

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, February 7, 2011

James T. Shallcross (1847–1911): My maternal grandfather, James T. Shallcross, died at his home on North Broad Street in Middletown, Delaware, near the end of January 100 years ago. He was 63. My paternal grandfather, Israel Marshall, died in late June that year at the age of 60. I was born 13 years later, the youngest grandchild of James and almost the youngest of Israel (the Mancill twins were 7½ months younger). I'm sorry I never knew either of my grandfathers. James's father, Sereck F. Shallcross (1816–1906), a Quaker from Byberry in Northeast Philadelphia, emigrated to the Odessa, Delaware, area in 1842 and built a large brick three-story house with a mansard roof and 6½-foot ceilings on the third floor, which he named Oakland. A successful farmer, Sereck soon bought adjacent farms northwest of Odessa, separated from Oakland only by Drawyers Creek, which was dammed up to power a small grist mill. James was Sereck's eldest son, and when the former married Mary Ellen Vandegrift on December 18, 1872, in the new Drawyers Presbyterian Church in Odessa, the newlyweds moved into Belleview Farm, about a mile north of Oakland. At Belleview, three sons and three daughters were born, the fourth child being my mother, Esther Shallcross (Marshall).

Like his father, James was a successful farmer, but he also liked to dabble in Democratic politics, which displeased my grandmother. Having several political jobs in Wilmington in addition to his farm responsibilities, he commuted daily from Belleview, driving by buggy or on horseback to the Delaware Road train at Mount Pleasant. In the early 1890s, he was Recorder of Deeds for New Castle County. The Marshall brothers, Israel and Elwood, having recently purchased the paper mill on Benge Road in Yorklyn, sought water rights from the small stream that parallels Auburn Mill Road near Red Clay Creek, and its owner, Levis Lamborn, agreed. The document contains the names of Israel and Elwood and is made official by James T. Shallcross, Recorder of Deeds. This document is still at Auburn Heights. At the time of his death, his children liked to say he was in line to be Lieutenant Governor of Delaware.

James and Mary's (she was never called "Mary" but either "Molly" or "Dolly") eldest daughter, Mary, married Bassett Ferguson on the lawn at Belleview on June 6, 1906. James Jr. had married a distant cousin, Elizabeth Shallcross of Byberry, in 1900, and they were living with his grandfather Sereck at Oakland.

About 1908, with his children grown and well able to take over the farm management, James, Dolly, and their four unmarried children moved from Belleview to a property called Flowerdale, which covered a city block of about four acres on North Broad Street in Middletown. The spacious frame house was built about 1876 with a porch on three sides, and the large first-floor windows went to the floor for summer ventilation. In the barn on the property, my grandfather was doing crop experimentation in connection with Delaware College at Newark, where two of his sons had attended.

All the conductors and trainmen on the "Delaware Road" knew my grandfather, as he was a frequent rail passenger. One morning he was riding the train from Middletown to Dover, and as he got up from his seat, he wobbled all over the aisle. Passengers thought he was drunk, but the trainmen knew better. He had developed pneumonia and had a very high fever. They got him on the first train back to Middletown, where he was nursed at home as well as the family knew how. Mustard plasters and other remedies proved ineffective, and a surgeon was summoned from Philadelphia. The doctor operated on his lungs at Flowerdale, but thereafter my grandfather regained consciousness only once and died within 48 hours. Four years later, my mother entered nursing school at Union Memorial Hospital in Baltimore. There may have been a connection.