

A VIEW FROM THE BLUFF

By Greg Bruny



Part of the tractor collection at the Legacy of the Plains Museum with the bluffs in the background.

This began in the spring of 2024 when Sandy Carlson and Shirley Reed from the Northern Colorado Chapter (NoCo) of VMCCA decided to pay a visit to the Gold Dust Chapter in Rapid City, South Dakota, to help them celebrate their 40th anniversary. That led to a discussion about a joint overnight tour between the two clubs, which later evolved into a regional tour. Shirley and Lloyd Reed from the NoCo chapter and Allen and Gail Trask from the Gold Dust Chapter took the lead in organizing the event. They decided that the tour would center around Scottsbluff and Gering, Nebraska, since Shirley and Lloyd had some familiarity with those areas.

The NoCo chapter had held a Western National Tour in the Scottsbluff area about 20 years ago. Some of us had the benefit of touring that area again and saw some things we may have forgotten and some new stuff, as it was an action-packed tour.

On the 2024 Scottsbluff Tour, held September 20-22, 2024, there were about 20 vehicles and 40 people. This included three national officers, Elaine Johnson (VMCCA Treasurer), Ray Maxfield (VMCCA Publications Vice-President), and Steve Fitzgerald (VMCCA Technical Vice-President), who I had the pleasure of riding with, as well as our Regional Director(s), Randy (and Sandy) Carlson. Chapters represented were NoCo, Gold Dust, Pikes Peak, and Colorado West.

The oldest car on tour was Scott and Cindy Bullis' 1929 Hudson Super Six. One of the more unique cars was Ken and Eileen Owens' 1947 Frazer. The owners of a recently acquired

1958 Ford Retractable drove some of the Saturday tour with the top down, and Weldon and Dee Shaver's 1966 Pontiac Ventura provided an excellent example to an original, one-family car.

On Friday, about ten cars from Colorado met in Windsor to caravan to Scottsbluff and arrived mid-afternoon at the Hampton Inn. The tour hosts had a welcome meet and greet where participants mingled and received tour books. There was no planned group dinner on Friday.



Ken and Eileen Owens' 1947 Frazer 4-door Sedan rests in a shady spot.



Inside a display building at Legacy of the Plains Museum.

Sometimes, unfortunate things happen with good results, such as the failure of Steve Fitzgerald's 1955 Ford Crown Victoria generator. Ironically, one of our tour stops was at a collector specializing in 1955 Fords. Steve got the repair done quickly and at a reasonable cost. More about the Ford garage will follow later on.

Our first stop Saturday morning was at the Legacy of the Plains Museum, which reflected on earlier life in the Sugar Valley. The name originated from the area's significant impact on the sugar beet industry. Located on the original Oregon Trail, the museum features an impressive collection of pioneer and community artifacts, antique tractors and farm implements, historic farmstead structures, and an 80-acre working farm, all providing timeless stories of life on the early Nebraska prairie. Special tribute was paid to the positive Japanese influence on the area with a visit to the Japan Building.

Next, we drove up to Scotts Bluff (notice the change in spelling) National Monument, rising about 800 feet above the surrounding plains and providing an exceptional view in all directions. There were many hiking opportunities, but many did not spend much time hiking.

After lunch on our own, the first afternoon stop was a visit to Tom Cozad's Ford Garage (where Steve got his generator and



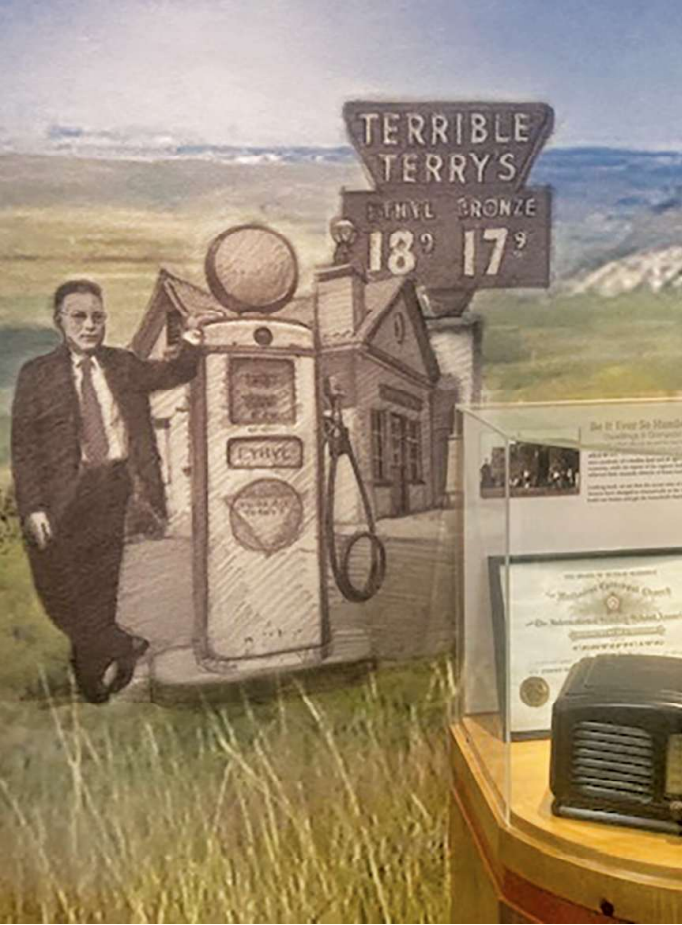
regulator replaced). What an excellent opportunity to view a fantastic collection highlighted by 1955 Fords, vintage signs, and Coca-Cola memorabilia. The impressive building took up a half city block, and included a vintage barber shop, an old service station, a diner, and a theatre. The host was very welcoming. He frequently opens his collection to car clubs. After the visit to Tom's garage, we drove by an old Packard/Studebaker dealership in an art-deco building with appropriate signage out front. Bob Cox, the owner, was unavailable to give us a full tour, but we were able to view a couple of Packards on display through the windows. Our last afternoon stop was the West Nebraska Art Center, a two-floor display by local artists who work with various art mediums. It was a nice end to a busy day. Even though we did not drive many miles, we saw and experienced quite a variety of interesting places and things.

Our final activity for the day was the evening banquet/meeting at the Powerhouse Restaurant. The Powerhouse Restaurant is a recently opened first-floor addition to the Western Public Service Company building. The building was built in 1931 and was recently added to the National Register of Historic Places. After a great meal, the Mountain and Plains Region held their annual business meeting, including the election of Sandy Carlson as regional director and Eileen Carpenter as secretary. Also, our group raised \$500 for the VMCCA Foundation, which fundraises to assist college students with their tuition.

The weather during the tour varied from rainy, warm, sunny, summer-like temperatures to chilly mornings.

There is an impressive museum Legacy of the Plains display detailing the lives of Japanese immigrants who settled in the area.





Above: An automobile themed exhibit at the Legacy of the Plains Museum. Bob and Cheryl Clifton's 1932 Buick Coupe looks like it would be a lot of fun to drive! The Cliftons are Northern Colorado Chapter members.



A group picture of our Colorado Springs members. A view looking down from the top of Scotts Bluff.





The outside facade of Tom Cozad's Ford themed-garage and the interior of his period correct diner. Milkshakes, anyone?



Steve Fitzgerald's 1955 Ford Crown Victoria. A passerby stopped by with his 1961 Corvette.



Vintage approved Packard service and authorized Studebaker service signs grace the outside of Bob Cox's collection. Weldon and Dee Shaver's 1966 Pontiac.



*Top to bottom: Chimney Rock helped to mark trails during the early days of western migration.
(Photo by Eric Foster)*

Ray and Carol Maxfield's 1986 Corvette is in the foreground. And Bob and Cheryl Clifton's 1932 Buick Coupe sits behind.

A vintage Ford long bed pick-up truck sits out in front of the Double L Country Store.

After breakfast Sunday morning, we had a brief drivers' meeting and a group photo. Then we departed for a 20-mile drive to Chimney Rock and its related museum. Chimney Rock is a famous landmark of western migration on the Oregon, California, and Mormon Trails, as hundreds of thousands passed this landmark on their difficult westward journeys. After an hour, we departed for our next stop, the Wildcat Hills Nature Center. This stop was on the way home for those of us from Colorado and Wyoming, but not so for those returning to South Dakota, so they likely departed for home from Chimney Rock. Wildcat Hills covers approximately an 1,000-acre wilderness preserve. Rather than driving through the park, we visited the visitors' center, which had some good taxidermy wildlife exhibits.

We enjoyed a final lunch together at a unique roadside café. Laura Lee's Double L Country Store was easy to miss if you didn't know it was there. Afterward, we departed at different times and on different routes to our homes.

Thanks to the tour hosts for a very interesting and fun tour, to all who enjoyed the connections of the weekend, and to Steve Fitzgerald for letting me ride along and navigate for him. It was a great tour with fond memories and now a pleasure to share this tour with you.

(Photos by Greg Bruny)

