

Ormand Family Activity

To read about our visit to the Mystery Castle in Phoenix [go here](#)

To read about our Central California vacation, [go here](#)

December 2016: New Mexico, Texas, and Oklahoma Route 66: in Winter

Around summer this year, we heard from my Dad that his sister, Cecil Yvonne Jackson, was going to observe her 90th birthday this year, and that there were plans underway to turn it into a sort of family get-together in her hometown of Pryor, Oklahoma. Of course, we intended to attend, but while we understood other people (including our children) were going to arrive just before the celebration and leave right afterward, we don't usually do that - so Jerri and I started planning on a "leisurely" drive from Tucson to Pryor... via Route 66.

Three years ago, we had done the Arizona Route 66 Passport thing, from Topock to Lupton via Oatman, Seligman, Flagstaff, Winona, Winslow, and Holbrook, and had a fine time. Thanks to a thriving Route 66 promotion culture in northern Arizona, the path and the attractions along the way are well documented and well marked. We figured the entirety of Route 66 from Chicago to Santa Monica would be the same. You will read about how mixed this assumption turned out to be.

When December arrived, I had quite a bit of vacation time that I had to use before the end of the year, so we planned out almost two weeks on the road. We left Thursday afternoon on the 1st, and we would return on Wednesday the 14th so I could put in another week of work before the plant shut-down for the Christmas holiday. Our first stop would be to spend the night at the last Harvey House on the Santa Fe line, which we had discovered on our previous Arizona tour three years ago - La Posada, in Winslow.



We left Tucson in 72-degree weather. Up on the Rim, it's quite a lot cooler, and we get there at night. The parking lot is almost full; thankfully, the hotel has luggage trolleys, so we can unload at the gate and park the van before rolling the bags inside.



Roll them as far as the stair to the upper floor.

We are in the Will Rogers room - which is interesting, since we are bound for Will Rogers country. The door doesn't have a peephole but rather a louvre and sliding shutters. There's a deep walk-in closet. The bathroom has vintage fixtures, but not as unique and more functional than the bathroom at Kingman's El Trouvatore.





Navajo blankets on the floor, rustic furniture, a hand-made headboard. It was very comfortable... don't know why I had trouble sleeping.

When we checked in, along with the usual hotel papers we got a walking tour booklet. It seems that as the passenger business fell off, the hotel (which never did well financially) was converted into an office building for the Santa Fe company. When they no longer needed it, it stood deserted for a long while. The railroad offered it to the city for a dollar, but the city had no use for it and no means to keep it up. It teetered on the edge of demolition until a party of artists bought it and started restoring it. There's still more work to do (the basement where the barber shop was is unfinished), but it's amazing how good it looks and that is in service as a hotel. After a fine breakfast in the Turquoise Room (the restaurant in the hotel is not part of the hotel operation, but rather an independent business of a notable chef), we follow the tour. This room used to be the lobby and dining area, but now it is a comfortable lounge or sitting room. The walls are covered with paintings done by Tina Mion, the artist partner/wife of the hotel restoration team leader - she has a gallery upstairs and prints available in the gift shop.



This was the "ballroom". The railroad had blocked up the windows and installed a projector screen over the fireplace and hung a ceiling over the beautiful sculpted ceiling. Now there are tables with games and puzzles, bookcases with *real* books (not the usual decorative Readers' Digest anthologies), and armchairs and benches. The idea is starting to occur to me... northern Arizona is pretty nice in the summer... it's not that expensive (not like a Scottsdale resort)... it's relaxing... maybe this might be a nice family resort place for a week or so.



All the rooms are named for celebrity guests. we peek into this one; this is the Howard Hughes room because Hughes actually stayed *in this room* frequently on business with his TWA airline that served tourists to the popular (in that day) northeast Arizona region.





The original Front Door faced the railroad, as the Harvey House existed to serve rail passengers. Now it's the back door, and most of the rail traffic is freights - but the sign out front says it's an Amtrak depot, and it is on the Super Chief line to Los Angeles.

On this side of the grounds, there is a croquet court! On the other side, there is a haybale maze and an orchard. This is looking more and more like a nice holiday destination.





Last night, we arrived to see lots of light strings around the front grounds. There are light strings around the trees and shrubs of the sunken garden. In fact, as we walk around, a Navajo groundskeeper is taking light strings from a big tub and winding them on a tree. He says we really ought to see the garden in the spring.

We have already spent too much time looking at La Posada. It's time to get back on the program. Leaving Winslow, we take I-40 past Meteor City and Two Guns, bypass Holbrook (you can see the Wigwam Hotel from the interstate), and cross the state line by Lupton (wherever Lupton is) and Chief Yellowhorse and the tourist trap there and proceed into New Mexico. In New Mexico, we keep seeing "Historic Route 66" signs, but they don't seem to go anywhere, and we waste a lot of time with them, especially near Laguna Pueblo. When we get to Gallup, the Route 66 sign is coincident with the I-40 Business sign, so I figure that's a safe bet. In a few minutes we are in downtown Gallup pulling into the lot by the Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Information office. The lady in the office doesn't seem to know much about Route 66 attractions, but she tells us Gallup is having a balloon festival, and there is a "Balloon Glow" this evening (it would be interesting, but we haven't the time). She also gives us a tip for a dining place and to be sure to see Richardson's Trading Post. Lunch is at Sammy C's, an extensive sports bar and cafe, with lots of celebrity athlete stuff hanging on the walls and in display cases in the central area - including an autographed photo of Chuck Norris and Wayne Gretsky's jersey. After the meal, Sammy C himself comes around to greet his guests, and I get to compliment him on the tasty green chili.

We are getting a feel of Gallup. The road south of Route 66 is really the downtown area, and it's a living, prospering downtown area. Across the street is Gallup's version of the Fox Theatre, still operating as a cinema.



Strings of lights run across the road; it's a shame we won't see downtown after dark. Other Christmas decorations hang from lampposts.

Richardson's has been operating as a trading post to the Indian nations since 1913. Just inside the door are newspaper clippings with Richardson history and display cases with the really good "not for sale" curios. The main room is mostly jewelry - real, authentic Navajo, Hopi, and Zuni made. The next room is mostly rugs. I had a passing notion that we could "invest" in a real Navajo blanket, but all the rugs have a certificate of authenticity and the price tag. \$1200... \$6200... \$24,000... unbelievable. Too rich for this engineer.



Jerri wants to look at Route 66 merchandise and postcards, so we leave downtown and go further on to a shopping plaza where there is Butlers - a large office and school and art supplies store, but they don't really have Route 66 stuff - and a Walgreen's drugstore, which doesn't really have anything either. Now, all the time after entering New Mexico, we kept seeing billboards advertising "Famous El Rancho Hotel", and even the girl at the Visitors' office mentioned El Rancho. Well... it is on Route 66, and we passed it on the way to Butler's, so we return and park in the overflowing parking lot in which are more than a few trucks and trailers with balloon gondolas. Inside is a flabbergasting sight; A huge decorated tree set between two sweeping staircases to the upper gallery. On one side is the check-in desk, a restaurant, a barbershop, and a gift shop (where Jerri gets her merchandise and postcard itch satisfied). On the other is a wall-size artsy map with historical facts. In the middle is a sitting or common room currently occupied by a large and boisterous crowd (apparently an extended family). Around the upper gallery are photos of movie sets (Gallup was the site of film operations?) and celebrities who had stayed at El Rancho. It looks like everyone who had stayed at La Posada (including Howard Hughes) also stayed at El Rancho.



Continuing down the road, Grants also has a "historic Route 66" and "I-40 Business". And a cute photo opportunity for travelers.

We get to Albuquerque late. Another "historic Route 66" and "I-40 Business" off-ramp. At the road, there is a "historic route" pointer. We go way down that road, turn left at a T-intersection, and go way into town. This is *not* any "historic" route. The GPS leads us back to the freeway and eventually to our hotel. Using the WiFi, I consult the Internet and Google Maps. Sure enough, we got off at the right place, but we missed the turn. Either we missed the sign or (more likely) it

wasn't there. I take the opportunity to record where Route 66 runs through the rest of New Mexico and into Texas. Unlike the eastern side of Arizona, 66 seems to *not* be coincident with I-40 more than it *does*.

The next morning is our chance to look at Old Town Albuquerque, which is just down the Rio Grande Blvd from our hotel. It looks like the little Tucson streets in the Art Museum district or the Barrio Viejo, except that all the historic buildings have been turned into tourist or craft shops, rather like Tubac. After looking in a few, we head



over to that plaza between the buildings where the Christmas tree is to find a public restroom. That's also where the Albuquerque Visitors' Center is. The ladies are very helpful, and supply us with maps and tips - and a caution that Central Avenue (the Route 66 path through the city) is torn up for the installation of a light rail ("trolley") system. Having gone through that in Tucson, I can sympathize with the downtown Albuquerque merchants.



The original nucleus of Albuquerque is centered on a town square, on the north side of which is the original community church - San Felipe de Neri.

In a little window box above the main door, Saint Philip holds a little kid - probably Baby Jesus.



Like Tucson, Albuquerque was the capital of the Confederate Territory of New Mexico. They had a number of these field howitzers. When the Union troops approached, the citizens buried them in a barnyard to prevent their capture. These aren't the original ones, of course, but now they guard the elves in the Christmas display.

Their bandstand is a little bigger than ours. Their central plaza is more accessible than ours (stuck away in La Placita Village).



Having seen as much of Old Town as we need to, we get back on the road and backtrack up Route 66, not quite to where we missed it last night, but far enough. The street is all torn up pretty much all through town, not just in Nob Hill where the trolley is being put in. It's a nice downtown area - we see the KiMo theatre marquee, the University area, and the Route 66 Diner on the other side of the Presbyterian medical complex.



We also see where the famous Alvarado Hotel used to be, before it ceased being a grand hotel and was torn down and replaced with this transit center that was designed to recall the impression of the original hotel. Not unlike El Conquistador in Tucson on Broadway, though now of course there's nothing to recall the former glory other than the old water tower.

Jerri had learned about a strip of musical pavement on Route 66 near Albuquerque. With a little Internet research, I located it near Tijeros on the east side. Sure enough, a little sign indicated its imminence. You have to drive off the edge of the roadway on the "rumble strip" that ordinarily tells you you've driven off the edge of the roadway, and if you drive at about 45MPH, instead of merely rumbling, it plays a bit of "America the Beautiful". We did it twice. Pretty cool.

It's already late in the day, and we want to see the museum in Santa Rosa according to the little Route 66 booklet that Jerri picked up in Flagstaff in 2013, so I suggest we skip the little museum in Moriarty. Then we get to Santa Rosa and discover that the museum is not quite what was advertised, and the alternative, a car museum, is closed - apparently permanently. Finally we arrive in Tucumcari - late - and find the interesting-looking historical museum. It closed at 3:00. A disappointing afternoon.

We also discover that the heater in the car isn't working. It gets downright chilly at night in northern New Mexico.

Jerri isn't feeling like Mexican food, or we would have dined at La Cita. Any Route 66 place that incorporates a sombrero into the architecture is a real draw.



The next morning is Sunday. This turns out to be significant later on. We arise to breakfast in the motel lobby, and notice that the windows of the car are all frosted over. I am getting concerned with the problem with the heater - there are safety implications beyond mere comfort. But moving the car to the other side of the lot where the sun is shining, and the window is clear in no time, in spite of the cold air.



Leaving town, I notice this mural. I also notice the famous Blue Swallow Motel, but too late to get a photo.

We are following Route 66 as recorded from Google Maps. This works okay until we get past San Jon, and the pavement disappears. We drive a long ways on a dirt road with my concern increasing - if Route 66 was the major highway from the east to California, why is it not paved in this stretch? At last, Jerri turns us around. On the way back, we see a farmer pulling off the road to open a gate, and she stops and hops out to ask him. After a few false starts (he's hard of hearing, and his diesel truck engine is hammering nearby), he informs us that yes, this *is* Route 66, but it's the older path, and the newer path is north of I-40, which we can get to by taking the nearby road. The road takes us to the freeway and to a truck-stop: Russell's.

We wanted to stop at Russell's anyways (having seen billboards off the freeway), so I'm glad we managed to not miss it by taking weird byways. There is a chapel at this truck stop (I'm picking up that Mr. Russell is a religious man), and there's actually a service under way - it's Sunday. There's also the museum, which is really cute. And also, Jerri finds a pack of Route 66 maps for sale that have turn-by-turn directions for following the route through each state in either direction. After leaving Russell's and following the directions into Texas, it becomes apparent to us that what was true in Arizona (that Route 66 is coincident with I-40 after Winona) is *not* true



about New Mexico - the old road wanders back and forth across I-40, and the doubtful road we were on at Laguna Pueblo really *was* old Route 66. We have committed to coming back some day and redoing the western part of New Mexico so we can honestly say we've "done" Route 66.



Per Jerri's booklet, in Adrian, Texas is the Midpoint Cafe. There it is; midway between Chicago and Santa Monica. It's about lunchtime, and I had thought about stopping here, but we can't - it's Sunday, and the cafe is closed.

The next Texas town is Vega. There are two attractions here. One is this old Marathon Oil filling station in downtown Vega. Vega is a cute little town, but everything is closed on Sunday.





The other thing is Dottie's Doll Museum (closed on Sunday) and the Boot Tree. Sorry, but I am less than impressed with the Boot Tree. I also fail to see how this is a "historic" Route 66 attraction.

On to the big city of Amarillo. The literature seems to indicate that the attraction here is 6th Avenue with little shops and cafes. I see mostly seedy shops and taverns. Mostly closed. It's Sunday.



The map directs us out of Amarillo on the east side, and then we don't find the "Avenue B" it indicates. We spend a lot of time and drive dozens of miles only to decide that the way we took the first time was the correct way but we didn't get on the frontage road on the *north* side of I-40 - *that* is Route 66. From this point on, Route 66 (at 55MPH) sails alongside I-40 (at 75MPH), so the day wears on quickly. We pass through Groom and see the giant cross, which we've seen before, and the leaning water tower, which we've seen before. It's dark before we get to Alanreed and McLean - the booklet says there's a "Devil's Rope Museum" in McLean, and because Route 66 is looping back and forth

just here, I take a little detour to find the museum in spite of knowing it would be closed, just to see what it is about. Ah. "Devil's Rope" is barbed wire. A museum for barbed wire. Okay.



In Shamrock is this famous Conoco tower station. If it weren't after dark, and it weren't Sunday, the Visitors Center in the station might be open. However, since it is dark, we get to see the station in a different (green) light.

Another "attraction" in Jerri's booklet is the rest area at this particular exit. Yes, there are hints of Art Deco in the architecture. Other than the tile mural inside the restrooms, I don't notice much to see here.



Continuing into Oklahoma in the dark. Route 66 goes through downtown Sayre, which has a nice decorated main street/downtown and a magnificent county courthouse. We go through Elk City (where the National Route 66 Museum is; we will come back tomorrow) and discover that their city park (on the Route) is decorated for Christmas in an awe-inspiring display of lights and figures of elves and snowmen and gingerbread men. We have to get off the road and drive slowly

through the park (along with some locals) in appreciation.



We arrive at our hotel in Clinton, which is right across the street from the Oklahoma Route 66 Museum. The literature indicates that this hotel was popular with Elvis, and he had a room that he would stay in whenever he went by. Well, we didn't get the Elvis room. Rather, we found a dilapidated, decaying motel run by Indians or Pakistanis. I don't think necessarily that the Indians

are *responsible* for decaying hotels; probably they buy into them because the owners want to unload them cheap, but there certainly seems to be a correlation between Indian owners and run-down hotels.

The "complimentary" breakfast was even more disappointing - a cereal dispenser and a jug of milk in an otherwise empty fridge. Then the *REAL* disappointment: The Oklahoma Route 66 Museum (which from the outside looks like a *great* museum) is closed on Mondays. Aauugh!

So it's drive back to Elk City (which we were going to do anyways, after all) and see the National Museum. This kachina statue originally stood outside a Route 66 tourist stand just outside Elk City.





There's... actually not much Route 66 to this museum. There's a tribute to the *Of Mice and Men* movie and Indian roadside curio shops. In another building is a cut-down car that you can "drive" on a bit of Route 66 (on the screen through the windshield and another cut-down car from which you can watch trailers of drive-in movies like *The Blob* and *Creature from the Black*

Lagoon and this cut-down car serving as a bench. There's a home-built kit airplane hanging from the ceiling and an Elk City firetruck with a slide-down pole next to it. That was about all the Route 66 stuff in the *national* Route 66 museum.

Mostly, it's an Elk City museum - a recreation of a little West Oklahoma town with a drugstore, a grocer, a barber, a land survey office, a masonic lodge, *two* funeral parlours, a tailor (that uses an X-Ray machine to take measurements!), and other establishments arranged behind big windows. There is a great rail station with some Elk City stories on the wall (such as the time at



the turn of the 20th century when there was some big ball game in a neighboring town, so the railroad arranged to carry large quantities of local spectators, some of whom got so drunk that, for the return trip, they were just loaded into a freight car, brought back, and left on a siding until they sobered up) with a walk-through caboose on a track outside. There was also this chapel, which is used for contract events, and some of the stained glass windows were salvaged from the First Methodist church when it was demolished.



There's also a large house with the usual antiques, a collection of quilts, a tribute room to Susan Powell (Elk City native and former Miss America), and upstairs was "the rodeo museum". Oh, well, rodeo museum, I thought. Actually, it's the story of the Beutler Brothers from Elk City, bucking stock raisers and rodeo impresarios, who have been involved for three generations now in rodeos all

over the West - including our own Fiesta De Los Vaqueros!

The last thing to see after stepping into the wind (the museum consists of a number of unattached buildings, and it is December in Western Oklahoma - cold with an incessant cutting wind) was the farming exhibit. Some classic tractors and antique harvesters (the kind that were powered by long leather belts from the power take-off of the steam tractor), wind turbine



equipment (including an enormous turbine intended to power machine tools - they didn't just pump water), farm vehicle seats with intricate iron scrollwork, and other odd things. Better than any farm museum we've seen elsewhere. We also learned that Elk City was the capital for "broom corn" - a particular kind of cornstalk that was used to make straw brooms. I always wondered why the straws in brooms were so more substantial than hay stalks. Now I know.



And "hog oilers". Iron pots made to rotate in their stands, and filled with oil, the hogs rub on them (I guess hogs like to rub on things, like horses like to chew on things and cats like to claw on things), the pot would rotate and distribute a quantity of oil on the hog, which would deter flies. These ingenious Americans...

So it wasn't really so much Route 66, but it was a thoroughly interesting museum. Taking our leave of Elk City (but pausing for lunch - and ice cream (yeah, it's winter; it's *still* ice cream) at the Braum's) - we return to Clinton and turn south. After about 25 miles there's Cordell, a thriving small town and the origin of Dairy *King*. Another 10 miles is Rocky, a tiny hamlet with three churches, a farmer's co-op, and a post office. The churches don't have graveyards (that's not a western thing), and there's nobody to ask about cemeteries, so Jerri and I take a chance on a cemetery about a mile north of town.

Jerri finds it - the headstone of my great-grandfather Edwin Monroe, who homesteaded in Rocky and raised his family, and of his first wife, my great-grandmother, Molly.





After Rocky, Jerri has me drive back north through Clinton and then west to Butler, where my grandfather farmed and my dad grew up. I've been in Butler before with my dad, and it had changed so much there wasn't anything left he remembered. But We Were Here.

South of Butler is Lake Foss behind its huge and lengthy earthen dam, and right at the interstate is the town of Foss, about the size of Cordell. With some telephone help from my dad, we find the graves of my great-grandfather Wesner.



We now return to the Old Highway. 55MPH and winding back and forth. Dusk falls by the time we get to Weatherford. There's something to see in Hydro, but it's too dark to see it. The road takes a funny hop after Bridgeport, and we have to pull off the road to consult the maps and the guidebook to assure ourselves that we are on the right road. Sure enough, immediately after starting again, we cross the 3/4-mile-long Pony Bridge. There's nothing visible until we get to Yukon, stop for dinner at a neon-trimmed cafe, and look at the maps and guidebook. Says there was a trestle bridge on an earlier alignment. After dinner we retrace our steps and go south of the main route and eventually (again, the directions on the maps leave something to be desired) find the road and cross the trestle bridge. In the dark.

Finally, we get to Oklahoma City, and follow the directions (except for another occasion where the map has us turn south instead of north) onto 23rd Street and past the Oklahoma State Capitol. In the dark. I was expecting it to be lit up a bit more. Then we quit the Route to find our hotel. Which turns out to be a conference hotel that is a little bit run down (and again, operated by Indians) and, since they don't have their

sign lit up, it takes a few passes before we finally locate it, a Ramada at Martin Luther King and Reno. It's clean and comfortable, and it turns out to be conveniently located near but not (expensively) in downtown.



Since last night was a long one, we sleep in, past the complimentary breakfast hour, so after Jerri is prepped for the day, we cross the street to the Waffle House and break our fast with the locals on hash browns and waffles. Then it's up Lincoln to the capital complex. There's a self-guided tour of the capital, but guided tours every hour except from 11 to 1, which is about when we arrive. We are thinking we would likely see more with a guide, so we deviate to the Oklahoma History building first. From the parking lot we see a set of oil derricks - the Oklahoma Capitol is the only state capitol with operating oil wells on the grounds!

The history museum is really quite good. We see maybe a fourth of it, the overview of Oklahoma history from the early days of French traders (those indefatigable Chouteau brothers from Saint Louis) through the economic blossoming of the Indian nations and the cattle, cotton, and wheat agriculture (spotlight on the "cathedrals of the plains": grain elevators) up to present times (Wiley Post, Paul Braniff (of Braniff Airlines), television, and sports teams). It ended at an architectural model of Devon Tower. Things we learned:

- The grocery shopping cart was invented in Oklahoma
- The curbside pay parking meter was invented in Oklahoma
- The now-ubiquitous Sonic Drive-In originated in Oklahoma
- The "Romper Room" children's television show was filmed in Oklahoma
- The chain of Love's Country Store truck stops originated in Oklahoma

There's more upstairs, but the day is wearing on, and we need to catch the last tour of the Capitol, so back across the street (no crosswalks) and through the parking lots to the side door of the Capitol and down to the entry level at the main door where the Visitors' Center is. We find three mostly-bored reps (this is the off-season, and they don't even have

school tours lately) who essentially draw straws for who will guide the two of us around the Capitol. The winner turns out to be a chatty fellow who takes us up to the Governor's Office on the second floor (he has conversed with the governor, who is very approachable and unassuming) and the Supreme Court chamber on the third floor (outside of which is the display of the Oklahoma Constitution - except it isn't there now), and he talks us past the guards and into the House of Representatives chamber.



The stained-glass skylights are functional! They are also restored after being closed off in the last century after some journalist was found on the roof listening to the proceedings. The fans along the wall are functional, also, but not needed due to the central air conditioning. I recalled that the Arizona capitol had no such consideration of the legislators sweltering in their unventilated original chamber in Phoenix.

The Constitution isn't there because the Capitol is undergoing refurbishment, and has been taken out for protection. So has a good bit of the artwork described in the self-guided tour booklet. It's clear to me that it is good that we got the guided tour. Plus, our chatty guide knows the dirt on previous governors, the ones whose busts line the walls of one room - colorful "Alfalfa Bill" Murray, and E. W. Marland, who lost

two oil fortunes and married his adopted daughter after his wife died.

The interesting story of the Official Seal of the State of Oklahoma was posted next to the empty Constitution case - the original capital was Guthrie, but the first governor (Haskell - a Democrat) had business interests in Oklahoma City, and arranged for the legislature to vote to move the capital. The Seal was smuggled out of Guthrie in a laundry bag (I suppose to evade the anti-OKC party) and the governor used it to stamp the hotel stationery upon which he certified the act to make Oklahoma City the capital.

Some of the artwork can't be moved, like the Indian murals at the corners of the Rotunda, and the lunette like this one of the Five Indian Ballerinas (including Yvonne Chouteau).



Over the Grand Staircase is the set of "Pro Patria" paintings, commemorating Oklahoma's contribution to World War I, commissioned by the founder of the Phillips Oil company.



Looking up the magnificent Grand Staircase back up to the Rotunda. I was fascinated to learn that the Capitol was built in about three years up to 1917 and was designed to include a dome, but because of the shortage of money, labor, and materials due to WWI, the dome was omitted. It wasn't until 2002 that the dome was built - more than 80 years later!



View of the dome interior from the first floor. It's pretty impressive, but I was hoping we might get to go up to the dome itself, like we did at the Iowa Capitol. No such luck.



Our tour ends just before closing time. Jerri finds out that there is Yet Another Program that Someone Hatched Up with a "passport" booklet with pages for all the state Capitols to be stamped. Well. Now we have to go BACK to all those states we've already visited just so we can get a stamp at the Capitol!

The Arizona Capitol has "Winged Victory" on the top, which is also a wind vane with servos to rotate the statue into the wind. Cool. Here, it is "The Guardian", who faces southeast toward Florida and Georgia where most of the Indian tribes came from.

The refurbishment is happening outside as well as inside. I find it curious that just ten or fifteen years after a massive project to build the dome, they are having to refurbish the building. I would have thought that such refurbishment would have been conducted as part of the earlier project.



It is now *well* after lunch, Jerri is hungry, so we get back in our car and run back down Lincoln to Reno and toodle around Bricktown a bit before parking at a Sonic (but *not* a drive-in). Afterwards, we head north across Reno to walk around Bricktown. I am a victim of seasonal advertising: In the tourist literature, Bricktown is supposed to be a bustling hub of shops and cafes and activity venues, as well as having the water taxis circulating up and down the canal. In December, it is almost entirely deserted. It is also cold - cold enough that Jerri doesn't feel like playing miniature golf at the cute little outdoor course at a bend in the canal.



Plus, it turns out that the water taxis don't operate in the winter - except for (popular) free rides after 6:00 Thursday through Saturday. We will be leaving OKC on Thursday.

Still, it is a pretty place, with the holiday lights out, and peaceful, almost restful without the advertised bustling crowds.

At the end of the Bricktown canal is a Bass Pro Shop. We aren't outdoorsy types, but it's always fun to see how other places compare with the Mother Shop in Springfield, Missouri. This one is pretty big - with full-size Oklahoma flags overhanging the main hall.



Every shop has a big diorama with an aquarium. This one includes (as usual) some rock climbers - I'm just not sure where in Oklahoma there might be rocks to climb.

There's also a Santa event. We encounter a line of people snaking down the aisles, and it takes me a little while to realize it's parents taking their children to see Santa. In a sporting goods store. They are their own little world.

One more thing to do tonight. When we were in Springfield, Missouri, I learned there is a pedestrian bridge over the railroad, and we found and crossed it. Here, there is a footbridge over I-40. The state bird of Oklahoma is the Scissortail Flycatcher, and there is a sculpture over the bridge reminiscent of the bird.

At night, it is illuminated by LED lamps that change color.



Very pretty. And big. And you can look over the side and see eight lanes of interstate traffic. It's also dark and cold. We don't hang out long.



Pretty good view of the city skyline from the bridge. It is significant of the Oklahoma southern/western values that tall buildings will have cross patterns.



Getting back to the hotel and parking in the back, I discover that the magnetic-strip key will not open the external door. I have to walk around to hotel to the front door and get new keys. Jerri gets "points" at Ramada hotel, and the previous night was a free one, so I'm not terribly surprised that the previous keys are deactivated. It was still a cold walk around a large hotel.



We intend to start the next day by looking through some antique shops, which are clustered in an area northwest of the capital complex. I take a route up I-40 so we can get a look at the scissortail sculpture in the daylight.

Some of the antique shops are amazing, in their extent if not necessarily the novelty of their content. One has *four* fainting couches! Here, Jerri has found some old snowshoes. Maybe Charity could use these in Fort Collins!





Our second destination today is the Myriad Gardens and the Crystal Bridge, downtown. After departing the antique district and arriving downtown, we put the car in the parking structure underneath the convention center, take the elevator up to street level, and walk out through an entirely deserted convention hall. Outside on the street, we look for a lunch place, and find Flint's, an upscale cafe that turns out to be the in-building restaurant for the old Colcord Hotel. This calls to mind our experience at the Phoenix ComiCon and having lunch at the Nook inside the Hilton Garden Inn, a gorgeous refurbished Art Deco building. At the Nook, the restrooms for the restaurant were

also the lobby restrooms for the hotel, and so it is for Flint's. The lobby of the Phoenix Hilton Garden Inn Downtown was much more impressive than the Colcord's. I would like to have stayed at the Phoenix Hilton (maybe we yet will), and maybe staying at the Colcord would have been more memorable than our Indian-operated Ramada. Certainly more expensive. Interestingly, in the restaurant, we sat across from a table with two men who were high-level executives from their talk. Other diners were similarly dressed for business.

Next to the Colcord is the Devon Tower, 10th largest building west of the Mississippi. There's a fancy restaurant on one of the upper floors with great views of the city, but that's not on our agenda.



It is cold, *cold*, COLD outside, freezing with a chilling breeze. The Myriad Garden is downtown's park, and there is outside landscaping and a little stream under the walkway and a waterfall. There's also an ice-skating rink set up, and a few hardy souls skating on it this afternoon. We are relieved to get inside the Crystal Bridge.



This is a huge tropical terrarium, rather like the Jewel Box in Forest Park in Saint Louis. It's smaller than the Jewel Box, but more densely filled, with a lot of amazing plants from cactus to cocoa trees, including a large set of agaves and aloes. Best of all: it's *warm*!

A pineapple plant! With a little pineapple growing on a stalk above the leafy part. I suppose it will get big enough to "harvest". I wonder what the Garden does with mature fruits like the cocoa pods, papayas, Jamaican cherries, bananas, and others.



When we finish taking the self-guided tour through the terrarium, we go back outside in the cold to look around the gardens a bit before dinner. The Crystal Bridge straddles a little pond. There's an auditorium here, for concerts in warmer times, now occupied by holiday decorations. The north end of the Crystal Bridge points at the Devon Tower.



Our dinner destination is the Cattlemen's Cafe, in the Stockyard City district. The Cattlemen's Cafe is Oklahoma City's oldest restaurant, established to serve the stockyard cowboys and meat packers. According to the history on the menu, at some point, it changed hands in a gambling game in which the winner rolled double-threes. The new owner branded the wall with "33".

After dinner of *excellent* steak, we follow the waitress' directions to the back room to see the brand - now part of a large "33" plaque which includes the "33" branding iron! I notice the other diners are working class Okies, and a few cowboy hats - very different from the clientele at Flint's.

After dinner, we return to the car and drive to get a better look at the entrance to the stockyards themselves. Unfortunately, in the poor street lighting, I think there is a ramp out of the parking lot at the west end, but there *isn't* - CLUNK CLUNK off the curb. There doesn't seem to be any consequent from my poor driving maneuver. We drive through the stockyard in the dark - extensive but empty pens. The OKC stockyard is still active - the world's largest cattle clearinghouse - unlike the historic but inactive Fort Worth stockyards. Must be past the cattle trading season.



Still very sensitive to the behaviour of the car, we leave Stockyard City and go back downtown. I read on the OKC tourist site that the Automobile Alley district is all trimmed up with holiday lights and neon. And so it was. It might have made more of an impression to get out and see it up close by walking, but both of us are definitely *not* up to walking any more in the cold.

Getting back to the hotel and parking in the back, AGAIN I discover the key won't open the outside door. Maybe it wasn't because the first night was free; maybe the keys get deactivated *every day*. How inconvenient for long-term guests. I leave Jerri in the (comparatively) warm car and AGAIN I walk around to hotel to the front door and get new keys. Then I go *through* the hotel (did I mention it's a convention hotel? It's not small) to fetch Jerri. In a rare moment of wisdom I try the new key on the external door just to test it. Doesn't work. I chock the door with my knife and get Jerri inside to wait by the room door while I go *back* to the

desk to get the keys recoded. They *still* don't work. After the *third* trip through the hotel to the front desk, the night manager comes back with me to make sure the key works. One doesn't, but the other does. Good grief. But it's the last night here.

The next day, we leave Oklahoma City to get to Tulsa. First, I check under the car for any leaks or obvious damage - nope, looks okay. On the way out, we look for the notable sites along Route 66, such as the Buckminster Fuller-designed Gold Dome building. Which has a For Sale sign outside. I'll bet it's on the Historic Register and can't be torn down (good) or significantly altered (which discourages potential occupants).



Just north of the Gold Dome is the Braum's Milk Bottle building. The building is very small, and seems to be a studio or a display for a local architect.

The Milk Bottle is in the City's Asian district. As we proceed along the Route, most of the businesses have signs with Chinese, Korean, or Thai lettering, and there are a lot of oriental restaurants and markets.



Following the directions on the map, we continue along Route 66, eventually leaving Oklahoma City and Edmond, out into the country, and approach Arcadia. At a junction we come upon another attraction - not a historic but a NEW attraction, and very much in the spirit of Route 66: POP'S station and cafe. At night, the giant pop bottle is all lit up. In daylight, it's still pretty impressive.

Since it is about lunchtime, we are stopped anyways, and we want to see the awesome inventory of soda that POP'S is famous for, we go in for lunch. The meal comes with any soda you want from the coolers, or a bottomless cup of their house root beer (which is excellent). All the bottles on the glass shelves are for display only, but the selection in the coolers put the displays to shame.



Further along, in Arcadia proper, is the signature attraction for the area - the Round Barn. It was built by the original homesteader with the intent of making it resistant to tornadoes. Subsequent owners made modifications with deleterious effects on the structure. Over time, the roof collapsed and the building was going to be torn down, and then a master carpenter came into

the area and took the restoration as his project. Original family members helped with the project, as well as other locals, including "Butch", whom we met in the gift shop/museum on the lower level. He is in his 70s or 80s now, still contributing to the project as the primary shop tender, but he's rather lonely and he likes to talk.

Upstairs, under the restored dome roof. Even before it's dissolution, it was used as a dance hall, and now, that's its primary purpose - along with concerts and gatherings of various sorts.



Further down the road is Chandler, that has an old National Guard Armory repurposed as a community center and Route 66 Interpretive Center. It's an amazing bit of stonework that was abandoned after the National Guard moved into better (newer) accommodations, and demolition was proposed,

but the city intervened and acquired it as a community center. The girl guide showed us a large room with a stage and lots of round tables set up for a banquet or a wedding, and she said demolishing it (and removing the resulting sandstone waste) would have been more expensive than refurbishing it. The interpretive part was fairly interesting: a number of stations with selectable video loops with various aspects of Route 66 history; some stations were "cars" (seats from a period vehicle mounted on stands) or "motel beds" (padded vinyl platforms with the screen overhead for viewing while reclining). Some of the videos (like the one about a cattle drive reenactment) didn't really seem to have much to do with Route 66. Also a photo project by the photography class of a local community college, and a map of Route 66 through Oklahoma with photos of attractions along the way. There was even a kiddie section with a "Cars" movie theme.

I suppose we stayed there too long. By the time we got to the next "attraction", it was already dusk. The "shoe tree". Rather like the "boot tree" in Texas. NOT a historic attraction, just a weird one. It was the "draw" for a "trading post", which was really a thrift or junk shop (cast-off picture frames, lamps, and bedding) with a decent stock of ammunition reloading equipment.



Once again, we drove over a lot of Route 66 in the dark before we got to Tulsa. Tulsa is a town that appreciates their Route 66 heritage.

It is conveniently both dinner time and near the location of an interesting spot in the guide booklet. Just to make sure we don't miss it, we get out the GPS rig, which guides us about 500 feet past the neon Tulsa sign.



Ollie's is an over-the-top model railroad hobbyist's dream. There are tracks overhead and into the adjacent dining areas, the walls are festooned with railroad-related signs - there's even a zepellin hanging from the ceiling. Nothing is running. I figure that's because the dinner hour is over and things are closing down.

Not so. As we are leaving and paying the bill at the counter, I mention that I was sorry to have missed the trains running. "Oh", she said, "I forgot. I'm so used to having them running that I don't even notice whether they are running or not." So she turned around and adjusted a knob on the control station behind the counter, and the trains started running around the restaurant.



I wish I had asked earlier. Here's Jerri standing at the corner of the restaurant (yes, still cold) near the "Historic Route 66" street sign.



We stay on Route 66 through Tulsa a little way. Some sights are better seen at night.

The next day is Friday, when my sisters and daughters are due to arrive at Tulsa International Airport. Before we pick them up at about 1:00pm, we want to catch as many sights in Tulsa as we can. Outside the Expo convention center is the Golden Driller. I sit on his boot to provide perspective.





It takes a lot of driving around downtown before locating the Blue Dome in the Blue Dome District. It was once a service station, but now it is a bar. The car repair bays are still present in the back. There are a lot of shops along the street in the Blue Dome district; too bad we don't have time to drift around more.

Just up the street from the Blue Dome is the Tulsa City Hall. I hope their city government is as transparent as their building.





North of downtown on the other side of the railroad is Cain's Ballroom. It had its own display in the Oklahoma History Center due to its significance; it seems to be to western or "cowboy" music as the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville is to country music. Like the Ryman, Cain's is still an active venue for music concerts and other stage-oriented events.

All these things were actually not on Route 66. There's not actually a lot on Route 66 through Tulsa, as it follows 10th Street, then switches down to 11th Street, and back to 10th Street a few times, and runs out eastward. Near Highway 169, there's a big masonry sign pointing to the Route 66 Interpretive Plaza, but in spite of a lot of driving back and forth and round and round, we utterly fail to locate any Interpretive Plaza. We give up and take 169 north to state route 11 and the airport, and collect the two parties - Kathi and Faith who flew in together from Tucson, and Becky and Charity who flew in together from Denver. Then we head east toward Pryor. After a bite of lunch, Kathi and Becky express interest in continuing with us on Route 66 for the afternoon, so it's on northward through the little town of Catoosa.

On the north side of Catoosa, at "Spunky Creek", is a Route 66 icon: The Catoosa Blue Whale. Back in the day, a man prepared a swimming hole for the local children, and created the reinforced concrete whale. There's an office here, with a woman on duty, who tells us that the pond isn't really fit to swim in anymore, but the place is still a popular picnic spot and play area.



There's an upper level inside the whale that Charity and Faith discover. I would imagine that, in these days, as a children's water park, the Blue Whale would be a legal liability.

Becky converses with Faith and Charity up on the platform. No rails. No handrail on the ladder. It's a bit unnerving to be up there.



Apparently, there was more to the amusement park than just the lakeside Whale and picnic area and "beach" with sand toys. We are thinking this was a "fairy circle" of giant mushrooms.

Jerri takes a closer look at one of the sad mushrooms. I'm thinking the tops were plexiglass dome windows from... something... airplanes or RVs or something.





There's also a big wooden "Ark" and what looks like the remnants of a little zoo. This may have been an enclosure for animals. There are bird cages and wire pens back in the wooded area, gradually being overgrown by weeds and small trees. It was all a bit depressing.

We return to the Road. Near Foyil, there is a Totem Park a few miles east of the main road. A Mr. Galloway built all these colorful concrete items to entertain his children.





Including this towering monolith covered with Indian images and symbols, standing on the back of a huge turtle.

Here we are at the base. There are electric cables running overhead to and through it, and ventilation louvres halfway up, and this door, so I'm suspicious that in earlier days, it was possible to go up inside of it.





But then there's a Welcome Center. Now a gift shop. Closed now, of course. But constructed and decorated like all the other statuary, so it must have been built at the same time, but for what purpose, if he made everything else to entertain his children?

Further up the road, at Chelsea, is the only extant Sears & Roebuck Catalog House. In Heritage Square in Phoenix is the Rosson House, which incorporates a beautiful wooden staircase that was ordered from Sears. I thought that was unusually large, but this exceeds it considerably. I suppose that mail-order prefab houses were the mobile homes of the pre-modern period, and notably, this house was located in a mobile home neighborhood. Still, a mail-order prefab arrive-by-train *two story plus attic* house. Wow.





Nearby is Pryor Creek. Yes, the Pryor Creek upon which the town of Pryor Creek is established, many miles south of here. Obviously, an original alignment of Route 66 went through this bridge that Becky is showing off, but it is not passible. Only the historic bridge remains as a monument. We drive through and back just to say we did.

Our destination today is the Turnpike Overpass near Vinita. From this roadside historic marker, it appears that FDR was also in Vinita, making a whistlestop campaign speech.





In times past, this archway over the Will Rogers Turnpike was the World's Largest McDonald's Restaurant. That record has since been surpassed, and it seems that this building has been rebuilt. It is of course late, cloudy, and this is a poor photo from a bridge.

This building is something my family would always pass on the way from Ohio to Grandpa and Grandma's home in Pryor. I was thinking that, like the Saint Louis Arch, this was something we always saw but never stopped to see; however, Kathi and Becky both profess a remembrance of being in here before. At any rate, at this year's Tucson



Modernism Week, we attended an event at the Loft Cinema at which comedian/historian Charlie Phoenix put up slides about fascinating modernist buildings, and this was one of them. My recollection of the building, and Phoenix' slide, showed an exterior with a lot more vertical members, like louvres, which the current reconstructed building lacks. It's also not a large McDonald's restaurant; there's also a Subway up here, and a gift shop.

That's all the time we have for sightseeing today, since today is over and we have to get back to our EconoLodge across Highway 20 from the railroad. I am surprised to see that there are quite a number of hotels being built near Pryor - there's nothing here except a moderate-size industrial park. The next morning, we all arise and meet up and go back into Pryor to look into our old favorite Mary's What-Not antique store. There's also a "Rust and Lace" antique and craft "mall" in Pryor's little downtown. We have lunch at an excellent little mom-and-pop* deli, and then return to the hotel to prepare for Aunt Yvonne's birthday

celebration, which is the reason we came on this trip. There is quite the crowd at the party, with Ormands and Wesners and Jacksons and former students and neighbors and church people. Here's the Lowell Ormand family (minus my brother Michael) with Aunt Yvonne in the hall of her First Baptist Church in Pryor Creek, Oklahoma.



* The deli is "Bill and Ruth's", so mom and pop have the same names as my uncle and aunt McMahon. Funny.

The next day is Sunday; Becky and Charity are on a morning flight back to Denver, and Faith is on a later flight back to Tucson. Kathi doesn't return until tomorrow. After depositing three women at the airport, Kathi goes with us on some more Route 66 explorations. This starts right here in Tulsa, back on the west side which we passed in the dark without noticing it. This is the "East Meets West" plaza, with a sculpture of a fictional encounter of Cyrus Avery and his family in a Model-T and a horse-drawn freight wagon. The flags of the seven Route 66 states flutter in the cold breeze.



That's one scared kitty. Probably the only person to be injured in this hypothetical accident is the little Avery girl getting clawed by her escape-minded cat.

As automobiles became more and more popular at the turn of the century, roads were constructed privately and haphazardly, and had names like "National Old Trails Highway" (which ran through Northern Arizona), and often obscure or ambiguous markings. Cyrus Avery was chosen to lead the team to remap a national highway system over the older roads, replacing names with numbers and setting up standardized signs. Cyrus, an Oklahoman, made sure that the main east-west

highway went through his own state. After some finagling with Kansas, the new highway was given the number "66" - history was made, and Cyrus Avery is considered the father of it.

He got his recognition as a civil engineer by building this bridge in Tulsa. You could say, this is where Route 66 *really* began.



Over the feeble Arkansas River. I think it is feeble because most of the water that would flow through Tulsa has been diverted into the McClellan-Kerr navigable canal that goes around Tulsa (and upon which Catoosa is a port). There are three bridges, now - the unused original, a Route 66 bypass, and the big I-244 bridge. Underneath the latter are pedestrian walkways over the river, part of a "river park" like we have in Tucson. And, like Tucson, often the transients will gather in the river park and intimidate tourists.

We get up on the freeway through Tulsa and get on the Will Rogers Turnpike (see? a private named highway) to zoom past the parts of Route 66 that we already saw. We take the Vinita exit, pay the toll, and come upon a truck stop with the giant Indian, holding his Oklahoma insignia shield. Not quite as tall as the Golden Driller.



Rick's (not Bob's) Big Boy is also here.



The next "official" attraction is the Packard DX station in Afton. There's a curio/gift shop in the former station (it's closed for the season) and two antique gas pumps.



Inside the showroom are some classic Packard automobiles - and a late model Maserati. Kathi shows off her "sister kidding her brother" act.

The glory days of Afton are behind it. The DX tourist stop is the only living thing left on this stretch of the highway.



There was something significant here in 1911. Seems this would qualify for a Historic Registry, and maybe grant money to fix it up.

On the east side of Afton, off the main road, is a stretch of original Route 66 pavement.





The most significant town in the northeast corner of Oklahoma is Miami - which even the guidebook explains is pronounced "M-eye-AH-muh". They proudly raise a Route 66 entrance archway - moved here from the railroad depot where it was in danger of being reduced to scrap metal during the War.

Here, just in time for lunch, is the last of the Ku-Ku Burger chain, now independently owned and operated by Waylan.





Except for the Ku-Ku Bird, it looks like a regular fast-food hamburger place. There's a few unique items on the menu, and they ask how you want your hamburger cooked.

Kathi sees Mr. Waylan behind the counter. There are youth soccer team posters hanging all over. Aside from the Route 66 appeal, I would think this place would interest a student of modernism.





The big historical relic in Miami is the Coleman Theatre, constructed lavishly by a local mining bigshot for the enjoyment of his employees and the community. It has been in continuous use for films and stage events, there's a ballroom for large gatherings at the other end, and the Miami visitors' bureau and the Chamber of Commerce have storefront offices in the building.

It's Sunday, so no tours. There's a neat inlay arrow in the pavement directing incoming people to the ticket booth. At the curb there's a historical plaque that proudly notes that the original Mighty Wurlitzer Organ is still in place and functional.





The vertical neon sign hangs over the side street.

Miami has a serious downtown, even when seen in the rain. There's some Christmas decorations, not as many as we've seen elsewhere (even tiny Groom, Texas, had their lamp-post hangings).





The guidebook says there's a restored Marathon Oil gas station on Main Street. I drive way down Main without seeing it, even as far as the county fairgrounds. Which I note has massive huge stone buildings and a stone wall around the grounds - puts the Pima County fairgrounds to shame. Then we break down and get out the GPS to guide us to the target - so unassuming that it was easy

to miss in the rain. The gas pumps have a logo of a classic Greek footracer - the original "Marathon". I reflect that most people in that day would understand the origin of "Marathon", where in our day, especially younger people, they would not.

Almost to the Kansas border is the town of Commerce, Mickey Mantle's home town. A statue of the baseball legend stands outside Mugg Field where he was discovered.





It takes some doing, but the directions lead us to Mickey Mantle's boyhood home. His father would come home from working at the mines, and practice ball with Mickey using the tin shed in the background as a backstop.

The last town in Oklahoma is Quapaw, but there's nothing to see there. Across the border, the first town in Kansas is charming Baxter Springs, which has a period gas station converted into a visitors' center and Route 66 museum. It's Sunday. It's closed.

Directly across the street is a downtown storefront Baxter Drugstore - the classic sign hanging over the sidewalk is subtitled "Operated by Walgreen's".



Just outside of Baxter Springs is a little stretch of a previous 66 alignment over this beautiful concrete arched bridge - Rainbow Curve Bridge.

There's really not much of Route 66 in Kansas. Just a little further up the road is Riverton. Here, there is the Eisler General Store. We go back and forth a few times until I look at the map and notice "Nelson (formerly Eisler) General Store". Well, there it is. And yes, it is a real working general store, with a period molded tin ceiling and lots of not-for-sale antique paraphernalia on the walls and shelves over the for-sale product.



The other room is a well-stocked Route 66 gift shop. More molded tin ceiling. Also a nifty neon clock.

Practically right outside Riverton is the big southeast Kansas town of Galena. They are proud of their Route 66 role, per this roadside mural barely visible in the dusk.



Galena is also "famous" as having the "Tow-Tater" garage, which is now a tourist trap but of course is closed now, whether because it's Sunday or late or the off-season.

Tow-Tater is the inspiration for the "Tow-Mater" character in the "Cars" Route 66-derived cartoon film.



After Galena, we go across the state line into Missouri and Joplin. We

have now accomplished our Route 66 objectives for this time - Missouri and Illinois will have to come later. We zoom back to Pryor on I-44 (which becomes the Turnpike) and Highway 20 and get back to Aunt Yvonne's home where we have a bit of leftovers for dinner and then hug Yvonne and Uncle David and Aunt Judy and my Dad and Marsha goodbye. The next morning we return to Tulsa for the third and last time, spending a bit of time at Gardner's Bookstore before taking Kathi to the airport and leaving Tulsa ourselves. Gardner's is an extensive used bookstore, rather like Bookman's is in Tucson. As we leave, I notice an advertisement on the bulletin board by the door - in January, there will be a ComiCon pop media fan convention - in Pryor!

It takes most of the day to drive south out of Oklahoma, and we make a few wrong turns in Muskogee and McAlester, but we get to the home of Jerri's sister, Maribeth, approximately an hour later than we said we would, and in time for dinner and some conversation with her and her husband Bob. The next morning, after looking at her "fairy garden" and other yard art, we depart, driving to and through the twisted maze of highways in Dallas and Fort Worth and the long, long road through Abilene and Midway and Odessa and Pecos to El Paso.



Maribeth has given us a lunch tip - the Smokestack Restaurant this side of Abilene (actually, Ranger). We keep our eyes peeled. Eventually, we see a lonely red brick smokestack from the freeway. This is "Thurber, Texas, Population 5". The meal is good, but large; Jerri gets an outsized chicken sandwich and I get a "Blue Plate Special". There are photos of Thurber in its heyday on the wall, as well as an American Airlines magazine article about the Thurber restaurant, so it seems they are "famous".

Detail of the smokestack - they took their brickwork seriously in 1908. Thurber is a "ghost town" - coal for the railroad was mined here, but the demand for coal shrivelled when the locomotives were converted to burn oil. There's still 127 million tons of coal in the ground that the Gas and Electric Company still owns, so it's possible that someday Thurber will rise again.



We spend the night in Clint, which is a suburb of El Paso. Next morning is waffles in the breakfast area. What is it about Texans and their fixation on the shape of their state? Arizona has a unique shape, also, and it shows up here and there, but I've never seen Arizona-shaped waffles.

My objective is to actually see a bit of El Paso and not just zoom through it like usual. There is a LOT of road construction in El Paso. It takes a little while after getting off the interstate to get downtown, ditch the car, and discover that the Visitors' Center is *next to* but not *within* the convention center. The girl in the visitors' center is very helpful with advice and literature and recommends



the walking tour of downtown. In the center, there is Old Number One, a locomotive that was built before the Civil War and served in the El Paso area for 50 years before it was decommissioned.



A wooden box cab. Classic. The machine used to have a funnel smokestack, but it was replaced with a simple cylinder when the locomotive was converted to use oil.

Now, I had heard from various people, including former natives, that El Paso was a nasty run-down place, but I wanted to see for myself. After all, downtown Tucson was a nasty run-down place not that long ago, and now it is a pleasant exciting place (except for the coddled transients). I am very pleased to discover that El Paso is undergoing a bit of a downtown renaissance as well.

This is the Paseo Del Norte Hotel, formerly one of the first hotels and meeting for business places, now joined to a newer hotel and refurbished to its original purpose.



The Plaza Theatre corresponds to our own Fox; the surviving historic cinema now fixed up for screen and stage productions. By the pictures in the walking tour booklet, the Plaza is even grander inside than the Fox. I note "Ice Skating Rink". In El Paso. Well, if in downtown Phoenix, Arizona, why not anywhere else?





El Paso (on the American side), formerly Franklin, is located on the site of a Spanish land-grant ranch. The Mills building stands where the original ranch house used to be.

It appears that most of the tall buildings downtown were designed and built in the 1910 era, during El Paso's boom, by the Henry Trost architect firm. His name was all over the

place, both in the booklet and on the buildings themselves.

The Plaza is another high-rise hotel (awful lot of tall hotels here), apparently Conrad Hilton's first high-rise hotel. Says something about how strategic El Paso was in the '20s and '30s. Another Trost design.





Close-up of the Art Deco capital. The guide booklet says it remained in operation as a hotel until 1991. Doesn't say what it is now. I hope it is still in use, or there are plans to refurbish it. We don't actually get close to it.

Across from San Jacinto Plaza is the Kress building with its colorful accents and tall vertical neon sign. I think I've heard "Kress" in the same context as "Woolworth", so it was big in its day. The booklet says it's not a Trost design; however, note the "Viva Trost" sign in the streetside window. Clearly the downtown El Pasoans known where most of their glorious buildings came from.





Pioneer Plaza is a couple of blocks southwest of here, and was the original central area of the town, where people gathered and news was tacked to the cottonwood trees along the irrigation canal. San Jacinto Plaza, where I'm standing, is the first city-designated park, and the fellow who was given the task of converting the former ranch corral to a park put a pond in the middle and

some alligators in the pond! The alligators stayed here until 1965, at which time they were moved to the city zoo, but the statue in the fountain recalls a bit of local history. There are a lot of Christmas decorations in the square, including (I am amazed to see) a full-size nativity scene.

Right next to the plaza is the Hotel Cortez, a Spanish Colonial Revival (like many in downtown Tucson) design by - you guessed it - Henry Trost. The '20s must have been an exciting time in El Paso, with all these gorgeous tall buildings growing up all at the same time.



A view of the city skyline from San Jacinto Plaza. El Paso is a serious city. Just with an awful lot of road construction at the moment.



Modernism! A vertical neon sign - with a thermometer. I hope it actually works at night. I think downtown El Paso might be an interesting place to see at night - especially now at Christmastime.

A magnificent bank building
- now occupied by a
hispanic fashion shop.



El Paso has its share of historical drama. Gunslinger John Wesley Hardin ran around rough and ready El Paso until he was shot unawares at the Acme Saloon (we pass the historical marker for the no-longer-extant Acme on San Antonio Street) by Constable John Selman. Selman was apparently a no-gooder, for he was shot coming out of the Wigwam Saloon by a U.S. marshall. It has gone through a number of faces since 1896, but it says "Wigwam Saloon" again, so I assume it is now back to being a drinking establishment, for stuff a little harder than Pepsi.

There seem to be two significant north-south streets in the city core. I thought Santa Fe would be a good way to get to the downtown area from the interstate, but it is all blocked off for the construction of (just like Tucson and Albuquerque) a light rail system! The other is El Paso Road, which is the old road from the American town (starting at Pioneer Plaza) to the original Mexican El Paso on the other side of the river. This road no longer connects to Mexico; all the border traffic comes through the port of entry, and along one road we found ourselves on, there were steel fences on this side of the river - the actual border wall. However, El Paso Road is the location of many of the older (pre-Trost) buildings and a thriving commercial district with a heavy Mexican flavor. Might be interesting to walk down some time; something like Mexican Nogales, but a lot safer.



We managed to find our way out of El Paso through surface street and interstate highway construction, back into and across New Mexico, and back to our own home Copper Star state.



Lessons Learned:

- Get the Route 66 maps with turn-by-turn directions, <http://www.historic66.com/books/?8maps> or equivalent.

- Plan carefully to travel the road during daylight. This means a lot more days on the road than if travelling on the interstate highway.
- Don't do it in December - that's the off-season.
- (In my opinion) El Paso is definitely worth a long look.

Our near-term future plan is to retrace our steps into New Mexico, now that we have the maps and can actually find (and hopefully trust the directions to) the original road. At least as far as Albuquerque. Then, we can take the interstate to zoom to all those points of interest that we failed to see on this trip.