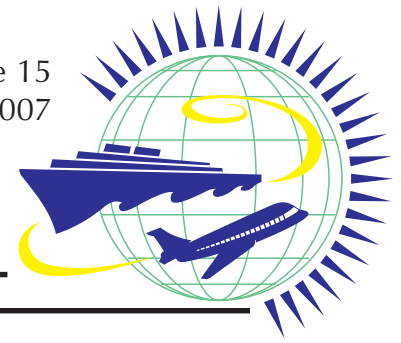


Routon's ROUSING Reports

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A Routon's Romantic Reservations Publication – not for resale

As predicted in the last letter, all of our “cruises” so far this year have been by auto – no, not even one day by ship, not even a ferry ride. (and, yes, I am getting “land sick”!) But we have enjoyed our new “cruiser” from Toyota. And there are port and starboard lights coming, a “light at the end of the tunnel” as they say. More about that later.

We started the year on our first “cruise by Toyota” – four weeks, six cities, and 6,000 miles (9,600 km). Mostly they were family, holiday visits but we did go dinner dancing on New Year’s Eve. Unfortunately, we did not stay until our coach could turn into a pumpkin as in Cinderella so we still saw the New Year arrive via television.

As promised, we did go back to Nashville to the Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center to see the Christmas decorations. WOW! No disappointment there. In case you do not recall – and do not have your November 2006 issue of

RRR immediately at hand – this is the hotel that has 47 acres under roof, starts to put up the Christmas decorations in June, and is ready for Christmas in December with 35,000 poinsettias, twelve trees with 10,000 lights each (that’s 120,000 lights in total!), and 10 miles of ribbon. I didn’t count the flowers or light bulbs or measure the ribbon, but there was more than enough. There were also Santa displays, very large stuffed animals “supported” by balloons (and cables), decorations of all sorts everywhere, even a computer with an internet connection direct to Santa!! Would you believe Helen tried the connection to Santa? Opryland was crowded but well worth the stop if you are anywhere in the area.

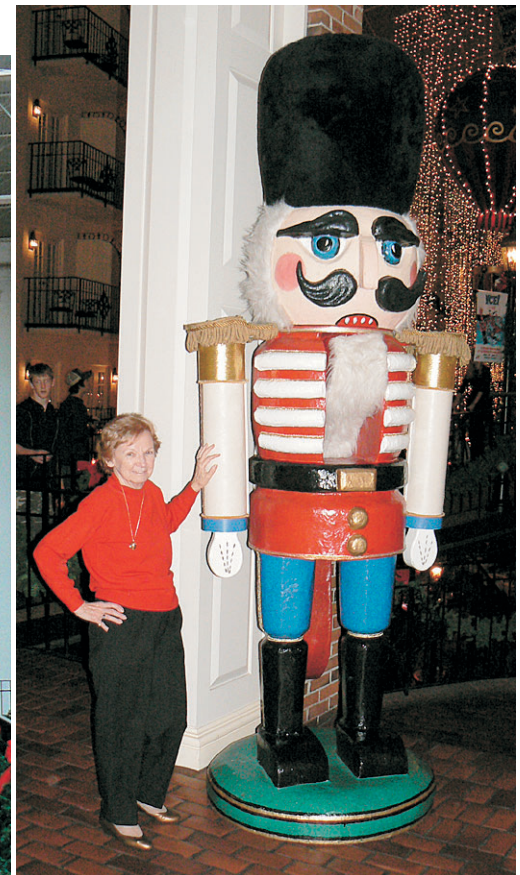
Nashville was our first stop and Charlottesville in Virginia provided a delightful last stop. We met our hosts, Kent and Judy Schlusser on a cruise to Alaska several years ago. They had invited us to stop by several

times, and we finally got around to it. (Be warned!! An invitation can be hazardous; it might be accepted!) We very much enjoyed our visit and, as a bonus, Helen had a chance to see an old friend from Akron.

The sight-seeing highlight of the stop was a visit to the home of Charlottesville’s most famous citizen, Thomas Jefferson, our third president. The home’s name is Monticello. First question—why Monticello? Monticello means small hill in Italian and the home is built on a small hill. OK, that’s a freebie question. Now for you Americans, the image of Monticello is on the back of which US coin?

Monticello is fascinating as it reflects the man behind it. Jefferson was a completely self-taught architect whose ideas and plans blended the Roman Neoclassical style he found in old books with ingenious ideas for his comfort, like an underground storage area for 62 wagon loads of ice harvested

Helen didn’t want this one...knock on wood.



from the river in winter. Why so much? He loved ice cream and chilled wine. The house started out to have 14 rooms. It ended up with 43 for a total living area of 11,000 square feet (about 1,400 square meters). It has 8 fireplaces for 43 rooms so someone(s) must have had chilly winters. There were also but 5 toilets and only 3 of these were inside. (Note: one of these was just off Jefferson's bedroom. Rank has its privileges!)

The house is great, but Jefferson, the man, is the real story. He read in seven languages and loved books. In 1815, after the British had burned Washington, D.C. in 1814, his library of 6,600 books became the starting base for today's Library of Congress. He was a member of the Virginia House, governor of Virginia, and wrote the US Declaration of Independence. He went on to be the US Minister to France, the Secretary of State, the Vice-President, and then President from 1801-1809. As President, he made the Louisiana Purchase from France adding much of the west to the US and establishing the US from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans. After he "retired" in 1809, he founded, designed, and built the University of Virginia where it is today in his beloved Charlottesville. All this talent and all these accomplishments but when he died he was \$107,000 in debt, and Monticello and its contents had to be sold to pay the creditors. Sad? Perhaps, but he did love and enjoy the good life right to the end.

We left the Schlusel's in "shirt sleeve" weather and headed home. Twelve hours later we were driving on ice in freezing rain! As we drove home, the cold winter wind from Canada flew in ahead of us, and the mild winter which was being enjoyed on the whole east coast of the US was over – and then some. Our daytime temperatures dropped from mid-sixties (18-19C) to the low twenties (minus 5-7C) and stayed there for about six weeks. It was certainly cold enough to keep you inside. And looking at the walls finally did it. A new kind of trip got started, my first of this type in 17 years, *redecorating the house!!!*

It all started simply – replace the badly worn 30 year old chairs and the tired 17 year old draperies. But men, *beware!* Once on the slippery slope, one thing leads to another! And do you know what a strain it puts on a marriage to go out to select drapery fabrics or (shudder) fabric for chairs



Redecorated piano bar at the Chéz Routon.

or paint colors to match (and who can tell from that little chip what a whole wall will look like?). This trip started in mid-February and continues yet today, although most was done by the end of April. Better to take a cruise!!!

Seriously, it does look nice and the chaos was worth it. I guess every 17 years is not too often. Of course, we do still have our bedroom and bath to go (shudder). I'll try to include a photo, but you'll have to come and see for yourself to get the whole picture.

However, you are too late to be the first guests at the newly decorated Chez Routon. For years Helen and I have been inviting her friends and relatives from Akron to come and see us for a change.

To our pleasant surprise, one of her nieces and husband finally made it. For another first, on a trip to the New Hampshire coast, they actually went into the water – all the way in! Not just feet and ankles. I was inspired! – but did I join them in the cold water? I was not *that* inspired. However, I did wade in to get better pictures

of them. In addition to the beach, they "toured" the local shops and together we did the usual things – a day in the White Mountains, the Maine coast, a lobster dinner, and a short tour of Boston. (All things you can do, too, when you visit.) We had a great time.

While in Boston, they went aboard the USS Constitution at the Navy yard. While waiting, I got to thinking about the ship, the oldest commissioned warship in the world – anywhere. Many of you may know why she is also called "Old Ironsides" but there is so much else I find. She was one of six frigates ordered by President Washington under the War Powers Act of 1794 to

Did he dump her into the water after the picture was taken? Yep.



create, *yes create*, the US Navy. The enemy was the Barbary Pirates. The frigates had to be capable of close fighting but also be fast to get away from superior numbers. \$115,000 was budgeted the USS Constitution and the final cost was \$303,000 – so cost overruns on military contracts are not new.

Not only is she in Boston now, but she was built in Boston using 2,000 New England oak trees and had copper cannon mounts and a copper bottom by Paul Revere. She was commissioned in October of 1797, became part of the US Navy then, and still is today. Her first significant battles were against the Barbary Pirates and their sanctuary in Tripoli in 1803-05. However, she is better known for her battles with the British in the War of 1812. It was then, in August of 1812, locked in close firing range combat with the HMS Guerriere that she got her nickname. A British sailor seeing their canon balls bounce off the oak hull called out (allegedly), “Huzzah, her sides are made of iron”.

Thus the name “Old Ironsides”. She sunk the Guerriere and went on to sink the HMS Java off Brazil. In a fight with two warships off Madeira she captured one, the HMS Cyane, and brought her back to the US where the ship became the USS Cyane. She actually captured both ships but lost one in a subsequent battle. But fighting on one side and keeping even one captive ship on the other is not bad work.

The name “Old Ironsides” is critically important for another reason. It saved her in 1830 when the Navy had scheduled her for salvage. Oliver Wendell Holmes poem, “Old Ironsides” (“Ay, tear her tattered ensign down...”) raised such a public outcry the Navy changed plans and scheduled her for a refit in Boston in the now historic “Dry Dock No. 1”. Interestingly, she was the first to use the dry dock in 1833 and the last ship in that same dry dock in 1995. Now the ship and the dry dock are both in the Charleston Yard as historic exhibits.

After the refit, she made a trip around the world showing the flag and as a symbol of America. (The trip took 455 days – and there was no dance floor, no nightly entertainment and the food and service was poor; better you should go on the Queen Victoria.) After many years as a training ship for the Naval Academy, “Old Ironsides” was literally sinking at the dock from leakage. A major refit was needed

again and again the public responded in the 1920's with over \$250,000 including \$148,000 from children, mostly in pennies. Her final “grand voyage”, sadly under tow, was in 1931-34 and she made ports from Bellingham, Washington, through the Panama Canal and north to Maine. She showed off to 4.6 million people, two million in California alone. And I was one of those. Somewhere I have a picture of me as a baby in my Mother's arms on board “Old Ironsides”. And the Navy, in the uniforms of 1812, still show her off today in Boston.

We did end the summer with a mini-trip to Canada by way of Akron. The Akron stop was for Helen's high school reunion dinner – boy, there were a lot of old people there! Interestingly and sadly, most of the attendees were “local” to Ohio. In particular, the Florida crowd did not or could not make the trip as they did only five years ago. The group did decide to meet again, but decided they'd better make it after only three years instead of five.

From Akron, with passports in hand and rum in the trunk for our friends (does this make me a rum runner?), we headed north and east through Toronto to see our table mates from the QE 2 world cruise in 1993. (Again, they asked us up. I told you inviting us could be hazardous.) At our request, this visit was mostly that, visiting. We enjoyed their new home on a golf course overlooking a lake and visiting with them and with Ashley, their year or so old Westie. Ashley loves to play, especially a form of “catch me if you can” – and you can't!! He is quick and fast, under the table, around the couch, into the next room, lots of fun. He had us laughing until we were exhausted. And then, he would cock his head and say, “You're quitting already?”

We did venture into Toronto for sight seeing – mostly from the excellent, revolving dining room 351 meters (1,150 feet) up the CN Tower. (And no, it is not the CNN Tower.) The tower is 553 meters tall – 1/3rd of a mile! – and is the tallest freestanding building in the world. Its prime functions are to support



Toronto's landmark CN Tower.



Ashley...momentarily at rest.



Our friends show us around Toronto before dessert.

communications equipment higher than the tall buildings of Toronto and tourism. Like the Space Needle in Seattle, it is the symbol of the city. For the “goats” among the tourists, there is the Sky Pod at 1,465 feet but you must walk up from the dining room another 300 plus vertical feet. I recommend stopping at the dining room. Trust me, you can see it *all* from there and enjoy a wonderful luncheon at the same time. They have over 500 labels in their wine selection and I recommend the Canadian Riesling from Cave Springs winery only a few miles away on the Niagara Peninsula.

We did find one place to add to our list of future trips. We crossed into the US on the edge of the Thousand Islands area of the St. Lawrence River just north of central New York. It was a brilliant day and the scenery was spectacular. We must go back but I'm not sure when. We actually do have some other plans for the rest of this year and early in 2008. We are hoping to see some of Helen's Romanian relatives here in late October including the bride and groom featured in the last issue of RRR. In November we have the usual family trips plus a seven day cruise just after Thanksgiving. Yes, I do remember the very inexpensive cruise from hell in last year's newsletter. But *this* is different – we hope. It is on Holland American Lines and so should be OK.

In January of 2008 we will be in New York when all three of Cunard's Queens come in to port: The QE 2, QM 2, and the brand new Queen Victoria. AND we will

board the Queen Victoria for her very first world cruise!!!! Of course, we will be **forced** getting off in Los Angeles, but it does sound better than simply saying a cruise from New York to LA, doesn't it? The 17 days will give us a chance to see the ship, and remember, we had those \$500 coupons from Cunard that I mentioned in the last issue. We will also try to see some of you after we disembark in LA. Beyond that, no plans so get your reservations in early, and we'll look for you here.

Starting in early November, we will be away most of the time until well after the holidays so I must reluctantly admit that it is

most unlikely that we will get out a special mailing of greetings for Christmas, Hanukkah, or the New Year. We do thank you for your cards and, especially, for notes telling us a bit about how and what you are doing. We are interested. And we do send our best wishes to each of you with this letter; may your holiday season be joyous and may 2008 bring good health and happiness to you and yours. May the peace of God rest in you and 'til next time, *may a kind and loving God walk with us and with each of you.*

Amen.

Just a few of the 35,000 poinsettias.

