

Story and photos by Randy Mallory

New York to Paris ...TEXAS STYLE!

On May 20-21, 1927, Charles A. Lindbergh made the first nonstop flight from New York to Paris. Years earlier, the Great Race of 1908 sent a mad dash of motorcars *westward* from New York to Paris.

Last year, I decided what the heck! Texas has its own New York and Paris, and they're only 100 miles apart! So I set off along scenic backroads for an excursion from New York to Paris, Lone Star style.

My cross-country jaunt starts, where else--New York, Texas (pop. 12).

Grand Central Station is the Reynolds New York Store. Owner Dewey Reynolds' feed-and-seed operation also stocks drinks and snacks for folks who come to "set a spell." His wife, Carolyn, has prettied-up the porch with plants in whiskey barrels and a watering trough. Sipping a soda while sitting on a cedar swing, I get into a New York state of mind.

Farmers in "gimme" caps chitchat beside their pickups. One of Dewey's fertilizer trucks idles across the road, bound for hay fields. A mail carrier pulls up in a red, four-wheel-drive Jeep, light flashing on top, and hands letters to Dewey's son, Ryan.

The Reynolds family has been here since 1856, when Davis Reynolds helped found the community. Tradition says he named it New York hoping for prosperity. Hope faded in 1901, when the railroad bypassed the town. Only the Reynolds store and a church and cemetery remain.

Cheesecake put New York on the map...literally. In the 1980s, Lynn and Peter Dunsavage began selling homemade "New York, Texas Cheesecake" at their home bakery a few miles from town. To attract customers, they got New York put on highway maps. In 2000, Bud and Nancy Hicks bought the New York, Texas Cheesecake company and relocated it 15 miles to the west in downtown Athens.

On a side trip to Bud and Nancy's current location, I learn that they use the original Dunsavage recipe and the same baker, Fayrene Miller, who's been at it 16 years. They also added peanut brittle to the line-up. At the bakery, I sample one of a dozen available flavors--"Verry Berry," a strawberry-raspberry-blueberry blend. [*note: verry is correct*]

Backtracking to New York, I head north through Brownsboro to Edom, where I discover *fresh* blueberries at Blueberry Hill Farm on FM 314 just south of town.

Chuck and Sherri Arena, who run a telecommunications firm in Dallas, bought the farm in 1999 as a getaway from big-city bustle. "This is our lake house," says Sherri, who spends summers here with their three daughters. Chuck joins them on weekends--as do friends and family--to work 10 acres of blueberries and an acre of blackberries. "We meet so many nice people," Sherri adds. "It's really fun!"

I find more food-fun at The Shed Cafe in Edom. The eatery epitomizes East Texas country cooking. From my counter stool, I watch local ladies deftly serve up steaming blue-plate specials. A friendly, humming waitress named Deb brings my selection--salmon croquettes, mashed potatoes with gravy, fresh green beans, and homemade rolls and cornbread. I eye today's dessert choices scribbled on a chalkboard and go for blackberry cobbler à la mode.

Garden of Edom

Stuffed, I mosey east of Edom to Blue Moon Gardens (see *Texas Highways*, June 2001). Sharon Smith and Mary Wilhite opened the gardens here in 1993. Their 12-acre wholesale-retail operation near Chandler grows unusual ornamentals, herbs, perennials, and Texas natives. “We’re a destination garden for hard-core master gardeners,” says Mary. The two also converted a 90-year-old farmhouse into a gift shop filled with home and garden accents.

Downtown Edom has been associated with handmade gifts (actually works of art) since Doug Brown set up his pottery shop here 30 years ago. Five studios now comprise the Edom craft community.

At Potters Brown, Doug and wife Beth (with help from potter Downey Stephens) make dinnerware in rich colors, particularly Doug’s signature green, which comes from copper in the glaze. At Pottery by Sherry, Sherry Gaspar makes interesting candleholders and other practical pottery. KC Studios purveys jewelry and fabric art. And at Zeke & Marty, one-time leather artists Zeke Zewick and Marty Flanagan craft intricate gold on silver jewelry incorporating bone, metal, and precious stones. The newest studio is Arbor Castle Birdhouses, where Joe Hopps fashions whimsical birdhouses that resemble medieval castles.

Kitsch--not art--pulls me from Edom west on Texas 64 to Canton and the mother of all flea markets, First Monday Trade Days (see *Texas Highways*, November 2000). In the 1850s, circuit judges held court on the first Monday of the month, and locals sold and traded goods and animals outside the courthouse. That humble beginning mushroomed into a bargain-hunter’s paradise, scattered indoors and outdoors across

300 acres, which now draws 200,000 shoppers monthly. Shop-a-holics converge on 7,000 vendor booths--selling everything from antique tools to registered puppies. After finding a *chiminea* (Mexican outdoor fireplace) for my deck, I retrace my tracks headed back east on Texas 64 to the Redland community, home of Roseland Plantation Bed and Breakfast.

In 1954, Tyler oil heiress Gertrude Windsor bought and restored the 1854 plantation home of Burwell J. Hambrick and named the two-story Greek Revival house Roseland. She added three other buildings--an 1851 home, an 1848 log cabin, and a free-standing 1850s structure that once served as a ballroom--and replaced the original chapel (burned in the 1950s) with a building of similar design.

After Mrs. Windsor died, Tim and Carolyn West bought Roseland in 1999 and opened it for tours, private events, and bed-and-breakfast stays.

Carolyn walks me across the spacious grounds, proudly displaying the 400 rose bushes they've planted. I notice a few blooming cotton plants. "We like to show visitors real cotton plants; they were so integral to this place," Carolyn explains. We peek inside a non-descript metal building that Carolyn calls "Mrs. Windsor's surprise building." I swear not to divulge its contents. (Hint: It measures 15 by 28 feet and replicates a work by Leonardo da Vinci.)

The next stop, 30 or so miles away, is Edgewood and its Heritage Park, a historical village depicting rural life, circa 1900. Of the dozen or so historic Texas structures moved to the park--including a house, church, barbershop, blacksmith shop, and barn--I especially like Tom's Cafe, a 1920s eatery that was patronized by outlaws Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow.

Salt of the Earth

Bonnie and Clyde--not exactly the salt of the earth. But Grand Saline certainly is: The town sits atop a cylindrical underground salt dome measuring a mile-and-a-half wide and nearly four miles deep.

The Salt Palace and Museum here chronicles the history and commerce of this claim to fame (celebrated June 11-14, 2003, at the 29th annual Salt Fest). Director Lynn Kitchens believes the museum to be America's only salt structure. The original 1936 salt palace, built to celebrate the Texas Centennial, was made of actual salt blocks. Rain washed it away, as well as two later replacements. This 1993 incarnation is faced with salt blocks which visitors like to lick, Lynn confides.

Not me. But out front I am tempted to taste a two-ton salt block from the nearby Morton Salt Company mine. Even after 70 years of grinding away at the salt dome, the mine still could meet world demand for another 20,000 years.

At Lynn's suggestion, I drive toward the mine (not open to the public) for a roadside view of a 400-acre salt-marsh prairie. A backwater of Saline Creek filters through this snow-white landscape. Indians collected surface salt here centuries ago. Now, saltgrass and cattails line the briny flats, home to salt-loving wildlife.

Freshwater lies 18 miles away at a premier bass fishery called Lake Fork. I lollygag along the 27,690-acre reservoir's shoreline, watching anglers cast for lunkers. Inside the Minnow Bucket Marina, I marvel at a 12.5-pound Florida bass, named Sally, swimming in a display aquarium next to photos of fishermen and their catches. (More than 65 percent of the Texas Top 50 largest bass, including the current state record 18-

plus pounder, were caught from Lake Fork.) [note: resource for add-copy is http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/fish/infish/lakes/fork/lake_id.htm]

Ever the contrarian, here in big-fish country I find myself craving a steak. I'm satisfied at the northern edge of Lake Fork at the Yantis Meat Market in Yantis.

Butcher Jimmy Jenkins and his wife, Suzette, give the market a novel twist--a cook-your-own indoor grill. Jimmy grabs a chunk of prime aged beef and cuts me a 12-ounce--what else--New York strip. I sprinkle it with garlic salt and pepper and toss it on the grill. As the steak sizzles, I stuff a baked potato with fixin's. A crisp salad and glass of strong-brewed iced tea complete the meal. "We will grill it for you. But most people like to cook their own," Jimmy says. "It's quick."

Got Milk?

Edging into Hopkins County, my mind's on milk. This is dairy country in a big way, as I learn at the Southwest Dairy Center and Museum in Sulphur Springs.

Larger-than-life statues of a Holstein ("Buttercup") and a Jersey ("Cream Puff") welcome me. The 10,000-square-foot, artifact-rich museum displays dairy memorabilia and showcases the modern Southwestern dairy industry. I've never seen so many ice cream molds, milk bottles, vacuum pumps, and butter churns in all my life!

A replica farm kitchen and milking barn--plus dozens of classic black-and-white photos--depict life on a small dairy in the early 20th century. A short film chronicles the development of the dairy industry. Hands-on exhibits even let you crank a cream separator or plunge into butter-making.

I grab lunch (a giant sour cream-topped baked potato) in the museum's 1940s-style soda fountain and finish it off with a rich chocolate milkshake. (Sulphur Springs honors its milky heritage June 7-14, 2003 at the Hopkins County Dairy Festival.)

Downtown, I cruise around, admiring the ornate red granite and sandstone 1894 Hopkins County Courthouse. Architect James Riely Gordon's Romanesque Revival design resembles his 1895 Ellis County Courthouse in Waxahachie...except there's no tower clock in Sulphur Springs. Commissioners of the day agreed you should "get up at sunup, go to bed at dark, and eat when you are hungry, and you don't need no damn clock."

For me, time's running out if I want to catch sunset at Cooper Lake State Park, a 15-mile jaunt north of Sulphur Springs near the town of Cooper.

The park opened in 1996 on the shores of the 19,300-acre lake. It's proved popular with Dallas visitors, who flock here for watersports, hiking and equestrian trails, nature study, camping, and rustic appeal of lake-view cabins. Theatrical productions take place at a new 1,500-seat amphitheater in the park (part of the Cooper Lake Education and Culture Center).

At the lake's Eagle Point overlook, the orange glow of sunset envelops me. A nine-banded armadillo lumbers ahead of me on the trail, and an eastern cottontail rabbit hops slowly--lippety, lippety--into tall grass.

It's only a short hop from Cooper Lake to my destination--Paris, Texas.

Texan in Paris

Tradition, not historical evidence, says Paris is named for Paris, France. Whatever the name's origin, settlers were using the appellation by 1844, when

merchant George W. Wright gave 50 acres for a town, notes Wright's great-great-grandson and local historian, Skipper Steely. Skipper's brother, fellow historian and author Jim Steely of Austin, [note: Unfortunately, Jim is moving to Arizona and may reside there by May...I'll find out] says the choice suits the South's penchant for European place names. (Texas claims other examples--including Athens, Roma, London, and Moscow.)

Paris basks in its French connection: evidence the Tour de Paris bicycle rally (July 19, 2003). It rambles across rolling countryside--sans the mountains and prestige of its continental cousin, the Tour de France (won four times by Texan Lance Armstrong). But does the Tour de France treat riders to cheerleaders, fresh-fruit smoothies, and finish-line water spray, as does the Tour de Paris?

Paris also boasts of its own Eiffel Tower. This 65-foot-tall look-alike of the 1,060-foot-tall French original sports a red cowboy hat. Locals brag that it's the "Second Largest Eiffel Tower in the Second Largest Paris."

How about arts and architecture, fountains and statues? *Oui, oui, ya'll!*

For starters, there's the annual Paris Art Festival (May 17, 2003), displaying regional works. There's the Hayden Museum of American Art (folk art to modern) and the Plaza Art Gallery (area artists), located on Paris' downtown plaza. Also on the plaza, there's the Paris Community Theater, staging five shows annually in the restored 1926 Plaza Theater. The plaza's centerpiece, the 1927 Culbertson Fountain, features Italian marble basins and gurgling water under shady oaks. One block north of the plaza, the 1903 figure of a Confederate soldier, sculpted by Italian-born artist Pompei Coppini, adorns the Lamar County Courthouse grounds.

(A more intriguing statue graces the grave of Willet Babcock (1828-1881) in Evergreen Cemetery, east of downtown. The 12-foot-high figure is affectionately--and appropriately--called "Jesus in cowboy boots.")

Just south of downtown's plaza, crape myrtles line nearby Bywaters Park, home of a 1931 Corinthian peristyle. The park hosts free summer concerts by the Paris Municipal Band, Texas' longest-running municipal band, as well as the annual Crape Myrtle Queen Coronation (July 18, 2003).

Architectural gems in Paris include several National Register structures--including the Queen Anne-style Wise Home, the eclectic Scott-Roden Mansion, the Classical-Palladian First United Methodist Church, and the 1916 Beaux Arts-style People's National Bank. The city's most notable antebellum structure--the 1867 Sam Maxey Bell House State Historic Site--blends Greek Revival and Victorian design.

My New York-to-Paris meander ends the way it began--with my favorite past-time, people watching. I head four miles west of Paris to the Pine Branch Daylily Garden. There, I gaze at gardeners examining beds of multicolored daylilies, selecting just the right varieties to take home.

The six-acre garden is Bobby and Aileen Castlebury's labor of love. Over the past four decades, they've turned the former pasture into a showplace. They grow and sell some 900 daylily varieties, including more than 60 that Aileen hybridized and introduced.

A longtime cameraman, Bobby has photographed most of the varieties for the energetic couple's website (www.castlebury.net). He also photographs wild birds and

butterflies, as well as the pea fowl he and Aileen raise and sell. He carves wood sculptures of birds as well as wooden feather pins. He even designs pewter jewelry depicting birds. Customers view and order his creations--as well as daylilies--on the their website

As Aileen strides off to dig up bright-red daylilies for a customer, I take a break on a grassy hill overlooking the garden. I admire the garden pond and notice a peacock strutting his stuff in warm sun at the water's edge.

Only one thing could make this pastoral moment more palatable, I tell myself--a cool slice of New York, Texas cheesecake.