

## FAHP News, December 17, 2016

**Christmas 1935 at Auburn Heights** (*Repeat of December 19, 2011*): Weekly News 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 '32 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" 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!

Tom

**Work Report:** On Tuesday, December 13, 29 volunteers were on hand, bolstered by Rose Ann Hoover's annual Chocolate Party for the volunteers in the museum. Those counted were: Ted Kamen (in charge), Jerry Novak, Dave Leon, Bob Wilhelm, Jeff Kennard, Dennis Tiley, Tom Sandbrook, Neal Sobocinski, John Bacino, Ken Hilbeck, Brent McDougall, Mike Ciosek, Mark Bodensstab, Rose Ann Hoover, Bill Schwoebel, Lou Mandich, Anne Cleary, Ryan Cleary, Larry Tennity, Tom Marshall, Steve Bryce, Tim Ward, Bob Stransky, Emil Christofano, Chuck Carisch, Cathy Carisch, Mark Russell, Linette Russell, and Jay Williams.

Tom conducted a section of his "Shop Course," a repeat of that on December 8, on pipe, tubing, and flare fittings. This was attended by about 16 of those listed above. In addition, the signals on the A.V.R.R. were brought in for the winter, and several heavy things were moved around in the museum attic. It was discovered that two of the light sockets on the '37 Packard were not grounded. In addition, Jeff Kennard took home an acorn nut from one of the windshield wipers to fabricate a new one.

The chocolate party was spectacular and very tasty, as usual. Wafers were used for railroad ties, and chocolate straws formed the rail. The train and the adjacent buildings were made from brownies, gingerbread, and dark chocolate. Cookies of several kinds were offered as well. A plate of assorted cookies was auctioned off to benefit the Joseph Boxler Education Fund. It brought \$65 (thanks to John Bacino who outbid Jerry Novak)! THANK YOU, ROSE ANN, for a fun evening and for all your goodies!

On Wednesday, December 14, only two volunteers appeared: Richard Bernard (in charge), and Tom Marshall. The 8-foot length of ½" stainless pipe was threaded on both ends in preparation for bending into a new superheater for our Model H-5. Several storage drawers in the shop were studied for content and future disposition.

On Thursday, December 15, a bitter wintry night, five volunteers turned out, as follows: Mark Bodensstab (in charge), Steve Bryce, Bob Jordan, Ted Kamen, and Neal Sobocinski.

The new fittings in the bottom of the boiler on the Model 87 were tightened again, and the boiler is ready for a new hydro-test. The faulty electric sockets on the '37 Packard were correctly grounded and the lights checked out well.

Our regular work sessions are suspended for the holidays and will resume again on Tuesday, January 3, 2017. Merry Christmas to all!