

C(8,W,T,S,F)

travel log


Iris Sanderson Jones

Things heavenly are best au naturel

Travel promoters like to add a little religion to their tourist attractions for special effects. They especially like Leonardo Da Vinci's "Last Supper."

Sometimes its religion-as-art and sometimes its religion-as-nature but the two common presences are The Voice and The Lights. Oh, yes, and let's not forget The Music.

I've seen three examples lately, one in Los Angeles and two in Natural Bridge, Va. Each one outdid the last.

Forest Lawn in Los Angeles is a cemetery that has gained celebrity status. Some aspects of it are very attractive, such as the landscaping and the small stone church.

The cemetery's rendering of "The Last Supper" is in a carved stone building, in a room surrounded by small sculptures. Visitors are asked to sit down on rows of folding chairs. The Lights go out. The Voice resonates through the room.

There are drawn curtains across the wall, and at the right moment they part to show the reproduction of "The Last Supper." As a work of art, it is interesting. As religious theater, it is full of light and sound but not taste.

I saw "The Last Supper" again this week at Natural Bridge, a scenic natural wonder privately owned.

The letters G.W. are carved on the side of the huge stone arch, said to have been surveyed by George Washington. Thomas Jefferson was so impressed with this natural bridge that he asked for and received a land grant to own it.

Soldiers from the Revolutionary War dropped small bits of lead from the top. The lead, as it fell, froze into shape when it hit the water and became a bullet.

In those days you could probably wonder down the hill for nothing and look at the bridge.

Nowadays it costs \$1. At the top of the hill, surrounding the parking lot, are several red brick buildings with traditional Virginia columns.

One is the entrance to the bridge, and a gift shop. Another is a tastefully designed hotel with a good dining room, run by the same private company. A third is the Natural Bridge Wax Museum.

The wax museum traces the history of the area from stone age men through all the Virginia presidents, in a passable array of wax figures. The piece de resistance is through a final door and has nothing to do with Natural Bridge.

GO THROUGH THE DOOR. Sit in rows of folding chairs. The Lights go out. The Music begins. The Voice recites the story of the last meal Christ and his disciples ate together. The Lights go on. There, across the stage in front of you, is a life-sized reproduction of "The Last Supper" in wax figures.

The Lights and The Voice begin again. The Crucifixion appears behind the supper scene and finally The Resurrection. The owner and maker is justly proud of what he has wrought with his hands. I cannot bring myself to tell him that the religious theater is not in keeping with the setting.

Later that night, we go downhill to watch the sound and light show, The Day of Creation, played on Natural Bridge. Here, too, we have The Voice, The Lights and The Music. Only this time they were saying "On the first day, God created..."

As the last note of music is played, and The Voice fades away, I see that the woman in front of me is crying. It is apparently quite common for this kind of religious theater to evoke this response.

I, too, want to cry, but for a different reason. The best way I know to honor the creator of a natural wonder like Natural Bridge is to leave it alone with the trees, the birds and the sky.

CORRECTION: Our March 31 story about Fort Jefferson, Fla., included an airline and phone number that are no more.

Flights to Fort Jefferson are now scheduled twice daily, at 8:30 a.m. (return at noon) and 12:30 p.m. (return at 4:30 p.m.) from Sugar Loaf Lodge, Sugar Loaf, Fla., about 20 miles from Key West. Phone 1-305-745-3211. The cost is \$55 per person round-trip or \$30 for children 6 and younger. For overnight campers or those wishing an all-day visit, the cost is \$110.

A Cessna 185 seaplane is flown by Al Weintraub, whose home number is 295-5254. Reservations are needed two to three days in advance.

Old times here are not forgotten

By IRIS SANDERSON JONES

SHENANDOAH VALLEY, VA. — This has been an important week in the Shenandoah Valley. Apple trees were budding the blossoms for the annual Shenandoah Apple Blossom Festival in Winchester. Young boys in Civil War uniforms fought the Battle of New Market once again on the fields outside New Market Battlefield Park. Old inns and historic houses dusted their antiques for the coming of spring and the opening of the tourist season.

There is a sense of discovery for the traveler in the valley, even though you drive expressways through some of the oldest settled land in America.

The Blue Ridge, to the east, and the Alleghenies, to the west, look much as they did when George Washington surveyed this land in the 18th century. The valley runs from Harper's Ferry in the north to Lexington in the south, with echoes on every inch of highway: John Brown, Stonewall Jackson, Calvin Coolidge.

The pleasant surprise is that very little of this has succumbed to 20th century amusement park hype. There are few signs to clutter the wilderness beside the road or the view past clipped grass and sleepy horses to white fenced old farms on the slopes.

Washington's survey office in Winchester is just now getting its act together as a tourist attraction, so there is little slickness to spoil that sense of discovery that we all love when we travel.

Most of the historic attractions of the Shenandoah Valley have been restored during the last 15 or 20 years. The chain hotels are here, and the old inns have combined 1980s bathrooms with their 1950s furniture, but you won't find any huge high-rise hotels on the skyline.

Highway 11, the old Valley Pike, from Winchester to Lexington, gives you a good taste of this wonderful old valley, but be prepared to fight the Civil War all the way.

In Winchester, a narrow road and two brick walls separates the Union cemetery from the Stonewall Jackson cemetery where Valley heroes are buried. There is a well-restored old stone house called Abrams Delight from Revolutionary times, but the most visited house in town is Stonewall Jackson's headquarters.

Jackson is the living hero of the Shenandoah. He rides his bronze horse through many towns along the valley floor, and his name is on everybody's lips, from the site of the Battle of Winchester to the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington.

These fields were the granary of the Confederacy. The two most important historic facts in every-day conversation are about Jackson, who continually outwitted the Yankees, and Union General Philip Sheridan, the Scourge of the Valley, who burned everything in the valley to cinders in a final attempt to stop the Confederate forces.

One grand old house that escaped the torch was Belle Grove, which is open to visitors outside of Middletown. A history lover called Leo Bernstein has restored the wayside Inn for lodgers and diners.

Soaping it up

Kings Island family entertainment center will present its second annual "Soap Opera Festival" May 10 and 11 in the International Showplace outdoor theater.

The 75-minute talk shows are scheduled for noon and 3 p.m. both days and will feature four popular soap operas. They are: *Delicious* (Dr. Marlena Craig), *Days of Our Lives* (Michael Storm, Dr. Larry Wolek), *One Life to Live* (Leslie Charleson (Monica Quartermain) and Ken Shriner (Scotty Baldwin), both of "General Hospital").

The four programs will be moderated by Joyce Becker, founder of the festival and columnist for Daytime TV magazine.

The festival will be free to park patrons. Kings Island is 20 miles north of Cincinnati on I-71 and open weekends only until May 24.

Blue Lake on tap

FIFTEEN YEARS have come and gone since Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp pitched its tent in Twin Lake in Muskegon County.

They will be celebrating that fact in song, dance, comedy and mime during the camp's fifth "Highlights Concert Series," which runs Saturday nights beginning June 28.

Artists appearing include:
New Christy Minstrels June 28
Bartone Robert Merrill July 5
Violinist Eugene Fodor July 12
Northshore Community Band July 19
Paul Gaudin Mime Company July 26
Comedian Bill Cosby Aug. 2
County Basie and his Band Aug. 9
Dance Ring (N.Y. ballet company) Aug. 16
Merrill, Fodor, Cosby, Dance Ring and the Gaudin Mime Company will perform with the Blue Lake Festival Orchestra. Merry also will sing with the Blue Lake High School Choir, and the artists will conduct clinics for Blue Lake campers before or after performances.

The Northshore (Chicago) Community Band will participate in special anniversary programs July 19-20, with Michigan high school band, orchestra and vocal directors. The band is conducted by John Paynter of Northwestern University and is comprised of many Chicago-area music teachers.

For information or individual or season tickets, write: Highlights, Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp, Twin Lake, Mich. 49457; or call 1-616-894-9026.

Both packages include: Round-trip Coach air fare from Detroit on United Airlines. Complimentary meals and beverage en route. Round-trip airport transfers. Complete baggage handling throughout (2 pieces). And more.

Fare includes all taxes, service, and air-

11:30 a.m., about 75 antique automobiles on parade plus other entries.

For information, write Leo Harrison of the Memphis Historical Society at 8055 Main St., Memphis, Mich. or call 1-392-2355 evenings or weekends. During the day, call Jim Mason, 1-727-9587.

in Middletown, as well as the Strasburg Hotel in nearby Strasburg.

AS YOU DRIVE south, you will find that new things are also happening in the Shenandoah Valley. The Shenandoah Vineyards, managed by Alan Kinne of Michigan, is part of a new movement to grow hybrid French grapes on fertile valley ground.

Jim and Becky Ellis have just opened a large new restaurant and bar among the scrubbed birch floors and the old grain bins of the Edinburg Mill in the village of Edinburg.

These small first steps at economic renewal are badly needed in an area that has been generally bypassed by industry; an area that would prefer to sell history and nature rather than electronics.

The natural limestone formations have provided tourist attractions here for years: huge caverns, such as the Shenandoah and Skyline caverns, natural chimneys near Harrisonburg, and the Natural Bridge south of Lexington.

One of the best attempts to commemorate the Civil War and attract tourists is at the New Market Battlefield Park in New Market designed and run by James Geary for the Virginia Military Institute.

On Sunday the park re-enacted the battle was designed to honor, in which cadets from VMI fought and died to stop the Union forces here at New Market.

A trip to Battlefield Park includes two films on the period, a display room that gives you an excellent capsule history of the Civil War, and the restored farmhouse and hilltop site, bristling with cannons, where the Battle of New Market was fought.

New Market is also the home of the Shenandoah Valley Tourist Information Center, where Director Meriwether German and his staff will give you detailed information about tourist attractions, lodging and restaurants up and down the valley.

Next week: The historic village of Lexington.



A student stands guard beneath General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, who likewise stands guard over the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington. (Photo by Iris Sanderson Jones)

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Cranking it out

The Memphis Historical Society has confirmed that Memphis, Mich. is the site of the first self-propelled passenger car built in this state.

To commemorate the 95th anniversary of Michigan's first automobile, the city celebrating May 18. Events will include old-fashioned hot air balloons, a masonic old-fashioned breakfast from 7-