

December 19, 2011 Story for Weekly News

Christmas 1935 at Auburn Heights: 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 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!

Work Report: Bill Schwoebel completed the installation of the hydraulic brake mechanism on the rear axle of the 607, and Ted Kamen, Bob Jordan and others fastened the boiler support bracket to the front cross member of the frame. The brake drums need to be bolted to the rear wheels, and then by putting the wheels on, the frame can be mobile. Tim Nolan cleaned up the aluminum differential housing on the Model 87. Inspection has been made of the engine and differential gears, as well as side play in the crankshaft bearings of the engine. All appears to be good with the possible exception of a small amount of side play in one of the connecting rods. A number of other things are planned for the 87 before it is returned to the museum.

Tim Ward, Bob Stransky, and others continue to move along with installation of the new boiler on the 725. New brackets are being made so the water level automatic can be 2" higher than before with the 14" high boiler (the new boiler is 16"). Tom modified the throttle brackets and piping so that all lined up with the new boiler.

Jerry Novak and Steve Bryce picked up the re-upholstered body from the 607 on Tuesday. Dave Walls did a very nice job. They delivered it to Mark Dugan in Coatesville for striping. Walter Higgins is rebuilding the hood for this car, prior to its painting.

On Thursday night, we had our annual holiday gourmet treats from Rose Ann Hoover in the museum. Train molds were filled with brownies, and there were edible rails, cross ties, coal, grass and snow. About 38 volunteers attended. Susan served as an elf to help Mrs. S. Claus (Rose Ann). Most of you know that it was impossible for the Robisons to have their holiday party this year because of Chevonne's close call from being scratched by a cat. We are happy to report that she is well again and working full-time. Art Wallace, our most active volunteer, has not been well and missed both sessions last week. We hope he is much improved and wish him well.