

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, February 4, 2013

Two Trips to the Sunshine State, 1928 and 1986: Since I never liked cold weather, it would seem I should have spent a lot of time in Florida during my lifetime, but that's not so. I have counted a total of 10 times that I've been there, but only twice was I "all over" the state in a modern car, once with my parents in 1928 and once with Ruth in 1986.

I remember very little about the 1928 trip. My father had a new Model 443 Packard Straight Eight seven-passenger sedan, the first of several big closed Packards he owned over the next decade. Since he was recently retired from National Vulcanized Fibre Company, my parents decided they would take a long trip to Florida. My aunt Helen Shallcross went along to help care for this four-year-old. I remember crossing the double-decker bridge between Perryville and Havre de Grace, Maryland, which had been an earlier railroad bridge. We stopped at Southern Pines, North Carolina, where Aunt Helen knew the Pottle family, who owned and operated the Hollywood Hotel. It was very hot when we reached Miami, and we soon headed northwest to Sebring, where there was a new hotel with ostriches racing around. At St. Petersburg, huge pelicans lined the dock, and there was an early morning fire in the old Huntington Hotel where we stayed. My father carried me down the fire escape from the burning building. From that time on, whenever we stayed at a multistoried hotel, he would ask for a room on one of the lower floors, even though it was often noisy with open windows and city traffic. In his earlier Packards, he had used Atlantic gasoline (this was before "White Flash" and "Ethyl," with their lead additives), but on the Florida trip, he started using Texaco and found it very good.

I remember a lot about the 1986 trip, a few months after Ruth and I were married. I had a 1972 Cadillac Fleetwood Brougham with a 472 cu. in. engine that I had bought from Ellice McDonald in 1978. With overnight stops at Washington, D.C.; Mineral, Virginia; and Florence, South Carolina, I wanted to enter Florida the hard way, so we took a ferry across the St. Johns River east of Jacksonville en-route to a bed-and-breakfast at St. Augustine, and then we went to Daytona Beach, where the temperature plummeted to 20 degrees. As we left there and headed west toward Silver Springs, the space shuttle Challenger blew up behind us at Cape Canaveral. We stayed at the Contemporary Hotel at Walt Disney World for three nights and then spent one or two nights at Winter Haven, where we visited Cypress Gardens. When we reached the west coast at Sarasota, we visited old friends there and stayed about three nights on Longboat Key. We enjoyed the Ringling home and museum and the Bellm Museum of antique cars and an excellent display of operating music machines. Ruth was not feeling well at Punta Gorda, so I visited the Edison home and institute (near Fort Myers) alone. As she recovered, we enjoyed a night on Marco Island, before heading east through the Everglades.

After a boat trip to look at alligators and other flora and fauna, we skirted Miami and went through a teen-infested Fort Lauderdale on a Sunday afternoon. Before dark, we took the last room (a suite) at an old-fashioned motel on the beach between wall-to-wall condominiums about six miles south of Palm Beach, where we stayed two or three nights before heading north again. Traveling toward home, there must have been one or two nights before we crossed the James River on a ferry en-route to Jamestown and Williamsburg, where we arose the next morning with 4 inches of snow on the ground. After visiting the Williamsburg potteries in the mud, the final day of our 3½-week trip was easy and uneventful.