

TRAVEL

O&E Monday, September 18, 1991



Iris Jones

Travelers tell tourism tales

Every traveler has a story to prove that truth is stranger than fiction.

My "impossible coincidence" occurred when I learned that a South African living in Michigan has a sister who lives across the street from my grandmother in Stratford-on-Avon, England.

We had never met before and we discovered this during a casual conversation among mutual friends. The chances of that happening are much less than the chances of winning the million-dollar lottery.

JAMES LOPRETE and his wife discovered their impossible coincidence on a recent 33-day tour of Poland, Czechoslovakia and eastern Germany.

They live in Orchard Lake. They knew about St. Cyril and Methodius Seminary, on the western shore of Orchard Lake, but they didn't expect to run into that name in the farmlands outside Warsaw.

Someone broke into their car on a Saturday afternoon, so they were driving with two broken windows when they went 40 miles west to Chopin's birthplace the next day.

"On the way back we saw a young priest hitchhiking. He spoke some English and in the course of our limited conversation we learned that his best friend had spent time at the Orchard Lake seminary."

THAT MILD coincidence was compounded the next day when LoPrete went to "a small farm outside Warsaw where an individual entrepreneur was making a very good living replacing auto windows. Some Polish people whose car was also being repaired spoke some English."

The two couples were sitting over a farmer's kitchen table drinking coffee when the Polish people pulled out photos taken during a trip to the United States. "He showed us some pictures of the two of them with a lake in the background. The picture had been taken in front of the Orchard Lake Seminary where they had visited his brother, who had been a priest there for a short time."

"I do not know what the odds would be that we would run into two people without any prearrangement, on a totally unscheduled basis, both of them with connections to an institution in our small community."

LoPrete added a P.S.: "The whole trip, even without advance reservations and English only, proved to be delightful and we would recommend it to others. Best of all the cost was about 70 percent of what we were used to paying in Western Europe."

THE NAME of Orchard Lake came up again when I spoke to Sarah Kneisel, a General Motors engineer who grew up in West Bloomfield, graduated from Mercy High School and earned a degree in industrial design from the University of Michigan.

Sarah's husband, Mark, teaches at St. Mary's High School in Orchard Lake. Mark graduated from South Lyon High School and the U-M and now coaches basketball and rowing at the school.

Mississippi yearning

Relive the old South in Natchez

By By Armand Gebert
special writer

Hoop-skirted ladies will guide visitors through high-ceilinged rooms and up spiraling stairways during the annual Fall Pilgrimage tours in Natchez, Miss., Oct. 5-25.

Natchez, population 22,400, was spared much of the pillage and burning of the Civil War, so more than 500 pre-war mansions, churches and other buildings remain intact or have been restored. Twenty-six of them are open to the public during the Fall Pilgrimage.

You will find manicured gardens, stately pillared mansions with priceless furnishings and heirlooms, stories and legends, mint juleps and marvelous cuisine — a place where Southern hospitality is alive and well. Half of these houses serve as bed-and-breakfast inns, which compete in the arenas of elegance and graciousness.

Each mansion could be an ideal setting for a romantic novel. Each has its distinctive personality. However, disciplined selection is needed to prevent an overdose of splendor.

Longwood is probably the best property on which to rouse yesterday's ghosts. Never completed because of the war, the five-story octagonal-shaped house has an Oriental mode, including Byzantine arches, and an onion dome which caps and dominates the structure.

The exterior is finished. The interior is a shell. Paint buckets and nail kegs, dusty packing boxes and tool sets are scattered throughout, reminders of the Northern artisans who fled when word arrived of the firing-on-Fort Sumter. Only these elements are complete, nine rooms where the occupants lived out the war.

Each December is devoted to a Victorian Christmas pageant at Longwood. Candlelight tours, a con-

cert of black spirituals and a first-person-account performance about attending an 1862 Christmas party are highlights of the event in the house, which glows with 100,000 lights.

Stanton Hall, the largest of the mansions, features a white classical colonnade and occupies an entire city block. Built in 1857, it features Carrara marble mantels, gold-leaf mirrors, bronze chandeliers and sterling door knobs as accents to luxurious furnishings made possible by King Cotton.

Rosalie is another genteel knock-out. It served as the Union Army's local headquarters during the war and in 1863 was occupied by Gen. Ulysses S. Grant. The gold-leaf mirrors, now hanging on the walls, were buried in a cave during the occupation. Rosalie overlooks the Mississippi, so it is a good site on which to ponder the past and the strategic role the mighty river played in the war.

One antidote to mansion overdose is to intersperse visits with other Natchez lifestyles.

Under-the-Hill on Silver Street is an example. It is a contrast to the stateliness of the uphill aristocratic section of town. This was the lair for gamblers and riverboat roughnecks. It teemed with brothels and bars. Its caves were filled with stolen goods.

The restored neighborhood is now home to shops and restaurants. The Under-the-Hill season with numerous French doors opening onto a gallery is a delightful spot to grab a rocker and watch river traffic.

For lodging information, reservations and tour tickets contact the Natchez Pilgrimage Tour, Canal at State Street, P.O. Box 347, Natchez, Miss. 39121 or telephone toll-free (800) 647-6742. A three-house tour costs \$12 and a four-house tour is \$14 per person. Twelve of the homes are open year round.

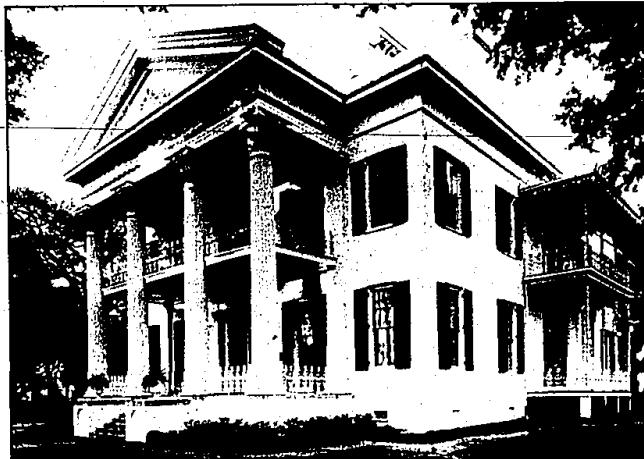


Photo by MARK COFFEY

Stanton Hall, the largest of the mansions, features a white classical colonnade and occupies an entire city block. It was built in 1857.



Visitors can learn of military strategies, defenses and offenses at Vicksburg National Military Park.



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Civil War vivid in Vicksburg

VICKSBURG, MISS. — The Vicksburg National Military Park is the centerpiece of this historic, proud, battle-scarred city. Memories of a 47-day Union siege, May 19 through July 14, 1863, are still vivid here.

Go first to the park's visitors center to capture the impact and understanding of the hardships endured by a beleaguered city. Study the dioramas of civilians seeking refuge in caves from bombardments. Learn of military strategies, defenses and offenses.

Then rent a tape cassette (\$4.50) and drive along a 16-mile trail through 2,000 acres of woods and hills, peppered with commemorative monuments and markers.

There's a transformation. A narrator changes the green hills into bloody entrenchments. A battle rages where majestic monuments were later to be erected, honoring the fallen Blues and Greys.

clarification

Our recent story on Laramie, Wyo., included a wrong address and phone number for the Vee Bar Guest Ranch. The Vee Bar is at 2091 State Highway 130, Laramie, Wyo. 82070, telephone (307) 745-7036.

Opposite the National Cemetery entrance is the museum for the USS Cairo, a sunken Union gunboat that has been salvaged. The ironclad Cairo destroyed on the Yazoo River by Confederates is believed to have been the first vessel sunk by an electrically detonated mine.

For information, contact your travel agent or the Vicksburg Convention and Visitors Bureau, P.O. Box 110, Vicksburg, Miss. 39180 or telephone toll-free (800) 221-3536.

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