

Auburn Heights Herald

*Newsletter of The Friends of
Auburn Heights Preserve, Inc.*

www.auburnheights.org

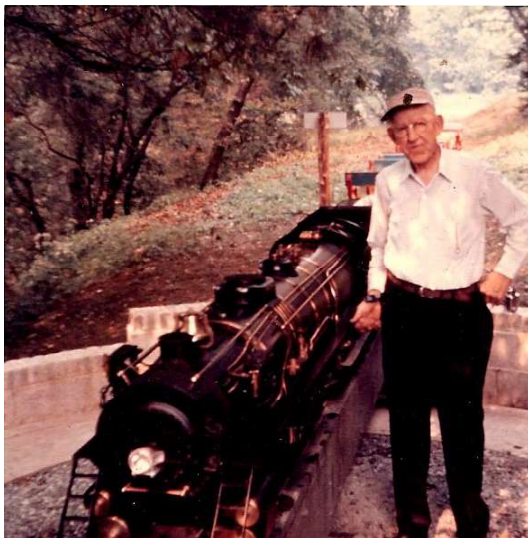
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THE BUILDING OF THE AUBURN VALLEY R.R.

Just over 50 years ago, T. Clarence Marshall began the building of a Union Pacific 4-8-4 "Northern-type" steam locomotive in 1-1/2" scale (1/8 actual size). Very similar to a locomotive half this size which he built during World War II, the castings and drawings were purchased from Little Engines, a California company founded by Martin S. Lewis. Built entirely in his shop adjoining the carriage house at Auburn Heights, the project took him 7,500 hours, but late in 1959 the engine was almost completed. Serious thought was given about a track to run it on, if, indeed, it was to run at all. I urged my father to do this as soon as possible, as I had always wanted a chance to run a steam locomotive.

Everett Hollingsworth of Fairville had recently retired from the W. D. Haddock Construction Company of Wilmington, and he and his partner, Chuck, were engaged to lay out, grade, and build the roadbed for a railroad loop around the Auburn Heights property, after which they would build and install the tiny track sections of 7-1/2" gauge for the 1/3-mile line. Because of the hilly terrain and a steep bank toward the rear of the property requiring a limited-radius curve, a lot of grading was done and a curved trestle was built extending over the mill race bank near the rear of the Museum building, allowing the railroad to have a curvature no sharper than a 55-foot radius.



T. Clarence Marshall next to his newly completed Engine # 401 in 1960



Ongoing construction of The Auburn Valley Railroad appears in this June 1960 photograph from atop the Marshall Brothers' water tower

Even though long locomotives of this design were not recommended for curves sharper than 70-foot radius, the trucks were modified and the gauge widened to accommodate this scale-model steam engine. There was also the need for a turntable near the locomotive's storage location in the basement of the shop, and a crossing to get across the front driveway.

Hollingsworth and his helpers built the original railroad in April, May, and June, 1960. Great care was given to keep the grade to less than 3% and to build the proper base with stone and gravel before actually setting in the 10-foot-long

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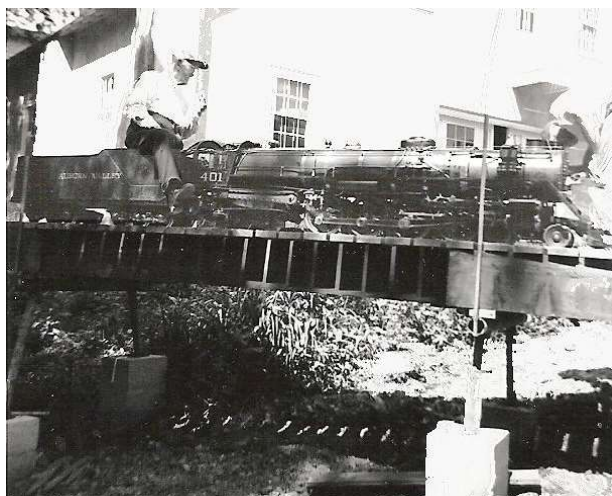
From left: The trestle being built on the west side of the Museum; the turntable under construction; track crossing the front driveway of Auburn Heights. Grates were placed over the track when not in use. Photos from spring 1960

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track sections, ballasting, leveling, and tamping. The aluminum rail, splice bars, and 2 x 2 redwood ties cut to length were purchased through Little Engines. No switches were included in the original building of the line. A depressed concrete trough was built across the front driveway and the railroad ran in this trough. When it was not in use and vehicular traffic needed to cross, several cast iron grates were placed on top of this trough to make a smooth crossing for automobiles. This crossing idea lasted about 3 weeks as it was highly impractical, and over the July 4th weekend in 1960 my father and I built a wooden grade crossing, raising the railroad to the same level as the driveway. Everett and Chuck had completed the first turntable (made like a wooden box) and its pit by early June and the newly-finished locomotive, soon to be numbered 401, was carefully moved from the upstairs shop to the turntable and pushed over newly-built track on trestles into the basement.

As the construction team began hooking up track sections near the turntable, Clarence fired up his locomotive for the first time and gingerly operated it back and forth over a few feet of adjoining track. Being pleased with its performance

and making adjustments as he went along, he would fire up at least twice a week, each time getting farther from the turntable. When the trestle over the race bank was finished, he eased across it with good results. Soon he got around the 55-foot-radius curve to his new water tower, built by Harrison Hall of the Hall-Woolford Wood Tank Company of Philadelphia. It was not long before he could get around the entire loop, soon followed by hooking several 6-foot cars, capable of hauling either two or three passengers each, behind the tender to constitute a train. The cars had come from an abandoned amusement park at Tolchester, MD, and the trucks and couplers for same were built by Clarence from parts supplied by Little Engines. It was decided to name the tiny railroad the Auburn Valley.



Clarence Marshall eases the #401 across the trestle behind the Museum in 1960

By July, at the age of 36, I was running the locomotive along with my father. Finally, a party was planned to show off his little beauty, and relatives and friends were invited to

the inaugural run to celebrate Clarence Marshall's 75th birthday, August 5, 1960. Although there were no stations on the line, it passed a little pre-fabricated play house that appeared to be a good place to board passengers.

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AUBURN VALLEY R.R.

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The locomotive was fired up and the train located at the boarding place as the guests began to arrive. About that time, however, the heavens let loose and a downpour forced most of those invited into the front hall at Auburn Heights. In about 45 minutes the storm was over, and my father asked me to go to the locomotive and make sure it was ready for its inaugural passenger-carrying run. With the greatest of confidence I was delighted by this request, but, alas, the fire had gone out! It took another half hour before our first guests had a ride. Finally, however, we got under way with my father at the throttle and me as conductor on the rear of the train. One of the passengers, John C. Mitchell, age 91, was riding backwards and as his head touched some wet branches he got a good dousing. Even that did not deter his or anyone else's enjoyment. The first passenger runs on the Auburn Valley were a great success.



1961: AVRR volunteers re-rail engine 402 on the curve behind the Museum under the direction of Clarence Marshall (foreground).

The Auburn Valley Railroad was operated several days in the fall of 1960, and the public was invited to ride. Favorable response was overwhelming. Clarence bought a partially-completed identical locomotive from

Irene Lewis, begun by her late husband, that was to become our #402. He finished this engine and tender in the winter of 1960-'61, built more flat cars using Little Engines trucks, and I built two passing tracks (with stub switches) and improved the West Yorklyn Station area. The expanded operation was to include two trains running in opposite directions, and the 1961 schedule, planned in cooperation with Historic Red Clay Valley, Inc. and its member-volunteers, called for 16 operating days from April through October. A lot was learned about stabilizing the alignment and elevation of the track, and corrections were applied to reduce derailments. 5,800 paying passengers were carried in 1961 which netted HRCV almost \$3,000.



Clarence Marshall fills the tender of #401, 1960

Note: The 40 plus years of operation on the Auburn Valley R.R., how the locomotives work, and the changes made over the years, are described in a monograph published by the Friends of Auburn Heights Preserve, copies of which may be purchased through the Gift Shop.

Thomas C. Marshall, Jr.

AUBURN HEIGHTS ALMANAC

(CHECK WWW.AUBURNHEIGHTS.ORG FOR MORE EVENTS)

June 17-22	Sunday - Friday	Eastern Invitational Steam Car Tour hosted by The Friends of Auburn Heights Preserve
July 1	Sunday	Steamin' Sunday at Auburn Heights, 1:00 to 4:30 PM
September 2	Sunday	Steamin' Sunday at Auburn Heights, 1:00 to 4:30 PM
October 27 & 28	Sat. & Sun.	Steamin' Weekend at Auburn Heights, 1:00 to 4:30 PM each day. <i>Annual "Auburn Heights House Tour Weekend."</i> Only public tours of the mansion in 2007 (additional charge applies).
Nov. 23 & 24	Fri. & Sat.	Steamin' Thanksgiving Weekend at Auburn Heights, 1:00 to 4:30 PM each day