



# West Auckland Men's Rebus Club Newsletter

**October 2024**

**Next meeting: 10:00 am Friday 11<sup>th</sup> October, Friendship Hall, 3063 Great North Road, New Lynn**

## COMMITTEE

|                          |                  |  |             |
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*Roast meal and movie at Ryders in Riversdale Road on Tuesday 1st October 2024*

## MEETING REPORT

September 2024

**Chairman: Bill Mutch**

**Attendance: 20 members and 2 visitors**

Members: Raymond Barrett, Neil Castle, Stephen David, Bill Fairs, Maurice Forbes, Robert King, John McKeown, Vince Middeldorp, John Mihaljevic, Bill Mutch, Andrew Narayan, Lyndsay Parris, Trevor Pollard, Noel Rose, Ian Smith, Alan Verry, Ken Webster, Allan Williamson, Garrick Yearsley. Visitors: Eddie Molloy, Joanne Williamson.

### 1. Apologies:

Apologies were received from Charles Nicholls, Mensto De Roos, and John Corban.



*Club stalwarts Lyn Parris and Neil Castle enjoying their usual spot together*

### 2. Matters Arising from the Previous Meeting (August):

Last month Trevor Pollard said the club's listing was missing in the Fringe magazine. However it was included in the latest issue.

### 3. Correspondence:

The Rebus Chronicles from Rebus New Zealand reported that 62% of Rebus members are ladies. Two ladies on their board are leaving, and they are seeking more female board members. They are also focusing on club promotion, retention, and recruitment. Feedback is requested on these areas.

### 4. Treasurer's Report:

Some months ago the club was expecting a profit of \$11 for the year, but now it's projected to exceed \$200, largely due to donations and savings from not paying some guest speakers.

### 5. Upcoming Events & Outings:

- A visit to Auckland Zoo is scheduled for Wednesday, the 25th. Members were reminded to either use their own car or catch a bus. Meeting time is at 10:00 AM.
- A potential visit to the Northcote Kauri Glen Reserve was discussed as an addition to the Christmas function.
- Christmas trip vote: A deposit of \$150 was approved for the Christmas trip to McHughs of Cheltenham. The group will pay the remaining costs later.
- It was agreed to use funds from the TTCF grant to minimize the bus cost for the Christmas function.

## 6. Welfare Report:

- John Corban was hospitalized for four days but is recovering at home and plans to attend the next meeting.
- Steven David has returned after a hospital stay.
- Andrew Geddes is in a care home, and his condition is not expected to improve significantly.

## 7. Guest Speakers:

- The next speaker is Alan Verry.
- In November, Wendy Hampton will speak about estate planning.
- Future plans include a talk in February by Adrian Riegan on the Miranda shorebirds, with a potential trip to the Miranda shorebird centre.

## 8. General Business:

A detailed discussion about the upcoming Ryders visit, including costs (\$38 per person), meal options, and logistical arrangements. Eighteen members expressed interest in attending.

## *Claudia's Corner*

Did you hear about the man who drowned  
in a bowl of muesli?  
He was pulled under by a strong current.

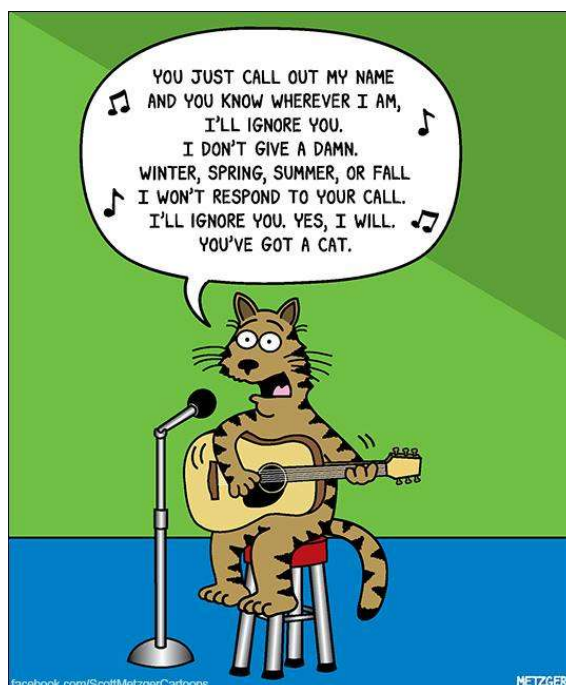
What do you get if you drop a Piano  
down a mine shaft?  
It's a flat minor.

What has 4 wheels and flies?  
A garbage truck.

What's brown, steams and comes out  
of cows backward?  
The Isle of Wight ferry.

One thing about telling a clean joke is there's  
a good chance no one's heard it before.

Cheers Claudia.



## **PRESIDENT'S PRATTLE** **President's Report October 2024** **Bill Mutch**

Hello everyone,

With daylight saving now in effect, the days are stretching out, giving us more time to enjoy our gardens. However, I must mention that the price of plants has increased significantly. The Beef Stake tomato plants, in particular, are quite expensive. Let's hope they yield a big crop!

Claudia, who writes our jokes, has been battling a severe flu but is now on the mend. Stephen David, our door greeter, is looking well and has moved into Crestwood. He had an unfortunate incident where the 186 bus didn't stop at his stop, resulting in a long walk back. I didn't realize it was Stephen until he got off at the next stop.

I missed the trip to Ryders due to a bad night with my Parkinson's acting up. It was disappointing, but I have to take each day as it comes. Janet didn't want to go alone, which was a shame. I haven't heard any other welfare news.

Two of our members joined the Railway group for a trip using their Gold Cards and ended up in Wellsford. I read Allan Verry's report to the Railway Enthusiasts Society, and it seems they all had a great time. It's a reminder of the wonderful trips you can take with the Gold Card, especially if planned well to minimize walking when changing buses.

For over 10 years, I was a Dale Carnegie Instructor and addressed large conferences with up to 1,400 people. When we have guest speakers, I pay attention to their presentation style. I use a checklist: 60% body language, 30% voice tones, and 10% words used. Our last guest speaker, Allan Williamson, a club member, was one of the best speakers I've heard. He kept us so engaged that I felt like I was on the river ferry. Congratulations, Allan!

Don't forget to bring a friend along to our meetings. It was nice to see Joanne come with Allan. Morning tea is free for guests.

At our last meeting, I brought some Ginger Kisses for morning tea. They were given to me by the owner of Devonport New World, who often asks about our group. Years ago, when I was in charge of trips, I took 18 of our group to Devonport, and they put on a nice lunch for us. He was very impressed and often asks how the group is doing.

Our next speaker is Alan Verry, a club member with a wealth of knowledge about railways. It will be great to hear Alan again as he is always interesting. So, bring some guests along!

Cheers,  
Bill Mutch

## ***JOURNEY DOWN THE MISSISSIPPI: A PADDLE STEAMER ADVENTURE***

### ***GUEST SPEAKER ALLAN WILLIAMSON***

#### ***Whisper AI & Copilot AI***



*Allan Williamson speaking about his journey from Minneapolis to New Orleans on the American Queen*

In 2018, Joanne and I embarked on an unforgettable seven-week journey through the US and Canada. The highlight of our trip was a two-week paddle steamer cruise down the Mississippi River, which I am going to share with you today.

Built in 1995 as a replica of the historic paddle steamers, the American Queen was designed specifically for cruising the Mississippi and its tributaries. With a capacity of around 430 passengers and a crew of about 170, this magnificent vessel stretches approximately 420 feet in length and 90 feet in width. Despite its size, it has a shallow draft of only seven or eight feet, perfect for navigating the often shallow waters of the Mississippi.

The American Queen boasts six decks, with the lower deck just a few feet above the water. The top deck, known as the "thumb deck," houses the pilot house, which we had the chance to visit later on. The boat is all about comfort, and the dining experience is no exception. The dining room, located at the front of the boat on the first two levels, offers buffet-style breakfast and lunch daily, along with formal dinners in the evening. With seating for about half the passengers at a time, there are two dinner seatings at 6 pm and 7:30 pm. We opted for the latter.

For those seeking a more casual dining experience, the front porch area offers continental breakfast, sandwiches for lunch, and a couple of hot dishes in the evening. Available 24/7 are cookies, tea, coffee, juice, soft drinks, water, and, of course, a popcorn machine and a soft-serve ice cream machine, which we frequented often, especially on warm, humid nights.

The boat features various lounges and chartrooms where passengers can relax and enjoy the scenery. The Grand Salon, located in the rear part of the boat, is the hub for nightly entertainment, with shows at 6 pm and 7:30 pm. We made it a point to catch a show every night.

Our cabin, located on Deck 4, had both exterior access to a deck and interior access to a corridor. It was about 150 square feet, just the right size for two people. The deck outside our cabin was a lovely spot to sit and enjoy the view or take a stroll during the day.

The front porch, located on Deck 4 or 5, features a wraparound area with rocking chairs and tables where you can enjoy your meals. The rear of the boat also has a lounge area with a bar and a pianist who also played the boat's calliope, a steam whistle organ.

Before we dive deeper into our journey, let's take a brief geography lesson about the United States. Our adventure began up north and concluded in New Orleans, with the Mississippi River flowing almost the entire length of the country. The river originates near the northern border and winds its way down to the Gulf of Mexico.

One interesting aspect of the US landscape is the mountain ranges. To the west, you have the Rockies, the Colorado Mountains, and the Nevadas. To the east, the Appalachian Mountains stretch from Virginia up towards Pennsylvania. In between these ranges lies the relatively flat central part of the United States, making the Mississippi River the central drain of America. Minneapolis, where we started, is about 800 or 900 feet above sea level, while New Orleans is at sea level. This creates a gentle slope across the middle of the country.

Now, let's talk about the river itself. The Mississippi River can be divided into two sections: the Upper Mississippi and the Lower Mississippi. We started our cruise at Red Wing, about 30 miles south of Minneapolis, which is as far north as these large boats can safely navigate. Over the next two weeks, we stopped at various towns and cities along the way.

The Upper Mississippi, characterized by less water and a higher rate of fall, was historically more treacherous due to rapids and rocky outcrops. In contrast, the Lower Mississippi has more water, fed by tributaries like the Ohio, Tennessee, and Cumberland Rivers. The elevation change is also significant, with two-thirds of the 800-foot drop between St. Paul and New Orleans occurring in the first third of the river. This means the Lower Mississippi flows more gently, spreading out over farmland during heavy rains.

In the 1930s, as part of the New Deal, the US Army Corps of Engineers transformed the Upper Mississippi by building 27 dams and locks to make it navigable. This massive engineering project required constructing villages to house workers, who stayed for a few years to build the dams before moving on. Today, some small towns still exist along the river, maintained by staff who oversee the lock and dam system.

Most of the traffic on the Mississippi River consists of cargo ships, but six times a year, the American Queen makes its journey up and down the river, three times each way. During these trips, the boat passes through

numerous locks, often between 7 pm and 10 pm on summer nights. This event is a source of great excitement for the local towns.

One memorable night, as we passed through a lock, we noticed a good fraction of the town's population had gathered to watch us. Even at 2 am, people stood by the lock, waving and chatting with us as we moved through. It was a delightful experience, feeling the warmth and curiosity of the locals.

The lock and dam system on the Mississippi River creates a staircase effect, allowing boats to navigate the river smoothly. Starting from Minneapolis and stretching down to St. Louis, these dams essentially act as hydraulic lifts, raising and lowering boats to the next level. Built with federal funds, they are owned by the federal government and are free to use, much like the freeways.

The system is managed in districts, including the St. Paul District, the Rock Island District, and the St. Louis District. This coordinated management ensures that the river remains navigable, even when there is extra rainfall in one area. It may take a day or two to adjust the water levels, but the system operates efficiently to maintain reasonable conditions for navigation.

Our journey began on a Sunday when we arrived and spent our first night in a hotel. This was where we checked in and took care of all the necessary formalities. The next morning, we left our bags behind and embarked on a city tour around St. Paul, the twin city to Minneapolis. By the afternoon, we reached Red Wing, where the American Queen awaited us. Our luggage had already been delivered to our room, and we were ready to start our adventure.

Over the next several days, we cruised down the Mississippi River, stopping at various towns and cities until we finally reached New Orleans. Each day brought a new destination. We would board the boat around 5 pm, and it would set off shortly thereafter. Travelling overnight at a leisurely pace, we would arrive at our next stop by morning, ready for a day of sightseeing.

The boat's crew provided a day sheet each evening, detailing the next day's destination, sights to see, and the hop-on, hop-off bus route. The American Queen had coaches that travelled down the river overnight to meet us at each stop. The day sheet included suggestions for activities, the bus route, and its timetable, allowing us to explore at our own pace. There were also special tours available for an additional fee.



*Steamboat tour buses followed us the entire way, driving to the next port while we cruised during the night*

For example, on day three in La Crosse, we had the option of included excursions, such as visiting the auto museum, chapel, or historic house, often free or requiring a small donation. There were also premium excursions operated by independent providers. On day ten in Hannibal, known for its Mark Twain heritage, the included excursions focused on the famous author and the history of the river. In Memphis, a city rich in rock and roll history, we visited the National Civil Rights Museum and took the premium Elvis Experience tour, which was a highlight of our trip.

Each morning, we were greeted by the sight of the riverbank as we pulled up alongside the edge of the Mississippi. The gangplank was slowly lowered from Deck 4, where we were staying, and we could see we were not far off the ground. The two coaches parked out front were part of the steamboat company's free hop-on, hop-off service, while another coach was designated for extra-fee tours.

Most of the passengers on board were Americans, primarily seniors, many of whom were retired. Some were quite advanced in age and had taken this cruise before, not necessarily to see the sights but to enjoy the leisurely journey. For those who wanted to explore the towns, the crew was incredibly accommodating, even assisting passengers with mobility scooters. Each coach had space for a mobility scooter, making it easy for everyone to get around.

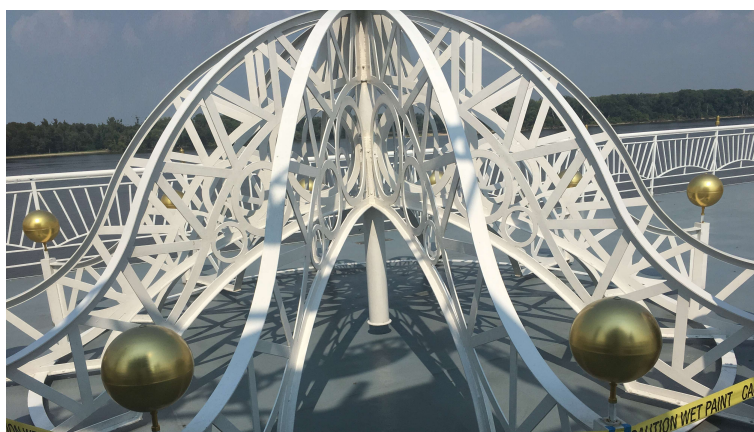
One of the fascinating aspects of our journey was navigating the locks and dams strategically located along the river, often over rapids. These structures create a staircase effect, allowing boats to move smoothly from one level to another. As we approached a lock, the gates would close behind us, and the lock would adjust to the water level on the other side. The entire process took about 30 minutes, and it was intriguing to watch the water levels change and the gates open, allowing us to continue our journey.

The Mississippi River is a vital transportation route, with numerous bridges spanning its width to connect the east and west. Many of these bridges are designed to accommodate both rail and road traffic. One example we encountered was a bridge integrated with a dam and lock, where a section of the bridge could swing 90 degrees to allow boats to pass through. The captain would call ahead to stop traffic and swing the bridge, and we would sail through smoothly.

Our first stop was in La Crosse, a town with a population of about 50,000 to 60,000 people. Known for its connection to the automotive industry, we spent our time wandering around and exploring the local attractions. One of the highlights was the auto museum, which housed a fascinating collection of vehicles with ties to the early automotive history of the region. Each exhibit included detailed explanations about the owners and the history of the vehicles.

As we continued our exploration, we stumbled upon the Chapel of St. Rose. If I hadn't known better, I would have thought we were in central Germany or Austria. This beautiful chapel is a testament to the rich immigrant history of the United States. Despite the ongoing debates about immigration, America remains a country of immigrants, with Spanish and French influences in the south, British in the north-east, and many central Europeans in this part of the country. The area was historically populated by Germans and others who came for forestry, hunting, and the fur trade.

The next day, we visited Dubuque, an even smaller town. Dubuque's claim to fame is its hill, which is high enough to warrant an observation platform. We took the incline rail from the street up the side of the hill, enjoying the unique experience. At the top, we found the observation platform, offering stunning views of the surrounding area. The landscape is mostly flat, with the river visible in the distance, along with a bridge.



*The crown of the American Queen which usually sits atop the pilothouse*

Returning to the boat after our early excursions, we often saw an intriguing object in the middle of the top deck called the crown. I'm not sure if it had recently been painted or if it was placed there to keep selfie-takers at bay, but it usually sits atop the pilothouse, a traditional feature of paddle steamers.

You might notice that the boat only has one chimney visible. This is because we were approaching a bridge without an opening, and we needed to get underneath it. The two chimney stacks, along with the radar equipment, fold forward to allow the boat to pass under low bridges. The pilot house itself is on hydraulic rams and can be lowered to reduce the boat's height even further. If all else fails and the water levels are too high, we would have to wait for the river to go down, which thankfully didn't happen during our trip.

Navigating under the bridge was a delicate operation, but once we were through, the chimneys and radar equipment were returned to their upright positions. The front porch cafe, where we frequently enjoyed soft-serve ice cream, was a welcome sight after these manoeuvres.

Most of the traffic on the river consists of barges in convoy, pushed or pulled by paddle steamers. These barges are designed to be squat so they can pass under the numerous bridges along the river. They are typically arranged in wide and long formations, but they must be separated before entering the locks. The barges are then reassembled on the other side, much like train cars in a shunting yard.

In addition to the large barges, there are smaller boats that provide day cruises and commuter services up and down the river. These boats are essential for connecting small towns on opposite sides of the river, offering a convenient alternative to long road trips.



*The Grand Salon on the American Queen*

The Grand Salon was the heart of our evening entertainment on the American Queen. This flat-floored auditorium with a raised stage became our go-to spot every night around five or six o'clock. After a quick freshen-up, we would find a cosy spot, often down near the front, and the wine staff would come around to take our drink orders.

On our first night, a friendly staff member brought us two gin and tonics. The next night, we tried a sazerac, but still ended up with gin and tonics. By the third night, the staff knew our preference, and by the fourth night, they simply handed us our favourite drinks without asking.

The entertainment in the Grand Salon was a nightly highlight, with a 50-minute show at six o'clock, repeated at 7:30. This schedule allowed us to enjoy both a show and dinner every night, which we did without fail. The entertainment troupe, consisting of six to ten multi-talented performers, sang, danced, and acted, providing us with delightful performances. Occasionally, guest performers would join the troupe for a night, adding variety to the shows.

One of the standout performers was our resident piano player, Phil Westbrooke. Earlier in his career, he played in piano bars in New York, and now he brought his talents to the American Queen. Phil not only entertained us in the piano bar but also performed a one-man show in the Grand Salon, showcasing his musical prowess.

Special events in the theatre added to the excitement. The night before we reached Hannibal, Mark Twain territory, an actor dressed as Mark Twain regaled us with stories about the river and Becky Thatcher. His performance was captivating and brought the history of the river to life.

For those who booked the more expensive suites on the boat, private booths were available in the Grand Salon, offering an exclusive viewing experience.



The next day, we arrived in Hannibal, famously known as Mark Twain territory. A couple of city blocks have been transformed into retro buildings, allowing visitors to experience the late 1800s. Although Samuel Clemens, better known as Mark Twain, wrote his stories after leaving Hannibal, his river experiences heavily influenced his work.

As we wandered around, one of the first things we saw at the entrance of the museum was a depiction of Mark Twain reading his book to a local resident. This farming area, rich in grain production, offered a glimpse into the typical lifestyle of that era. The museum featured various exhibits related to Mark Twain's stories, including the famous scene where Tom Sawyer persuades his friends to paint a fence and charges them for the privilege while he watches.

Further inside, we encountered reconstructions of buildings from Twain's time. Actors in period costumes brought the era to life, playing the roles of people from that period.

One of the highlights of our journey was the opportunity to visit the pilot house while we were moored. The pilot house, also known as the green bridge, is where all the navigation magic happens. We weren't shown around by the sailing crew, a customer service representative gave us a tour.



*The pilot house also known as the green bridge on the American Queen*

In the centre of the pilot house, we saw the controls for the paddle wheel, which can move forward or reverse at variable speeds. Additionally, there were controls for two propeller systems driven by what they call a Z-Drive. These propellers, located on either side of the paddle wheel at the back, are connected to the engine via a series of gearboxes. This setup allows the propellers to change direction, providing the boat with its manoeuvrability. The Z-Drive offers some thrust but is primarily responsible for the boat's agility.

One evening, while we were underway, we had the chance to visit the engine room. The engine room staff were incredibly welcoming and eager to share their knowledge about the boat's mechanics. They explained various aspects of the boat's operation. However, it was quite hot and humid in the engine room, so we didn't stay too long.

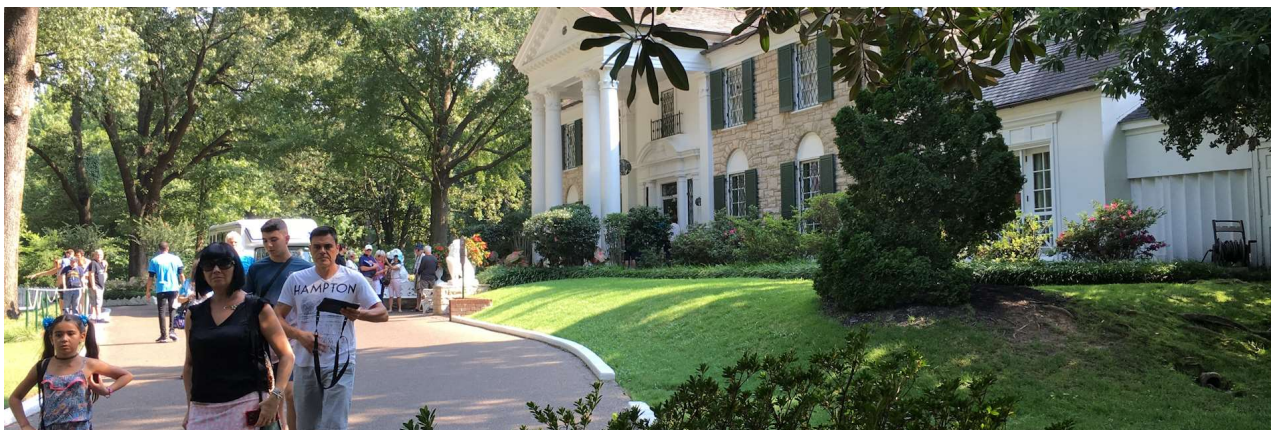
One of our next stops was Memphis, marking our entry into the lower half of the river. Memphis, the home of Rock and Roll, was the perfect place for us to take one of the special tours—the Elvis experience.

We were picked up at the boat and, as we made our way to Graceland, an Elvis impersonator came on board to entertain us with songs and stories. Graceland, located on the outskirts of Memphis, is situated on a relatively large block of land with plenty of trees. You can see the entire estate from the highway as you approach.

Upon arrival, the visitor experience began. We were given a device similar to a laptop, which we plugged into our ears for a self-guided tour. The system knew our location and provided commentary on what we were seeing. The house, built in the 1930s and later acquired and improved by Elvis in the 50s and 60s, exudes the plush style of the 1960s, albeit with some over-the-top elements. There was a lot of glass, making it quite interesting.

We toured many rooms, including the study and the office, but some were just plain bizarre. The pool room, for instance, had walls lined with curtain fabric, and the ceiling was covered with the same fabric in folds. It was quite a sight.

Outside, we visited the shrine where many people spent time reflecting. We saw Elvis's grave alongside those of his parents. After completing the tour, we boarded the coach again and headed to the Elvis museum, just two blocks away. The museum featured large pavilions displaying various items, including Elvis's extensive collection of cars and motorcycles. There was also a room dedicated to his awards, showcasing a third of his accolades. Interestingly, despite the presence of Australian symbols, Elvis never toured Australia.



*Graceland was acquired by Elvis Presley in March 1957 for \$102,500*

The museum also housed an enormous number of costumes, and nearby gift shops offered all sorts of Elvis paraphernalia. After exploring the museum, we headed back to Memphis City, passing Sun Studios, an operational recording studio where Elvis recorded his first record. During the day, visitors can tour the studio, while artists book it for recording sessions in the evenings.

We also drove past the Lorraine Motel, now part of the National Civil Rights Museum. This motel is historically significant as the site where Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. The complex now serves as a poignant reminder of the civil rights movement.

One of our favourite spots on the American Queen was the piano bar, where Phil Westbrook would play the piano from six to eight o'clock, taking a few breaks in between. Phil was not only a talented pianist but also a raconteur, entertaining us with stories and chatting with the guests. The bar was conveniently located nearby, making it the perfect place to unwind before dinner.

Our routine involved attending the six o'clock show, then spending an hour with Phil in the piano bar before heading to dinner. Phil knew he was the only thing standing between us and our meal, as the dining room entrance was just to the left of the bar. The dining room, set up for buffet service during the day, transformed into a formal dining area in the evening, seating a couple of hundred people. The space was two decks high, with the library, games room, and other amenities carved out in the middle.

As the saying goes, if you want to lose weight, don't go on a cruise. And if you really don't want to lose weight, don't go on a cruise primarily intended for Americans. The menu onboard was a testament to this, featuring starters like rare beef tenderloin and southern crabfish, seafood chowder, and mains such as veal, duck, red snapper, and mushrooms. Every night, I would ask the cooks for grilled chicken, but they didn't seem to understand the concept of small meals. Complimentary wine with dinner made the experience even more enjoyable.

One night, a fellow diner was indecisive about what to order, and the waitress solved the dilemma by bringing both options. Our dining room experience was always delightful. We had the 7:30 seating and were assigned to a table with eight people. Although the people at the table often changed, our group remained the same, and we enjoyed each other's company every night.

Our table included a diverse group of individuals. There was a corn farmer from Michigan who worked from sunup to sundown and showed me photos of his enormous tractors. His wife, Carolyn, was content without

modern gadgets like iPads or iPhones. Another couple, Mark and his wife, were more liberal and hailed from California. Both were American-born but of European parentage, with Mark's parents being German and his wife's Italian. They had travelled extensively and had fascinating stories to share.

We also had a blue-collar couple, with the husband having transitioned from a trade job to the fire service and the wife working in management. They were either from Oregon or Florida, but it didn't matter much for our conversations. Another couple at our table was from the antipodes, adding an international flavor to our group.

Our serving crew, hailing from New Orleans, was exceptional. One of the waitresses, training to be a radiographer, took three months off during the summer to work on the boat and earn some extra money. Her dedication and friendly demeanour added to the overall enjoyment of our dining experience.

A bit further down from Memphis, we arrived in Greenville, which marks the beginning of the cotton belt. This area is steeped in blues and ragtime history, with BB King being a notable figure. Before this trip, I wasn't very familiar with his name, but the museum in Greenville showcased a variety of instruments he played and displayed a great collection of honours from around the world.

One of the highlights was visiting Club Ebony, a historic club built after World War II specifically for black entertainers and audiences, as they were not permitted in white hotels. The club is still operational today, and the entrance features a wonderful montage of its storied past.

Continuing south, we reached Vicksburg, a site of some of the fiercest Civil War battles. The area now hosts a national military park spanning about 20 acres. We took a tour of the park, stopping to see various monuments—around 500 in total. One notable monument had 47 steps, symbolizing the 47-day siege of Vicksburg before its final surrender. The park also features displays of cannons and other historical artifacts, providing insights into the battles fought and the lives lost.

A significant exhibit in the park is the USS Cairo, an ironclad warship from the Civil War era. These steam-powered paddle steamers were armoured with steel cladding to provide additional protection. The USS Cairo was sunk by a mine in the Mississippi River and was dredged up about 40 years ago. It now sits under a protective cover, with a wooden frame holding it together.



*The wreck of the Civil War Ironclad USS Cairo which was sunk by a mine in 1862*

On our last day before reaching New Orleans, we stopped at the Nottoway Plantation. This plantation, dating back to the 1860s, initially grew cotton and later switched to sugar, which was more lucrative. We had the opportunity to tour the plantation house, which offered a glimpse into the opulent lifestyle of the plantation owners.

The lower Mississippi River's edge is quite different from the upper regions. We literally pulled up to the riverbank, with ropes holding the boat in place against the breeze. The gangplank was set up, and temporary walkways were installed. In spring, when the water level rises, it reaches up into the greenery, which helps stabilize the riverbank. However, the area we docked at was dry and heavy with concrete mats laid out to protect the edge.

Exploring the Nottoway Plantation and learning about its history was a fascinating experience. The plantation owner lived in great splendour, and actors in period costumes added to the authenticity of our visit. After our tour, we headed back on board, ready for the final leg of our journey to New Orleans.



*The Nottoway plantation house built for John Hampden Randolph in 1859*

The next morning, we arrived in New Orleans, marking the end of our 15-day journey. For the first time, we moored at a proper passenger terminal, unlike the other stops where we simply pulled up and disembarked. The water here was very muddy, filled with silt from the lower Mississippi. A lot of effort goes into pumping out the silt and protecting the riverbanks.

All good things must come to an end. We spent another two or three days exploring New Orleans before heading to the airport and returning home.

Q: What were those engines burning?

A: They were burning diesel fuel oil, not coal. The boat had conventional engines to run the props as well. Unfortunately, the American Queen is now out of commission. It's a 50-50 chance whether it will be turned into a floating hotel, which would be very expensive, or sent to the scrapyards. The boat is 50 years old and fell out of favour during the COVID period. It's also on the higher end price-wise for tours. If it were to come back into service, there would be significant costs to reduce its environmental impact.

Q: My understanding is that different states now have different currencies. Did you come across any of that?

A: I was on holiday, so I didn't pick up on that. What I found amusing was that something in America was free. Earlier in our trip, we spent time in the Northeast, visiting Boston, Canada, New York, and Washington. In Washington, all the federal museums are free. However, the lock system is operated federally at no cost to users. When politicians in Washington have a disagreement and block monetary supply, it means no one is there to open the locks.

Q: Were most of the passengers Americans?

A: Oh yes, about 90%. I was surprised at how many had done the cruise before. It's similar to going on a lovely holiday to the islands—comfortable, with great meals and entertainment. Some people just enjoy the journey itself.

Q: Did you have any trouble with your New Zealand accent?

A: No, not at all. The variation in the American accent is so extreme anyway. We did have some difficulty explaining the concept of socialised medicine, like a public hospital where you'd be treated for free if you were injured. They didn't quite get that.

Q: Were you tipping the staff?

A: When we booked, the bill included a gratuity, which was added automatically. You could opt out, but then they might not book you. There is a pool of tips available to the crew, which is considerable. That's likely why the young lady worked over the summer—to earn extra money. Midway through the cruise, we were given a survey to fill out, and the serving staff were keen for us to complete it, as it affected their tip percentages.

Just digressing for a moment: Having visited the US many times, I've always felt uncomfortable with tipping—how much to tip, when to tip, etc. On this trip, we were in Canada for dinner one night, and the server was very pleasant. I explained that we don't tip in New Zealand, and he said five or ten percent was up to us. When I asked if he was well-paid, he said he was going to college and this job was paying his way. However, he only earned seven dollars an hour from his employer, with tips making up the rest. This explained the importance of tipping in their system.

When we took the train in the US, we were advised to grab a redcap. These guys are not employees of the rail company but require security clearance to work on the platform. They work solely for tips, and their job depends on good behaviour. I felt comfortable tipping them for their service.

Q: Was there much vibration on the boat?

A: Surprisingly, no. The river is pretty calm and flat most of the time, unlike ocean sailing. There was a little vibration when you were low down, but not much.

## **NEW FACES AND FAMILIAR FRIENDS AT GLORIA JEAN'S**

*Vince Middeldorp & Copilot AI*



*We filled most of the reserved seating set aside for us by the proprietors at Gloria Jean's cafe*

We enjoyed another coffee morning at Gloria Jean's Café, which has become a favourite spot for Ian Smith's coffee mornings. Regular attendees Eric and Janelle Davison from the combined group were present, along with Trevor and Fay Pollard and Raymond and Suzanne Barrett from the men's group. Unfortunately, John Mihaljavic couldn't join us as he was attending a coffee morning at Waitakere Gardens, hosted by the MP for Te Atatu, the Hon. Phil Twyford.

It was a pleasant surprise to see Vince Dennehy, who rarely attends our coffee mornings. We also welcomed Allan Williamson for the first time. Allan not only joined us for coffee, but also brought a copy of his PowerPoint presentation on the Mississippi cruise. It proved to be of immense help with writing the newsletter story on the talk he gave to the club in September.



*Fay Pollard; Vince Dennehy and Allan Williamson; Suzanne and Raymond Barrett*

## **A DAY AT AUCKLAND ZOO**

**Vince Middeldorp & Copilot AI**

While standing in line at the Auckland Zoo ticket booth, John Mihaljevic approached me and said I could head straight to the entrance since I had purchased my ticket online. Skipping the queue, showing my ticket to the scanning person, and being able to walk straight through felt good.

Inside the Zoo, I found a long bench seat that seemed like a suitable spot to wait for others. I sat down and struck up a conversation with a woman who was also sitting there. She mentioned she was waiting for her friends. She looked vaguely familiar, and I tried to recall where I might have seen her before.

Soon after, Janet Geddes joined us and started talking about the pay-and-display machine in the car park, which only accepted credit cards, not EFTPOS. The woman on the bench had parked her car without realising there was no free parking at the Zoo. After hearing Janet's story, she left to pay for her parking.

After she left, John Mihaljevic told me he had spoken to her earlier, and said her name was Annette. We never saw Annette again, so she most likely went home.

John, Janet, and I waited for others to arrive. When no one else showed up, we decided to explore the Zoo. While walking around, Alan Verry appeared on a bridge above us. We thought he would quickly join us, but he never did. Our search for him proved futile.



*Janet Geddes gets her camera out to take a photo of the Ring Tailed Black Cockatoo*

Our plan included a visit to the Te Puna Café, and that's where we found Alan. The café was spacious, with plenty of empty seats, suggesting a quiet day at the Zoo.

Both Alan and I had parked on Motions Road to avoid parking fees, the only downside to which was a short walk to the Zoo entrance. Three of us had also bought our tickets online, which was cheaper than buying at the Zoo entrance and still offered a sizeable Gold Card discount.



*Janet Geddes, Alan Verry and John Mihaljevic enjoying the comforts of Te Puna Café*

Despite the low turnout, I enjoyed my time at the Zoo, and I'm sure Janet, John, and Alan did too. It really is a wonderful place to visit. If you have trouble walking, Te Puna Café offers a comfortable spot to take the weight off your feet, enjoy a meal, and have a coffee or tea.

A few days after the Zoo visit, I remembered where I had seen Annette before. She was with us at Metlifecare Orion Point. I then realized she had been waiting for the Waitakere Combined Rebus group. If only I had known. We would have invited her to join us for our walk around the Zoo and our visit to Te Puna Café.

## ***A DELIGHTFUL MOVIE AND ROAST LUNCH***

***Vince Middeldorp & Copilot AI***

On the afternoon of Friday 27<sup>th</sup> September, I called Clint Ryder to confirm that 20 people would be attending the movie and roast lunch on following Tuesday. Earlier that morning, Clint had also received a call from Allison Turner, who informed him that she had 24 people on her list. Needless to say, Clint was thrilled with the numbers. His dining room holds 48, so we were just four people short of filling all the available places in the dining room.



*The late Roger Whittaker performing one of his songs before the movie "Going In Style" starts at Ryders*

Given our age profile, it was inevitable that some people would be unable to attend on the day. Allison's 24 people reduced to 22, and my 20 people went down to 15. Nevertheless, we had 37 attendees, which was still a very good number for Clint.

The movie we watched was "Going in Style," starring Morgan Freeman, Michael Caine, and Alan Arkin, with Christopher Lloyd also making an appearance. It was a fantastic film about three elderly pensioners who successfully rob a bank after their former employer legally evades its pension obligations.



*Filing out of the movie theatre and into the dining room*

Once again, the roast meal following the movie was terrific. Linda Narrayan, who had visited Bricklane Restaurant a few weeks ago, described it as more like a good home-cooked roast than a restaurant meal. I loaded my plate with roast potatoes, kumara, pumpkin, pork, and beef. Enjoying a meal in a unique venue with many friends and familiar faces made for a day filled with wonderful memories.

## NEXT COFFEE MORNING

Join us for our next coffee morning on **Wednesday, October 23rd** at The Alderman—the name given to the historic Fall’s Hotel by its new operators, Donna Hutchins and business partner Shaun Margan.



*New signage has gone up at what was formerly The Falls Bistro*

Free parking is still available along the boundary with The Alderman in The Falls carpark, located at the corner of Edmonton Road and Alderman Drive. These spaces are marked for 120-minute parking. All other parking spaces in this carpark are Pay & Display.

## NEW DATE FOR CHRISTMAS LUNCH AT MCHUGH’S

Ian Smith has provided us with a new date for the Christmas Lunch at McHugh’s. The date advertised in the last newsletter was lost because we didn’t get our deposit through on time to secure it. The new date is **Friday 6<sup>th</sup> December at 12:00 pm**. The booking has been made for thirty people.

## GUEST SPEAKER FOR OCTOBER



Alan Verry will offer fascinating insights into Cuba. This is a country Alan has visited as a tourist. Cuba has been shaped by its history and remains largely untouched by the forces of modern development.

## SUPPORTERS



Our meetings are held at 10:00 am on the **2nd Friday of each month at New Lynn Friendship Hall**, located at 3063 Great North Rd. The date for our October meeting is Friday, 8th November.