

1996 Year-end letter by John and Mary Lou Tanton

At Year's End 1996

*I can do a year's work in eleven months,
but not twelve - Andrew Carnegie (I think).*

Adopting this philosophy, Mary Lou and I decided to spend the month of April traveling in Europe, seeing some new sights. We started with London, where, in addition to the usual tourist things, three experiences stood out. The first was a trip down the Thames River to Greenwich, the location of the 0 (prime) east-west longitudinal Meridian. I have been interested in this feature of navigation for many years, because the oldest heirloom in our family is a watch, made in England in the 1790s.

Watches like ours were the key to solving the problem of accurate east-west navigation, a story that has recently been told in the book, *Longitude*, by Eva Sobel. At Greenwich we saw the lovingly preserved (and still running) first clocks that were accurate enough to determine longitude, and which in the 1860s won for the inventor, John Harrison, a £20,000 prize from the British Parliament (about \$1 million in today's dollars). The lore of our own watch is that a forebear wore it on Nelson's ship, *Victory*, at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. Well, maybe ...

Our watch is a marvel of intricacy. Some of its detail shows in the accompanying photograph. It has a tiny chain drive; one wonders how it was possible to make such a small mechanism back in those days. A watch like that must have cost a year's wage for an average workman.

Next were visits to homes of Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), and the Scottish philosopher, Thomas Carlyle (1798-1881). I had years before read James Boswell's famous biography of Dr. Johnson (who compiled the first English-language dictionary) and was glad to see where he lived and worked. The same goes for Carlyle; the oldest book I own is a copy of his *Heroes and Hero Worship*, on a topic still very current today.

Walking up the Thames to Carlyle's home, we stopped at Chelsea's Physic Garden, the second oldest botanical garden in England, one that was founded by Sir Joseph Banks, whose story is told in the November'96 issue of *The National Geographic*. Banks was a renowned botanist. He journeyed around the world with Captain Cook, spending a good deal of time on the east coast of Australia in particular. Some years before, we saw in Australia the genus of plants (*Banksia*) named for him, so that was a nice flashback to a previous trip.

But the most challenging day was one when we took the underground out to the northwest London suburb of Neasden to see the largest Hindu temple in Europe. It was built right next door to a park named for Edward Gibbon who wrote *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. The temple was symbolic for us of the tremendous social and ethnic change going on in London, and, of course, raises many similar questions about the future of our own country. Then, before the day was spent, we took the tube to Eastern Cemetery in Highgate, London to see the grave of Karl Marx, who spent his later years working at London's British Museum, where he wrote the first volume of *Das Kapital*. There could hardly be a greater contrast than between the spiritual philosophy of the Hindus and the materialism of Marx - both seen within the space of several hours! Right across the path from Marx's grave was that of Herbert Spencer, the British philosopher who coined the phrase, "survival of the fittest," and who was the father of "social Darwinism." I presume he had himself buried there as a way of thumbing his nose at Marx. Quite a day.

We then took the train to the county of Devon in the west of England to visit the region where my family started from in the 1850s. I stumbled onto this bit of history by chance, Several years ago, when I was involved in a controversial English language campaign in California, a lady who was compiling a Tanton genealogy saw my name in the paper, and wrote wondering if I were one of her Tantons. It turned out that I was. But I lacked the time at that point to pursue the matter, so I just put her material away in the file. With this trip coming up, I dug it out and took it along, together with another heirloom that has come down in the family, a loving cup. It is also shown in the accompanying picture. The inscription on the cup says:

Presented by Major Lord Eberington
to John Tanton of the Torrington Group
as a prize for proficiency
in the Sword Exercise
1849
NDY (= North Devon Yeomanry).

In the town of Torrington, thanks to the genealogical information we had been given, we were able to track down a namesake Tanton with whom I share a great, great, grandfather. We saw the farm that our forebear worked as a tenant (with his eleven children), and the church that the family attended, together with some of their headstones in the cemetery (including ones that said John and Mary Tanton, which gave us pause!).

Given our interest in international migration, we are now engaged in trying to learn something about the history of Devon in the 1850s, and what would have caused my forebear to (in all likelihood) sell everything he owned to buy passage for his brood to Canada. What a trip that must have been - back then it took about six weeks to cross

the Atlantic; it took us six hours! Three of the younger children and the parents eventually returned to England; the other eight stayed abroad, and, of course, they never saw each other again.

Also in the west of England, we visited Buckfast Abbey, an international pilgrimage site for beekeepers, for it was there that the famous (in beekeeping circles) Brother Adam developed the disease-resistant Buckfast bee. We toyed with the idea of visiting Brother Adam, who was in his 90s, but decided not to bother him. He has since passed on, so that option is now foreclosed, to our regret. Our own bees recovered quite well this year from the attack by mites they suffered during the past two seasons.

From Devon, we drove to Wales to visit our friend, Jack Parsons, whose book on population competition among human groups is nearing completion. We visited a now-closed Welsh underground coal mine, which brought to mind the saying that the Welsh coal miners often went for six months without seeing the sun, for they worked a twelve-hour day. During the winter time, they were in the mines before the sun came up, and were still there when it went down. The conditions were scarcely fathomable: wet, only candles for light, women, children, and Welsh ponies (and hence manure and rats) to pull the coal wagons, together with the danger from cave-ins, explosions - all for survival-level pay. Yet these were sought-after jobs - ones that helped build the industrial revolution and many of the material advantages that we take for granted

We arranged a visit with David Coleman, a colleague who teaches at Oxford University and is quite interested in immigration matters. David gave us a nice town-and-gown walking tour of Oxford, which stimulated fresh regret that I came in second best in the Rhodes Scholarship competition 40 years ago now. Blenheim Palace, the Churchill family seat, is close by. We have an interest in Churchill, having visited his home of Chartwell some years before; it was fine to see the place where he was born and spent his boyhood. The grounds there were designed by the early landscape architect "Capability Brown," so named because he frequently spoke about the "capability" of the sites he evaluated. We had heard about him for years, and had earlier run into his work at the Kew Gardens near London. He was George III's gardener.

Leaving England via train and the "chunnel" under the English Channel, we traveled by the high-speed TGV trains across France to Stuttgart in Bavaria, where Mary Lou and I were guests at a meeting of the European Forum for Migration Studies - conducted in German! Our hosts kindly provided us with translators to help us follow the proceedings - I can read and understand spoken German moderately well, but never learned to speak it. I had played a minor role in helping establish this group some years before, and its principals often attend our meetings in the United States. Immigration is very much a front-burner issue throughout Europe.

We then moved on to Switzerland to visit Berta Baumgartner, a friend of Mary Lou's from farm-youth-exchange days. Berta lived with Mary Lou's family in 1955. She is a hiker, and Switzerland is still one of our favorite places for walking. We had some grand outings, continuing to move around chiefly by the terrific European trains. One of the most startling things about Switzerland is the price of the land. In Berta's town of Grosshöchstetten, about ten miles east of Bern, residential land costs about \$45 a square foot - \$450,000 for a 100-foot square lot. The net result is that most people can never own their own home. Are we heading in that direction here in the United States?

Then it was on to Paris, again by the TGV train at 175 miles per hour. Our daughters, Laura and Jane, joined us there for a week, as did Alexandra and George Steinhauer. Alex is from Greece, and lived with us for a year (1971-72) as an exchange student. We had never met her husband, George, and hadn't seen Alex since 1979, so with our daughters, this was a quadruple treat.

We had never been to Paris before, so we took in some of the usual sights, including the Eiffel Tower - which is really very impressive on the spot - and the wonderful little chapel of Saint Chapelle, built to house Christ's reputed crown of thorns (which disappeared during the French Revolution). Fortunately, the chapel survived, together with its magnificent stained glass windows.

In our walks around the streets, we stumbled across the Laennec Hospital. That name rang a bell. I recalled my from history of medicine courses in medical school that Laennec was the person who invented the stethoscope. It was edifying to see where he worked.

Another stroll took us to a public cemetery, where many famous people were buried, including Auguste Bartholdi. He sculpted the Statue of Liberty, that misunderstood symbol with which I have been heavily involved over many years of work on the immigration issue.

We also visited the Rodin Sculpture Garden, where we saw some of the same pieces that were on display in Washington the year we spent there (1981-82): Balzac and *The Gates of Hell*. We then went to Giverny, where Monet painted for many years. Jane and I had seen the Monet exhibit when it was in Chicago a year ago, so this too was a great - though very crowded - treat.

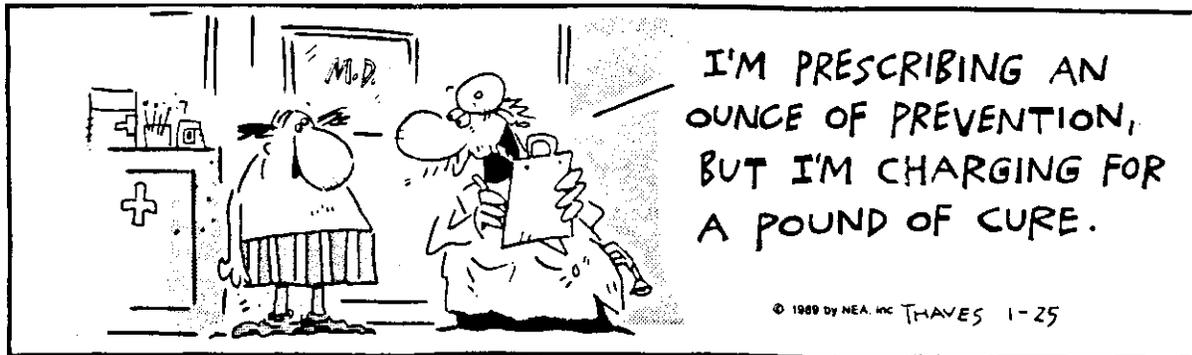
But one of the most interesting (and least visited) museums in Paris is the Sewer Museum! There actually is a very well done exhibit in one of the functioning sewers (at 93 quai d'Orsay), which have played a prominent role in the health and political history of Paris, and which Napoleon considered one of his crowning achievements. The designer of the sewers was a close friend of Victor Hugo, accounting for the sewer scene in *Les Miserables*. Knowing something about public health, I'm aware of the pivotal role that sewers played in the development of cities, and hence civilizations. Quite interesting!

That used up our month; we returned home both refreshed and worn out from what, in retrospect, was a frenetic pace.

Back on the home front, perhaps the most exciting activity of the year was helping with Governor Richard Lamm's run for the Reform Party's presidential nomination. Though unsuccessful, we felt the effort was very much worthwhile, and that it helped to raise issues that the other candidates were unwilling to touch.

Medicine continues to change rapidly; I'll let it go at that and with this cartoon:

FRANK & ERNEST® by Bob Thaves



It has been a stimulating year for some of the projects we have worked on for decades. On behalf of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), which I helped found back in 1979, I spoke last spring to the Channel City Club in Santa Barbara. As you doubtless have noticed, major immigration legislation finally passed this year - not all to our liking by any means. Much work went into that bill, as it also went into a television series entitled "Borderline" that we launched on cable TV. It appears on Monday nights on NET (Political News Talk Network). I am also at work with Ron Maxwell (producer of the epic film *Gettysburg*) on an immigration film, hoping to reach the American public on this difficult topic through movies and TV.

On the English language front, our organization, English Language Advocates, continues to carry the case that arose out of the 1988 English language initiative in Arizona. After eight years in the courts, it finally wended its way to the Supreme Court; we attended the oral arguments on December 4 - quite an exciting experience! The arguments seemed favorable for our side. We look for a decision in the spring, one which will have a major effect on the future direction of our society.

Our little foundation called simply "U.S." (out of which we run our projects) also had a very busy year. We produced our first catalog of books and monographs that we offer for sale, and have gotten a very gratifying response. We moved into Volume VII of our quarterly journal, *The Social Contract*, and have had a fine reception to "Immigration by the Numbers," a video on the demographic consequences of immigration, produced by one of our co-workers, Roy Beck. It is now being revised into a half-hour infomercial, and we're going to experiment with actually buying time in highly selective markets as a way to help promote discussion.

One of U.S.'s projects now has a home page available on the Internet: **THE SOCIAL CONTRACT PRESS** (www.tscpress.com). Our home e-mail address is mtanton@freeway.net. Drop us a line - electronic or otherwise.

Our book discussion group discovered the Dover Thrift Series of reprints this year - top-quality reproductions of famous works at a \$1.00 or \$2.00 at most. The Tantons' nomination for the "best book of the year": Will and Ariel Durants' *The Lessons of History* - a lot of thought-provoking material packed into only 100 pages, for just \$7.00.

On a personal level, our elder daughter, Laura, is back in school at the Eastern Carolina University at Greenville, working on her master's degree in social work, Jane is in her seventh year as an operating room nurse, primarily in plastic surgery, at the University Hospital in Ann Arbor - and survived the first several rounds of personnel cuts, for which we are thankful. Grandmother Tanton still holds forth in the 18-room farmhouse in which she was raised - most of the family members were able to gather there at Thanksgiving for memorable and memory-provoking festivities.

We continue to garden away. The grapes we planted in 1994 produced their first fruit this year; Mary Lou put up a good deal of grape jam and juice. The freezer is stuffed with homegrown fruits and vegetables. We have very much enjoyed the ten-foot-by-ten-foot greenhouse we put up in 1994. It's a pleasant place to sit on a sunny February afternoon, and a great way to jump start the garden season in the spring and extend it in the fall.

Last summer, we undertook the second thinning of the small pine plantation we bought about 10 years ago. The trees were planted around 1955. It was quite an interesting operation. There probably will be two more cuts, one ten, and then twenty years from now.

At summer's end, a friend sold us his no-longer-wanted reflecting telescope. It has powers of 45 and up. We were eagerly anticipating watching this past summer's eclipse of the moon, but alas! the sky was completely clouded over here that night. We have had to settle for watching the moons of Jupiter in their rapid motion around that massive planet.

The installation of a pilot logo signing program at 30 locations on Michigan's highways was an exciting event for Mary Lou, as was Scenic Michigan's (which she chairs) affiliation with Scenic America, the national organization.

Those are the highlights of our year. We hope that yours was interesting too. We wish you well in the coming year and look forward to what 1997 will bring.

John and Mary Lou