

## GUIDING AROUND AUBURN HEIGHTS

**GUIDE # 1:** *[I suggest that some context info be given before this narrative begins such as "We are about to begin a tour of the grounds immediately surrounding the Marshall home at Auburn Heights. Three generations of the Marshall family have lived at Auburn Heights since its construction in 1897 and once the present residents leave, the home and grounds will be donated to the State of Delaware to be joined with 200 surrounding acres in what will be known as Auburn Heights Preserve State Park. "]*

Starting at the Gas Pump. We are standing in what used to be the division between the back yard and the vegetable garden. Looking back alongside the present Museum building were two rows of apple trees, about 12 in all, with a grass plot between the rows. On both sides of these rows, one toward the steep embankment going down to the mill race, and the other toward the Marshall Brothers paper mill, was the vegetable garden. There was a grape arbor across one end completely inside the present museum building. Through this area Israel Marshall (1850-1911) and his two sons, Warren (1881-1953) and Clarence (1885-1969), passed enroute to work at the mill. Naturally the shortest pedestrian route was desirable, and that was out the kitchen door of Auburn Heights some 100 yards from the mill. Until 1904 the complex of mill buildings along Benge Road and the several dwelling units that went with them comprised all of the Marshalls' milling interests in Yorklyn. In the 1930's the apple trees were old and did not produce good apples, but their blossoms were beautiful in the springtime. As the trees got larger, much of the vegetable garden was too shady to be productive, and some of it was moved slightly down the hill closer to the mill buildings. It is somewhat hard to visualize how this was, as a triple frame house and the large mill building on our side of Benge Road have been torn down.

About 1940, Esther Marshall took the section of the old vegetable garden closest to the bank, and developed this into a very nice flower garden. From the rear of Auburn Heights this garden could be viewed, and it was a very scenic addition to the back yard. Remember at that time the paved driveway ended in front of the carriage house (garage and shop today). This garden was completely eliminated when the museum building was constructed in 1947. Also in the back yard near the race bank was a hen house, in which Tom kept white rabbits in the early 1930's until dogs broke in and wiped out the rabbit population.

Looking toward the little railroad station called West Yorklyn where you board the Auburn Valley R.R. trains, this was all lawn until the first tiny railroad cut through it in 1960. The station building had been a pre-fabricated play house which sold for \$98 when it was erected here in 1932. The original rail line was on our side (toward the museum) of the building; in 1970 it was moved to its present location with the erection of the double-tracked trestle across the old garden.

Now, let's take a behind-the-scenes look at the turntable and engine house for the Auburn Valley R.R. Here the two locomotives that pull the trains are stored in a heated building.



Under the shop on the end of the carriage house, this basement was originally intended for storage and for working under automobiles through a pit in the floor above.

As we walk around toward the front of the carriage house, the rose arbor is to your right. Built in the early 1920's the original arbor was considerably longer than at present, with contemporary rose bushes planted at each post. Two or three of these bushes are VanFleets, almost extinct now but very popular in Victorian times. Except for fertilization and pruning, the rose bushes are "original", and put on a most spectacular show in June each year. *[By this time group should be in front of the carriage house/shop.]*

**GUIDE # 2 takes over:** To your left is the stable and carriage house for Auburn Heights built in 1902, five years after the "mansion" was finished. The stable was in the half closest to the big house, with a small window at the end of each of the 5 stalls. A partition divided this end from the carriage house, which was on the end toward the present museum. About 1905, however, Clarence Marshall, the family's youngest member, began owning automobiles, and after three "gas cars" bought his first Stanley Steamer in 1908. In 1910, he became an agent for Stanleys in this part of the country, and serviced them from the carriage house here. In 1914 while he was at the mill, a mechanic working on a Stanley set the hay on fire with a torch, and the frame interior of the building went up in flames. It was rebuilt immediately, but with much more fireproof construction, eliminating the wood posts, partitions, joists and floor above, using concrete and steel instead. The original stone walls were little damaged by the fire. From that time on, it was used as a garage and for a good many years Clarence Marshall's shop. There is an apartment above, with a dining room-kitchen, powder and laundry room, a large living room, two small bedrooms with a bath, and a screened porch. In 1937, Clarence decided he wanted a real shop, and a 1-1/2 floor addition was added to the "carriage house" end, and soon it was filled with many tools and machines he had always wanted in his shop. In this shop he invented and built a new clay target trap in 1938, converted a 1940 Packard to a steam car in 1941-42, and built 3 scale-model steam locomotives, including those we use today. The stone in the walls of the 1937 shop came from the same quarry as all previous buildings on the property, but nothing has been quarried there since. On mill property for many years, the site is in the woods just off Route 82 barely in Pennsylvania less than 1/2 mile away.

As we proceed around the driveway, the tiny stone building on the left was built about 1915 over the original well on the property, and always called the "pump house". In addition to the water supply, electricity (direct current) from the mill came in here to be divided between the big house and the outbuildings. When water from an excellent spring 1/2 mile away was piped in in 1928, this well was used only for a back-up should the spring or its pipeline fail. However, the well caved in before the spring gave out, and now the little building is used only for electric meters, phone connections to the various buildings, and storage. The driveway around the east side of the property was a 1970 addition, to give us a "Mountain Wagon Route" when the Magic Age of Steam was opened, and rides were given in these ancient Stanleys. *[Stop at the new well head and hand the group over to..]*



**GUIDE # 3:** First, to the left, you see the rear of Auburn Heights, which is really a 1933-34 addition to the original house, with kitchen and informal eating area on the first floor, with a recreation room (now used for computer, printer, and ironing) below, almost at ground level in the rear. The stairway from the ground to the open deck on the second floor, built in 1988, serves as a fire escape not only from the second floor, but from the third floor as well. That same year, a frame second floor addition housing a dining room and kitchen was torn off, this having been built in 1955-56, when Clarence and Esther Marshall moved to the second floor to spend the remainder of their lives. He died in 1969; she in 1979.

To the right is a sun dial which could be over 100 years old, as these were very popular about 1900. It was rebuilt last year. A huge spruce tree, planted in 1897 when the house was built, stood almost against the driveway, but had to be cut down in 2005, as its deterioration was becoming dangerous. The ginkgo tree next to it is one of three on the property. Since none of ours have an unpleasant odor, we assume they are male. Looking toward the house again, the glass enclosure is a spacious sun porch, built in 1922. The original open porch, still lengthy across the front of the house and under one of the steeples, used to come completely down the east side as well. Terminating with steps to the ground next to the dining room door, at least 20 feet of it was incorporated into the enclosed sun porch. The sun porch was heated with steam from the mill, as were all the buildings on the property. No attempt is made to heat this room now, but the huge radiator is still in place.

Near the northeast steeple is the State Champion Scarlet Oak tree planted in 1897. It is full of cables but otherwise quite healthy. Just to the right of the driveway and very close to it stood a flag pole 108 feet tall. Erected when Clarence and Esther were married in 1921, it had an electric light on top, and a large 48-star flag to match. Once the rope got caught with the flag near the top and Tom bet Clifford Murray, a long-time fixture at Auburn Heights, that he could get the flag down. He cut the rope with a couple of shots from his 22-calibre rifle, the rope and the flag came down, but the trouble then began. The flag lodged in a tree about 50 feet from the ground, and it took a long time to dislodge it and claim a successful operation. About 1980, the flag pole was deemed unsafe, and was taken down by a friend of Tom's. On the way down, it got away from the good man and ended up across Route 82. Fortunately, it hit no one and was cut up and removed before any further damage was done.

The steeple can be inhabited on four floors. It's part of a storage area in the basement. It's part of a large living room on the first floor. It's part of a large bedroom on the second floor, and we believe it was in this bedroom that the only birth to take place at Auburn Heights occurred when Norman Clarence Mancill was born on November 28, 1914. Norman was Israel and Lizzie Marshall's first grandson (Tom was their second over 9 years later). On the third floor, it's a screened-in porch accessible from a third-floor bedroom. When the third floor was a World War II apartment, this porch was a nice summer eating place. *[ Guide # 3 takes group to in front of copper beech and hands them over to . . ]*

#### **GUIDE # 4:**



In front of the house and also to your left is a huge copper beech or purple beech tree, planted about 1912. We know this is a State Champion runner-up, and possibly a State Champion for trees of this species. On the other side is the double-tracked railroad which passes under the front lawn through a 92-foot-long tunnel, built from R.R. tank car bodies in 1970-71. The original railroad climbed to the elevation of the present driveway before dropping off again to cross the main driveway and pass through what is the middle of the present pond.

At the center of the front porch is the large oak front door, probably used by all visitors in the early years, but seldom used by the family today. To the right of it is the porte-cochere where guests disembarked from their buggies or carriages prior to their visit. The room above the arch is a spacious bedroom, no longer heated, but a delightful summer bedroom where fans and air conditioning are seldom needed. The second floor porch under the north steeple is accessed from this bedroom. In 1988, to provide access to the ground and also as a fire escape from the third floor, a spiral stairway was added. A much more modest flag pole was erected just in front of this steeple in 1971.

To the right is Lakeside Park Station on the railroad, and the pond adjacent thereto. The small building close to the driveway near the entrance is, of course, our ticket office. The pond was finished in 1971 and for several years thereafter a scale-model paddle wheel steamboat plied its waters, giving rides to visitors to the Magic Age of Steam. A model Delaware River ferry boat was tied up at the dock near the steamer. In 1988, however, Tom built the arch bridge and the platform on the island which eliminated commercial traffic on the pond.

**GUIDE # 5 takes over:** Beyond the pond and out of sight today was Esther Marshall's rock garden of the 1930's. She may have been inspired by Mrs. Hoopes' rock garden along Route 82 at Mount Cuba. Esther's garden was quite expansive and covered the far reaches of the Auburn Heights property on the hillside facing the big house. The pond and its embankment, built in 1970, obscure this area from view today. Between the rocks, it was planted with perennials which bloomed at alternate times of the year. Clarence piped water from the mill race to a basin at the top of the garden with hydraulic rams in the meadow below (later an overshot water wheel). From the basin the water flowed through a serpentine spillway through two tiny ponds and one large one nearly 20 feet in diameter, and eventually discharged back into the mill race. A rustic arch pedestrian bridge crossed the race, and all important areas of the rock garden were accessed by flagstone walkways. It grew up during World War II, and was never restored.

The west side of the house toward the main driveway is used the most today. Both the kitchen door and the side door are the main points of entry. A small elevator was added in 1952 to give access to the cellar and the second floor, which required relocating the side door and its small porch. On the far side of the circle from the house is one of four original hitching posts which surrounded this circle when horses and their riders frequented Auburn Heights. Unlike some of the fancy homes of 100 plus years ago, these did not have a horse's head or other ornamentation atop the post, but were made simply from iron rail used on railroads and trolley

lines of those days. After the \$11,500 plus cost of building Auburn Heights, Israel Marshall probably needed to economize on his hitching posts.

The final building to your right is not historical. Built strictly for utilitarian purposes in 1970-71, it originally housed a snack bar, a boiler room, and the present rest rooms. Its fate is unknown at this time.

TCM 11/06/05, Modified 11/11/05, modified by Rnb 11/13/05