

MaH Members Tour Saint-Gaudens National Historical Site
By Cynthia Sue Martell

It's been said that half the fun of a journey is the unexpected events that happen along the way. It's also been said, "Cross your bridges when you come to them."

Both were true of MaH's incredible trip to Saint-Gaudens National Historical Site in Cornish, N.H. on Thursday, June 20, 2013.

The weather was so ideal that it seemed almost surreal after days of rain. The van's twelve seats quickly filled with eager MaH day-trippers. With all on board we launched – a tiny cruise ship on wheels with Michelle, our driver, at the helm.

As the van traced the scenic shorelines of the mighty Connecticut River, we watched farmers busily haying, taking advantage of the tentative sunshine. We slipped past hillside apple orchards, vast cornfields, and large rectangles of fertile soil dotted with neat rows of vegetable plants.

Within a short distance of our destination we turned onto a side road, and suddenly came face to face with a bridge. Not just *any* bridge. It was the famous Cornish-Windsor Covered Bridge that connects Cornish, N.H. and Windsor, Vt. stretching an astounding 449'5" over the Connecticut River.

This bridge is touted on the National Register of Historic Places as: "... the longest wooden covered bridge in the U.S. and the longest two-span covered bridge in the world."

By driving across it we could've shaved off about eight miles travel distance. But there was a problem. The van's height was 9' 10", and the bridge's vertical clearance was just two or three inches higher.

If we attempted to drive through, the bridge could've proven to be a "tight squeeze." After discussion and a quick phone call, we chose to turn the van around (no easy task), and drive the extra miles up the main highway to Saint-Gaudens.

Arriving at the Historical Site we embarked on a guided tour. To experience first-hand the breathtaking realism of Augustus Saint-Gaudens' huge sculptural works in bronze is beyond amazing.

These sculptures bring Civil War heroes to life: Lincoln, Sherman, Farragut, Logan and the war's first black regiment and its colonel depicted so gloriously in the *Shaw Memorial*.

After a tour of the artist's studio, twenty-two members of MaH enjoyed a scrumptious lunch prepared by Chef Bonnie. We ate and relaxed on the

studio's cool garden-pergola with its white columns, bright flowers and latticed, grape- vine covered roof. We could've easily been visiting an Italian Villa in the hills of Tuscany.

From this high vantage point we had a remarkable close up broadside view of Mt. Ascutney. Owen Houghton pointed out that Mt. Ascutney is *another* "mountain that stands alone" – a monadnock – like our own Grand Monadnock Mountain.

On our return trip home we had to pass directly by the 'opposite end' of the Cornish-Windsor Covered Bridge. The van pulled over to get a closer look at our nemesis. Our view was limited, and soon we were outside hiking toward the bridge.

Across the upper front of it in large, bold, white letters was written: "Walk Your Horses Or Pay A \$2 Fine". No one noticed any horses, but the flow of automobiles moving through the bridge was non-stop in both directions.

As we congregated close to the bridge's entrance, there seemed to be an "Ah-Hah!" moment that quietly rippled through the group. Intent eyes studied the structure like military strategists before a battle. Height and weight, regulation and risk, were systematically evaluated.

Before long a tactical decision was reached: If we kept the van squarely in the middle of the bridge as we drove across, and avoided getting too close to either side we could make it work. We were clearly in conqueror mode!

Two courageous members volunteered to stop traffic at either end of the bridge. A brave gal walked its length to the far end where she stood guard. A brave gentleman stationed himself at the bridge's entryway. But the most valiant participant in this "cross the bridge challenge" had to be our intrepid van driver.

Decision made, we all excitedly climbed aboard the van. It then proceeded to the 'mouth' of the bridge making us feel a little like Jonah and the Whale. Reassured by our compatriots at either end (of the bridge) that all two-way traffic was safely stopped, the van began moving through the center of it – *very, very* slowly.

"Yes", we did emerge victoriously out of the long, tunnel-like covered bridge. And "Yes", we did see a light at the end– daylight – for which we were all grateful.

As we successfully exited there was a brief silence, immediately followed by loud and jubilant cheering! Someone thought they heard bugles blowing.

Clearly, there's no group more adventurous than a vanload of free-spirited MaH members on an outing. Perhaps that's one of the reasons we were mutually attracted to the concept of MaH in the first place.