

Dpuntia 8.5

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OPUNTIA is published irregularly by Dale Speirs at Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. It can be had for \$1 per issue, letter of comment, or trade for your zine. The following back issues are available at \$1 each: 1, 4, 7.1, 7.5, 8, 8.1. All other issues gone.

ART CREDIT: I was at the flea market a while back, and bought a switch labelled "Ejector Seat". It doesn't hook up to anything but did have a sticky back to attach it to the dashboard. The idea is that when you are stressed by traffic, flip the switch and imagine the other driver being ejected. A tension reliever. There was a drawing on the back, done by some nameless Korean (where this gadget was made). I've enlarged it for the cover.

EDITORIAL: Yes, as you saw with the last issue, I've gone to mailing OPUNTIA in an envelope. This provides an extra page of text and eliminates frazzled nerves trying to remove the scotch tape. The extra cost of envelopes is affordable for now.

American and Canadian readers won't be affected by this change because the extra weight of the envelope still keeps it under the 30 g limit. However, an issue plus envelope goes over the 20 g limit for international mail and increases postage from \$0.84 to \$1.26. For this price I can mail two issues of OPUNTIA, so international readers will get two OPUNTIA's at a time. This means one issue will be late in each envelope but the frequent schedule should compensate somewhat.

Last week finished up pruning for the winter. We had shirtsleeve weather for the final run of trees, a long row of poplars in the Parkland suburb along an escarpment overlooking Fish Creek Park. There were four of us on the crew. We rotate between pruning, collecting the cut branches and handing them up into the four-ton truck, and standing on the back of the truck stacking and tramping down the branches in the load. The one on the truck usually has time to admire the view while waiting for branches. I looked across the Fish Creek valley to the other side of the provincial park, and I could see the Midnapore suburb on the far side where we had pruned along the escarpment at the beginning of the winter. The valley, like everything else in the city, is brown, but green grass is not far away.

Today is the start of spring cleanup. My district is the worst in the city for leaves. Twenty years ago, when the suburbs of Willowpark, Mapleridge, Bonavista, and Parkland were being developed, they were way overplanted with poplars. Poplars on the boulevards, down along the medians, two in every front yard, several in the back. The developer has long since gone with the money, but now the poplars are huge and troublesome. People phone in complaints about drifts of leaves in the parks and say they are blowing into their yards. No one ever admits to the point that just as many leaves are blowing from yards into parks.

It is windy with strong gusts, which doesn't help the cleanup crews. Each crew consists of a four-ton truck with high sides to haul the leaves, a self-propelled sweeper, and a couple of people to handrake the spots the sweeper can't get through. The sweeper has a hopper bin into which the leaves are swept by contra-rotating reels with rubber fingers. When the bin is full it is hydraulically lifted up into the four-ton, and the contents dumped into the truck.

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In the other Parks Areas, the leaves are hauled to City landfill sites where Parks maintains compost piles. These piles are turned regularly by bulldozer, and the finished compost is mixed with topsoil to stretch our supplies. In South Area, we haul the leaves to the Civic Tree Nursery, which maintains a pile variously for compost or mulch. We haul about eight tons of leaves per day, enough to completely fill the average living room.

RATS CAN'T VOMIT

1992-3-26

Just one of the many useful facts I learned today at the WHMIS "Train the Trainer" course. Which is why rats are used for toxicity tests in laboratories.

But before that, this. Last autumn, just before I transferred down here to the South Area, a Gardener vacancy was posted. The successful applicant was Theresa, who was the Pest Control Foreman at the time. She liked that job, but it was classified Limited Term at the time. Being a single mother with a young daughter to support, she wanted some security, which the Gardener position offered, as it was a Permanent position. Her old position was vacant all winter, and she worked as my Gardener during the pruning season. With the mosquitoes about to hatch, Parks finally decided to post the Pest Control position, making it a Permanent job. Theresa put in for it again, now that it offered security, and was one of three candidates on the short list. Wayne and Alan were the other two. Wayne had experience but lacked horticultural papers; Alan had papers but lacked experience. Alan got the job, and Wayne and Theresa both filed grievances with the union. It was nothing personal; everyone thinks Alan is a nice guy, and he himself is not put out over the matter. But he starts as Pest Control Foreman next Monday just the same.

WHMIS stands for Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System. It has three components: all containers must

properly labelled, there must be Material Safety Data Sheets at every jobsite, and all employees must be trained annually in the WHMIS system. This is federal law, not City policy. Yesterday, Theresa and I, being former Pest Control Foremen both, began making plans to teach the annual WHMIS refresher to our permanent staff this coming Tuesday. WHMIS is the responsibility of Pest Control, but Alan is still in West Area, and we have to move fast as first hire is a week away and all seasonal staff must be indoctrinated. I haven't been a Pest Control Foreman since 1982, but over the years remained on the Pest Control oversight committee as a researcher and trainer. Despite teaching WHMIS, I had never been formally trained as a trainer, hence my being sent to this course.

Several other Parks staff were at the course, put on by a provincial safety agency. Alan was there, and I let him know that when he came over to South Area he would be immediately thrown in the deep end and would help us teach our staff. He is a nice guy, and a credit to his parents. Most of the WHMIS course was a refresher for me, but we all had to write an exam to get a certificate entitling us to official status as WHMIS trainers, something I've never had. I got 98%, missing one question. Home safe.

An interesting point mentioned in the course was that new legislation, informally known as WHMIS 2 (sounds like a movie series, said our instructor) is due from the federal government in about eighteen months. It is mostly standardization of MSDSs (presently the data can be put on an MSDS in any order or format, which is hard reading when going through a batch of them) and other housekeeping details.

Some of the other foremen don't take WHMIS seriously, which means we'll have to motivate them when they take the course from us next Tuesday. I'll casually mention the \$150,000 fines for non-compliance. Might work.

LIQUID PAPER AND RAZOR BLADES

1992-3-30

Getting ready for the WHMIS course tomorrow, I was going through some MSDSs and discovered that Liquid Paper, the white-out fluid without which this zine would not be possible, is a product of Gillette. Liquid Paper is about as deadly as razor blades in certain circumstances; the news had a report a few days ago about a girl in Norway House, Manitoba, dying after sniffing the stuff. My understanding is that Liquid Paper was invented by Michael Nesmith's mother, she a secretary and he of the band out of the Sixties, the Monkees. This was why he was reluctant to be involved with the revival of the band, as he didn't need the money, having the royalties of Liquid Paper to live off. The rest of the band had little money, since the rights to the band were owned by a Hollywood studio. Speaking of band reunions, when the Guess Who announced a get-together, they released a photo of the band which clearly demonstrated that the members had enjoyed a good life in the intervening years. The successor group to Guess Who was Bachman Turner Overdrive; when the photo was released of the revived version of Guess Who, the band was immediately dubbed Bachman Turner Overweight.

I asked Theresa this morning if she would be willing to help Alan and I put on the WHMIS refresher for permanent staff. She was reluctant to do so. I pointed out that my boss Harold and I both applied for the supervisor job he now has, but the fact that he beat me out for it does not affect our relationship. We all have to work together sooner or later, and a sour attitude might ruin future job prospects. In addition, it never hurts to develop a reputation or specialty in technical fields. I haven't been in Pest Control operations for years, but my committee work and teaching of WHMIS, TDG, and Pest Control are useful items for the resumé. She said she'd think about it.

Later in the afternoon, after a dusty day of leaf cleanup in the parks, she said yes. We met with Alan and did a

quick run-through of the course. A little tense to begin with, but they talked it out and we were soon on to the course planning.

WHIZZING THROUGH WHMIS IN TWO HOURS

1992-3-31

Which is how long it took to teach it this morning. We each covered a third of the material. The quizzes had no major difficulty with most of the staff, although one supervisor helped out by giving an illiterate driver the test as an oral exam. The fellow in question came from Romania many years ago as a refugee; he can speak English without trouble but can't read it. I am never surprised to keep discovering illiterates wherever I go, as it is entirely possible to get by in our society without the ability to read if, of course, one doesn't mind staying in the lower-class jobs. The news can be had from television or radio. Equipment operators are taught by practical training directly on the machines, not by book. And one thing I have learned is that illiterates are very clever at hiding. Until recently, Parks Dept. job vacancies were filled by verbal interviews of the candidates. Then it was decided to include written exams as well, which immediately smoked out a few illiterates. A foreman position came open this winter, and Gino was widely considered to be a shoo-in for the job. He turned in a blank exam paper, and the job was filled by someone else. Gino had been the assistant foreman for many years. In retrospect, I can see how he got away with it. The paperwork was done for him by some labourer eager for a soft job. If he was handed a memo to read, he would say "Can you read this for me? I left my glasses at home". Or he would plead lack of time to read it, sneak it home, and get a family member to read it to him.

But the WHMIS is done for permanent staff. The day after tomorrow, Alan will give a shorter version to the first hire of seasonals.

Just finished talking to the City Enumerator, who rang my doorbell a few moments ago. An elderly gent, he and other enumerators will be spending next fortnight going door to door, putting people on the voter's list for the upcoming municipal elections throughout Alberta on October 19. He wanted to know my name, how many people resided herein, did I own or rent (I told him I'll own it in six years), and did I pay property taxes as a public school supporter (yes) or separate school (Catholic).

It will be an annoying year in politics. City Council has already covered itself in mud flip-flopping while trying to appease taxpayers. Aldermen serve three-year terms. The first two years they gave good raises to City staff, but early in 1992 declared that all wages would be frozen for two years. This came about because of the paramedic fiasco.

The paramedics went out on strike for several weeks. Management took over the running of the ambulances, and did well; no lives were endangered. The paperwork was shot to hell though, and about \$150,000 in billings were not recovered because no one did the invoices. (Medicare does not cover ambulance trips; only from the time you arrive at the hospital or doctor's office is one covered.) City negotiators eventually reached a contract settlement with paramedics. The paramedics ratified the contract and returned to work immediately. City negotiators forwarded to Council the contract for approval, normally a rubber stamp process. Some alderman decided to start their election campaigns early however, and Council rejected the contract on the grounds that it was too expensive. Since the paramedics were getting what all the other city workers had gotten, this sudden concern for finances was not very believable. When the paramedics heard about the rejection, they drove all the ambulances downtown, parked them against City Hall with lights flashing, and left the job. The new City Hall is a glass-curtain skyscraper, and

the reflections of dozens of ambulance flashers made an awe-inspiring scene in the night. A few days later, Council did an abrupt aboutface and approved a richer contract that not only gave the paramedics more than they asked for, but paid the union local a \$30,000 fine for negotiating in bad faith.

This whole disaster succeeded in antagonizing everyone in the city. City management was upset because they had negotiated the original contract under instructions from Council; the rejection was a slap in the face for management. Taxpayers were upset for obvious reasons. To add insult to injury, when Council rejected the contract and sparked the second strike, they went to the provincial Minister of Labour and asked for an order returning paramedics to the job, on the grounds that there was a public hazard. The Minister pointed out that no such claim had been made during the first strike, so why was the second one any different?

Meanwhile, the saga of smoking in the City Hall cafeteria continues. Council banned all smoking, then reallocated smoking, then banned it, and are now reconsidering the matter. A tower of jelly, they are.

All city union contracts expire at the end of this year. Council's declaration of a wage freeze would be more believable if it were to take place before the election, but final contracts will not be settled until after. The smarter union presidents are keeping a low profile until October 20.

WINTER SNOWS AND THE CHILL OF DEATH

1992-4-6

Today was the first day of work for the first hire of seasonal workers. It was also the arrival of winter, with 15 cm of wet snow falling. The seasonals were sent home for the week; we'll try again next Monday.

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My two permanent staff, Dan and Theresa, went on a garbage run, checking all the garbage cans in our parks. It is a good day for this, as the doggy do won't smell. There's nothing like emptying a garbage can heavy with pooper-scooped dog feces on a hot summer day. Especially if the bag breaks.

Tonight I dropped over to Steve's place, he being the one who is doing the computer work on my manuscript "History of the Calgary Philatelic Society". He has set it up as camera-ready copy, and we went over what was needed for the final draft. The heavy work is over now, and it is just a matter of cleaning up a few typos and getting the cover design finalized. We had thought of publishing the book electronically as well, but in the end decided not to. It would be a lot simpler, but we couldn't see how to release a disk or make it available via modem in a manner that would protect the text from being altered. I will be given a disk of the text for the CPS Archives. Thirty years from now, someone (perhaps myself) can continue the history for the centennial of the CPS in 2022. If there still is a CPS. If stamps are still collected. If stamps are even issued anymore, and the old ones haven't crumbled because of the acid paper and gum.

Isaac Asimov died today of heart and kidney failure. Age 72, books 500. Another man done gone.

As a young lad in Red Deer (100 km north of Calgary), I read through most of the SF books in the Red Deer Public Library, which at that time was on the second floor of City Hall. Heinlein, Asimov, Clarke, Norton, and L'Engle dominated my reading. There was also Bradbury on the shelves, but I never much cared for him. His brand of nostalgia had little relevance to a boy in a small town where the circus set up in the hockey arena, not tents, and few houses had porches because that just meant extra snow to shovel off. Asimov wrote clearly and simply, a thing that didn't mean much to me as a boy, but is now appreciated as an adult. A lot of SF today makes the re-

ader work unnecessarily hard, trying to figure out what the author is talking about. This distracts the reader from the story. Asimov had no flashy style to attract the praise of some university professor of literature but he was an easy read. I didn't care much for his later short stories about the Black Widowers and Azazel. But "Nightfall" made an impression on me because I first read it while listening to a mournful trumpet tune; decades later the music still reminds me of the crash of that civilization. I did not read the sequels or novelization of "Nightfall", as I prefer to leave well enough alone.

Asimov will have tributes in LOCUS and elsewhere, or rather I should say, everywhere. Heinlein's death didn't sadden me too much; I haven't reread any of his books. But I have reread Asimov's works often, particularly his massive autobiography. Imagine how big it would have been had he led an exciting life in politics or the military!

MANY ARE COLD BUT FEW ARE FROZEN

1992-4-10

We never had winter in February, so we're getting it now; the last few days have been -10°C and snow. The snow has changed from wet to dry snow, which isn't so bad, and the temperature doesn't require the car to be plugged in. In fact, now that I think about it, I've only plugged the car in a couple or so nights this winter, which certainly saves on the electricity bill. My gas bill has also remained low since the furnace hasn't been running as much. I recall that in December 1990 when we had extended supercold, the bill was \$161 for the month.

OPUNTIA #7.5 to the printers today.

Warm weather returned, and we put the crews to work. I arrive at work at 06h30 every morning and use the time to read the morning paper in peace and quiet. Today's headline on the front pages were about the death of James Pierson Carleton, better known to Calgarians as Jimmy the Con. He died on Saturday at the age of 78. Immediate cause of death was heart failure, but his untimely end had been expected ever since he slipped and fell a couple of weeks ago on the backdoor steps, snapping his spine where it meets the skull and leaving him paralysed. Pneumonia set in and it was just a matter of time. He left a young widow aged 27, and two daughters, 4 and 10. Irene is a beautiful Russian emigré; I dare say most Calgary men had a bit of envy that Jimmy was able to wed her at his age. It wasn't money; both lived on and off welfare.

Jimmy the Con had a record of 525 convictions, mostly for passing bad cheques. In his old age he settled down with Irene and became known to Calgarians as a champion of the poor. He was a candidate for mayor in the last election and was declared for the upcoming one this fall. In his previous turnout, he finished very well in the top five out of a dozen or more candidates, and polled several thousand votes, one of which was mine. All this without money or organization, but plenty of sympathy from the news media and general public.

His passing provided an excuse for anecdotes about him to be printed in the newspaper. The Crown Prosecutor, Les Grieve, was the last to deal with Jimmy the Con before he went straight. Jimmy was representing himself. Grieve said "Our evidence was weak and his arguments were numerous, which caused the case to be adjourned over the Christmas holidays. He then sent me a Christmas card. We then matched the handwriting on the card to the bad cheques and he was convicted. He was never bitter though; he laughed about that card and continued to send me one every Christmas thereafter."

For several elections over the 1980s, Calgary returned populist Ralph Klein as mayor with ever-increasing majorities. Klein's final election saw him re-elected with 97% of the vote. He then went into provincial politics and is now Minister of the Environment. With the way cleared, the following municipal election was crowded with a record number of candidates. Most were fringe, looking for free publicity and upset when the media failed to give it to them. Jimmy the Con was at first treated the same way, but the press soon noticed that he was attending Council meetings prior to the election, taking notes, and asking serious questions. He built up a following among the lower-income groups of Calgary; he was in poverty himself and knew quite well the problems they faced. He had a humorous way; on the election ballot his name actually was listed as Jimmy the Con.

All cheques issued by the City of Calgary have the engraved signature of the Mayor and the City Clerk. If Jimmy had been elected, he would have touched off some complicated enquiries, as his last appearance in Court of Queen's Bench had resulted in him being banned for life from signing any cheques.

Jimmy had been married six times, and claimed to have fathered 42 children, although I have my doubts. Irene said he was an enthusiastic 25-year-old trapped inside a 78-year-old body. She was pregnant with his youngest daughter when he was last convicted. Being in jail away from his family was finally too much for him, and he went straight. I've always thought that he could have used the campaign slogan "You know he'll be an honest mayor; he's too old to do anymore time."

Al Duerr, the present mayor, is considered a shoo-in come October. He is a kind, decent yuppie. His wife, Kit Chan, gets him the Cantonese vote; Hong Kongers are one-sixth the population of Calgary. With Jimmy's passing, the election will be much duller.

SOMETHING FISHY GOING ON

1992-4-21

Off to the monthly meeting of the Calgary Aquarium Society tonight. About fifty people attending, and the usual events. I took a bag of Spirodela polyrhiza, giant duckweed, to the mini-auction, which runs during the break that separates the business part of the meeting from the program. Mini-auctions are run on a cash basis; one pays on the spot for a successful bid. The CAS takes a commission, and the consignor is paid out at the end of the meeting. My bag of giant duckweed was a donation to the club; others bring in expensive fish such as discus and earn a bit of spot money. The March and November meetings are the regular auctions with bidder cards, etc, and a five-lot maximum per consignor, whereas the mini-auctions are one lot each. Last month's regular auction was about \$600 in sales, the CAS keeping about \$125 in commissions. The other monthly money-maker is a raffle, and there is pop and coffee for sale by the Ways & Means committee.

My particular committee is Exchanges. We trade our club bulletin CALQUARIUM with other clubs across North America and I bring them to the meetings for members to look at. Aquarium clubs often reprint articles from other bulletins. I've had quite a few of my articles reprinted, for which I get author's copies. At tonight's meeting, I handed out reprints to other club members who were so honoured. No such thing as perzines in the aquarium hobby; they're all clubzines. Quite a bit of specialization in the hobby, and many clubs are devoted to one type of fish only. But there is no Them-versus-Us. Cichlid clubs do not sneer at killifish clubs, nor do general clubs such as the CAS put on airs. None of this zine versus media snobbery that SF is afflicted with. I write a review column called "Paper Patter" for CALQUARIUM. The column originally began in 1964 under that name, and I took it over in 1985 from a long line of reviewers. (CALQUARIUM began in February 1959).

There was also the Jar Show. Each month contestants in this event bring in whatever fish are the classes for that month. Tonight the classes were catfish and killifish. They are judged during the break and ribbons handed out. Points are awarded, and at the end of the year cumulative awards are given for highest point totals. The results from the Home Competition were announced tonight. The CAS has an annual show on the Labour Day weekend, but the reverse takes place in spring; instead of bringing the fish to the judges, the judges come to the fish. The Home Competition goes on a weekend. The judges travel from house to house and look at the tanks in the home. There is no need to tear down and set up as must be done when taking them to the annual show. The Home Competition judges do a lot of travelling, as besides Calgary, we have members in surrounding towns such as Airdrie and Cochrane.

Like most aquarium clubs, the CAS has a BAP and a HAP. BAP is the Breeder Award Program, in which points are assigned for each species of fish reproduced. Various award levels exist from Novice to Master Breeder. HAP is the Horticultural Award Program, and operates much the same way. In the aquarium hobby, one's skill is judged not by how many kinds of fish one keeps, but by how many species have been bred. BAPs encourage people to propagate fish and keep them in the hobby, especially important at a time when so many species are endangered in habitat. In fact, some fish species are only known from the hobby and are extinct in the wild because of habitat destruction.

The club librarian was there as always, displaying on a table the books and magazines relating to the Jar Show and program. The CAS loans several thousand items each year, mostly books and files, but in recent years more and more videocassettes. (I forgot to mention above that the Home Competition judges videotape all the tanks so that others can view them at leisure)

Calgary has two major philatelic clubs. The Calgary Philatelic Society was founded in 1922, has about 225 members, and is a general stamp collecting club. The other club is the Calgary Regional Group of the British North America Philatelic Society, more commonly known as the Calgary BNAPSers (pronounced "be-nap-sirs"). The CPS has a major show every autumn called CALTAPEX, and a spring minishow called Stamp Day. The BNAPSers are a small club of about twenty members meeting in member's homes, and are not able to put on a big show. Therefore, they do a small event back-to-back with Stamp Day, which benefits both clubs. The BNAPSer meeting is Friday evening and Saturday, Stamp Day is Sunday, and the result is somewhat like a relaxicon. CALTAPEX is equivalent to a regional con of about 2000 attendees.

And so tonight to the Friday evening get-together. The hospitality suite was open 17h00 to 19h00. A bit small, but the crowded room certainly forced one to mix socially with others. Drinks and vegetable munchies. Many of the attendees were from British Columbia or Texas. I suspect the reason why so many Texans collect BNA is because they worked for the petroleum industry here, and thus became interested in Canadian stamps. Certainly most of those present were geologists.

At 19h00 we went down to the hotel restaurant for a no-host dinner. The food was good; I had the steak sandwich and was pleased with it. The waitress on our side of the room was not very efficient and disappeared for long periods of time. I was rather annoyed that our final bill included a 15% gratuity; she didn't earn it. The hotel was one used by both stamp clubs for years until a few years ago. They made it so difficult to get a booking we moved to a new hotel. However it is now under new management, so we figure we'll be here for a few years. The problem has to do with public misperception of stamp collectors. When hotels first learn about stamp shows, they

anticipate heavy revenues from the bar. After all, stamp collectors are rich and have lots of money to spend, right? A few years later, the hotel has learned that few stamp collectors are rich, and that the ones who are prefer to spend their money on stamps, not booze. Shriners we are not.

It is easy to mistake many stamp clubs for Shriners. In looking around at the other BNAPSers at the dinner it was obvious beyond any reasonable doubt that I was the youngest person there. I am 36, and the next youngest was 48. BNAPSers do in fact worry quite a bit about it, but I don't see what can be done. Kids are not suitable for specialized collecting such as ours, and the ageing general population means that collectors are ageing as well.

The gentleman I sat next to was telling me about his hometown. It was in one of those European borders so susceptible to rearrangement by war. Originally it was in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After WW1, it was swallowed up by Romania, and since WW2 it has been part of Ukraine. So he calls himself Ukrainian.

AND THE NEXT DAY WAS SATURDAY

1992-4-25

Seminars today. Leading off in the morning was Jack White, an Oregon BNAPSer, talking about the reason why post offices charge you postage by the weight of the letter. It all began with his topic, Trans-Atlantic Mail 1750-1850, in which he discussed how mail went from Britain to USA. USA, incidently, is part of British North America philately up to the late 1700s for obvious reasons. Trans-Atlantic mail originally was privately carried from one coffeehouse to another. Coffeehouses were exactly what the name suggests, but they also handled mail, ran lending and reading libraries, and many of them developed into

commodity markets, stock exchanges, and insurance firms. After a while, the post offices began running mails and hiring ships. Ship letters began; carried by a captain for two pence plus the rate of postage. Trans-Atlantic letters cost about a week's pay in the 1800s, so don't complain about today's postal rates. They took two or three months to reach their destination, if at all. It was a practice to take newly-received letters from a ship into a coffeehouse and shout out names; if the addressee wasn't in, the letter was left on a table in case he came by. If not, it was advertised in the newspaper, and if still no answer, was returned to sender.

When government post offices first took over the mails, they charged postage by how many sheets of paper. An envelope was counted as a sheet, so everybody just folded over the letters and sealed them with wax. This is why philatelists today refer to an envelope as a cover. What soon happened was people began writing letters on long rolls of paper, thus claiming that postage only needed to be paid for one sheet. Since one could mail a scroll in this manner, post offices switched to charging postage by weight.

Jeff Switt was up next. A Texan, he collects postal history of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, for some strange reason. He has a variety of sideline collections. The advantage of sidelines is that few people collect whatever oddball topic it is, which reduces competition in obtaining the material. It also allows one to be the recognized authority on the subject, albeit the only person collecting the stuff. Jeff collects General Delivery markings as one sideline. Besides giving his talk on that subject, he photocopied his collection and bound the photocopies as books, which were sold today to us for \$5 each, proceeds to Calgary Regional Group. Quite a few collectors are doing this sort of thing now; it preserves the hard-won information on the album pages and is a cheap and easy method of publishing.

We broke off for lunch, about a dozen of us sitting at a table, enjoying stamp talk and good food. Waddling back to the seminar room, and on with the next talk, being about the Canadian Contingent in the Boer War. Besides the fighting, many Canadians were Mounties who helped set up the South African Constabulary. British invented concentration camps in this war, by the way. The final talk of the day was on coil stamps, but the epilogue to this talk was a quick slide show about a Calgary BNAPS gathering in 1970. They rented a railway passenger car, the antique type, not the streamlined metal ones, and took a train ride out to B.C. and back again. There is talk about booking a train for Canadian; it would be an idea.

We finished off the day with a clothesline exhibit. A number of attendees showed a page of stamps or covers, explaining the interest behind them and then putting them on display on a rack. At one time, single-page exhibits were hung on a line with a clothes pin, hence the name, but now we just use a display rack.

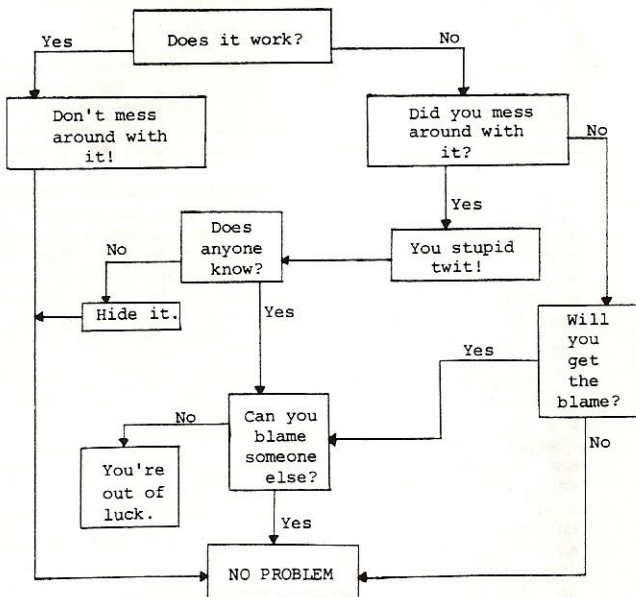
STAMP DAY

1992-4-26

Today was the minishow of the CPS, basically a dealer bourse, since no one could be found to look after exhibits. On my way to Stamp Day from home, I passed by a grass fire along the freeway, on the north bank of the Bow River. Calgary has grass fires the way Kansas has tornados, or Florida has sinkholes. Never serious, but a frequent sight this time of year as the ground thaws and the grass dries out from the snow.

The bourse was busy; in fact, it took me a while to get a seat at a table. I didn't buy much. A set of fish stamps, an old postcard depicting Bowness Park, and a book on strike posts, which are couriers who operate whenever the Canadian posties go on strike.

PROBLEM-SOLVING FLOWCHART



I hadn't been to Big Hill Springs Provincial Park for many years, and so decided to fill in an afternoon by driving out. The park is about 30 km northwest of Calgary city limits, a short drive on paved two-lane roads all the way. It is a small park, located in a narrow glacial meltwater valley with steep grassy slopes and the occasional outcrop of sandstone. It is in the middle of cattle ranges; one drives over several Texas gates on the way in. A Texas gate is a grille of heavy iron pipes covering a trench across the road. A vehicle can drive across it with no problem, a pedestrian can walk across it with care, and cattle cannot cross it because their legs would slip through the grille into the trench. Most Texas gates feel like a set of rumble strips when the car goes across them, but poorly maintained gates, bent under the weight of cars over the years, can give one a heck of a jounce going over them. The Big Hill park had one of each kind; my car sailed over the first one smoothly but tried to shake itself apart on the next one. Many years ago I read that some ranchers simply paint white lines across the road and their cattle still won't cross, but cannot recall seeing any proof of this.

Big Hill Springs is right on the transition between the prairie and the aspen woodland. The sun-facing slopes are grass, the shaded areas are aspen poplar and spruce with alpine currants, anemones, ferns, and moss. The park is a wooded coulee where the springs arise and flow down the slope, with numerous waterfalls, before emptying out onto the valley floor to wander off as a creek.

As I pulled into the small, crowded parking lot, the first view was an elderly Hindu sitting cross-legged on the grass under a tree, contemplating.

[continued next page]

Leaving the car and the Hindu in the parking lot, I took the footpath up into the park. Big Hill Springs is known for its massive deposits of tufa, which is otherwise rare in Alberta. Tufa is formed when calcium from spring water precipitates onto organic matter, such as fallen logs or moss. The organic matter then rots away, leaving a spongy porous type of limestone. In this park, the springs flow over countless ledges and blocks of tufa (the surrounding bedrock is sandstone), creating lovely waterfalls. Back during late glacial times when Alberta had a wetter climate, beavers built a dam across the coulee. The dam was converted to tufa over the centuries. When the climate dried out, the beavers were gone, the valley was dry, and a thick wall of tufa was left. It snakes across the coulee like a miniature version of the Great Wall of China.

In 1891, the first creamery in Alberta set up production at Big Hill Springs. The Radcliffe Creamery used springs to cool the cream and to power the churn. The concrete chute of the waterwheel is still there, although the waterwheel and buildings have long since vanished. Butter from the creamery was sent to the nearby railway station at Cochrane and from there shipped to Vancouver, where it sold at a premium price because of its high quality.

Although the park is small, no bigger than a quarter-section or so, it is a steep climb from the valley floor to the prairie plateau. One can walk it in an hour or so, but I had only ascended halfway up the trail when rain began. I was only in shirtsleeves, so I turned back.

Reaching the parking lot, the Hindu was still there but had been joined by the rest of the family, and all were picnicking under the tree. And off I drove. I had forgotten about that bad Texas gate, and hit it at full speed, getting another bad shaking.

THE BLUE CANADIAN ROCKIES

1992-6-11

The Rocky Mountains are not a single chain of peaks but rather consist of a series of ranges running parallel to each other. From central and north Calgary, the range seen is the Kannanaskis, where the 1988 Olympics were held. This is the view most familiar to Calgarians but as the city expands south, the Douglas range has come into view.

The Rockies are made of dolomite and limestone. Close up, the mountains are gray. But I've noticed an interesting difference between the two ranges. Kannanaskis mountains are gray, with a fair bit of green vegetation and a topping of snow. As I work in the McKenzie and Douglasdale suburbs, in view of the Douglas range, I've noticed these mountains are exactly the same shade of blue as the sky. The result is that the mountains blend in so well with the sky that one cannot see them at all. The snowfields appear suspended in midair. The edges of the Douglas mountains cannot be seen, only the glaciers, dangling in a blue sky.

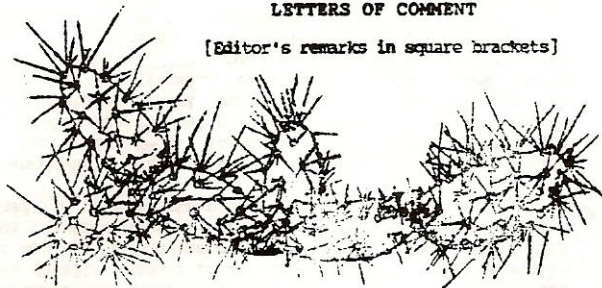
The best time to see the mountain view is in the morning sun, when it shines full face on the mountains. By midday, the sun is shining parallel to the mountains, and the late afternoon view is only a silhouette.

The mountains are an hour's drive west of Calgary, and every summer weekend half the city heads out. This does make it tough to hold some events, and undoubtedly reduces attendance.

Banff is an overcrowded tourist trap. I prefer to head south to Crowsnest Pass, several hours drive more but less crowded. It has equally spectacular scenery, with no Japanese tourists. (Many Banff stores are bi-lingual in English and Japanese.) I'll have to write about the Crowsnest Pass in a future issue.

LETTERS OF COMMENT

[Editor's remarks in square brackets]



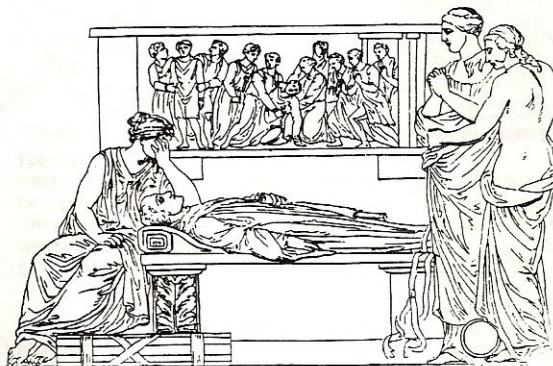
FROM: Chester Cuthbert
1104 Mulvey Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3M 1J5

1992-4-24

OPUNTIA 7.5 arrived this morning and provided a welcome relief from my duty to provide an Income Tax return. I am replying immediately because I promised Steve George that I would ask you to place his name on your mailing list. Steve is an SF fan who published many fanzines a decade ago, and who is seriously considering resuming publication. He has had seven horror novels published by Zebra Books. I am a minor character in several of them, and have proofread them for him, some before and some after publication. It is never advisable for a writer to proofread his own books, since he is likely to overlook mistakes made originally because he did not realize they were mistakes. Here's his address: Stephen R. George, 642 Ingersoll Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3G 2J4.

[I sent him a few back issues of my zine. Proofreading I do best when I set aside the copy for a few days, then come back after I've had time to forget what I wrote. One then sees the text as it is, not as one expects it.]

With reference to your enquiry, I will not be attending Conadian. Most of its activities will be of little interest to me, and I have already informed several people that I intend being at home and available to anyone interested in my book collection. I do not have a car, but my home is only a twenty-minute bus ride from downtown, ten minutes by car, and since most of the people I know have cars, they visit me.



FROM: Joseph Nicholas
5A Frinton Road
Stamford Hill, London N15 6NH, England

1992-4-30

You wonder who the Mr. Perceval on the cover of #7.5 was, and why the ancient Greeks should be so distressed. The first point to make is that they are not Greeks but Romans, as should be clear from the mural behind the bier. One individual sagging in death, a second clutching a dagger, a third being apprehended as he turns to flee; what is this but the assassination of Julius Caesar? Its relevance to the figure on the

bier is that Spenser Perceval is the only British Prime Minister ever to have been assassinated while in office, the only thing, in fact, for which he is at all memorable, his other policies having faded into invisibility. He followed Pitt the Younger; he was succeeded by Lords Canning and Castlereagh, and made no other mark on history.

FROM: Mark Manning
1709 South Holgate
Seattle, Washington 98144

1992-5-5

The postal regs in British North America must have been very odd to create so many stamp-issuing authorities. Are you saying that the territories you list, including Vancouver Island, actually printed their own stamps only pre-1867, or that frontier conditions were that fragmentary even afterwards? The only post-1867 "regional" stamp issues I really comprehend are those of Newfoundland, as it wasn't part of Canada until 1949.

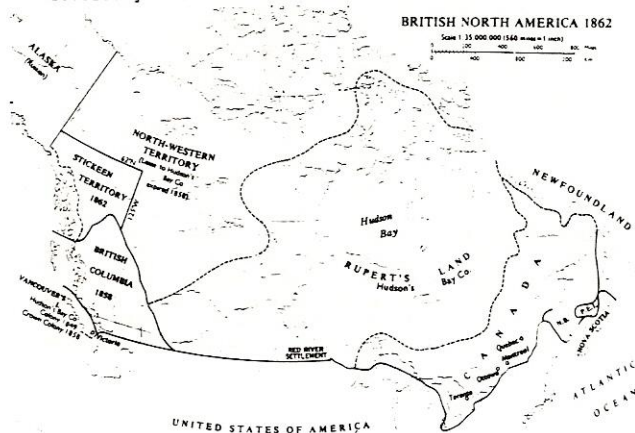
[Although Canada dates its origin from 1867, it did not resemble the present-day country until 1912, and the final details weren't filled in until 1949. This is similar to USA, which was proclaimed in 1776 but didn't fill out its present shape for about 150 years and only reached its present stage in 1959.]

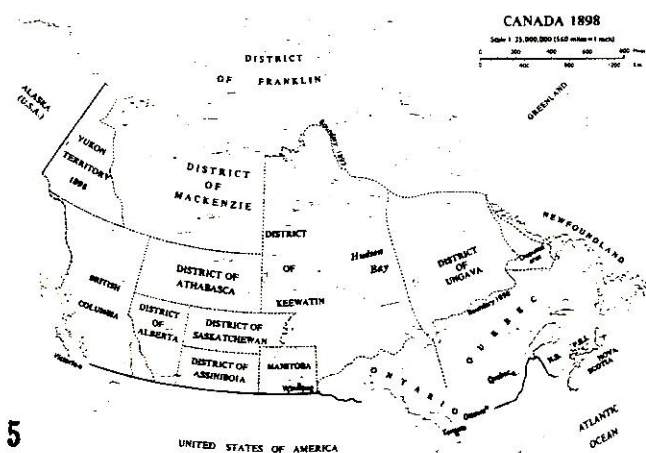
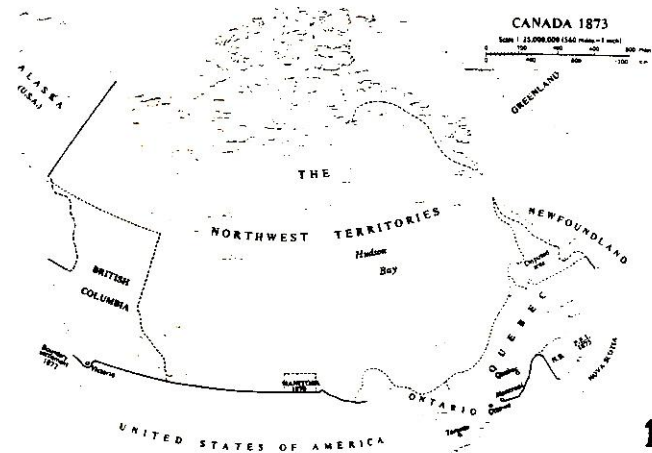
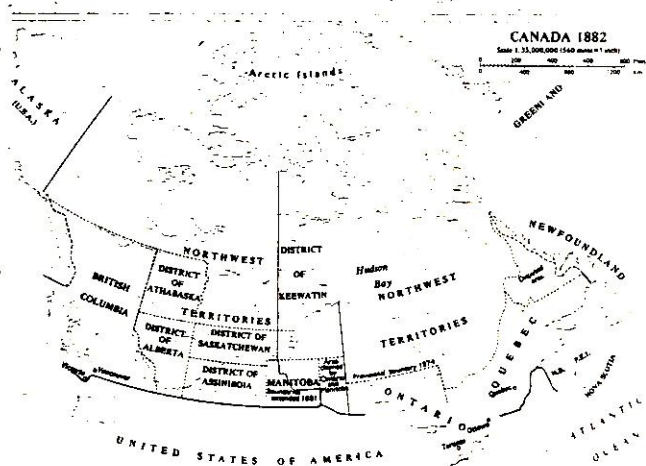
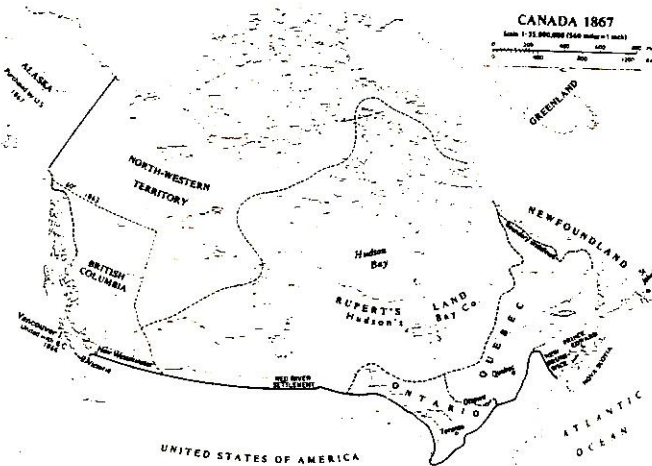
[Vancouver's Island changed its name to Vancouver Island in the early 1860s. Its last postage stamp was issued in 1865. The following year it merged with its neighbour British Columbia to form a single Crown Colony. In 1867, the Colony called Province of Canada merged with the Dominion of Nova Scotia and the Dominion of New Brunswick to form a single country called the Dominion of Canada. The Province of Canada issued stamps from 1851 to 1867. N.B. and N.S. also had their own stamps in the same time period. Upon Confederation, the Province of

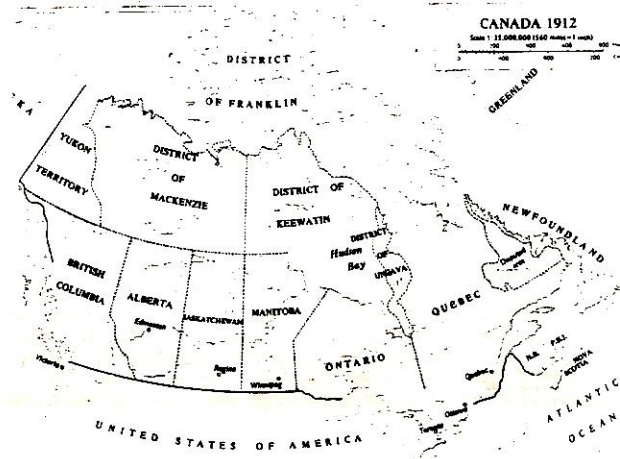
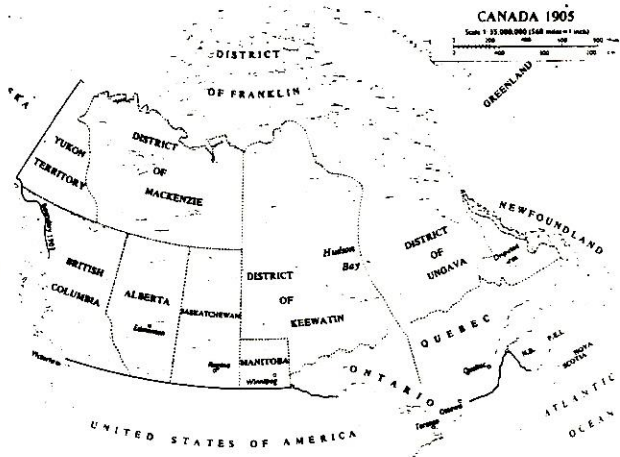
Canada was split into two halves. What was previously Upper Canada or Canada West became Ontario, while Lower Canada or Canada East became Quebec.]

[In 1871, B.C. joined Confederation and ceased issuing stamps. Prince Edward Island, which had stamps from 1861, stopped issuing them when it joined Confederation in 1873. Newfoundland had stamps from 1857 until it became part of Canada in 1949. All stamps from these colonies and dominions are still valid for postage, although only a few Newfie stamps are cheap enough that a philatelist would use them for postage; the rest cost tens to tens of thousands of dollars as collector items and no one in their right mind would use them on a letter.]

[The rest of Canada was part of the Territories or was owned by the Hudson's Bay Company as part of Rupert's Land. HBC is still in existence as the department store 'The Bay', although of course it no longer holds the land. The rest of Canada was carved out of these territories.]







The aforesaid maps are from Philips' HISTORICAL ATLAS OF CANADA (1966). The boundaries may yet change, as the Inuit are currently negotiating to split the Northwest Territories in half, and make the eastern half their new homeland, called Nunavut. The western part is proposed as Denedeb, home of the Dené, but there are other tribes who dispute this, not to mention the white folk. Quebec has been told by the Inuit and Cree that if it separates, it will lose the northern two-thirds of the province, as the aboriginal tribes will not tolerate living in a francophone republic.

And so it goes.

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Henry Welch, Buck Coulson, Paula Johanson, Harry Andruschak, Harry Warner Jr., and Colin Hinz.