

**Monday September 14**

My phone gave a temperature reading of 41F this morning as we had breakfast in the hotel before checking out about 9:30. Today our drive was over the Smoky Mountains to Knoxville and we had a beautifully clear and sunny day for it. The only hint that we were near the Smoky Mountains (famed for their thick mist and cloud cover) was from the hotel window as a light fog covered downtown Asheville. Actually, as we drove east there were a few clouds near ground level but as we got closer to the mountains the weather just got clearer.

After passing the sprawl that is Cherokee (much built up since our last visit, with a huge new casino) we entered the National park and climbed through thick forest to Newfound Gap, which sits at the North Carolina/Tennessee border. We stayed in North Carolina for a while longer as we climbed to the highest point at Clingman's Dome. At an elevation of 6,433 feet, this spot is the highest in the Smokies and, indeed, with only one exception, the highest point east of the Rocky Mountains.



***Smoky Mountains***



Robert and I walked the steep ½ mile trail from the parking lot to the very top where a concrete walkway to an overlook provides distant views across what looks like unending forest. It is said that one can see 100 miles from this point on clear days and certainly this must have been one of the best for visibility. I am sure that I picked out Mt Mitchell (6,684 feet) which is the highest mountain in the Appalachians (and the East) which the marker said was 73 miles to the north-east.

We descended through heavy traffic (much heavier than we would have predicted for this late in the season) from “the sublime to the ridiculous” as we entered the ever-growing tourist trap of Gatlinburg. Its collection of hotels, shops, restaurants and “fun activities” (waterparks, mini-golf, Ripleys, etc, etc) now stretches all the way through Pigeon Forge and beyond. What a contrast to the unspoiled nature we had left just a few minutes earlier.

We were, however, thankful for one aspect of modern life that Pigeon Forge provided – a brand new Starbucks where we enjoyed a late lunch. Then it was on to our destination for the night on the east side of Knoxville, where we checked in soon after 4pm. We drove into Knoxville tonight to eat at Bravo.

### **Tuesday September 15**

We left Knoxville after breakfast (at Cracker Barrel—see photo! and drove along I-40 for a little over an hour before taking US-70 West towards the south side of Nashville.



We took this to avoid driving on an expressway all day and because the road was marked scenic. It was interesting but not as scenic as we might have hoped, although there were lots of trees and some open farmland. We eventually reached the very outer suburbs of the city where we found a Starbucks. Robert also found a place to get his hair cut, a job he had been threatening for several days.

Then we drove around Nashville to the Inn at Opryland where we were booked for two nights. This is a

Gaylord (now Marriott) property directly across the street from the much bigger Opryland Hotel and Resort. We did visit the latter via the complimentary shuttle bus and strolled through the huge facility, with its many indoor areas, ponds, landscaping and waterfalls. Molly and I had stayed here a few years back and enjoyed the place, especially the couple of very good restaurants on the property. So, while in the resort we made dinner reservations for tonight at the Steakhouse and for tomorrow at the Italian restaurant.

### ***Enjoying an afternoon drink in the Opryland Resort***



On getting back to our hotel we also made reservations for a bus tour of Nashville for Wednesday morning, so our stay here is pretty much set. . Tonight we ate at the Old Hickory Steakhouse and enjoyed the meal, although it was not quite up to the experience at Morton’s or Ruth’s Chris – but just as expensive. I guess you pay for the location!

### **Wednesday September 16**

We had an early breakfast in the hotel and caught our tour bus a little before nine. This took us to downtown Nashville where we drove along a dozen or so blocks south of the river (Cumberland) in the center of the business district and the state capital buildings. We passed through a park in which a replica of the Parthenon sits; it was built originally for the

centennial celebrations in 1897 but this particular structure was completely re-done in the late 1920s.

We also saw many of the recording studios and clubs where famous country music artists have performed over the years and we spent about 30 minutes in the Ryman Auditorium. This was originally built as a church but was the first home of the Grand Ole Opry until it fell into decay. It has now been completely restored and is used for both tours and concerts today.



### *Robert searching for his Gold Album in the Country Music Hall of Fame*



We also spent over an hour in the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum which is dedicated to the artists who have become legends in this genre. It is housed on three floors and many of the exhibits change to honor different stars or groups. Many stay the same, however, and the top floor has much of the early history of Country Music and contains many articles belonging to the most famous – including a car and gold piano that belonged to Elvis.



This concluded the bus tour but we decided to stay downtown and walk through some of the areas that we had caught glimpses of from the bus. We walked to the State Capitol (but couldn't go inside because some of us didn't have picture ID!) and then walked down to Centennial Park. Here there is a huge pavement map of Tennessee, quotations and facts about the state and a wall containing information on the history from the state dating back to pre-historic times.

## **Modern Nashville**



*Nashville is the capital of the U.S. state of Tennessee and the county seat of Davidson County. Nashville is the second largest city in Tennessee, after Memphis, and is the fourth largest city in the Southeastern United States. It is located on the Cumberland River in the north-central part of the state. The city is a center for the music, healthcare, publishing, banking and transportation industries, and is home to numerous colleges and universities. It is known as a center of the music industry, earning it the nickname "Music City".*

We also paid a visit to the First Presbyterian Church downtown. We had passed the historic building before stopping for lunch at a nearby Starbucks where we met a man who said we really should visit it as “it’s more like an Egyptian Palace than a church”. Indeed, there are many aspects that show an Egyptian influence but Molly and I also saw architectural resemblance to the Inca temples we had seen earlier this year in Peru. Regardless, it is a beautiful building and has a long history of service to the community and beyond. In fact, lunch was being served for some of Nashville’s homeless as we made our visit.

First Presbyterian Church had been located on the corner of Spring & Summer Streets since 1816. In 1849 this building was begun, and it was dedicated on Easter in 1851, William Strickland was the architect. The cavetto cornice, window and door surrounds, and the recessed panels along the roof line were brick, painted to resemble stone. The church manse stands behind it on Summer Street. James Stevenson’s stoneyard is across the street. The building has been known as the Downtown Presbyterian Church since 1955. It measures 60 x 108 feet, had a wooden shingle roof, and as part of Hospital No. 8 it had 206 beds in it. The floor plans are our first indication of the original interior configuration.

The two-story outhouse built by the Federal Army to the east side was an attempt by them to solve the sanitary problem presented by a 26 hole latrine in the side yard of the church. They closed it down in January of 1864. But the solution was even worse. The two-story outhouse had four holes upstairs, and four holes downstairs. The elbows to the drains were made of leather—and leaked. It did contain a stove for warmth however.



***First Presbyterian Church, Nashville***





## ***The Tennessee State Capitol and the view to Centennial Park.***

***Park pictured below and right***



***Robert enjoying his favorite  
water feature in the resort.***



It was and had been a warm and sunny day but the humidity was low; however, we were glad of the free city bus service that took us back to the place where we were able to get a shuttle back to the Opryland Hotel complex. A cool drink in the Opryland Resort completed the afternoon before we returned to our hotel to relax until dinner time. We returned to the Resort and had a very nice dinner at the Italian restaurant there; far quieter than the Steakhouse and a better experience, altogether and a very good way to end the driving trip evenings.

**Thursday September 17**

We had breakfast in the hotel and then started on our almost 300 mile drive home. We followed I-65 and I-71 the whole way except for a brief detour for lunch and gas in Louisville. We were home soon after 4pm and relaxed until dinner time.

This ended our driving trip and on Saturday Robert was to begin his journey back to London. We still had a two more days together with activities together including dinner tonight at Sultan's, a favorite Turkish restaurant of ours in West Chester.

**Friday September 18**

We had breakfast at Bob Evans. We returned the car at 1pm, had coffee and went to dinner at the Brown Dog.

**Saturday September 19**

We had breakfast at Bob Evans with Elizabeth and Colin then Robert and I went for a walk. We had coffee in the afternoon and left for the airport at 4. Robert's flight was supposed to leave at 7:15 and connect with his overnight flight to London in Toronto. Unfortunately weather caused delays and he had to stay in Cincinnati overnight and catch a very early flight Sunday to Toronto and then on to London, arriving there about 9pm. Not the best way to end a great vacation!

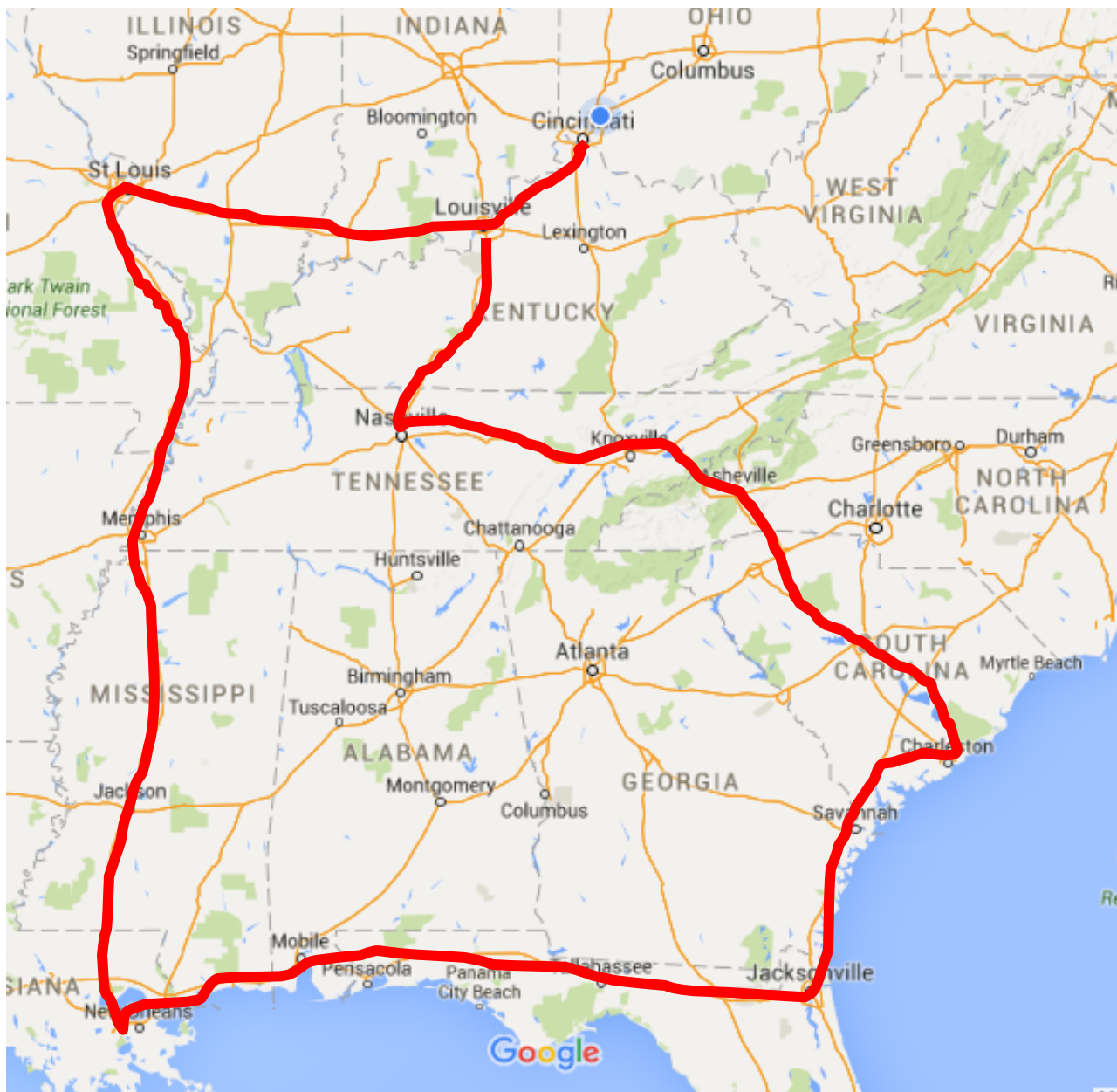
# ***Appendix***

***Our journey facts and figures***

In our 20 day trip we covered 3411 miles (see route below) and visited parts of fourteen states from Ohio as far south as Louisiana and Florida. We saw four capital cities (Tennessee, Mississippi, Florida and South Carolina) and visited the Capitols in each.

The scenery in most of the South is not as dramatic as that we saw when we went to the Western States with Robert , although parts of the Gulf Coast, the Atlantic Coast and certainly the Great Smoky Mountains were impressive. What the South does have is History. Clearly many of the towns and cities we visited were directly impacted by the American Civil War and a number also played key roles in the Revolutionary War. In addition, many of the places we visited are architecturally and culturally of significance and perhaps New Orleans, Savannah and Charleston could be cited in this regard. And let's not forget the impact that these states have had on the music of this country—from Traditional Jazz to Country.

The wildlife and culinary delights were of particular interest to our guest and he sampled (among many others) dishes such as turtle soup, alligator tails, dolphin, biscuits and sausage gravy and grits. We also saw dolphin, alligator, pelican and a number of other species not found in his native England.







14 States  
visited

