

DOTTY'S DIMENSIONS CONTINUES

by Dorothy M. Kurtz
#8 Winter 2009/10



© L. Pezzuto 2009

For a paper copy: in USA: A legal sized, self-addressed stamped envelope (SASE). In North America, outside USA: A large, self-addressed envelope (SAE) and one International Reply Coupon (IRC). Overseas: A large SAE and two IRCs. DIMENSIONAL PRESS, 230 Kings Highway East, #188, Haddonfield, NJ 08033
Email: dottymk@yahoo.com Web site: http://members.tripod.com/lp_web4us/
Copyright © 2009 by Dorothy M. Kurtz

Greetings, and I hope you had a good summer and autumn. The picture above is an old firehouse weathervane; nowadays, it is on display downtown at the New York City Fire Department Museum in Soho.

As I was vacationing in Rhode Island this summer, I learned about the death of anchorman Walter Cronkite (1916-2009). Aside from Cronkite's coverage of *Apollo 11* in 1969, my favorite memory of Walter was from a June 1994 Discovery Channel TV special, *The Cronkite Report* "Outer Space: Can We Afford to Go?" At the end of this episode, Walter Cronkite concluded, "Outer space--can we afford to go? The answer is, the present environment would indicate we can not. But the alternative is worse. We can not afford not to go."

If you would like to try to come closer to making those outer space dreams a reality and you live in the Philadelphia area, then I recommend joining the following organization. The Philadelphia Area Space Alliance (PASA), 928 Clinton St., #6, Philadelphia, PA 19107 or <http://pasa01.tripod.com> is a chapter of the National Space Society. In addition, PASA also covers other space interest organizations as well as events having to do with space: space and science fiction (SF) conventions and conferences (cons), science museums, planetariums, etc.

One of those SF cons, the Philadelphia SF con or Philcon, is where PASA has a table. This regional SF con offers many tracks of programming and has something of interest for almost everybody! For more information write to Philcon, PO Box 8303, 30th Street Station, Philadelphia, PA 19101 or check their web site: www.philcon.org.

Tuesday, September 1: I looked forward to seeing two things: *Star Trek* (ST) The Exhibition at the Franklin Institute (FI), 222 N.20th St. at the Ben Franklin Parkway, Philadelphia (215-448-1200), and the science museum itself.

Because I had a timed pass to see the ST exhibit area, and I arrived a bit early, I browsed in the FI's large gift shop. This store offered plenty of merchandise from the educational to the silly or from science books to a mouse pad showing a cartoon of Ben Franklin with pointed ears and giving a Vulcan greeting! Then it was time to see the ST exhibit. Here, I noticed many texts, pictures, and videos as well as costumes, props, and other things from the different ST TV series and films, dating from the 1960s TV series to the latest film. If you are a fan of all the ST franchises, I suppose it would be interesting. Nevertheless, I was a big ST fan from 1966 to '81. Thus, I was a bit disappointed that I didn't see too many things from the 1960s series or *ST: The Motion Picture*; there was no mention of the 1970s ST animated series. I found the ST exhibits nice, but not exciting. The sets that I saw, the bridge, sickbay, and engineering, were from *ST: The Next Generation*, but I did see the captain's chair from the 1960s TV series. (Back in the 1990s, I attended a special ST exhibit at the Air & Space Museum in Washington, DC, and The Science of ST at the FI. To be honest, I was more impressed with those ST exhibit presentations than this latest ST exhibit.) After lunch, I looked at the rest of the FI and made a beeline toward Space Command. A few years ago, I was glad the FI finally had an exhibit area about space exploration, but compared to space exhibit areas in a few other science museums, I felt that the FI could have done a bit better. I still felt that way on this visit as well. In a space station setting, Space Command offered several hands-on exhibit areas as well as viewing exhibits and texts. What they had was interesting, but they could have had more. Later, I learned that the rest of the museum cut back on its exhibit areas, and there were fewer exhibits within those areas. Anyhow, the FI still offered the following exhibit areas: trains, aviation, and biology as well as how machines work, physics, and some science demonstrations by the staff. Absent from the museum, however, were the sections on water travel, electricity, and weather. Anyway, somebody from the FI told me that the staff members were restoring the exhibits from those areas, and they should be back in the museum in 2010. (I'll be doing a revisit in a year or so.)

Saturday, September 12: On this day, I revisited the Empire State Building (ESB), 5th Ave. and W.34th St. (212-736-3100). Since September 11, 2001, the ESB has once again been the tallest building in NYC. My first visit to this building was in 1970, and although I never tire of the views, security has become tighter, and the prices to visit both observation floors, the 86th and the 102nd, have gone way up. (Somebody has to pay for the post 9/11/2001 security.) Other attractions included the Sky Ride, a hydraulic and video ride that lasted 20 minutes and offered a "wild ride" in NYC, and the Art-Deco interior itself. Here, I looked at marble walls and floors with displays of bronze medallions showing images of the materials and workmanship that went into building the ESB. Later, I revisited another Art-Deco wonder, Rockefeller Center (RC). On past visits, I've toured both NBC Studios and Radio City Music Hall, and I highly recommend both tours. (I gave more details about those tours in past issues of both DOTTY'S DIMENSIONS and DOTTY'S DIMENSIONS CONTINUES.) Nevertheless, I don't recommend the regular RC tour (and I gave details about why in DOTTY'S DIMENSIONS CONTINUES #5). This time, I explored on my own for free around the public areas that the RC tour showed me for a price. Three of my favorite stores were the NBC Store, a branch of the Metropolitan Museum of Art Store, and the Top of the Rock Gift Shop. Then, I spent the rest of the day browsing at the shops in the concourse area and noticing more marble Art-Deco interiors as well.

Saturday, October 10: Although September 11, 2001, brought the world's limelight to the New York City Fire Department (NYFD), in reality, long before that date, the NYFD had been fighting fires and rescuing people. At the NYC Fire Museum, 278 Spring St. (212-691-1303), I saw a special room dedicated to

the memory of those fallen firefighters. The 9/11/2001 Room showed pictures and badge numbers of the firefighters who lost their lives in that tragedy. More pictures and videos presented the events unfolding on that day at the World Trade Center before, during, and after the catastrophe. Nearby display cases exhibited the dust-covered items that the firefighters took from Ground Zero, and a side room displayed a poem called "If They Could Speak." Other rooms contained old fire-fighting vehicles from the human- and horse-drawn vehicles of the 1800s and early 20th century to the motorized fire trucks of the early to mid-20th century. Meanwhile, display cases presented old fire helmets, badges, and different fire-fighting memorabilia as well as pictures, texts, and other items having to do with fighting fires. Even the museum building itself was in a 1904 Beaux-Art, former fire station in Soho. Overall, this place was a moving tribute to those past firefighters and a way to honor the current NYFD.

Sunday, November 8: Compared to the Bronx Zoo, the Central Park Zoo, 830 5th Ave. at 64th St. (212-439-6500) was small. I first visited here in the 1970s; lately, however, the animals have been living in more natural-looking enclosures, and they seemed better for it. In the first of the three main areas, the Tropic Zone, I looked at pythons, toucans, bats, and other animals in a building that looked and felt like a tropical rain forest. Next, I observed snow monkeys, snow leopards, red pandas, and other creatures in the Temperate Territory. The third major area, the Polar Circle, showed polar bears lounging, seals swimming, and penguins waddling on the rocks and dive-swimming in the water. Other sections of the zoo included the sea lion pool that drew the biggest crowds--especially at feeding time, the children's zoo with its share of farm animals to pet, and the Delacorte Clock. This animated clock attracted crowds of people who viewed its brass animals that spun around the clock on the hour. Therefore, between the clock, the animals, and the landscaping, this zoo provided an interesting and pleasant few hours.

Friday, November 20: Similar to last year, Philcon 2009 became a commuter con for me because it took place in the same location: Crown Plaza Hotel, Cherry Hill, NJ--close to where I live. The first event I attended was (1) Doing a Lot of Costuming With Practically Nothing. Contrary to what some people think, you don't have to spend a fortune to make a good costume. The two prize-winning costumers leading this panel said they have used materials that they have found at flea markets, yard sales, and special sales such as after Halloween and Christmas. Staying in the costuming track, the next panel was (2) What is SF Costuming & Why Do We Care About It? Here, this panel of experienced costumers felt SF costuming gave someone a chance to wear something that didn't fit into mainstream fashions. Then, they mentioned where they got some of their ideas from--TV shows, films, books, museum exhibits, and so forth. Finally, I ended the night at (3) the Con Suite where the committee offered the usual snack foods, soft drinks, and chances to talk with other SF fans. I particularly remember talking with someone about the recent ST film.

Saturday, November 21: The busiest day at this con started for me by taking a (4) Guided Tour of the Art Show. Because in these last few years the Art Show room has had less art than it did as late as the early 2000s, my tour only took a half hour. My guide, artist Alexis Gilliland, pointed out what art he liked and disliked and why he felt that way. He also brought my attention to details that I may not have noticed myself, especially on shading, proportions, and colors. Then, I spent the next half hour walking through the Art Show on my own and noticed that about 75% of the art presented paintings, drawings, and computer pictures. The rest of the art exhibited jewelry, sculptures (especially *Lego* sculptures), and pottery as well as crocheted and knitted items, and so forth. About two-thirds of the art themes showed fantasy and the remainder displayed SF and space art. Afterward, the first panel I listened to that day was (5) The Current Economic Downturn and What it Means to SF. This

panel noticed that during a good economy, most SF stories have a darker theme, and the opposite was mostly true during bad economic times. The panel also said that nowadays, most publishing managers suggest to employees to "Do more with less." A more cheerful panel talk awaited at (6) Do SF and Rock & Roll Explore Similar Themes? The guest-of-honor, writer-singer-scientist-dancer-and so on--Renaissance-person Catherine Asaro, moderated this panel. Anyhow, most of the panel came to the same conclusion: Both SF and rock & roll came from anti-establishment roots and pushed the envelope in different ways. Rock & roll challenged the status quo with its style of music, and SF with its futuristic technology. Speaking of technology, I spent the next hour listening to a panel talk about (7) the *Planck* Telescope and *Herschel* Space Observatory. SF author Eric Kotani (real name, Dr. Yoji Kondo, astrophysicist), moderated as this panel explained and compared both *Planck* and *Herschel*. It seemed that *Planck* will be able to pick up the microwave background of the remnants from the Big Bang. Meanwhile, astronomers should be able to see things with the *Herschel* that they haven't been able to see before in space, including dust and other stuff usually absorbed by visible light. At the next space-related panel, (8) Space Inc.: Is Private Enterprise the Future of Space Development?, the panel wondered what areas or percentage of space development should be government (NASA) run, and what areas or percentage would be best run by private enterprise. (One of the people on this panel was the president of PASA, Earl Bennett.) Some people felt that government worked best with research, but for mining, tourism, and other ways to make money, it seemed private industry might be the way to go.

That night, I attended (9) To the Moon and Beyond filk concert. In a salute to the 40th Anniversary of the Moon Landing of 1969, Dr. H. Paul Shuch, Roberta Rogow, Gary Ehrlich, and a few others, sang songs about space exploration. From *Sputnik* through the Space Race, the Moon Landing, the shuttles, and beyond, I heard around a dozen songs, both filk songs with added lyrics to popular tunes and original songs that some of the filk singers wrote. It made for a lively and interesting hour! I wish I could say the same for (10) the Masquerade. This year, Philcon had the fewest contestants enter the contest of any year: seven. A warrior from *Star Wars*, and two people who were airship pirates were the only contestants who wore SF costumes, and the rest wore fantasy costumes. (I think Philcon should go back to what it did in 1980: have a masquerade party in the ballroom or at least until they can get more contestants to enter.)

Sunday, November 22: I only did two things on this day and one of those was touring (11) the Dealers' Room. Similar to other years, about half of the dealers sold reading materials: books, magazines, and semi-pro-zines; the remainder sold other merchandise: jewelry, buttons, and bumper stickers as well as costumes, t-shirts, games, DVDs, and so on. I bought a SF magazine called *Space and Time*. Finally, I sat in on a panel about (12) Philly Geek: What's going on in Philly Fandom? Here, the panel covered different events and groups who have been related, even remotely, with SF in the Philadelphia area: film festivals and clubs, anime, media SF clubs, costume clubs, gamers, book groups, high tech groups, etc. Of course, this panel mentioned the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society (PSFS)--the group who has put on Philcon since 1936. When they asked the audience for any input, I mentioned PASA. After this, it was time to go home.

If anybody has been curious about what I did in the years leading up to 2000, I'd suggest reading DOTTY'S DIMENSIONS: THE PREFACE. It is my abridged life story on 18 pages, including a color-front cover.

The latest issue of MOSTLY MATINEE TIME is out and includes what I had to say about a live show I saw in Philadelphia: *Say Goodnight, Gracie*. It also includes three films I saw in NYC: *ST*, *Moon*, and *Julie & Julia*.

In THE STATE I'M IN #3, I've written about where I visited in New Jersey from March 2008 through February 2009 or from Atlantic City to the NJ Naval Museum in Hackensack.

Finally, I changed the name of the Photo Album on my web site to Photo Blog. Here, you should find pictures and paragraphs covering some extra places I've visited, especially in Pennsylvania. Meanwhile, I wish you all a Happy Winter Solstice and a Happy 2010!