

# WOODEN NICKEL

WOODEN NICKEL Volume 1 Number 7 Whole Number 7 is presented to a select mailing list of 50 with the sincerest regards of the perpetrator, Arnie Katz (59 Livingston St., Apt. 6B, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201). This is the Special Fanhistory issue of WOODEN NICKEL, occasioned by a particularly interesting letter from Harry Warner on that subject and my desire to give my thoughts in reply.

HARRY WARNER WRITES: "Personalized fanzines are flowing in with soft thuds in remarkable numbers. I like them because they can be read briefly, and because they encourage their publishers to write fanzine material regularly.

"But the little personalzines do present one problem. They're often hard to locate, particularly when they concern a small circle of intimates, and I don't know the people mentioned most often well enough to understand the in-group references and hidden significances.

"What really hurt, though, is that I don't know when or where 'I had one once but the wheels fell off' began. It must be more popular in face-to-face fanac than anyone could possibly imagine from fanzines. I seem to recall vaguely that it's been thrown in as a punchline on a few occasions, but that's all. Of course, if I'm so unaware of a recent fannish cry, I'm probably also ignorant of the last four scandals involving famous fans, two more bids for the 1975 worldcon and three 1972 issues of Warhoon.

"Anyway, it's more evidence for a case that I've been trying to build for my theory that fandom has finally turned a corner or tipped a balance or otherwise finally switched its emphasis from the written to the spoken word. It has happened so gradually that nobody else seems to have pointed it out. But despite the flood of fanzines, I do believe that more fanac is now done face-to-face at local club meetings and cons and informal gatherings and so on than through the mails, after almost a half century of the other emphasis. If nobody manages to disprove this theory, I might even break down and admit that fourth fandom has finally begun. (First Fandom: that which depended on prozine letter columns. Second Fandom: from the first fanzine to sometime in the 1960's. Third Fandom: the break up into numerous subfandoms combined with phenomenal growth in quantities of fans and the mutual influence of fanzines and the underground press on one another.)"

IF THIS IS FRIDAY,  
THIS MUST BE THE  
LATE NEOLITHIC

"I had one once, but the wheels fell off" is actually a phrase of some fannish antiquity popularized by Lee Hoffman and other sixth fandomites. Perhaps Lee, a WOODEN NICKEL reader, will enlighten us all further on the subject. I greatly exaggerated the popularity of the phrase so I could work it into the item about poor Neal's car.

Nevertheless, your point about in-person fanac exceeding the written variety in volume seems well taken. With so many clubs and regional conventions, I'm sure that more words are exchanged in person than in fanzines, but I also believe that the two types of fanac are very different. Many who engage exclusively in face-to-face fanac know little more of fandom than the average Analog reader, and their conversations are almost indistinguishable from what one could overhear at the local Young Republican group, tavern, or hobo jungle. Fandom in the traditional sense is often remote from in-person fan contact, not even entering as a background context.

I'm not too fond of your designation of four fandoms, though. What you call a "fandom" could with more justice, I feel, be termed a "fan era". What's the sense of dividing fandom into historical periods, if we're going to make them so large and all-encompassing that they illuminate nothing? Dividing the history of Western European Civilization into the Ancient, Medieval and Modern eras is all well and good, but without such finer distinctions as "Renaissance", "Napoleonic" and the rest, these broad, sweeping historical categories don't tell us a hell of a lot about the course of history.

I'd keep the long range changes you call "fandoms" in my schema of fanhistory as fan eras (but only three of them, since the Fourth Fan Era which you postulate appears to me to be a straight-line outgrowth of the Third Fan Era, which I agree began in the mid-1960's), but I would subdivide them into smaller time units. Of course, what I'm talking about is the Numbered Fandoms theory of fanhistory as developed by Speer, Silverberg, White and my own fanhistorical writings. The Numbered Fandoms theory is admittedly somewhat arbitrary in that specific dates are chosen to represent the point at which a transition coalesces into a fandom or a fandom diffuses into a transition. On the other hand, it is equally arbitrary to select a date on which to end the Age of Feudalism, but people still use terms like that, because they are handy devices to organize a mass of historical data. Adherants of the Numbered Fandoms theory are aware (or they should be) that Seventh Fandom did not really end with the final gavel of the Chicon III, but this approximation helps put what happened before and after that date into an on-going framework.

I'll save my complete theory of numbered fandoms until someone asks for it (we're in the Ninth Transition by my count), but I believe that our hobby might be on the verge of entering a Fourth Fan Era or, at the least, a new stage of the Third Fan Era. I think the astounding growth in the fan population and the increasing lack of communication among the various sub-groups is driving these subfandoms further and further away from each other. How much real common ground does a person whose primary fan activity is publishing fanzines have with another person whose fanac is entirely composed of attending the super-large conventions like Infinitycon and Star Trek con? How much of a meeting ground is there for a typical member of the N3F and an active participant in the fan swingers subfandom which has become well entrenched in recent years? Despite some overlap among the various sub-groups, I think the only realistic answer is, "Not much."

The old need to subordinate individual interests to the general set of interests that typify fandom at any particular point in time is gone due to the vast increase in the numbers of fans. The American stampede into all types of leisure time activities has already begun to affect fandom, and the sub-groups are now large enough to keep going under their own power without reference to what the rest of fandom is doing. In former times, if you had a major interest that was really specialized such as science fiction war games or orgies, you couldn't persue it very strenuously or else you would lose the interest of the vast majority of your fellow hobbyists and rapidly become an ex-fan. Now, if your main interest is specialized, fandom is so large that you can probably find a hundred or so people of similar mind without too much effort. I've noticed a strong tendency of late for fans to identify with whatever sub-group (or groups) they belong to rather than with fandom as a whole.

I think what we're seeing is a splitting off of the various sub-groups into quasi-independent fandoms. Oh, there will probably be at least a tenuous interconnection for some time to come, but perhaps no closer than today's NFFF is to the mainstream of publishing fandom. When this process is complete, we'll be in the Fourth Fan Era by the Warner reckoning. I expect this will be a fact of much interest to the few subgroups maintaining even slight knowledge of 1926 and all of that.