Thu., July 13: A First Lady Leads to Harmony

My first preplanned stop for the day, in Lexington, did not open until 10. Given another early wakeup, I decided to kill time by visiting the University of Kentucky. I've always enjoyed seeing college campuses, in part simple curiosity about names I'd only seen in sports scores, and in part to confirm my overt bias that the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is in fact the most beautiful in America. UK was of special interest because its men's basketball program and UNC's for many years swapped places as the winningest of all time.[1]

During an early morning drive back through the pretty bluegrass country and past the Thoroughbred Center, I noticed approvingly the signs people put up telling the names of individuals who built the long stone walls. After entering Lexington, I was surprised to pass a university I'd never heard of. Transylvania University, I learned online, was the first college west of the Appalachians, founded in 1780 in a small town during the American Revolution and moved here afterward. I already knew the source of the name: Boonesborough was part of the Transylvania Colony, also the name of the fraudulent company Boone worked for, which died when Virginia declared all land claims in Kentucky void a couple years before the school's birth.

After turning toward town, and being once again abandoned by signage, such that I went past the UK campus a few blocks over, I eventually found myself driving up the body and wondering where the heart was. Spotting a guard booth at a restricted area where I could not park, I nonetheless pulled in to ask the guard where I could. He kindly pointed me just up the road to a deck. A busy pedestrian bridge led over the road and dropped me onto campus.

Curling concrete sidewalks—not the beautiful brick of UNC—took me past a map that suggested I was in the main part of campus, the "Academic Core." But it didn't make clear which buildings were significant. I passed several brick ones from the late 1800s, and investigated the outside of Memorial Hall, a church-like structure that serves as a symbol of the college. It was built in 1929 as a World War I memorial. UNC's symbol is the Old Well, dating to the 1790s.

Wandering, I noticed a lawn maintenance crew on break with two members on mowers, one of whom kept glancing over his shoulder at me. When I got close enough, he called out a compliment to my fedora (my blue straw Bailey of Hollywood). I went over and

1 A check of Wikipedia in Fall 2023 suggests Kansas had overtaken them by number of wins, though by percentage they were still the top two.

thanked him, saying I'd bought it in Charleston. He said he had four inherited from his grandfather, which I declared "cool," adding I wished I could see them. I then told him and his colleagues my self-deprecating story of taking a hat to a store in Georgetown (in D.C.) to get it cleaned and blocked for a few bucks, only to walk out with an additional $150 hat. "That was a win-win—for the company," he teased, giving us all a chuckle.

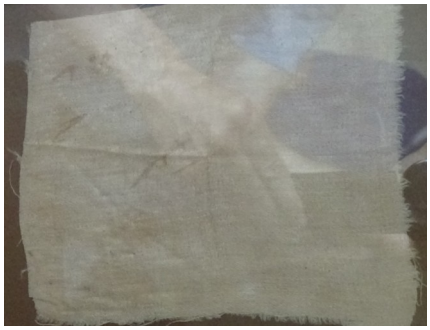
On leaving I repeated that the purchase was in Charleston and added with a dramatic gesture, "I bought that—and a *seersucker suit*!" Because, of course I did. They all belly laughed, and we wished each other a good day. If you didn't laugh, you're probably not a Southerner.

My drift took me to the college bookstore, which I swung through first to pee (not in the aisles, though as a Carolina fan I was tempted) and then to drive into my head where I was, surrounded by hated UK gear. Ameliorating the sensation was a bevy of fetching high-school volleyball players in their competition shorts filling the Student Union, apparently there for a tournement.

Out front, I went over to a statue that explained the university founded in 1865 had torn down its first two buildings. Some of the bricks, dug from the grounds of the college, were in its base. Though UK's core is pretty, the fact that UNC's first buildings from the 1790s still stand, under mature trees covering brick sidewalks, was the final proof for me that its campus is superior, if not always its basketball teams.

The night before, I had booked online a guided tour of the childhood home of Mary Todd Lincoln, wife of President Abraham, to make sure I could get in when it first opened. I pulled down the driveway and parked in one of the few spots behind the two-story brick house. Still a bit early, I walked next door to Rupp Arena, where UK's basketball team plays. I wasn't expecting a modernist building, part of the city convention center. I climbed the escalator, imagining fans in dark blue all around me, to the entrance to the court, which I was not shocked to find locked. At least it was air-conditioned. I exited through booths of some convention, both happy and unhappy not to be attending.

Mary Todd was born several blocks from the house museum bearing her name and moved here at 13. With many original furnishings, it mostly displays the typical ostentation of the noveau riche of the antebellum[2] period. She grew up in relative opulence, compared to her later husband, with fancy silverware still at the house and house slaves to polish it. One room was set up as a combined nursery and enslaved person's bedroom.



The only artifact of interest to me was a square patch of a breakfast tablecloth from her wedding to Lincoln, framed on a wall. It seems farfetched that the daughter of a rich slaveholding family would even meet, much less marry the famously poor Lincoln. But she moved to Springfield, Ill., at age 20 because her sister lived there, by which time Lincoln was a semi-respectable lawyer in town. Ten years later her father died and this house was sold. My favorite part of its history received only a single mention, on a small sign by a picture of what the main hallway looked like before restoration: Among other later uses, for a time the house was a brothel!

I wasn't close to being the visitor from farthest away, easily bested by the couple from Australia being led around by their son and his wife. She appeared to be a historical researcher of some sort, given her knowledgeable comments to them. I couldn't help but acknowledge she looked good in shorts, too. Don't worry, I didn't stare. I'm as creepy as the next healthy straight male, but I try hard not to let the woman notice my notice.

Mary is a figure of tragedy, not limited to her sitting next to her husband when he was shot at Ford's Theatre in Washington just after the Civil War ended in 1865. She was highly educated, and interested in politics before meeting Lincoln. They settled in Springfield, but she made what at the time was a highly unusual move with him to Washington when he was elected to Congress. Mary was a full partner in his political life, writing letters to party leaders on his behalf and advising him successfully against becoming governor of the Oregon Territory because he would be too far from the limelight.

2 In the U.S., this means "pre-Civil War," usually more specifically between independence and that war.

Once in the White House, she embarked on a redecorating campaign that went way over-budget, drawing widespread ridicule and putting her husband in debt. Some wives of Eastern politicians snubbed her as a rustic Westerner, and physical and mental problems hardly aided her reputation. Her family of origin was full of Confederates, some of whom were casualties of the war, raising unfair suspicions of her loyalties. And the Lincoln's son Willie died at 11 of typhoid fever. Nonetheless, she is credited as a a staunch backer of freedom for enslaved people ("abolition"), and raised money to support troops and former slaves. Her husband's death, plus that of another son six years later, left her so distraught that her remaining son had her commited to an "insane asylum." She tried to commit suicide twice. After four years, though, she was declared sane and went to live with her sister. She died at 63, my age as I stood in her childhood home.

After I left it with a left, the road out front turned into US 421, parts of which I'd driven in N.C. I took it west rather than jump immediately onto I-64, and was rewarded with a two-laner through more horse country before it joined the interstate.

I was rolling early enough to follow an optional set of directions on the itinerary, to Zachary Taylor National Cemetery, to see its namesake's mausoleum. Taylor grew up on this land, then part of his parents' tobacco plantation. After serving in the army four decades, most notably commanding American forces during a war with Mexico in the 1840s, Taylor became the president. I feel no connection to Taylor, but I like seeing graves of major historical figures. President Taylor's most significant impact on American history came by dying an odd way, with really bad timing. He ate some cherries and uncooked veggies with milk, got terrible cramps, and died a few days later. Historians speculate that had he lived, he may have vetoed the "Fugitive Slave Act," which forced free states to allow escaped slaves to be recaptured within their borders. It also allowed slavery to expand into western territories. This "Compromise of 1850" was more like the Capitulation of 1850, to slaveholders. It obliterates the claims of modern apologists for the Confederacy that "states rights" were the major cause of the Civil War, because it ran roughshod over the rights of the northern states. Nor, obviously, did it succeed at preventing war.

The original Taylor mausoleum

The tombs of Taylor and his wife Peggy are visible through glass in the unimpressive building above. Their first burial place, a few dozen feet behind it, was more visually interesting. Around the corner in an upscale residential neighborhood, I paused a moment in front of the house he was raised and married in, which remains a private home.

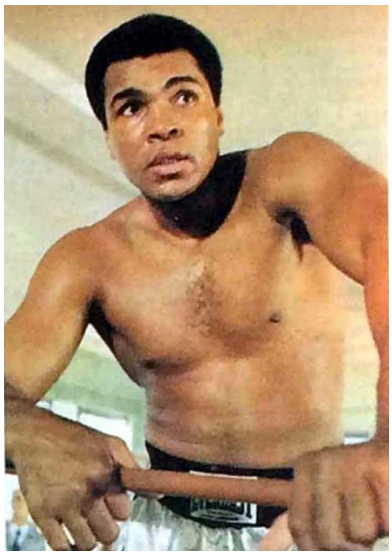
This is wholly irrational, given that I don't believe in life after death—I'm confounded as to why anyone would *want* to live forever, given how much shit falls even on the best of lives—but in recent years I've gotten into the habit of thanking dead veterans at their graves for their service. Before leaving for the house, I walked along doing so with some of the veterans. Two graves especially caught my eye. Lewis Hix was a private in a Field Artillery Replacement Regiment during World War I, which was fought between European powers and then America from 1914-1919 (much more about that in a few days). I didn't know what "replacement" meant in this context, and took a pic to check now. The Web was no help, but friend Guy Pace, a Vietnam vet and author, helped me out by text: "An artillery replacement regiment is generally like a reserve unit that is prepared to go in and replace artillery units that are destroyed… Artillery units were often destroyed or overrun in combat." By World War II 25 years later replacement units were no longer needed, because artillery could shoot at such long range they weren't on the battlefield, he explained.

The other grave, of Herman Reinhardt, noted he was a Wagoner in the same war. Much as I've read about WWI, it's still hard to accept that horses and the wagons they pulled were on the same battlefields as tanks and trucks.

I looped downtown along the Ohio River, took the exit for the road I was looking for, and passed it because, yes, there was no sign indicating you had to take an immediate right. Eventually I found my way to my destination, the Muhammed Ali Center. I didn't spot the sign for its parking lot, and ended up paying an extra $6 for a municipal deck connected by a walkway over the street.

Born and raised as Cassius Clay in Louisville, he was introduced to boxing at 12 and six years later won an Olympic gold medal in the 1960 Rome Games. Four years after that he shocked the boxing world by winning a fight no one thought he could, over world heavyweight champion Sonny Liston. Having recently joined the Nation of Islam, an

African-American Muslim community, he took on the name bestowed by its leader. After three years of successful fights, he was drafted to join the military, at the time fighting a war in Vietnam against Communist rebels. He refused, having stated sometime earlier he had "nothing against the Viet Cong." His championship belt was taken from him, he was blocked from fighting, and he was convicted of draft dodging. But the Supreme Court eventually overturned that conviction. He returned to boxing, winning and losing the championship twice more before retiring. Ali may have been the most famous man on the planet, and turned that fame toward many humanitarian efforts before getting Parkinson's Disease and dying at 74.



Like millions around the world, I was captivated by Ali when I was a teen. In those pre-cable days, major fights were available to everyone via broadcast TV. I watched the "Thrilla in Manila" and "Rumble in the Jungle" and other Ali fights live. The fact his wits were as fast as his fists set him apart from any competitor. So too his willingness to change strategies to address the strengths of the opponent. Normally a dancer in the ring—hence his famous line, "Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee"—against the hard-charging George Foreman in the Rumble fight, he covered up and leaned on the ropes until Foreman tired himself out. This "Rope-a-Dope" tactic won the fight.

He also featured in the most extraordinary half-hour news broadcast of my life, viewed at my college, North Carolina School of the Arts.[3] On the 1981 day before Ronald Reagan was inaugurated president, Ali learned of a man threatening to jump out of a ninth-story window near him in Los Angeles. Ali went to the site and talked him out of it. Film of the story hit the news the next day, the same day the new Islamic Revolutionary government of Iran unexpectedly released 52 Americans it had taken hostage 444 days earlier. I watched all of this on *CBS Evening News* with Walter Cronkite, the archetypal anchorman soon to retire, in the laundry room of my school dorms.[4]

3 Now the "University of," but no alumnus of a certain age will use that term.

4 Memory holds there was a fourth major event. I thought it was a Space Shuttle launch, but the Internet disabuses me of this idea (the first launch was three months away) and fails to relay the missing happening.

Unfortunately, the Ali Center was disappointing. Neither the film shown nor the screens used instead of exhibits to tell his life story do a good job of it. The former had few details, which would have been okay if the screens made the story easy to follow. Part of the problem is that the screens kept changing: If I arrived partway through its cycle, the timeline disappeared before I could finish it, replaced by other content for a long enough period I got tired of waiting for the timeline to return. Thus I did not get the entire thing. The other problem for me was the lack of artifacts. I was expecting shorts and gloves and robes and belts from all of his major fights, and instead got a smattering of less, or less clear, significance. I enjoyed seeing a pair of boxing gloves signed by Ali and two famous opponents, Joe Frazier and Ken Norton, but no explanation was provided. Were they from a fight? Multiple fights? No fight? The boxing shorts from the "Thrilla" fight with Frazier were the most thrilling artifact. The only other item I felt any connection with was the torch he used in his suprise appearance at the Opening Ceremonies of the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. He lit the stadium torch with it. Sadly, I was not watching at the time, so I did not see the dramatic moment until I already knew about it, in replays. My sense of connection comes more from having stood at the spot where the flame was lit, before the Temple of Zeus in Olympus, Greece.

My hopes of seeing his Olympic gold medal were dashed by an exhibit busting the myth of his throwing it into the Ohio River as a protest against racism. I hadn't know the myth, so I expected it to be here. This story, it turned out, was spun by the ghost writer of his first biography; he just lost the medal somehow. The exhibit did not, however, explain where the replacement medal he was given in 1996 is. Another award raised my curiosity, a clear vertical block labeled "Happiness Hall of Fame 2015." I thought perhaps this was from Bhutan, a Himalayan nation that measures "Gross Domestic Happiness" instead of focusing on gross domestic product like most countries (economic output). But I see now on the Web this is a nonprofit based at Stanford University "that recognizes special people that have advanced the cause of happiness throughout the world."[5] Ali certainly caused it in me.

A major source of my unhappiness with the museum was stupid humans. In this case I refer to people who had claimed online, and to my face at a friend's wedding reception, that a video screen setup allowed you to shadow-box with Ali. I imagined a video game scenario where they had plugged in algorithms based on his moves. After 40-plus years of martial arts training, I was eager to take on the Champ. But, no, idiots. (Not you, dear

5 https://happinesshalloffame.com/index.html.

readers.) There *is* an exhibit where you can stand next to a shadow of a generic boxer and try to match his moves. Next to it is a ring in which you can watch a video of Ali's daughter Laila, also a professional boxer, walk you through some basic moves. That's it. I didn't bother.

The film's lobby is cool, offering a multi-story glass window with a view of the river. As it angles away from you, it allows a view down several stories to the ground. A father waiting with his family refused to step close, pleading fear of heights. I made a point of sticking my toes next to the glass and leaning forward as far as I could.

The film did offer one fascinating factoid, that Ali was a huge fan of Rudyard Kipling's poem "If" published in 1910, with quotes sliding throughout. Not having my binder, I jotted a note on my phone so I could look it up now. Here it is:

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son![6]

This sums up what I know of Ali better than the entire museum.

6 https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46473/if---. Public domain.

After a loop around downtown forced by a blocked-off entrance to the interstate, I crossed the Ohio into Indiana and, after more lack-of-signage adventures, finally made my way to Falls of the Ohio State Park. I knew from itinerary planning the VC was closed for renovations, but at least wanted to get a view of what's left of the falls. Daniel Boone visited them on one or more of his long hunts. Today they are tamed, and displays about the exposed rocks focus on the fossils contained within.

Choosing to head west without consulting the atlas or smartphone, since I knew I'd eventually have to run into I-64 again as it curled north, brought an amazing stroke of luck. At an intersection where I needed to turn right, I spotted a small brown sign announcing the "Clark Homesite" and turned left instead. A long straightaway punctured by stop signs dead-ended in the George Rogers Clark Home Site, a detached extension of Falls Park. This introduces another theme of the trip.

I had encountered George when I stopped off in Vincennes, Indiana, on a road trip to Chicago. During the American Revolution, Clark captured several British outposts in what by British law was Native American territory, north of the Ohio River. Later, Redcoats[7] from Fort Detroit retook the fort in Vincennes, a town inhabited mostly by French-Canadiens with no great love for England. But most of the British troops were sent back to better lodgings for the winter, not an unusual practice in an era when fighting usually paused for the season.

Informed of this, Clark begat a foolhardy plan to lead 170 men 140 miles on foot through frozen marshlands in the dead of January 1779. They made it, and surrounded the fort. Clark had brought along enough flags to make his army seem three times as large, and the accuracy and rate of fire from his frontiersmen' rifles added to the impression. Some British-allied NAs with bad timing helped. Returning from a raid and heading for the fort, they realized too late what was going on, and some were killed or captured by the Americans. Clark had five of the prisoners tomahawked in view of the fort. The British commander surrendered. The site is now a national historic park, and the huge circular

7 The British army uniform of the day was red.

memorial to Clark emphasizes what a major morale boost this victory was for Americans back East, where the war was providing little good news after four years.

Thus it was exciting to find myself standing at his home. I walked up a hill from the parking lot to find a lone chimney. This was not explained onsite, but the park's website says the chimney is from an 1830s cabin moved here in the 1950s to illustrate Clark's. As had the original, this one burned down, a couple years ago. A plaque on a marker told me of the other significant personage and event related to the site: Clark's younger brother William, of the Lewis & Clark Expedition.

In 1803, in perhaps the greatest "no-duh" moment in American history, President Thomas Jefferson accepted an unexpected offer from Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte of France to sell its claims in the North American continent to the United States, at the fire-sale price of three cents an acre. The land spread in a rough triangle from New Orleans up the entire Mississippi River to Canada, and west to today's Oregon and Washington. Basically Jefferson doubled the size of the U.S. in a single "Louisiana Purchase," ignoring as usual the rights of the Native people already living there.

However, like people who bid on foresaken storage units today in hopes of finding treasure, Jefferson had little idea what he bought. He recruited two men to lead an expedition across the widest chunk to find out. Meriwether Lewis was his secretary, a captain in the army, and an herbologist. Clark was a former army officer, illustrator, mapmaker, and surveyor now running the family farm here. When living in Seattle, I had visited Cape Disappointment, where the men reached the Pacific Ocean, and the spot where they camped through the winter of 1805-6. I'd driven parts of the Lewis & Clark Trail. And on a trip to Pittsburgh, I had seen the river point from which Lewis started his adventure.

Here he picked up his partner Clark, and left with nine men of the officially named "Corps of Discovery." The nearby boat ramp was locked off, but I ignored the gate and security cameras to walk down, touch the Ohio River, and look downstream in the direction the men would have headed, perhaps from this very spot. "I'm on the boat ramp the Lewis & Clark Expedition launched from," I joked to myself. Having seen the starting and ending points of their westward journey, filling in the gaps between was a major goal of this one. And so we shall.

I returned to my earlier right, took it straight to a promising left, and after passing through Clarksville proper and grabbing some gas, did indeed find myself back at I-64. I had enough time for one last stop today. A few miles west I exited at Corydon and parked on its central square in the small but bustling downtown. There I was disappointed but not shocked to find the State Historic Site that was supposed to be open wasn't. This building was the first Indiana state capitol, built in 1816. I did a loop around it, booked my room for the night online, and then took advantage of the library, a former bank complete with vault, to pee. While searching for the bathrooms, I went up to the half-second floor only to receive a mama-bear glare from a woman seated at a table. I had inadvertently entered the children's section. I craned my neck to communicate that I was looking for something, and retreated downstairs before heading to the other side of Indiana's southern tip for a planned stop.

The only hotel in that immediate area was the New Harmony Inn and Conference Center. Given the name, I was surprised to have it fall in what became the normal price range on Booking. The complex is a series of low buildings blending into the surrounding woods and quiet residential neighborhood. My surprise grew when I stepped into my upstairs room with a four-poster bed and the TV hidden in a lovely wardrobe of wood. The bathroom featured New Harmony Soap products, made at a store in the compact retail center. The bar was "Unscented Green Clay," said to be, "Handmade with Organic Coconut and Sunflower Oils and Pure French Green Clay"; free of all the supposed product evils in the world (GMOs, Paraben, Sulfate); and not tested on animals. The room

being of course *too* cool, in the literal sense, I turned off the AC. I was delighted to be able to open the windows in the gable, turning handles attached to arms that swung the glass outward, a style I associate with old-style Florida homes.

Business District (Timothy K Hamilton Creativity+ Photography, Creative Commons Attribution 3.0)

The tiny, isolated town of New Harmony is a golf cart community, as evidenced by the line of rentals near the hotel check-in, and thus imminently walkable for someone like me. Not interested in the high prices of the hotel's restaurant, I went to a tavern on the cute main drag of gingerbread buildings. The place was so forgettable in meal and décor that I didn't bother recording my impressions of either in my notes. Taking the long way home, I reflected on two points that did stand out: Everyone I'd seen so far was white, and other than the 30-something server, 40s or older. Finally at the Roofless Church (which I'll explain tomorrow), I saw three children with their family—not being "worshipful," as a sign at the entrance implored—and in the last stretch before home, an Average Dirty Teen-Aged Punk.[8] EAs all, though.

8 Or ADTAP, a label coined by the inimitable George Russell of Raleigh, which I first heard applied to me and his son Randy as high school best friends.