



In Search of El dorado

A daily journal of my travels and adventures in my.....Search for Eldorado

Hello to Family & Friends

Tuesday, March 2nd 2021 Day 44



After a very quiet night I drove into Johnson City for gas and breakfast. I should have eaten at the Mexican place next door, it smelled really good, but instead I chose a sausage, egg & cheese biscuit from a donut shop that was warmed up in the microwave. I should have followed my nose. I did a little itinerary planning and headed for Austin.

MURDER AT THE LAND OFFICE AND OTHER STORIES

From 1887 to 1891, William Sidney Porter, the popular short story writer O. Henry, worked as a draftsman for the Texas General Land Office in this building, which presently houses the Capitol Visitors Center.

I was planning to visit Hamilton Pool on my way, but part of my research found that, other than having to make a reservation for a morning or afternoon time slot, they are charging \$12 per car to enter the park and then \$8 per person to take the hike. The quarter-mile hike is to the pool which you can then hike around and under a large rock overhang and a waterfall. Sounds like it might be fun, but due to the freezing temps causing pieces of rock to fall from the ceiling of the cave, the cave and waterfall hike is closed. You all know my thoughts on paying to hike, and I just could not justify \$20 for a quarter-mile hike to a pool of water.

It was about an hour drive into Austin and, believe it or not, I found a free parking spot on the street almost right in front of the Capital visitor center. As mentioned above the visitor center used to be the Land Office where William Porter worked, and the sign below is in the drafting room where he did his job. Many of his experiences from this office and building went into his short stories. I have to admit I have read Shakespeare, Twain, Homer, Dickens, Hemmingway, London, Orwell, Steinbeck and a host of others, but I have never read O. Henry. I will make that effort soon.

The area where you are now standing served as the General Land Office drafting room from 1858-1918.

(Top) The circular stairway described in "Bexar Scrip No. 2692" may be seen through the doorway to your right. The photo above was taken in the 1930s as part of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS). The stairway was still dark and unused.



Left is their photo, and right is my photo.



LEGO

Texas State Capitol



Designed by Central Texas resident Ben Rollman, the LEGO Texas State Capitol is made of approximately 65,000 LEGO pieces. Rollman and members of the Texas LEGO User Group (TexLUG) spent eighteen months designing the massive model and four months constructing it. The model contains no custom-made pieces and is constructed entirely with generic LEGO bricks. Standing 50 inches high, 62 inches wide and 102 inches long, this 145 pound model is a 1/72 scale replica of the 1888 Texas State Capitol. Before going on display here in August 2019, the model was shown at Brick Fiesta, TexLUG's annual LEGO event.

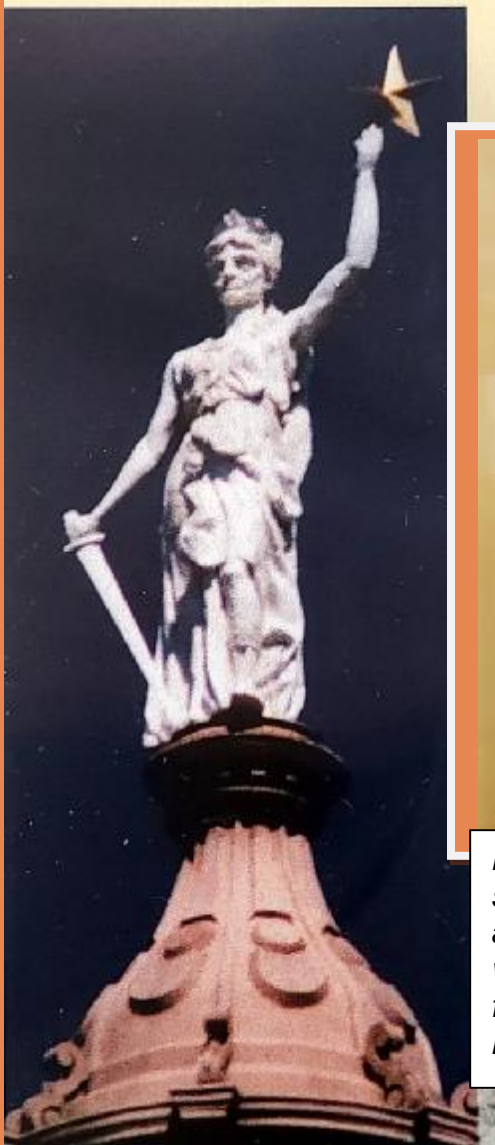
Impressive! Hard to believe there are no custom pieces used.

The paragraph is too wide to show in a photo, so I will type some of it here and on the next page I can insert the rest.

Perched atop the Capital dome, the Goddess of Liberty Statue has become a symbol of Texas history as well as the statehouse's crowning architectural element. Left is the original star that the Goddess held high above the statehouse from 1888 to 1985.

E.E. Myers designed the original statue, perhaps influenced by the Statue of Liberty in the 1870's, the Freedom statue of the

Nation's Capital building, circa 1863, or even the monumental Athena statue at the Parthenon in Ancient Greece (I was there). Made of zinc alloy, the 2000-pound statue required 80 separate pieces, which were welded into four sections. During the last week of February 1888, the four sections were hoisted to the top of the dome and assembled with large iron screws.



Damage and deterioration due to 97 years of exposure to heat, rain, wind and pollution led to the November 1985 removal of the original Goddess by military helicopter. The replacement Goddess, made of aluminum, was installed on June 14, 1986. Like the original, the replica has a gilded star raised by a figure painted white to simulate stone. The original statue, now refurbished, resides at the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum.



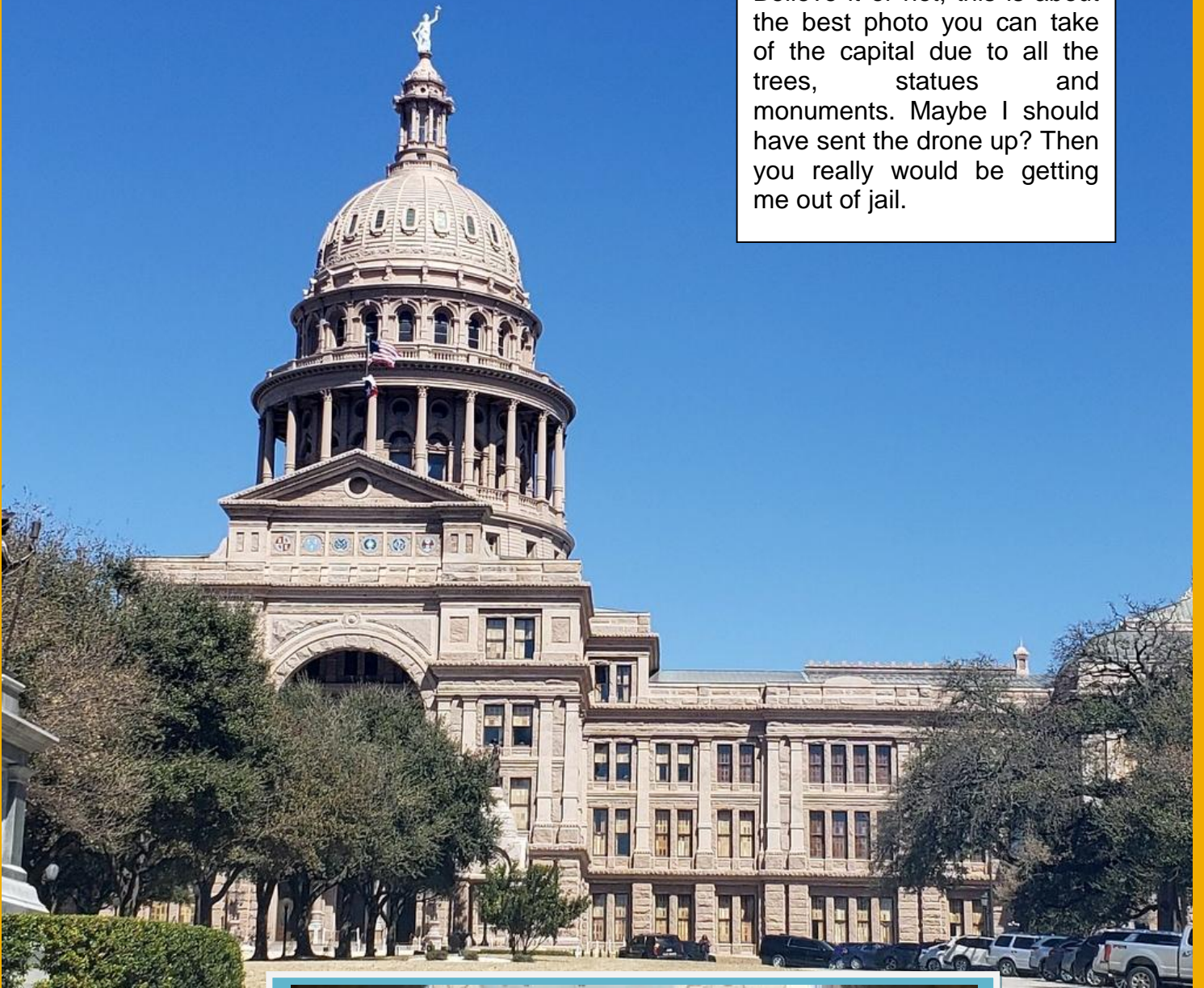
Maintenance of the original Goddess over the years has yielded surprises. An early steeplejack performed stunts as he worked. In the late '20s or early '30s, the statue had black hair, pink skin and a blue robe with gold sash. One work crew encountered a beehive inside her head and reportedly plugged her nose with corks to avoid being stung while they worked. And a decaying time capsule from 1888 was discovered in the star during the statue's restoration. It contained the remains of spiders, cockroaches, flies, moths, ants and bees along with a copy of *Texas Vorwaerts* (a German-language newspaper published in Austin); two newspapers from Wisconsin and several calling cards. The materials are part of the Capitol Historic Artifact Collection.



It's hard to see in this photo with all the light coming in behind, but there are actually two domes, one inside of the other. I guess I should have taken a picture of why that is, but I didn't. The Texas Capitol building is the largest in the nation, and only the one in Washington D.C. is larger. Floor space covers just over 192,000 square feet. The building was completed in 1888 after six and a half years of construction. There were all sorts of stories about events that occurred during that time, including the firing of the architect, but I won't get that deeply into it. Below is the cornerstone of the Texas State Capital.

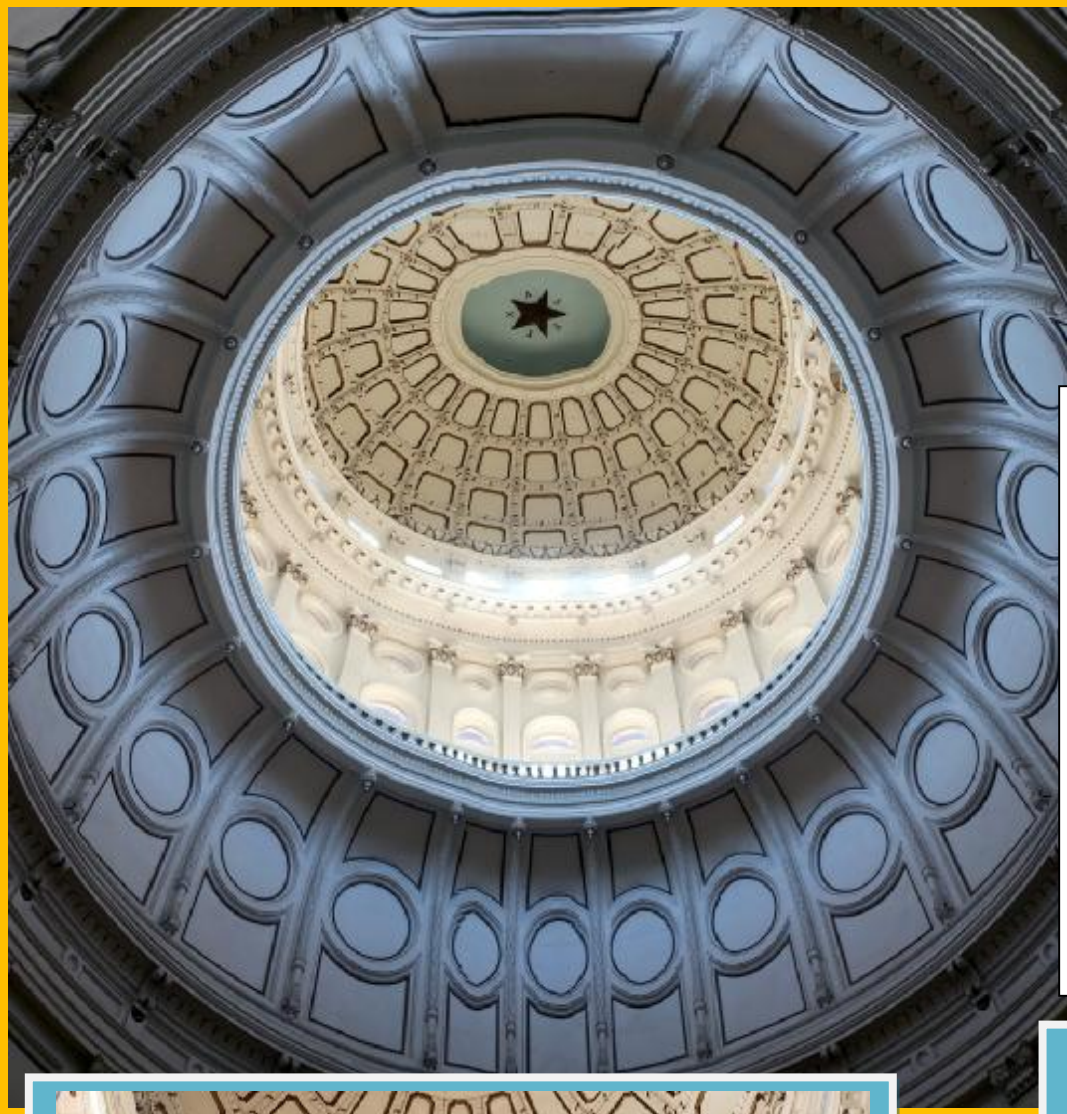


Believe it or not, this is about the best photo you can take of the capital due to all the trees, statues and monuments. Maybe I should have sent the drone up? Then you really would be getting me out of jail.



Ya gotta laugh at how a panoramic distorts the roundness of the rotunda.

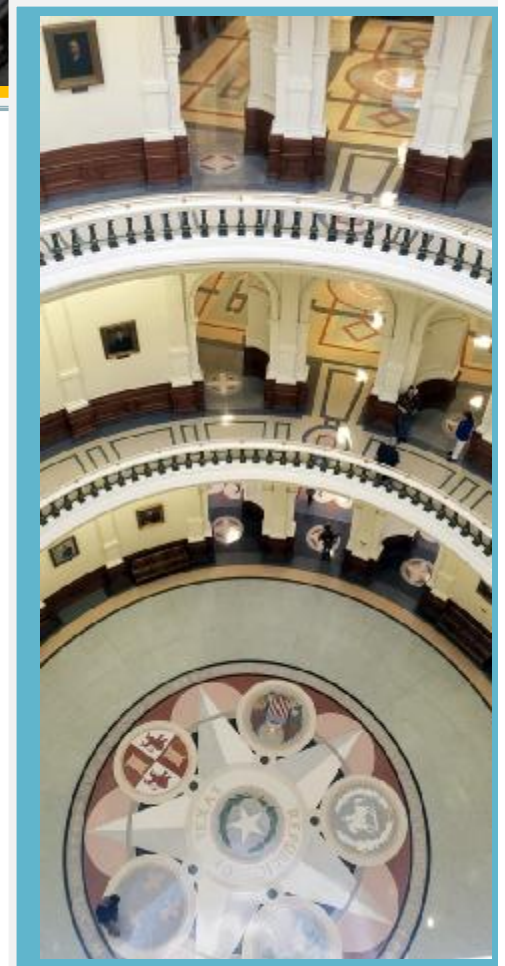




This one, taken from the fourth floor balcony, is a little better.

The photo below is looking down at the floor of the rotunda. I did give a thought to lying on my back down there to take a picture straight up, but it was a fleeting one.

Over on the left you can see the spiral staircase which leads into the area between the inner and outer domes.



The Texas Governor's Mansion

The Texas Governor's Mansion was constructed by noted master builder, Abner Cook. Completed in 1856, this Greek Revival Mansion has served as the official residence of Texas governors and their families since its construction. The Mansion plays an important role in Texas history, telling the unique story of our state and the governors that have called it home.



Between the trees, security fencing and state troopers, this was the best I could do.

On June 8, 2008, an arsonist set fire to the Governor's Mansion. At the time of the fire, the Mansion was unoccupied, and the historic furnishings and collection were in storage while the Mansion underwent deferred maintenance to upgrade plumbing, mechanical, and fire systems.

Once again I will be retying from the info board.

Austin firefighters arrived on the scene and immediately worked to contain the blaze. After extinguishing the fire at the front of the mansion, firefighters worked to extinguish the fire on the second floor. They faced a tremendous challenge as the fire spread to the roof, part of which collapsed. It took more than 100 firefighters and more than six hours to extinguish the fire, which caused extensive damage to both the interior and exterior. Smoke damage and millions of gallons of water used to combat the flames also marred interior walls, floors, woodwork and plaster.

Restoration of the Mansion after the fire took four years and required millions of dollars from the state and private donations. In July 2012, the Mansion Collection was returned to the Mansion, and the First Family moved back into the home.



The lawn had more Alamo memorials, Tejano statues and a couple tributes to the Confederacy, which I am opposed to. Just my opinion. So I ate lunch in the RV and found that the Toy Museum was only seven blocks away, just right for a nice walk - Closed on Tuesdays. Checking the phone again I found the museum below about another seven blocks away from me. It was a little weird how the city environment altered in just a block or two from clean and businesslike and safe, to dirty and night club-ish and a little scary. Of course the museum of the weird could be no place else but right in the middle of it.



The Haunted Driskill Hotel

I passed this hotel on my way to the museum and thought it would make a good picture, but I passed it by. Then after seeing the info inside I made plans to go past and get a picture to go with this story. Then I forgot. Something to look forward to tomorrow.

The year was 1885. Colonel Jesse Driskill, a very wealthy cattle-baron who made his fortune running cattle up the Chisolm Trail in the 1860s, had decided he was going to take his money and build the grandest hotel in the South, located right here in his beloved town of Austin. He purchased a whole city block for \$7,500, a sizable sum of money for that day, and construction soon began. After months of building and an enormous cost of \$400,000, the hotel opened to much fanfare on December 20th, 1886.

Alas, the celebrations were to be short lived, as Colonel Driskill would soon learn he made a very bad business decision. At the time, Austin was still very much a frontier town, complete with dusty dirt roads, outlaws, and gun fights. It was still the Wild West, and the fact was that nobody could afford to stay at the extravagant hotel. Just six months after the hotel opened to the public, Colonel Driskill had to sadly close the doors to his pride and joy.

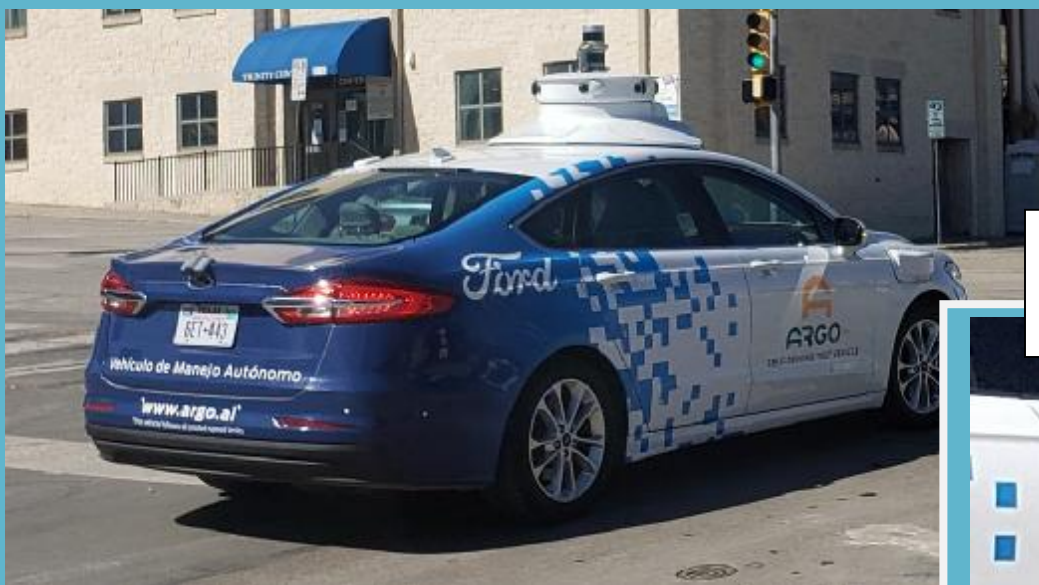


I hesitated at the \$12 price tag, but the seller had relatives in Spooner so I handed over my credit card. He's from Minnesota and we talked a little about cold weather.

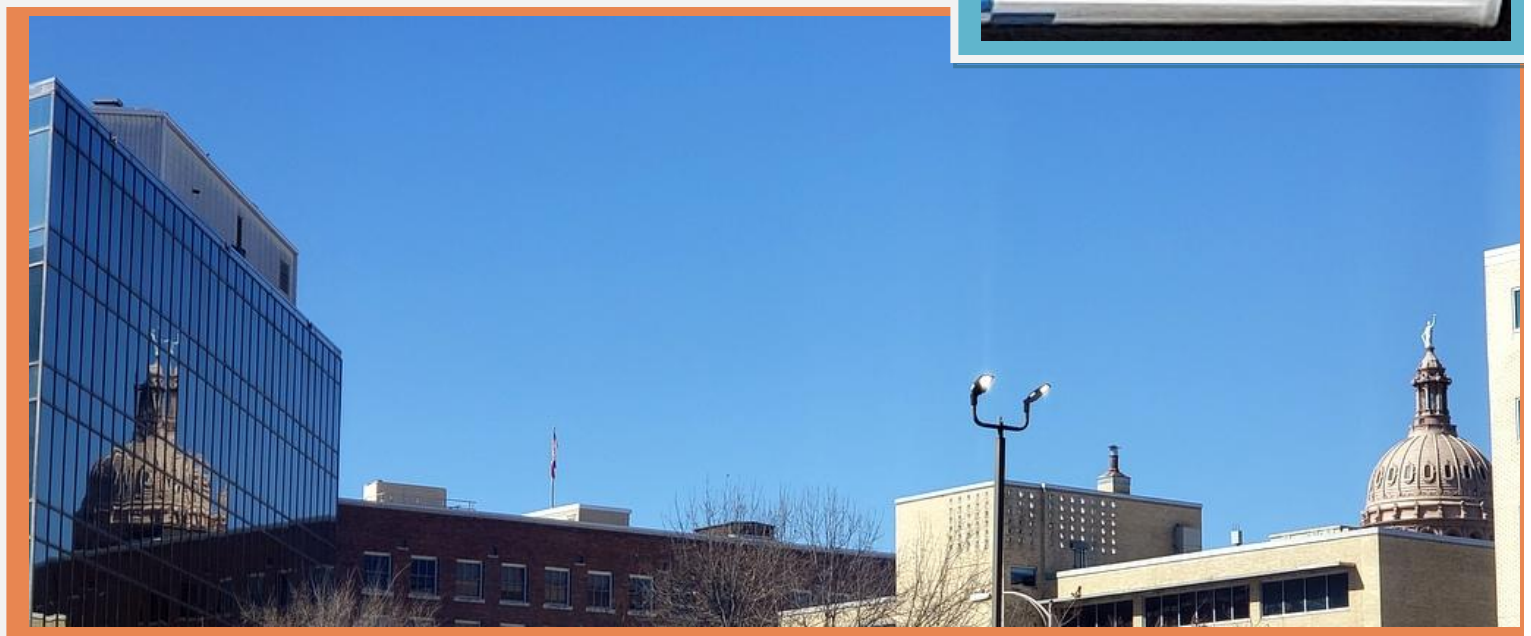
To make matters worse, Driskill had lost the remainder of his fortune in 1888, when 3,000 of his cattle had died on the northern plains due to a late spring freeze. In a final blow of defeat, the broken and penniless Colonel lost his beloved hotel in a desperate game of poker in 1890, and sadly died of a stroke on May 3 that same year.

Hmmm...I guess these are the only pictures I found worth taking in this museum. They had a lot of Ripley's Believe It or Not type stuff, two-headed calves, mummies, shrunken heads, side show freaks, big foot plaster casts of footprints, and so on; wax figures of movie monsters like Frankenstein, Dracula, Wolfman, Creature from the Black Lagoon and so on. Much of it was in the Buckhorn Saloon back in San Antonio, and I paid \$20 for that museum, so I guess I got myself a deal.

Forgetting to talk a walk past the Driskill Hotel I headed back to the RV.

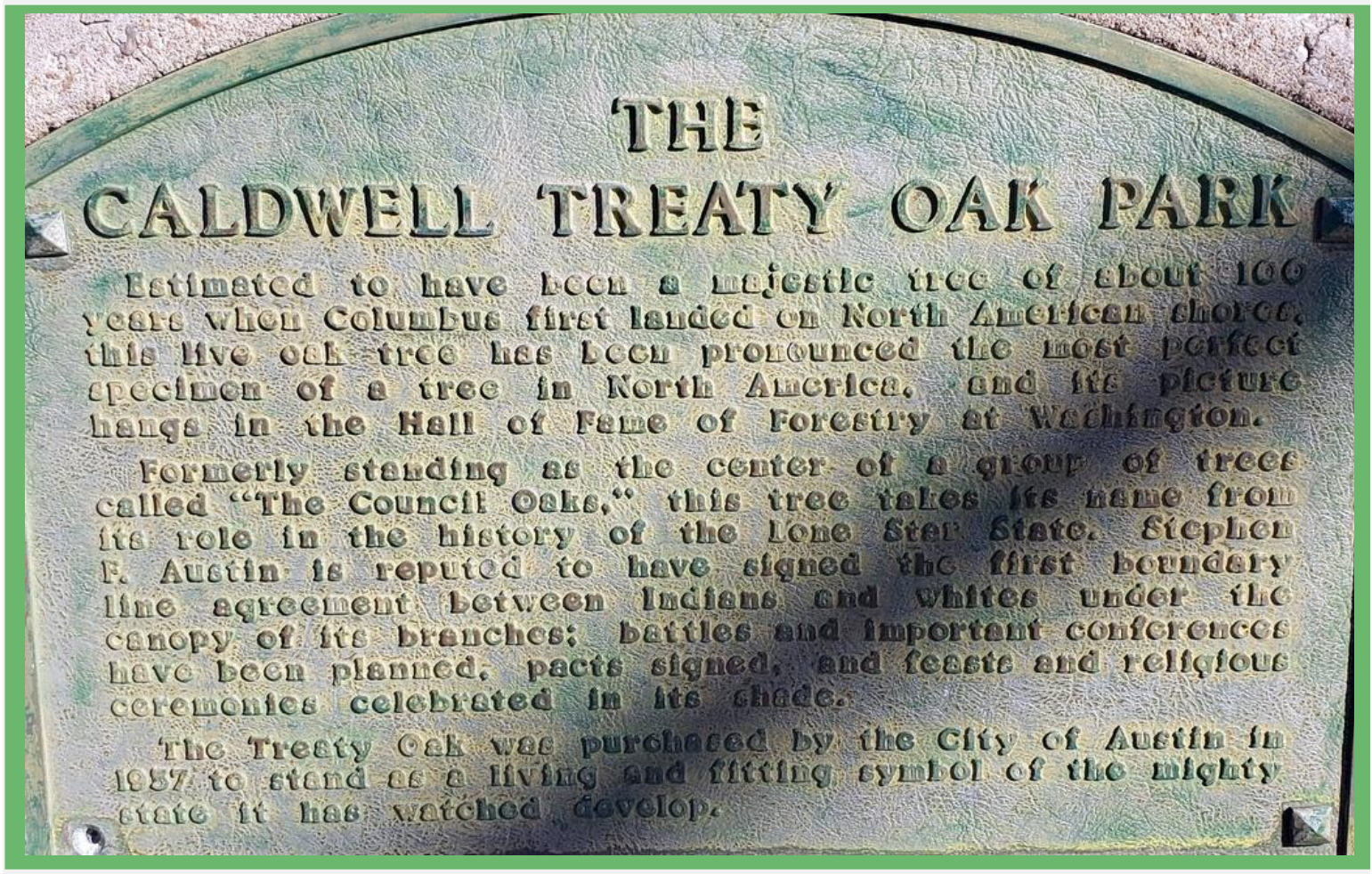


What do we have here? Interesting. First time I've seen one in person.



I've always said that things happen for a reason. If I had walked back past the Driskill Hotel I would not have seen the sight above. The Capital Dome reflected in the building opposite.

And, standing in the same exact spot, the photo below of St Mary Cathedral, reflected in the other side of the same building.





I know what you're thinking, that tree looks half dead. In a way, it is. You can read the full story at the link below, but here is the cliff notes version – In 1989 a feed store employee was convicted of spreading a volatile chemical under the tree and causing it to look the way it does. Austinites were calling for the death penalty (JK), but he received nine years and while he passed away in 2001, the tree still clings to life, however tenuously.

Here is the link to the newspaper article –

[25 years later, intrigue of poisoned Treaty Oak remains - News - Austin American-Statesman - Austin, TX](#)

You may have to copy and paste to get it all.

I don't know about Austin, a city where people burn down the Governor's Mansion and poison 600 year old trees.

Sam's Club tonight and some other things to do tomorrow. I'm tired. Good night.

Until next time.....