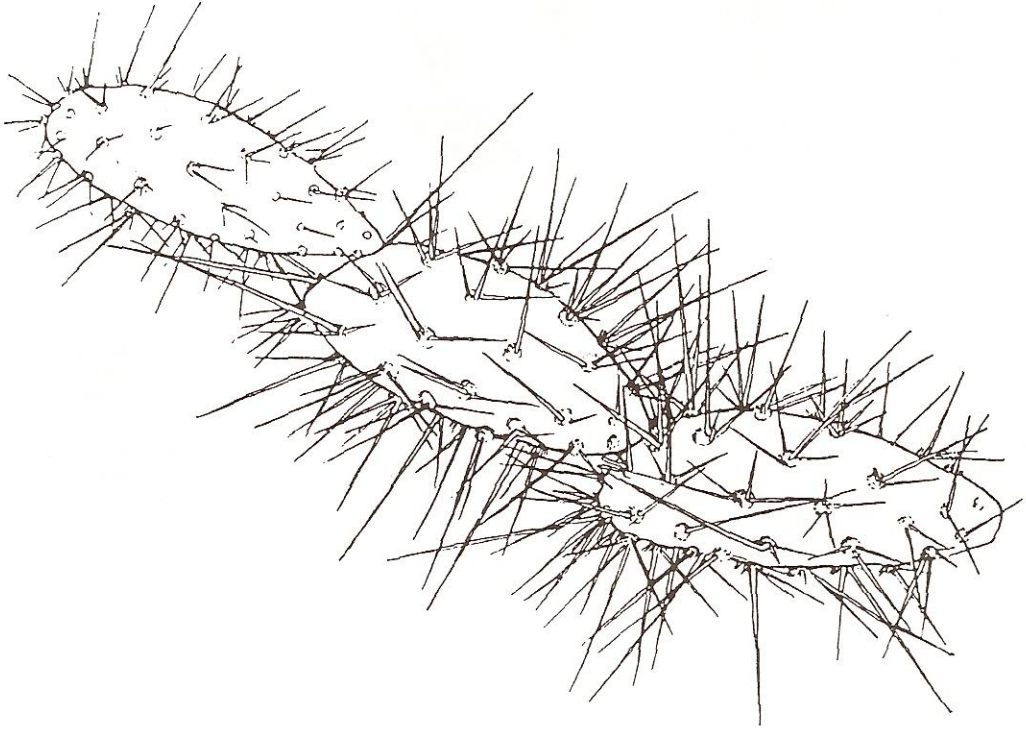
OPUNTIA
39



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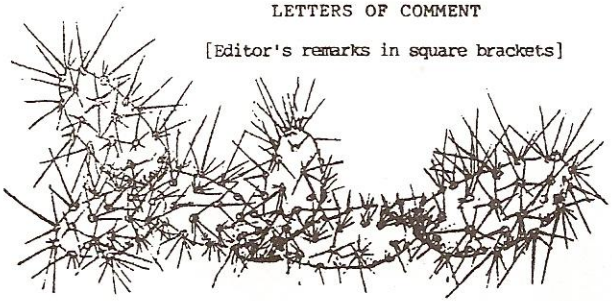
ART CREDIT: The cover depicts Opuntia borinquensis, by an unknown artist from the 1920 book THE CACTACEAE by N.L. Britton and J.N. Rose.

EDITORIAL: For some time now I've been working on what is shaping up to be a book-length manuscript on invisible postal history, things like public letter writers, round robins, and chain letters. This issue has an extract from the latter subject, and in future issues I'll have accounts of the dying child postcard chain, prayer letters, and other aspects of the chain letter. There'll also be an article on begging letters of the Victorian times (not to be confused with letters sent out by charitable organizations). Just as the Internet has brought forth unintended consequences, so it was that the Papernet which originated with the postal reforms of 1840 brought forth such unexpected results.

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Scott Crow, Garth Spencer, Murray Moore, Brad Walker, John Held Jr, Chester Cuthbert, Buck Coulson, Randall Tin-ear, Harry Warner Jr, Joseph Major

LETTERS OF COMMENT

[Editor's remarks in square brackets]



FROM: Fred Lerner 1998-06-10
5 Worcester Avenue
White River Junction, Vermont 05001-1609

Your piece on public letter writers in #37 didn't mention the role they played in Rudyard Kipling's KIM. The walk-on part they played in the Great Game is the least of your reasons to read it!

FROM: Karen Johnson 1998-06-01
35 Mariana Avenue
South Croyden, Victoria 3136, Australia

I have never used a spirit duplicator myself but I can remember the one they had at my high school. It sat on a table in one of the corridors. Desperate teachers who had used up their photocopier ration queued up to crank the handle and churn out worksheets in the 10 minutes before class. Then they'd hand the sheets out to us and we'd try to decipher the smudgy hand printing/writing while getting progressively more lightheaded. Ah, the smell of methylated spirits in the morning.

[continued next page]

The other disadvantage of spirit duplicator prints was that they didn't last, even if you managed a readable print. I was in the primary school choir for a few years, and we were regularly handed new music to learn. I carefully stored it away in a folder but when I got it out a few years ago (at least ten years after) I found that the sheets had almost entirely faded to a uniform yellow. The paper darkened while the ink lightened and the end result was unreadable. Does this always happen, or was it the result of several interstate moves?

[As some spirit duplicated documents I have from the 1960s are still fresh, I think your problem was due to materials quality or climate conditions of storage.]

FROM: Harry Andrushak 1998-06-14
Box 5309
Torrance, California 90510-5309

By the way, whatever happened to that Canadian chain letter you proposed as a joke? Did you ever get around to sending it out? Any results to date?

[In OPUNTIA #25, I wrote about the St. Jude chain letter and mentioned that I had written a version that would be instantly recognized by Canadians as a joke but would circulate elsewhere in the world. ("Joe Clark didn't send his copy of the letter on and as a result lost all his luggage") The idea was that this letter would die every time it came into Canada since few outlanders would know the story about former P.M. Joe Clark losing his luggage on a world tour. I went to the public library, picked out a dozen addresses from American telephone directories, and mailed them. That is the last I've heard of them, but if I see a reference in an American publication about them years from now, I'll know they worked.]

FROM: Bridget Bradshaw (née Hardcastle) 1998-06-17
19 Wedgewood Road
Hitchin, Herts. SG4 OEX, England

Would Cyrano de Bergerac, with his writing of love letters on behalf of another, be classed as a public letter writer? And could I earn a bit of cash by writing locs for fans short of time? Or would that be more like doing someone else's homework than public letter writing?

[I suppose that unless Cyrano set up a table by the post office and sat there crying "Letters written! Letters read!", he really wouldn't be a public writer, as versus writing for an inarticulate friend. Writing locs for others? That might be an interesting sideline; perhaps you could put up a few posters at SF cons and see if any fans apply.]

FROM: Joseph Nicholas 1998-06-15
15 Jansons Road
South Tottenham, London N15 4JU, England

I would correct the reference to THE TIMES OF LONDON in your story of the million stamps. Such a newspaper, and its oft-quoted alternative THE LONDON TIMES, does not exist. It is THE TIMES and THE TIMES alone. In Britain, national newspapers do not have their city of publication incorporated in their title. I appreciate that this may be confusing to North Americans, who are used to seeing national newspapers with city names in their titles.

[The main reason for this practice is to avoid confusion with newspapers such as THE TIMES OF INDIA, NEW YORK TIMES, or LOS ANGELES TIMES. The University of Calgary Library, for example, lists the British newspaper as the TIMES (LONDON). Since many other newspapers also change their names, I have also used the current one, as this would be the one used for indexing.]

THE CHAIN LETTER FAD OF 1935

by Dale Speirs

Introduction.

Chain letters have been around since the 1800s and probably earlier in different forms. They are a type of pyramid scheme where those who start them get the money and those who are only two or three links down seldom even make their initial investment back. Chain letters are essentially a type of lottery, where the money is distributed by chance, and this has been so established in law, no matter what chain operators may say. Chain letters are always operating quietly in the background, and surge into full flame every few years before sputtering back down to a low ember. The biggest and best-reported chain letter was one that occurred in May 1935 and spread throughout United States and Canada in days, but numerous others wax and wane over the years.

Chain letters expand exponentially and fail very quickly because the number of required participants soon exceeds the population. Various calculations have been done to demonstrate this, not that many people listen. One "good luck" letter was to be copied to nine other people, who would do the same in turn. A recipient got this letter when it had 99 names (ref. 4). He calculated that on its 11th link, there would be 31,381,059,609 people on the list. Another calculation showed that a person who was 200th on a list would need 200,000 others to reach the top of the list (ref. 6). Because people playing the chains only see their list of five or six people, they do not think this is true, and fail to realize that by the time they get a chain, half the population may have already participated. A postal inspector calculated that a twelve-link chain letter would involve 305,175,770 persons if unbroken, but only 3911 people in that chain would actually make money (ref. 18). Another calculation was that if a five-name chain was unbroken, and everyone followed instructions, within three months everyone in the world would have received 13,000,000 copies of the letter (ref. 132).

May 1935.

The Great Depression was at its most miserable. The Dionne quintuplets were almost a year old. RCA was about to begin the first field test of television. Pundits predicted a world war in 1937. Alberta was about to sweep Social Credit into power. The times were not happy ones, and people were only too glad to grab at straws and get-rich-quick schemes. One of those schemes was the chain letter fad of May 1935. This chain letter actually started in April and lasted until June, but its height was during May, when it swept the North American continent. It made its way across the Atlantic to Britain, where questions were asked in the House of Commons (ref. 37).

The Start of the Chain Letters.

The chain letter of 1935 appears to have started in Denver, Colorado, in April. The post office declared it illegal, but admitted that it could not stop the flow. To do so required a court order for each individual letter, and it was estimated that 67,000 chain letters a day were moving through the system (ref. 32). A Denver restaurant owner placed a newspaper ad pleading not to receive anymore chain letters; he had gotten 2300 of them to date and couldn't handle the flow. Chain letters could avoid postal harassment by going to person-to-person transfers in a hastily-rented room or storefront. One Denver chain-letter operator admitted to handling 10,000 letters in two days, which would give a gross of $5000, less his cost for twenty stenographers and notaries public and rent (ref. 38).

The Springfield Mob.

The height of the frenzy was in Springfield, Missouri. To avoid trouble from the postal authorities, this chain letter operated from rented rooms. The letters were initially sold by operators who required the buyer to use a notary public to swear an oath that the money had been sent to the top name on the list. The money was collected (less a commission) and two copies of the buyer's letter were then sold, with the buyer name at the bottom of the list. The name would move up the list with each subsequent re-selling, until the original buyer hit the jackpot. This solved the major problem of chain letters by guaranteeing that the chain would not be broken. It also allowed the operators to make good money from commissions, plus hiring out the services of notaries, clerks, and stenographers, all the while avoiding legal risk from the actual chain letter operation. One operator of a $5 chain made $1080 in twelve hours. The chain letter factories set up everywhere in Springfield. Beauty parlors sold letters to their clients, and bartenders did good business on them (ref. 39). The chain operations had fanciful names. A $5 chain called itself "The Pot of Gold Club" and a $3 chain was "The Cream of the Crop".

The fly in the ointment, of course, is that chain letters accelerate exponentially, and very quickly outrun the available population. Those who came in late not only had to hustle to sell their letters, but also had to work hard on behalf of those to whom they had sold a letter, to ensure that the chain circulated long enough to move them up to the top of the list. By May 9, the Springfield chain was dead, and latecomers were left holding the bag, a serious matter if they had bought in at $5, bigger money than it is today. The operators made money, but few others (ref. 40).

The Spread of the Chain Letters.

The chain letter madness quickly spread across the continent. American President Franklin Roosevelt got more than 200 chain letters at the White House, all of which were turned over to the Postmaster-General for possibility of fraud action (ref. 41). The letters were circulating in Ontario by May 8, as postal officials were already making statements to the press about their legality (ref. 1): " *... their transmission through His Majesty's mails is prohibited ...* ". These letters were from a chain letter called the Prosperity Club, which was in Toronto already but extended all over North America. Calgarians began receiving chain letters from the Prosperity Club operation out of Spokane, Washington (ref. 42), and Reginans ditto the same day (ref. 43). The chain was already in Oklahoma City, where one smart promoter hired a taxi, bought a case of liquor, and sold letters after mellowing his clients (ref. 45). Winnipeg got its chain letters from across the border, sent to such people as the Fire Chief and an official of the Better Business Bureau (ref. 46). Kansas City, St. Louis, Fayetteville (Arkansas) and Pittsburg (Kansas) had chain letter shops by that day (ref. 47). From Regina, the letters reached Saskatoon by May 24, where police were investigating $1 and $5 letters (ref. 48).

The initial spread of chain letters was helped along by rumour and exaggerated accounts of early winners. Reports in Regina of people winning up to $60 caused a reporter to spend time and energy trying to track down big winners (ref. 49), but the truth never matched up to rumour. One big winner, a beauty-shop worker, turned out to have gotten only one dime. At the same time, Winnipeg reporters on the trail of *"a man in the Grain Exchange has made $700 in three days"* and other stories could only find one $5 winner and many who had yet to see a dime back (ref. 50). Some of the stories floating about

in Denver were: "*A poor seamstress is reported to have received enough to purchase a sewing machine. A widow is reported to be paying off burial expenses for her husband. A mother is reported to have paid off hospital expenses for the birth of her child and to have had enough over to buy a baby carriage. None of these reports are confirmed.*" (ref. 18).

The Maritime Provinces.

By at least as early as May 10, the chain letter was in St. John, New Brunswick (ref. 44). The Prosperity Club letters reached Halifax via Montreal before May 13 (ref. 21). At about the same time, the letters arrived in Digby, Nova Scotia, and the local newspaper reported that there were willing participants there who acted immediately (ref. 133). About the same time, Weymouth, Nova Scotia, had the letters via Freeport and Westport (ref. 134).

Kansas City.

A May 17 report out of Kansas City told of some of the trials and tribulations of chain-letter operators (ref. 51): "*The front door knob fell off at the home of Mrs. George F. Bischoff. Women pulled it loose in their eagerness to get outside and canvass their lists. The Bischoff home has been the filing point for one chain since Monday. "Look at this house", moaned Mrs. Arthur L. Wetsel, another chain headquarters where lists were filed. Each woman invested one dollar and was given a list of names. Re-sales theoretically built the profits up to $27. It was a strictly friend-to-friend affair. Mrs. Bischoff said there had been about thirty pay-offs a day. "My goodness, it'll take $27 for me to break even", she said. A woman confided that each $27 winner had been leaving $2 with Mrs. Bischoff, adding: "Look at that rug. It started to fray out last night. Just too much traffic"."*

Regina.

Regina had chains operating in early May, but for some reason they didn't fully expand into the usual mob frenzy until the last week of the month. By May 22, the chain letter market was supposedly weakening. The *REGINA LEADER POST* ran a mocking headline in that day's paper (page 3): "*Letter Mart Crashes! Bears Rush Exchange! Dime Donors Despair!*". It reported that while one woman had managed to make $23 in a week (impressive money for the Great Depression), " ... *by Wednesday as the chains widened, buyers were becoming scarce.*". Unfortunately the editor spoke too soon, for a week later the chain operators were going flat out. The Prosperity Fraternity syndicate was a $5 chain whose operators made money by charging a 10% commission to the players (ref. 52). There were at least six syndicates going by May 28 and one of them had moved to bigger quarters to handle the influx (ref. 53). But the following day, some operators reported a slight decline in business, even as business offices and government supervisors were issuing bans on playing the chains during working hours (ref. 54). A postage stamp chain letter made its appearance, imported from Ottawa, and other oddball chains showed up. After May 30, the saturation point was reached. $10 and $20 chains were dead or stillborn by June 1 and a couple of days later even the small-amount chains were gone (ref. 55 and 56).

Edmonton.

According to the Edmonton postmaster, A.R. MacKenzie, the initial chain letter influx was from the United States, and it wasn't until middle May that local chain letter traffic picked up (ref. 151). MacKenzie kept track of mail volumes once the

chain letter fad was noted, and reported as follows (ref. 152 to 155):

Average day	= 30,000 letters
May 13	= 33,051
May 14	= 36,633
May 15	= 36,507
May 16	= 36,200
May 17	= 38,653
May 18	= 42,825
May 19	= Sunday, no service
May 20	= 51,172
May 21	= 43,372
May 22	= 38,682
May 23	= 42,048
May 24	= Victoria Day, no service

Bill Edmond, a grocer in Edmonton's Borden Park neighbourhood, was foolish enough to allow himself to be quoted by a newspaper reporter that he welcomed chain letters and would keep them going (ref. 137). His initial idea was publicity, but ten days later he was asking the newspaper to publish a retraction. He was besieged by hundreds of letter-mongers at his store. Since he had given his word, he was out a considerable sum in stamps and dimes keeping the letters going.

Southern Alberta.

The chain letters arrived in Lethbridge the week of May 8, from Spokane, Washington (ref. 141). By May 9, the craze was increasing local post office business notably, although the Postmaster was quoted as saying that he was not yet planning to hire more staff (ref. 142). Although volume was up, stamp sales had not increased. This may be due to people using up their existing stock of stamps on hand. The fad dwindled away by the end of May in both Lethbridge and Medicine Hat (ref. 147).

Crime Follows The Trade.

When chain letters hit the headlines, thieves were among the interested readers of the news. In Oklahoma City, a gunman who held up a chain-letter club paused long enough to lecture the players on the foolishness of the fad (ref. 45). He was, more than likely, the only one besides the operator to make money from that chain. Police then had to provide protection for chain clubs in that city, as the Attorney General remained silent on whether or not to prosecute. The Internal Revenue Service did not remain silent, and began to investigate the operations.

The local postal workers began to go about armed, and Special Delivery letters were refused for night delivery if carrying cash. In Springfield, burglars broke into the post office and tore open letters looking for chain cash (ref. 47). On May 14, three Denver boys began ransacking apartment building mailboxes for chain letters containing money. The dime chain was the favoured letter at that time and place, and the boys had a hat full of silver by the time they were apprehended (ref. 57).

The posties were not always without sin themselves. One New York City letter carrier was charged with opening chain letters (ref. 58). In general, postal sorters had too much mail to handle in too quick a time to be checking for chain letters containing cash. Sorting plants were also monitored by watchers in secret passages in the ceilings (ref. 140). With the rush of mail flowing through a city post office, it seems unlikely that posties could get any kind of scheme going to make it worth the risk and consequences. In a small rural office or on

the letter carrier route, there would have been more opportunity for theft, but the amounts would necessarily be small. From a practical point of view it is difficult for posties to spot chain letters in the rush and heavy flow of sorting. Local posties could not be expected to catch even a fraction of chain letters (ref. 148).

In a turnabout-is-fair-play sting, a man arrested in a gambling club raid in Woodville, Texas, was found to have in his possession a chain letter. One of the names and addresses was for his brother, who was wanted for escaping prison. Police had a simple task to check the address and the brother went from a chain letter to a chain gang (ref. 136).

Authorities Condemn To Little Avail.

During the May 1935 chain letter boom, the Montreal district Director of Postal Services, Victor Gaudet, said: "*Don't send chain letters unless you are willing to take a chance of spending your vacation in a nice, cool jail cell on a charge of fraud.*" (ref. 19). Four days later, the Regina postmaster Leo LaBelle got chain letters from Crossville, Tennessee, and Rock Springs, Wyoming, which took a lot of gall on the part of the senders. Needless to say, he did not continue the chains (ref. 20). Halifax posties were forwarding suspected chain letters to the Dead Letter Office in Ottawa for inspection and destruction (ref. 21).

In New Westminster, British Columbia, police raided the Tri-Mutual Club, which had over 800 subscribers exchanging chain letters (ref. 139). The operator of the club was run in for keeping a common gaming house or lottery, and bail set at $100.

Postal authorities pointed out one obvious flaw in chain letters, and which made them fail as often as simply breaking the chain. There was nothing to stop people from mailing out thousands of letters with their own name at the top (ref. 22). Indeed, one Davenport, Iowa, chain letter agency was closed after it was revealed that the names of the promoters and their friends were in advantageous positions and recurred often and early in the chain, and would have produced excellent profits (ref. 6).

Declarations by American postal officials that chain letters were illegal were made as the boom started in 1935 (ref. 23) but had no discernable effect on the fad. The Great Depression created a lot of disrespect for the government. When three Denver men were charged for chain-letter sending, a grand jury refused to indict them. However, the threat of legal action was usually enough to close up many letter operations, even if fresh ones immediately sprang up elsewhere like dragon's teeth (ref. 24). The people indicted for chain letters usually had some sharp practice going, such as the Minnesota school teacher who mimeographed 100 chain letters with his name at both the top and bottom of the list (ref. 25).

Newspapers cautioned and denounced but had no effect. The *GLOBE AND MAIL* titled a leader "The Chain Letter Humbug", and as most editorials did, briefly explained how the letters worked and why they would leave the majority of people out of money (ref. 26). The *NEW YORK TIMES* pointed out that for everyone in the United States to get to the top of a chain would require a world population of 4,000,000,000,000 (ref. 27). The editor of the *CALGARY ALBERTAN* got a chain letter from the Prosperity Club, to which his response was an editorial "Fishing for Suckers" (ref. 28). The *LETHBRIDGE HERALD* took the opportunity to sideswipe the socialist C.C.F. party (ref. 143): *"Can it be possible that, in spite of all our C.C.F. friends*

have been telling us, the profit motive is still the great force which stirs the genus homo to activity? Here we were, almost convinced that the day was at hand when the word 'profit' was to be taken out of the dictionary ... and then comes this chain letter craze and smashes our hopes to smithereens." Putting a local slant on its editorial against the letters, the *CALGARY HERALD* stated: "*It is a manifestation of the popular unrest ... This puts Social Credit in the shade.*" (ref. 29). The editor failed to stop both the chains or the Socreds, who were swept into power that year.

Chain Telegrams.

A faster, albeit more expensive, method of running a chain system was to use telegrams. These showed up as early as May 8, 1935, from Chicago, where the ante was as high as $5 (ref. 60). On May 30 a Montreal man had wired a $5 chain letter to Regina, a 102-word telegram (ref. 61). The Mayor of Pittsburgh got one such telegram, which had the courtesy to ask him to wire back collect if he did not plan to extend the chain (ref. 59). The Mayor gave this the contempt it deserved and did not reply. Chain telegrams appeared in Lethbridge by the end of May as the fad was dying out (ref. 146). The 1935 chain telegrams ended, as did the letters, in tears. In the aftermath, the Western Union Telegraph Company was sued for violating an 1877 gambling law (ref. 62) According to a detailed list of telegrams sent, $26.5 million dollars was handled in New Jersey alone (ref. 63).

The End of the 1935 Fad.

Chain letters ultimately fail because of the exponential growth. A secondary cause of failure is that a successful chain letters must keep the money circulating at high velocity. This is stymied when someone breaks the chain or, as happened when the chain spread too far geographically, the money leaves town. Winnipeg, for example, had too many letters circulating with U.S. addresses on them. As a result, more money left town than came in (ref. 50).

In Oklahoma City, unsuccessful letter buyers sued operators for $35,840 in breach of contract for failing to get their names to the top of the list before the chain collapsed (ref. 59). It was always someone else's fault, of course, if the gullible marks got in too late.

Come The Revolution, We Know What Is To Be Done.

One interesting take on chain letters, written during the 1935 fad (ref. 138), mixed in class warfare with the chains: *"Three per cent of the people in the United States and Canada control all the financial resources ... The centralization of money into control of a limited class is just about complete."*

"You are mistaken in thinking that gambling is illegal. Any form of gambling which directs money into the control of the limited class is absolutely legal. You can adopt the sky as the limit in gambling on the stock exchanges or the mining exchanges or the grain exchanges, and not come into conflict with law or society."

"Any form of gambling which tends to divert money outwards from the control of the limited class and into the hands of the general public is criminal and illegal; all the forces of state and church unite to stamp it out."

"Canada and the United States are fermenting with financial revolution, and in the course of any revolution strange things are certain to happen. One of these strange things is the send a dime craze, which has been multiplied in many instances to

a send five dollars craze."

"Analysis shows that it is basically an attempt to divert money outwards into the hands of the general public, instead of inwards into the control of the limited class."

"It is a danger signal, because it shows that a sufficient body of the general public is ready to travel along any revolutionary line which will break up the present monetary control."

Supporters of Chain Letters.

It was also suggested that welfare clients start chain letters and get themselves off relief that way (ref. 34). This was tried by one welfare officer in Tarboro, North Carolina, who in 1936 telephoned five friends to start a $1 chain letter for Edgecombe County relief work (ref. 116). He got $15 after one day, but his subsequent success is unrecorded.

The letters-to-the-editor columns of newspapers during the May 1935 fad had their share of supporters, some speaking with tongue in cheek, others perhaps serious. The most obvious reason to support chain letters was that they would increase post office revenue. It was calculated by a Fergus, Ontario, woman that by the time a Canadian chain circulated up to the top of the initial list of six names, the post office would have received $385.90 in revenues (ref. 12). From there, the writer went on to suggest that unemployed could be hired to handle the workload and that people be fined for breaking the chain. A New York writer took this point further and pointed out that if the letters were kept going to the 23rd link, the U.S. Post Office would gross about 250 trillion dollars (ref. 16). Big money even today, and in Depression dollars enough to wipe out all debts and hand out money to everyone. An anonymous Calgarian, writing to the *CALGARY HERALD* (ref 30), said chain letters were no worse than lotteries or gambling, and besides the revenue to the post office, kept the people entertained.

An Edmontonian who signed himself "One Of The Chain Gang" wrote (ref. 135): *"Surely a few extra postmen in this fair city of ours would help the unemployment situation, and if we can triple the sales on postage stamps, would that help any?"*

The actual effect on post office revenues is variable. Since some chain letters operate person-to-person with cash transfers to avoid mail fraud charges, postage use does not always increase noticeably. The 1935 chain letter had mixed results. The May 1935 report for the Regina post office actually showed stamp sales down $5000, while money orders were up because of mail-order businesses, not the chains (ref. 31). The original Denver chain letter, which operated by mail, however, almost doubled the post office volume (ref. 32). As against this, the post office there had to pay 1400 extra hours to posties to handle the workload. The final effect was to boost net revenues by $30,000 in a two-month period (ref. 33). St. Louis mail volume doubled during its craze (ref. 23). Edmonton posties noticed an increase in mail volume on May 13 and subsequently (ref. 149), with a similar increase in stamp sales (ref. 150).

In short, post offices made money if the chain was sent by mail, but did not profit where the letters moved person-to-person to avoid mail fraud charges.

Et tu, Reverend?

Church ministers should be above such things as chain letters, and most of them are. No doubt the occasional sermon has been preached on the subject of getting rich quick. Some

clergy, alas, cannot resist. During the 1935 chain letter fad, in Texarkana, Texas, the Rev. Walter Cannan of the Hardy Memorial Methodist Church, proposed a fundraising scheme for the church treasury based on chain letters. There would be six chains for as many age groups. The children, for example, would play the penny chain. A somewhat more respectable chain letter was used by the Rev. W.H. Allison, of the Argentine Baptist Church in Kansas City, who used it to promote Sunday attendance (ref. 35). It seemed to have worked, as the congregation was up 75%, but he complained that the chain must have been broken because there were only 300 present instead of 900 by his calculations. He also claimed that the first chain letter in the world was Apostle Paul's "Epistle to the Galatians".

Joke Letters and Oddball Descendants.

Chain letters start off in earnest, but as they die out, they often switch to oddball types. At the end of the May 1935 madness, when the public was sick of chain letters, one letter appeared that may be classified either as a joke or sharp practice, depending on your viewpoint: "*The latest chain letter scheme, it appears, is for a purchaser to buy a letter for a dime with the assurance it is not a chain letter. When opened, a note says: "This dime will be used to transport mules to Arabia. Don't be an ass and ask for your money back." Very few people, it seems, ask for their money back."* (ref. 64).

Hollywood was saturated with chain letters in 1935, and as always with any hot topic, thought about making movies about them (ref. 65). Paramount Studios was planning to make a movie about the chain letter fad. (Can readers advise if such was done?) Meanwhile, five Columbia scenarists started a chain letter asking for film ideas. One wonders why they didn't just visit the local library and browse the shelves.

Other variations that appeared during the 1935 madness were for golf balls and cigarettes (ref. 47). A chain letter from Concord, New Hampshire, asked for quilt pieces to be made into "world friendship" quilts (ref. 66). If they had gotten all the pieces from an unbroken chain, the textile industry would have had to work overtime, and the quilts could have covered the entire state of New Hampshire. Meanwhile, the Protective Club of America Against Utility Monopolies started a $1 chain for the purpose of "*breaking the shackles of light and telephone companies who have the city of Concordia, Mo. in their clutches"* (ref. 59).

The Liquid Assets Club was a 1935 chain letter for a pint of whiskey. A Denver man started a hay bale letter. He got at least one (ref. 67). One chain letter, albeit not intentionally, sparked a romance that led to marriage. The blushing bride was 72 years old (ref. 68).

Even the Dionne quintuplets were not immune. Comedian Fred Allen wrote to the U.S. Postmaster General and suggested "*the only five people in the world today who can start a chain letter involving money and come out even are the Dionne quintuplets. The girls can write their five names and circulate one dime among themselves until the cows come home. As soon as the quintuplets see the cows, they will cry for milk, and the entire chain-letter business will be forgotten, which it should have been in the first place.*" (ref. 69). Fred Allen spoke too soon. The quintuplets had in fact been getting stacks of letters. One printed chain letter had written on it: "*As a tribute to your marvelous work we have started this. Please keep it going.*" Their guardian, Dr. Allan Roy Dafoe, was annoyed by the influx, and was discarding them all (ref. 70).

In Berkeley, at the University of California, the May 1935 chain letter produced a send-a-dame variation (ref. 145). The

dames were co-eds whose names appeared on the chain letter, and then: *"Men students were directed to make a date with the top girl, scratch her name from the list, add a new one, and send copies along to five friends. ... each of the 6,000 co-eds at the university would be dated approximately 26,000 times if each of the 10,000 men students co-operated by seeing that no link was broken."*

The ultimate in chain letters appeared in Augusta, Kansas, in May 1935 from the Good Riddance Club. It read: "*When you receive this letter, buy yourself a gun and shoot the guy at the top of the list. Have the faith your friends haven't in you and this will be the best chain yet.*" (ref. 35).

Postage Stamp Chain Letters.

During the final days of the May 1935 resurgence of chain letters, numerous variants of the money letters were used, including stamps. At Chatham, Ontario, a report reads: "*A new chain-letter stunt is operating here designed to effect a quick cleanup of the issue of 13-cent Jubilee stamps. The chain letter asks recipients to send five registered letters with the 13-cent stamp. If the chain is unbroken, it will yield the sender 15,525 registered letters with canceled 13-cent Jubilee stamps on the envelope at the sixth turnover. The originator apparently believes the stamps will eventually be valuable.*" (ref. 73).

This chain quickly spread to Saskatchewan in two days, but one doubts its ultimate success. A 1935-05-22 news item, which, incidently, was adjacent to a report on a man committed to trial for counterfeiting revenue stamps on travelers' cheques, read as follows:

" *... as the chains widened, buyers were becoming scarce. The chain letter scheme, applied to stamp collectors, made its appearance in Regina. This plan adopts the 13-cent jubilee stamp. The receivers of the letters are supposed to send it on to another stamp collector, using a 13-cent stamp and registered mail. A Regina collector received one of these from Ottawa.*" (ref. 74).

One newspaper stamp columnist reported that not only the 13-cent Jubilee chain was circulating but that others at the same time were asking for 50-cents to $5 catalogue value of any kind of mint or used stamps (ref. 144).

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