

# Students of Predictive History

A. KENDRA GREENE

*As historians and students of predictive history, we need make no guesses. This is how it really happened.*

—Stephen E. Whitfield, *The Making of Star Trek*

## **Stardate—313781.1 / 2009 AD**

Riverside, Iowa, population 965, isn't big enough to have its own movie theater. It has no stoplights. It's the kind of place where businesses are named for their owners, places like Jim's Small Engine Repair and Bud's Custom Meats, and you might be forgiven for noticing that Bud's is directly across the street from a veterinary clinic. A sign in the beauty parlor window shames prom-goers for making tanning bed appointments and then, *ahem*, not showing up on time. Folks in town are still waiting for the casino that opened two years prior on the other side of the highway to boost the local economy, but in terms of population growth and median home price, Riverside, in the spring of 2009, is doing better than average for rural Iowa.

Back in 1984, however, Riverside was a town looking for a way to distinguish itself. It had just enough enrollment to keep its two schools open, but most of the town's storefronts sat empty. Business was leaving, and the buildings they'd left were deteriorating from neglect. In the opinion of one Steve

Miller—not the leader of the Steve Miller Band’s Steve Miller, but Riverside City Councilman Steve Miller—in the opinion of this concerned citizen: “Best thing that could’ve happened was a benign tornado.”

**Stardate—338779.9 / 1984 AD**

In 1984, in the dim clutter of the town’s makeshift city hall, Councilman Miller made a motion. In his capacity as councilman and respecting all proper procedure, Miller formally proposed that Riverside proclaim itself the future birthplace of *Star Trek*’s Captain James T. Kirk. The motion was quickly seconded and unanimously passed. If anyone was concerned about creating a time paradox, the minutes do not record it. The one councilperson absent that night was shocked when she heard about the decision and vowed she’d never miss another council meeting, but otherwise, at first—for a while—nothing happened.

And maybe nothing would have happened, except Tom Walsh published a news story in the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*. Once it hit the wire, the proclamation was reported in papers across the country. Residents in Riverside started getting calls from friends in other states, from their kids in Europe. The BBC ran a story. The mayor took a week’s vacation from his day job just to keep up with all the reporters who kept calling.

The town began a rechristening, officially changing its slogan from “Where the Best Begins” to “Where the Trek Begins.” The annual town celebration, held the last Saturday of June, dropped the name “River Fest” in favor of the more tourist-enticing “Trek Fest.” Because a birthplace is not only an idea but also a specific spot, Miller donated a bit of land and commissioned a small plaque behind the barbershop to give the future birthplace a site. Which is to say, four years before movie crews went to Dyersville, Iowa, to film *Field of Dreams*, the people of Riverside installed one little plaque. They built just that. And the people came.

**Stardate—313781.1 / 2009 AD**

Steve Miller started watching *Star Trek* in high school. In college, he’d go

down to the Quadrangle Dormitory TV Room and sit through *The Wild, Wild West* at seven o'clock just to make sure he had a good seat for *Star Trek* at eight o'clock. But when he claimed Kirk's birthplace for Riverside, he was unprepared for what real commitment looks like. "Until this, I didn't know there were *Star Trek* fan clubs," Miller says. Groups from Des Moines and Chicago and St. Louis made the pilgrimage. California. Denmark. As Internet usage increased, *Trek* fans increasingly made Riverside a destination to meet up.

Some sojourners are disappointed to discover that Riverside isn't a full-on Trekker colony. A lot of residents couldn't tell you the difference between a Vulcan and a Klingon. If you have a hankering for Romulan Ale, Murphy's only serves it one night a year. Both STARTRK and the alternate spelling STRTREK are vanity plates registered to Riverside, but you could forgive a fan for wanting more. The mayor remembers a letter from an irate Canadian who'd apparently gone to a lot of trouble to visit this alleged *Trek* Mecca, only to find—what?—the opportunity to walk around, maybe take a picture next to the local fake starship and buy a souvenir T-shirt?

But whatever Riverside is not, I feel it's worth noting: Nowhere else in the world can you acquire a genuine vial of Kirk Dirt—earth dug from the *actual arbitrary birthplace*, sterilized on baking sheets in someone's home oven, and sold for a few dollars, complete with certificate of authenticity, lest it sound too good to be true.

### **Stardate—356312.6 / 1966 AD**

Steve Miller is the kind of man who wins bar bets. Indeed, as a younger man he ran an Iowa City tavern, and even after trading in his bar rag for a job at the post office, his reputation for trivia was such that, for years, he was still getting calls at two or three in the morning from bar regulars. People wanted him to settle contentions and answer riddles and provide at a moment's notice the name of the Lone Ranger's nephew's horse. And I wouldn't think about Riverside at all, wouldn't know the name of this Steve Miller in the first place, except for the unlikely fact that he once took hold of a single sentence—a thing

that small—and carried it in his memory until it took on a life of its own.

It helps to remember that *Star Trek* was first broadcast in September 1966. By the spring of 1967, there were already plans to produce kits to put together your own tiny USS *Enterprise*. In 1968, Ballantine Books published *The Making of Star Trek*, and in 1969, the show ended. It had terrible ratings. It was lucky to last three seasons. Yet by 1975, just six years later, the show was a leader in syndication, and the book was in its seventeenth U.S. printing.

Back during the first season, the man assigned to oversee the *Enterprise* model kits and get all the details right was a plastics company designer named Stephen E. Whitfield. In May 1967, Whitfield's new friend, *Star Trek* art director Matt Jefferies, sent him a copy of "The *Star Trek* Guide," a character bible written by series creator Gene Roddenberry. Whatever this inside information did to contribute to accurate starship models, the guide quickly became the basis for Whitfield and Roddenberry's book *The Making of Star Trek*. The book is 414 pages long, and the only statement of interest to Riverside comes in Part II: An Official Biography of a Ship and Its Crew. There, in subsection "The Ship's Captain," the second sentence of the last paragraph on page 215 says exactly this: "He appears to be about thirty-four years old and was born in a small town in the state of Iowa."

The Iowa bit was never mentioned in the original television series. It existed in Roddenberry's original guide only as a detail to give the writers of the series a sense of the character and maintain continuity from one episode to the next. Steve Miller read that scintilla of trivia and made note of it, but perhaps far more important than just what he saw there, he also noticed what *wasn't* there at all. The Guide only said Iowa. It was no more specific than that. Indeed, the Texas-born Roddenberry never had a particular town in mind. Nor did he seem to care. Paramount's been known to threaten litigation when Riverside's citizens make something that's too close to the trademark, but Roddenberry is said to have remarked about Riverside's initiative: "That's a very enterprising idea. As far as I'm concerned, the first volunteer has it."

**Stardate—313781.1 / 2009 AD**

The great walrus mustache Miller has worn for decades is graying, but his eyes twinkle from under a U.S. Army Veteran cap embroidered with a bald eagle and the American flag. One suspects he has no shortage of enterprising ideas—like the time he suggested to the governor that Iowa print bumper stickers with John Wayne at one end, Captain Kirk at the other, and the slogan “Birthplace of Heroes” between them.

Miller was born in Iowa, and his roots go deep. He’ll tell you his mother’s family settled here before Iowa was granted statehood, and his father’s side arrived in 1848. Now his grandchildren are growing up in Iowa, too. Miller has lived outside of Iowa borders for nineteen months, two days, eight hours, and twenty-two minutes. He’s done the math. That’s exactly how long he spent away when drafted into the army during Vietnam.

As for Riverside, Miller and his wife and three kids called it home from 1974 to 1992. Since then they’ve lived twelve miles north, in Iowa City, where the retired Miller occupies himself driving a school bus and feeding a longtime fascination with the Civil War. He serves on the Kalona Historic Society Board of Directors. It’s been a long time since his 10-year stint on the Riverside City Council, but he’s still got ties to the community. For instance, he’s been invited back as grand marshal of the Silver Anniversary Trek Fest, and Miller’s planning to invite President Barack Obama and Iowa Governor Chet Culver to sit alongside him and wave from the parade car. He still owns the plot of land where Captain Kirk will be born in 2228.

In addition to the usual greased-pig-contest/kids-tractor-pull/demolition-derby small-town festival fare, the 2009 Trek Fest will boast a Sci Fi Swap Meet and the “Mirror, Mirror, Don’t You Mock; Who Looks the Most Like Mr. Spock?” look-alike contest for pets. I ask Miller if he’s satisfied with his unorthodox, albeit lasting, legacy. Miller says he can’t complain.

Insofar as Roddenberry included it in “The *Star Trek* Guide,” Kirk’s birth in Iowa was technically always canon, but it wasn’t mentioned on-screen prior to the Riverside claim. Miller says every film thereafter has slipped in a nod to the

Hawkeye State. The studio has gone so far as to hire transportation to take interested Riverside residents to the movies in Iowa City for opening night of J.J.Abrams' *Star Trek* in a few weeks, where the first word in the opening scene will be a place marker in all caps, silver white, suspended above a crossroads of farm fields: IOWA.

As legacy goes, there's really only one thing missing. What he'd like, Miller says, what he's been working toward since the early days, is a monument. "I'd still like to do a Captain Kirk statue in the park," he says. I think of the brass Paul Reveres and plaster Davy Crocketts I've run across, but then Miller finishes the thought. "I envision it," he says, "like the Lincoln Memorial."

#### **Stardate—314377.3 / 2008 AD**

When I left a museum job I loved to move to Iowa in 2008, my Chicago friends were clear on the fact that they would not come visit. They had no use for Iowa, had not conceived of the charm of state fair butter sculpture or small-town sauerkraut festivals or the pounding *affrettando* of auctioneers. But one friend offered to help me move, to put my writing desk in the back of his pickup and head west in the mid-August heat.

"You know," he said, somewhere near the state border. "Captain Kirk is from Iowa." I didn't. I didn't know about Riverside. I didn't know Kirk's birthday is a day (and 248 years) after mine. I had a growing fascination with the Ice Age megafauna represented at the University of Iowa Museum of Natural History, but I hadn't the slightest premonition about a Riverside museum that was just opening its doors. I didn't know I'd visit the town half a dozen times that spring or think about the museum off and on for years.

#### **Stardate—313781.1 / 2009 AD**

On my first visit to Riverside, I park two spots down from a five-ton model starship. The USS *Riverside*, which bears a striking resemblance to the copyrighted USS *Enterprise*, was constructed in honor of the town's self-designation as Kirk's future birthplace. Ken McCracken was twelve when his family built

the starship. His dad programmed a console to light up in patterns faithful to the original series. His Aunt Loree designed and printed the decals. His grandmother Colleen contributed just the right salad bowls to stand in for the two glowing red half-domes known to starcraft connoisseurs as the Bussard Ramscoops. If the *Riverside* lacks truly functional plasma conduits and explosive bolts, it is nonetheless impressively rigged to produce lateral motion, blinking lights, and plumes of exhaust.

In a few weeks, McCracken will tow the '84 USS *Riverside* starship back to the garage for body work and a tune-up to address the ravages inflicted by 25 years of Iowa winters and overzealous tourists. The *Riverside* is dented, faded, scratched up, and broken. It needs new tires, new panels, new lights. Ken estimates it's about a hundred hours of labor.

The McCrackens haven't lived in Riverside for almost two decades, and they were only there eight years in the first place. And yet, three generations were present for the annunciation of Riverside's future significance, and because the McCrackens have been part of Trek Fest from the start, they continue to stay involved.

Every summer, without fail, the McCracken clan hitches up the starship for parades and conventions, and perhaps the occasional joyride. But mostly their handiwork has passed its first quarter century as a fixture in Legion Park, a small triangle of grass and weeds across from the Casey's gas station. The new docking is at the end of a small parking lot a block up First Street, where it is hoped the USS *Riverside* might help promote the town's new museum, opened in 2008.

### **Stardate—314377.3 / 2008 AD**

Before it was a museum, the two-room storefront on Riverside's main drag had been both a KWIK-N-EZ and a day care. Groceries were bought and sold in the room where there's now an exhibit of *Star Trek* spacecraft. In the adjacent room, the clamor of kids in day care rang out where there's now the hush of a history museum. In a way, the Voyage Home/Riverside History Center has preserved that history of odd coupling as it tries to launch an enterprise half

fact and half fantasy. It's intriguing, this strange symmetry, an institution with a foot in the future and a foot in the past: one room all phasers and Klingon bat'leths, the other antique vacuum cleaners and local railroad spikes.

"It's silly to compare us to the Smithsonian," the museum's president, Paul LaPorte, says to me. It's silly, but otherwise he's at a loss for role models as he tries to steward divergent interests under one governing museum.

And if the pairing is unusual, the parts are strange enough; there's a paucity of *Star Trek*-related institutions boldly curating where no one has curated before. Indeed it's possible that the Voyage Home/Riverside History Center has only a few distant relations, none of which are hybrid institutions. The Las Vegas exhibition/destination *Star Trek: The Experience* ran successfully for ten years before it was decommissioned and closed in 2008, but even at its peak, it never sought to stretch beyond the franchise. Ditto for *Star Trek: The Exhibition*, which kept a full schedule touring Europe and the United States after *Star Trek: The Experience* closed. Though it's a minor pilgrimage site for fans, the *Trek*-sounding town of Vulcan, in Alberta, Canada, steers clear of any fictionalized future; the Vulcan & District Historical Society Archives & Museum concerns itself only with its actual past.

This means Riverside is in a unique position, and not simply because it offers you the chance to see the only known, unopened package of "Shats"—color-coded berets marketed by William Shatner and worn to indicate, under the same green-yellow-red color code as a traffic light, whether a Shat wearer ought to be approached gladly, with caution, or not at all. What's special about Riverside is that, should you choose not to approach the package of Shats at all, just a few strides in the opposite direction and you're reading about Albert Schulze's "Auto Director" (an early turn signal) and Christine Kirkwood's "Quilt Guide Stamp Kit Apparatus"—two of the twenty-three patents held by Riverside inventors.

"I know there's more," LaPorte says of the patents and the research left to be done. "That's just what I got from the Internet."

The quality of artifacts in the collection and the production values of

exhibition aside, it's only silly to mention the Smithsonian in comparison to Riverside if one is preoccupied by scale. To the extent that the Voyage Home/Riverside History Center is a history museum, and specifically a kind of *Star Trek* museum, the Smithsonian is precisely the place to start.

The very first page of *The Making of Star Trek* assures us, "This history text is an authentic contemporary record of early *Star Trek*," and continues on to advise that "students making field trips to Earth may wish to visit the Smithsonian Institute where one of *Star Trek*'s visualizations (flatscreen) may be viewed." The television show was only in its second season when the Smithsonian recognized its importance and asked for a print for their collection.

Then, in 1992, the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum honored the twenty-fifth anniversary of the original series with an exhibition of the largest collection of *Trek* items used on-screen ever assembled for the public. If you want to visit the original 11-foot-long, 200-pound *Enterprise* model used in the show, complete with original base still sprinkled with bits of blue dust so the support will disappear in post-production, Paramount donated it to the Smithsonian in 1974. The Smithsonian installed it in the main building's gift shop.

### **Stardate—313781.1 / 2009 AD**

"They come to the museum to get their T-shirts," says the Voyage Home/Riverside History Center's vice president, Carolyn Hudson. She mentions this to characterize their typical patron, but there's no missing how the clothing racks and cubbies full of *Trek*-themed apparel flank the entrance doors and spill into the main room.

Hudson designed both the *Next Generation* display in the *Star Trek* half of the museum and another small exhibition in the historical half that is announced by cut-out paper letters on a white piece of poster board as: HOUSES IN HISTORY. I am accustomed to museum-quality conditions meaning industrial mat cutters and cold storage vaults. I have spent years recording every slight accretion and negligible abrasion, and now I try not to judge the print quality, the creased corners. I know how much work the three active board members

have put in, how much more work they will continue to put in, after they see to their full-time jobs and their families. I know that the community club tries to help, that the city pays the rent, but still this is pretty much all out of pocket, and I know, as Hudson reminds me, just how much ink and toner costs.

When I visit, the museum has been in existence for eight months, and already one hundred donors, roughly one-tenth of Riverside residents, have contributed something to the museum's collections. By LaPorte's estimate, "Seventy-five percent of what we have is on display right now. Maybe fifty percent."

I don't object to the "Quantum Destiny" time capsule or the honey-stained wooden sculpture of Kirk-à-la-cigar-store-Indian that anchored a corner of the People's Trust and Savings before it was relocated to the museum. The potluck community spirit of the collection is revealing in its own way. What bothers me is that there is so much to see and yet, ultimately, so little to learn.

We are all passingly familiar with *Star Trek* and its principal characters. Spock's pointy ears; his spread-finger Vulcan salute accompanied by the benediction "Live long and prosper"; the command "Beam me up, Scotty"; and "to boldly go where no man has gone before" have achieved widespread cultural currency. But that doesn't mean we know anything. That doesn't mean a tribute should become a shrine, its icons decipherable only to the initiates. If the story's that good—and by gracious, it actually *is*—why not tell it?

### **Stardate—310776.2/ 2012 AD**

I am always one to read the wall text, but I am functionally illiterate in *Star Trek* when I first walk in the museum, and I am hardly less ignorant the last time I leave. I don't know until years later, when I ask the Internet, that the original series lasted only three seasons. It's my boyfriend who points out that the physics of *Star Trek* demands its own unit of measurement, the Cochrane. I am listening to NPR when an interview with Nichelle Nichols, who played Lieutenant Uhura, reveals that none other than the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. convinced her to stay on the show instead of leaving for Broadway. King said he was her greatest fan. He said *Star Trek* was the only show he and Coretta

let their children stay up and watch.

The museum does not display the minutes from the 1984 city council meeting. It does not display any of the press clippings. It does not hint at its origin story, and it certainly does not display a copy of *The Making of Star Trek* and the one sentence that made all of this possible. I can see how it should be displayed. The vitrine would be positioned to bridge the threshold, ensconced at the join in the back of the museum where one passes out of *Trek* and into history. I think of it as a place of honor: I think Gutenberg Bible and Audubon folios, a bookstand cut to cradle it, illuminated by pin lights. But it need be nothing so ornate. Its presentation need not correspond to its importance. I would be happy with a five-cent photocopy stapled to the wall.

For all my angst, the remarkable thing is that I could potentially rectify this absence myself. This is a museum that doesn't want students just to visit; they're willing to let kids create the exhibits. Hudson says that if the pupils of Highland High School are willing to do the research and create the exhibits, the museum is happy to turn over the wall space. Ditto for nearby University of Iowa museum studies scholars looking to build their résumés.

Three years after my last visit to Riverside, I find myself stewing about the museum's neglect of its own history. I have been trying to explain to a friend how local history museums so often seem trapped by their collections, that they seem able to talk only about the things they have rather than collect whatever they need to tell the story that most needs telling. I find this immensely frustrating, but when the museum in question has a story that exists because of and is composed of accessible documents, what excuse is there left?

It is in this state of agitation that I pay a visit to the central branch of the Dallas Public Library. The catalog records show there are three copies of the book I'm looking for, though the librarian can locate only two of them. I can't check out the copy he brings me from Special Collections; it's too valuable for circulation. But I can read it until the library closes.

I'm still mad as I copy out the exact wording on page 215. It is the first and only time I see that all-important sentence. I wonder briefly whether the

visually rich but text-poor museum might have room for an essay, if I should format it nicely and send them a file, plus the money to print it out.

### **Stardate—343564.6/ 1979 AD**

In retrospect, there are ways in which it seems fated. Of course a lifelong Iowan with a knack for trivia and a passion for genealogy would put Captain Kirk's birthplace on the map. But it's worth remembering that, and this strikes me as rather beautiful, the past naming of the future birthplace never had to happen. It didn't have to be Miller, and it didn't have to be Riverside. To wit, another city councilman from eastern Iowa once stopped Miller and asked to shake his hand. "I had the same idea about Kirk," he said. "But I didn't have the guts to act on it. My hat's off to you."

Steve Miller grew up 22 miles west of Riverside in the even smaller town of Kinross. At his hometown's centennial celebration in 1979, he mentioned to an old high school buddy that maybe Kinross could be Kirk's home. Neither of them pursued it. Kinross has since dwindled to a population of 80 people, and as Miller says, "A town that can't support a tavern isn't worth calling a town in Iowa." A town that small would have been hard pressed to harness *Trek* attention for community benefit. People visiting wouldn't even have had a place to get lunch in Kinross before climbing back into their cars and driving on.

### **Stardate—313781.1 / 2009 AD**

Only a thin pane of museum glass stands between me and the autographed flesh-colored underwear of William Shatner's body double. Two other items share exhibition space with the stand-in Captain Kirk's unmentionables: Shatner's uncashed personal check for \$4 (memo note: FOOD) and a canning jar of mucus-like goo.

"We don't know if that's extra goo from filming, or if they scraped it off him afterward," LaPorte tells me. "Frankly," he adds, "I don't want to know."

This is funny because of all the people on this planet, president Paul LaPorte might be the only one I could reasonably expect to take an interest in prop goo

provenance. LaPorte is, by his own estimation, a historian, and these are some of the most prominently displayed artifacts in his museum. I don't care whether the specimen is actually virgin surplus goo or authentic site-specific goo still suspending a trace of sloughed skin cells from a stunt double. But I do take an interest in what a museum chooses to leave out, what it forgets or ignores. And because I value the story undergirding this museum, I am distracted by the absence of that story.

Museums make strange bedfellows all the time—factories, private homes, functioning elementary schools—as if the museum were a species of scavenger, an opportunist, an epiphyte. You'll find them anywhere, taking shopping malls and aircraft carriers and prisons as their hosts. So it's not necessarily weird that Shats and patents are found side by side in a former convenience store—there is, in fact, a perfectly good explanation.

What's weird is that no one tells you what that perfectly good explanation is. What's confounding is that this is a history museum, yet it elides the very event in Riverside history that accounts for half a museum filled with Spock cutouts and cast photos printed on a home computer, glued to foam core, and put on display without further explanation. This is *astonishing* because, with all due respect to the prophesied arrival of Captain Kirk, something extraordinary already *has* happened to Riverside, Iowa.

Indeed—who knows how many?—maybe hundreds of phenomenal occurrences have already unfolded right here, where the trek begins, but I know for certain that one in particular is both remarkable and ripe for exhibition. It is *ideal* for exhibition. The future birthplace declaration is engaging, relevant, unique to this place, and furthermore clearly and compellingly told through known objects of material culture. It is a museum dream! At its root it is that city council motion, that event, that story, that is responsible for scores of folks, year-round, driving past fields upon fields of corn and soybeans just to look around and take a photo and maybe buy a yarn Tribble knotted and snipped into being by a few ladies in town and sold in the gift shop to fund local scholarships five dollars at a time.

**Stardate—306563.1 / 2016 AD**

There are those who would say the past is the past, and let us be done with it. I don't imagine any of them are historians. I don't expect any of them run museums. I do respect the position of let bygones be bygones and all that, but why then this museum's obsession with a fictional future when it makes a fiction of its past?

By omitting the history of becoming a future birthplace, the Voyage Home/Riverside History Center not only keeps the past in the past but also seems to keep the future in the future. The museum doesn't mention once, in either of its halves, that Kirk was or is or will be an Iowan. They ignore this future incident like it never happened. Which, of course, it hasn't. But whether you think in past or future tense, if you do think that James Tiberius Kirk is (or rather, *is going to be*) a real person, then this omission makes perfect sense.

James T. Kirk wasn't born in a tourist trap. He wasn't, and he won't be. When March 22, 2228, rolls around, we are told, he will be born in a town in Iowa. We know that much. That we know *which* town in Iowa is due to some embroidering, but that doesn't mean we can insert into the silences of this fiction whatever else we like. No, indeed I feel confident in confirming something else never specifically said in "The *Star Trek* Guide": Captain Kirk wasn't and won't be born in a town that had prepared for his sainted arrival for 244 years.

Riverside made its own destiny back in 1984, and I want its museum to remember that it was audacious and savvy and clever. It had gumption and a sense of humor, and I want that on display. It may or may not be the reason Riverside survived to become a place where the people who left had a reason to come back. And yet, the more I think about it, the more I also have a begrudging respect for the museum as it is. I have to admit that adopting the identity of future birthplace is plausible only insofar as the birthplace remains essentially unaware of itself. To explain too much about *Star Trek* in this place begins to strain the museum's own mythology.

**Stardate—313781.1 / 2009 AD**

In the beginning, I always called ahead when I went to Riverside. I called to make sure the museum would be open when it said it would be. I called before showing up to city council or community club meetings. But the last time I visit, I don't call ahead, end up in town on a lark, and find the museum closed. I cup my hands to the plate-glass windows to confirm, look around for signs of life and find none. I walk over to Greene Street Sweets, which has been closed all winter, and buy an ice cream. When I walk back to my car in the museum parking lot, a stranger approaches me.

"Were you the one looking around here earlier?" It's not a menacing question, but I hesitate before answering. "We're not really open," the stranger continues, "but I got a call someone was interested, so I drove on over." And with that, the keys jangle and the doors open and we switch on the lights.

The Voyage Home/Riverside History Center has been designed such that one enters and leaves by the gift shop. "For lack of a better word," LaPorte says, "call it a community organization consignment store." All right, then. One enters and one leaves by the *community organization consignment store*, a place where you can, as the season permits, purchase Girl Scout cookies or Boy Scout popcorn or a throw blanket depicting in red and white the grand spires of St. Mary's Catholic Church—the building that sits like a crown on Riverside's highest hill a few blocks away.

Once outside the museum, however, you won't find another place in town to purchase the postcards or the mousepads. Ditto on the keychains and shot glasses and star-shaped squeeze-y stress toys. Indeed, if you forget the modest plaque behind the barber shop—if you don't invite the mayor out for drinks or meet former councilmen for coffee, and if you ignore the fact that you've parked next to a starship—that is, if you step away from the museum itself, everything else in Riverside approximates, with great historical accuracy, a town that's never heard of a man who has yet to be born.

