

Biltmore Hotels: One of the most famous names in the hotel business in the 1920–1960 period was Biltmore. Originally it was a closely knit chain of big city hotels, which many businessmen considered unsurpassed. There was a Biltmore in New York, in Los Angeles, in Providence, and in Dayton, Ohio. For the first 20 years of its existence, the Hotel DuPont in Wilmington was run by the chain and was advertised as the DuPont Biltmore. The Dayton-Biltmore was mentioned briefly in the “News” of August 17, 2009.

My father stayed at the Dayton-Biltmore for an average of six nights each for 10 years between 1934 and 1947 while attending the Grand American Trapshooting Championships at Vandalia, Ohio, 10 miles away. I was lucky enough to be with him for seven of those years plus two nights in 1934, wherefrom we went to the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago. From 1936 through 1946, with the exception of 1937 and three missed years during World War II, Clarence L. Walker of Wilmington would usually be with us, and twice the three of us were joined by Ralph P. Willis of Penns Grove, New Jersey. I enjoyed associating with men 40 years my seniors, and picked up much late 19th-century wisdom.

My first real memories of the Dayton Biltmore are from 1936. The fine 12-story hotel had been built in the 1920s at 201 No. Main Street at the north end of the downtown section of the city. Few people had experienced air conditioning in 1936, but the fine restaurant on the first floor was air conditioned. Eating there each evening, our party experienced A/C for the first time! It was a very hot week in late August, and the restaurant was too cold; about 70 degrees vs. the high 90s in the rest of the hotel and on the sidewalk outside. I will never forget the drastic change in temperature and humidity as we went from the restaurant to the sidewalk, where we found Dr. J. C. Wynkoop, Walter Wilson, and Julius Marcey, all from the Washington, DC area, trying to keep cool before retiring for the night. While on the sidewalk, the first trackless trolley I had seen moved by with no noise except the wires clicking on the catenary above. The tracks were gone from the streets in Dayton.

Clarence Walker had a connecting room with the one shared by my father and me, and both rooms were hot. The windows were open but there was little air moving. For some reason, I looked in on Walker to find him lying on the floor under the window in his old-fashioned night gown. I was shocked, not because of that, but because I had never seen him without his wig; he was completely bald. From these windows, we could see neon signs that lit up the sky. One said “Rent a Car – U Drive It.” We had never heard of such a thing. Another beer advertisement said “Vas You Ever in Zinzinnati?” For five straight years, 1938–1942, my dad discovered he could rent a corner suite for the three or four of us for very little more than two double rooms, so this he did. What luxury, even without A/C! There was a twin-bedded room, a single room, a large sitting room with two Murphy beds, and two complete baths (no showers in those days). The restaurant was superb. In addition to air conditioning, it featured a four-piece band, a female singer, and a full-course prime rib dinner with complimentary shrimp cocktail for \$1.25. The parking garage was on the ground floor of the hotel next to the restaurant and was accessed from the street with a door just wide enough for our ’37 Packard Twelve. The luxurious lobby was on the second floor.

On our California trip in 1941, also in our favorite Packard, we stayed at the Biltmore in downtown Los Angeles. In 1943, during my first six months of active duty at Brown University, my parents came once to visit and stayed at the Biltmore on Providence, Rhode Island’s main square near the New Haven railroad station. Food and service was limited

during wartime, but this hotel has been upgraded and is still listed as one of Providence's best. Unfortunately, that is not the case in Dayton and Los Angeles, where crime is prevalent on the streets adjoining these properties. The Dayton Biltmore became a facility for the elderly of limited means 40 years ago, and the shell of the building is vacant today.

Work Report: On Tuesday, May 13, 19 volunteers were on hand, viz: Jerry Novak (in charge), Tom Marshall, Bob Jordan, Bill Schwoebel, Bill Rule, Ted Kamen, Steve Bryce, Richard Bernard, Dave Leon, Gary Green, Dennis Dragon, Brent McDougall, Tim Ward, Jeff Kennard, Gerhard Maute, Eugene Maute, Dan Citron, Jerry Lucas, and Tim Nolan. This was record attendance for a work session this year.

In firing up the Model 740, the branch forks continued to leak badly, so it was given up until the problem is fixed. Jeff Kennard took parts home to fabricate a new holding bracket for the forks. Work was also done on the branch forks of the 735, and the car was cleaned from its trip to Dover on 5/3. A leaking flare fitting was repaired on the stack blower line on the Model 87. The Rauch & Lang batteries were recharged after the car's use at Easton on 5/10. The inside of the stone wall at the north end of the garage was painted and also the floor in this area.

Cleaning continued in the snack bar preparatory to moving the storage bins from this area. Both the Models 78 and 607 were fired up and tested for their runs on 5/17 and 5/18 to Winterthur and Linvilla Orchards respectively. The '37 Packard was tested on the road prior to its run to New Castle on 5/17.

On Thursday, May 15, 12 volunteers were in the work force: Tim Ward (in charge), Dan Citron, Bob Stransky, Steve Bryce, Bill Schwoebel, Dave Leon, Ted Kamen, Bob Jordan, Tim Nolan, Jerry Koss, Rose Ann Hoover, and Tom Marshall.

Painting on the walls and floor of the garage continued. The burner was plastered up again on the Model 740, and the new bracket was installed on the branch forks. Our newly acquired Ford Model T was started, the bands adjusted, and the car driven around the loop of the driveway several times, before ending up in the museum ready for use on June 1. In attempting to fire up and road-test the Model 735, a feed-water pipe developed a serious hole while on the road, so the car was towed back and a repair delayed until things cooled off. Locomotive 401 was cleaned from its runs on Train Day, 5/10. Paint was touched up on the 607, the 735, and the 740, and the nickel was cleaned on the Model 78.

As a result of the preparatory work, the Model 76 and the '37 Packard went on Saturday to a Day in Old New Castle, and the Model 78 went for special display at Winterthur. All went well except with the 76, where a pipe on the 3-tube indicator sprung a leak, and the car was towed home. On Sunday, our Models 725 and 607 embarked on the 35-mile round-trip to the HCCP show at Linvilla Orchards, and all went well. In two separate attempts, the Model 735 was repaired and is now ready for service again.