OPUNTIA

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OPUNTIA is published by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. It is available for $3 cash for a one-time sample copy, trade for your zine, or letter of comment. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada as the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount. US$ banknotes are acceptable in Canada at par value; what we gain on the exchange rate we lose on the higher postage rate to USA. Do not send mint USA stamps as they are not valid for postage outside USA and I don't collect them.

Whole-numbered OPUNTIAs are sercon, x.1 issues are reviewzines, x.2 issues are indexes, x.3 issues are apazines, and x.5 issues are perzines. A cumulative subject index for all issues is available on request.

WHY I DO MAIL ART
by Peter Netmail

because it feeds my wife, children, and grandchildren well after tax and postage

because it is an easy pastime between the hardships of my daily life

because it fills me with spiritual growth in sleepless nights

because it fills my archive with handmade valuable original artworks from everywhere

because they are all exactly about my project themes and arrive long before deadline

because its family of polyglottal cosmopolitans welcome me at their doorsteps any time

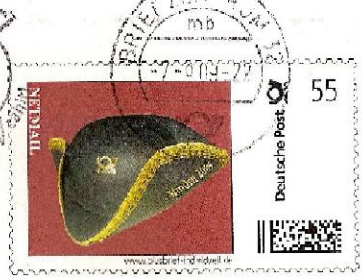
because they are all enduring and tolerant vegetarian non-smoking peace workers

because it floods my P.O. box with documentary catalogs that include my works in full size

MINDEN er LEBEN
1758

FOREVER FRIENDS IN EUROPE
250 YEARS BATTLE - OF - MINDEN

Bundestagswahl 27.09.09



REAL POSTAGE
WITH MY OWN HAT

For Ophuntia
to Dale Spain
Box 6830
Calgary Alta T2P2E7
Kanada

Peter Netmail envelope with personalized stamp

because it secures me fame in art history and opens the biggest museum doors for me

because it has deeply befriended me with all postal workers in my city

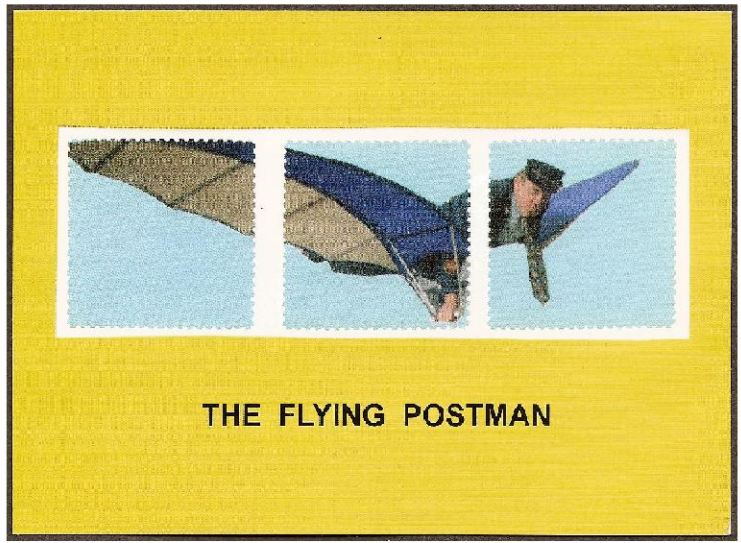
because it is easy to explain to newcomers, journalists, and to my mother

because I prefer licking stamps to any other indoor activity and any other outdoor activity

because I love bad photocopies and bad English from all over the world

because I truly appreciate new creative spellings of my name and address twice weekly

and if all this is not absolutely true, my name shall not be Peter Netmail anymore but Monty Cantsin from Mail Art Mecca Minden



Privately printed postcard of Peter Netmail

Peter Netmail can be reached at:
P.O. Box 2644
32383 Minden, Deutschland

THE ORIGIN OF GOLD
by Dale Speirs

Nucleosynthesis.

The gold that we covet as a store of value is rare in the Earth. Like all elements, it was born inside stars, scattered to the galactic winds, coalesced into planets, and, in the case of the third planet of a minor star, grubbed out and purified by sapient life forms. When you wear gold jewelry or hoard bullion, you are handling atoms that were synthesized billions of years ago and traveled stupendous distances before ending up in your possession.

In the initial Big Bang that started the universe going about 14 billion years ago, the first atoms were hydrogen, deuterium, helium and lithium. Hydrogen is a proton and an electron, and is the lightest element, with an atomic number of 1. (The atomic number is the number of protons in an atom.) Slight eddies swirling about in the birth pangs of the universe had a slightly larger gravitational pull than other areas, which pulled in more hydrogen, which increased the gravitational pull further and soon developed clouds of dense hydrogen. As the hydrogen clouds increased in size, they formed into spherical gas balls, which then collapsed inward until the pressure in the centre ignited nuclear fusion, from which helium (atomic number 2) was produced.

Over the gigayears, stars lived and died, constantly fusing protons and neutrons into heavier and heavier atoms, a process known as nucleosynthesis. The cooking process of fusion released energy on a net basis, enabling the stars to shine. When the process reached iron, however, the laws of physics suddenly switched over. Iron will not fuse by itself and requires an input of energy. As a star accumulates iron in its core, the pressure of energy flowing outward slows and can no longer counterbalance the inward gravitational pull of the outer shell.

Per Astra Ad Aurum.

When the balance tips over in an iron star, the outer gaseous layers of the star collapse inward, generating energy, and then rebound in a supernova. During the initial moments of the supernova, the energy released is so great that it will enable fusion in the core, thus producing elements heavier than iron. Supernovas over the billions of years gradually built up a mixture of elements, which combined in random proportions depending on what was floating around in the neighbourhood when the star was formed and later died. Constant supernovas spray atoms out into space and create jets and eddies that mix them thoroughly in dust clouds. These clouds subsequently accumulate and form the next generation of stars, repeating the process. About 5 billion years ago that process created the Solar System, the third planet of which developed life about 3.8 billion years ago.

Not all stars follow the same sequence though, one group of which are neutron stars. Gold has an atomic number of 79, compared to iron's 26 and 82 for lead. The energy needed to produce heavier atoms increases with weight. The current hypothesis as to how sufficient energy can be created for gold is that it is born from collisions between neutron stars, which produce even larger explosions than supernovas. The gold we possess today thus would have come from immense explosions beyond our ken gigayears ago.

When the Earth formed, gold atoms (and other metals) were randomly and thinly scattered through the dust. The earth was initially a ball of magma, terrifically hot of course, but not enough to allow fusion. As the magma cooled and a crust formed, the metals segregated themselves into layers. But for the advent of convection currents in the magma and tectonic forces (continental drift), those layers would still be there. As the crust developed, currents within the molten inner core cracked it into plates, and these plates moved about, mixing up the strata. Some were pushed below the surface to be melted into magma again, and others floated along the surface and still exist today as cratons (such as the Canadian Shield). Earth's crust was frequently punched full of holes in its early days by asteroids slamming into the planet, allowing metal-rich magma to well up. The Witwatersrand of South Africa and the Sudbury Basin of central Ontario are two such impact structures, and where the majority of the world's gold is mined today. If you buy a gold Maple Leaf bullion coin from the Royal Canadian Mint, it is, by law, made only from gold out of Canadian mines, and therefore the product of asteroid impacts in the Earth's early history.

References.

1] Burbridge, E.M., et al (1957) Synthesis of the elements in stars. REVIEWS OF MODERN PHYSICS 29:547-650

2] Freiburghaus, C., et al (1999) R-process in neutron star mergers. ASTROPHYSICAL JOURNAL 525:L121-L124

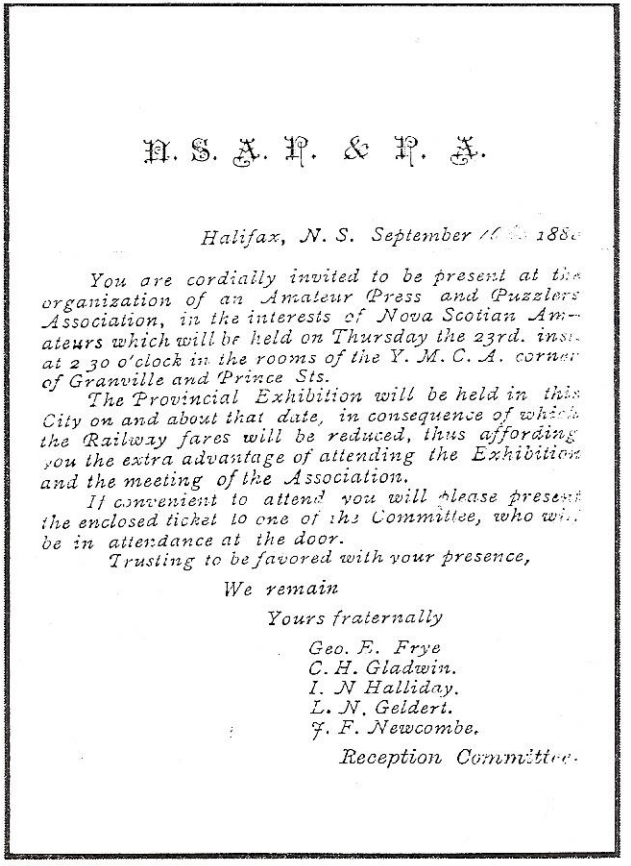
AN 1880 NOVA SCOTIA APA

by Dale Speirs

At CALTAPEX 2009, the annual show of the Calgary Philatelic Society, I was browsing in the dealer bourse and came across a piece of ephemera announcing the formation of an amateur press association (apa) in 1880.

The ephemera is a sheet of 8.5 x 11 paper folded to give four pages, but only one is printed on. It is entirely printed by letterpress, excepting that a blank had been left for the insertion of the day of the month, which was printed as September 1880. My copy is dated September 10. The message invites interested zinesters to visit Halifax, Nova Scotia, for the purpose of forming an organization called the Nova Scotia Amateur Press and Puzzlers Association. The meeting was timed to occur during the Provincial Exhibition, which would have been an additional point of interest for out-of-towners, and which also meant that the railways were offering reduced excursion fares.

The only information I could find about the NSAPPA was a note on page 73 of THE PRINTER'S MISCELLANY which repeated the details of the invitation and added that they intended publishing a monthly called the TABLET. If anyone can provide more details, I'd like to hear them. Nova Scotia is not known as a hotbed of zine publishing today.



N. S. A. P. & P. A.

Halifax, N. S. September 1[illegible] 188[illegible]

You are cordially invited to be present at the organization of an Amateur Press and Puzzlers Association, in the interests of Nova Scotian Amateurs which will be held on Thursday the 23rd. inst. at 2 30 o'clock in the rooms of the Y. M. C. A. corner of Granville and Prince Sts.

The Provincial Exhibition will be held in this City on and about that date, in consequence of which the Railway fares will be reduced, thus affording you the extra advantage of attending the Exhibition and the meeting of the Association.

If convenient to attend you will please present the enclosed ticket to one of the Committee, who will be in attendance at the door.

Trusting to be favored with your presence,

We remain

Yours fraternally

Geo. E. Frye
C. H. Gladwin.
I. N Halliday.
L. N. Gelderl.
J. F. Newcombe.

Reception Committee.

THE STATE OF ZINEDOM IN 2009
by Dale Speirs

My tabulations of zines received through the Papernet continue, and the update through the end of 2009 is as below. The data continue to show a long-tail distribution. Had I not dropped memberships in other apas in 2005, the absolute numbers would have been higher but the trend would probably be the same. There are thousands of zines out there that I do not receive, so the important thing is not the absolute numbers but the trend. I expect a long slow decline but not extinction of paper zines in my lifetime, but the grandchildren will no doubt read only on screens.

Year	Australia	Canada	Britain	USA	Others	FAPA	Other apas	Totals
1998	23	31	39	244	7	155	10	509
1999	14	51	67	213	19	150	125	639
2000	7	55	55	161	29	140	90	537
2001	9	42	35	172	25	132	68	483
2002	10	40	42	184	31	102	42	451
2003	4	72	27	171	26	111	34	445
2004	1	33	19	172	34	135	53	447
2005	8	34	14	148	27	116	0	347
2006	5	10	32	130	18	120	0	315
2007	5	32	12	139	10	105	0	303
2008	5	28	10	136	7	115	0	301
2009	5	31	8	143	5	105	0	297

A comparison between activity in an electronic apa and a paper apa is shown below. (I'm sure you can figure out which is which.) The numbers represent the total number of pages published in each apa per year.

Year	eAPA	FAPA
2005	424	1,065
2006	722	1,287
2007	494	1,019
2008	448	1,088
2009	497	1,011

eAPA hides its membership numbers except for once a year when a sample copy is available for open access, while FAPA has about 35 members. eAPA appears to have about ten members (15 is the stated maximum) or about one-third of FAPA, although some members belong to both. On a per-page basis, it appears the two groups are roughly equal in activity. Since there is no limit to page count in electronic publishing, this suggests that activity in an apa is not limited because of the cost of photocopying and postage. One would otherwise expect electronic zinesters to have much higher page counts than they do since verbosity costs nothing extra on the Internet.

One of the reviewzines I trade for is ZINE WORLD, which reviews a different subset of zinedom than I do. There is very little overlap between OPUNTIA and ZINE WORLD as far as reviews are concerned, with the latter having mostly underground or music zines that I don't cover..

Year	ZINE WORLD	OPUNTIA
2005	540	347
2006	250	315
2007	455	303
2008	271	301
2009	177	297

Unfortunately there doesn't seem to be any discernable trend in the number of zines received by ZW, so I can't draw any conclusions from these data.

The decline in paper zines is not matched by any rise in electronic zines. The efanzines.com site is mostly a collection of the same dozen Usual Suspects, instead of a flood of newbies. E-zines appear to have been co-opted by blogs and social network Websites. It isn't because of cost. I've long noted that zinesters who complain that it is too expensive to publish on paper nonetheless always seem to have money for beer and traveling to conventions.

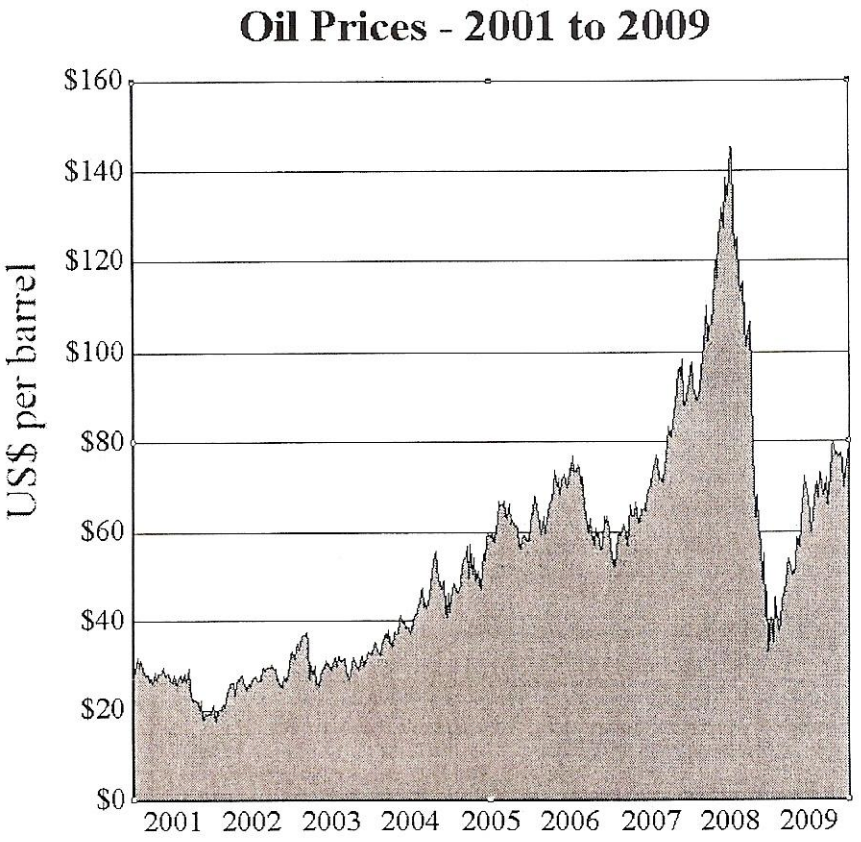
THE STATE OF COMMODITIES IN 2009

by Dale Speirs

Having inherited mineral rights from my mother, and subsequently investing in other oil properties, and living as I do in a petro-province, I naturally take a strong interest in the price of petroleum.

World oil production peaked between 2005 and 2008, and despite oil at $147, OPEC couldn't pump it fast enough to keep the price down. Combined with the American housing bubble and derivatives scandal, this was sufficient to lay the groundwork for the Panic of 2008.

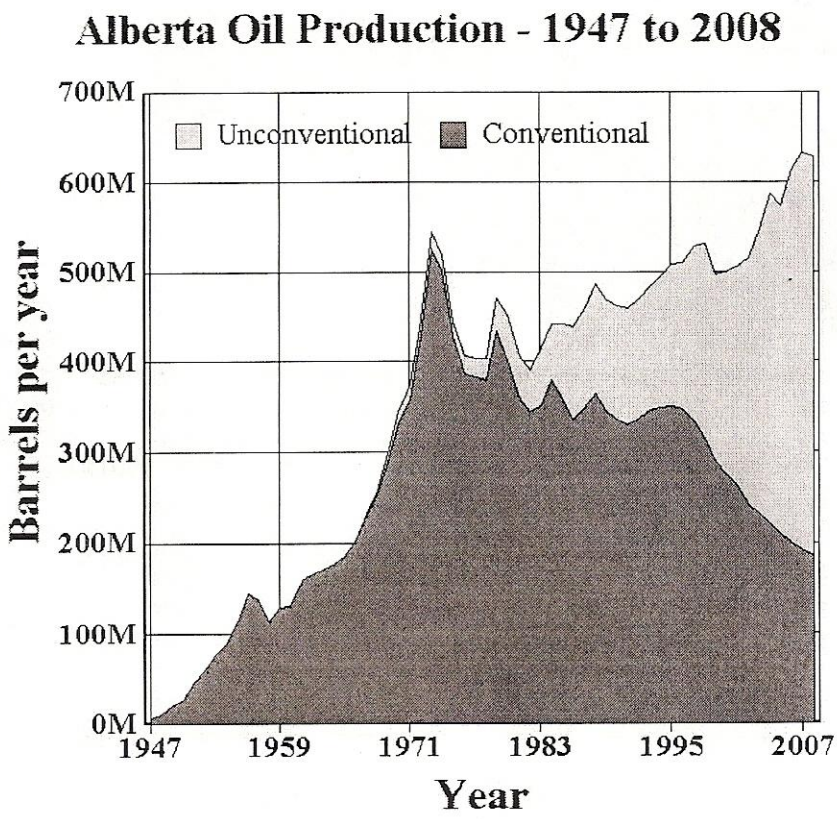
Even though the American and European economies remain mired, oil has been creeping back up in price to the low US$80 range. China and India are ramping up their economies, and the Saudis can't export enough oil anymore. Although the OPEC countries are pumping more, most of that is staying within their own borders due to exploding populations. Saudi Arabia alone is up to 30 million people, and no longer exports as much of its oil. The USA is no longer the major market mover. Peak Oil doesn't mean the collapse is near, only that it will be harder to find and be more expensive.

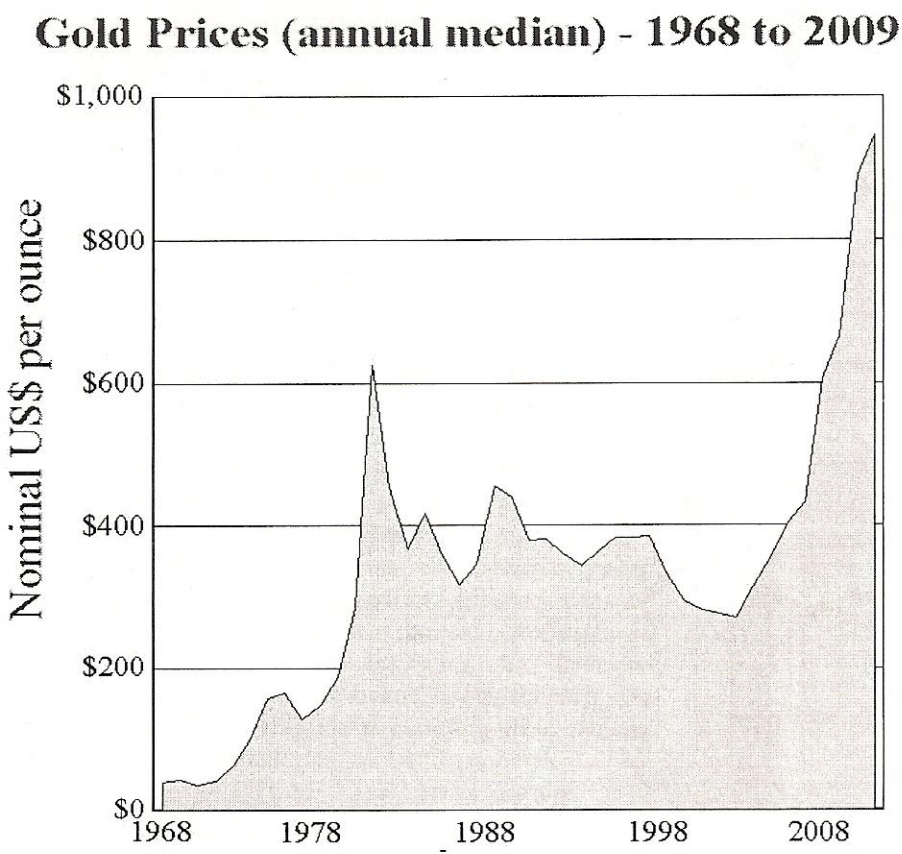


Alberta's conventional oil production peaked in the early 1970s. Today we produce only about one-third of what we used to at the peak, despite having three times as many oil wells. The only thing saving us are the oilsands of Cold Lake, Peace River, and Athabasca. Beginning after 1995, oilsands production managed to turn the graph back up, but it is expensive oil, $60 to $75 per barrel. The glory days of cheap light sweet crude oil from a borehole are gone.

Conventional oil depleted faster than additions from oilsands last year. The result was that Alberta's total oil production actually declined in 2009. Many oilsands projects were put on hold after the Panic of 2008, not so much because of oil prices but because labour costs were running out of control. Construction is slowly restarting nowadays, but the boom is not likely to return anytime soon.

There are still many who think Alberta can supply any quantity of oil, but Peak Oil has its presence here as well. If we were not fortunate enough to have the oilsands, Alberta would be dwindling away. My grandfather drove a horse-and-buggy, my father drove a car, and my great-grandchildren will drive horse-and-buggys.



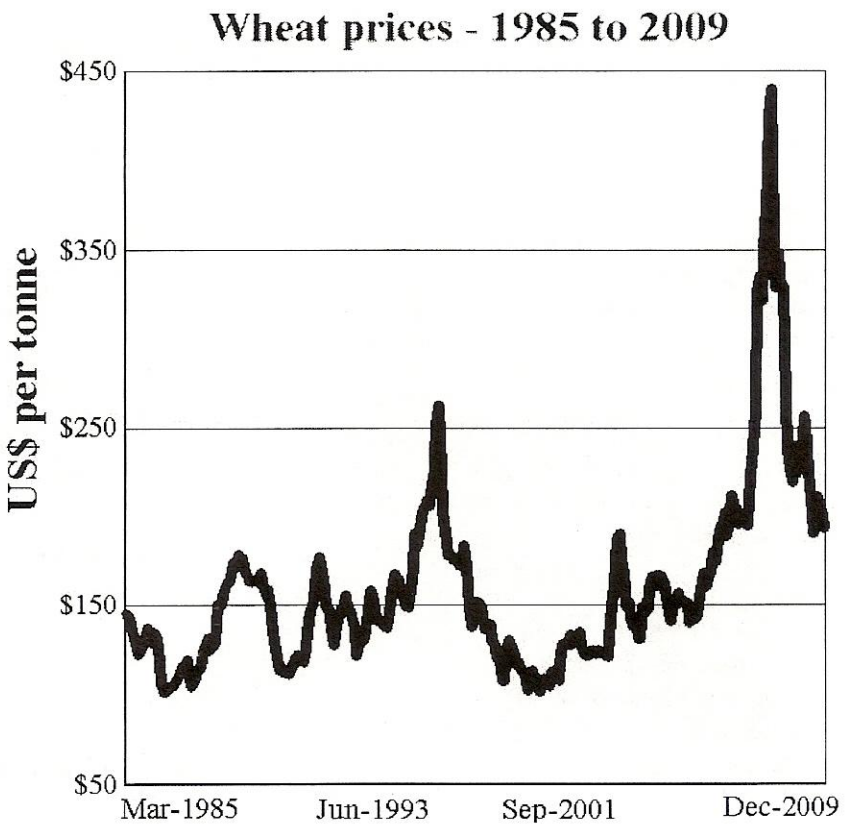


The stock and commodity markets weren't just irrational for the past couple of years, they were outright insane. After the Panic of 2008, the American and Canadian stock markets have only recovered about two-thirds of their value, yet brokers speak giddily of a new bull market. Gold, on the other hand, is higher than it was before the panic, yet anyone who emphasizes this point is sneered at as a gold bug, and people blithely talk about the depreciated US$ as a safe haven.

The chart at left uses annual median prices of gold to filter out the noise. The last peak of gold was $850 in January 1980, but it was actually only at that price a few days, and the median for the year was just over $600. Likewise gold fell during the Panic of 2008 (as did everything else) but soon recovered (as few other things did). Anyone who owned gold before the panic has made money, while anyone who owned stocks has lost at least one-third.

In 2007 and early 2008, many commodities spiked, including agricultural crops. There was much talk at the time of an ongoing food shortage, but being a farm boy I never took it seriously because I knew that one good harvest could turn things around. As it happened, that was exactly why wheat and rice prices fell out of the news. The mass media have moved on to the next crisis, which as I type this involves a Hollywood actress who made a fool of herself praising her husband while she accepted an Oscar award and then separating from him a week later when she found out he was unfaithful. Wheat prices have since dropped back into their usual range. Since Alberta is not a rice producer, I haven't bothered checking the data for rice. I'll leave that to the Louisiana zinesters, which, according to the label on the box of rice in my kitchen, is where Alberta gets its rice from.

There is much to-do about how modern agriculture will collapse without petrochemicals and fertilizers. While true, and I don't argue against it, that day is still far into the future. As Dmitry Orlov pointed out in his excellent book RE-INVENTING COLLAPSE (about surviving in the fallen Soviet Union), such prophecies tend to be premature by at least five years and often decades.



THE STATE OF COLLECTIBLES IN 2009

by Dale Speirs

I am quite active in the philatelic world. LINN'S STAMP NEWS is the leading weekly paper, published by the same company that produces the Scott catalogues. LINN'S runs a U.S.A. stamp prices index chart at intervals, as shown below. The chart goes from 1970 to 2009, where a composite of stamp prices is set such that 1970 = 100. The stamp world has never recovered from the run-up of prices in the double-digit inflation era of 1979 to 1982. The market was slowly recovering over the past decade but is now trending down slightly.

from LINN'S STAMP NEWS, 2010-02-01, page 40

You'll notice a small blip in the middle of 1976 as ill-informed members of the public bid up Bicentennial stamps in the vain hope that they would be valuable. They weren't; too many were printed. There is also a post-September 11 blip as other investments failed and interest rates dropped, but later the common people discovered real estate and told each other that house prices always went up and SUVs were a necessity.

Stamp collecting requires much knowledge to pick the winners if all one wants to do is invest. Stamps are not valuable just because they are old or rare. Stamps are valuable because the demand exceeds the supply. The vast majority of stamps are common and cheap, and will always be common and cheap.

Stamps, like other collectibles, have the problem of poor liquidity, meaning that they are difficult to sell at full value in a hurry. A gold bug can get close to spot value for a bullion coin from a dealer, and a refinery buys oil upon presentation. Collectibles must be shopped around for the best price, and often it requires weeks or months to get it.

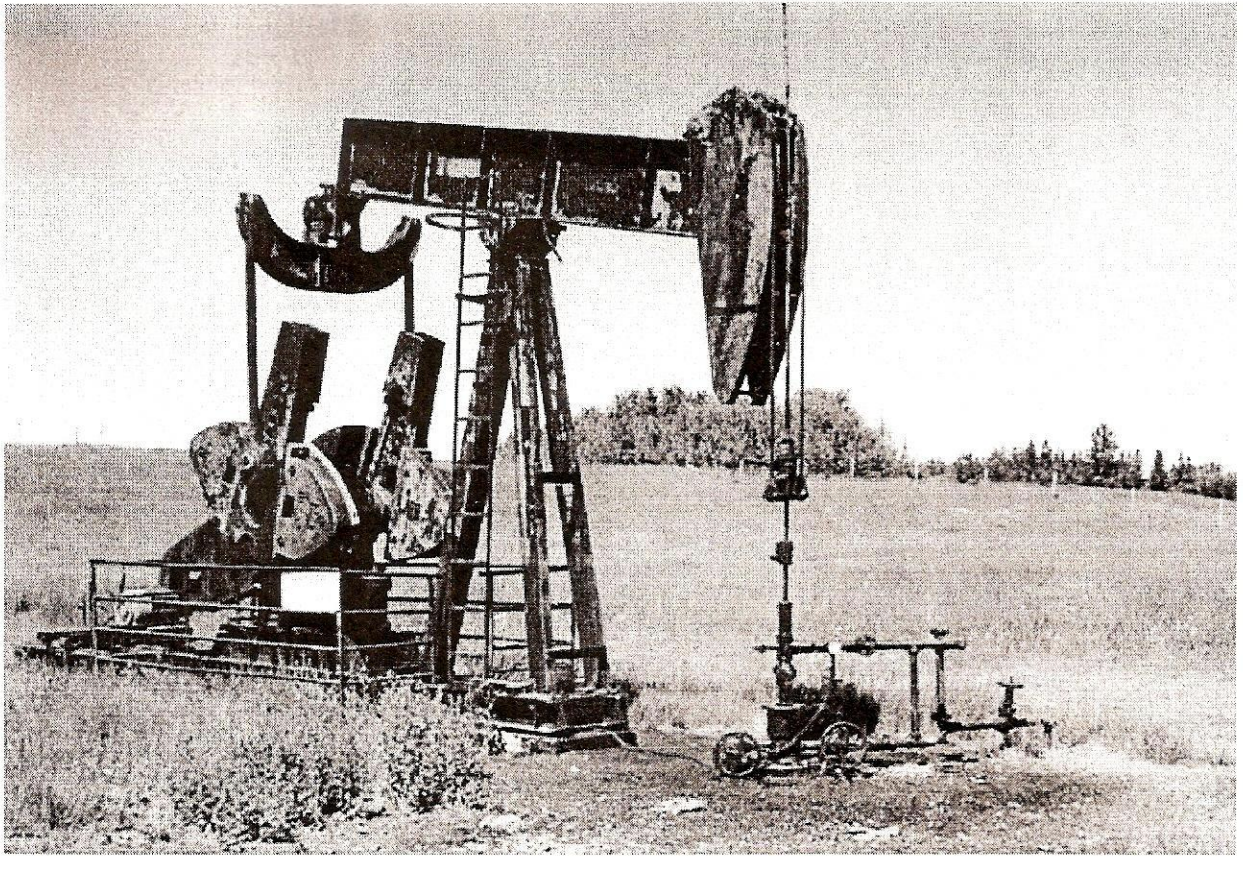
The best quality stamps and postal history have held their value despite the Panic of 2008, but the common stuff is harder to sell because the number of collectors has shrunk. Collectibles are a luxury for the boom times, and a burden for those who are unemployed or about to lose their house.

[Editor's remarks in square brackets.]

FROM: Ken Bausert 2009-10-15
2140 Erma Drive
East Meadow, New York 11554-1120

[Re: stamps] I have a lot of stamps I inherited from my mother; she was a big collector. I have someone interested in buying the collections but I have no idea what they're worth. A coin and stamp dealer that used to be nearby closed up shop recently so I can't get an estimate of their worth. I tried selling one book of old Austrian stamps on eBay and got no substantial offers, so I'm wondering what to do with them. I guess I'll have to try and find another dealer to show them to.

[Without a detailed description it is impossible to value a collection, but one general rule is that if it was a fill-in-the-spaces album, then it is unlikely to be worth much. Selling lots on eBay requires a good description and a set of high-resolution scans because serious collectors will not buy a pig in a poke. It is not just the stamp itself that is important; philatelists want to verify there are no paper thins, tears, or stains. You could do an Internet search for nearby stamp clubs, or go to the American Philatelic Society Website at www.stamps.org, where they have a section on selling estate collections.]



ALBERTA GOLD
by Dale Speirs

A photo of our family oil well, north of Eckville, Alberta. In 1903, when my great-grandparents homesteaded on the land, the only mineral rights the government kept were for coal. Just before WW1, they woke up and realized the value of oil, so my ancestors got in just under the wire. About 30 of us descendants now share the royalties.

The oil comes from tight Jurassic sands of the Medicine River Unit.

2010 will have the 17th annual World Wide Party on June 21st at 21h00 your local time. Invented by Benoit Girard (Québec) and Franz Miklis (Austria), the idea is to get a wave circulating the world of zinesters, mail artists, and SF fans toasting the Papernet. At 21h00, you are requested to raise a glass to your fellow denizens of zinedom. Face to the east and toast those who have already celebrated the WWP. Then toast to the north and south for those in your time zone. Finally, face to the west and toast those yet to celebrate. Write it up for a zine or do some mail art. Have a party, or devise your own method of celebrating.