

Our Cross Country Expedition (Part I)

Driving across the continent of the United States is, without doubt, many people's desire. It has also been on my bucket list for a quite some time, however, for the longest time, we have been hesitant to make it reality. After all, it is about at least 6,000 miles round trip (direct) or more of driving that would take enormous amount of energy and will power to complete in addition to at least 3 weeks of time, if not more.

The earliest pioneers to make such trip was because of, frivolously, a \$50 bar bet! On one of the lazy afternoons in May 1903, a disagreement ignited inside the exclusive University Club in San Francisco that it was impossible to drive across the country since there were no reliable roads and the commercial use of the automobile had not been introduced. An automobile enthusiast named Horatio Jackson took on the bet to make what was thought to be an impossible attempt since the previous cross country automobile tries had all ended in failure. To win the bet, Mr. Jackson was to drive from San Francisco to New York in less than 90 days. Four days later, Mr. Jackson embarked on this, then, unthinkable trip with a young mechanic named Sewall Crocker. The trip ultimately took 63 and half days to complete, almost one month less than the 90 day requirement, Jackson did win the \$50 bet although it cost him \$8,000 in the process.

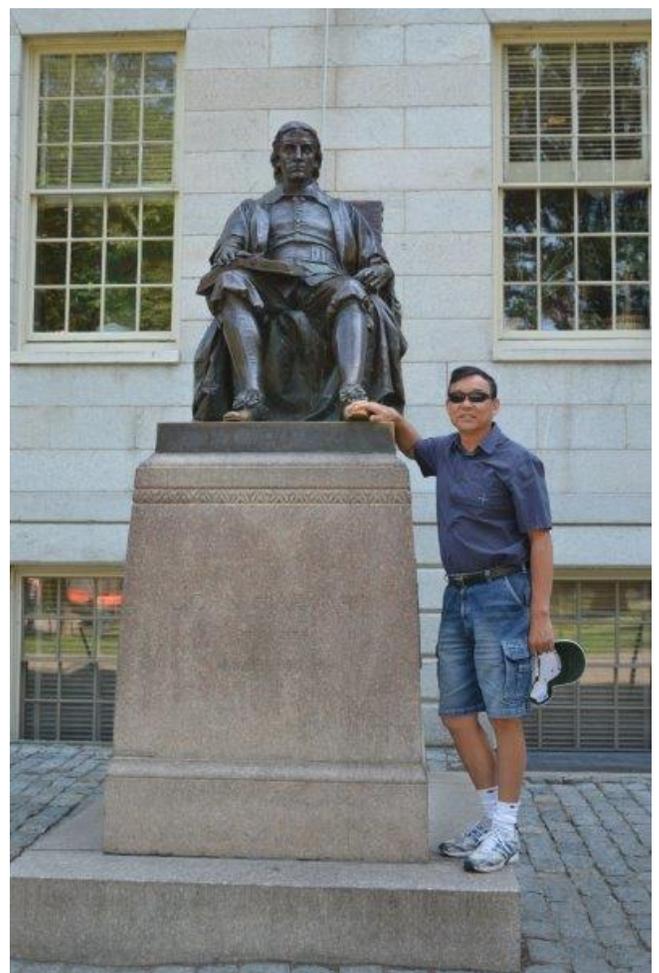
More than 100 years later, we decided to take the trip under an entirely different circumstance. Like Horatio Jackson, our son, also an automobile enthusiast, wanted to drive from the west coast to Boston to start his graduate study. Since he would not be needing a car while in Boston, the car would need to be returned to the west coast. To me, it was a golden opportunity to take this long sought epic trip off my bucket list since we would be driving only one way back from Boston - approximately 4,000 miles of driving which was just about right. Besides, according to one of the sayings that "if one never drove through the continent of America, one hasn't been to America." I wanted to be able to officially say that I have been to America by completing this journey.



America is a country of road trips, where more than several million miles of highways lead past red-rock deserts, below towering mountain peaks, and across fertile wheat fields that roll off toward the horizon. The scenic country lanes of New England, the once glorious industrial Midwest and the sun-bleached hillsides of the Great Plains are a few fine starting points for the great American road trip. When it comes to travel, America has always floored me with its staggering range of possibilities. Not many other countries have so much natural beauty – mountains, beaches, rainforest, deserts, canyons, glaciers – coupled with fascinating cities to explore and all the things that make travel so rewarding. I love walking and pedaling around cities, but there's nothing quite like hitting the open road for the unsung wonders and hidden corners of this inspiring country. After an extensive research for the best possible route to cover the most scenic regions on the way, we settled on a northern route.

Our first stop, of course was the historical Boston, home to the Boston Tea Party – one of the early key turning points that led to the American Revolution which ultimately enabled the American Independence from the Great Britain.

The Greater Boston Area is also the home to more than 50 higher educational institutions. Our first stop was to tour the 380 year-old Harvard University. I first visited it with admiration 30 some years prior when I first arrived in this country. Unfortunately, joining most of the visitors, the closest we could ever get to possibly attend Harvard is to just settle for touching Mr. Harvard's feet on his statue located in the Harvard Yard as the threshold for attending it was and still is extremely high, evidenced by his shining boots.



Hypocritically, this extremely high threshold is contrary to what is so claimed that the Harvard Square is “the most tolerant place on earth” as the following picture portrayed:



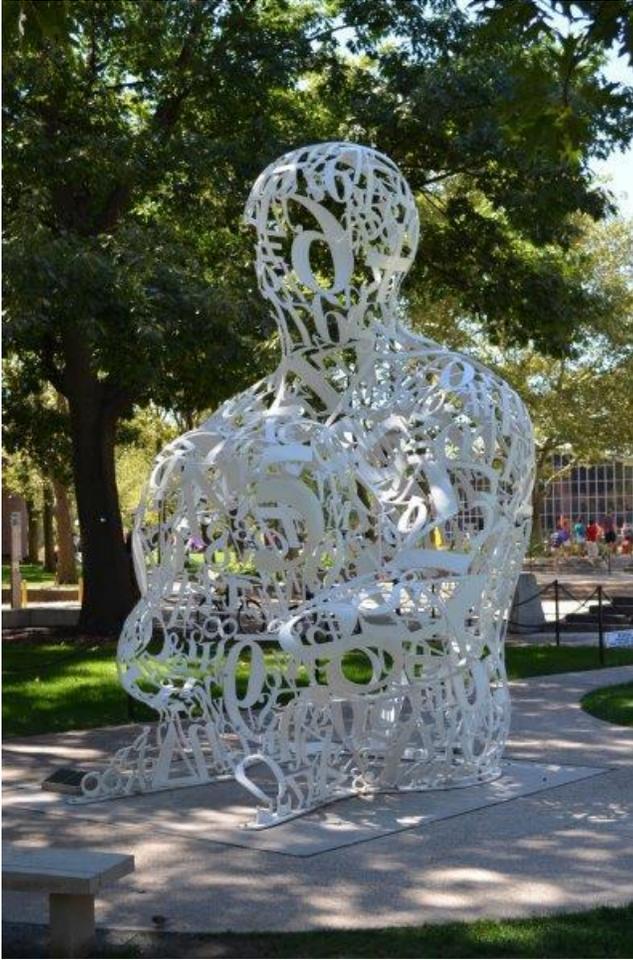
Picture taken at Harvard Square

In addition to visit Harvard, being an engineering professional visiting Boston, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) was also a must visit destination for us.



MIT's Main Administration Building

In addition to its prestige, MIT is also populated with sculptures and “oddly-shaped” buildings. Although some people have even said that the non-homogeneous, non-ivy-covered buildings were just plain ugly, in actuality, many of MIT’s buildings are literally works of art evidenced below:





One of the dormitory buildings at MIT



The Stratton Student Center Building at MIT

The weirdest looking is the Stratton Student Center Building captured by these photos.



The Stratton Student Center Building at MIT

In December of 1964, one year after his assigation, President Kennedy's family selected I. M. Pei (貝聿銘), the son of the former governor of the Chinese Nationalists' Central Bank of China, as the architect of the John F. Kennedy (JFK) Presidential library and Museum. Even though Pei was relatively unknown, at the time, amongst the list of candidates, Mrs. Kennedy chose Pei to design the library, based on the innovated design ideas demonstrated in his earlier works and the fact that Pei and JFK both were born in 1917, something I have failed to recognize its relevance. However, if one has to make a connection between the two, the more legitimate facts that I know are that both men were born with a silver spoon in their mouths and Harvard is their alma mater.



Inside of the JFK Library



Taken outside of the JFK Presidential library and Museum



Inside of the JFK Library

Perhaps the most important consequence of the Kennedy Project for I. M. Pei was his elevation in the public's consciousness as a great architect. Mr. Pei, of course, has gone on to capture the title of the internationally recognized architect.

Unfortunately, the much-anticipated landmark, the tallest building in Boston for more than 30 years, and also the tallest building in New England, the John Hancock Tower took a notice as a big embarrassment for the engineering community. The



The John Hancock Tower

professionals had to fix the engineering flaws existed from the beginning of the construction. The total cost of the fixes is rumored to have increased \$100 million that brought the project cost from \$75 million to \$175 million and delay of the opening for five years. Ironically, the design firm was owned by none other than Mr. I. M Pei.

For a long time, the only thing this building is good for was to serve as a mirror which reflected the nearby Trinity Church.



Trinity Episcopal Church reflected in John Hancock Tower

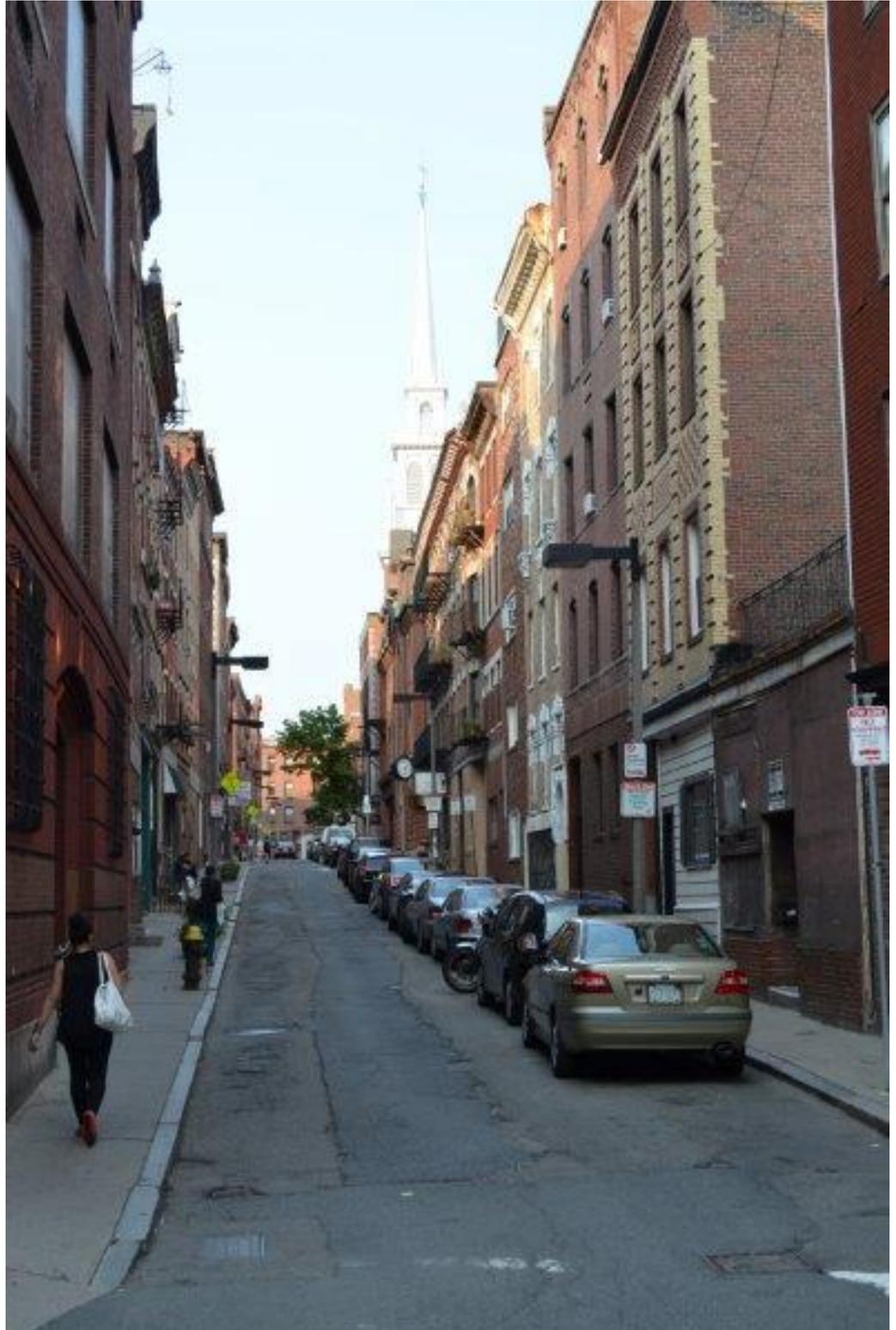
Speaking of churches, the Church of Christ, Scientist worthy a mentioning. This congregation is widely known for its unconventional beliefs and publications, especially



The Church of Christ, Scientist headquarters reflected in the reflecting pool

the internationally renowned “Christian Science Monitor”. The church’s main believe is that healing through Christian Science Treatment alone. In other words: according to the church, all illnesses can be healed by God without any treatment by medical professionals.

On a lighter side, a visit to Boston’s North End would provide visitors with a taste of Italy since it is known for its Italian American population and fine Italian restaurants. For many of the Italian communities outside of Italy that we had visited, the North End is the closest one that resembles of Italy.



Cannoli and black pasta are the two famous Italian dishes that win people over all the time, at least at the North End. Cannoli are beloved Sicilian desserts for those with sweet teeth while the authentic black pasta is supposedly made out of squid or cuttlefish ink.



Sicilian pastry desserts Cannoli



Seafood black spaghetti served in a hot iron pan

When talking about touring Boston or the New England Area, one cannot ignore one of the New England's delicacies - Maine Lobsters. Due to a pricing dispute between the New England lobster fishermen and the Canadian Lobsters Processing Association while we were in town, New Englanders were showed with more than usual amount of lobsters for sell. The less expensive lobsters could be found in local markets for mere \$2.99/lbs. We've learned that almost all the Maine Lobsters usually are taken to Canada for processing and shipping internationally. Because of the dispute, tones of lobsters were set for the ruining, so much so, that the lobster fishermen had to sell them pennies on the dollar in the local markets. We, of course, were able to fest on abundant supply of succulent Maine lobsters for much less the cost.



Besides food, I would like to offer a practical advice: driving in Boston is not for the faint-hearted! I highly recommend one to avoid driving in Boston at all cost. Streets in the oldest parts of Boston were laid out during Colonial times. They are extremely narrow, windy and congested. Central Boston is small and compact - great for walking, but a nightmare when filled with cars, bicycles, and pedestrians who embrace a culture of jaywalking - sometimes rather aggressively, so are bicycles. Almost no one obeys the traffic rules! I was honked at constantly for not going through red lights and didn't know which traffic light was for which street in many of the five-street intersections.

One other piece of advice I feel compelled to mention is that the Boston Area seems always have a shortage of hotel rooms during the annual graduation season and start of new school year that lasts approximately one month starting in mid-May and Mid-August, respectively. With over 50 colleges and universities holding their graduation commencements and welcoming the incoming students. Therefore, one should take it into consideration if arriving during those time frames. We were lucky enough to secure lodging in the heart of Boston that enabled us to roam around the major tourist sites.

Because of the summer sabbatical, there were no formal performance by the prestige Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO) at their Performance Hall. That was a huge disappointment to a music lover. Fortunately, Hatch Memorial Shell on the east bank of the Charles River became the outdoor performance venue for it. Instead of attending a long sought-after formal performance by BSO, we had to settle for a free summer concert performed by the BSO's remaining musicians there. Luckily, we were treated with a performance of one of my favorite time tested masterpieces "The 1812 Overture" by



Peter Tchaikovsky on our last night of staying in Boston which was appropriately, in my opinion, the best way to conclude our brief visit to the historical Boston Area and the start of what would be our chance of life time cross country expedition next day.

On September 1, 2012, we embarked on our much anticipated and fun filled cross country journey, we had opportunities to see some of the most magnificent places America has to offer. We visited many national treasures, breathtaking natural landscapes that we had never seen, as well as enjoyed much of the delicious local cuisines on the way. Unlike Horatio Jackson's bet winning cross country drive over 100 years ago when he had to endure the hardships of without reliable roads and fight the elements, our trip resulted to be extremely rewarding and enjoyable which much exceeded our original expectations. This trip also provided us with unforgettable memories and educational experiences that we will cherish forever.

(To be continued)