

May 30, 2004

Motoring through Virginia, USA

When we pulled into a 'park in the field' RV park near Dillon, SC we noticed the windshield of the motor home next to us. Both sides were broken, from the middle cross piece radiating out. The folks reported that they had hit a flying buzzard at 61 mph. Vowing to watch those birds along the road a little more carefully, we started out the next morning heading to Virginia Beach. Ten miles down the road we encountered two large brown pigs strolling down the highway. We considered "bumper shopping" for some bacon, but decided to skip it. Challenging driving in South Carolina.

Charlottesville

Thursday we visited Mr. Jefferson and Mr. Monroe. After riding in from Louisa, we fancied a nourishing lunch of fried chicken, stewed tomatoes, black-eyed peas and other good things (including a notable Piedmont ale) at Mr. Michie's Tavern before proceeding. We did not find Mr. Jefferson at home, but Monticello is as nice as we remembered from previous visits. Visiting has become so popular that parking has become a problem, so a place to leave carriages is provided further down the Little Mountain. Walking is good exercise for one's limbs after a ride, according to Mrs. Salmon. Restoration work is being done on the western gallery of the home but all else is in fine repair, and Mr. Jefferson's deserved reputation as an architectural and mechanical genius is on full display. The vegetable gardens are producing nicely, most of the flower gardens are in bloom, and the huge linden and tulip poplar trees are beautiful in full leaf.

From Monticello we proceeded some two miles 'round the hill to Ashland, Mr. Monroe's country home. The Monroes have another home in Charlottesville and one near Washington, so their residence here is modest. Indeed, the only items we found remarkable about the home were the Frenchified wallpapers (such colors!) and the flooring in the dining room. Because food and liquid spills in one's dining room endanger a carpet, wood floors are used. But the Monroes have made what we predict will become a popular innovation for dining rooms. They have procured a most interesting and serviceable flooring, of canvas sailcloth coated with lacquer and painted a pleasing pattern. With a pad underneath it is soft to walk upon, yet durable, and sheds spills with facility. The Hepplewhite chairs and leaved dining table are most fitting in the room, and it is (mercifully!) painted a bright blue rather than covered with the French wallpaper. The grounds are also quite attractive, if not so grand as Mr. Jeffersons. We are told that weddings are often held in these gardens.

By this time Mr. Salmon's pedal extremities had become quite fatigued, so we

undertook the return journey to our own abode, with a stop along the way to purchase viands for our evening repast. A vigorous rain with attendant thunder and lightning enlivened the evening, after which we were lulled to sleep by the sound of rain dripping from the oaks and hickories now sheltering our home. A fine day.

Saturday we were in Richmond, a surprisingly nice city. We drove down Monument Avenue, where Lee/Jackson/Davis and other Rebels sit atop marble and contemplate their failures. At the far end, somewhat out of character, is a monument honoring Arthur Ashe, Jr. Out of character because he was black and because he won... playing tennis. We toured the Fan District, where the streets "fan out" from the Capitol Square -- nice old row houses with a variety of styles of facade and colors, mostly, and many of them now chopped into apartments for the students at VCU. And we wandered the grounds of the Capitol, a fine old building (designed by Mr. Jefferson, Carolyn says) and associated buildings in a big green lawn with old trees, fountains, etc. Quite a nice place. Saw Bobby Lee's house too, just down the street from the square.

After lunch near the Capitol, in the Shockoe district, we drove down to the James River park area, where the Tredegar Works were located. Tredegar was the Confederacy's largest single industrial establishment, where they made Tredegar rifles, cannon, steel plate for their few "ironclads," that sort of thing. The main foundry was smaller than our lot in Pensacola, and the entire works area -- several buildings, grounds, rail shunting yards, etc. -- wasn't much more than a square block. Since the Union had a dozen or more factories larger than Tredegar, it's no wonder the South lost. Sort of like Admiral Yamamoto's advice to the Japanese high command early in 1941: "I was a student at Harvard, and I traveled across the US on my return to Japan. I saw the steel mills in Pittsburgh, the factories in Detroit, the oil fields in Texas. We cannot defeat the Americans." Too bad nobody listens to advice like that.

But the high point was to come. We walked from Tredegar (powered mostly by water wheels) across the street to the James River Park and along the river. We sat on a bench for a while to watch silly people rafting over the small rapids right on the edge of downtown. While we sat there some young folks who had been swimming in the river walked by. One young thing looked at us a minute, then turned to her boyfriend (husband?) as they walked by and said (loudly enough that we could hear), "Isn't that sweet? When we're old we'll be like that." Carolyn gave them a thumbs up. I presented a different digit.

Today, Sunday, is cloudy, misty, cold -- actually ran the heat pump a bit, and we're wearing jeans and long-sleeve shirts. I drove into town to get a Washington Post and we've spent much of the day reading that.

May rain again this evening. The camp is pretty lively, with lots of people and families here for the holiday.

Jack & Carolyn Salmon
On The Road
In the Fish Tank