

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, April 7, 2008

The Chalfants of Kennett Square: Like the Chalfants of Atglen and Lenover, some of whom built the Chalfant automobile before 1910, the Kennett Chalfants did not pronounce or spell their surname "Chalfonte." It was pronounced more like "Chalfint." Harry W. Chalfant was president of the National Bank of Kennett Square before it was merged with the Kennett Trust Company in 1929 and was my father's mentor in the banking business. His office was in a small partitioned room alongside the front door of "the bank" at State and Broad Streets, and here he stayed after the merger, although he was basically retired.

Mrs. Chalfant was the former Mary Leonard who grew up on a farm just south of Unionville. She was a tiny lady who never weighed more than 85 pounds. They had one daughter, Sara, who married Lawrence A. Bowers about 1920. When he died a few years later, Sara moved back home. The Chalfant house was on East Linden Street, where a modest brick home and a nice carriage house were the only structures between North Broad and North Union Streets. Harry Chalfant had a bachelor brother, John, who had a home on North Union, and a sister, Jennie, a spinster who lived in a Victorian house with lots of "gingerbread," also on North Union Street. Harry had a 1931 Packard Model 826, Standard Eight five-passenger sedan with sidemounts that he drove himself a few miles each year. My father said he "rode the clutch," which contributed to clutch lining replacement frequently; otherwise the car remained like new. In 1931, when I was seven, we were invited to the Chalfant home for Saturday evening dinner. My mother dressed me in my new suit and told me to be on my best behavior. I took it seriously, and I remember it as a festive occasion that I never forgot.

Sara Bowers was cafeteria cashier at the Kennett Consolidated School that opened in 1932. I remember her telling us the school had 1,380 students. Her father died in 1933, so she and her mother were home alone. They kept the Packard, thinking they could find a driver occasionally who could take them where they needed to go. Mrs. Chalfant was getting up in years, and Sara was looking for a companion/housekeeper to be with her mother while she was at work. My mother knew of Mabel Horsey of Middletown, Delaware, a widow who needed a place to live. She took the job in Kennett, and it worked out well; she was with Mrs. Chalfant and Sara for eight years.

In the mid- to late 1930s, my parents enjoyed weekend trips to see the fall foliage. Sometimes it would be to the Pennsylvania mountains and at least twice to Virginia's Skyline Drive. We would leave after school on Friday, stay somewhere Friday night, travel farther on Saturday with a second overnight destination, and return home late Sunday. Sara and her mother were often invited to go, and they usually did. There was only one way it would work, however: Mrs. Chalfant was never to have more than 24 hours notice for such a trip, or she would get so upset she couldn't go. Once away from Kennett, however, she enjoyed the trip immensely. They also joined us for early spring weekends in Atlantic City, where we stayed two nights at the Hotel Dennis.

In January and February 1935, Mrs. Chalfant, Sara Bowers, Mabel Horsey, and their '31 Packard joined the Mancills and the Marshalls for seven weeks at Southern Pines, North Carolina. The story of those seven weeks will be covered in another "Weekly News." I last visited Mrs. Chalfant while home on a weekend pass in the summer of 1943. She was bedfast at her home on East Linden Street and died there a few months later. Sara kept the home for about 10 years and invited Hanna Passmore Ewart to move in with her, which was another nice relationship. In the 1950s, Sara sold the property and bought a smaller house on Lincoln Street, formerly the home of Mary D. Lang, a beloved teacher in the Kennett schools. The East Linden Street buildings, both the house and the carriage house, were turned into offices.