

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, July 18, 2016

Before There Was Air Conditioning: This past week, when most of us have enjoyed the relief of air conditioning, brings back memories of when there was none. At Auburn Heights, my grandparents never knew what it was. In fact, they did not even have portable electric fans to circulate the hot, humid air. Lizzie Marshall would open most of the windows at night and close them, along with the interior recessed shutters, during the day. She probably had other tricks to help keep the big house somewhat comfortable. Israel's working clothes would include a white shirt, probably with a detachable collar, and a tie, either a self-tied bow tie or a four-in-hand tie. Lizzie would have on several layers of clothing covering everything from her neck to her wrists and ankles. They simply got used to hot weather. It was better than cold winters with insufficient heat.

In my parents' time, when I was growing up, portable oscillating electric fans that sat on the floor came "on line" in the 1920s. By the late 1930s, we had a large one on a pedestal, which was also used at the Gun Club during the big "shoot." The very first time I witnessed an air conditioned room was when I went with my father and Clarence Walker to the Grand American trapshooting tournament in Vandalia, Ohio, in August 1936. The dining room of the Dayton-Biltmore Hotel, where we stayed, was air conditioned, probably had the best food in town, and also featured a four-piece band with a female singer. A full course prime rib of beef dinner was \$1.25, with a 10% tip expected. I'll not forget our first night there. We were in the middle of a heat wave, and even at dinner time the outside temperature was in the high 90s. In the dining room it was about 70 degrees! Going and coming was quite a shock.

By 1939, my father had bought a Carrier air conditioner for their bedroom, a big floor unit that connected to a front window of Auburn Heights. My mother made fancy sand bags to seal the space under the bedroom doors. The A/C unit put out a peculiar but not unpleasant smell, but my father was afraid to let it run all night. He would start up the machine in late afternoon, let it run until bedtime, then shut it off and open the windows. At least once each summer, I used to be covered with poison ivy, so I enjoyed this room, where perspiration was kept to a minimum. In later years, two or three small window units cooled that many rooms in the big house.

When my parents, my cousin Meta Shallcross, and I went west in our '37 Packard in 1941, we came across a small hotel chain named Lamer, with properties in Kansas and surrounding states, that advertised air conditioned rooms. Moving west from Kansas City on a very hot day, we pulled in at Hays, Kansas, and enjoyed the somewhat sporadic cooling of the Lamer Hotel there. At Beaver Dam, Arizona, with the outside temperature registering 110 degrees, a small lodge offering the same amenity attracted our attention, so we stayed until midnight, when the temperature was 99 degrees but dropping rapidly, after which we made our way to Riverside, California.

Packard advertised to have air conditioning available in its high-end cars just before World War II. I think I saw a Packard so equipped in Frank Diver's Wilmington dealership. However, this feature was probably very expensive, not very effective, and did not result in many orders. It was not until the mid-1950s that air conditioning was standard on top-of-the-line American cars. My father had a 1956 Packard Patrician that did not have it. Eventually, he bought an after-market Sears A/C unit that mounted under the dash, but it was primitive compared to what came along soon thereafter. At Hershey in 1978, I bought a '55 Chrysler Imperial eight-passenger sedan. This 149-inch wheelbase car had a large coolant tank in the trunk, part of the circulating system for its early air conditioning. The car had seen hard use as a limousine at Toledo Airport, and although I restored the car's appearance, I never tried to activate its air conditioning.

From their beginnings in 1952, all Holiday Inns advertised air conditioning. However, the rooms had only a two-pipe heating and cooling system, and the whole place would be circulating chilled water or hot water, as the season required. Our first inn, opened in 1961, had this system. During the spring and fall months, it was never satisfactory in our area. Often we would have to switch back and forth daily -- heat in the early morning,

cooling from noon until late evening. The occupants of one room wanted it warmer, those of another wanted it cooler. We soon improved this system, as was done in most Holiday Inns.

Although I don't have figures, I imagine we spend more money today in cooling our buildings in this area than we do in heating them. Historically, however, it was much more important to keep warm than it was to keep cool.