

Abilene

*Sunday, January 22nd - Saturday, January 28th*

Sunday morning I woke up in drizzly Jackson and once again began heading west.





It rained steadily as I left Mississippi but then abated shortly after I entered Louisiana. It was a long drive across the state, following I-20 as I would all day. The interstate is one of the worst ways to see a place, and the length of Louisiana came across as dingy, run down and tired. I'm sure there is beauty here, but I did not make time to find it.

Eventually I entered Texas, and drove through the rest of day and into night. The Mighty Scooter continued to hum along, the maintenance in Nashville clearly helping. I'd hoped to make it as far as Midland, but after reading about the cities and looking at distances from a rest stop as the sun sank down, I decided to stop at Abilene. A decision which worked out well.



*Entrance*

It was well after dark when I arrived, but the screen-door was clearly hanging ajar at my

AirBnb for the next couple of days (photo taken the next day). Not an auspicious start, but that turned out to be a result of the 40mph winds I'd driven through a lot of Sunday. The landlord wasn't even aware it'd torn off until he stopped by a day into my stay. I'd noticed strong winds, but at this point I've ridden through enough not to think much of them. The inside of the house was lovely, originally I planned to stay just a couple of days and then drive after work every night a bit farther to get across Texas. However, due to having to check out before my shift is over, that's a really annoying way to travel and I ended up enjoying Abilene enough that I shifted into a nearby motel for the rest of the week.



Book stand at the grocery store.



Not to say I want to move there, but there's a lot of fun stuff in Abilene and their downtown has some fun bars and restaurants.



*"Computers"*



*"Jacob's Dream" on the campus of Abilene Christian University.*

Nothing makes you feel like a creepy old guy like taking photos on a college campus while fresh faced students are lounging all around.



*Cannon*

A few minutes outside Abilene to the north is Fort Phantom Hill, an abandoned fort briefly used to harass the Indians and help settler mail and commerce make it through.





*Blacksmith Shop*



*Inside*





*Unexplained sitting device.*

Fort Phantom Hill is a cool place to wander around. Not a lot of information posted, but that helps make it a bit more haunting.





*Hospital Complex*



*Fort Phantom Hill*

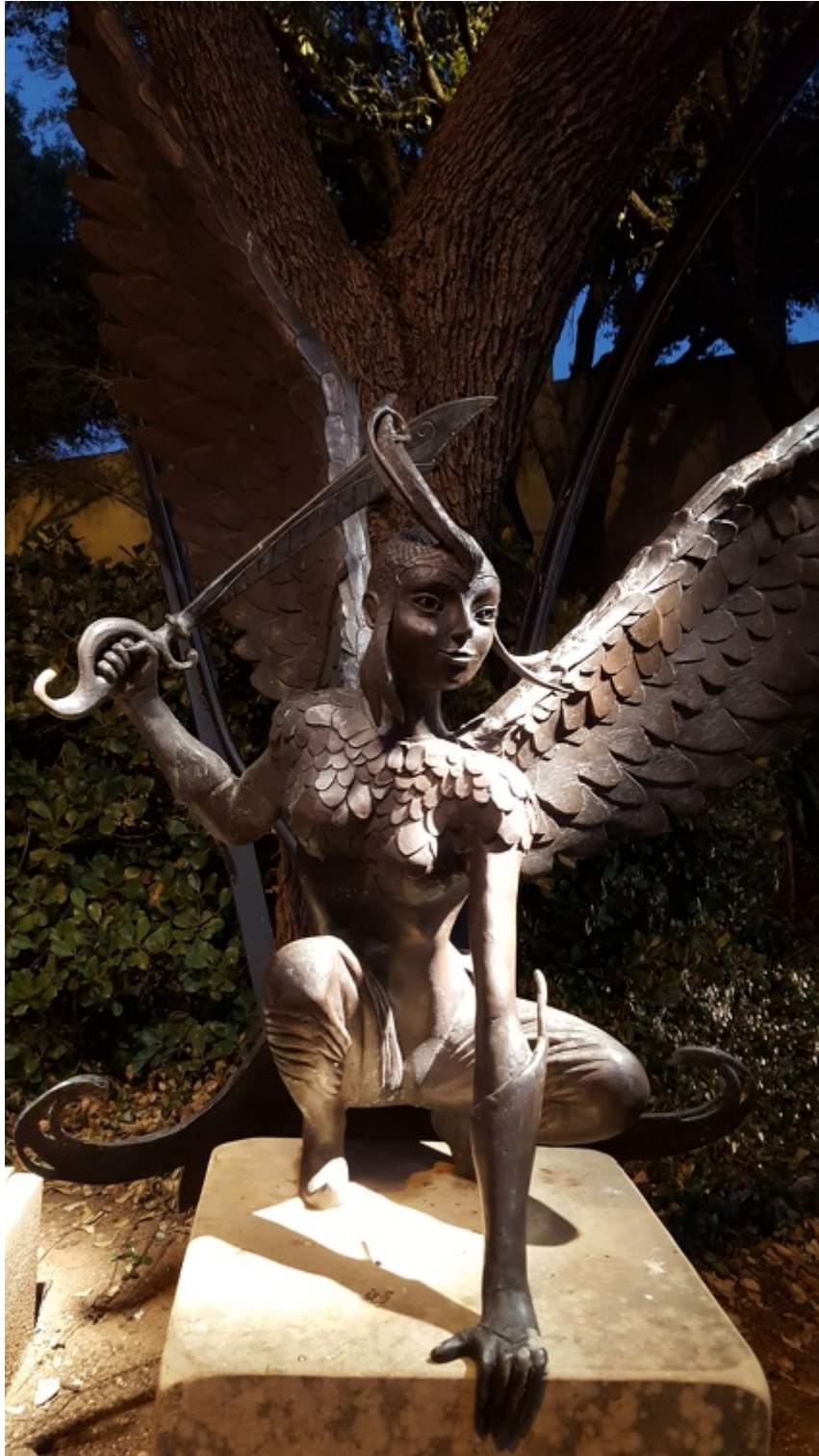


*Two blocks from downtown.*





*"What are you waiting for ... FLY"*



*"Queen Toothiana" by Steve Neves, (2014)*



There are a number of sculptures from children's books around downtown Abilene, along with a National Center for Children's Literature and other initiatives that helped Abilene convince the Texas State Legislature to designate the town the official, "Storybook Capital of Texas."



*Buffalo vs. Wolves*

Let's talk about Frontier Texas!. Yes the exclamation mark is part of the name. I'm not sure how to punctuate a sentence that ends that way. In keeping with stories, this is not so much a historical museum as a place to recount the history of European settlement of Texas. They do this by having a half dozen "spirit guides" in the form of holograms that each have one to several speeches you can prompt them to give. They frame everything as a conflict of values and ideas, careful to stay neutral. The slaughter of Indians, settlers and buffalo are all presented in a fairly unflinching light. There's certainly the impression that history is



researched, but what's being presented here are really stories. Which is something I both really liked and regarded warily.



*Buffalo Skulls*

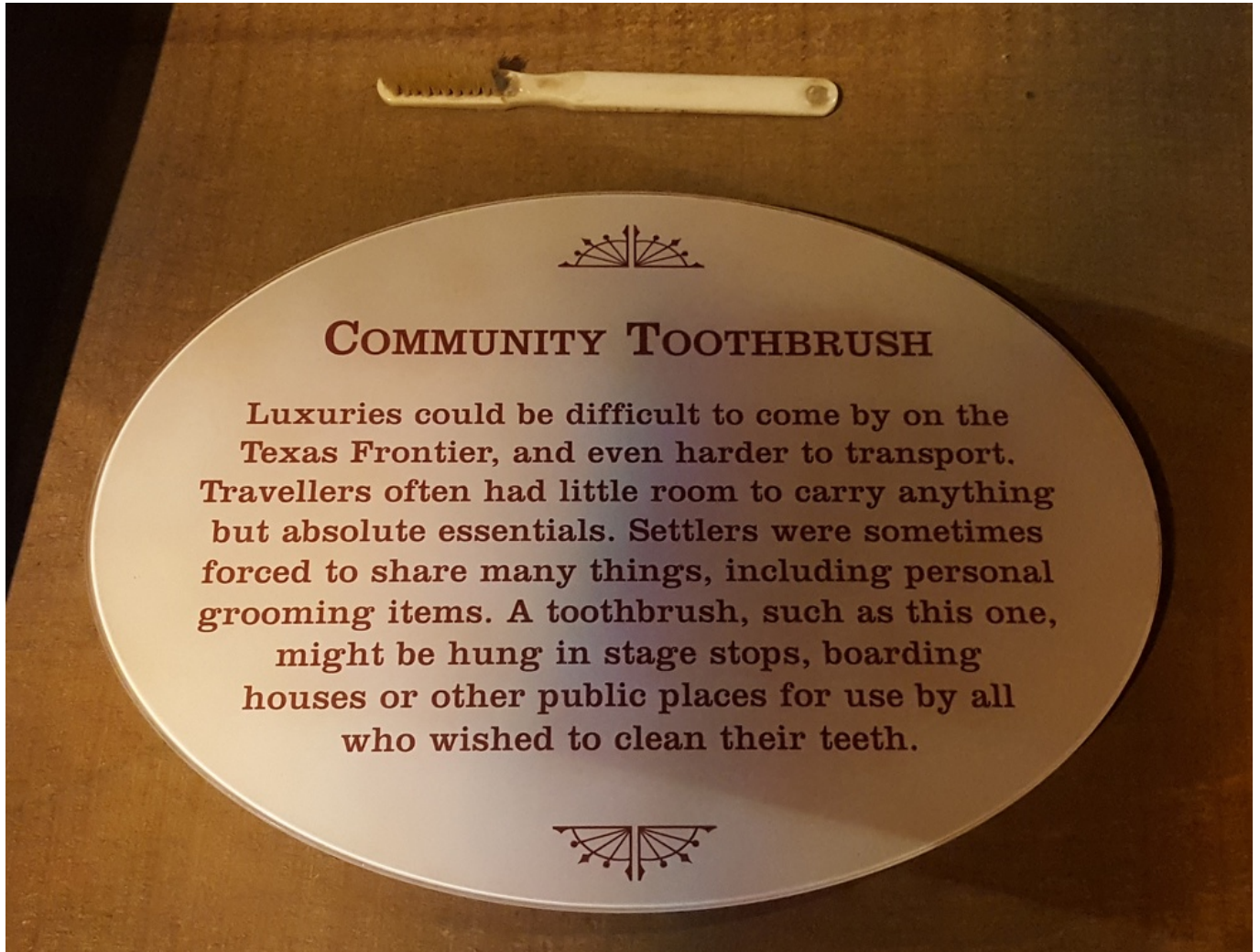


*Stampede!*





*Indian shield with scalps. Real? Fake? Does it matter?.*



*Community Toothbrush - my scooter journey seems so civilized!*





*2D Bison with 3D Saddle*

Back wandering downtown, this time I came across this strange two dimensional buffalo sign, with an actual saddle attached and stairs up so kids can climb on board.

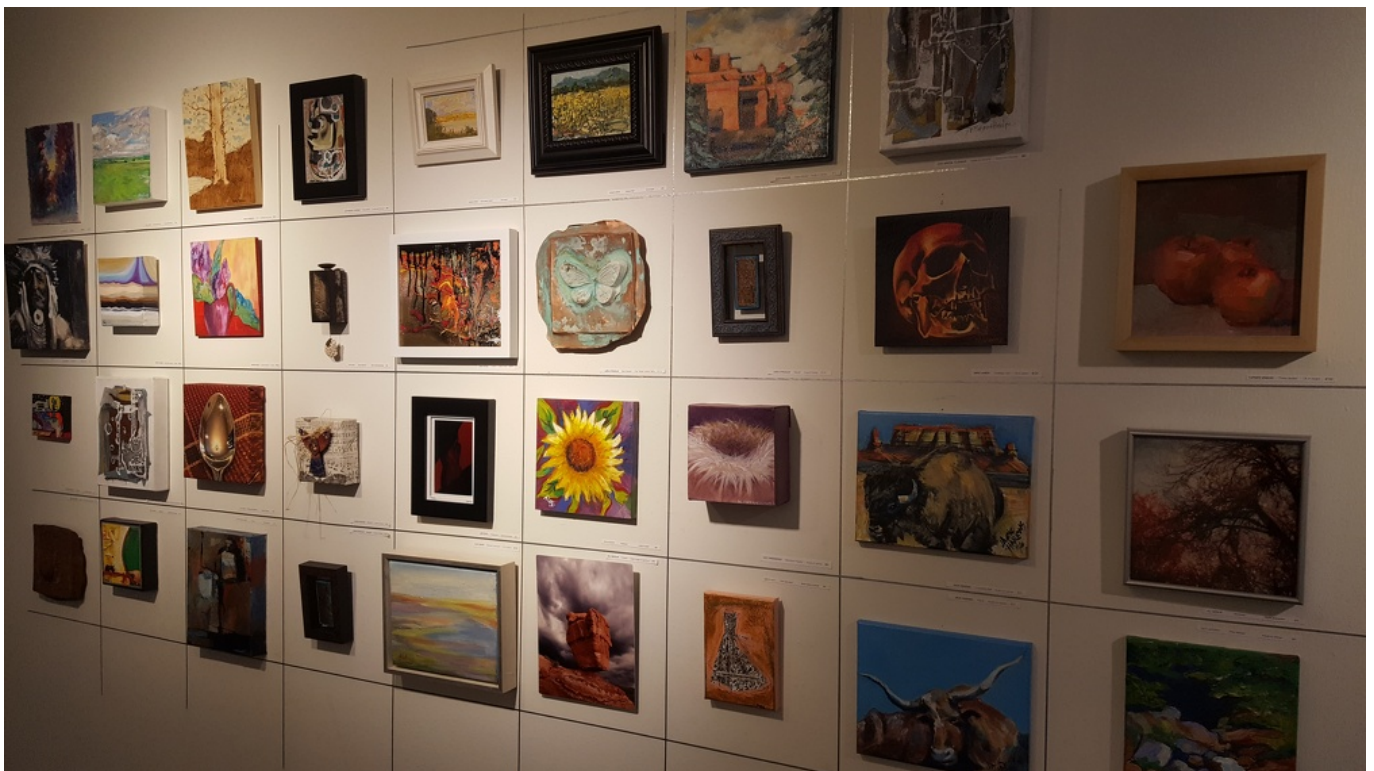


*Toothiana makes poor decisions when cold.*



At one point someone came along and decorated all the sculptures with this bit of propaganda. I tend to view “school choice” as corporations getting people to campaign on their behalf; for-profit organizations whose product is students, whose competition is other schools, and whose clients are politicians directing tax funds. I have rants on many topics!

I really did enjoy my time in Abilene. The folks there are proud of their town, and although the wide open skies made me feel like I might fall upward into space when I got out of town at first, I enjoyed driving around, seeing the marvelous sunset, the massive flocks of birds, and seeing a downtown really start to hit its stride. I’ll finish up with a few photos from the Contemporary Arts Center, a collective of local artists.



*Their “XS Art” exhibit contains only small, relatively cheap art that rotates every 4-6 weeks a portion of each sale going to the center.*



*"Cooler Rails" by April Rifenburgh (oil on canvas).*





*"Adventures of Uncertainty #2" by Russell Ellison (acrylics and texturing medium).*

