

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, September 24, 2018

**Maps and Where You Are:** My view of maps and geography in general are reflective of my generation. The only young people who really know their geography today are the meteorologists on TV. As a storm approaches or moves across, it's amazing how they recite the locales, and they are nearly 100% correct.

For a long time, I have said that if you don't know where you are, there is no way you know where you are going. Some travelers could not go anywhere without assistance from automatic devices. I have often asked newcomers to Auburn Heights, "Where are you from?" The answer is often "Only 45 minutes from here," or something like that. Time is no measure of distance, and chances are it took them twice that long, anyway. Then I might ask "Which direction?" That is a complete stopper.

When I was about eight years old, good road maps were starting to become available and were distributed free by the various oil companies that sold gasoline. Various map companies supplied these retailers with maps. Some were better, more accurate, and much easier to read than others. Rand-McNally, the most famous of the map makers, supplied some of them. I never liked Rand-McNally maps, as road maps made by the General Drafting Company were far superior in every way. In our area, Esso and Mobilgas had General Drafting Company maps, the only difference being the color of the water (the ocean, the Great Lakes, etc. would be blue on Esso maps and green on Mobil maps). In New York State, under the same Standard Oil umbrella was Socony (Standard Oil Co. of New York) Mobilgas, Imperial Oil in Eastern Canada, and Sohio (Standard Oil of Ohio) in Ohio. I think General Drafting Co. was a subsidiary of Standard Oil Company. Although foreign maps were not distributed through filling stations, they were available. In the 1940s and '50s, there was a huge map rack at Rockefeller Center in New York, where free Esso road maps of many foreign lands were available for the taking- no cost!

So, I learned to read and enjoy maps at an early age and guided my father from the passenger's seat on many trips in the northeast. In the 1970s, free maps at filling stations became scarce, including my favorite Esso maps, which changed to Exxon about 1973. I wrote to the General Drafting Company in northern New Jersey and found they still had them at a modest price. These maps were also sold through mail houses such as L. L. Bean. Stopping with Ruth at Bean headquarters in Freeport, Maine, in 1986, I bought a complete set: every state in the U.S. I have taken care of and used these maps ever since, and some are getting "shop-worn." In the 1990s, a company named American Map Co. took over the limited printing of these maps, and apparently General Drafting Company went out of business.

For many years, if you went to a AAA office to get assistance in planning a motor trip, they would supply you with strip maps, with the various strips showing the recommended route. Some liked strip maps, but I never did. They showed your route, but told nothing about where you were. I was always interested in knowing. Pursuing this curiosity for a lifetime allowed me to fill in the United States and Canada and parts of Western Europe so I have a rough idea of where most, but certainly not all, places are located. Coupled with my interest in railroads and the main line routes of many of them in the 1940s and '50s, maps have made for a fun and useful hobby for 85 years, but they are almost obsolete.