

## Ormand Family Activity

### May 2011: Phoenix Vacation

Charity is back from NAU; she has signed up for summer school math classes at Pima Community College and starts next week. Faith is out of school and fulfilled her duty as an ensemble member at the graduation ceremony. We have a little window before a full summer, and we don't have a lot of money. What to do? How about a vacation in Arizona's largest city?

There's more to do in the Phoenix metroplex than you could fit in many months. Scottsdale with its resorts and high-end shopping opportunities. The Confederate Air Force museum in Gilbert. The revitalized downtown areas in Chandler, Mesa, Glendale, pretty much all the townships. The Arizona Pioneer living history village in the north. The Queen Creek mining museum in the south. Camelback and Superstition Mountain parks in the east. The Shamrock Dairy farm in the west. Lots to do and see. But we have three days.

After a bit of planning, making reservations, gathering information, getting discount tickets, all that sort of thing, we leave Thursday evening right after graduation. It's a two-hour drive from Tucson to Phoenix even without the roadwork, and we don't arrive at our hotel until 1:00 in the morning! We aren't really in a rush today, so we sleep in on Friday.



There is quite a range of prices for hotels in the downtown area, or at least along the Metro rail line. Jerri has a Wyndham Rewards card, so we pick one of the mid- to higher-price places. You would think that would mean it was fancy, but it really wasn't. Comfortable, yes; fancy, no. But very good location, on Central and Adams. Here we embark on our first day of

adventures.

The Phoenix tourist websites indicate an information office just a block west of here, which we confirm with the concierge. We go there first, and get a map and some tips from the "ambassador". Phoenix is working hard to put its best face forward, so in addition to some very good websites (such as [downtownphoenix.com](http://downtownphoenix.com)) and sidewalk kiosks with maps and flyers and bulletins, they have people drifting about on foot or on bicycle with orange "Ambassador" shirts and fanny packs full of information to answer questions, offer tips, smile, and make tourists feel welcome. Works pretty good.

The hotel concierge and the info office "ambassador" both recommend the Wells Fargo museum, which is just another block west of the hotel. Wells Fargo is, of course, a major bank, and their logo is a stagecoach, so naturally we arrive with expectations.

The founders: Mr. Wells and Mr. Fargo, New York entrepreneurs and bankers and investors. I thought that they were in the stagecoach business, along with Butterfield and all that, but it turns out to not be quite so simple - they contracted with independent stagecoach companies like Overland, who were pleased to be able to



advertise their connections with Well Fargo, and gradually invested in some, bought some out, and formed their own line.



Like this coach. Owned and operated by a big player in the West, who eventually sold his holdings to Wells Fargo. This is a real one!

This is not. The travellers are real (real silly), and enjoy their trip with video scenery through the other window passing by.



Big coach ponies. Faith got a little one to take home.

A placard on the inside of this coach driver's box explains how to hold the reins for a team of six, something much more involved than you could tell from Western movies and the coach ride in Tombstone. Charity is getting into the thrill of driving her team. Faith seems a bit apprehensive.



The Pony Express was another of those great iconic American experiments. Wells Fargo didn't start it, but they took it over from the originators who were failing at it. At the core, though, it was an unworkable concept, and Wells Fargo couldn't keep it going, either. Jerri tries out the Pony rider's seat and hat.



Western Union and the telegraph is another iconic American institution. Western Union still exists; I wonder if they have a museum somewhere. Wells Fargo was a bank, of course, and had worked out arrangements for people to conduct financial transactions via telegraph.



The little display had two sets of working keys and receivers, one inside the window and the other at the left side of the photo, so you and your kid could tap Morse code back and forth. If I had been a ham radio type, I might have been able actually work this.



The phrase "cut a check" has historical basis in machines like this that cut numbers into a paper check for authentication.

Some of the 19th Century money forms that Wells Fargo and their customer dealt in during the heyday. Not only some bank notes and "greenbacks", but some of the famous "double eagle" gold U.S. coins. I like coins; I like dollar coins, I would go for \$5, \$10, even \$20 coins, and I could dream of jingling a pocketful of golden double eagles!



The famous strongbox that you always see in the movies being handed up to or down from the roof of the coach, or being thrown down for the bandits. *This* is why Wells Fargo contracted with stagecoach companies, and eventually got into the business themselves, to move the gold deposits from the mines or the payrolls to the army forts.

The little history museum on the ground floor of the Wells Fargo tower in Phoenix is quite good. Turns out there are about six of these museums in various cities around the country, and Phoenix is one, which is funny to me, because while Tucson was a major stop on the stagecoach route, Phoenix never was! But Phoenix has the big buildings, and Tucson can't seem to get a downtown plan together to save their lives, so I'm just going to enjoy it and not begrudge the capital city all the advantages it has.

Having finished our visit to the Wells Fargo museum, we walk the two blocks back toward the hotel and catch the Metro light rail train at Central, northbound, to our next visit - the Heard Museum.



The Heard has a world-famous collection of American Indian art. Even though we're really not into Indian art, since the Heard is a Big Important Place for Arizona, we make a pilgrimage so we can say we did. Turns out to be quite interesting - especially, for me, in a particular aspect: I was *really* into Hopi kachinas for about a year in my

teens. Former Arizona senator Barry Goldwater was really into kachinas as well, and donated his collection to the Heard, where they pretty much fill up a whole room.

Beautiful day for tourists. Here is the Shopper, the Scholar, and the Snapper. The Heard building was formerly the home of Mr. and Mrs. Heard, big movers and shakers in turn-of-the-century Phoenix, and hosted bigshot parties that included the likes of Teddy Roosevelt.



Charity doing a Pocahontas act. The Heard is primarily dedicated to the twenty-plus Indian tribes and communities of Arizona, and their desert-adapted cultures. This one room acknowledges other Indian cultures in North America, including the Northeast or Great Lakes or river-dwelling Indians, the Great Plains tribes like the Lakota, the Inuit or

eskimos, and the Pacific Northwest tribes who lived in big decorated wooden houses like the one in the background.

Art aside, the Heard was especially interesting for two reasons (besides the kachina collection):

- There was a central gallery dedicated to the tribes of Arizona and their struggles to retain their cultural identities in spite of the Great White Father - the U.S. government. But they did so mostly by appeal to the government. I found it ironic that the Indian tribes would complain about being victimised and oppressed by the very government that they, and most Americans anymore, it seems, look to for the solution to all our problems.

(I also found it ironic that the various Apache tribes represented



painted themselves as victims. Anyone who is even remotely familiar with the history of Arizona all the way back to Spanish colonial times knows that *everyone else* were the Apaches' victims.)

- Another gallery called to mind the Indian School system set up in the late 19th Century by the federal government through the Bureau of Indian Affairs as a nonviolent solution to the "Indian problem". I didn't really know much about the "Indian School", just that there is an "Indian School Blvd" cutting across the Phoenix metroplex. The display, while comprehensive of all aspects of Indian School life, was predominantly negative. Mostly from a postmodern ethical principle of "it is wrong to suppress other cultures". I guess this comes from a postwar horror of genocide, but the propagandistic museum gallery failed to recognize that the government Indian School strategy of integrating the native peoples into the dominant national setting was *precisely* an alternative to real genocide, the extermination of people by that dominant culture which lacked the fine multi-cultural pacifist values of the present American culture.

Another interesting thing: One of the prominent artists whose jewelry is presented at the museum once made (on commission) a big gold belt buckle for a man, who afterwards said he couldn't buy it because "I just bought a Porsche", so the artist donated it to the museum. \$40,000 of his own artwork! The tour guide (we started with a tour) said the museum gift shop had articles of the artist's work for sale. Before we left the museum, we looked in the gift store. We couldn't tell for sure if a particular selection under the glass was his work, but it might have been - a necklace had a \$49,000 price tag on it!

After leaving the museum, we return to our hotel to drop off our goodies (not including the necklace), and then leave for our exploration of Mill Avenue in Tempe. From our hotel window, I can see the train moving down Jefferson St., and it seems to be stopping in front of the U.S. Airways Center, just three blocks away. So we depart leisurely and cross the "mall" between Washington and Jefferson only to discover that there is in fact no stop here. I can see the next stop from here, it's in front of the Chase Field stadium (home to the Arizona Diamondbacks). The train arrives just as we are getting there, and we have to hustle to get on board.

The Metro train runs from the center of the Phoenix metroplex, south to downtown Phoenix, where it bends eastward, past Sky Harbor airport

(where a new shuttle rail link is being constructed from the airport to the Metro station) to downtown Tempe. Mill Avenue is about three stops before the end of the line.

Mill Avenue, named after the old Hayden Mill which still stands at the end, runs from the Salt River through the Arizona State University campus. We had been on Mill before, when we saw "Celtic Women" at the Gammage Theatre, also on Mill, but we hadn't seen this northern part of *Mill Avenue*, which is a college-influenced urban shopping district analogous to Fourth Avenue near downtown Tucson. The "Salt River Project" has turned this stretch of the Salt River (aka Rio Salado) into a recreation lake, with paddle boats and canoes and rowboats, but by the time we arrive, it's already evening; we don't see the mill, we don't see the river, and we don't play with boats. All we can do is walk down the Avenue and see what's there. And look for a dinner place. There are lots of dinner places. And bars and taverns and nightclubs. And lots of young people.

After dinner, we find this elaborate artsy bike rack. There are artworks and fountains everywhere. Lots of restaurants and drinking places. Not so many shops. I conclude that our own Fourth Avenue is *better than* Tempe's Mill Avenue, in that there are more shops (some I wouldn't want to visit, but that's a different matter) and more... *character*.



It is late when we return to our hotel, and another late morning. My plan was to visit "Castles and Coasters" in the morning and afternoon, and then have dinner at the famous Pizzeria Bianco here in central Phoenix, but Jerri points out that it would be better to avoid the heat of the day and do "Castles and Coasters" in the evening. So we decide to swap it around, and see some of Phoenix and have lunch at Bianco first.



The view from our hotel room on the sixteen floor. Directly across is a tall building with a curving array of golden windows that reflect the hotel and the adjacent buildings. Off to the left of the photo is a parking garage with a tennis court on top (unused for many years, and in disrepair) and a Mexican restaurant at street level. Beyond that is the building on Washington St., which has a travel agency and a coffee bar (not Starbucks!) at the street. Then a parking lot between Washington and Jefferson, and the U.S. Airways Center, right in the middle of the photo. To the left of that is a high-rise

apartment building (intended for ASU students), and to the left of that, just visible behind the tall building, is a corner of Chase Field. It's Saturday, and there's not a lot of traffic on the street, but there are lots of people (mostly in the shops and cafes in the buildings, so you can't see them here). The train runs westward (left-to-right) on Washington, and then eastward (right-to-left) on Jefferson, past the U.S. Airways Center.

The elevators for our hotel are on the north side of the building, and through the window near the elevators is visible this handsome but abandoned building, with art deco-style stonework. I hope someone will occupy and refurbish the building; it really is too attractive to demolish.



Outside the hotel on Adams St. we can see some tall buildings with an airwalk between them. There are many tall buildings in Phoenix, but not as dense as Chicago or Dallas. Some of that Western "elbow room" you've heard about. This means more walking to get places, outside in that Phoenix "dry heat". It's not bad at all today, only 101 degrees, but in August, it's oppressive.



Two blocks north of our hotel (which is on the site of the former historic Adams hotel) is historic Hotel San Carlos. The price is about the same as the Wyndham, and I'm sure the furnishings, while characteristic of the period, are more comfortable than the Copper Queen in Bisbee. Unfortunately, like the Copper Queen, the Hotel San Carlos has a reputation for being haunted. Hence the "Ghost Lounge" at street level. On the corner, right under the sign, is the part of the Ghost Lounge called "Bistro 202", where we have our breakfast, watching the people walk past and the Metro train zoom northward on Central.



After breakfast, we continue eastward to see the city. Like this view of St. Mary's Basilica from the back. In the background is part of the expansive Phoenix Convention Center.

Later, on our return, we go past the front of St. Mary's. In Tucson, it's St. Augustine *Cathedral*. A cathedral is where a catholic bishop serves. I'm guessing a basilica is where an archbishop serves. The church bells (electronic carillon, actually; no actual bells were visible in the towers) ring the hour and play an occasional unrecognizable hymn.



Our objective is Arizona Center, an outdoor shopping mall. What we find is a few restaurants and a number of odd shops that sell mostly tourist stuff and Arizona paraphernalia. I'm still looking for a decent Centennial tee-shirt, but there weren't any at all here, odd. There were some Arizona flag swimsuits in one shop, but none in my size. The attraction here, though, is the lovely garden with fountains and sculptures and a "pond".



Three girls enjoy the garden pond. Charity might not have objected to actually getting wet. There is a pool at our hotel, on the fifth floor patio, but we never use it. Just too busy.



Downtown is bounded on the east side by Seventh St. As we walk south, we pass the Phoenix Children's Museum, housed in a large former elementary school building. I'll bet it's more interesting than our own Tucson Children's Museum, but since we don't have little kids, we don't feel that it's an appropriate visit (like that is a good reason?).



Soon we arrive at our next destination: Heritage Square, the original Phoenix town site. This is the Rosson House, built by Fort McDowell army doctor Rosson who served as Phoenix mayor. They lived in this house two years! We've visited before, but that's okay; we tour it again anyways. When we were here before, there wasn't a creepy mannequin looking out of the cupola window.



You aren't allowed to touch anything in the Rosson House, or even take pictures (umm, Faith?), but after the tour of the Rosson House, the guide takes us across the Square to a hands-on exhibit, which has a number of unique items; a cash register, some vacuum cleaners, and these iron coin banks.



Pizzeria Bianco has built a reputation for their pizzas made in their brick oven and their homemade Mozzarella cheese. Unfortunately, since they are housed in this old mechanics shop (no, the picture isn't mine), they are limited in the number of customers they can serve at a time. We arrived just after 2:00,

we were told the wait was an hour and forty five minutes! So we walked back to Arizona Center and got some smoothies at the Coldstone Creamery there and sat in the garden listening to the unrecognizable hymns played on St. Mary's carillon. When it was time to return, we were seated and each of us got a pizza - which is (as I learned in Sardinia) actual Italian style. They were of course delicious. As were the anchovies on mine! All the same, they were pizzas; I'm not sure they were worth the long wait and the price, but that's what you get for following the crowd who has proclaimed Pizzeria Bianco "famous".

Something that surprised us. Turns out we arranged our "school's out" vacation on the same weekend as the Phoenix Comicon. The central hall of the Convention Center was occupied by comics authors and media companies, vendors of fantasy paraphernalia, and *lots and lots* of fans dressed up in silly costumes. Faith was fascinated. In fact, she met



a school friend outside the Convention Center who came up for Comicon. If we had known, we might have gotten a round of \$35 tickets and spent an afternoon (or a day). Maybe next time.



After returning to the hotel, Faith was photographing convention-goers from her sixteenth-story window. Didn't turn out too well. She was too bashful to take pictures at street level, even though her friend's dad assured her that these people delight in having their picture taken!

The evening is spent at "Castles and Coasters", a small-time amusement park in the central metrocity that has a few rides, including a creditable roller coaster, a log flume, a drop tower, and the usual bumper boats and mini-motor cars. Also some excellent miniature golf courses - not as good as our old "Magic Carpet", but better than our "Funtastics". If our local "Golf and Stuff" doubled their not-bad golf courses and put in some roller coasters, it and "Castles and Coasters" could compete for the amusement park market in Arizona.

The next day is Sunday. It is late when we return to the hotel after the amusement park, so even though my intention is to do some "religious tourism" at North Phoenix Baptist or Calvary Community (which we see on I-17 every time we go to Flagstaff), I know we aren't going to get up in time, so I don't try. When we *are* up and ready for the day, and we check out of the Wyndham (\$\$\$\$), we get our car from the valet and depart downtown Phoenix. Our first stop is to follow up on what we learned at the Heard - is there still an Indian School located on Central Avenue and Indian School Blvd?

Yes, there is. The school was started in 1891, and closed in 1990, when it was clear that the reservations themselves had picked up the public school idea and enrollment at the government boarding school was below sustainability levels. The three remaining buildings are now the center of a city park, with a lake and baseball and soccer fields and lots of grass. This is the dining hall.



This is Memorial Hall, and the grammar school-turned-music department is between them. The Indian School band became quite famous, having been a major part of Phoenix entertainment in the pre-war years. Memorial Hall is still used by Indians for various purposes. All around the three

buildings is a "Circle of Life", with markers explaining aspects of Indian School life in a much more balanced perspective than offered at the Heard.

We have now done more than most Zonies do - we've been to the "world famous" Heard Museum, we've eaten at Pizzeria Bianco, and we've discovered that there was an actual Indian School, and what it was, and seen what's left. It's time to leave, but we have one more destination: The SeaLife Aquarium at Arizona Mills Mall.

It's not Scripps, but it's pretty good for Arizona. Very much geared for younger children; there are lots of hands-on displays, including a "tidal pool" area where you can hold starfish and pick up hermit crabs and touch anemones. The aquarium tanks have features so you can get real close to the fish, like this observation bubble that Faith is in right now.



Followed by her sister.

And then her mom.







Charity and Faith may have seen better lobster in the tank at the restaurant in Maine when they were real small, but they've been around more than most Zonie kids.

SeaLife has to do the "take your family picture with a green-screen background and sell it to you on your way out" angle that we've seen at Las Vegas and Stone Mountain and elsewhere. Mommy has to get ours. SeaLife is a bit on the pricey side, although they are ready to offer you a discounted annual membership - which may be okay for Phoenicians, but not for anyone else in the state.