

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, August 17, 2009

Hotels in the late 1930s: Although he was never much for joining clubs, my father liked to stay at the best hotels when we traveled, mostly in Packard cars. There was not much choice in those days—either a hotel right in town, a room in a “tourist home,” or crude cabins with poor plumbing and no eating facilities along the roadways. Some adventuresome motorists liked to “rough it,” such as pulling a tiny 900-pound house trailer behind their car or carrying a lean-to tent that attached to one side of the car, barely large enough to sleep two people in tight quarters. Real house trailers and motor homes were many years in the future. These rustic arrangements were not for my father (my mother might have enjoyed them, occasionally).

In the cities, the big chains dominated: names like Statler, Ritz Carlton and Biltmore were always considered the best and the most expensive (the Hotel du Pont in Wilmington was leased to the Biltmore chain for the first 20 years or so of its existence), but they were really geared more toward the business traveler who usually arrived by train. Regional hotel chains in smaller towns were starting to appear: in Pennsylvania, a chain existed with “Penn” as the descriptive prefix to the hotel’s name, like the Penn-Harris in Harrisburg, the Penn-Albert in Greensburg, and the Penn-Stroud in Stroudsburg. There were many more. In Kansas, the Lamer chain had about eight small air-conditioned hotels across the state, and in West Texas, a small chain named Hilton had about five hotels, the westernmost of which was in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I stayed there one night in 1944. A number of big hotels were owned by the railroads. This was especially true in Canada, where either Canadian Pacific or Canadian National owned the top hotel in most Canadian cities. The railroads also owned and promoted many resort places, such as the Greenbrier at White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia (the C & O), the Canadian Pacific resorts across Canada, El Tovar (south rim of Grand Canyon) and La Fonda in Santa Fe (A.T. & S.F.), and the Sun Valley Lodge and the lodges in the Southern Utah Parks (Union Pacific).

On our trip to Nova Scotia and the Gaspé Peninsula in our '34 Packard Twelve in 1936, although the lodging facilities in those places were very Spartan (at Perce on the Gaspé there was no electricity in town), we stayed at some very fine places coming and going. First, the Lake Mohonk Mountain House in the Catskills, owned and operated by the Smiley family from 1870 until the present, the Lake Placid Club, a famous hotel in the Adirondacks that closed in the late 1970s, the Mountain View House at Whitefield, New Hampshire, headquarters of the 2004 Eastern Steam Car Tour, the Chateau Frontenac, a Canadian Pacific hotel in Quebec City, the Glen Springs Hotel at Watkins Glen, New York (it never re-opened after World War II), and the Inn at Buck Hill Falls, also long closed.

From 1936 to 1942, when I went with my father (and often Clarence Walker and Ralph Willis) to the Grand American Trapshooting Tournament in late August at Vandalia, Ohio, we stayed at the Dayton Biltmore in the city of the same name, 10 miles from the shooting grounds. Most shooters stayed in Dayton, the more reasonably priced hotels being the Miami and the Gibbons. In 1936 Dayton had the first trackless trolleys and the first air conditioned room I had ever seen, which was the Biltmore’s restaurant. It had a small dance floor, and for \$1.25 you could have a five-course dinner with roast prime rib of beef, and a four-piece band with a female singer. *Nice!*