

Ormand Family Activity

August 2009: Visit to North Texas

The primary TOW launcher for the U.S. Army is ITAS. The outfit who makes ITAS is the Raytheon facility at McKinney, Texas. Since we are building a TOW system simulation that uses components from the ITAS, I am visiting my Raytheon brothers in the Lone Star State.

Most of the time on these business trips, I either don't have time to do anything on the side (yes, I actually *work* on these business trips!), or I don't have the liberty of being on my own, and being able to "call the shots". In this case, the meetings went faster than expected (they do that half the time), and my coworker has a friend who lives in Lewisville (another Dallas/Fort Worth municipality), so he takes the car to hang with his friend for the evening.

At 5:30pm, I'm on my own in a land with Daylight Savings Time, so I've got nearly four hours of daylight left. Downtown McKinney is maybe three or four miles away, and I haven't gotten much physical activity this trip so far, so... I put on my tennies and start walking.



Every Texas town has a water tower, and you can usually figure about where you are by looking around for the nearest water tower with a legible ID.

McKinney has three, and my hotel is near the largest and most clearly labeled.

It's actually a pleasant afternoon, temperature wise, although I'm wishing I had packed a cap to keep the sun off. However, the humidity is really quite high, so I'm damp by the time I get to the main street.

Where I see the Christian Church. Lots of big church buildings, pushing their steeples above the treetops. I guess that's their practical function; advertising. There were a few smaller church buildings I walked by, but all of them (of course) displayed the traditional structure (that is, the primacy of the Sunday Morning "worship" service) on their marquees.



When I saw this steeple over the trees, I thought it might be a mormon church, since mormon churches don't put crosses on their steeples, and Christian churches do. But when I got closer, I discovered this was First Baptist. Largest church building in town. Quite a complex of ancillary buildings around the main structure, to house all the children's, youth, education, and other programs that draw the local religious consumers in.

And beautiful landscaping. Like this crepe myrtle. A sign I passed on the way in declared that McKinney was on the "Crepe Myrtle Trail". Kind of like Huntsville is on somebody's "Golf Trail". I guess there's an American tradition of "trails", like "Oregon Trail" or "Appalachian Trail". You can roll your own.



But these crepe myrtles are beautiful. I don't see this sort of thing in Tucson.

After walking along the main road into town, which is lined by fine old houses, some in the traditional "gingerbread" style (at least one of which is a bed-and-breakfast inn), I arrive at the "historic" downtown area.

This used to be the Collin County Courthouse. Now it is the something or other "art" center. I guess when a city outgrows its downtown, the easiest or cheapest thing to do is convert it to an "arts" district. Note the lady with the camera on a tripod. There was



a crowd of photographers. I think I may have strayed into a class.



Another view. Classic arrangement: the courthouse in the center of the square, the business storefronts surrounding it, and an enclosing one-way street with parking. Note the lack of traffic. This is the "historic" area, the tourist

attraction, but everything closes at 5:00!

Well, not everything; there's a couple of cafes, with a few young people gathered at sidewalk tables sipping cocktails. But nearly all of the actual shops are antique stores or yoga studios. I suppose every town has some sort of specialty. I'm not sure that yoga studios are better than the wierdo art galleries and tattoo parlours that characterize Tucson's downtown, but it *is* different.



I'm also puzzled by all the cars parked around the square. Nearly every spot is full, but there are very few people walking around. All the shops are closed. The cafes are not busy. Where are all the people who park their cars downtown? The Truth Is Out There...



This is why Church Street is named Church Street. The first Methodist church in town, and apparently the oldest. The Methodists made quite a mark on the South and Southwest.

Interesting
butcher shop, with
the entrance inset
so far under the
roof. I think I've
seen a building
like that in Tucson
somewhere...



If you look
carefully, you can
see the remains of
"PENNEYS" on
the region over the
open door. Used to
be one of the main
stores in
McKinney, but
now it's vacant,
awaiting the next
antique dealer.
Note the beautiful
carved stonework
running above the
stories and around

the windows and door.

It is now 8:00 PM. It is still full daylight, thanks to government-mandated fiddling with clocks. Sweat is streaming down my face and getting in my eyes and stinging. I wash it off in this lovely fountain off Church Street. Nobody in the park. Nobody driving by. Well, maybe they're all at dinner.



And after my walk, and during the return trip, I'm ready for dinner myself. I wend through the cozy neighborhoods in the north-west direction. McKinney is kind of spotty about sidewalks (Huntsville is, too). I see several beautiful houses, including the "Muse Academy" founded a hundred years ago, but my little old camera is full (it also doesn't deal with the late afternoon lighting very well; time to look for a better one). Walking down White Street, I pass the high school athletic fields - the Amateur Baseball League Congress and World Series is just starting a game. There are a few young men with "Puerto Rico" on their shirts carrying bats inside. Gee, if I had a few more dollars in my pocket, I'd get a ticket and a hotdog and sit in the stands and watch the game! But all I've got is a company credit card, which they can't take, so I pass on. Besides, there's a Braum's just north of my hotel, so I settle into a chicken sandwich and a shake made with Blue Bell ice-cream and listen to the locals talking about life. It doesn't get better than this!

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The next day is our last day in McKinney. The meeting is winding up on schedules and program planning, but I don't have to struggle to stay awake, because it starts late, and it's over by noon. We're done! What to do with the rest of the day? The ITAS technical lead, Frank, suggests we visit the Fort Worth Stockyards. So we do. After a bit of GPS-guided driving, we arrive at the Stockyards district.



I've got my work clothes on, including my boots, so I fit in with the "cowboy" motif running strong around here. Even the tourists feel obliged to get a Stetson or a pretty shirt, and the shops lining the brick street are full of western gear. It's even hotter here, and I'm wishing I had a hat of some sort. But my usual "TOW" or "Balboa Park" ball cap just won't work with boots and a silver-trimmed belt!

These guys might laugh at me! They're getting ready for the daily "cattle drive" of Texas longhorns down Exchange Street, just like they did in the heyday of the Chisholm Trail (ooh, another "trail") 150 years ago. There's a Livery Stable off the south side of the street, so you can ride, too. Probably not out in the street, though. We didn't check it out. Maybe some day when the family



returns to visit the kin we have in the area.

The shops include many of the saloons and restaurants that were active back in the day. It appears our own Wyatt Earp and other giants of that time were present in Fort Worth. We have lunch at "Riskey's", owned by the same Polish-descended family for 70 years. I have a cup of Kapusta soup - saurkraut soup. Pretty good. I was thinking of my girls as I ate it (they would be revolted, of course). The White Elephant Saloon was nearby, where those original cattle-driving cowboys would expend their end of the trail wages.



Big building that housed all the business of buying and selling cattle bound for the Chicago packing houses via railroad. Millions of head of cattle went through the Stockyards all the way up to 1944. The historical sign said, "local stockyards took business away from the Cattle Exchange", so it wasn't clear that there was *no* livestock business here anymore.

But there wasn't any evidence of activity in the pens behind the Exchange building. I think modern stockyards have b-i-g pens; these don't look like they could hold more than twenty each.





Here I am on the catwalk that runs over the pens, the length of the enclosure. This is where the dealers would inspect the lots prior to bidding on them at the auction.

Looking east toward the big empty field adjacent to the pens. Don't know what that was for... unless it's just more parking for visitors' cars! The pens are not in great shape. I don't know if there's any effort for historical preservation, or even keeping it up for the tourist business. Note the telephone pole being stored. Also note the concrete water troughs and the brick floor. Awful fancy for a cattle pen! I guess it kept dust down for the dealers.





There are several large buildings at the Stockyards district. A shopping mall occupies the former pens of a large enclosed livestock facility with the railroad track running through it; perhaps the loading docs. There are two more large

buildings that now house the Cowboy Museum and other such attractions. This building is the "Coliseum". We peeked inside this building - an indoor rodeo arena! Smaller than the Tucson Rodeo Arena, but... *inside!* They have shows here every weekend, through the year.

They do a daily "cattle drive" down the street at 4:00, but since our flight leaves at 6:45 and we don't want to take chances with traffic on the way, we end our lightning tour of the Fort Worth Stockyards and head back to the Dallas/Fort Worth airport.

Turns out there is a big thunderstorm system just northeast of the airport - wasn't on the forecast Monday, but here it is. The airplane we are going to get on gets diverted to Austin. Starts off as a half-hour delay - and then it gets cancelled. The way the airlines do things anymore, every flight is booked pretty solid, so there's no way we are going to get a flight back earlier than 1:45 tomorrow! So we rebook, and the company travel office gets us rooms at the nearby Sheraton. Which is where I'm finishing writing this up right now!