

## 020813 Whirlwind Out of the Northeast

After a bit of a hiatus, I am once again starting to publish emails. No, I am not yet back in Europe. I depart on August 21st for Iceland where I will spend a day before returning to Copenhagen. Time is a cruel bedfellow. When I arrived in the US in June, two months in the US seemed like a long time. But with a week remaining I am left wondering how it all went so quickly.

The subject of this email will be my recent travels in the US. I thought that I would give them equal standing with my adventures elsewhere in the world since not everyone on this list is from the Northeast, nor from the US for that matter. Plus it has been interesting for me to revisit cities with which I had been acquainted, but now have seen from a different perspective.

My travels in July included a visit with my friends Jeff and Jen Morris in Portland, Maine. Jeff and I have been friends since we were about two years old and so I have been up to Portland countless times since they moved there several years ago. One thing that made this trip different from others to Portland was that I decided to take the train from Boston to Portland rather than to drive. Boston is such a difficult city in which to catch a train going north if you live in the south. Boston has two main rail stations, North and South station which of course are not connected. I had to catch a commuter rail train to South Station and then a subway to the neighborhood of North Station from where I walked to the station (of course, the subway could not have a station in the rail station). The connections added over an hour to my journey and would be a nightmare for someone who did not understand the system or speak English. Otherwise, the train was a great way to travel north. The line is called the Downeaster and is subsidized by outside groups in addition to Amtrak. The line currently runs from Boston to Portland, but due to its popularity is soon to be expanded all the way up to Bar Harbor which will I imagine will be very popular with tourists. Most of the people on the trains on which I rode were first time riders of the line and many were either going to Boston or Portland just for the day.

Portland is the largest city in Maine and what is most astounding is that it has the second largest number of restaurants per capita in the US. If you are looking to try different ethnic foods or just your regular submarine sandwiches, Portland is a great place to go. Plus its proximity to Freeport Maine, home of LL Bean and the LL Bean store which is open 24 hours a day, make Portland a popular destination. Therefore, a lot of people will fly into Portland's airport on their way to other destinations, such as Acadia National Park. Portland has a thriving Old Port section with quaint shops and restaurants to wander about.

In between games of Diablo, Jeff came up with the idea of spending Saturday out on one of the islands which are scattered all about Casco Bay, the bay around Portland. There are ferries which run from island to island or if you are in a hurry there are water taxis for hire. Many of the larger islands, such as Long Island where we visited are very populated while others are owned by one person. Admiral Robert Peary, the famous North Pole explorer had his own island called Eagle Island and his summer house is now a museum which can be visited. Wandering around the island on bicycles was a great way to spend the day and Jeff and Jen have visited other islands since our visit.

More recent travels in August have included Philadelphia, New York and Albany last weekend, all by rail. I went to Philadelphia to visit my friend Stefanie Eshleman who I know from Washington University and with my friend Tim Silvestri from Muhlenberg. Stef went to Wash U to get her masters in social work and although I wont tell the story about how we met, we both attended the Newman Center. Stef moved from St. Louis to a neighborhood near the art museum. It is an up and coming neighborhood which is gaining in popularity. The transition of the neighborhood is clearly marked by a Starbucks, and a yuppie grocery store and health club. Stef now works for Joint Action in Community Service which helps at risk youth enter the workforce and become reliant adults.

I met my friend Tim during my freshman year at Muhlenberg. We hung out together during my four years, especially since we were both on the cross-country and track teams. Tim and his wife, Kim live in Allentown, but formerly resided in the Antique Row neighborhood of Philadelphia. It was during their two year stay that Tim became quite interested in Revolutionary War history. On Thursday, Tim took off from his work at Lafayette College to give me a historical walking tour of some old parts of the city. A city so rich in history could not be covered in only a few hours, but we did see a lot. Tim explained that Philadelphia was one of the first planned cities. The city hall is in the middle with main streets radiating out at the compass points. The main streets divide the city into four quadrants, each with its own park.

We started our tour at the old city hospital which Tim used to live near. The hospital facility features a large, round room on the top floor with skylights. The skylights allowed surgeries to be performed indoors for the very first time. Up till that point, the surgeries had been performed on the front lawn so that the doctors had adequate light.

The Washington Square neighborhood which we wandered through has paved or Belgium block streets which are lined with several hundred year old buildings. The historic houses are all two or three stories tall with brick walls and slated roofs. The houses are narrow in width and each house is connected to the next. The streets are tree lined with walkways making walks through the neighborhood quite pleasant. The houses were each quite similar so to display their wealth, prosperous homeowners would invest in lavish stairways from the street to their front doors.

Several of the old houses which line the streets still have brass plaques on them which showed four hands clasping each other in the form of a ring. The plaque indicated that the owner had an insurance policy with Ben Franklin's insurance and fire company. Franklin set up the first fire company to put out fires for the people who had bought a policy with them. Homeowners who did not own a policy could still hire the firefighters to put out a fire, but at a high cost. There were other competing insurance and firefighter companies and some of the older houses also bore these plaques. The firefighters eventually became public services, but to this day they are still called fire companies.

Scattered amongst the historic areas are plaques commemorating the builder of this or that house and the date. Even more is written if the owner played a role in the history of the country. Examples of a working class house are also shown near the halls where the first and second Continental Congresses were held (one hall for each

congress). Volunteers wander through the area in period dress and can be seen chatting with tourists about the historical structures or playing period music. What the volunteers can't show are the historic houses of Franklin, Washington, Adams and other rather important people. For some reason, at some point the city made the decision that the homes of these giants in US history were not worth preserving and so they were all razed to make room for new construction. Today, a metal frame outlines the way historians believe Benjamin Franklin's house looked and much of the site has been excavated to reveal relics. Also at the site is a post office where letters can be sent which bear the postmark "Post Office" rather than "US Postal" since the US did not exist when Franklin became the first Postmaster General.

The only other disappointing part of the otherwise beautiful neighborhoods is the presence of new buildings tucked between the several hundred year old buildings. Tim explained that many were built for the bicentennial celebration of the country in 1976. At that time, the neighborhoods were in poor shape with abandoned or run down buildings. To be able to host the bicentennial, the city tore down the dilapidated buildings and although the new buildings were the same height as the old and constructed of the same brick, they just don't match.

Right in the Society Hill neighborhood is Independence Hall which served as the first capitol of the United States. The building also housed the state and city governments, each in one of the two wings. The inside of the buildings have been preserved and refurbished with furniture that resembles what was there before the British used it all as firewood when they occupied the city during the Revolutionary War. It was amazing to stand in the room and imagine Washington handing over power to Adams in the first peaceful, democratic transition of power, all of those years ago. Near Independence Hall resides the Liberty Bell. However, the bell will soon be moved to a new home after all of the work on the park and environs is completed.

Right now, there are steel barricades surrounding the whole park with rangers patrolling all about. The only way to access either the hall or the bell is to pass through metal detectors and all bags must be x-rayed. Admittedly, the birthplace of the country would be a symbolic target for terrorists, but the mass of rambling steel barriers is sad to see. I am curious to see what permanent structures the park service will replace the temporary barriers with as the entire site is remodeled.

Tim completed our short tour and departed from the city in time to beat the rush hour traffic heading north while I hung out in the park around Independence Hall to wait for Stef to be done with work. That evening Stef and I walked up to the art museum which was made famous in the movie Rocky when Rocky ran up the stairs leading to the museum and jumped about at the top. The museum was closed when we arrived, but by walking around the back we were afforded a great view of the sunset. The museum overlooks a river which is lined with historic boat houses. Different rowing clubs own the boat houses and the buildings are illuminated at night with bulbs arranged along their edges. We also watched a large group of people who were learning the steps to Celtic dances in the large courtyard in front of the museum.

Philadelphia also has a museum dedicated to the works of Rodin. The museum and collection inside were made possible by Mastbaum who in the 1920's became intrigued by Rodin's works and wanted to fund a museum to enrich the lives of his

fellow citizens. At the time, most of the plaster molds which Rodin made were still kept by the Rodin museum in France. Mastbaum commissioned bronzes be made from the molds, including Gates of Hell which up to that time had never been cast. One now resides at the front entrance to the Philadelphia Rodin Museum, the other was given by Mastbaum to the Rodin museum in Paris. In order to create a well rounded collection, Mastbaum also collected marble sculptures and drawings which Rodin made as he conceived his works.

I was in Philadelphia for only two days, so I did not get to see much of the city. But, this was not my first time in the city. My first university was in Allentown, PA which is about 45 minutes outside of Philadelphia. However, up to now the times which I had been to the city were to go to the airport, basketball games, cross-country races or for model united nations held by the University of Pennsylvania. So my impressions of the city were based on the neighborhoods around the airport, the few blocks in the financial district around city hall and the infamously bad neighborhoods around Penn. Needless to say, my impressions of the city were not very favorable and I could never understand why Tim would rave about the city. But, thanks to Tim and Stef, my regard for the city has grown tremendously and I look forward to my next visit.

On Friday, I walked the 10 blocks from Stef's apartment to the 30th Street train station where I caught a train bound for New York City. Again, the train was great and an hour and a half later, I arrived at Penn Staion. I arrived in New York to visit my friend Karen Mankin who is another Newman Center friend from St. Louis. She was getting her masters at the Central Institute for the Deaf (CID) as I was finishing up my bachelor and starting my masters at Wash U. CID offers graduate degrees in audiology, deaf education and speech and hearing sciences. Karen now lives about two blocks from Penn Station and so I could easily walk to the apartment. Downtown Philadelphia to downtown New York could never have been done so easily if I had driven rather than taken the train.

More to come . . . .

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