

Ormand Family Activity

September 2009: Labour Day Downtown

I like downtown. In addition to walking around in the squalor of downtown and imagining what it *could* be if our idiot city council decided to encourage business rather than the leftist fringe that currently occupies it, I have been wanting to do a few things there:

- Take the Trolley downtown, now that it goes downtown
- Check out the new/improved Children's Museum
- Find "El Tiradito"
- Take the bus downtown and spend the day as an honest "urban" type with no car

That last one sounds pretty odd, doesn't it? Well, I used to take the express route to work, and that was a pretty good experience, and I got a monthly pass to do it, which works on the regular routes, which I used on occasion, so I got to appreciate public transit. We used public transit at Disney World (yes, not authentic) and Chicago (*very* authentic) on last year's trip, and liked that pretty well. Some time ago, we used the trolley/bus in San Fransisco, and that wasn't too bad. Plus, when Charity goes to school next year (if she does), wherever it may be, she will need to understand the use of public transit.

Now, as it turns out, I could not prevail upon my family to even consider using the bus, so as close as we came was the trolley.



As part of the on-again, off-again underfunded overspent Rio Nuevo downtown revitalization project (which *cannot* work unless there is a refocus on business, see remarks above), and the Regional Transit Authority, the city has revamped the Fourth Avenue underpass, and extended the trolley tracks from the trolley depot on Fourth Avenue, through the underpass, to downtown. I'm excited! **However** (there's always a "however" when the government is involved), the plans for incorporating the trolley as part of the regular city transit system, as in regular service, is a ways off. So right now, the Old Pueblo Trolley association (club) uses the tracks for their historic trolleys. On a hobby basis. Not regular service. Only on

Friday, Saturday, and Sunday afternoon and evening. Which isn't bad, but it isn't Monday, when I was hoping to use it.

So we begin our adventure on Sunday afternoon by dumping the car at the University garage on Park. My intention is to try out one of the unique restaurants downtown, but it turns out few of them are open on Sunday (!); instead, we have hamburgers at Johnny Rockets and frozen yogurt at Malibu. The trolley is waiting as we emerge with our yogurt cups in hand, so we board and travel down University to Fourth Avenue to Congress to 5th Avenue. The trolley car is from Belgium, and doesn't have many seats, so I'm standing at a handhold trying to eat my dessert while the trolley lurches and clatters and dings along.

At the downtown stop on 5th, we get off and look around. Just north is a big construction project, and beyond that, the train depot. There is a restaurant in the depot, wish I'd known. There is also the Railroad Museum there.

On the platform behind the depot, we learn that the aftermath of the OK Corral battle continued to linger on even in Tucson. Wyatt Earp gunned down another of the Tombstone enemies here. Doc Holliday wasn't here for that, but because he's a famous figure of the whole episode, he gets immortalized here, also.





Locomotive 1673 saw extensive service in Southern Arizona with the Southern Pacific Railroad. For the longest time, it was a playground toy at Himmel Park. Now, appropriately, it is here. Its diesel descendents rumble past every so often on the active through-town tracks.

After looking around a bit more, and locating the (well hidden) Cafe Poca Cosa restaurant, which will have to be another day's objective, we walk down Pennington Street, then Stone, and then down Congress. Charity discovers a Irish-Scottish-Celtic knick knock shop; I'm amazed to find a real business down here. Hope it holds up! We wait for the trolley for a good while in the shade of a building. Remember, no regular service, no timed stops. But finally, here it comes, lumbering past the Hotel Congress.





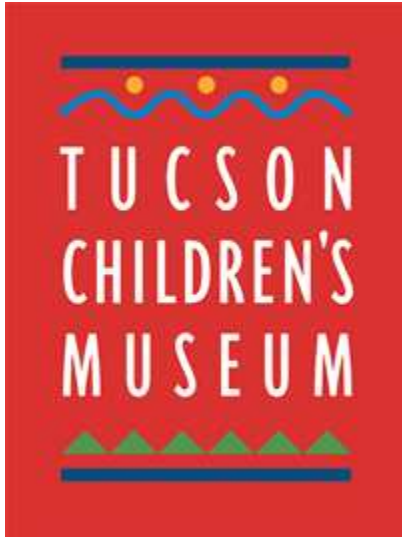
Some people get off, we get on.

On the way back, it is clear you can get off wherever you like, you just have to inform the operator. I wonder how easy it is to get back on; do you have to go to the "official" stop, halfway up Fourth Avenue, or can you flag it down other places?

End of the line back at the University, and the end of our adventure on Sunday.

(Note the operator changing poles. It's electric - that's 600V DC on the wire up there!)





The following day is Labour Day. Now, a few weeks ago, Faith went to a friend's birthday party; her parents had *rented the entire Children's Museum for the evening*. Like I've said, Desert Christian is more of a *private* school (for rich people). Anyways, when I dropped her off and picktced her up that evening, I noticed their banner advertising "Free Admission" on September 7. That's today!

When we arrive, there is a crowd! Should have expected that. There is also a Solar Energy festival. All kinds of different solar ovens and water heaters and photovoltaic displays. And what a sunny day to use them! There is also a live band inside the fence.



The Tucson Children's Museum is in the former Carnegie Public

Library. The real Tucson Main Library used to be in here, and it was a fascinating place. As much as the purist in me wishes the library was still in the original library building, I concede that the library is better off in a proper modern building (just as the Carnegie was in the first half of the last century), as it is north of here a ways on Church Street, and the Children's Museum is a worthy inheritor.

The Tucson Electric Power Company contribution is still here, but much improved. I briefly consider a career change.





What used to be the "market" room is much improved, not least with this large-scale "Operation" game, with anatomical realities instead of dated gags.

AAIIEE, the Shark ate Dad and Faith!





Two sisters are enjoying each other and the toys. Actually, "children's museums" wherever you find them are great for *all* ages. The Tucson museum isn't on a par with the one in San Diego, but it is much, MUCH improved over the embarrassment it was just a few years ago.

Full circle. Yesterday it was real trains, today it is toy trains.

There is a working model train running on a track near the ceiling, and the locomotive has a little camera with a wireless link to a display monitor on the wall. Now *that's* cool!



We enjoy the Children's Museum for more than an hour, mixing with the mob of young kids and young parents and a few grandparents and nursing mothers. Charity and Faith were the only teens that I noticed, and I was looking. After checking out the gift shop (which is a branch of the incomparable "Mrs. Tiggy Winkles" shop midtown) and taking the computerized visitor's survey, we emerge from the Carnegie

building. The girls obtain some solar-baked sausages, and we head southwest toward Cushing Street.



On the way, we discover the Temple of Music and Art, home of the Arizona Theatre Company. Charity has been to shows here. I guess we will have to look for opportunities, also. The building is "historic" (from the early 1920s) and made to purpose, rather than a converted church building, like other arts things downtown.

We go past the Tucson Police Building (which houses a display of police gear and historical objects, such as some of John Dillinger's weapons, from when he was captured in Tucson, but that is yet another day's activity) and find out that 14th Street turns into Cushing Street here at Church Street. We continue along the south side of the Tucson Convention Center, past the Cushing Street Bar and Grill (another landmark survivor; closed today) and Meyer Street and arrive at Main Avenue. Main was really "Main", I'm guessing, before the Convention Center was built, and now Granada runs along the west side of the TCC until it turns back into Main at the railroad crossing. El Minuto Cafe is here on the corner (another landmark; also closed, even if the sign in the window says "OPEN"). Behind the El Minuto

parking lot is El Tiradito.



Or, "The Castaway". The plaque exults that this is the only shrine in North America commemorating a sinner. Apparently, there was an adultery and murder episode some two hundred years ago, and the young perpetrator who was killed, being catholic, was refused burial in consecrated ground, so they put him here. I don't know why it is so special, or all the candles, et cetera, but the ground is just soaked with the candle wax of years and years.



The candles are all out, and full of water from the recent rains. No, it isn't anything much to look at, but it is uniquely Tucson, and even if Faith and Charity never come back, they as native Tucsonans have at least experienced part of "real" Tucson.

Leaving El Tiradito, we head north and cut across the Convention Center. We find "Fiddler on the Roof" is playing next February with Topol, the original actor, on his final tour. We continue past the Leo Rich Theatre and the Music Hall with all the fountains (not running today), the scene of many Desert Christian plays, and where "Oklahoma" will be performed later this fall. On through a deserted La Placita Village and across the Garces Footbridge.



Which crosses Congress at the point where Broadway splits off eastbound, at the "Pancho Villa" park. I guess the footbridges (another one crosses Pennington to the old Pima County Courthouse) are historic. They are at least convenient, and unique. This is looking west. That's the Arizona Hotel on the left, the only big hotel that functions as a hotel left downtown. The historic Santa Rita is either being torn down or remodelled as condominiums. Beyond the Hotel is the new Federal Building. Says something when the newest and biggest building is for the Federal Government. Beyond, on the horizon, are the jagged Tucson Mountains.

The backup lunch plan was Cafe Milano, but it's closed also, due to the owners being out of town. Subway is next door, it will do. There used to be an Eegees downtown; we sorely miss it.

And next door is the newly renovated Fox Theatre. The summer classic films run is playing; next Saturday is "Key Largo". I think we will finally attend the Fox for that.





Another historic building is the Pioneer Hotel. Not so historic anymore, and not a hotel; it was gutted by a famous arson fire in the 1970s, and rebuilt as a "modern" office and apartments building. But it's still here, and it's still the "Pioneer".

In the 30's, it was Tucson's skyscraper.



pioneer hotel, circa 1930s

My family is tired of walking, so we head back to the car. Past the Irish shop (still closed, like everything else). Past the tattoo parlours and wierdo art galleries that compose the bulk of the "business" in the downtown area. But we don't go home right away.



If you continue west on Congress, on the other side of the Freeway, there is "the biggest tree in Tucson". I don't know if it really is, but there is an "official" sign for it.

On the north side of Congress is the "Garden of Gethsemane". A pious Hispanic-American soldier in WWII was wounded in battle, and made a vow to craft some sacred sculptures if he returned. He did, and he did.





The "Last Supper" tableau is the centerpiece. In spite of the high fence, there is evidence of vandalism.

Jesus is wearing a skirt, probably to cover more vandalism. This little park is part of Tucson Parks and Recreation; I suppose at some time the ACLU or some local "civil rights" advocate is going to demand that the city destroy or divest this "religious" exhibit.





Dead tired, the children are ready to go home now.

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Update

The following weekend we visited the Fox Theatre to see "Key Largo" with Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall, Edward G. Robinson, and Lionel Barrymore. A light rain was falling at 6:45pm Saturday evening when I dropped the ladies off at that theatre to get the tickets, and I took the car to the Pennington Street Garage and hiked the two or three city blocks back. Not very far, about as far as parking in the mall lot at Park Mall and walking in.



The restored building is simply gorgeous. Art Deco, as the picture here of the ceiling rosette and the chandelier indicate. Big, too, and the seats are numbered for selling them individually for concerts and ballets and other such performances, such as the Moscow Ballet which will be

performing "The Nutcracker" a few months from now. It is of course fitted as a movie theatre right now, with a big screen that currently is showing advertisements of upcoming attractions and pictures of the Fox in former days ("Mickey Mouse Club").

We get our popcorn and soda from the concession stand just off the lobby (not *in* the lobby as in most modern theatres) and settle in. We arrived a half hour early, because at other theatres, if you want a decent seat, you got to beat the crowd. Tonight, the crowd is 30-40 people! Just before the film starts, the manager (volunteer, as all the ushers and other workers are) states opportunities for you to support the Fox, since "there aren't enough of you out there to do it with ticket sales!". I wonder if Desert Christian could put on their shows here; it would be *ever* so much more interesting than at the Leo Rich Theatre!



The film is thoroughly enjoyable, and afterwards we walk back through almost deserted city streets to the garage (which is still full of cars; can't imagine where all those people are, they certainly weren't at the Fox). Very convenient, very enjoyable. We will be back!