

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, January 15, 2018

**Walter W. Anderson (1921-2010):** Walter was my business partner for 37 years, and I could not have wished for a better one. A native of Cecil County, Maryland, he grew up on a farm near Calvert and was graduated from high school in 1939. From there, he went to Beacom Business College in Wilmington on a scholarship, with a daily commute of almost 50 miles round-trip. Graduating after two years, he was hired as a junior bookkeeper by Delaware Coach Company, a wholly owned subsidiary of Delaware Power & Light, which would eventually change its name to Delmarva Power Company.

When Walter joined Delaware Coach, all electrified lines had “trackless trolleys” in Wilmington, a 1939 improvement that had eliminated tracks in the street and allowed the rubber-tired trolleys to pull up to a curb for boarding. They still required a centralized trolley barn and could only operate where miles of copper wire were strung above their routes, with a high-voltage generating system. Trackless trolleys, almost silent in operation, lasted just over 10 years in Wilmington, after which they were replaced by smelly and noisy, but much more flexible Diesel buses which were slightly larger.

Walter was drafted into the army early in 1943, and before the year was over, he married his longtime girlfriend Frances Gifford. Serving at Lincoln, Nebraska, Salt Lake City, Utah, and Fort Lewis, Washington, he was released in 1945 and went back to work at Delaware Coach Company. The company sponsored his membership in the newly formed Wilmington Junior Chamber of Commerce (JayCees).

As a young travel agent, I joined the JayCees in 1950, and I met Walter right away, as he was “on the door,” which meant he collected \$1 from each member who attended the weekly luncheon at the Hob Tea Room in the Delaware Trust Building. It was not long until Walter, Lindsay Greenplate (another active JayCee), and I were having lunch together once or twice a week, where we often had a 50-cent meal at a Chinese restaurant on Delaware Avenue. Walter knew his days at Delaware Coach were numbered, and he was not surprised when he was fired in 1957. By this time, he and Frances had three sons, ages 3 to 13. He took a job as credit manager at Elkton Supply Company, near his home, and he learned a lot about how the best customers were often the “poorest pay.” He liked working in Elkton, but he disliked his job.

By the late 1950s, I knew I didn't want to sit behind a desk as a travel agent for the rest of my life and was looking at the growing motel business, with some encouragement from my father. I asked Walter if he would have an interest in such an endeavor, and he responded positively. In 1960, he worked temporarily in the travel agency, while we made plans to build our first motel. On restricted land bought from Woodlawn Trustees, we planned a 35-room Colonial-style motel, but I had the feeling that being part of a chain was the answer to long-term success.

There was a fast-growing new chain in the south named Holiday Inn that was selling franchises and had opened about 30 locations. Investigation showed its headquarters to be in Memphis, where a 46-year-old entrepreneur named Kemmons Wilson had developed a team of young men to help expand his hotel chain. Walter and I flew to Memphis in June 1959, spent a day with them, and came home sold on applying for a franchise. This was approved by late summer, and construction began in 1960 on 60 rooms and a restaurant at Talleyville on Route 202. Walter sold his home in Elkton and moved with his family to McDaniel Heights, less than one mile from the new Holiday Inn. As was the practice in those days, a prospective innkeeper spent two or three weeks working at an established Holiday Inn (in his case Columbus, OH) before qualifying for the job.

From the first day we opened in August 1961, our Holiday Inn was highly successful. We turned away more than we could accommodate and hung bedspreads at the windows while awaiting our curtains. Within two months, we planned to build 49 more rooms, which opened in June 1962. We followed Holiday Inn instructions to the “T,” and for the most part this paid off handsomely. Walter was a “detail” man, not only with figures but also with cleanliness. He never walked around the inn without picking up cigarette butts. Walter and I were very

fortunate in the staff we hired, and they were as friendly as they were efficient. His wife, Frances, was the assistant housekeeper and often had to substitute as housekeeper during vacation time and when roads were slippery. More than once, she skated to the inn from their home nearly one mile away.

Walter and Holiday Inns were a perfect match. He usually worked between 16 and 18 hours each day, seven days a week, but he loved it. He had his hand on everything. He soon became well known at Holiday Inn headquarters in Memphis and was the perennial secretary and treasurer of the Delaware Hotel-Motel Association. He and Frances enjoyed the annual Holiday Inn Conferences and the post-conference vacation tours. In 1964, we opened our second Holiday Inn with 100 rooms at Exit 3 of I-95, which we called "Wilmington-Southwest." In 1967, we added 35 more rooms at Talleyville, and in 1978-79, 44 more were added at Exit 3. Walter was in charge of all these operations but maintained his position of Innkeeper at Talleyville until Holiday Inns decided to change the title to General Manager. During the last 25 years before we sold our Talleyville Holiday Inn in 1997, Walter and his family owned about 40% of our local company, and, thanks to prudent management, it was very profitable. We were always glad we could make it profitable to our employees as well.

Although I usually visited one of our inns a few times each week, his devoted leadership as my partner made it possible for me to found the Wilmington & Western Railroad, the Magic Age of Steam, and to serve 36 years as treasurer and clerk of the Finance Committee at the Friends Home in Kennett, as well as to enjoy many long steam car trips. Thank you, Walter, I shall always be grateful for a wonderful friend.