OPUNTIA 355

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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.

OUR ULTIMATE DESTINATION
photos by Dale Speirs

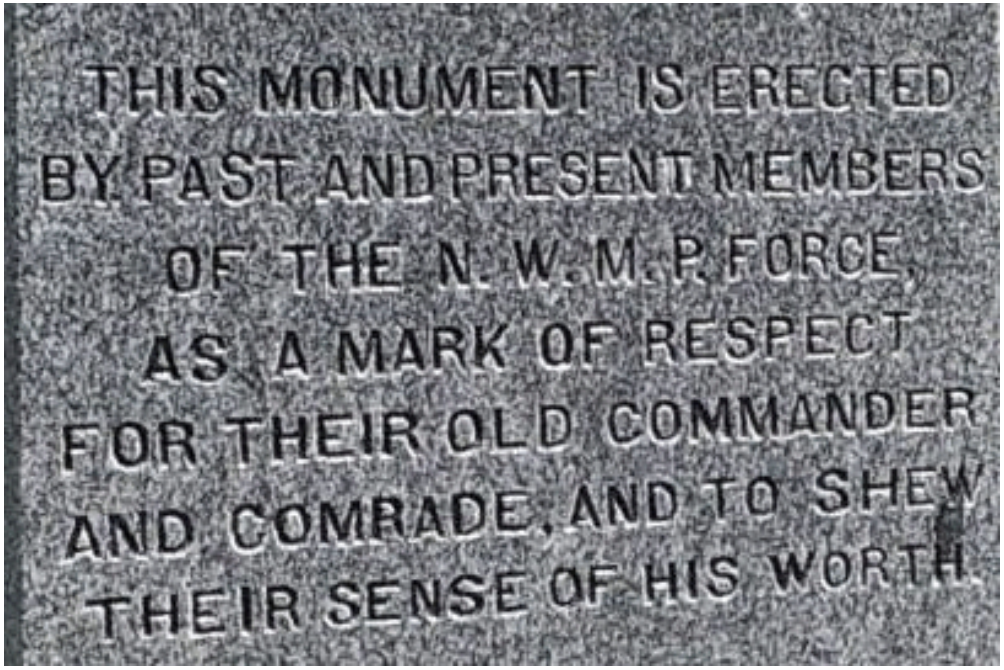
Cemetery Hill, like all graveyards, gives one pause when strolling through it. The hill is the original cemetery of the pioneers of Calgary.

The downtown core is where the pioneer settlement once was. Fort Calgary was to the right of the photo, next to the single skyscraper seen through the trees.

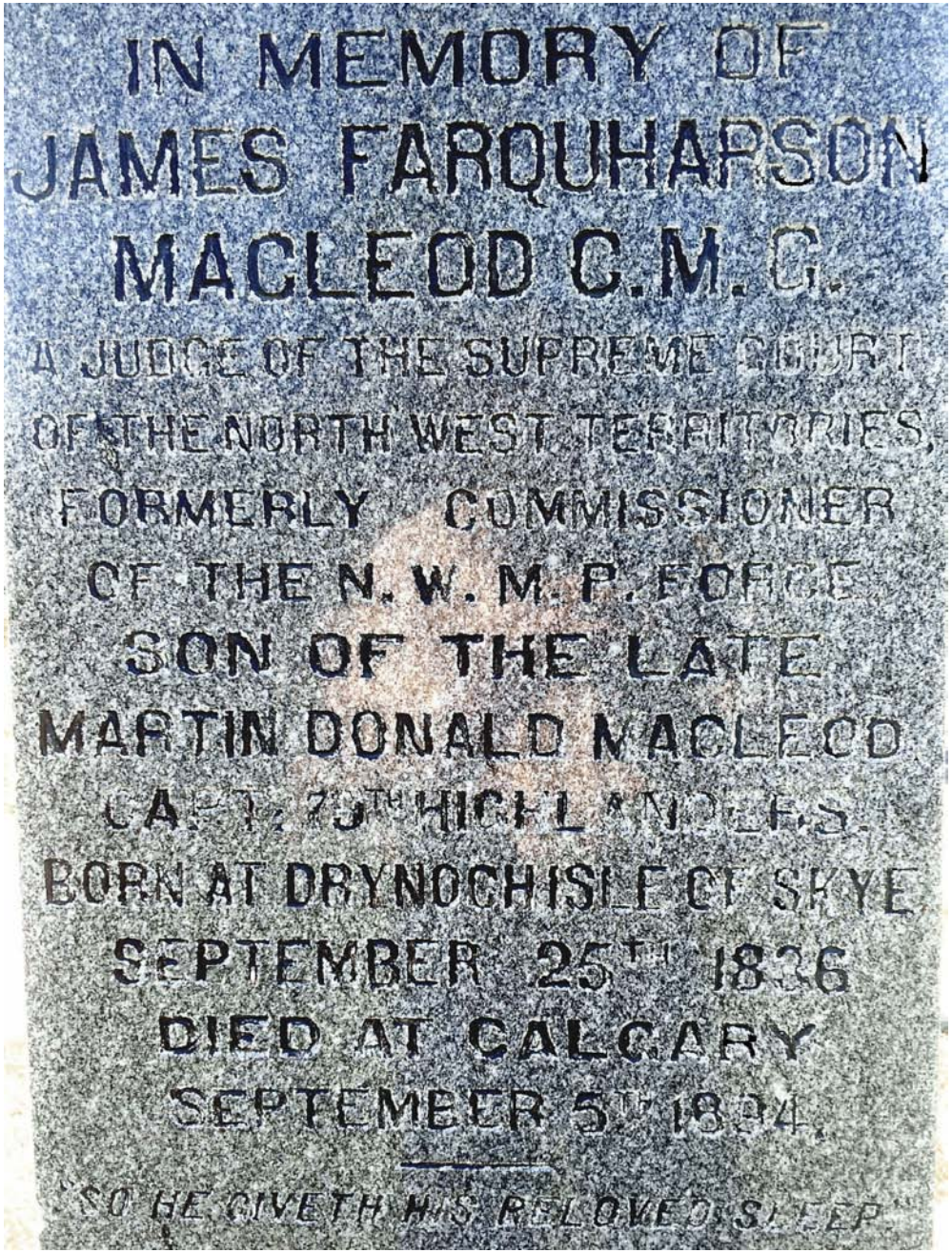
Why is a British flag flying over a Canadian cemetery? Because in 1875, when the North West Mounted Police arrived at the junction of the Bow and Elbow Rivers, Canada hadn't got around to adopting an official flag, so it used either the Union Jack or the Red Ensign. Fort Calgary was in the Northwest Territories, and the province of Alberta wasn't carved out of it until 1905.

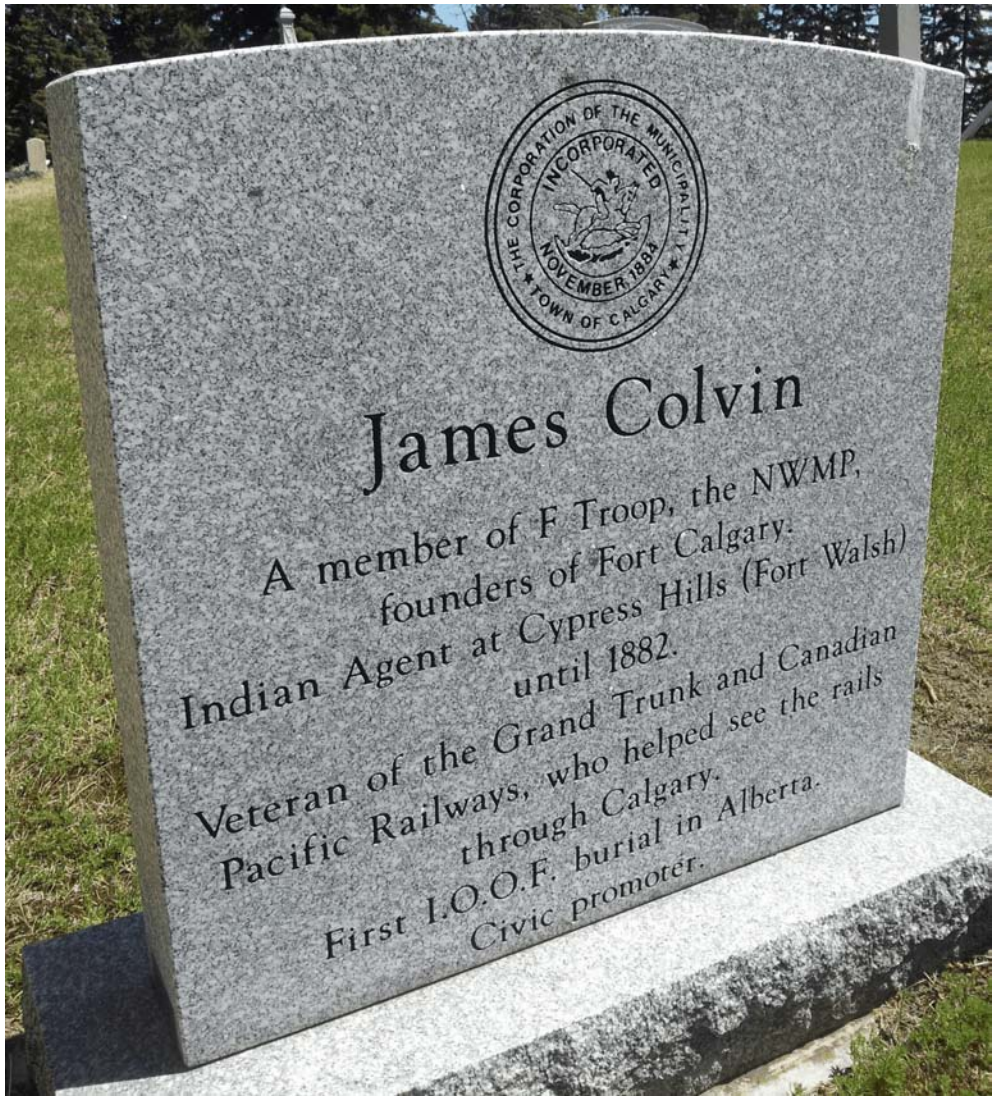
F Troop of the NWMP, Lt. Ephrem Brisebois commanding, set up the Bow Valley Post. A few days later, Brisebois renamed it Fort Brisebois. The commanding officer for what is now Alberta, Col. James Macleod, countermanded the order, and issued a letter directing the name be changed to Fort Calgary. The letter was sent north from Fort Macleod via the main road still known today as the Macleod Trail. Calgary was named after the Macleod seat on the Isle of Mull. As they say in the army, rank has its privileges. The only remembrance of the Lieutenant in Calgary today is Brisebois Drive NW, a suburban street in far northwest Calgary where he probably never set foot.

The flag marks the Macleod family graves. James is buried at the taller headstone in the foreground. Macleod Trail, now eight lanes wide, runs along the west side of Cemetery Hill, just outside the photo to the left. Below is an inscription from one side of James's tombstone.



On the other side of James's tombstone is a more weathered inscription. His men were very loyal to him, and many are buried nearby.

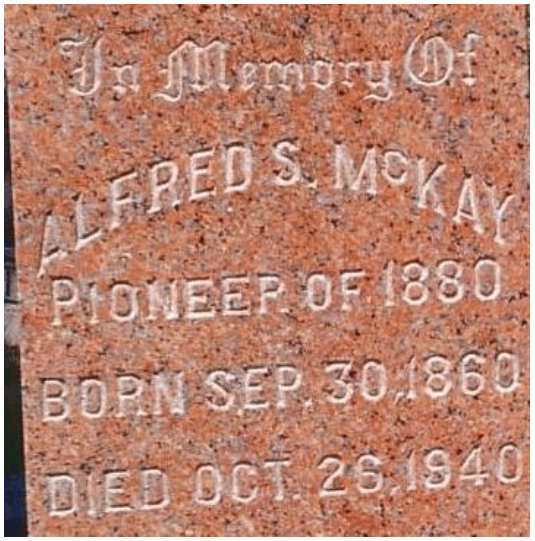




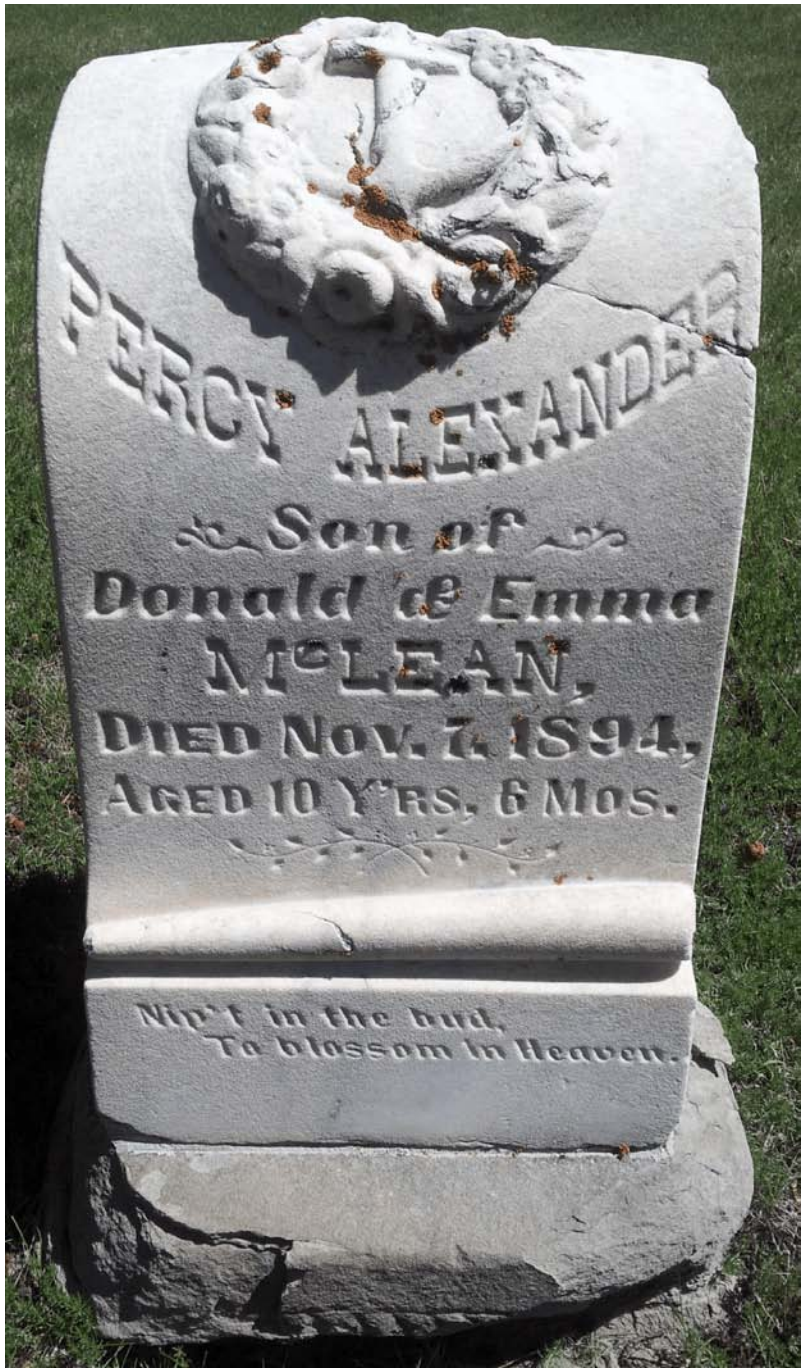
Macleod held a variety of positions in later life, rising to Commissioner of the NWMP (today the Royal Canadian Mounted Police). He was a police magistrate, then a Territorial judge, had business interests all over Alberta, and was involved in politics. Not a bad life for a poor farm boy from the Isle of Skye.

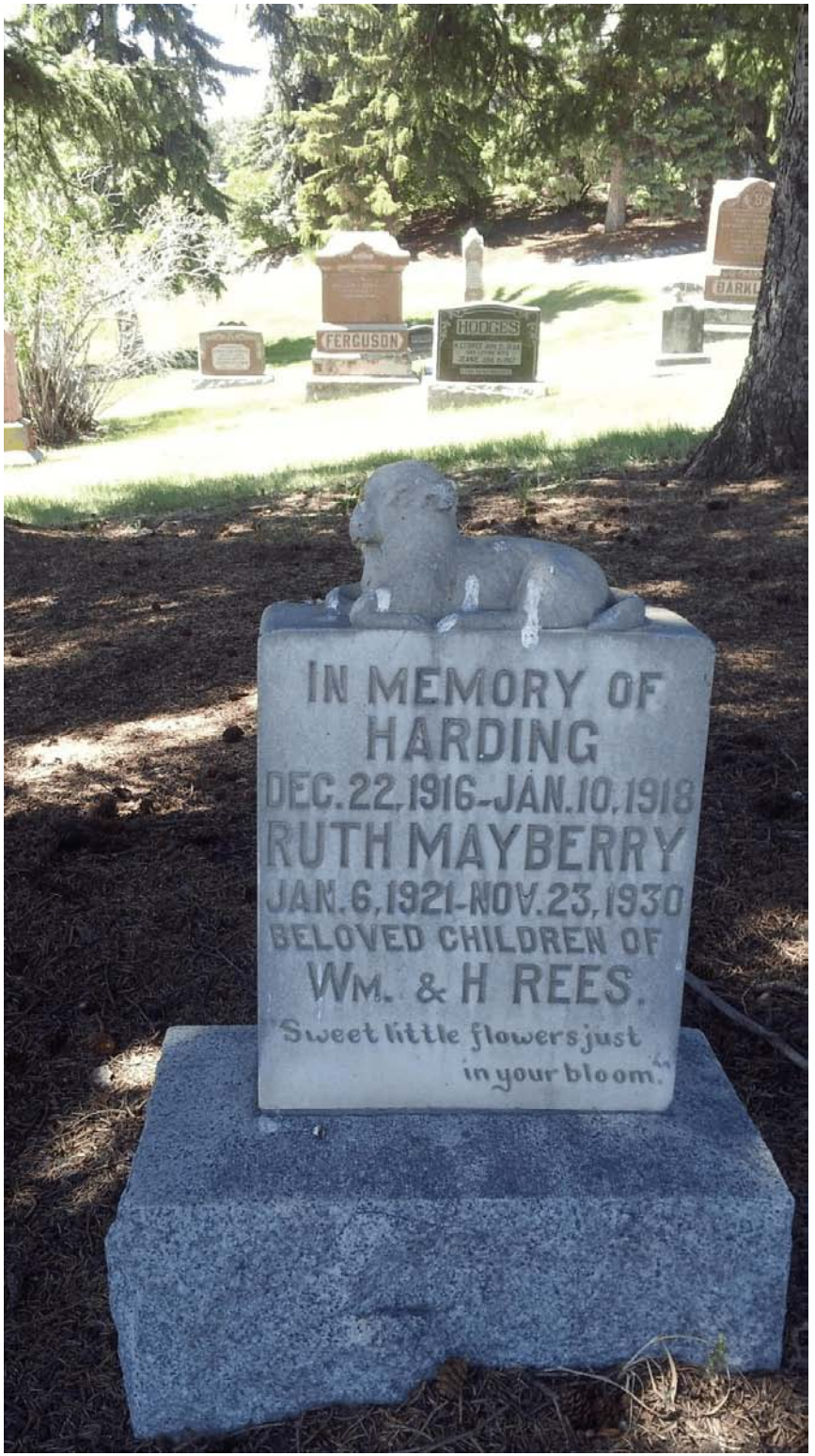
The chapel is currently a maintenance building, since memorial services nowadays are held elsewhere at a church or funeral parlour.

The railroad came through in 1883, after which the hamlet surrounding the fort boomed and became a town. Anyone in Calgary before the railroad is considered a genuine pioneer.

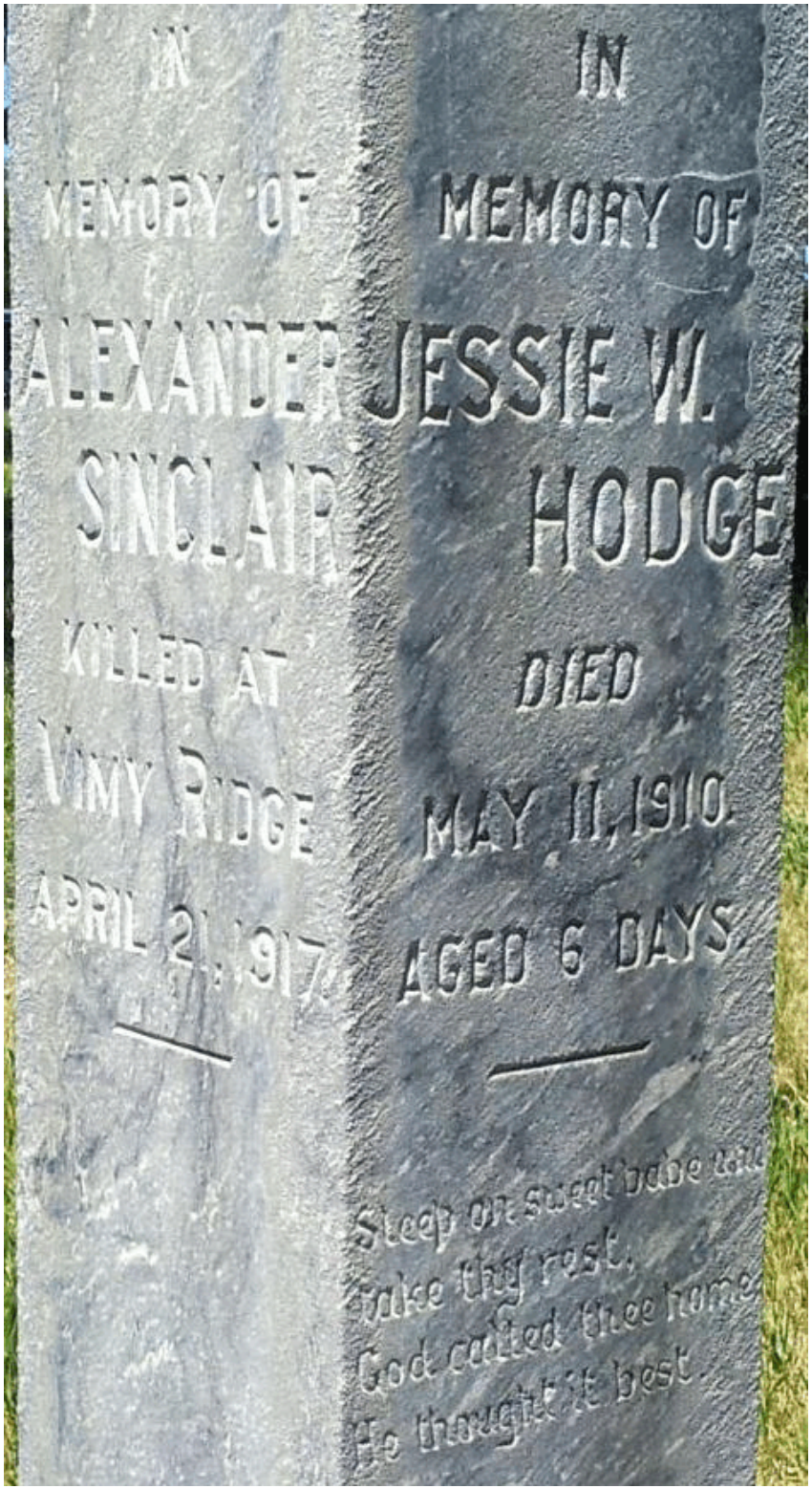


Most people know that infant mortality rates were appalling a century ago. It isn't until strolling through an old cemetery that one appreciates how much pain parents went through. The majority of graves in the older sections of Cemetery Hill are children. It was very common to signify a child's grave with a lamb.





A double blow to the Hodge family, losing a newborn child, and then a few years later a son at Vimy Ridge.



The only memorial Lt. Brisebois got was a street running from Nose Hill to Crowchild Trail. He wasn't a very good commander, and Calgary histories tend to skip over what happened afterwards. He didn't get along with his NCOs, which can make or break a commissioned officer, and once had to suppress a mutiny. He resigned his commission, and went back east to Quebec.

In 1880, he moved to Manitoba where he lived out his life. He is buried there at St. Boniface. When he died in 1890, he was long forgotten by Calgarians. It wasn't until decades later that his name was rehabilitated.

IF THE WIND COULD BLOW MY TROUBLES AWAY: PART 2
by Dale Speirs

[Part 1 appeared in OPUNTIA #326.]

Players At The Game Of God.

Is weather control desirable? Assuming, of course, that it is possible, but that is a fair suspension of disbelief for SF stories.

"Summer Snow Storm" by Adam Chase (1956 October, AMAZING) reverses cause and effect when it is discovered that there is a good reason for weather forecaster Johnny Sloman's 100% accurate forecasts. He isn't predicting; he is creating the weather. This isn't discovered until he comes to work drunk after his fiancee dumped him, and then predicted snow across the USA on July 25.

Such a bizarre forecast coming true produces the realization that he has mental control over the weather and can make the atmosphere do what he wants. After making a fortune by catering to farmers who need rain and festival organizers who want bright sunshine, he is kidnapped by Soviet agents who try to bend him to their way of life. They find out the hard way what happens to coerced supermen when he makes it rain ceaselessly over the USSR and floods it into collapse.

"Rain, Rain, Go Away" by James A. Cox (1962 June, FANTASTIC) is based on a more traditional form of weather control, using technology. An inventor has developed a machine that can control local weather precisely, as in rain at exactly 05h00 and ending at exactly 07h35, or snow on the north bank of a river but not the south bank. In a fit of idealism and stupidity, he gives the plans to the American federal government. The Feds erect hundreds of the machines across the country. The problem they quickly run into is that no one can agree on what kind of weather a city should have or when.

Congress is kept busy changing weather prescriptions back and forth. Chaos results. Rain is good for farmers but not so for golfers. Having it only in the small hours of the morning everywhere may satisfy both factions but all that rain at once has to drain somewhere. It doesn't all soak into the fields, so floods result downstream. Skiers want lots of snow, but that snow will melt come spring. If the weather is uniform, it can actually be boring enough to anger citizens who don't mind the occasional variety in a day. Tornados and hurricanes are essential to redistribute heat from warm to cold areas, but what happens when they are done away with? The inventor decides to nullify his invention with his secret master control device, but accidently triggers endless rain before blowing it up and causing a Noah's flood over the Earth.

It's Written In The Wind.

"Ill Wind" by Glen Bever (1976, GALILEO #2) is about Jake Bardahl, a man sent to a tornado planet to test a new pup tent in field conditions and to film video of it surviving a direct hit with him inside it, all the better to convince potential customers to buy the thing. The tent is controlled by a microchip that snaps it open from a small pouch and makes rigid enough to survive any impact short of an artillery shell.

The first test is a success and takes the full impact of a tornado with no harm to Bardahl. He gets out afterward to survey the terrain and wanders away for a moment. Too late, he learns that a cloud can send down more than one tornado within a few minutes. He realizes he won't make it back to the tent in time but manages to run off to the side of the second tornado. After it passes, he eventually locates the tent, or what is left of it, and realizes that had he stayed in it, he would have been killed. This is basically an ANALOG-type story, although no one spotwelds any busbars.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation hoards its backlist of radio shows and it is difficult to find mp3s of its works. I did get one from the drama anthology series NIGHTFALL, which ran in the early 1980s on CBC Radio 2. "Weather Station Four" is a 1983-01-14 episode written by Arthur Samuels about two meteorologists trapped in the Arctic by an endless blizzard. Supplies are running low, and the men are constantly bickering. The plot is cliched and one can guess it ten minutes in advance.

The narrator is a weak-willed wimp, and the listener wonders how he ever passed the initial psych exam. Then and now, any white folk going up to a remote weather station would have been tested at least somewhat. He begins to have conversations with a woman on the shortwave radio, but is she real or an hallucination? His partner tries to talk him back to reality, but makes the mistake of saying "*You haven't got the guts to use that gun.*"

The rest of the plot seems obvious as the female voice then lures the narrator out into the blizzard. When the re-supply plane arrives after the storm abates, only

the sled dog is still alive. Crisp acting and good sound quality, but a tired and emotional script.

SLIPSTREAM (1989) is a movie that seemed to have promise but instead faded away into boredom. It was filmed on location in Turkey instead of the usual southern California hills, and had good production values. There were big-name actors and a big budget. What it didn't have was a good script and storyline.

The premise, as pompously announced in a voice-over narration, was that because humans didn't recycle or stop using underarm deodorant spray, this somehow caused jet streams to descend to Earth's surface and scour it clean. The cities were destroyed by supersonic winds, and humanity reduced to enclaves hunkered down in deep canyons where the winds didn't reach.

The slipstream appeared and disappeared in the movie according to the needs of the plot. When needed, it howled like a demon, and anyone putting their head up over the escarpment was blown about like tissue paper. However, the lead characters did a lot of flying in a light single-engine aircraft, which seemed to have no difficulty zooming about. The plane also had a remarkable range for what little fuel it could have carried.

The movie was about rival bounty hunters chasing an android that murdered its master. One pair of bounty hunters, the ones with the small plane, caught him by running him down with the plane as he ran across open spaces in a straight line. The prey deserved to be caught, given how he ignored crevices and pinnacles that would have stymied the aircraft. On the journey back, with the android sitting in the back seat, the bounty hunters meet various tribes living in the canyons. Another bounty hunter tries to highjack the prisoner, as the reward offered for him was huge enough to make the effort worthwhile.

The problem with the movie was that the plot and characters were boring. Not much emotion, a plot you could see coming five minutes ahead of time, and obvious items on a list to be checked off by the characters. To be fair to the actor who played the android, it was a requirement for him to be emotionless. The best that the others could do was to occasionally work themselves into a concerned-looking face when required.

The orchestral music churns itself into a crescendo as the aircraft puttered along, but nothing ever happened. The plane kept puttering and the music kept hitting triumphal notes. The plane banked left or right from time to time, as if to justify the music. When the plane landed, it was never tied down with straps against the wind, but that was because the jet streams disappeared before, during, and after landings.

On land, that is, down on the terraces and bottomlands of the valleys, there were long-lense shots of characters trudging, sometimes running, over the landscape. Many, many such shots, which presumably were used to pad the movie as they could not have served any other useful purpose. This is a movie suited for a drinking game. Take one gulp of vodka every time the plane banks and turns but does nothing else. Another swallow for each jump cut to a character walking across the bottomlands in a straight line for no apparent reason.

Wikipedia advises that this movie bankrupted the producer, so at least some good came of it, as he wouldn't be able to re-offend. The copyright went into the public domain, which is how I was able to view it as one of those fifty-movies for $10 bargain bin sets.

THE MAN FROM MONTENEGRO: PART 14
by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 13 appeared in OPUNTIAs #252, 253, 275, 278, 279, 289, 304, 307, 319, 332, 335, 337, and 344.]

REX STOUT DOES NOT BELONG IN RUSSIA (2016) by Molly Jane Levine Zuckerman is a heavily-footnoted academic treatise based on her thesis. It is, however, quite readable, with no major lapses into jargon. She is a student of Russian studies. The book had its genesis when she was browsing in a Moscow bookstore and came across a Russian-language edition of a Nero Wolfe novel.

The book begins with a general summary of the detective genre and in particular the Nero Wolfe novels, both in relation to the history of the Soviet Union and post-1991 Russia. Zuckerman quotes extensively from Russian mystery fans of the post-Soviet era. Rex Stout is the best selling American author in Russian translation, which seems paradoxical in light of his staunch anti-Communism and pro-capitalism.

Rex Stout was a strong anti-German critic during World War Two, and the remainder of his life was an equally outspoken anti-Communist. He was also vocal against Senator Joseph McCarthy and the FBI, both of whom he considered as threats to democracy. Stout was definitely a capitalist. He made his initial fortune not from writing but from banking. He then retired at an early age to an estate in rural Connecticut to write the Wolfe stories, which made him a second fortune.

In the Soviet era, the ideology was that there would eventually be no crime under advanced Communism. Stalin banned detective novels, and it wasn't until the late 1960s that foreign mystery books could be published. Even then, translators had to be careful. As late as the 1990s, it was unsafe to mention the Gulag Archipelago, so where Stout mentioned Russian labour camps, translators changed it to Polish labour camps.

Zuckerman takes a detailed look at several Wolfe stories that are strongly anti-Communist. The novel THE SECOND CONFESSION, and the novellas "Home To Roost" and "The Cop Killer" deal explicitly with Communist supporters in New York City. In the novel THE BLACK MOUNTAIN, Wolfe returns to his birthplace in Montenegro to investigate the death of a close friend, and, later, the death of Wolfe's daughter. In the process, he becomes mixed up in the anti-Communist underground of what was then Yugoslavia.

Modern-day Russian mystery fans have some criticisms of these books that are not what one would expect. The books deal with the American Communist Party, not Soviet Russia, so the criticism was not taken personally but rather as an indication that the ACP needed stronger guidance from Mother Russia. The fans also sneered at "The Cop Killer", which depicted Gulag refugees as weak-willed cowards, when the Russians knew that to escape from their country required strong presence of mind and courage.

Most of the Wolfe stories were verboten during the Stalinist era because they depicted a fat rich man indulging himself with gluttony and orchids, instead of being a man of the proletariat. After Stalin, censors began to relax slowly, and Wolfe stories appeared in Russian translation.

The first two widely published novels were THE DOORBELL RANG and A RIGHT TO DIE. The first was an explicit criticism of the FBI and how it operated under Hoover in the early 1960s. The latter book dealt with racism and mixed marriages in America at a time when it was physically dangerous for a black man to court a white woman. For obvious reasons, these two books passed muster with Soviet censors.

Zuckerman read through criticism of the Wolfe novels in the original Russian. Like large bureaucracies everywhere, the left hand of the Soviet Union did not always know what the right hand was doing. At the same time that Moscow critics were denouncing other Wolfe stories as capitalistic propaganda, state-subsidized fiction magazines were publishing those very works repeatedly.

THE DOORBELL RANG, a polemic against the FBI, was popular in part because no Russian dared criticize the KGB, certainly not in print, so the analogy could easily be drawn. It would have meant a quick trip to the Gulag had anyone written such a novel about the KGB. The censors, out of touch as they usually were, allowed the book because they thought it was simply a criticism, not thinking about how the readers would take it as an analogy with the KGB.

There was also the contradiction that Stout was known in Russia as a virulent anti-Communist, yet the criticism was confined to the Wolfe stories in themselves, with no reference to the author. Stout did not receive royalties from the Russian translations. He wasn't bothered because he didn't need the money and, more importantly, it gave him satisfaction that his ideas were influencing Russians.

By the late 1980s as the Soviet Union began to crumble, the flood gates opened at the publishing agencies. Foreign detective novels were printed in huge quantities to keep the publishers solvent, since they were no longer subsidized by the bankrupt USSR. The demand for detective novels was greater than the supply. When the ruble collapsed, the books became valuable items of barter.

When the boom in Wolfe translations began in the early 2000s, difficulties were experienced due to the frequent references to types of food the Russians had no experience with. The vast majority of food items were unknown, not just the exotic dishes but simple ingredients such as Parmesan cheese. Many translations included a cookbook or a glossary to help the reader understand.

Some very bad television shows of Wolfe were done in Russia, and the Russian fans scorned them. How bad? One series showed Wolfe's Manhattan brownstone not only with a driveway but adjacent to a large natural forest.

STEPHEN LEACOCK: PART 5
by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 4 appeared in OPUNTIAs #64.1A, 351, 352, and 354.]

Random Miscellanies.

ESSAYS AND LITERARY STUDIES (1916) starts off with a consideration of the university professor, which Leacock was for much of his life. He was concerned, in 1916, that universities were job factories, not places of higher learning as they should have been. So you see, there is no new thing. Professors should be the type who wanted to teach, and students should be there thirsting for knowledge, not jumping hurdles to get a piece of paper.

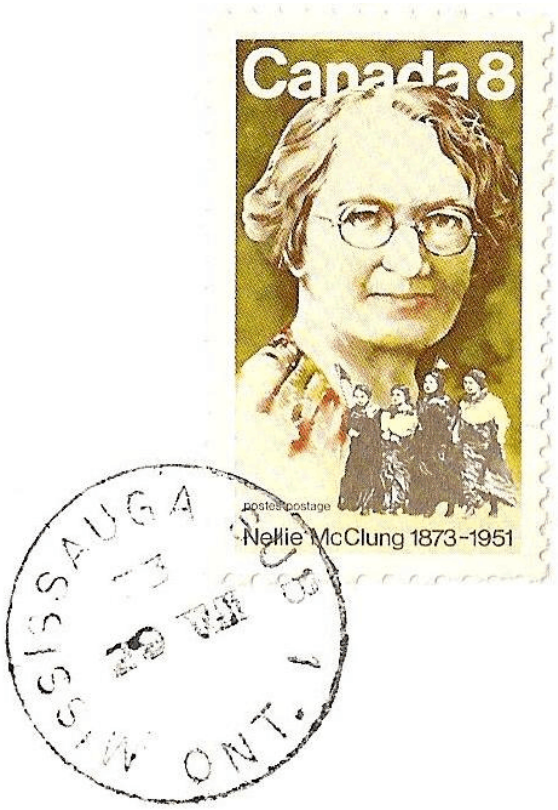
While I am sympathetic to Leacock, I have mixed feelings. I got a B.Sc. in Horticulture from the University of Alberta, which enabled me to have a long career in that profession. At the same time though, I spent many hours browsing in the library reading books that had nothing to do with my career.

When I moved to Calgary in 1978 after graduation, I began a habit that I have continued to this day, visiting the University of Calgary Library once a week to browse through current periodicals, not just on horticulture but on a wide variety of subjects that had nothing to do with horticulture. A university education, properly received, can instill such habits. Granted, the majority of students do not do this. For them the paper chase is just another line item for their resume. But it is not as bad as Leacock suggested. Some of us did appreciate the opportunity to widen our horizons. Especially farm boys like me.

"The Devil And The Deep Sea" is about the shift in theology back then to do away with the Devil, or at least modify him into something less fearful. Hell was no longer considered an actual place of flames and endless pain, but an afterlife of moral torment. Well, that's alright then; we can all be complacent in the face of moral qualms, as opposed to something that really hurts, ow, ow, ow, for all eternity.

G.K. Chesterton once remarked that if people no longer believe in God, the result is not that they no longer believe in anything, but rather they will believe in anything. Leacock makes this point as well, for the occult and other nonsense beliefs were surging in his day. People were willing to believe in anything. It hasn't changed much in our time. We have the UFO nuts, the vaxxers, and just about any newsworthy event will generate its quota of conspiracy theorists.

The next three essays are about higher education, humour, and suffrage in North America. In the first, Leacock is writing of the humanities in universities, where increasing specialization was the trend even then. A scholar might know everything about an obscure Greek poet, right down to what types of verbs he used and how often, but be ignorant of sociology and history. Leacock felt that the humanities should be a broad education, not an imitation of the sciences where everyone specializes. Regarding humour, he concludes that it rests on incongruities. I'm sure it does.



As for the woman question, 1916 was the year that women on the Canadian prairies got the vote. The suffragists were led by Nellie McClung, a Calgarian, whose house in Cowtown is preserved today as an historic site. The rest of the country didn't follow until several years later. (Leacock was an easterner.)

His essay will get any modern woman foaming at the mouth by the third page. Women can't do men's work, he writes. They are no good in business, and haven't got enough to occupy their minds as a wife because of all those modern labour-saving devices such as washing machines. They should be down at the creek, beating clothes clean in the water and gossiping with other wives. I'm almost tempted to post it online somewhere just for the fun of it.

"The Lot Of The Schoolmaster" is a bitter piece, based on the years that Leacock was a schoolteacher in rural schools before going back to university

and thence to academia. There were no labour unions in his days of teaching in the 1800s. Teachers were in surplus, and school trustees paid a pittance to young men and women who had to take it and like it. Leacock's main proposal was better pay and working conditions, which finally came true fifty years later in the 1960s.

My mother was a schoolteacher in the late 1940s until her marriage in 1952, when she had to quit because married women were not allowed to teach. She taught at a rural west-central Alberta school where she had to open up a one-room school each morning, light the furnace, sweep and wash the classroom as required while the building was heating up, teach her class of students from Grades 1 to 12, and clean up again before going home in the evening. Leacock did much the same in the late 1800s in rural Ontario. Teachers today who think they have a hard life should read this essay.

The next section of this book is titled "Fiction And Reality". It starts off with a pastiche of Charles Dickens's stories, a mash-up if you will. You have to be a Dickens fan to appreciate it, which I'm not.

Leacock then discusses the short stories of O. Henry and the differing impact of them on British and North American audiences. The former hadn't heard of him but he was popular among the latter. Leacock was off his mark when he wrote that the British preferred high culture rather the low-brow entertainment of the colonists. He was ignoring the music halls and penny papers of Britain.

Leacock looked forward to the day when O. Henry would be marked as one of the greatest writers of all time. This was a fanboy talking, even if he was a university professor. The stories are good but because they invariably rely on a twist ending which surprises only once, they have kept O. Henry in the midlist of posterity.

The final essay is "A Rehabilitation Of Charles II". This is a strange topic for an essay, as Leacock is well aware, and he begins it with an apology for thinking kindly of Charles II. The main reason for Leacock's sympathy is the King's sense of humour, which Leacock discusses at length.

Charles's quips include the remark that he was the most secure man in Britain because no one would kill him knowing that his brother James would then become King. Charles was the more intelligent and competent of the two, albeit lazier and more fun-loving. It was said of the two brothers that Charles could if he would, and James would if he could. Even on his deathbed, Charles jokingly apologized for taking such a long time to die.

Leacock emphasizes that Charles II had to walk a tightrope between the Royalists, who didn't understand that things couldn't go back to the way they were, and the Puritans, who were defeated but still active. If the pigheaded James had first succeeded to the throne, England would have become a republic again. Charles was not a free man to act in the manner of his father.

When James finally did succeed three decades later after tempers had died down somewhat, his stupidity cost him the throne a few years later, although he was replaced by another monarch (two of them, actually) instead of a republic.

Leacock was out of his depth in writing serious essays, and few of his opinions and beliefs have survived among the populace today. His humour is less of a time and more universal. Had Leacock only written of his specialty, political economics, he would today be completely forgotten.

Collections.

Leacock was an economist with an eye to the main chance, and his books were no different than his investment forays. Every so often a collection of his short pieces would be issued, and after several of them had come and gone, some of the stories would be recycled from one book to another. This sort of thing would never happen in SF or mystery collections, of course.

LITERARY LAPSES was Leacock's first book, published in 1910, allowing him to make the step from a short story writer to a book author. To pick a representative story, Leacock calls out the poets that were plaguing society in his day, in a piece titled "The Poet Answered". To the poet who nostalgically wonders where the friends and youth of yesteryear have gone, Leacock tersely reminds him that those who are not in jail are probably still there in the village. To the man who babbles "*Give me not silk, nor rich attire, nor gold, nor jewels rare*.", Leacock points out that he can wear factory cotton. When a poet asks: "*Why was I born? Why should I breathe?*", we are unanimous with Leacock that the poet shouldn't breathe.

"Winter Pastimes" is one that every Canuck can relate to, namely what to do on a day when it is too cold to go outside. The modern answer is to watch television, but that didn't show up until 35 years after this book was published.

Leacock proposes Indoor Football, where family members can work off their anger on each other. If some of the furniture is damaged, then what of it?

"Helping The Armenians" points out a truth that is still exists, namely that most of the funds donated to charity don't make it to the intended victims. A lot of it sticks along the way for operational expenses, and the people running the charity. Good intentions, the road to Hell, etcetera.

WINNOWED WISDOM (1926) has more optimistic stories than other post-WW1 books of Leacock's, presumably because he was getting over his depressed feelings of the postwar period. To pick an example, "The Crossword Puzzle Craze" should be mandatory reading for Pokemon Go fanatics. In Leacock's time, crossword puzzles were a full-blown mania. He didn't object to it per se, on the grounds that people who did the puzzles improved their vocabulary. The commoner learned new words such as eke, farrago, yost, withers, and carapace. The problem was that too many people were talking about nothing else at work or social gatherings.

"Our Summer Convention" is narrated by a man who deals in peanuts. The national association of peanut men have their convention at a mountain resort. The narrator reports that there was an excellent programme with lots of good speakers, at least that's what someone told him, because he went out fishing with some friends. The banquet and keynote speech apparently were a success, but the narrator was elsewhere. All told, a wonderful convention, even if he didn't do any more at it than to stop in and pick up his name badge. This sort of thing would never happen at an SF convention, of course. What SF fan wants to drink in the bar when he could instead be attending a panel?

LAUGH WITH LEACOCK (1930) is a compilation of short pieces Leacock published between 1913 and the 1930s. I'll just pick out one piece to review. "Oxford As I See It" is a comparison of universities between Ye Olde England and North America, written in an ironic tone. He compares the antiquated old buildings of Oxford University with the modern ones in Canada, noting that roasting whole oxen in ovens of the former to feed students obviously cannot compare with institutional cafeterias doling out mystery meats and slices of processed cheese. Leacock is then sidetracked for too many pages by the subject of female students and why co-education is a bad thing on both sides of the Atlantic. He gets back on track by noting that Oxford tolerated more eccentricity in its professors than the industrial universities of our side.

Where I agree with Leacock, based on my experiences living in student residences when I was at the University of Alberta, is that the main part of learning should take place outside the classrooms. He writes that if he were to found a university, he would first build a common room, then dormitories, and next a library. If he had money left over, he might hire a few professors and build some classrooms. The best part of university is the coming together of students from around the world and from different walks of life, with perhaps a few professors to guide them a bit.

MODEL MEMOIRS (1938) collects stories and radio plays not previously in a volume. Leacock kept up with the times in one respect, and had sold a number of radio scripts. For this volume, he re-wrote them as short stories, albeit with some italicized interlineations as stage directions.

One short story that fits SF fandom is "The Dissolution Of Our Dinner Club", which describes the birth, decline, and fall of not only the dinner club Leacock was involved with but many SF clubs over the past eighty years. It started with a burst of enthusiasm and grandiose ideas. Then, after a while, the workload drags people down, and the faint-hearted leave. Finally only the stalwarts are left, and when they become tired, the club collapses. Those who once were members reminisce later about the good times, prompting someone to try it again and loop through the next cycle.

LAUGH PARADE (1940) is another collection of older pieces, some of them previously compiled in other books. A few of them could be reprinted today and still find popularity. "Frenzied Fiction" is a look at detective fiction in which Leacock dissects all the cliches of that genre. The main characters are the Great Detective and his faithful companion the Poor Nut, who has to have everything explained to him. The novel was padded out with side trips and false leads. This was in the days before word processors, remember. Eventually someone has to go to jail.

A good author would spin that out by staging a J'accuse! meeting, often in a manor house drawing room. The Great Detective goes on at great length (if the author is indeed good) about each suspect and his/her minute-by-minute movements. The culprit was sometimes given an out by suddenly developing a fatal disease before he could be hanged, but that was cheating.

The Great Detective would often bring in a criminal mastermind no one had ever heard of before, a good poke at Sir Arthur and his sudden invention of

Professor Moriarty. Others are brought to justice because they can't keep their mouths shut and burst out "*Yes! I did it! And I'd gladly do it again.*" Had they remained silent, the case would have been tossed because the Great Detective did not adhere to rules of evidence, chain of custody, and search warrants.

Leacock earned a lot of money on the lecture circuit, and his essay "We Have With Us Tonight" is a compendium of painful experiences. The audience won't come out because of bad weather, and it won't come out because of good weather. Sometimes the people on the stage outnumbered the audience. (Seems like any panel at an SF convention about fanzines.) Then there is the chairman who introduces the speaker with a long boring speech, or, worse yet, a better speech than the one the lecturer is to give. Leacock was a humourist, so he recalls the time when he had to give a funny talk from the pulpit of a church, the one place where we are all are conditioned from youth not to laugh.

LAST LEAVES (1945) is a post-mortem collection of Leacock's final stories and essays. The foreword has personal reminisces by his niece Barbara Nimmo, who was his secretary until her marriage. The stories and essays are mostly average but a few stand out. Leacock went over old ground in some of them, such as why the British Empire should carry on, but he was astute enough to realize he had lost that debate and the younger generation of Canadians had no emotional ties to Britain the way his did (Leacock was born in 1869).

"This Business Of Prophecy" addresses an issue that can be summed up in what I propose should be known as Leacock's Law: Never make predictions that will come due during your lifetime. Always set them safely for the distant future after you are dead and gone. By then, your predictions will probably be forgotten, or if not, you will be beyond any embarrassment. I've made this mistake myself, and Leacock tells of how he did so with three decades of students he taught in university.

Two essays on Leacock's specialty of political economics are "Gold" and "Can We Beat Inflation?". In his time, the world was on the gold standard, which forced discipline on government spending. This was and still is unpopular with both politicians and the voting public. The gold standard was done away with in 1971 and will never return. The general public cannot and will not understand that inflation is a hidden tax caused by the central banks, and instead blame businesses and landlords for raising prices and rents. A lost cause for both essays, which Leacock probably realized privately but felt the need to carry on the fight.

HAPPY STORIES (1943) was published a year before Leacock's death. It is a collection of short stories and a few novellas. The stories are average, although "Mr McCoy Sails For Fiji" is funnier than most. It is about the narrator, Leacock *en locus*, meeting an old schoolmate when both are middle-aged men. McCoy, a Scottish-Canadian entrepreneur, is vague about how he made his alleged fortune, and spins several yarns about his life. He departs suddenly when he notices two men approaching with whom he would rather not renew acquaintances. It turns out that McCoy method of garnering riches is to run up debts, convert to cash, and skip town before his creditors are aware of his hasty departure. Today we still meet those kinds of men, usually executives of junior mining companies or real estate developers.

In OPUNTIA #64.1, I reviewed MY REMARKABLE UNCLE, Leacock's true story of his uncle who was always seeking quick riches but never finding them. He homesteaded in Manitoba when it and he were young in the 1880s, but that was too much like work. He drifted from scheme to scheme, never succeeding. Leacock, in HAPPY STORIES, has a novella "Boom Times" which is a rewrite about his uncle, only this time as fiction, with names barely changed, and many sentences lifted whole from the book. I'll be generous and say that Leacock was tired and near death, desperately trying to earn enough money for his crippled son's trust fund.

Also in #64.1 of OPUNTIA was a review of Leacock's greatest work and one that has withstood the test of time, SUNSHINE SKETCHES OF A LITTLE TOWN. Leacock wrote a sequel for the collection here titled "Mariposa Moves On", about the town and its efforts to reach a target for the Victory Loan of World War Two. They are striving hard because a mad Scotsman has threatened to blast assorted citizens with his shotgun if they don't. Where are the police, you might ask? This was in rural Ontario, where the Mounties are far away and disputes generally settled by private means. Leacock writes it as humour and makes it work. It is too topical though. Modern readers would have to have it explained to them what a Victory Loan was.

THIS JUST IN FROM JAPAN
by Dale Speirs

In OPUNTIA #350, I reported on the visit of Japanese mail artist Ryosuke Cohen to Calgary in early August. While he was here, he sketched many of us for his silhouette art.

On September 26, I received a cardboard tube containing my silhouette. I have framed it and it will occupy a place of honour in my den.

COWTOWN THANKSGIVING

Calgary had a wet summer, which is why you didn't see too many mountain views in the OPUNTIA issues for this summer. No big rainfalls, just day after day of afternoon and evening showers. My garden did very well this year.

The sunflowers were still in full bloom when the first snowfall came along on October 7, three days before Thanksgiving, although it soon melted off. The black seeds of the flower heads caught the snow, as seen at right.