

Spring in the Eastern USA 2026

This spring I embarked on a six-week trip to the US, six weeks in six different states with stops in two more. The first logistics challenge was Atlanta Hartsfield Airport where my transatlantic flight arrived. There is no hotel in either terminal and the hotel shuttles only serve the domestic terminal.

So, my wheelchair pusher and I faced a challenge after collecting my luggage. How to get me to the domestic terminal when he and the chair couldn't leave international. His supervisor suggested I might be able to pre-check my bag for the next day's flight (no way!).



In the end he left the chair, put me and my bag on the shuttle bus – and came with me! Here he is and the drawing he was creating. He then found a chair at the domestic terminal and got me to hotel shuttle pick up which was not close to where the shuttle bus dropped us off.

The next morning brought a new logistics challenge. The hotel shuttle only stops at the Delta terminal which is quite a distance from the domestic terminal serving all the other airlines where my wheelchair and

American Airlines flight to Asheville, NC awaited. The shuttle driver (who also suffers from a back disability!) kept me on the bus, took me to the other terminal and found a stray wheelchair on which I could push my luggage to my check-in point. Two very kind rule breakers – southern hospitality!

Fortunately, the transfer at Charlotte went totally smoothly as did the arrival in Asheville. My grandson was flying my daughter down from Michigan in his piper cub and her rental car was delivered to their plane at the general aviation part of the airport. They collected me and I had a bonus of lunch with my grandson!



Our Hendersonville destination where my cousin (closest relative other than descendants) lives is charming. Its wide main street with lots of pedestrian amenities has mostly

preserved the late 18th C and early 19th C buildings. The historic district is filled with antique shops, galleries and restaurants and the area has a four-season climate. The bear sculptures dotting Main Street are from the annual (since 2003) Bearfootin' Art Week when local businesses and individuals commission the sculptures which are then auctioned to benefit local non-profits and the downtown association.



We stayed at 1898 Waverly Inn, built as an Inn and continuously operated as such. They provide a nice happy hour daily and what I think is the best breakfast in town, ordered the night before off the menu and served freshly made at your reserved breakfast time.

We visited the 264-



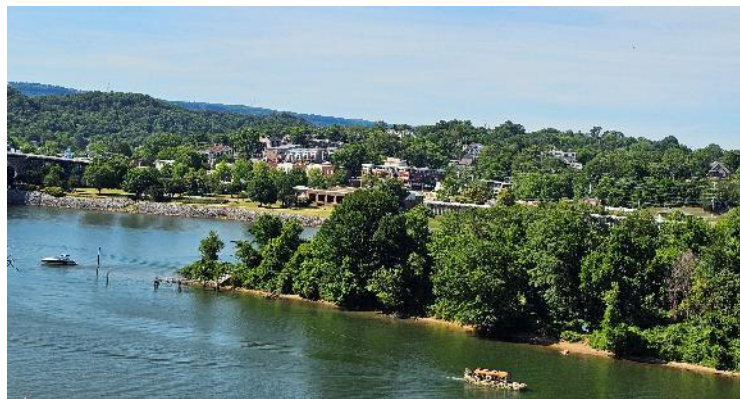
acre Carl Sandburg house and farm, part of the National Park Service. The house remains as it was when Carl passed away in 1967. Although I knew Sandburg's poetry I had forgotten about his six-volume biography of Abraham Lincoln and did not know how instrumental he had been in obtaining improved labor laws through his writing, activism and singing. When they moved to Connemara Farm in Flat Rock, NC in 1945 they arrived with 14,000 books. Carl tended to write wherever and whenever the mood struck him. His wife Lillian bred champion goats for milk production.



A further bonus in addition to time with my two daughters is that a close friend from Peace Corps Morocco lives a couple hours away and joined us for an afternoon and evening.

Since there was no easy way to get to Chattanooga, my friend drove over (4 hours) to collect me. Because of construction on I-40 the return drive was on beautiful country roads through Great Smoky Mountain National Park.

In the 25 years my friend has lived there the city has invested heavily in amenities that attract families. There are excellent concert hall and museum as well as the first aquarium in the region. An outdoor sculpture park, amphitheater and river walk further enhance the city. It is a beautiful city with the Tennessee River, Lookout Mountain and lovely neighborhoods.



Next stop was the Boston area to visit friends from when I lived there in the 1960's. An uneventful flight and ride up to the north shore found Swampscott in full spring flower. It is so rocky I don't know how the houses find a spot for their foundations. But there are lots of



beautiful rock gardens!

I spent nostalgic time roaming old Marblehead which has done a great job posting the history of the houses.

There is still maritime industry.





Marblehead was one of the stops on the US tour Friends of Lafayette organized in 2024 to recreate/celebrate 200 years after his final US visit.

We did a couple of day trips. Salem capitalizes even more on its witch history –



apparently it gets really intense near Halloween. The visit to the Peabody Essex Museum there is always a treat. The current Boreal Forest exhibit (the forest that stretches across northern US and southern Canada) focused on the wildlife and ecosystem as well as indigenous people. I loved the patterns painted on the skin coats to bring the hunters good



luck.



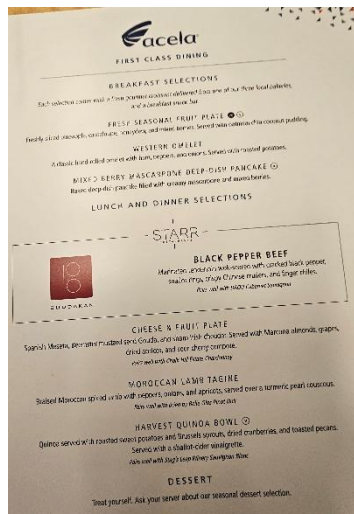
It was also great to see an Arcade (pinball machines etc) actively patronized.

Salem has a rich diversity of housing types!



Gloucester also still has an active fishing industry.

I took the Amtrak Acela first class from Boston to Washington, DC. Amtrak only reimbursed 1/3 of our tickets cancelled last year (due to my heart failure) and the remaining credit was about to expire! It was a super comfortable day-long trip including excellent food and service and free flowing bar/beverage service.

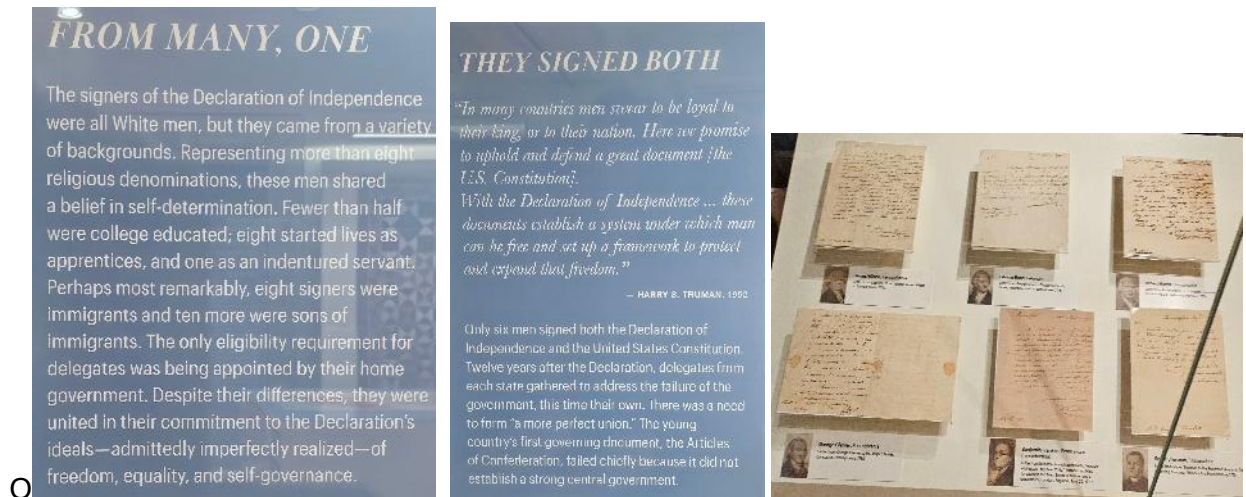


The DC visit was timed to coincide with a Women of Peace Corps Legacy spring meet and greet which provided the chance to reconnect with many friends from that chapter of my life. With one friend I went to Dunbarton Oaks Museum focusing on Byzantine and Pre-Columbian studies where I had never been.

Another suggested the National Museum of Women in the Arts that I didn't know about and which has a terrific international collection including some French favorites (Cassatt, Valadon, Rosa Bonheur). And I encountered French artist, Niki de Saint Phalle's Pregnant Nona Sculpture.

In honor of America's 250th celebration I did a public tour at the Daughters of the American Revolution HQ. In addition to fascinating period rooms created by individual state chapters, an exhibit "Revolution In Their Words" highlights the individuals involved in the Declaration of Independence through to the Constitution in 1783. Only six signers were on both documents.





Of the Period Rooms I found the New Jersey room particularly interesting. In 1777 in the battle of Red Bank a ship was partially sunk in the Delaware River. In 1910 two NJ DAR members acquired the rights to the ship and had the idea to use the wood and create this room from the relics. After a year of drying the wood, this room was delivered and used for committee meetings at DAR until into the 1930's.



A must visit was to the Philips Collection where I was a member when I lived in DC in 2006-7. At the time they had gala parties to welcome back Renoir's Luncheon of The Boating Party which had been on a two-year tour. It is currently in Paris at the Renoir exhibit at Musee D'Orsay so I had to wait until I got home to see it again.

The current exhibit of Miro and the United States explores the relationship between Miro and post-WWII American artists. Miro spent considerable time in the US and had close relationships with many American artists of the time including Alexander Calder, Joan Mitchell, Jackson Pollack, Mark Rothko, Max Ernst and Yves Tanguy. He admired the "enthusiasm and



freshness” of American Art. This Self-Portrait in 1960 from a private collection he said was re-worked from an earlier version in 1930’s.



My hotel was close to Annie’s Paramount Steak House in the Dupont Circle neighborhood. It was founded by Greek Immigrant George Katinas in 1948 and is still family run and excellent with many Greek influences. It was famous as a public place where gay couples could socialize openly in the 1970’s. There is some street art at that corner.



I took Amtrak first class as far back as Newark, NJ where my closest friend since junior high collected me for the short drive to her retirement community in Bethlehem, PA.

We planned three days in Philadelphia which is considered the birthplace of the US and is celebrating 250 years accordingly. We didn’t do any tours related to that but instead took in the Barnes Foundation. Dr Barnes amassed a collection (current estimated value \$22 billion) that he willed to the city so long as it continued to be displayed exactly as he had. It wasn’t easy to figure out the theme for each room but his 181 Renoirs is the largest collection in the world and his 100 Monets not shabby either. I especially appreciated



getting to see Utrillo’s and Modigliani’s I hadn’t seen before.

One of Henri Rousseau’s most famous works from the Barnes, Unpleasant Surprise, is on loan to the Orangerie in Paris for its current exhibition which I was able to see when I returned home.



A relatively new Alexander Calder garden is worth a visit. I didn't know that his father and grandfather were also sculptors. A short film of his Connecticut studio put the recreated prairie setting in context.



Inside are some of his mobiles.



The huge Reading Terminal Market, formerly a railroad station, has more than 80 locally sourced food vendors including prepared foods such as Ethiopian and Philly cheese steak.

We also partook of excellent Greek food at Zorba's Tavern.



Because I am a street art junkie I insisted on a street art walking tour. This large multi-panel piece focuses on the seventh ward on the south side of Philly.



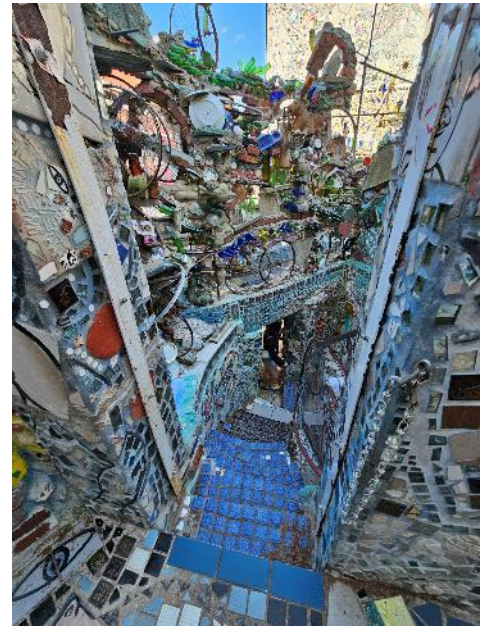


The tour especially focused on Isaiah Zagar whose works I didn't know.



But his Magic Gardens, a project of mosaics executed over the last 20 years of his life had been on my list of must-see things in Philly!

Our guide said Philly claims to be the street art capital of the US with over 4600 pieces. Two were only visible from our hotel room.



Not far from LOVE Park (dedicated to President Kennedy) we found a traditional diner where I had a breakfast complete with scrapple and raisin bread!



Back to Newark for a short flight to Chicago where I would have reunion visits with friends from my years there. With one friend I visited a new National Hellenic Museum displaying the history of Greek Town in Chicago as well as the Greek Orthodox Church's influence on the greater community. Of course, Greek food for lunch, and then a visit to the exterior of the Saints Volodymyr and Olha Catholic Ukrainian Church.



We saw street art in progress and completed.



I always take the Chicago Architecture Society river boat tour because I learn something new from every docent! The riverwalk becomes more attractive each year with new restaurants, art displays and gardens. The building on the far left is my former home.



No visit to Chicago is complete without some time in the Art Institute. I have to revisit the Chagall America Windows and Gustav Caillebotte's Paris Street Rainy Day, one of my inspirations to live in Paris and painted not far from my apartment. The buildings are still there but the street is no longer cobblestones and of course people's clothes are different. Umbrellas can still often be prevalent, however.



Chagall's windows were perhaps inspired by Picasso's 1967 untitled Civic Center sculpture which began the commissioning of many huge public works of art by Alexander Calder, Joan Miro, Jean Dubuffet, Claes Oldenburg and others. Picasso later said the sculpture represented the head of his Afghan Hound Kabul.



A current temporary exhibition was Embroidered Traditions from Morocco to

Afghanistan. Much to my surprise there were featured a cape, the same type my

Chattanooga friend has which are woven on special looms by Amazigh (Berber) women in the south of Morocco, and a necklace from Ida Ou Nadif, a somewhat remote village in the Middle Atlas Mountains, where as a Peace Corps Volunteer I did a project with women who embroidered Berber shoes.



Fortunately, many fine Chicago buildings have been preserved. Louis Sullivan's former Carson Pirie Scott building with its magnificent iron façade is now a Target department store.

The new highlight of the Chicago visit was the Barack Obama Presidential Center. It was scheduled to officially open two weeks after my visit (I watched the opening ceremony live streamed in Paris) but I wanted to see it for myself. It is truly a community center on Chicago's South Side with a branch of the Chicago Public Library, sports facilities and programs fostering creativity and innovation for Chicago's youth. The site is large (19 acres) with gardens and walking paths adjacent to the University of Chicago campus and Museum of Science and Industry.



A final Amtrak leg took me to Ann Arbor, Michigan where the whole family was able to assemble for the marriage of my youngest granddaughter.



It was a very special week as I and my daughters had been tasked with preparing the flowers for the wedding (bouquets, boutonnieres etc.) out of beautiful silk flowers. This was something we hadn't done before and had a great time implementing.



And of course, there was time to spend with all the members of the Michigan family. The Anchorage and Virginia-based family members were able to attend also!

Here are Leanne, Heida and I with the bride and groom.

