

“Hoosier Hospitality” Evansville Style

Grand Indiana Auto Tour 14 • August 6-9, 2008



Evansville, Indiana • 14

“Visit Evansville to experience the meaning of ‘Hoosier Hospitality!’” This statement is proudly displayed on the convention & visitor’s web site of Indiana’s 3rd largest city and a more apt description cannot be made. Thanks to our tour hosts Max & Laura Hanold and George & Verna Titzer, Grand Indiana Auto Tour number 14 was treated to our state’s famous “hospitality” in spades.

Forty-two classics with 99 driver/passenger combinations assembled Thursday, August 6th, at the Comfort Inn, Evansville, IN, to create new and renew old friendships. After checking in, the group made a short trek to Bauer’s Grove Bauerhaus for our opening banquet that evening. Along with the usual pleasantries of excellent food, plenty of visiting, and our annual introduction of participants, the Super Mileage Team of Mater Dei High School gave us a presentation of their 2,843 miles per gallon car design which won the Shell Eco-marathon of the Americas fuel efficiency competition in Fontana, Calif. Despite the volley of questions from our group, the young men handled themselves deftly and their accomplishments spoke for themselves. One can’t help but be proud of them and all young people of their calibre.

Thursday, August 7, 2008

Milder temps moved through the area Thursday morning and thankfully stayed for the rest of the tour. Our first official destination of ‘08 was the private collection and museum of John Smith in Warick County. A lifelong automobile enthusiast/restorer, John has amassed a beautiful collection of cars, motorcycles, bicycles, pedal cars, and memorabilia that are a feast for the eye. He and his family welcomed us graciously and answered our questions as we perused the fruits of his labors. Of the many classics he displays, his early 60’s Jaguar Model J’s were my personal favorite.

From the Smith’s we traveled the byways of Indiana to our luncheon spot, namely the Log Inn off Old State Road. Built in 1825 as the Noon Day Stage Coach Stop & Trading Post, The Log Inn is officially recognized as Indiana’s oldest restaurant. The building’s interior is remarkably well preserved, and stepping through the native timber threshold gives one the sensation of stepping back in time. Of particular significance is the fact that Abraham Lincoln stopped here on his way back home from Evansville in November of 1844. Standing in the room he also stood in (and still looks as it did back then) is quite an experience.

Our historic experiences continued. After leaving the Log Inn, our next destination was the USS LST Ship Memorial in Evansville. LST-325 (Landing Ship, Tank) is an amphibious vessel designed to land battle-ready tanks, troops and supplies directly onto enemy shores and is the only operating vessel of its kind in the United States. Originally built in Evansville, the LST-

325 was brought back to the U.S. by a crew of 28 veterans in 2000 (whose average age was 72 years old) from Greece where it had been serving in their navy until being decommissioned. Navy veterans served as our tour guides and did an exceptional job of bringing history to life during this fascinating part of GIAT ‘08. If you ever have the opportunity to visit the USS LST-325 Memorial I highly recommend that you do.

Friday, August 8, 2008

At the dawning of another beautiful day, our group made the trek along the Ohio River into Posey County to our next destination: New Harmony, Indiana. After a welcome/orientation film in the Atheneum/Visitors Center, we were split into smaller groups and treated to a guided walking tour of the historic town. New Harmony, we learned, began as a religious society in 1814 by a group of Germans who pursued Christian perfection through every aspect of their daily conduct. To that end, they created a highly ordered and productive community. The Harmonists, as they were called, constructed over 180 log, frame and brick structures in their settlement. The community was entirely self-sufficient, and produced a wide variety of goods that were recognized worldwide for their fine quality. Harmonist wares



Tom & Cindy Jester’s ‘37 Buick Roadmaster after a day of touring in Evansville, Indiana.



Seeing double, Chevy-style. Joe & Kathleen Bryson's '64 Corvair convertible next to Tom & Carol Whetsel's '63 Corvair convertible.

were sold throughout the United States and overseas in the British Isles, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Germany. After ten years the Harmonists sold the community to a pair of business partners named William Maclure and Robert Owen who planned to establish a modern community where education and social equality would flourish. Despite the breakdown of the so-called Owen/Maclure Experiment in 1827, Owen's utopian dream brought significant contributions to American scientific and educational theory, study, and practice. Descriptions of both the Harmonist and Owen/Maclure Experiment's daily life by our tour hosts were quite fascinating and made alive by walking through many of the original



Bob & Sarah Hein's mascot peeks out of their '69 Plymouth convertible



Max & Laura Hanold's '50 Ford Crestliner

buildings still standing today. Of significant note are the Harmonist Labyrinth, Roofless Church, Double Log Cabin, and the Rapp-Owen Granary, which is beautifully restored and retains a number of its original architectural details including fortress-like openings for defense and an escape tunnel. Afterwards we had a delicious lunch in the community center and perused many of the local shops in town for treasures.

After heading back to Evansville mid-afternoon, we gathered downtown at the EMTRAC exhibit of the city's museum. Inside the Transportation Hall we viewed select vehicles from the museum's collection that recall travel in the period prior to the 1920s. Of special interest were: a hearse from the 1880s used by Alexander Funeral Homes; a steam powered fire pumper utilized by the City's Fire Department; a high wheel bicycle; a Sears Motor Car built by Evansville's Hercules Buggy Company, plus an intricate model railroad reflecting the city in the late 1940s called "Charlotte's Evansville." Moving outside we were able to walk through the museum's Milwaukee Road 0-6-0 Steam Switch Engine, the last one of its kind in the USA; Tennessee Club Car which was used by General Dwight Eisenhower during his presidential campaign in 1952 and also used by Ladybird Johnson as she stumped for her husband in 1964; and a circa 1900 Caboose outfitted with a pot-bellied stove and washstand.

With the day's official activities complete, we were on our own to explore Evansville's many eateries and walk the scenic Green Way Passage along the Ohio River. Another great day.

Saturday, August 9, 2008

This morning's destination was the Reitz House & Museum located in the heart of Evansville's Riverside Historic District. Separated into three groups, GIAT then enjoyed a guided tour of lumber baron John Augustus Reitz' home built in 1871 which was, we discovered, modeled in the high Victorian style using the height of modern conveniences for that era. It was considered a showplace at the time, built using the finest materials available so as to reflect Mr. Reitz' station in life. Judging from the stained glass panels, gilded grand entry hall, imported mantelpieces and walnut wainscoting throughout, it is not hard to see why. Inside and out, the house is truly a feast for the eye.

Once the tour guides had sated our curiosity concerning the Reitz home, we headed out of the city to the Haubstadt Community park in the self named nearby town. In a peaceful woods off the main road, Haubstadt was the perfect setting for us to enjoy a relaxing moment in the shade, visit or play some bean-bag toss before the closing lunch.

After a short prayer, we dug into a delicious feast and hearty thanks were dispensed to our GIAT hosts Max & Laura Hanold and George & Verna Titzer for all their hard work in putting together/executing another great event.



George & Verna Titzer's '30 Model A Sedan



Jim & Cathy Dininger's '59 Ford Skyliner