking about going to the dance, but I doubt that he did. When passengers got in a car on a winter evening, it was cold, but lap robes and Tropic Aire heaters installed in many Packards of that period helped and the ride soon became comfortable. It took 45 minutes from Middletown to Yorklyn- sometimes we went through Cooch's Bridge and Newark, and sometimes through Kirkwood, Bear Station, "Christine" and Stanton.

We hope you had a nice Christmas. The Friends of Auburn Heights Preserve is on vacation this week, but we will be processing memberships and annual appeal gifts to be counted in 2006. Bob Reilly generates the acknowledgements from Colorado, and I print, stuff, and mail (Butch helped me with this last Thursday) from here. Betty Hoffmeister has offered to help with this right after the first of the year. Bob wants me to mention the CHANGE IN THE MEMBERSHIP YEAR, in the event it was not made clear before. This year members get 15 months, as the 2006 year does not end until March 31, 2007, and you will not be solicited to renew your membership until March. New members joining now are good until March 31, 2008. This change was made so there will not be a conflict with the Annual Appeal, which normally will be planned for the fall. If you have not given to our current appeal, we urge you to do so, as there are just a few days to go. As of this date, we have raised just over \$50,000 including a few matching gifts not yet in hand.

Kelly Williams and Art Wallace were able to get the steam loop out of the Model 735, no easy task, for repair to the flare at one end.

Art Seibel and Ted Simpkins are preparing to repair or replace the chairs on the wooden railroad cars, and Jim Personti took the water tank from the Model CX home with him to complete his soldering job. Bill Schwoebel assembled the group project leaders in the office last Tuesday to move ahead with our mechanical, renovation, construction, and training projects plan. Jerry Lucas held a second meeting of the Nominating Committee last Thursday. HAPPY NEW YEAR to all!

Tom

