

OPUNTIA 345

Canada Day 2016

Opuntia is published by Dale Speirs, Calgary, Alberta. It is posted on www.efanzines.com and www.fanac.org. My e-mail address is: opuntia57@hotmail.com When sending me an emailed letter of comment, please include your name and town in the message.

THE MORMON DIASPORA IN ALBERTA

photos by Dale Speirs

Southwestern Alberta was colonized by Mormons escaping the troubles in Utah in the late 1800s. Because of their skills at irrigation farming, the Canadian federal government invited them to homestead in this area. They still dominate the population, and canals and centre-pivot irrigation are everywhere.

As one of my retirement activities, I am writing and publishing the postal history of Alberta on a district-by-district basis. And so to the place on June 22. The view below is looking west at the Waterton mountains from a country road.



The capital of the Mormons in Alberta is Cardston. After the pioneer era was over and they were successfully established, they built this temple. Tours are available to the general public but I didn't have time, so I snapped this photo and drove on.

On the next page is a view from just south of the town, looking west across a sugar beet field at the mountains. The massive mountain at left is Chief Mountain, on the Montana side of the border. The Waterton mountains are at right, on the Canadian side.







One of the canals dug by the Mormons, back in the days of horse-drawn excavators.



A centre-pivot irrigation system. The water spray doesn't show up clearly but if you look closely under the pivot, you can see a series of nozzles spraying water onto the crop. The water gun at the end of the pivot is also firing a stream of water.

The Wray family were among the Mormon homesteaders. They settled at the base of the Waterton mountains. They later moved back to Utah, and thence to California, where their daughter Fay became an actress.

In 1962, she returned to Alberta, where, among other things, she was honoured by this mini-park on Cardston's main street. The red plaque mentions she had boyfriend trouble in one of her movies.





The hamlet of Leavitt, with Chief Mountain looming in the distance.



The foothills at Beazer.

After going west, I then swung around and headed east along the Montana border. Whiskey Gap is a break between the hills that line the border, through which American whiskey traders entered Canada and caused havoc among the aboriginal tribes by peddling rotgut to them. The Mounties were originally formed to deal with this problem, and arrived in 1873, chasing them out. The whiskey forts were built on the cheap from green wood, so nothing remains of them today.

The Montana border is just over the horizon, on the opposite side of the far hills.



Malvastrum coccineum, the scarlet mallow, was in bloom in the shortgrass prairie.



One of the post offices I was researching was Del Bonita, at a crossroads on Highway 62 just north of the border. Only the southeast and the northwest corners had buildings. The red car is my trusty Honda Civic.



Heading back north, I paused at a picnic ground where Highway 62 crosses the Milk River. There were thousands of swallows nesting under the bridge.



CANADA DAY 2016
photos by Dale Speirs

Calgarians packed the downtown core again for Canada Day. The ever-increasing crowds resulted in an expansion of the event along the Bow River Promenade from Peace Bridge just upstream of the downtown core (top photo) to Fort Calgary downstream at the Elbow River junction (bottom photo), a distance of about 4 km. At right is the view of the bridge onto Prince’s Island.



Looking from the Bow River Promenade across the channel to Prince's Island.



Below: on the island.



At right: bicycle rider at Fort Calgary.





Just in case you get lost, a signpost on the promenade is helpful. More so if you're Dutch.



THRILLING TYPEWRITER TALES: PART 2

by Dale Speirs

[Part 1 appeared in OPUNTIA #287.]

Continuing with my themed review columns, this one is devoted to typewriters in fiction. This is a review column not likely to be frequently published. Typewriting lacks the stuff exciting stories are made of, but I do occasionally come across some fiction about typewriters.

Death Comes To Qwerty.

“Death Tunes In At 790 Kilocycles” is a 1947 episode of the unlamented old-time radio (OTR) show called DANGER, DR. DANFIELD, written by Ralph Wilkinson. (This and other OTR shows are available as free mp3s from www.archive.org.)

Danfield was a psychologist, not a legitimate private investigator, but that never stopped him from barging into any murder investigation near him. His towering ego reassured him that he was always right and no one could do any job as well as he. If you listen to several episodes in sequence, from the way he treats people and will not accept any other viewpoint, his behaviour is downright psychotic. The series should have been called DANGEROUS DR. DANFIELD.

In this particular episode, Danfield and his girlfriend Rusty Fairfax have backstage passes to the Tom Woods radio show. Naturally there is a murder, Woods’s soloist Helen McGregor becoming the victim. Danfield says not to call the police until he has solved the crime, which he does by asking everyone to account for their movements and then timing the re-enactments for verification.

All the timings come out correctly, but Danfield accuses the show’s writer when he noticed that a sample of typing from the studio typewriter does not match the typing on the actual script. His conclusion is that the writer typed the script at home so he would have the spare time to kill McGregor, who kept butchering her lines on the show. Writers are sensitive about actors who don’t stick to the script or can’t do the lines properly. The pacing of this and other episodes is brisk, with lots of organ music to highlight turning points even if they didn’t need highlighting.

NICK CARTER, MASTER DETECTIVE was an OTR show that traced its literary antecedents back to 1886. The episode “The Case Of The Missing Street” (1947) was about Carter’s investigation into a bunco operation that sold phony blueprints to contractors bidding on a non-existent job. The perpetrator used a mail drop that Carter traced to a public stenographer, who turned out to be an accomplice of the bunco man. The two of them realized they were being investigated and probably overheard. When they talked, the stenographer tapped out a warning message on her typewriter in Morse code while they conversed about inconsequential things.

Carter heard the surveillance tape and understood the tapping of the typewriter. To flush out the suspects and catch them in the act, he telephones the stenographer and taps out a warning code on the mouthpiece with his ring. She falls for it, and one murder later, is sent up the river to the electric chair. The prime piece of evidence is the recording of her tapping out messages on her typewriter. An interesting idea, although the situation using it was contrived.

BOX 13 was an OTR show of the late 1940s with Dan Holiday, a journalist turned freelance writer. He had trouble thinking up plots for his stories, so he ran a continuing classified advertisement in a newspaper: “*Adventure wanted, will go anywhere, do anything. Box 13*” Once a week he would drop by the newspaper to pick up mail addressed to his box number and begin another adventure. “Hunt And Peck”, a 1949 episode written by Russell Hughes, began with him receiving a letter from Martin Kirby, a condemned man with 48 hours to go before frying in the electric chair.

Holiday agreed to help, and began reviewing the files. The evidence seemed cut and dried. The victim had an insurance policy that divided \$100,000 between Kirby, the victim’s wife, and a business partner. One piece of evidence was a typewritten note found in the dead man’s typewriter, accusing Kirby of business irregularities. The note was unsigned, so anyone could have typed it. Holiday tries to see if there was a difference between a note typed using the touch system, which the wife knew from when she was a secretary, or the hunt-and-peck method that non-typists use. He couldn’t find it but decided to try a bluff.

He sends both the wife and the business partner an “I know what you did” note and stages a rendezvous. The wife didn’t show and called the police about the note, but the partner shows up and shoots at Holiday. After a few alarms and excursions, the finale is a meeting between the two men in a manor house. The partner used to be a typewriter salesman, but Holiday bluffs him that every

typist has a distinctive style and his style will convict him. The police arrive just in time and Kirby's seat on Old Sparky is taken over by the partner.

An interesting concept. Individual typewriters can be identified by the way their keys are aligned, broken letters, or soft impressions of a particular key. Was Holiday correct on whether or not typing styles are distinguishable? Can individual typists using the same machine can be identified from short notes?

The typewriter's the thing and therein lies the conscience of the king is the premise of "Hemingway's Typewriter" by Michael Haskins (2015 January, ELLERY QUEEN MYSTERY MAGAZINE). The story is set in Key West where a novelist named Peter Jacobson has a guilty conscience because he stole a typewriter that once belonged to Hemingway.

Jacobson was suffering from writer's block, and when he had the opportunity to take the typewriter from a private collection, he did. The problem is that the typewriter is haunted by Hemingway's ghost, who at first helps Jacobson write but then becomes a burden by typing at night and preventing Jacobson from getting proper sleep. This makes no sense because ghosts stay where they died, and Hemingway committed suicide with a shotgun in Ketchum, Idaho.

Jacobson asks a friend named Mick Murphy, the narrator of the story, to return the typewriter on his behalf. Murphy does so, but the proprietor tells him the typewriter on display was not the real Hemingway machine, which is locked up in a vault. It wasn't the first time it was stolen, so they never displayed the real one. At that point, the story suddenly rushes to an end, with Jacobson committing suicide with a shotgun in the same style as Hemingway. The supposed ghost is explained away as Jacobson typing during sleepwalking episodes and not remembering it during his waking hours. A bit of a stretch.

Getting Personal With Typewriters.

"The Frontier Of Fear" is a 1974 episode of CBS RADIO MYSTERY THEATER, written by Milt Wisoff. Not actually OTR but one of several attempts to re-establish programme shows in the modern era. The series had money spent on it and was quite good; you can download zipped files of the entire run from www.archive.org.

The story is about a small-time bunco man named Harry Dorn who gets a typewriter from pawn shop that seems to control him. He types out a sheaf of

poems under the influence of the typewriter. They sell to a publisher. Then a short story. Then another, always with Dorn in a blackout each time. They sell and Dorn's money woes are over. Other woes begin though, when police notice a connection between a Dorn murder mystery and a real-life murder. They haul him in but can't prove anything, and have to let him go.

The typewriter begins talking to Dorn and tells him two things; the typewriter is in charge and it can control the future by writing it. Dorn is drawn deeper and deeper into its machinations. The machine begins granting him wishes, but not the way Dorn wants. The machine seems to be planning something, such as typing up a copy of the current defense budget. Dorn is frantic with worry about what the spirit controlling the typewriter is doing. Some of the manuscripts are about superscience weapons and other things Dorn doesn't understand.

The revelation comes that an alien is controlling the typewriter, and the manuscripts detailing how to make the weapons will be mailed out to various countries around the world. The aliens know human psychology and want them to destroy themselves, clearing the way for the aliens. When Dorn refuses to co-operate any further, the alien presence writes him out of the script and brings in another stooge who will finish the job.

"The Ballad Of The Flexible Bullet" (1984 June, MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SF) by Stephen King is about a young writer named Reg Thorpe who went crazy and then on a shooting spree. He came to believe his typewriter was inhabited by little people called Fornit who sprayed good-luck dust on his stories.

He began feeding the typewriter with little bits of cookies and smeared peanut butter on the platen. His wife and his editor humour him because otherwise he might stop writing. The editor needs some good stories to fill in holes in the magazine and the wife needs the money for the support of the family. She cleans the food out of the typewriter while Thorpe is outside on his regular evening walk, so he thinks Fornits are really there and eating the food. The editor writes about his own Fornits to Thorpe, not that he actually believes in them, but anything to keep the writer going.

Unfortunately the editor's magazine publisher changes policy and decides not to publish anymore fiction, killing Thorpe's story (as well as a John Updike novella, so it wasn't personal). Thorpe goes off the deep end and becomes a

full-blown paranoid, and the editor, an alcoholic, isn't far behind him. After a drunken blackout, the editor finds a letter in his typewriter from his own Fornit. He inadvertently causes Thorpe to begin shooting anybody who might be a threat to the Fornit, which was basically everyone. Anything to protect his typewriter.

Comedy Tonight.

AMOS AND ANDY, set in Harlem, was one of the top-ranked OTR series for three decades. It was constantly plagued by criticism because the two actors who played most of the male Negro parts were white.

“Cleaning 32 Typewriters” was a 1953 episode. Sapphire is a secretarial pool supervisor who needs 32 typewriters sent out to the Acme Typewriter Company for cleaning and overhauling. She gives her husband Kingfish \$320 to pay the invoice if he and his friend Andy will haul the machines to Acme. He instead gives them to the Jim Dandy Typewriter Service where they promise to do it for \$150. This allows the Kingfish a windfall, which of course he won't tell Sapphire about.

Unfortunately, the company is a fly-by-night outfit with no fixed address. They disappear with the machines, leaving Kingfish and Andy frantic to find replacement typewriters. All sorts of complications develop as they chase around trying to replace 32 typewriters. Just when the two men think they've solved the problem there is a twist ending and, as usual, they are hoist on their own petard.

WHEN WORDS COLLIDE 2016

Calgary's annual readercon will be held this year on the weekend of August 12 to 14, returning to the Delta Hotel at Southland Drive SE and Bonaventure Drive. The membership cap is 650. As of June 19, they are more than 90% sold. The Steampunk Banquet is completely sold out. Details from www.whenwordscollide.org The Aurora Awards will follow after the banquet.

You can read my account of the 2015 event in OPUNTIA #318 to get an idea of the seminars and events.

ALTERNATIVE HISTORY REVIEWS

by Dale Speirs

Steampunk.

Kevin Wayne Jeter coined the word “steampunk” in the April 1987 issue of LOCUS in a letter to the editor. It caught on, and was applied to literary alternative history that had previously just been science fiction, and is now a genre in its own right.

Steampunk did not evolve in a linear fashion in the way that SF went from space opera to spotweld-that-busbar stories in ANALOG to New Wave to ten-volume fantasy trilogies. Until the early 1960s, SF fandom was mostly a single stream of fans, until they were over-run and outnumbered by Trekkies, who were the vanguard of media fans. Steampunk arose from several independent sources which, at the time and often even today, were ignorant of their cousins. Comic book fandom, costumers, and media fans each think they originated it.

In the recent past, I have met costumers who had no idea there were steampunk novels, and comic book collectors firmly convinced that they created it. Calgary is a great city for street festivals, and I invariably see steampunks parading and posing for photos.

Which brings me to THE STEAMPUNK GAZETTE (2012) by Thaddeus Tinker, an encyclopedia-style picture book. After a brief nod to SF fandom as the founders of steampunk, the book then concentrates on modern steampunk, copiously illustrated with colour photos. Steampunk is first discussed on a geographical basis. Following chapters then discuss costuming, furnishings, vehicles and tech gear, the science and nature of steampunk, art, literary works, and social events such as conventions or street festivals.

Some of it was new to me. I had no idea that there was a steampunk furniture industry, supplying wood stoves that look like locomotive boilers and, what seems to be popular, large chairs in the style of Victorian thrones. The vehicles and tech gear are not just paintings, they are actual machinery, although the steam is usually simulated with dry ice. The book is a good survey of modern steampunk, circa now.

Steampunk has more adherents who consider it from a visual point of view than as a literary one. Costumers love it, many fans think it came from comics, and

I was not surprised to see that Lego fans also got into the act. STEAMPUNK LEGO (2015) by Guy Himber is a coffee-table book whose subject is self-evident from the title. It is a full-colour portfolio of Lego steampunk machines. Each chapter covers a different aspect of steampunk technology done up as Lego block models.

It begins with steam trains that never were and should have been. Some fantastic designs, including railed battleships that go far beyond the Big Bertha cannon that the Germans used. Next up are bicycles, of which a few are penny-farthings but most are monowheels, A monowheel is a single large wheel whose rider sits inside it like a treadmill, only mobile. Some are pedaled but others are big enough to be powered by steam.

The chapter on horseless carriages quickly moves past automobiles and tanks to articulated power walkers with three, four, or six legs. The idea of mobile hamlets (you can't call them towns or cities), built on multiple giant treads, is briefly touched upon, but these gargantuan devices have limits on where they can crawl because of their weight.

From there to robots and automatons. By now, there is little new in the field after eighty years of speculation by SF writers, and the Lego sculptures are not particularly exciting. Autonomous metal bipeds, exoskeletons, and body armour pretty much sum up the field. A couple of chapters follow depicting miscellaneous items, few of which are steampunkish. The chapter on naval vessels is mostly about one-man submarines. Since the real Steam Age took warships as far as they could go with steam, there isn't much that could be innovated thereafter.

The airship section is mostly floating hamlets or aerial military bases. Some are lifted by gas bags, others by multiple large propellers. Floating rocks with single detached houses on them are shown, but they veer away from strict SF in that they rely on Cavorite to keep them airborne. The section on steam-powered spacecraft just doesn't work. Some of them are taken from Star Wars. Likewise the clockwork animals don't appeal.

I read this book at the Calgary Public Library, where strangely enough it was filed in the non-fiction section. Not worth buying unless you're a completist steampunk collector. It is suitable for a few minutes paging through the book, but not much more.

Airships.

It's not real alternative history until an airship floats by in the background. "The Long Haul, From The Annals Of Transportation, The Pacific Monthly, May 2009." (2014 November, CLARKESWORLD) by Ken Liu is an AH where the Hindenburg disaster never happened. Airships still travel the modern skies, although airplanes are widely used as well.

After the initial infodumps about the success of airships, I almost fell off my chair when I came to this paragraph: *"Below us, the vast city of Ordos, in Inner Mongolia, stretched out to the horizon ... Ordos is China's Alberta. There is coal here, some of the best, cleanest coal in the world. Ordos was planned in anticipation of an energy boom, but the construction itself became the boom."*

Pause for digression. Coal-fired generation is Alberta's major source of electricity, since we don't have much potential for hydroelectricity. Wind is expensive and solar power is not much good in winter because of the short days. The lunatic NDP (labour-socialist) provincial government imposed a carbon tax in 2016 designed to shut down the coal generators and convert Alberta to other more expensive sources. This doesn't bother me too much because I am invested in a junior pete that is starting up electrical generation plants using natural gas. What I lose on higher electricity bills for my house, I'll make back in dividends.

Meanwhile, back at the plot, such as it is, is a narration about the voyage of a Zeppelin freighter carrying cargo from southern China to Las Vegas via the Great Circle route of the northern Pacific Ocean. There are a few mild alarums such as a patch of turbulence and later some lightning, but nothing really happens. It is an extended "As you know, Professor" infodump about how the airship freighting industry would operate. An average read.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

FROM: Lloyd Penney
Etobicoke, Ontario

2016-06-29

OPUNTIA #343: [Re: Calgary Lilac Festival] There's plenty of lilacs here, but in Etobicoke there are many huge willow trees. The overhanging branches sometimes have to be trimmed, especially if they are close to the road. Otherwise, they are great for lounging underneath. They often drop fronds and whole branches, and the willow branches are good for creating handiworks. The photographs sure made the festival look good.

[Calgary is a great city for festivals, and by the time you see this, we'll all be out Stampeding.]

I often see the Car2Go cars in Toronto, but there are so many car rentals like this one everywhere. Often, they are a target for theft and break-ins.

[I'm surprised to hear that. They have spidered GPS and are carefully tracked in Calgary, according to what I read. Unless the user carelessly left something shiny and expensive on the front seat, there really isn't much that can be stolen out of them.]

Towers are everywhere here. From where we are located on Highway 427, we used to be able to see the city skyline. Not any more. Two condo towers were built beside us on the west side of the highway, three on the east side, and three more are scheduled for construction beside the existing three on the east side. I see more towers in the distance being built. Toronto is right behind Vancouver when it comes to expensive housing, so even though we have lost our view of the city, our apartment is a rental bargain. We'd like to move, but we know we'd be paying about \$300 more a month in rent if we do.

[When I bought my house in 1982, I had a view of the Rocky Mountains from my living room window. Then a business park was built along the horizon. I could still see a couple of mountains if I stood on the top step of the front steps and leaned outward at a dangerous angle while clinging to the railing, but alas, that view has now been replaced by a six-level car park in the distance.]

The letter column: I did indeed get the birthday cartoon from Teddy Harvia. He drew my likeness from my Facebook avatar. We did indeed celebrate the World Wide Party on June 21st. We had good drinks and small snacks at home (we are on a low-carb diet right now), and we did talk about absent friends like Girard and Miklis, and others who seem to have walked off the face of the earth. The good old days, and stories of our exploits, were part of our talks, too.

OPUNTIA #344: We've been hearing lots about local coyotes here, too. They have attacked small pets, and have been heard to attack small children. I've heard about herds of goats being brought in to trim some of the parks in Calgary, no doubt parks you used to maintain yourself.

[Laugh, I thought I'd die, when Calgary Parks Dept. announced they were bringing in goats as an experiment. It was tried in previous years but long before current managers were here, so there is no one left to tell them what happened last time. The goats trimmed the grass and weeds quite well, but they also covered the park in, uh, small pellets that made it a health hazard for children playing in the grass or sports leagues using the fields.]

Letter racks are such a good idea, especially since, back then, letters were about the only way to communicate, and you got few enough letters as it was. Your friends were few, and valued all the more because of it. Probably social media like Tumblr and Pinterest are popular because they actually parallel the letter rack.

Time to fold up. I am having some trouble with Windows 10 (what else is new), and now with Bell Internet and MS Outlook, failing to download email. We're getting by with Windows webmail. Still, the problems have to be fixed, Bell doesn't seem able to do so, and my computer guru in Mississauga says he can fix it. I hope he can. Take care, many thanks, see you with the next issue.

[I may have to upgrade my Samsung Galaxy S2 smartphone in the near future because some of the apps have stopped working properly. I use a 2006 laptop running Windows XP which has always been offline. I download email or pdfs on my smartphone, cable it to the laptop, and transfer them via the computer directory.]

[My fear is that the next time I upgrade my smartphone, it won't connect to the laptop. The laptop is where I prepare OPUNTIA with WordPerfect 12 and Adobe Acrobat 7, transfer the completed pdf to my smartphone, and send it as

an attachment via a partially broken Hotmail app. I can receive email on the phone via a Yahoo or Gmail app, or an Outlook Webpage, but none of them will send an email with a pdf attached. The Hotmail app won't receive email but will still send it with pdfs. I have to use the Outlook Web page to receive Hotmail email. I don't know anyone who hasn't had trouble with Windows 10. They all are operating with crippled systems and work-arounds.]

ZINE LISTINGS

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

CHRISTIAN NEW AGE QUARTERLY (US\$5 from Catherine Groves, Box 276, Clifton, New Jersey 07015-0276) Articles and letters of comment. A trip report to the Grand Canyon looks at the features in terms of vortexes and mystical experiences it can trigger in humans.

SIGNS, SIGNS, EVERYWHERE A SIGN
photos by Dale Speirs



The only sign I've ever seen in Calgary depicting an *Opuntia*. Seen in the Beltline on 17 Avenue SW.

