

F.A.H.P. News, February 14, 2011

James T. Shallcross (1847-1911): My maternal grandfather, James T. Shallcross, died at his home on North Broad Street in Middletown, Delaware, near the end of January 100 years ago. He was 63. My paternal grandfather, Israel Marshall, died in late June that year at the age of 60. I was born 13 years later, the youngest grandchild of James and almost the youngest of Israel (the Mancill twins were 7½ months younger). I'm sorry I never knew either of my grandfathers. James's father, Sereck F. Shallcross (1816-1906), a Quaker from Byberry in Northeast Philadelphia, emigrated to the Odessa, Delaware, area in 1842 and built a large brick three-story house with a mansard roof and 6½-foot ceilings on the third floor, which he named Oakland. A successful farmer, Sereck soon bought adjacent farms northwest of Odessa, separated from Oakland only by Drawyers Creek, which was dammed up to power a small grist mill. James was Sereck's eldest son, and when the former married Mary Ellen Vandegrift on December 18, 1872, in the new Drawyers Presbyterian Church in Odessa, the newlyweds moved into Bellevue Farm, about a mile north of Oakland. At Bellevue, three sons and three daughters were born, the fourth child being my mother, Esther Shallcross (Marshall).

Like his father, James was a successful farmer, but he also liked to dabble in Democratic politics, which displeased my grandmother. Having several political jobs in Wilmington in addition to his farm responsibilities, he commuted daily from Bellevue, driving by buggy or on horseback to the Delaware Road train at Mount Pleasant. In the early 1890s, he was Recorder of Deeds for New Castle County. The Marshall brothers, Israel and Elwood, having recently purchased the paper mill on Benge Road in Yorklyn, sought water rights from the small stream that parallels Auburn Mill Road near Red Clay Creek, and its owner, Levis Lamborn, agreed. The document contains the names of Israel and Elwood and is made official by James T. Shallcross, Recorder of Deeds. This document is still at Auburn Heights. At the time of his death, his children liked to say he was in line to be Lieutenant Governor of Delaware.

James and Mary's (she was never called "Mary" but either "Molly" or "Dolly") eldest daughter, Mary, married Bassett Ferguson on the lawn at Bellevue on June 6, 1906. James Jr. had married a distant cousin, Elizabeth Shallcross of Byberry, in 1900, and they were living with his grandfather Sereck at Oakland.

About 1908, with his children grown and well able to take over the farm management, James, Dolly, and their four unmarried children moved from Bellevue to a property called "Flowerdale," which covered a city block of about four acres on North Broad Street in Middletown. The spacious frame house was built about 1876 with a porch on three sides, and the large first-floor windows went

to the floor for summer ventilation. In the barn on the property, my grandfather was doing crop experimentation in connection with Delaware College at Newark, where two of his sons had attended.

All the conductors and trainmen on the "Delaware Road" knew my grandfather, as he was a frequent rail passenger. One morning he was riding the train from Middletown to Dover, and as he got up from his seat, he wobbled all over the aisle. Passengers thought he was drunk, but the trainmen knew better. He had developed pneumonia and had a very high fever. They got him on the first train back to Middletown, where he was nursed at home as well as the family knew how. Mustard plasters and other remedies proved ineffective, and a surgeon was summoned from Philadelphia. The doctor operated on his lungs at Flowerdale, but thereafter my grandfather regained consciousness only once and died within 48 hours. Four years later, my mother entered nursing school at Union Memorial Hospital in Baltimore. There may have been a connection.

Occupants of West Yorklyn Station: The pre-fabricated "camping out" house, sold by a Minnesota company for \$98 in the early 1930s (we have the original catalog) was advertised as being highly preferable to a tent. Ours was ordered by my father and erected, turned 180 degrees from its present orientation, as a playhouse for me and my friends. It was equipped with screens on the windows, a folding table, and benches that hinged to the wall. There was room for two or three small cots. Although I can remember the many fun times my friends and I had "playing house" and several meals eaten there, I can recall only one overnight stay. The Mancill twins and I looked forward to this, away from the care of our parents. We were making out well until my dad showed up about 8:30, concerned that we shouldn't be there alone all night. I don't know how we all fit, but he moved in, and four of us slept there until morning.

About two years later, a hired man named Bill Tate worked at Auburn Heights through one winter and spring. The little house was insulated with newspaper stuffed in the cracks, and Bill lived there with a small electric heater and an electric hot plate (stove top). He walked to the garage for his bathroom, with a makeshift shower being installed in a back corner. The little house soon took on the aroma of Bill's pipe, but the arrangement seemed to work out well. By late spring, however, Bill's employment was terminated. I hated to see him go; 10-year-olds didn't understand such things.

The next tenant was William H. Whorl. Bill was an orphan from upstate New York who, at age 22, came to Delaware seeking work. He, too, was hired as an outside man to assist "Cliffey" (Clifford Murray) and lived in the boardinghouse near the Yorklyn bridge. Bill fit in well wherever he was and got along fine with the

bachelors living there, most of whom worked for the snuff mills. When the boardinghouse was torn down in 1937, Bill moved into the tiny playhouse. He lived there over a year and, on his meager wages, bought an Indian Motorcycle. As the mills got busier leading up to World War II, Bill went to work for National Fibre, where the pay was considerably better, and he married about 1940. He was in the service during World War II, and we corresponded when both of us were far from home. Following the war, my mother encouraged Bill to start a small nursery and lawn care business, as she had recognized his abilities along those lines. He was just getting started when he was killed in an automobile accident at the age of 33.

When the first Auburn Valley Railroad was built in 1960, the right-of-way came right alongside the little building. Still in its original location, Paul Wollaston built a lean-to overhang on the track side and enlarged the window thereunder so the building could be a ticket office. We called it "West Yorklyn Station." About 30,000 Auburn Valley tickets were sold from this window between 1961 and 1965. When the Magic Age of Steam began in 1971, the building was rotated 90 degrees with the ticket window then facing the mansion, and tracks came by on both sides. Tickets were sold both at the front gate and from this window. Finally, as the Auburn Valley came into current use about 15 years ago, the building was rotated another 90 degrees with the thought that the ticket window would be facing the present tracks, as the "upper line" had been abandoned. Unfortunately it has not been used as a ticket office in recent years.

Work Nights: Last week was a busy one for F.A.H.P. members. On Tuesday night the well-attended Annual Meeting was held at the Kennett Township Building—thanks to Steve Bryce, Susan Randolph, Richard Bernard, and Jamie Wagner for their presentations. On Thursday evening the Board of Directors meeting was held at Auburn Heights while other members attended to ongoing winter projects. Jim Personti and Mac Taylor continued disassembling the Orchestrion, checking for leaks. Chuck Erikson and Sal Gioia continued the huge task of organizing the shop, working on the shelves along the back of the shop, and Ted Kamen and Bob Jordan continued preparing the new Mountain Wagon rims for paint. Also last week, Tom continued work on the oil pump in the Model 71, and after running the car on the jack, all appears to be working properly. Linoleum was delivered by Tony Lauria for both the Models 607 and 78 on Saturday, and Mike May tells us the lamps for the Model 78 have now been completed. David Walls is supposed to come this week to look over the Rauch & Lang prior to ordering new **upholstery**.