

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, March 6, 2017

**The Great New England Blackout, 1965:** In July 1965, I took delivery of a new '65 Chrysler 300 four-door sedan. It cost \$3,600. That October, I was anxious to take a trip in it. Holiday Inns of America, of which our Wilmington-area operations were a part, was undergoing massive expansion at that time, opening a new Inn every 2½ days. When our first Holiday Inn opened in August 1961, there were less than 200 Inns in the system; by the end of the decade there were about 1,700. In 1965, a lot of new Holiday Inns dotted New England. Although my trip was not an official inspection requested by the parent company, it was to our interest to learn what we could about the inns in New England, as so much of our transient business near Wilmington was over the new Interstate Highway System up and down the East Coast.

Traveling alone, I visited every Holiday Inn but one then in New England. I missed only Burlington, Vermont. I stayed overnight at several, of which I remember the following: the first night was at Milford, Connecticut, between Bridgeport and New Haven. The second was at one of the two called Providence, Rhode Island, although the one where I stayed was actually in Massachusetts just over the state line from Pawtucket. I believe the third night was near Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Then I went into Maine, visiting Lewiston and Augusta, before returning to Portland where Holiday Inns had an excellent operation. After a good dinner, I inquired where I could go to the movies and was told that just across the road was a new building with twin theatres. On one side was showing "The Sound of Music" and on the other was "Mary Poppins." I enjoyed the former for the first of many times.

Planning to pass near Boston and stay at a new Holiday Inn on Route 128 west of the city, I wanted to call my friends the Gardners and see if a brief visit would be convenient. About 5 P.M. I stopped at a filling station with a phone booth on the northeast side of Boston and placed my call to their home in West Newton. Just about the time the connection was made, all the lights went out, and darkness was fast approaching. I thought it was local and temporary, and Eloise "Weezie" Gardner suggested I come for a late supper after I got settled. As I moved down Route 128, however, all was dark everywhere except for motorists' lights.

I found the Holiday Inn and made my way to the front desk. The clerk was operating with a candle and without a cash register. It seemed very few overnight guests had arrived. He said he could check me in and lend me a candle but that there was no heat, and they would soon be out of hot water. I took advantage of the candle and then drove through the darkness the 3 or 4 miles to the Gardner home. Rod Blood, a famous Packard collector then in the last year of his life, was living with the Gardners, and they were heating one room from the fireplace therein. Weezie had no stove or kitchen conveniences, but she got together a cold supper for all of us. I can still see Rod Blood standing in front of the fireplace. About 10 P.M., I returned to the Holiday Inn, where they gave me extra blankets to keep warm. The power outage was everywhere, covering the six New England states and into southeastern New York, including New York City.

The sun came out the next morning, but there was still no power. I headed west to visit Holiday Inns at Worcester and Pittsfield and planned to end my trip with a late arrival that night at Auburn Heights. Seldom missing a chance to go to the movies, I drove down one of the parkways into Manhattan, parked and took in a show (possibly at the Radio City Music Hall) and then drove home. Obviously, New York City had power by that time, and southwest of there toward home the power was never off. However, some New England areas were without power for five or six days. A lot was learned from the Great Blackout, and steps were taken so it has not happened again.