

June 2008: Family Vacation - South and Midwest

3. Georgia & So. Carolina

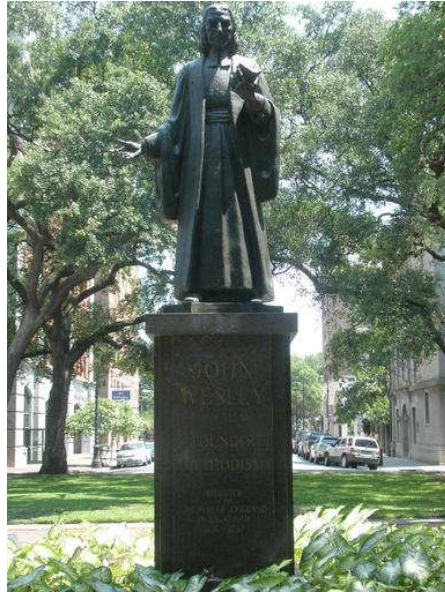
Tuesday June 24: Savannah: We get up early as we can, 'cause there's a lot to do today. Turns out Savannah has a Grey Lines tour shuttle system for tourists to move about downtown and see stuff. This is probably a good mark of a city determined to promote itself for tourism - which means Tucson will never see it. However, the shuttle involves too much time for us, so we pack the car and go downtown. I knew parking would be difficult, but not too bad, and we find a 2-hour spot and dismount.

First Disaster

Last night, unloading the cameras and processing the pictures, it seems the battery was low and the plug didn't mate well with the wall outlet, so it kept blinking in and out of battery. I don't know if this had anything to do with it, but later, attempts to boot the laptop result in "Media error: Check cable". We were depending on this laptop to unload our cameras, since all but mommy's have limited and non-expandable memory. I was also hoping to update this site "live". Well, the darn thing wouldn't boot for the rest of the trip. I suppose that Windows users would be hosed, while I at least had the chance to get a LiveCD and do almost everything I could with a hard drive. Unfortunately, Linux LiveCDs are rare in the wild, and I never had time to download and burn one. So there was no camera downloading after Savannah, and no website updating.

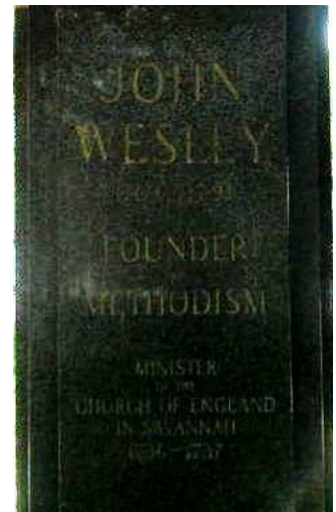
Funny thing, I am writing this now on the laptop! Upon returning to Tucson, I got my boot CD to see what was wrong. Well, the hard drive had responded and had LILO running before I could load the CD! Miracle Cure! grrr...

Savannah is really a beautiful city. And friendly, considering their commitment to tourism. And ancient, being founded before the Revolutionary War. The main feature of Savannah is their square. There are several squares through downtown that function as parks, traffic circles (practically all the roads are one-way), and communities with homes, apartments, and churches facing the square. They are lush with trees and shrubbery - apparently the City maintains the landscaping - and usually have a monument or a fountain or some focus.



The squares all have names, but usually the name has little to do with the monument. For instance, I don't think this is Wesley Square, but his statue is in it. Note the plants at the base, the green grass and trees, and the street lined with tall buildings beyond. They all look like this. City dwellers are relaxing on park benches, eating their lunch, feeding pigeons, playing chess, reading books, and watching the tourist take pictures of their monuments. Because of the trees and the openness, the squares are cool refuges from the streets and sidewalks.

I always thought that Wesley and Whitefield and all the Great Awakening characters operated in New England. Seems Wesley was quite active here in Georgia, until his tradition-minded church kicked him and his radical message out. Sounds familiar.



At the north end of downtown is an odd feature that reminds me of Huntsville - the split-level city. The squares and streets and government buildings (including the City Hall, with its golden dome, and the ancient Cotton Exchange building (or Masonic Lodge, same thing) on a flat level above the river. Along the river are other buildings, with bridges reaching from the street level to their upper stories. Their first stories are on the river bank level, reached by numerous stairways and driving ramps.



Looking down the Savannah River from street level. Note the altitude; I'd say we are 40 feet above the cars down there. Also note the park and pathway along the river bank.

Looking up the river. The park appears to run the width of downtown. I also note there's not really any city on the other side of the river.



At the bottom of the above picture is this statue of a young woman, whose love went to sea, and she promised to wave to him upon his return. Problem is, she didn't know what ship he was on! So she waved at all of them. This friendly behaviour made her famous. I don't think she ever met up with him again, though...

At this level, right at the drop to the river level, is another park, which contains such monuments as their Vietnam memorial, several Revolutionary busts and markers - and a lighthouse. Yes, it's listed in the Lighthouse guide, and it's interesting, but hardly a lighthouse.



At this point, we are sticking to our plan, which calls for us to leave Savannah and go east to the coast, just a few miles from here, to Tybee Island and another lighthouse. On the way, we see an island out in the River with Fort Pulaski,

named after a famous Revolutionary War Polish hero, and notable that, in the Civil War, it was taken in a siege that lasted only a few hours, since its brick defenses could not withstand the new rifled guns. There is a lighthouse in the river off its eastern end, but we can't stop and see it. Not much to see anyways.



The Georgia coast, at least here at the River mouth, is rather like the Florida coast; marshy and threaded with numerous creeks. Tybee Island actually has a beach, which makes it a popular draw for Georgians and tourists. There is a real lighthouse here, which is why we visit - and finally find it, after asking directions.

However, the lighthouse is open every day except - you guessed it - Tuesdays!

South Carolina: The next part of the plan is to hop over the River and visit South Carolina, just to say we were there. And to see Hilton Head, which is a famous beach resort. It's quite a drive, and the traffic gets quite dense as we approach the island.



First order of business is - yes - a lighthouse. Well, it turns out there are two lighthouses here, a real navigation aid on the north side of the island, and a fake one on the south side, part of a golf and resort community. We didn't realize this, of course, until after we paid the community entrance fee, followed the map, and ended up at a "lighthouse" which was really a three-story gift shop with an observation deck!

Okay, enough of this, on to the beach! Well, not here; all the beaches here, we are told, are private (even though the guide on the Internet says otherwise). So we leave the community and waste a lot of time circling around the wierd traffic structures mid-island, dumping the car in a grocery store parking lot, getting some touristy beach towels, attempting to walk to the beach, getting lost, returning to the car, dropping the girls off at the sign saying "beach access", driving around some more, finding the public parking area, and catching up.

Once there, we find the beach is wonderful! Cool sand, cool (but not bath-warm, like Florida) water, a little more breaker action, and not at all crowded! Not like the pictures. Must be the off season (June? whatever). So we stay a couple of hours playing in the water and looking for shells (aren't hardly any), and then leave for Atlanta.



Which is a four-hour drive from here. It's already six. We arrive at our hotel in the dark, having seen almost none of Georgia in the crossing. Rats.

Wednesday June 25: Atlanta: We picked a hotel near the only real attraction in the Atlanta area, so in minutes we are at - Stone Mountain!



Part of the attraction is a little "town" at the foot of the mountain, reminiscent of Old Tucson. Folksy, gift shops, lots of stuff for little kids, and strolling musicians. One of them is a scurrilous coot playing a banjo, who approaches Charity and informs her that he lives on the mountain and has come down looking for a wife. She politely rebuffs his advances.

We came to ride the cable car to the top, but I take a wrong turn and end up in a recreation of an antebellum plantation, with a manor house (small), a mansion (large), and other structures moved here from other parts of Georgia. Rather like "Burritt on the Mountain" in Huntsville. Of course, we have to see it all, and enjoy it, but it wasn't in the plans.

After leaving the plantation, a short walk uphill brings us to the cable car terminal. Here, we encounter a practise that persists for the rest of our vacation: Every attraction has a photographer; a family picture is taken, mounted on a themed background or frame, and sold to you after your visit for about \$20. In some cases, this was okay; in most, the pictures *we* took were more interesting than the faked picture they wanted to sell us. And they were always selections, with so many 8x10, so many 4x6, so many wallet sizes - it was like getting school portraits.



Up we went. Stone Mountain is an unusual formation, probably a problem for geologists just like Devil's Tower in Wyoming is a problem. It's a huge granite lump rising out of the flat plain. The walls are steep, and at the beginning of the 20th century, with pro-South feelings still running high, the Daughters of the Confederacy commissioned a sculpture of Southern Civil War heroes. After numerous changes in direction and host organizations, the sculpture of Jefferson

Davis, Robert E. Lee, and Stonewall Jackson was completed - on a scale larger than the faces on Mount Rushmore! The cable car offers a nice view of the sculpture. However, once you're on top, the interest fades rapidly. The experience of being on this big bald hill is unique, but there's nothing really to see (the tall buildings of downtown Atlanta are blue in the distance), and there's nothing else up here. So back down we go.

We then visit the museum for the construction of the monument, which is rather like the Mount Rushmore museum, but being privately funded (Stone Mountain is a state park, Mount Rushmore is a national monument), the visit doesn't last long.



After returning to the "town", having lunch at the train depot, and learning that the train around the mountain leaves every hour (and we can't wait), we are ready to leave and see Downtown Atlanta.

Second Disaster

We didn't intend to do the "plantation" thing, just the sky-ride. Our original plan was to spend the morning at Stone Mountain, and the

afternoon in Downtown Atlanta, but we didn't leave Stone Mountain until the afternoon. *Error #1: We failed to stick to our plan*

The intent was to go immediately to downtown. But we didn't get out the atlas and plan a route to get there. We just struck out, missed the entrance to the beltway, and started driving across Metropolitan Atlanta, trying to navigate with the inadequate map in the road atlas. *Error #2: We failed to plan our route to our destination*

So we thought we wanted local route 10. We were on local route 10, but the road curved and forked, and it wasn't clear where 10 went. We went the wrong way. The choice was to go back to where we started [the right choice] or go back to the fork and take the other road [the wrong choice]. Proceeding back onto 10 to go back where we started, I was in the right lane of a four-lane road. The fork arrived, and in a moment of hysteria and poor judgment, I attempted to turn left on the other road. A really stupid tourist driving move. I didn't see the car in the left hand lane. So we sideswiped. Didn't hurt her car much, but it messed up our rental pretty bad.

Outcome: it was my fault, I have a Decatur "improper left turn" ticket; fortunately, nobody was hurt, and my insurance will take care of it (at the cost of the deductible and elevated premiums for the next three years); and National won't give me a replacement vehicle. Bad scene. *Lessons Learned: Stick with your plan, and plan your driving route before you leave*

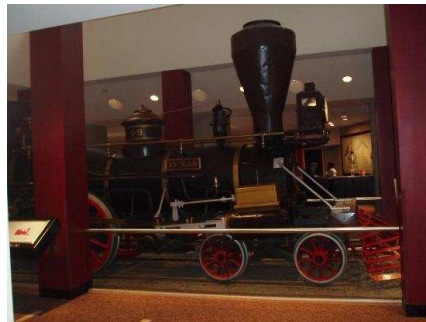
The rest of the day is spent waiting for a taxi to pick us up at the accident scene and take us to our downtown hotel, then reporting to the insurance people, then contacting Dollar Car Rental at the airport, then getting another taxi to take us to the airport (all Atlanta taxi drivers seem to be immigrants who can barely speak English - I wonder how they pass their commercial driver's license tests), and this last one is convinced that the rental counters are at the pick-up lots, not in the airport terminal itself. He didn't get much of a tip when we finally got out at the "Arriving Flights" doors.), and then driving our new (and inferior) rental back to the hotel. So we don't see "Underground Atlanta", the Coke Museum, the Olympic compound, or any of the interesting buildings on Peachtree St. On the other hand, we *do* notice that Downtown Atlanta after nightfall is lit up like Times Square.

Thursday June 26: Atlanta (the Remnant): Next morning, the plan calls for us to leave early for Chattanooga, but we can't bring ourselves to leave Atlanta without seeing *something*, so we agree to spending a few hours at the Cyclorama.

Grant Park is a beautiful park with huge trees and steep hillsides southeast of Downtown, and is home to the Zoo and the Cyclorama. At the turn of the Century (about the same time the idea for the Stone Mountain sculpture was born), some German artists got the idea for painting a commemorative panoramic picture of the Battle for Atlanta. The idea was, the painting (three stories tall) would be mounted in a temporary wooden structure which could be moved from city to city, set up for paying visitors, and then dismantled. This model worked for a while (there were several such paintings at that time; only two, including Atlanta's, survive), but the market finally fell through and the painting was abandoned, to finally be acquired by the City of Atlanta and given a permanent home here.



The audience sat in a rotating structure while the tour guide pointed out features in the painting or as sculpted tableaux at its base, and told the story of the Battle of Atlanta as conducted by Gen. Sherman. It was worth the visit.



The Cyclorama building also contains The Texas, one of the locomotives used by the Confederates to pursue some Yankee soldiers who had captured a train and were moving across the South on a mission to sabotage the railroad, destroying as they went. The Great Train Chase. The Yanks were captured - and most of them were executed as spies.

It is now late morning. Time to leave for Chattanooga!

On to Tennessee: See Part 4