

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, December 20, 2010

Christmases Past and Present: In his famous *A Christmas Carol*, Charles Dickens spoke of Christmases past. I thank Susan Randolph for resurrecting two "Christmas Past" stories for the *Weekly News* of December 6 and 13, telling of my memories of Auburn Heights in 1929 and 1934. I'm very thankful for memories of the past, but even more thankful that I'm able to wish all of you a Merry Christmas and a very happy holiday season in 2010.

In past years, I have told of Christmases while growing up at Auburn Heights and those spent far away in 1944 and 1945. Less interesting and quieter Christmases took place in the post-World War II years. My grandmother Shallcross had passed away in Middletown, and her home, *Flowerdale*, had been sold to the local VFW. All my cousins were married (after 1948) and had their own families, so Christmas day was spent with Aunt Mary and Uncle Bassett Ferguson in Ridley Park, or the two of them would come to Auburn Heights, usually on alternate years. My father and Uncle Bassett enjoyed their annual lengthy chats. Mince Pie was a favorite of Uncle Bassett and me, I suppose because our birthdays were one day apart. This tradition continued until about 1960; Bassett Ferguson, born in 1878, died the next year.

The 1960s were even quieter Christmases at Auburn Heights. My parents had moved to the second floor in 1956, and in 1966 my mother came down with shingles behind her eyes, from which she never recovered. Early in 1968, my father became ill, and he was bedfast at Auburn Heights for much of the time thereafter until his death in October 1969. One of my cousins, Eugene S. Ferguson (1916–2004), had landed a job teaching at the University of Delaware and the Hagley Library (he helped establish the History of Technology fellowship program) and was moving his family to Newark. His mother, my Aunt Mary, sold her home, *Whitehall*, in Ridley Park and moved to a small house a few doors from her son and his family. For the next several years, my mother and I joined the Fergusons for Christmas dinner at 54 Winslow Road in Newark. Aunt Mary died in 1976 and my mother in 1979, but Gene and Jo Ferguson continued to invite me for Christmas dinner. I accepted until Ruth and I were married in 1985, and she had Christmas at Auburn Heights again for many members of her family. Since many in the family are dairy farmers, however, Christmas each year since about 1990 has been spent at the home of her brother, Phil Pierson, now a widower, near Clayton, Delaware.

May each of you have a most joyous holiday season. Ruth and I send our very best wishes. Tom