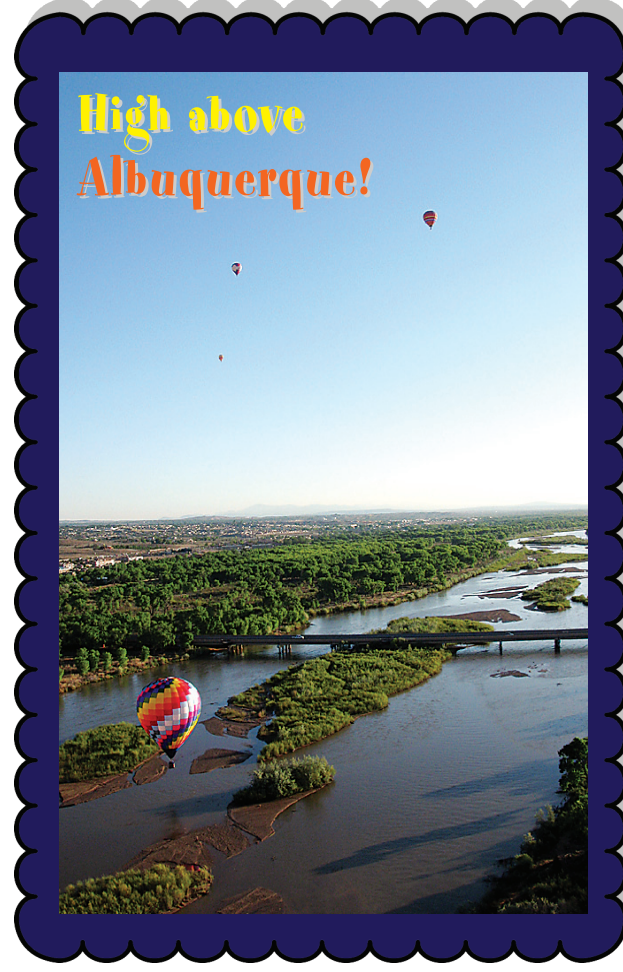


Louisiana Capitol



High above Albuquerque!



River Walk San Antonio, Texas

ago. Coronado had not yet failed in his expedition to find gold here. Henry the VIII was ruling in Britain. Captain John Smith, of Jamestown fame, would not be born for another 41 years! And the Spanish are...already... here.

My iPod says that Santa Fe is 1,869 miles west of Jamestown. In the museum in the Palace of the Governors, the oldest continually occupied public structure in America, I see a 1600s-era map that shows "Virginie" as an insignificant bubble of territory huddled on the East Coast. Santa Fe, with its San Miguel Church, was an established community just as Jamestown was first settled. Even then it was known as "New" Mexico, to differentiate it from "Old" Mexico to the south.

Meanwhile, the French claimed all the territory to the north. In fact, in 1720, a Spanish expedition from Santa Fe ran into the French and the Pawnee to fight a pitched battle near present-day Nebraska! When it was fought, our own Alexander Spotswood, the man whose name is synonymous with western expansion, had only peaked over the Blue Ridge Mountains four years prior! Colonel James P. Taylor II had not even built Bloomsbury yet!

And so whereas we "Anglos" in Virginia look to Europe and particularly the British Isles as the source of our "roots," and African Americans look to East Africa for theirs, it is an entirely different story in Santa Fe. They look not to Europe, but south to "Old" Mexico. In an El Paso convenience store I am a minority. So is the black guy waiting in line behind me. Psychologically, Blacks and Whites are still 'come-tos' to this territory, and Indios and Latinos are 'here-before-es.' The 2008 census estimates 45 percent of New Mexico is of Hispanic origin; another 10 percent is Native American.

Considering this, it is a marvel that English is our primary language. It might be second, or even third, were it not for the Louisiana Purchase, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hildalgo and an odd little boundary adjustment known as the Gadsden Purchase.

Whether it was land, gold, grazing, adventure, political control, lawlessness, whatever, the Camino Real brought the Mexicans north; the Santa Fe Trail brought the white man west. They met in Santa Fe.

By the 1870s the iron road had reached Santa Fe, taking only 30 months to lay down 1,000 miles of track and thereby winning the race over who was to control this area. Still, New Mexico didn't become a state until 1912...the 47th to join the fold. In 1926, Route 66, following the Santa Fe Trail for the most part, brought the automobile, bearing everybody from artists to nuclear scientists. And the rest is, as they say, history.

We head for home, on a four-lane through Oklahoma that follows that very path. It really is all about routes and roots... where you're going and where you're coming from.

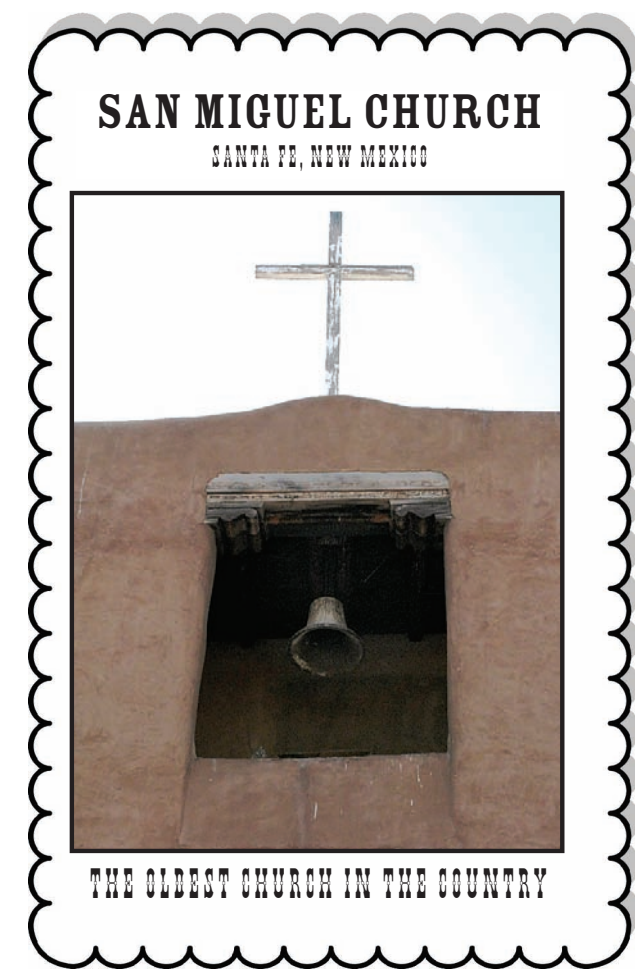
# Postcards from The Road



On the road again...



Puye Cliffs, NEW MEXICO



SAN MIGUEL CHURCH  
SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

THE OLDEST CHURCH IN THE COUNTRY

Welcome to our fifth edition of "Postcards," the annual Insider that takes a look at America and what makes it tick (by the way, we still don't have the answer to that question).

This time we decided to visit the American southwest. It was a heckuva trip... 4,651 miles in our mini RV, from Virginia through east Tennessee, down the Natchez Trace across Mississippi, and into Louisiana. We crossed Texas at its widest part from Orange (see accompanying article) to El Paso. Then we then turned north into New Mexico, soared high above Albuquerque in a hot-air balloon, spent some time rubbing shoulders with artists and Indians in Santa Fe, before heading back home by way of Oklahoma and Missouri. We realize that this is a timeworn saying, but we confirmed that in America, it's all about the road.

Whether you're on an ancient Indian path, an urban river walk, historic Old Route 66, a six-lane interstate, the Mississippi River or the Santa Fe trail, it's all about the road... that and where you're coming from. Routes and roots, we call it.

The journey starts here in Gordonsville. But two and a half centuries ago folks did not make a trip like this for pleasure; it was made out of necessity. We've all seen the heroic paintings of the romanticized jut-jawed pioneer men and women blazing their way west with their ox-drawn covered wagons. But truth of the matter is, many were running away... from creditors, from persecution, from the law.

We pass into Tennessee near the Cumberland Gap where Daniel Boone heroically led such a party through to the promised land of Kentucky, when there were no roads. This is the man who when asked if he'd ever been lost, reportedly replied, "No, but I have been a mite confused for three weeks at a time."

Ms. Garmin with her gentle suggestions and recalculations is not in the least confused as she guides us past Gordonsville, Tennessee, with its very own Route 231. We pass the birthplace of another larger-than-life backwoodsman, Davey Crockett, knowing full well that in just four days time, we will visit the Alamo where he died.

We wonder why these people kept on going west, past verdant farmland and perfectly good places to settle, only to plunge further and further into forbidding desert. Was it the lure of gold, or was it what we call "just-around-the-next-bend syndrome." Looking for campsites on canoe trips, we have been known to paddle past dark trying to find the perfect place to lay our head... just around the next bend.

Below Nashville we join the Natchez Trace, a gently winding, leafy parkway that crosses the state of Mississippi diagonally with nary a town or traffic light for 440 miles. This is an important road. It started out as a Paleo hunting trail 10,000 years ago. Then it morphed into a Chickasaw, Choctaw and Natchez Indian path. The Spanish soon discovered it and turned it to their own use, as they did everything.

By the 18th century the Natchez Trace was

the way home for the Ohio River flat boaters. Having floated their goods down the Ohio and Mississippi for sale at trading posts like Natchez, Baton Rouge and New Orleans, they couldn't very well row those clunky barges back upstream. So, they sold their boats for lumber (hence the typical Louisiana shotgun house), and walked home via the Natchez Trace. In places, you can still see the old sunken roadbed winding beside the parkway.

It is along this very trail that Meriwether Lewis, beset by demons, laudanum and alcohol was either murdered or pulled the trigger on himself in a roadside tavern...a desperate and lonely end for this Albemarle County hero who had safely led the Corps of Discovery on river



and mountain roads to the Pacific and back.

From Baton Rouge we cross America's central artery and head west, across the brooding Atchafalaya Swamp, where the Interstate walks on stilts, resembling a giant centipede winding through the rice paddies, crayfish farms, and cypress bogs. We cross the Sabine River and enter Texas at milepost 883 at the Town of Orange. More on that later.

It's ugly around here, with circular squatting fuel storage tanks and towering spacestation-like refineries with their eternal flames, belching a sulfurous natural gas and petroleum stench. Tall forests of signs promoting everything from Wal-mart to Waffle House,

Target to Taco Bell beckon us off the Interstate to spend, spend, and spend some more. But we have no time for that; we're headed west, young man, through the nightmare that is Houston, now the fourth largest city in the United States. We find safety on the other side in a fetid roadside campground that collects rescue animals both two and four legged. We note that none of the RVs deploy their awnings. We wonder why.

We find out the next day. We're taking a back road to San Antonio because we want to actually see something, and there, on the horizon, loom the ominous clouds. First they are mustard yellow, then pea green then black with portentous upside-down, pyramid-like projections, known as mammae because they resemble mammary glands. This is the mother of hell on earth.

Everybody has a bugaboo. For some it's snakes; others it's fire. Maybe an earthquake freaks you out, or a raging hurricane. For us it's tornadoes. The idea that you can be sucked up into the sky, or blasted to smithereens, or punctured by 200-mile per hour darts of straw, or buried alive under tons of rubble...well you get the idea; it terrifies us. We shiver, not just because the temperature has plummeted 30 degrees in 10 minutes. We never saw a funnel that day, but we came as close as we ever care to. Instead we end up safely in soggy San Antonio with its water

road and river walk. This was a major stop for travelers taking the southern route west to El Paso. But between here and there, they had to run a gauntlet through the Davis Mountains past Apache and Comanche Indians coming down from New Mexico and Oklahoma. Fort Davis must have been a welcome sight to these jittery travelers.

During its heyday in the 1880s, there were 400 soldiers and 1,000 horses here. They fought raiding Indians, escorted everything from wagon trains to mail coaches and hunted down bandits, like the infamous Victorio...all to protect a road.

At El Paso, this road T's into the north south

Camino Real de Tierra Adentro, which means the Royal Road to the Interior. It is the major north-south route connecting Mexico City to Santa Fe. It has been here since the late 1500s. Driving on the modern-day equivalent, we pass an exit for "Radium Springs." Soon we are ensconced in a campground in Albuquerque that sits right beside another historic road, albeit more recent... old Route 66. The slip-finger piano theme, from the 1960s TV show of the same name, tinkles in our heads.

In this campground, a '47 Hudson poses as a piece of magnificent yard art. It reminds us of the delightful animated film, "Cars." We relive Paul Newman's performance as that very car in Radiator, not Radium, Springs, a fictitious community of automobiles that the new Interstate has bypassed. Ah, the Interstate; it takes you so far to see so little. Still it is the most magnificent road system in the world.

The next morning at daybreak we see plenty as we soar above Albuquerque in a hot-air balloon. The voyage starts skimming just inches high in a parking lot, then up over the trees and power lines to watch the city awaken from above, our propane burners blasting audible exclamation points. There is no sense of motion because you are traveling at the speed of the wind. Instead, the world turns beneath you, the same odd sensation of standing on a "moving" platform as a "stationary" train rushes by.

We kiss the tops of trees and descend to the Rio Grande, hovering barely four feet above the swirling water. Dogs bark. Joggers point. We ascend to 1,300 feet or more, and drift back over historic Old Route 66. It snakes off in the distance. Once we come back to earth, we will take this route home all the way to the Mississippi.

But not yet. High above this city, the three-dimensional road of balloon travel is a delightful way to get around because, like the trail-blazers of yore, we're never quite sure where we'll end up. In our case it is high desert, jack rabbits scurrying away from our light bulb shaped shadow, as we crash land in a 9-knot wind right next to, you guessed it, a busy road.

Santa Fe is next with its artists, adobe buildings and cliff dwellings. We marvel at the history. Routes and roots. The Camino Real intersects the Santa Fe Trail here. Latino meets Anglo as Indio looks on.

Consider this: as early as 1539, the Spanish were here. An explorer from Florida named Cabeza de Vaca (Cowhead) shipwrecked in Texas and, with a few survivors, wandered this territory for eight years. That was a long time

# Orange, TEXAS

Over the past five years in our travels, we have tried to visit every community named Orange that we could. We have driven through urban communities named Orange in New Jersey and Connecticut. We have actually stopped, visited and written about rural Oranges in Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Ohio and Indiana.

Now we can add Texas to our list. In planning this trip to the desert southwest, we couldn't help notice that our namesake hometown was right on our way.

"We have small town charm and world class culture," Darline Zavada of the Orange Visitor's Bureau repeats the well-rehearsed line about her town and county. "We're a quiet little community."

Not as quiet as ours it would seem. The population of this town right on the Texas/Louisiana border, is about 18,000. The county of the same name claims around 84,000; almost three times as big as



Orange Texas used to be named 'Madison' after our native son, James Madison.

Orange, Texas is the first (or last) exit on Interstate 10 that travels 883 miles across the state at its widest part, east to west. Every year in mid-May it celebrates its Texas Cajun festival of music, dance, and food. Darline (not Darlene) Zavada's name says it all: a Cajun first name and an Hispanic last one. And that's Orange, Texas...so close to Louisiana it's Cajun, so close to the Gulf it's Mexican.

The community lies on the edge of petrochemical country; its employers have names like Bayer, Dupont and Firestone. To the southwest you can see the lights of the Port Arthur refineries. It also has a deepwater port, first established during World War I when the channel on the Sabine River was dredged. During World War II it was a major shipbuilding center.

Still Orange manages to keep a small town feel with its tree-lined residential streets and local folks who go to the Orange Café and Catering Company for lunch. Here they talk about things like the recent town elections, term limits, and the fact that the council has swelled from five to seven members. Sounds familiar.

That building that looks like a courthouse is actually the Presbyterian Church with original Tiffany stained glass windows. Darline tells us proudly it is the first church west of the

Mississippi to have air conditioning. "Oh the humidity is horrible around here," she rolls her eyes dramatically.

She echoes an oft-heard small town frustration when prospective employers ask questions about population. "When you tell them anything below 20,000, it's kind of, 'do they really want to locate in a smaller community?' They're overlooking a lot. We're right here between Houston and New Orleans," she

grouses.

Established as a settlement by French fur trappers around 1718, it was known at one point (are you ready for this?) as 'Madison' after our first son, President James Madison, while he was serving his second term in office. But they had to change the name because of confusion with the town of Madisonville, Texas. So they named it Orange, not for the fourth President's home, but for the wild oranges that supposedly grew along the banks of the river.

Following the Civil War, like many communities in these parts, Orange succumbed to a reign of terror and lawlessness. A storm in 1865 almost wiped it off the map, and to this day, towns in this area define themselves by the storms they have survived. Baton Rouge, for example, doesn't even talk about Katrina; but



The Orange Presbyterian Church was the first public building west of the Mississippi to install air conditioning.

mention Gustav...

As you walk the streets of Orange, two names keep cropping up: Lutchter and Stark. Here's the W.H. Stark house, a perfect Victorian gingerbread right on Main Street. Right next door sprawls the Lutchter Theatre, a huge performing arts space that draws traveling productions from as far away as New York and Boston. Just outside of town lies the 252-acre Shangri La Botanical gardens established by the Nelda C. and H.J. Lutchter Stark Foundation. Who are these guys?

Timber money, mostly; that and gas and oil. According to a plaque, H.J. Lutchter Stark was at one point the wealthiest man in Texas. He and his wife were also philanthropists, and their beneficiaries were their hometown...Orange.

Oh that we should have such a sugar daddy!

Among the numerous public buildings that bear their name is the Stark Museum of Art. When you walk into the two-story atrium the first thing you see are half a dozen Frederic Remington bronzes, flanked by an outstanding collection of American Indian pottery and weavings. As you roam the five galleries, names like Charles Marion Russell, James Audubon, N.C. Wyeth, Joseph Henry Sharp and George Catlin leap out at you.

As we leave this community, we remark that for a small town, we have never seen such an outstanding collection of art...except maybe in one other Orange that we know.