

Travel



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O&E Thursday, August 19, 1984

Elvis story lives on at Graceland mansion

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — "Elvis — We Love You and We Miss You."

Those words are written in blue chalk on the red brick gateposts at Graceland, the Memphis mansion where Elvis Presley lived for 20 years and where he died seven years ago today.

Thousands of Elvis's fans went through that gate late last night in a candlelight procession that wound past Fred Sli's gatehouse and up the long winding driveway to the house set in acres of grass and trees at the top of a hill.

Fans tour the house and grounds, and visit Elvis's grave, every day on tours, but the procession was a special occasion. It was part of the second annual Elvis International Tribute march, organized for Aug. 11-18 by the Graceland management, who run the estate in the name of Elvis's teen-aged daughter Lisa Marie.

Iris Jones

I've toured a lot of 'historic' houses in my time, but this one tells its sad-happy story of the rewards and price of fame better than some. Nobody has tried to make Elvis more or less than the poor boy who became an overnight success and was caught over after in his own fame.

PRESLEY WAS BORN 100 miles away in Tupelo, Mississippi, and learned a lot of his lip-shaking rhythms from performers on Beale Street in Memphis before cutting his first record at Sun Studio in 1954.

The record, which cost four dollars, was a birthday present for his mother: "My Blue Heaven." Tour guides will tell you that he was discovered by accident when he began to make his own distinct musical sounds after the taping was over.

You can tour Sun Studio, a small red brick building at Union and Marshall streets in Memphis, but it would be hard to imagine the meteoric rise that occurred between then and the day he bought Graceland in 1957.

That is a very short time to go through the gravitational pull of sudden fame. The house with the white columns and the stone doo-doo lions, tells that story to those who look.

ON THE MAIN floor, the crystal chandelier hangs over the initialled wine glasses on the dining room table to the one side of the central hall. A white-carpeted room leads through blue drapes to a gold piano on the other side.

If you think Elvis's musical fame is past tense, think again. He not only made more gold records than any other performer, but another five records were certified gold in 1983. Michael Jackson would have to sell at his current rate for 17 years to match Elvis's sales record.

You can't tour the upstairs bedrooms at Graceland, but you can see the rooms where Elvis relaxed in the basement. A favorite room full of television sets and blue velvet couches. The couches scattered with 19 gold-and-white pillows inset with mirrors.

On another level, you'll find the gaudy carved wooden furniture of the jungle room, where Elvis recorded his last album, *Moody Blues*. (A tiny barking dog distracted us at that point in our tour. It was Elvis's Pomeranian Edmond, who still lives in the mansion with Elvis's Aunt Delta.)

THE TOUR takes you out of the jungle room into the carport, where the pink jeep used in the movie "Blue Hawaii" sits next to a pink Cadillac bought for Elvis's mother and the Stutz Blackhawk the singer drove to the dentist the day before he died.

If you are an Elvis fan, all this is heavy stuff. If not, you are bemused by the contrast: the gaudy furniture in the elegant setting, the horses browsing beyond the white fence, the memorabilia in the small museum and the film shown in what was once a racquetball court.

The 12-minute, multi-media show is certainly the weakest part of the tour. It doesn't live up to the standards of a musical star or the expectation tourists may have of seeing their favorite singer at work.

I preferred to walk back across the street and talk to Fred Sli, who has been the gate-man at Graceland since 1964. You can walk past Fred and up the driveway to the Meditation Garden free between 7 and 8 a.m., otherwise you wouldn't see him except through the tour bus window.

He will tell you about the 10,000 people who waited outside the gate with candles in their hands on the 1983 anniversary of Elvis' death. Prod him a little and he will also reminisce about what it was like when Elvis came in and out in his car and the fans mobbed him.

Elvis' whole life seems to have been like that after he became a star. His fans loved him and made him a prisoner in his own house. They still love him. It's all there in the small chalked message on the brick gatepost.

"Elvis — We Love You and We Miss You."

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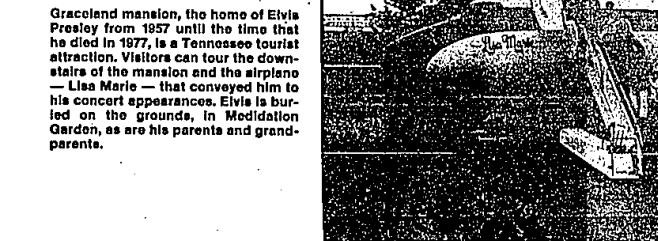
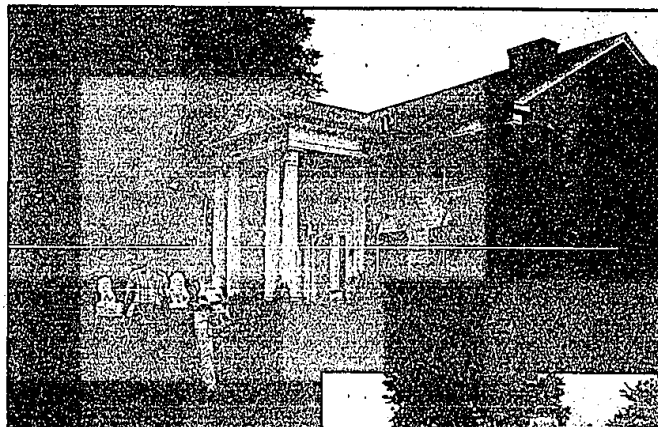
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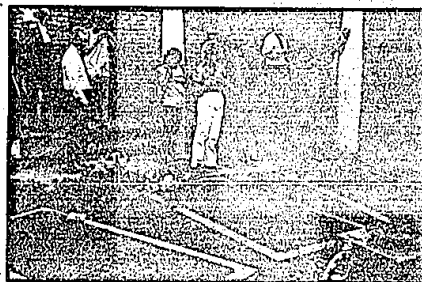
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All paths lead eventually to the Meditation Garden where Elvis is buried.



Photos by Iris Jones

All paths lead eventually to the Meditation Garden where Elvis is buried with his parents and grandparents. Plastic flowers decorate his grave, accompanied usually by a fresh bouquet of blooms marked with a personal message of affection from a fan or fan club.

TOURS OF GRACELAND start and end across Elvis Presley Boulevard (Highway 51) at a staging area, where a new tourist attraction was added this spring: Elvis' Convair 440 airplane, named the Lisa Marie.

If you want to spend \$3.50 to see a film of a plane flying through the air, and to tour the places where Elvis slept and kept his clothes aboard the plane, you should add this to the \$5.50 (\$4.50 under 12 years old) already budgeted for the Graceland tour.

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"Elvis — We Love You and We Miss You."

Connecticut is more than leaves changing color

By Greg Melikov
special writer

"What do you do for excitement around here?"

"We go down by the lake and watch the leaves change color."

That old joke is true of Connecticut. Tourists come from throughout the world, residents stay, to watch Mother Nature paint summer leaves the fall colors of the rainbow.

The Constitution State is as diverse as its striking small mountains and broad low river plain. Northwestern Connecticut, especially, offers a vacation smorgasbord.

You can hike, bicycle, camp, fish, boat, swim, picnic, birdwatch, horse-back-ride, town-hop, visit museums and art galleries, view historic houses more than 200 years old, check out farms and pick fruit, attend fairs and tour a vineyard and winery.

A RECTANGULAR section of Northwestern Connecticut — bounded by Routes 7, 4, 43 and 103 — offers all this along a 40-mile stretch of highway in the borough of Litchfield. Along the way you will pass more antique shops and gas stations.

About 33 miles north of Danbury, on Route 7, near the New York State Line, lies Kent, settled in 1738. You won't completely escape the outside world, the old Kent Market stands next to the new Kent Video building.

Just north is the Sloan-Stanley Museum, opened in 1959 on the site of the Kent blast furnace that transformed

ore into 15 tons of pig iron daily from 1828 to '62.

The museum features early American tools and implements, many handmade, carved from wood or forged from iron. You'll see a 1790 sawmill blade and an all-wood footwarmer, a wooden splint sheet that once supported a mattress in a rope bed.

MUSEUM HOURS are 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Wednesday to Sunday, through October.

Other nearby points of interest include: Kent Covered Bridge, one of the three remaining in the state.

Kent Historical Society Museum, open 2-4:30 p.m., Saturday and Sunday through August.

Kent Falls State Park, scenic roadside parkland dominated by a 200-foot cascade: camping, fishing, hiking, picnicking.

Macedonia Brook State Park, off Route 341: camping, fishing, hiking, picnicking, swimming.

Less than 13 miles north on Route 4 is Cornwall. Between Cornwall and Goshen on intersecting Route 63 are many high rugged hills and ridges, flanked by steep slopes.

PLACES of interest include: Cornwall Covered Bridge, Routes 7 and 12; Cornwall-Canaan bike trail, 24 miles long; Cornwall Historical Society Museum; Mohawk State Park; and Goshen Historical Society Museum.

The Goshen Fair runs three days, Labor Day weekend.

Ten miles south of Goshen where

one of the famous natives, Educator Sarah Pierce's school on North Street was the first to offer higher learning to women, starting in 1792. Writer Harriet Beecher Stowe, born within walking distance, was one of 3,000 who attended the academy during its 63 years.

Across south Street from the Wolcott house is the birthplace of American jurisprudence. Tapping Reeve came to Litchfield in 1771, passed the bar in 1773, wed Sally Burr and they moved into their new home in 1773.

The tour guide points out that Reeve immediately opened his six-room house to law students, who were taught in the parlor and slept in the attic. Reeve's first students was his wife's brother,

who lived in one of the three upstairs bedrooms. You'll see the room but no sign that says "Aaron Burr slept here."

Reeve's house and school are open noon to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday through mid-October.

You can see much of Northwestern

Connecticut in a day. You can stay overnight at a quaint inn. You can dine at numerous fine restaurants. You don't have to wait for the leaves to change color to see a beautiful part of the country where everything goes.

THE GREEN Mountain Boy is only

Routes 63 and 202 intersect is Litchfield, incorporated in 1719. It is the most historic town in the area.

The focal point is the Village Green which remains the same since it was laid out in the early 1700s.

The Litchfield walking tour features 42 points of interest. The most historic street is South where the house of Declaration of Independence signer Oliver Wolcott Sr. was built in 1753. It remained in the family until several years ago when an ancestor made an unpopular decision and sold it.

At the lower end of the Old South Road is the homestead of Ethan Allen that dates back to 1736, one year before his birth.

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