

Earl's Diary - Friday - May 10, 2013

Dear Loyal Readers;

This has been a travel day. We left Amarillo about 8:30, headed for Oklahoma City. It was a pretty uneventful drive along I-40. The brown of Texas gave way to pretty green rolling hills of Oklahoma.

Our first stop was at a fancy rest stop in Texas. As far as I could see, it was the only one with rest room facilities along the whole Texas I-40 stretch. It was a very fancy one at that. It had colorful tile floors and walls. It even had a fancy tornado shelter. We stopped just long enough to stretch the old bones and then were on the way again. I was happy to let Alan drive for me while I took a 15 minute snooze.

While coming to Groom, Texas, we saw an amazing sight that you can't miss! Looming ahead was a giant cross! This cross is 190 feet tall!

Construction of the cross frame was done in two shops in Pampa, Texas by more than 100 welders and erected in July of 1995. The free standing cross can be seen from twenty miles away. We aren't sure which church constructed this sight but it sure is impressive. Their church building has been constructed right next to the cross. I'll bet they paid as much for the cross as they did for the whole building.



Also in Groom one can find a leaning water which currently serves as a decorative item. It originally was a functioning water tower which was slated for demolition until Ralph Britten bought it and moved it to serve as a sign for his truck stop and tourist information center (located on a stretch of interstate that was once a part of old U.S. 66). This truck stop can still be seen, set back off the road behind the tower, now boarded up and in disrepair following a devastating fire decades ago.

The leaning water tower still remains a popular target for cameras, and the town of Groom turns on a large colored star mounted on the top around Christmas time. The water tower is a common image from Route 66 photography books.

On down the road we suddenly found ourselves in Oklahoma! I was sure we didn't see a sign welcoming us to their state. All of a sudden, the highway off ramp markers switched from 200 numbers to #1. I guess that means we crossed state lines.

Just 4 miles further on was a rest stop/welcoming center. They did welcome us in a good way. Three ladies from one of the adjacent towns were serving cookies, coffee,

and milk to weary travelers. Of course we took part in their generosity and stopped to talk briefly with them. They were of such good cheer and great smiling faces.

Oh yes, we were on the lookout for Dairy Queens. This day we found 4. We found the sign for the last one, and since it was lunch time decided to seek it out. What they didn't tell us on the freeway was the DQ was almost 2 miles away. Seek it out we did anyway. Michele had the only DQ treat this time (a chocolate truffle) blizzard. Alan and I had hamburgers. Next time it's back to blizzards for me.

We are now all set up in Twin Fountains RV Resort, in Oklahoma City. It sure is a fancy place with lots of huge stickies! We two Scamps feel almost dwarfed. We will be here for three nights. I will let you know which activities we will be taking part in at a later date. See you next time - - bye for now, and thanks for coming along with me today.

- - Earl

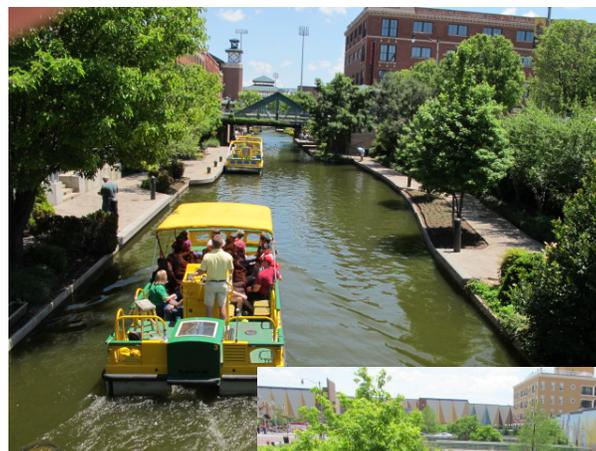


This is The Peanut's temporary home from three days at Twin Fountains RV Resort in Oklahoma City

Earl's Diary - Saturday - May 11, 2013

This is a sightseeing day while we are here in Oklahoma City - but what to see? There is so much! My first choice was to see the Banjo Museum, and it's right downtown in the heart of the tourist trap district. You have to understand that the city has had a massive overhaul of it's downtown area. They even have a baseball stadium right in the middle of downtown. Today there is an evening game that has drawn many thousands more people into the area.

The thing that amazes me is that they have constructed a river in downtown where no river existed previously! What that means is they have dug a giant ditch about a mile long and filled it with water and landscaped it with flowers, trees, grass, ducks and things they call "water taxis". Well, let me show you:



To the left of this photo is the baseball stadium. Many, many restaurants and night clubs were placed along each side of the "river". People were flocking to the area, where I suppose people never flocked before because of the deterioration. I can say they've done a magnificent job of rehabilitation! Because of the baseball game, the area was becoming very congested. It was my feeling we couldn't get out of the area fast enough!!!!

We came to see the Banjo museum. My first thought was: once you've seen one banjo, you've seen them all. Well - - that's partially true. Our first stop in the museum was an overview of the history of the instrument. **Warning: Here is a brief history of the banjo. If you are not interested, skip it and just look at the pictures!**

The banjo, as we can begin to recognize it, was made by African slaves based on instruments that were indigenous to their parts of Africa. These early "banjos" were spread to the colonies of those countries engaged in the slave trade.

White men began using blackface as a comic gimmick before the American Revolution. The banjo became a prop for these entertainers, either individually or in groups. By the early part of the 19th century, minstrelsy became a very popular form of entertainment. Joel Walker Sweeney and his Sweeney Minstrels were already popular by the 1830s. By 1843 the Virginia Minstrels began to do an entire show of this blackface entertainment and this is usually the date used to mark the beginning of the minstrel era.

From the 1840s through the 1890s the Minstrel show was not the only place to see banjo players. There are records of urban Banjo contests and tournaments held at hotels, race tracks and bars, especially in New York to the enthusiastic cheering and clapping of sometimes inebriated crowds. Most of the contestants were white in the early contests but there are records of black players taking part in the post-civil war era.

After the Civil War soldiers carried the knowledge and appreciation of the instrument home to almost every corner of America. During most of this time the banjo was looked-down upon by the more well-to-do classes of the population. Articles in the papers of the day like that in the Boston Daily Evening Voice of 1866, classified the Banjo of the 1840s and 1850s as an instrument in "the depth of popular degradation", an instrument fit only for "the jig-dancing lower classes of the community..." By 1866, however, the instrument had become a "universal favorite" with over 10,000 instruments in use in Boston alone. The cause of this sudden popularity was the introduction of the banjo as a parlor instrument. This is the somewhat misnamed "classical" period of the banjo. The banjo was played in the "classical" style which meant that it was picked with the fingers in imitation of the popular guitar players of the day.

The First World War, like the Civil War, was a watershed in the popularity of the banjo. America entered a time of isolation and turned to "American made" music for pleasure. Jazz entered the picture and the banjo became an integral part of the early jazz bands.

The stock market collapse of 1929 and the world wide depression that followed wiped out the banjo.

1940s- renewed urban interest in banjo, beginning of "folk-revival"

1943- Pete Seeger creates long-neck

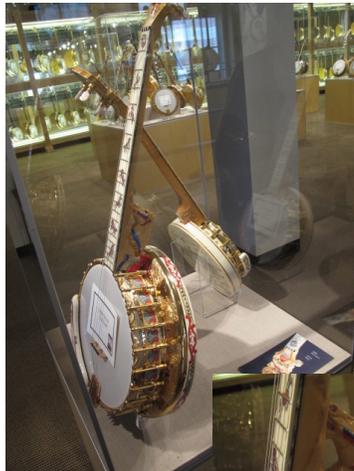
1960s when folk boom hit, Gibson and Vega were only companies to still have banjos in their catalogues as compared to 200 makers in 1900.



Some other important timeline features:

- 1620- Explorer Richard Jobson mentions "gourd with neck and strings" in Africa
- 1678- "Banza" noted in Martinique as played by blacks
- 1769- white banjo players performed in blackface
- 1843- first documented minstrel show
- 1840s-1850s Minstrel Craze; Banjo becomes urban instrument
- 1851- Stephen Foster writes "Old Folks at Home"
- 1859- Dan Emmett writes "Dixie"
- 1880s- first banjos documented in "the hills"

We saw rows and rows of instruments, some plain, some very fancy.



This banjo decorated with carousel horses.

This instrument being refurbished. Notice the size compared to the chairs behind it.



Many had fancy inlays





Since I had never been to a Bass Pro Shop before, Alan and Michele decided I should be initiated. There is one right in the middle of downtown Oklahoma City. My Impulse Buying Filter was lowered for one minute and I purchased one item for my back patio area - a colorful wind spinner. I have been looking for one - and found this one. It's made in the U.S. NOT China!

While we were on our River Walk stroll, I spied a self serve yogurt shop. My feelings: It's almost as good as Dairy Queen. It beckoned us in. Good stuff!

That was our sightseeing day. We hurried back to the park for a well earned nap! Tomorrow: The day may include a visit to the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum.

That was my day. Thanks for coming along with me. - - Earl