

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, December 18, 2006

Christmas 1934 at Auburn Heights: To a 10-year-old in a family that could afford to buy him too many toys, the whole month of December was an exciting time of anticipation, and the number of days until Christmas were always counted quite accurately. Having been in bed and weak with pneumonia over Christmas 1932, and at my Grandmother Shallcross' in 1933, the Shallcross and Ferguson families coming here in 1934 was indeed to be a special occasion. In addition to all this, we would be showing off our new kitchen, finished early in the year, with its recreation room underneath, my new playroom! Even though Santa Claus was no longer expected, I couldn't wait for Christmas morning.

When I arrived in the kitchen early in the morning, the door to the lower level was locked. Soon this was remedied, and as I raced down the steps, here on the floor was the greatest Lionel layout I had ever seen. Although previously I had two standard-gauge electric trains and one O-gauge train that ran on the circular railway, here was a layout that included about six electric switches, a couple of semaphore signals, a turntable, a lighted station platform, and a passenger train with a 400-E steam-type locomotive! With the Depression taking its toll on many people, my father had bought this wonderful equipment in one lot from a family in Philadelphia that had fallen on hard times. Much of it was just two years old. I didn't deserve it, but I still have most of it, and it operates in the museum 72 years later.

The *Weekly News* of December 19, 2005, told of Christmas 1929, when my mother and her helpers fed 22 family members for Christmas dinner. Our number was reduced by 1934, however, as it was decided that Uncle Jay and his family would no longer be included, as it made "just too many." He and Aunt Bess had five daughters, and four of them were either married or engaged by Christmastime 1934, and they had a big family gathering of their own. So, about 12 sat down at the dining room table here for my father to carve the turkey. Grandmother Shallcross, then 82 (my age now), was ill at her home in Middletown, and Uncle Ned stayed home with her. As usual we had a sumptuous dinner at Auburn Heights, finished off with mince or pumpkin pie. Although our new kitchen had an electric stove, I think the home-grown turkey was roasted in the more-trusted woodstove, which was located for a number of years in the laundry room below the original kitchen.

Sometime in early evening, Norman Mancill, who had been born at Auburn Heights just 20 years before (and my first cousin on my father's side of the family), stopped in to pick up Gene Ferguson, my 19-year-old cousin on my mother's side, and take him and their dates to the annual Christmas dance in Kennett Square. Lorraine Marshall, also my first cousin, and S. John Pyle, to whom she was engaged, stopped by as well; perhaps they were headed for the same dance. The young ladies were decked out in long evening gowns and the young men in tuxedos, and they did look sharp! Then this 10-year-old was sent to bed after an exciting day.