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## SUMMER ODYSSEY – 2013

By Gordon L. Wilson, TCA #76-10233



Every year since moving to Arizona, we've driven to each TCA Convention. That has meant many thousands of miles, countless hours, and varied adventures traversing across the byways of this great nation of ours. There is so much to see and do, it is impossible to run out of interesting things to enjoy no matter how many times one crisscrosses this country. History, local festivals, music, opera, professional baseball both of the major and minor league variety, visiting friends and fellow TCA members, food stops, and likely other things long forgotten occupy us, time after time. As we've always said, "You see much more at ground level, than you do at 35,000 feet." Of course, you DO NEED about three weeks of uninterrupted time to make it all work!



"Cadillac Ranch" along I-40 in Amarillo, Texas  
10 vintage Cadillacs buried nose  
down in the Texas desert –  
Blasphemy!

This year's trip to the TCA Convention in St. Louis provided many unique and wonderful experiences. Traveling east out of New Mexico along the Texas Panhandle on I-40, it doesn't take long before one comes across an old Route 66 left-over, "The Cadillac Ranch." This is 10 early '60's Cadillacs, buried nose down in the Texas desert. It is pure Blasphemy to Cadillac owners, but a MUST STOP for all who know about it.

For us, however, the first really memorable "fun" thing took place at a minor league baseball game in Amarillo, Texas. As you well know, beer and soda pop at Pro Baseball games tend to be costly. Between one of the half-innings, a young boy was called to the field and given a bat, then a plastic ball was placed on a "T" ball stand, and it was announced to the 2,000+ fans in attendance that, "if he hit the that ball over the fence in front of him in any of three swings, beer and soda for the next 20 minutes would be \$1.00 a glass." Like Mighty Casey, this young man took a huge swing, only he didn't miss! All who wanted, got their \$1.00 drinks for the next 20 minutes. The smile on that boy's face was worth more than any beer or soda! He obviously knew, "He had DONE GOOD!" I hope his Mom or Dad were each able to get their Dollar Beers



Amarillo Sox Stadium

or Soda Pops, but more so, I hope they took a photo of their son enjoying his moment of fame at the Amarillo Sox baseball game. It was a priceless scene.

In Lamar, Missouri, we visited the Harry Truman boyhood home. Considering the wealth of most of the US Presidents since the end of World War Two, it is truly amazing that any of our Chief Executives could ever have risen from such a small, humble beginning as this. At the urging of Rio Grande Chapter President Greg Palmer, we made a luncheon stop at the Lewis Café in St. Clair, Missouri. Even the local Union Pacific train cooperated by passing by, right next to this really nice “Ma & Pa” eatery. Their reputation for serving superior food at 1950’s prices was well deserved.



Harry Truman boyhood home



The Lewis Café in St. Clair, MO



Even the trains cooperated!



We arrived in St. Louis four days prior to the Convention, not for Cardinals baseball, but for five opera performances presented by the Opera Theater of St. Louis. Opera has been one of my passions since I was a youth of around 16 years of age. While my peers were chasing Elvis, I was riding the “Bird Cage” elevator to the top balcony of the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City.

The Convention activities for us were varied. We had a plethora of tours, both formal and independent. A trek to Springfield, Illinois provided more U. S. Presidential material as this was the city which spurred Abraham Lincoln to be the 16<sup>th</sup> President of the USA and is also his final resting place. Quite by accident, and near the Lincoln Visitor’s Center, is the Western Depot, now a beautifully restored Springfield Chamber of Commerce Visitors Center. I convinced our docent to make an unscheduled stop here, which turned out to be a super bonus for those of us on this LINCOLNLAND TOUR.



Western Depot in Springfield, IL

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Lincoln's Tomb in Springfield, IL

The Millennium Hotel, in which many of us were housed for the week, was a short walk from many of St. Louis' major attractions, such as The Gateway Arch, The Old Basilica, River Boats, The Old Court House, and Busch Stadium. Many of us opted to take a tour of the Cardinals Major League Baseball park, Busch Memorial Stadium, and also to take a ride to the top of the 630' Gateway Arch National Monument, which dominates the St. Louis skyline. One evening, below the Gateway Arch, we took a relaxing three hour dinner cruise on the Mississippi River amidst the company of Peter and Mary Jane Atonna and roughly 300 other TCA members and their families.



The Millennium Hotel



The Old Court House



The Old Basilica



We had an Arch view from our room at the Millennium Hotel.



Busch Stadium as seen from the Millennium Hotel



Bush Memorial Stadium



Riverboat Cruise Terminal



Dinner Cruise aboard the Tom Sawyer River Boat

Christie performed her duties as TCA’s National Secretary while Katie Elgar and Bob Mintz did their due diligence as TCA’s Vice-President and Treasurer, respectively. Dannie Martin was honored at the Convention’s closing Banquet for his 18 years of service as the Chairman of the TCA Convention Guidelines Committee. All-in-all, the Desert Division was quite visible and well represented at this, the 59<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention. Most of all, KUDO’s with Capital Letters, need to be given to Dennis James, Ozark Division’s President and Convention Chairman, for a wonderful week of “Training” in St. Louis, Missouri. THANK YOU, DENNIS!!!



2013 Board of Directors

Our trek home would also be adventurous and Presidential, as well as filled with more of the “Old West,” Grand Opera, and Railroading. A “Theater in the Round” production of THE WIZARD of OZ just north of Louisville, Kentucky started our return journey, followed by our third Presidential visit, this time to the President William Clinton Library & Museum in Little Rock, Arkansas, alongside the Arkansas River. Just as we entered this venue, someone decided to “end it all” by jumping from one of the nearby bridges, thus filling the Clinton Library’s parking lot full of Little Rock Police and Emergency vehicles. We didn’t hang around for a conclusion!



Fort Knox - on the way to Dinner Theater!



Clinton Library & Museum



EMT’s etc. for suicide hunt?

Leaving Little Rock, Arkansas, early on Independence Day, we were in no particular hurry to reach our evening’s respite in Weatherford, Oklahoma, once we learned that Terral Klaassen, TCA friend and elite collector, would not be home in nearby Hydro, Oklahoma. Therefore we decided to do something we had somehow gotten away from doing during our annual treks to TCA National Conventions: Take an unplanned side trip to a town or event which “just sort of popped up.” In an Arkansas State Guidebook was an intriguing description of a railroad depot with an excursion train operating on the Arkansas and Missouri Railroad line in the small town of Van Buren. It was only a short distance south of I-40 and it was nearing lunch time. We figured that the worst thing that could happen if the train angle didn’t pan out was that we would at least find a place to get a bite to eat. Bingo!! We hit two thirds of our wish list! In Pro Sports 67% is worth a Million Dollar contract, right?



Depot - Van Buren, Arkansas



Brothers Cottage Café in Van Buren



A “Razorback” at the Brothers Cottage Café

Alas, the excursion train was not running, but the restored Old Frisco Depot, now a combination Van Buren Visitor's Bureau and Railroad Museum, was a marvelous treasure. Coincidentally, directly across the street was one of those "Ma & Pa" eateries you only find in "small town" America. The accommodating docent at the Visitor's Center recommended it highly. So off we went, 20 yards across the street to Brothers Cottage Café. It was overflowing with Arkansas University Razorback memorabilia, and the menu was "down home" varied. This required not much study on my part, as there was a Breaded Pork Tenderloin Sandwich, one of my all-time favorite things to consume! By pure chance, we had lucked into "Heaven on Earth." This 45 minute lunch stop turned into a nearly two hour layover by the time we explored this bit of Americana. What fun!

All of this brought us to America's birthday in the small Oklahoma town of Weatherford around 6 PM in the early evening. One thing about small towns on July 4 – they surely do have long and large Fireworks' displays! Theirs began around 9:45PM adjacent to a Town Park and concluded nearly an hour later. That is a lot of Fire Works for a small town in western Oklahoma. Happy Birthday, America!



"Billy the Kid" Museum

Another small town loomed on the horizon the next day, Clovis, New Mexico, where we viewed an American Icon, the Motion Picture version of the latest "interpretation" of the story of The Lone Ranger. As a ten-year-old, I met the "original" Lone Ranger, Clayton Moore, in Madison, New Jersey. This new masked man and Tonto were huge disappointments!! This was the third First Run movie we had seen on this trip. (Going to the movies beats staying in a motel and watching TV.) On the road again early the next day, the highway took us through Fort Sumner, New Mexico, a town which proved to be the undoing of "Billy the Kid," a REAL American western "outlaw legend."

From here we made our way to Albuquerque, prior to heading to Santa Fe. Albuquerque has one of America's TOP 10 Bar-B-Que spots at Exit 160 on I-40. It is called RUDY'S, and they now have a place in Chandler, AZ, too. If you have never been to RUDY'S, you need to go, for their ranking is justifiably earned. The food is great! This was our lunch stop. For dinner that evening in Santa Fe, there is yet another eatery we prefer above all others, called the COWGIRL GRILL on Guadalupe. Their food is also "out of this world," but be sure you have a reservation. Our final stop that night was the Santa Fe Opera, which featured the Metropolitan Opera's Diva, Susan Graham, in Jacques Offenbach's opera, "The Grand Duchess of Gerolstein."



Rudy's World Famous Bar-B-Que in Albuquerque, NM



Cowgirl Grill in Santa Fe, NM



Interior of Santa Fe Opera Theater

Sunday, July 7 was our last official day of this trip, with yet another visit to the Harvey House in Winslow, Arizona, "La Posada." As we were unloading our bags, we had a chance meeting with a member of the "Winslow Harvey Girls." She informed us that she would be conducting a tour in 15 minutes, so we quickly finished unloading our car and made haste to join her tour. It was a very wise move and one we'd recommend to every member of this Division. Winslow is only 2½ hours north of the Phoenix area via the Bee Line Highway (Route 87N) and this hotel is one of the real hidden gems in our state. With 5 main lines of the BNSF and Amtrak only a few feet south of the rear patio, (be sure to request ROOM 101 – it is the ONLY room with a door to the rear patio for direct access to the railroad tracks) it is a train-lover's Mecca, as some 120 trains venture by every 24 hours. We were joined here for dinner and breakfast the next morning by Greg Palmer and his sister Mechele. By noontime on

July 8, we were home in Fountain Hills, having traveled nearly 5000 miles – a short trip by previous years' standards, but a fun one, none-the-less.



Entrance to La Posada Hotel



Winslow Harvey Girl,  
Peggy



Trains seen from the  
Dining Room window



Trains as seen from the  
window of Room 101

We've already begun planning for the trip to TCA's 60<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention next June in Philadelphia. Maybe we can have a caravan from the Desert Division? On the "menu" for 2014? Try some of these happenings on for size: Carlsbad Caverns, NM; President George Bush (#43) Library in Dallas; NCAA Women's Softball Championship in Oklahoma City; Opera in St. Louis; Grand Ole Opry in Nashville; Lionel Headquarters in Concord, NC; President George Washington Library in Mt. Vernon, VA; US Capitol Tour, Washington, DC; and a great TCA Convention in Philadelphia. Plan to join us early in June of 2014! Let us hear from you at: [christielwilson@aol.com](mailto:christielwilson@aol.com) or [exTCA1@aol.com](mailto:exTCA1@aol.com).



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