

December 24, 2007

Hello, Steam Team:

**“Twas the Night before Christmas
And all through the House
Not a Creature was stirring
Not even a Mouse . . . “**

As we approach Christmas, I can reflect on what a great group of people have come together to form the *Friends of Auburn Heights Preserve!* This more than offsets our sadness in realizing this will probably be our last Christmas at Auburn Heights. I have enjoyed 81 of them here, missing only two during World War II. Even though I was in the service for 4 Christmases, in 1942 I had not yet been called to active duty, and in 1943 we were between accelerated semesters in Meteorology School at M.I.T. I had to return to Boston on December 26, and our second semester began on the 27th. In 1944, I was forecasting weather at Roswell Army Air Field in New Mexico, and in 1945 I was overseeing an area on North Field, Guam, that had been abandoned by a B-29 bomber squadron, and the jungle was fast taking over.

The war having ended in early September, our Weather Reconnaissance Squadron was falling apart by late November, and it was difficult to find jobs for those of us who did not have enough “points” to come home. Our former commander, Lt. Col. Nicholas Chevasse, did not give up easily, however. About mid-December, another unlucky lieutenant and I, both disliked by Chevasse, were sent to an outpost on North Field about 10 miles from our former base headquarters. He had illusions of developing this former bomber squadron area into an enlarged and upgraded headquarters for his weather squadron, although its numbers were diminishing daily. We two lieutenants could go to the other side of North Field for our meals and to an open-air movie theatre. I first saw the 1945 version of Rodgers & Hammerstein’s “State Fair” (a great movie) at that location. Otherwise we were isolated, but we had a jeep and one of us would use it while the other “kept watch”. Some of the guys from our headquarters would come up once in a while and we’d have a softball game. Other times, a bunch of Japanese P.O.W.s would play softball there with about 25 players in the field. Chevasse’s plans were doomed from the start, and I ended up closing out the PX at this remote location. Some of the stuff could be saved, like Gillette Thin Blades at 10 cents per pack, but all the candy had to be thrown out. This concluded Christmas and New Year’s on North Field, and soon after 1946 began we moved back to 20th Air Force Headquarters near Harmon Field to wait 6 more months before we could start home.

The song *"I'll be home for Christmas, if only in my dreams"* was written during that war, and many G.I.'s could relate to it as they found themselves far from home. Over 60 years later, it is still popular for the same reasons. All of us pray that those who are far away this Christmas will be united with their families before another year passes.

Growing up, my mother would have Christmas dinner for her extended family about every third year. After World War II, it seemed she shared it with her sister, Aunt Mary Ferguson, who lived at Ridley Park. In the 1970's and early '80's, my mother and I and then I alone were invited to Gene and Jo Fergusons' in Newark. Finally, since Ruth and I were married in 1985, we have been with her family, most often at her brother Phil Pierson's near Clayton, DE, and so it is planned for tomorrow. Wherever I have been, we have eaten very well on Christmas day.

Although we thought our work sessions were winding down, we had a spontaneous party last Tuesday night when Bill Schwoebel drew a big crowd as he fired up the 1905 Model CX, and Rose Ann Hoover surprised us with an edible train layout, heavy on chocolate. The locomotive and cars were delicious brownies, the ballast was brownie crumbs, the rail was licorice sticks, the cross ties were thin "sandwich wafers", the lamp posts were candy canes, the tunnel was a hollowed-out cinnamon loaf, and cocoanut and pulverized sugar provided the snow. 21 of us were here to enjoy and consume. The reconstruction of the burner for the Model 735 is coming along well, and Jim Personti took the crankshaft from the Stanley Museum's Model 70 to install a new spur gear.

It pleases me to tell you that Catherine P. Coin has been appointed our new Executive Director to begin the week of January 7. We welcome Catherine and look forward to working with her in her new job with us, and are happy to report that Bob Reilly will be here at least two weeks after she starts, which should permit an orderly transition. When Bob returns from his holiday break about January 4, he will be sending out an "official" announcement, giving you Catherine's past experience and biographical information.

To ALL of you, Ruth and I extend a most joyous and happy holiday season, and thank you for everything you do for us.

**"And I heard him exclaim
As he drove out of sight
'HAPPY CHRISTMAS to all
And to all a good-night' "**

Clement Clark Moore, 1822

Thomas C. Marshall, 2007