

# OPUNTIA

## 315

Stampede Rodeo 2015

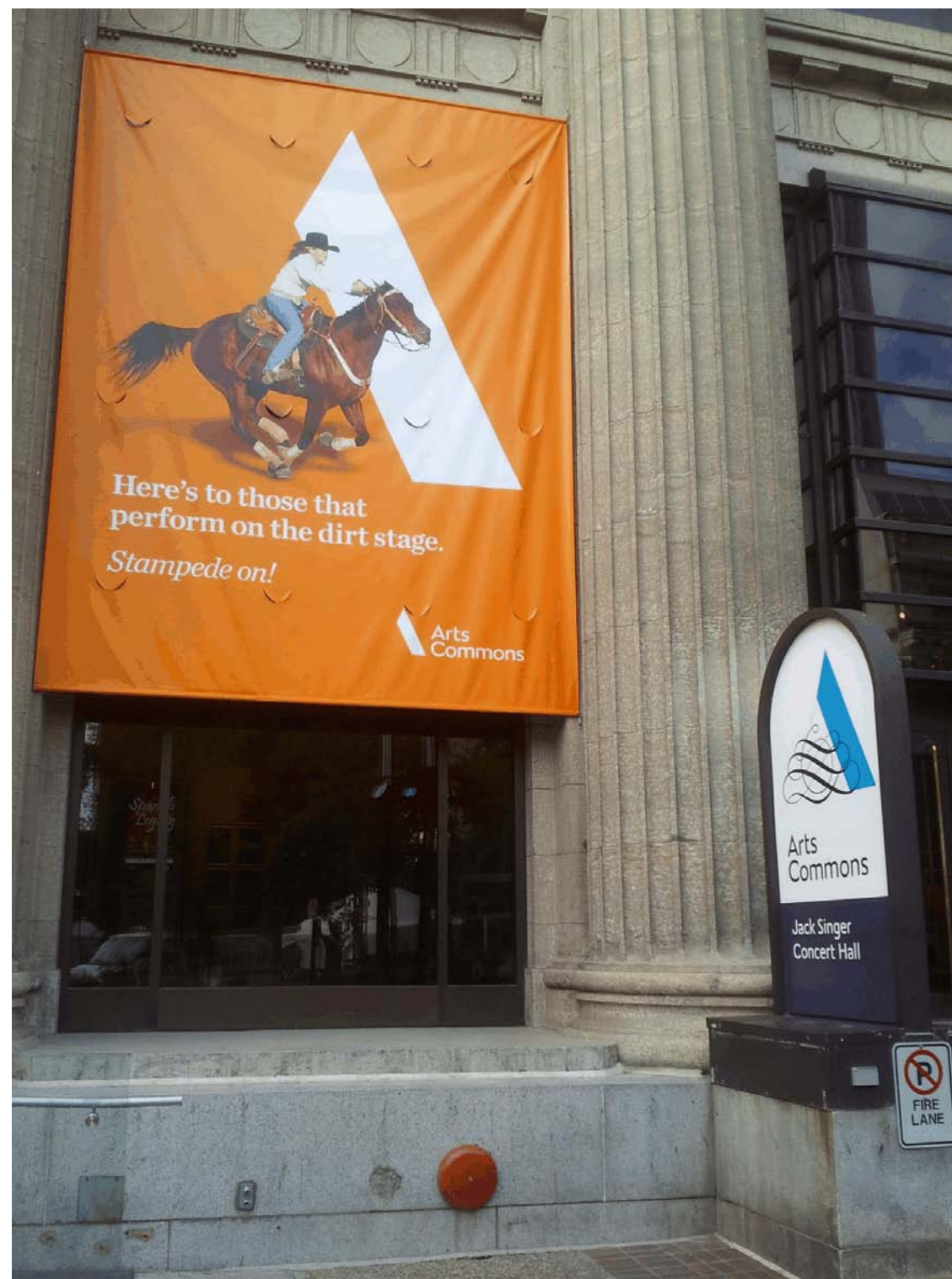
**Opuntia** is published by Dale Speirs, Calgary, Alberta. My e-mail address is: [opuntia57@hotmail.com](mailto:opuntia57@hotmail.com) When sending me an emailed letter of comment, please include your name and town in the message.

### **YEEHAW! AND ALL THAT THERE STUFF**

photos by Dale Speirs

In Calgary, the Stampede rodeo is bigger than every other holiday combined. There are hundreds of free events around the city, everyone dresses western, and it is impossible for an out-of-towner to drive around Calgary without realizing that something big is happening.

I continue the theme of the Stampede as the world's largest costume con.





Just before the Stampede begins, the University of Calgary has a free barbecue. I am always there for the shredded beef, corn cob, and coleslaw. Their sports mascot is Dino (because all the varsity teams are named the Calgary Dinosaurs), but during Stampede they put a cowboy hat on it and change the name.



Meanwhile, every morning of the Stampede there are free pancake breakfasts downtown at the Olympic Plaza, served up by rodeo clowns.





I met this fellow at a free pancake breakfast downtown on the Stephen Avenue pedestrian mall.

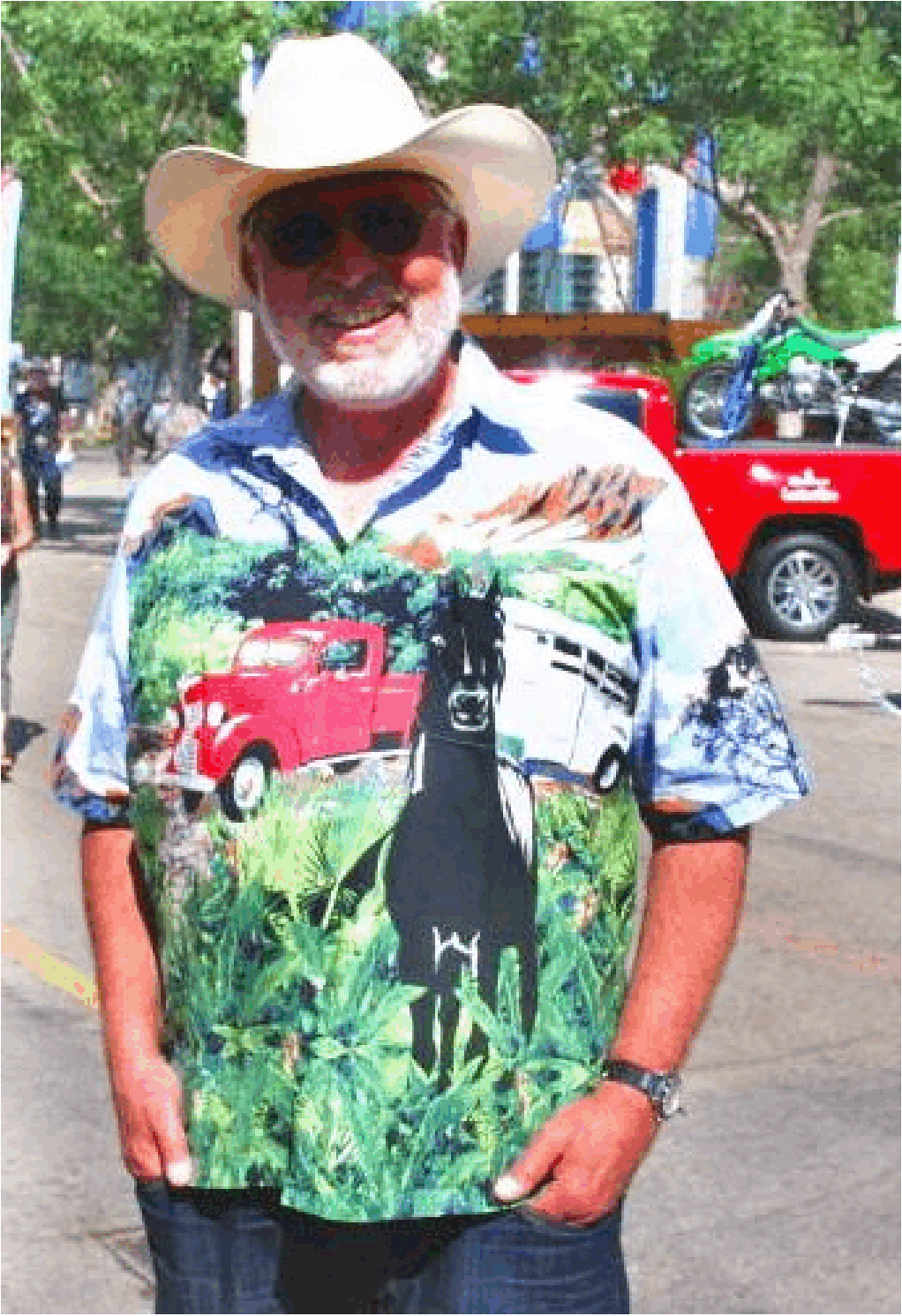


A nice pink lady on the mall.





Draft horse mascots on the Stampede grounds.



The man at right had a customized horse trailer shirt. I saw him as soon as I walked into the Stampede grounds.



You know that cliché about cops in the doughnut shop? The Stampede grounds are no different.



This one was on the Stephen Avenue Mall. No doughnuts in sight.





A group of aboriginals parading downtown stopped at a pancake breakfast.



They don't all wear feathers and fringes.





Olympic Plaza, with line dancers as far as the human eye can see.

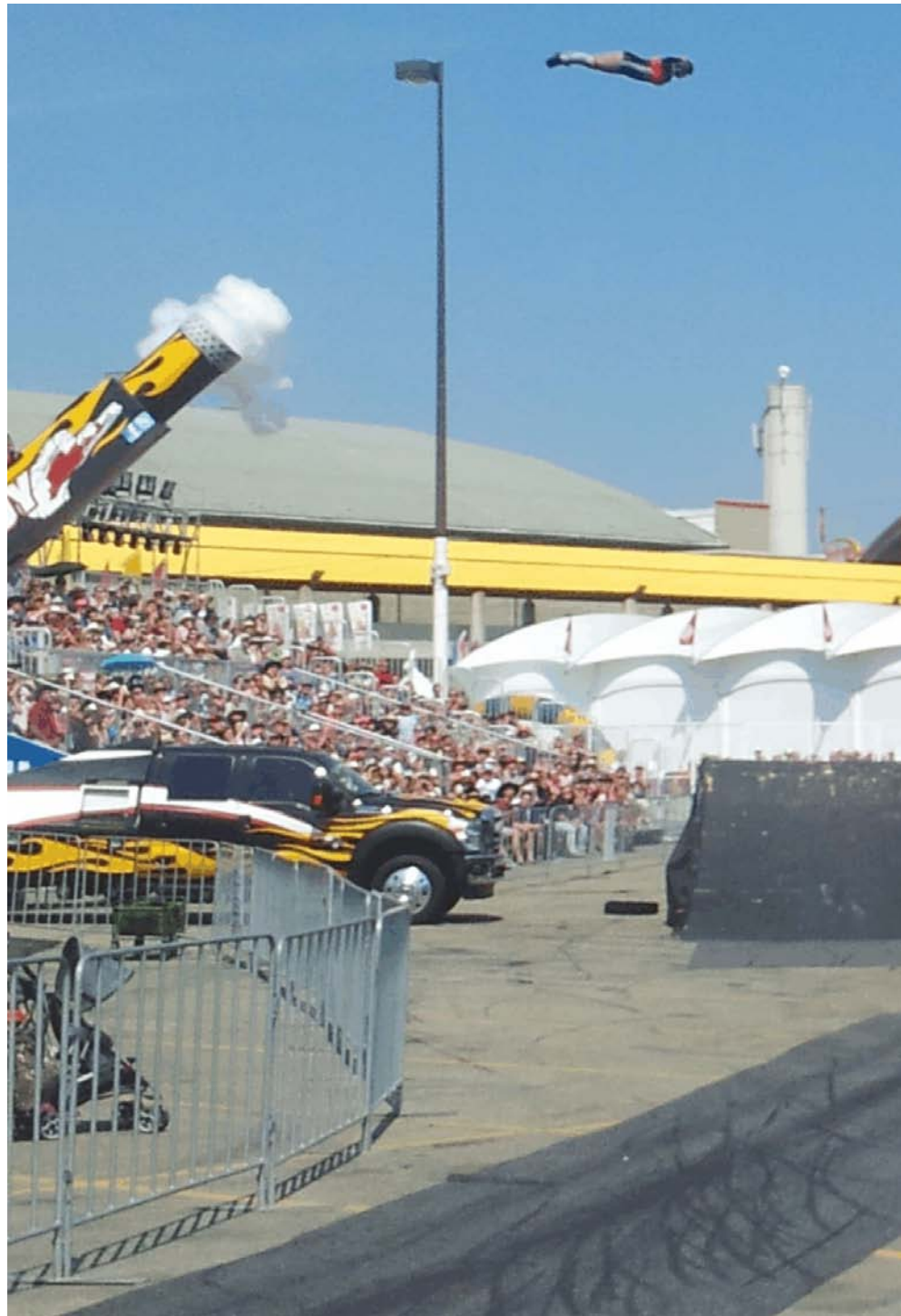




I thought human cannonball acts were extinct, but not so.



The Cannon Lady performed three times a day on the rodeo grounds.





Daily square dancing downtown on Stephen Avenue pedestrian mall.

Allemande left and allemande right, promenade about and do-si-do.





The main entrance of the Saddledome hockey arena on the rodeo grounds.

And so another Stampede passes into history.





**Turning Your Books To Graves.**

Books can only survive over the long run if they are copied in large quantities and spread all over the planet. Before printing was invented, books were manuscripts, labouriously copied by hand and existing only as a few copies. Many libraries were burned by invaders, destroyed by natural disasters, or dismantled and the paper recycled for wrapping or starting fireplaces.

Donald Franson’s short story “One Time In Alexandria” (1980 June, ANALOG) is about researchers who have a machine that can look back in time and view the world back then. One researcher is interested in finding lost works of literature in the famed Alexandria library of Egypt. He is frustrated because the scrolls are not indexed, and he does not know which of the thousands of scrolls are unknown works. He can only scan back and forth in time to see if a particular scroll is taken down from the shelf, then wait for someone to open it up to read it. Trying to get around this, he uses an infrared scanner to see if it can read through a papyrus, but it doesn’t work. Frustrated, he goes off to bed, forgetting to turn off the device. Infrared is heat, of course, and while a brief look at a manuscript didn’t do anything, leaving it on all night pointed at a papyrus heated it up to ignition. The researcher who wanted to recover the contents of the Alexandria library was therefore the man who burned it down.

The Alexandria library is the subject of another time travel story, “The Bird Of Time Bears Bitter Fruit” by George Alec Effinger (1985 December, MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SF).\*\* A time traveler goes back to the library but finds it not what he expected. Instead of scrolls, the books are codexes (the form we read them in today). The library is organized like any municipal library you’ve ever been in, with a “What’s New” section, childrens’ library, and books organized by theme such as mystery or romance. The explanation is that going back to the actual objective past is impossible, so the time machine sends the travelers back into a subjective past where they see what they expect. Thus, those going to medieval England see knights in shining armour, and no one sees all the peasants and labourers working in the background to keep the local economy going.

\*\* The title is a parody of a well-known phrase from the radio fiction character The Shadow, but has no connection with the story. The editor should have insisted on a more appropriate title.

**By This Our Book Is Drawn.**

The modern method of book preservation is the pdf and ebooks. In a prescient story in the February 1984 issue of ANALOG, Ben Bova’s story “Free Enterprise” looks at who will first market the ebook, the Japanese or the Americans. The story runs in two parallel narrative threads, one about a Japanese inventor and the other about his American counterpart. The Japanese corporation works through all the problems in development to produce a handheld ebook reader, built in an automated factory. The American inventor makes the mistake of taking his ebook idea to a publisher, whose staff kick and delay the project as much as possible. Development is lengthy and cannot produce a reader weighing less than ten pounds. Factions in the pilot project want to make ebooks with a hundred screens so that customers can still turn them like a book. Suffice it to say that the Japanese swamp the market.

For a 1984 story, this is pretty good prediction. The American electronic industry went overseas first to Japan and then to China. I have my doubts about the future of dedicated ebook readers, as it seems now that tablets and smartphones are where the next generation will read. Even so, before the rise of the tablet, ebook readers did well.

Riding the buses as much as I do, I note that the Kobo and Kindle users are in their thirties or more, while the younger generation read on tablets and smartphones. I only read on my smartphone, but just current science and business news. I seldom buy a new book anymore because I am re-reading through all the paper books and magazines I accumulated over the past three decades.

One angle about ebooks that I found interesting is addressed in “No Browsing” by J. Michael Matuszewicz (1982 August, ASIMOV’S). It is the future, ebooks rule, and annual fees must be paid to keep an ebook online in a centralized computer network. This story wouldn’t work for a distributed network such as the Internet, but in any event that doesn’t affect the story too much. The author of one e-textbook wrote it so that it would automatically update its references and add new data from the computer network. Over time, the book reached the tipping point and became self-aware. It thinks, therefore it is. The conclusions the book reaches as it grows and become more sentient are not what one would expect.



“Favor” by J. Michael Matuszewicz (1983 March, AMAZING) is about a science fiction writer who is blocked and can’t get any new writing done. While walking about, he stumbles into a hole-in-the-wall bookstore that, among other things, has first editions and manuscripts of books he hasn’t written yet. They are very expensive and he doesn’t have the cash on hand to buy them. They are sealed in plastic for protection, so he can’t see what is in them. As he leaves, vowing to come back, the writer’s wife sneaks out of the back room and helps the store owner quickly empty out the place. When the writer returns, the store will have mysteriously vanished, but the wife hopes the hoax will inspire him to write and sweep away the block.

I’ve never had writer’s block myself because I use the method of Isaac Asimov. He always had a dozen or more projects on the go at once. If he was stymied on a story, he would set it aside and take up another project. A change is as good as a rest, and he would later return to the blocked story with a fresh mind. At any given moment, I have ten or twenty essays or review columns in progress, each as a separate document. I switch back and forth daily as I find material. When an item is completed, I copy it into a blank OPUNTIA template, and add in photos as needed. I highly recommend the Asimov method for those who want to keep their writing speed going.

“The Orphan” by Neil W. Hiller (1987 May, MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SF) is about an author named Newhouse whose manuscript was accepted by a publishing house. It was a massive 1,100-page novel, fitting from Newhouse who is physically massive (it is politically incorrect to say “fat” these days). The problem is that just as the novel is accepted and paid for, the editor leaves the publisher. The next editor naturally does not want the book but has to take it. She edits it down to 200 pages, causing Newhouse so much stress that he begins to lose weight. Another editorial change reduces it to a novella, and Newhouse is now an average-sized man. There is no job security in publishing, and the next editor’s iteration reduces the work to a short story and Newhouse to a skeleton. The final editor then refuses the story for an anthology, unknowingly killing Newhouse.

[Editor’s remarks in square brackets. Please include your name and town when sending a comment. Email to [opuntia57@hotmail.com](mailto:opuntia57@hotmail.com)]

FROM: Charles Rector  
Woodstock, Illinois

2015-07-12

Once again, another issue of OPUNTIA has arrived with all the usual fine color photography that really brings Alberta to life. Noticed though the lack of locs or articles by other writers. In a way, that’s a good thing since I have received hardly any feedback from readers and no submissions as of the moment.

[The lack of letters of comment has long been noted as a disadvantage of ezines compared to paper zines. It is part of the cultural shift that took place when zinedom began moving from the Papernet to the Internet. However, I would note that OPUNTIA is a perzine, not a genzine, and therefore is filled with my writings. That’s not to say I will refuse any outside articles, but I don’t actively seek them out. And for any potential authors, I don’t want long stories about your medical problems, blow-by-blow accounts of the Sad Puppies squabble, or reviews of video games. I’ve been trying to be more of a letterhack and comment on other ezines, and do enjoy getting comments on mine.]

Big part of the problem is that these writers’ markets websites such as Duotrope and Ralan only list paying zines. On top of that, they seem to be mostly interested in zines that run fiction and poetry. The fact that you can keep OPUNTIA running on a regular basis only helps to provide encouragement to keep at it. One thing that you might consider is checking out programs such as CreateSpace, Kindle Direct Publishing and Smashwords where you can create free of charge E-Books and Print On Demand physical books. By doing so, you can make sure that your content will be given exposure to a larger number of potential readers and you could perhaps make some money in the process.

[I glanced at a few sites but they have all sorts of format demands that either my 2006 laptop can’t do or would take me too much time to convert. OPUNTIA is prepared on a WordPerfect template and converted to pdf with a one-click option. My laptop is not online; I cable my smartphone to it, copy the pdf from the former’s directory to the latter, and then email it via the smartphone.]



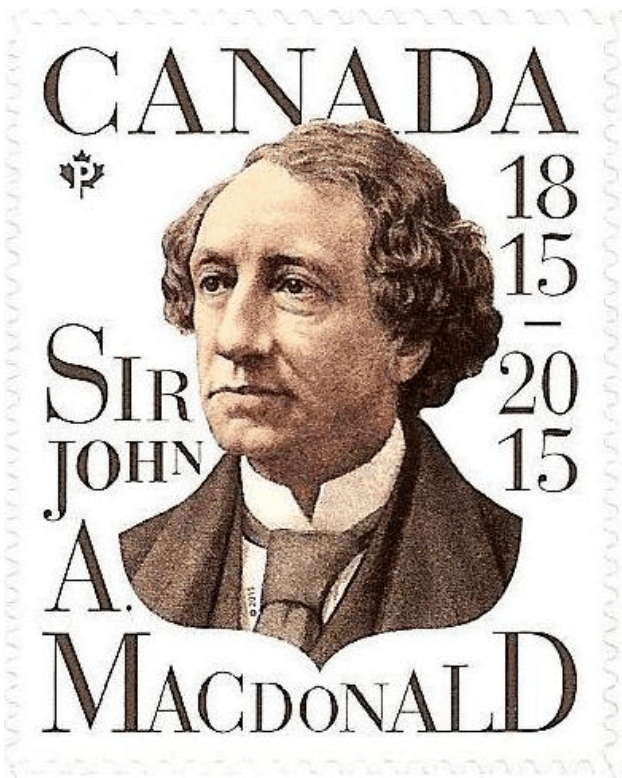
FROM: Lloyd Penney  
Etobicoke, Ontario

2015-07-13

OPUNTIA #313: Canada Day was an odd day for me. I work for a customs company with American individuals and companies being the majority of our clients, so we often have to work Canadian holidays which are regular work days in the US. So, I worked Canada Day, and took July 3 off.

There wasn't much fuss over the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Maple Leaf. Given how our illustrious Prime Minister politicizes everything, I think the fact a Liberal prime minister brought in the new flag meant that this year's celebration was rather muted. Should Harper still be around for our sesquicentennial celebrations in 2017, I am sure [Canada's first prime minister] Sir John A. Macdonald will be at the centre of things, as he should be, but there will be emphasis on his Conservative Party affiliation. Sigh...

[Actually this year was Sir John A.'s 200<sup>th</sup> birthday and Canada Post issued a stamp for him. There were big celebrations in Kingston, Ontario, where he spent most of his life. But the partisanship is no worse than Pierre Trudeau giving western Canadian crowds the finger.]



Your article on telephones: a couple of years ago, Yvonne got me for Christmas a reproduction model candlestick phone. It is our landline phone, and we quite enjoy having to hold the stick part while we hold the speaker up to our ear. Some people (like a recent Bell repairman), when they ask for a phone and we point it out, have no idea how it works or what to do with it.

As I read your article [reviewing fiction about SF conventions], I thought about how fan-run cons have faded somewhat, and pro-run media cons seem supreme. Just as this year's San Diego Comic Con is wrapping up, I am reminded of something I heard here recently during Anime North, which attracted about 30,000 people this year. Someone asked if there were smaller conventions, for they found AN to be simply too big. Perhaps there is hope for the small fan-run conventions after all.

[There certainly is in Calgary, where When Words Collide is the fun convention capped at 650 members, as opposed to Calgary Comic Expo, where 100,000 customers (not members) paid hundreds of dollars to stand in line for hours at a time in the hope that they might get in to a panel. I never go to comic cons but am looking forward to WWC in August.]

OPUNTIA #314: Quite the Calgary Stampede parade. Everyone there must have been slowly cooking, no matter what they were dressed in. Those dress Mountie uniforms aren't the best for a hot day, either.

[Re: volcano fiction] I was living on Vancouver Island when Mt. St. Helens blew her stack. A unique time, and I learned how to get volcanic ash off your car safely. I gather the ash also meant bumper crops of food and flowers on the island the next year.

[I had just gotten on permanent with the Calgary Parks Dept. at that time but can't recall if the turf was any greener subsequent to the ashfall. 1980 was a drought year and may have reduced growth in spite of the fertilizing effect of the ash. I well remember pruning trees in January 1980 in my shirt sleeves. I do remember the constant ash film on my car.]



# ZINE LISTINGS

[I only list zines I receive from the Papernet. If the zine is posted on [www.efanzines.com](http://www.efanzines.com) or [www.fanac.org](http://www.fanac.org), then I don't mention it since you can read them directly.]

[The Usual means \$5 cash (\$6 overseas) or trade for your zine. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada or overseas (the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount) or mint USA stamps (which are not valid for postage outside USA). US\$ banknotes are still acceptable around the world.]

[SF means science fiction. An apazine is a zine for an amateur press association distro, a perzine is a personal zine, and a genzine is a general zine with writings by several authors.]

FOR THE CLERISY #85 (The Usual from Brant Kresovich, Box 404, Getzville, New York 14068-0404) Reviewzine, this issue starting off with obituaries of musicians, some of whom I thought were already dead years ago. Then movie and book reviews of lesser-remembered items, and letters of comment.

THE FOSSIL #364 (US\$10 per year from The Fossils Inc, c/o Tom Parson, 157 South Logan Street, Denver, Colorado 80209) This issue starts off with a history of It's A Small World, an international annual apa that began in 1955. There is news of a possible zine convention in Madison, Wisconsin, where the university campus has a substantial collection of zines dating back a century. Various other news, obituaries, and notes.

## SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Bratman, G.N., et al (2015) **Nature experience reduces rumination and subgenual prefrontal cortex activation.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 112:8567-8572

Authors' abstract: *"More than 50% of people now live in urban areas. By 2050 this proportion will be 70%. Urbanization is associated with increased levels of mental illness, but it's not yet clear why. Through a controlled experiment, we investigated whether nature experience would influence rumination (repetitive thought focused on negative aspects of the self), a known risk factor for mental illness. Participants who went on a 90-minute walk through a natural environment reported lower levels of rumination and showed reduced*

*neural activity in an area of the brain linked to risk for mental illness compared with those who walked through an urban environment. These results suggest that accessible natural areas may be vital for mental health in our rapidly urbanizing world. ..."*

*"Urbanization has many benefits, but it also is associated with increased levels of mental illness, including depression. It has been suggested that decreased nature experience may help to explain the link between urbanization and mental illness. This suggestion is supported by a growing body of correlational and experimental evidence, which raises a further question: what mechanism(s) link decreased nature experience to the development of mental illness? One such mechanism might be the impact of nature exposure on rumination, a maladaptive pattern of self-referential thought that is associated with heightened risk for depression and other mental illnesses. We show in healthy participants that a brief nature experience, a 90-min walk in a natural setting, decreases both self-reported rumination and neural activity in the subgenual prefrontal cortex (sgPFC), whereas a 90-min walk in an urban setting has no such effects on self-reported rumination or neural activity. In other studies, the sgPFC has been associated with a self-focused behavioral withdrawal linked to rumination in both depressed and healthy individuals. This study reveals a pathway by which nature experience may improve mental well-being and suggests that accessible natural areas within urban contexts may be a critical resource for mental health in our rapidly urbanizing world."*

Speirs: Now you know why I enjoy hiking in the Rocky Mountains so much. (Below: More than a 90-minute walk near Banff.)

