

OPUNTIA 390

Early September 2017

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.

Personalized stamps showing Dale Speirs in Banff National Park. Behind him is Crowfoot Glacier. To the right of his shoulder you can see a bit of Bow Lake, source of the Bow River that flows through Calgary.

STAMPING AROUND COWTOWN

by Dale Speirs

Prelude: Comparative Avocational Subcultures.

Robert Runté was an Alberta science fiction fan for many years in the 1970s to 1980s before becoming Professor of Sociology at the University of Lethbridge and, on the side, an editor and publisher of the Tesseract line of SF books. He liked to refer to hobbies as avocational subcultures because he knew it sounded better to his stuffier university colleagues.

Although I've been in zinedom for mumble-mumble years, and have attended many science fiction conventions, I have never joined any local SF club or volunteered for an SF convention. The reason is that I am very heavily involved in my local stamp club, the Calgary Philatelic Society (www.calgaryphilatelicsociety.com).

The differences between philately and SF fandom are interesting. Herewith is a bit of comparison between the two hobbies.



I have edited the CPS bulletin, the CALGARY PHILATELIST, since 1983, and have held numerous positions on its Show Committee. For me, going to an SF convention is my chance to relax and let others do the work. For stamp shows, I help out with set-up and teardown of bourse tables and exhibit frames, and many miscellaneous duties. In the months leading up to the show, I prepare the show catalogue. I usually have an exhibit in the shows.

Prelude: An Explanation.

The CPS has an annual show called CALTAPEX, held every October on the weekend after Thanksgiving. Excepting, however, that approximately every five years we host a national stamp show. Sometimes it is the annual convention of the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada (RPSC, www.rpsc.org), the most recent one being Royal 2006 Royale.

The other national convention we have hosted is BNAPEX, of the British North America Philatelic Society (BNAPS, www.bnaps.org). BNAPS is a trans-national society of Americans and Canadians interested in the postage stamps and postal history of BNA. It has numerous regional groups which meet on their own, one of which has operated in Calgary since 1956.

We last had BNAPEX in 2012 and agreed to host it in 2017. I produced the show catalogue in 2012, which is still available as a free pdf from www.bnaps.org/bnapex2012/index.htm That year was the centennial of the Calgary Stampede rodeo, for which two postage stamps were issued, so the catalogue has a lot of material in it about the history of Cowtown.

BNAPEX 2017 was a national stamp show held on the Labour Day weekend from September 1 to 3 in downtown Calgary. Let me tell you a bit about as an example of a comparative avocational subculture. The official title of the show was BNAPEX 2017 CALTAPEX, but I will abbreviate it in this report. There were two sets of judges for the show, one from BNAPS taking care of the BNA exhibits, and the other judging non-BNA entries.

BNAPEX 2017 was originally scheduled for Ottawa, since 2017 is the 150th anniversary of Confederation. The show chairman was geriatric, in poor health, and did not meet deadlines. Making matters worse was the fact that Ottawa would be a very busy place in 2017 because of all the major celebrations being hosted there. No hotel had been booked as of early 2016, and by then it was too

late. The BNAPS National Executive took the show away from Ottawa and began casting about for a replacement venue.

Calgary philatelists have a reputation for putting on good conventions. BNAPEX 2012 was considered a tremendous success, so BNAPS asked us to host the event. The Calgary Regional Group of BNAPS and the CPS got together and agreed to co-host the event. Since there is an 80% overlap between the executives of the two groups, and since they have co-hosted all the previous national conventions, it wasn't too difficult to reach a decision.

As part of advance publicity, sheets of obsolete precancel Canadian stamps were overprinted by running them through a computer to produce fund-raising souvenirs. It is illegal to deface Canadian coins but there is no law against privately overprinting stamps as long as no fraud is intended.



Digression: BNA Stuff.

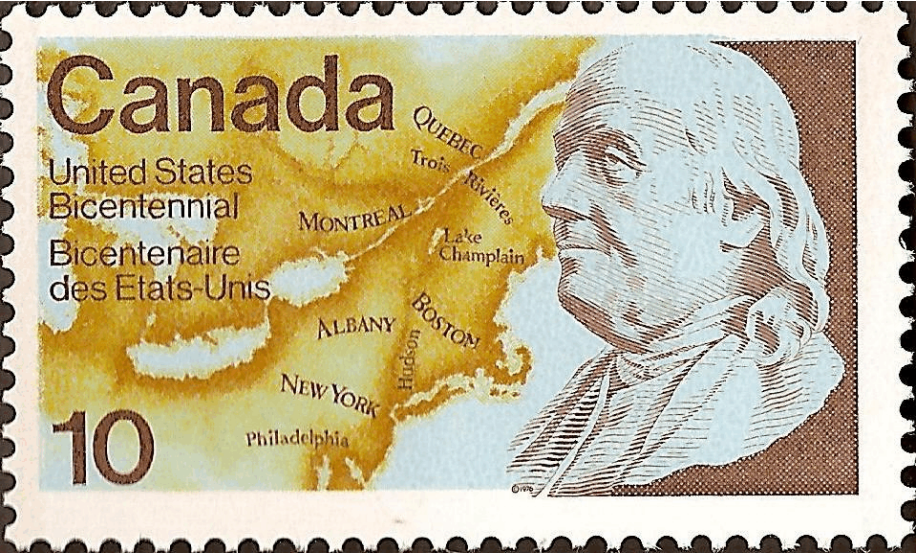
British North America in the philatelic sense means the stamp issuing countries of North America which had their own post offices. They are the Dominion of Canada (modern-day Canada since Confederation in 1867, first stamp issued 1868), the Province of Canada (a merger of Ontario and Quebec, 1851 to 1867), Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, British Columbia, Vancouver Island, and pre-1776 American colonies. Prior to Confederation, the provinces used Canadian sterling, which was not the same as the British pound sterling. The Canadian sterling had only shillings and pence, no pounds. After Confederation, decimal currency was used.



*Above: Province of Canada, 1851
Right: Dominion of Canada, 1868*



Benjamin Franklin was the first Postmaster-General of Canada, before that unpleasantness back when. He is the only person who was PMG of two different countries. He set up the first courier routes in eastern Canada and designated post offices, and did the same for the USA.



Saint Pierre et Miquelon, a group of tiny islands off the coast of Newfoundland, is a French enclave inside Canadian territorial waters, and is given honorary status as a BNA country although in the strictest sense it is not. Few people know that France is a North American country. The enclave is a municipality within France's political structure, not a colony.



For all the trouble that it has caused with separatism, Quebec has never had its own postal system. The three prairie provinces and the Arctic territories were all created post-Confederation and therefore used what was then the Canadian Post Office and today is Canada Post.

Digression: The History Of Philately.

The first stamp was issued by Great Britain on 1840-05-06, and the idea was quickly copied by other nations. By the 1850s there were enough stamps and stamp collectors that the first dealers came into business.

In the 1860s, local stamp clubs began forming. It was a proud and lonely thing to be a philatelist, and at first the hobby was ridiculed as childish and a waste of time. By the late 1800s, almost all developed nations had national societies. The RPSC was founded in 1887, BNAPS in 1948, and my home club the CPS in 1922. I am a life member of all three.

Stamp shows began about this time, and by 1900 had become commonplace. In the same manner that most SF conventions use a name that is “Con-Something”, so it is that most stamp shows use “SOMETHINGPEX”. The PEX stands for “philatelic exhibition”.



Calgary held its first public stamp show in 1927, five years after the CPS began meeting in the office of Dr Edward George Mason, the founder of the society. The CPS has had its ups and downs but currently has about 150 members, about half of whom come out to meetings.

*Our founder,
Dr. Edward G. Mason*

Except for July, August, and December, the CPS has a general meeting on first Wednesdays, much like any other type of club. There is a brief business session, a speaker for the evening, a silent auction of material brought by members, and refreshments afterwards. The third Wednesday of the month is a called auction, again of material brought in by members. The December meeting is the Christmas social, the only function of that month.

The birth and death rate of stamp clubs is comparable to SF clubs. One reason why the CPS is successful is because there are always stamps and postal history in the auctions for members looking for material or who like to wheel and deal.

Another reason is that there is no “them versus us” among Cowtown philatelists. Second Wednesdays are the meetings of the Calgary Regional Group of BNAPS, and fourth Wednesdays are the Calgary Association of Philatelic Exhibitors. I attend the former regularly but go to CAPE meetings only occasionally, even though I do exhibit at shows.

In the past, there were study groups for specialists in Ukraine, Great Britain, or USA philately, but they were mostly immigrants. When they died off, those groups faded away. The CPS is a general society, and BNA philately obviously has a homegrown base.

Getting Ready: The Venue.

CALTAPEX shows, being local, are held in a community centre, but for a national show, we use a major hotel. The last BNAPEX was in the Hyatt Regency Hotel downtown, a prestige site with good facilities and lots of room to take several thousand visitors. It helped that because of the oil price collapse, Calgary’s economy was hurting and hotel business was suffering. As before, we booked the Labour Day weekend. We were welcomed with open arms.

Hotels keep records of past conventions, and managers talk to each other. When the Hyatt staff looked up the files on BNAPEX 2012, they were pleased at what they read. Stamp collectors are not party animals, so we didn’t trash the place. Philatelists are generally older and well-to-do. Unlike cheapskate SF fans, they don’t try to sneak in extra guests into the hotel room. Neither do they stand in the hotel lobby and loudly discuss where to eat at some outside restaurant, but prefer to eat in.

We also have the Awards Banquet in the hotel, which certainly pleases them, and have no trouble getting enough room nights to have the show facilities comped. The typical layout of the show is a massive ballroom with the exhibits taking up the centre and the dealers around the walls. Along the adjacent corridors are the meeting rooms for seminars, business meetings, and other functions. It is also traditional to have a catered breakfast hosted by various groups each morning.

The hotel has a train station immediately adjacent, and is an easy walk to downtown attractions.



Getting Ready: Planning In Advance.

By July 2016, a hotel contract had been arranged, committee positions named, and a preliminary budget established. Since most of the Show Committee are retired, myself included, we had the time to devote to our tasks. The August 2016 meeting was a backyard barbecue at the CPS President's house, at which time the committee positions were confirmed. I will do the show catalogue, and help with set-up and teardown.

At the November 17 planning meeting, the advance details were confirmed. For a national convention, publicity begins in earnest as soon as the last one is over. Registration begins in the spring. Unlike SF conventions, there are no discounted rates for early registration as such, but those who book early get coupons for the dealer bourse and cheaper rates for ancillary events. Registrations are non-transferable and non-refundable, so if a member doesn't arrive, we save that much on coupons and discounts, which are only given out in person at the show.

For spouses who are not interested in stamps, there will be an organized bus tour south of Calgary to Head-Smashed-In, Fort Macleod, and Vulcan. They also have lots of things to see and do in Calgary itself.

Some details can be left for later, but the November meeting had to finalize many of them to meet publication deadlines. It requires not only good organization but an ability to guess what expenses and income will be a year in advance. The method is to overestimate costs and assume a worst-case income.

As Garth Spencer has noted in his histories of Canadian SF conventions, fandom often does the opposite, which is why they have so many financial disasters. Taking my portfolio as an example, the November budget included a cost of \$1,500 to print the show catalogue, \$250 in advertising income, and \$1,250 in subsidies. Almost certainly it won't cost that much to print, and we will sell more ads than predicted, reducing the subsidy, the surplus funds of which can be diverted elsewhere for last-minute extras just before the show.

The Tempo Begins To Speed Up.

In January 2017, the convention seemed a long way off, but tempus fugit and all that. Registration and exhibit forms were disseminated by March, and half the

dealer tables were sold in the bourse by then. I began inserting non-time sensitive copy into the show catalogue template in the final week of March, and gradually added more copy over the next few weeks. The final copy, due in July, will be lists of exhibits, dealers, and events such as seminars and group tours. The book then goes to the printer in the second week of August.

At the March 27 meeting, I handed in my entry form for my exhibit "The Maple Leaf Flag". I was applying for four frames (16 album pages in a frame) at \$16 per frame. A brief summary of that exhibit can be read in OPUNTIA #363. The Exhibits Chairwoman said she already had 38 frames applied for. The maximum number of frames that are allowed in a BNAPEX is 150, that being a reasonable number for the jury members to judge.

Judge Lest You Not Be Judged.

In an international stamp show, there are thousands of frames, but they have seven-figure budgets and a hundred or so judges. The maximum number of frames any exhibitor is allowed at any stamp show is ten. Most have fewer frames, but there are always some exhibitors who go whole hog. Stamp exhibits are judged by how well they tell a story, not by rarity or value of the stamps.

In fact, it is forbidden to mention prices of a stamp and doing so will disqualify an exhibit. Really keen exhibitors have been known to win a Grand Award for an exhibit that only cost \$100 to assemble, while some billionaire who threw together scattered pages of great rarities he bought at random will only get a Certificate of Participation.

Exhibits are judged against standards, not against each other. It is therefore common for several exhibits to win Gold, a dozen to win Vermeil or Silver, and dozens to win Bronze. The Grand Award is Best in Show, and there is also a Reserve Grand.

An exhibit must tell a story that matches its title, moving from an introduction to a general survey to specific particulars. Many exhibits often fail because their title was too broad. If you title your exhibit "The History Of The Toronto Post Office", it had better be ten frames packed with hundreds of postmarks and covers from the 1700s to the present. On the other hand, "Lawnmowers On Stamps" will be a one-page exhibit, never mind filling even one frame.

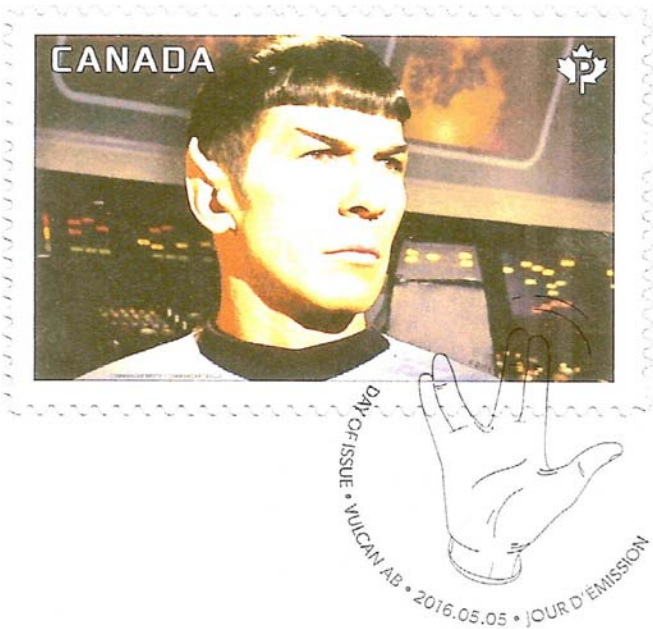
Keeping The Outlanders Happy.

Stamp collecting is about 75% male and 25% female. (Although the Calgary club has one member who had a sex-change operation and went from John to Jane. She, as he now is, collects Japanese stamps and samurai swords.) Spouses will visit Calgary sites of interest and go shopping. We also lay on a group tour. The last Calgary BNAPEX in 2012 took them east out to the Drumheller badlands and the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology, the world’s largest fossil museum.

This year, our tour director will take visitors south to Head-Smashed-In, then Fort Macleod, and back up through Vulcan. The first stop is an aboriginal killing site where ancient tribes, before horses were introduced, stampeded bison herds off a cliff to get their year’s supply of dried meat and robes. The full name, translated from Piikani, is “Where He Got His Head Smashed In”. It refers to their legend about a brave at the base of the cliff who either didn’t get the message that the herd was on its way, or else didn’t move fast enough.



Fort Macleod was the command post of the North West Mounted Police, today the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, named after Col. James Macleod. He gave Calgary its name, after his boyhood home on the Isle of Mull, Scotland. I last visited it in 2015 and can verify that it is trapped in the 1970s, which is why Hollywood producers like to use it for location shots of movies or television shows set back then. Nothing ever changes in that town.



The town of Vulcan was named after the Roman god of fire and patron of blacksmiths. See OPUNTIA #342 for photos of its present-day incarnation as a Trekkie trap.

Another BNAPEX committee meeting tonight. The pieces are falling into place. The Exhibits Chairwoman reported that 104 of the 150 frames have been paid for, so it looks as if the show will be a sellout. The dealer bourse is half sold, and I have filled about one-third of the pages in the show catalogue. The big rush of work begins in July, followed by a pause until opening day.

Everyone commits to timelines for their various tasks. The two co-chairmen are very good at following up to see if the jobs are being done. One committee member has been replaced because she over-committed and under-performed. No rancor; she was told privately and honestly that time was awasting and someone else would get the job done.

I mention that because if you read Garth Spencer’s fanhistories in the early issues of OPUNTIA (check the cumulative index for exact details), that was a common problem among SF fans hosting conventions. I think the difference is that the fans are younger, often in their early 20s, whereas the average age of a stamp show committee member is ‘retired’.

Age does make a difference. The younger set is less experienced, more easily distracted, and often struggling to earn a living. Retired people have been there and done that, with decades of experience. In the philatelic world, most of us are middle-class or rich, and we can concentrate on the show without worrying about utility bills and mortgage payments.

Spencer’s histories indicate that many SF convention disasters were due to weak-willed chairmen who didn’t keep after committee members to get the job done, or, as sometimes happened, vice versa. Personality clashes seem far more common in fandom than philately, based on my informal observations.

I had taken in to the printers the July issue of CALGARY PHILATELIST (print run of 200), and at the same time had requested an estimate for the BNAPEX show catalogue. The day is coming in philately, and is already here for many other hobbies, when there will be no printed show catalogue, just an app or pdf. I can understand why. Today I picked up the printed CPs and the catalogue estimate.

Per multiple of 250 copies, the BNAPEX catalogue will cost \$740 for colour card covers and 64 black-and-white interior pages, in digest size. Full colour throughout would be \$2,300. At our next committee meeting on July 10, it is safe to guess which version will be printed. Display ad sales will be several hundred dollars but nowhere near enough to pay for full colour.

I don’t think it will be in my time, but the next generation will expect show catalogues or programme books to be pdfs or ebooks for reading on a tablet. SF conventions can lead the way, as they produce programme books. It is a truism that few read the big book at the actual convention, and it is more for the historical record than anything else. The pocket programme is well read, but it can be replaced with an app or Web page. That makes it easier to update at the last minute as rooms are reshuffled or speakers cancel or arrive late.

As someone who has for decades been a person editing and arranging for the printing of philatelic show catalogues, I would not be such a neo-Luddite against only producing a pdf version. The first baby steps are already being taken in philately, as most stamp shows post the catalogue pdf on their Website even if a print version was produced.

It is also becoming more and more difficult to find volunteers to do the actual work, as the Millennials are conspicuous by their absence. It’s not that they don’t collect stamps, for they are abundant online, but they won’t come out and help set up exhibit frames or man the registration table. Yet they turn up at shows to browse the dealer bourse and sit in on seminars that someone else had to arrange. What are they going to do when us Boomers are gone?

Another committee meeting tonight in the midst of the Stampede rodeo. Everything is coming together rapidly. I am daily receiving display ads from stamp dealers for the catalogue, and chasing people about for schedules, exhibit lists, and so forth. I have now filled all but a few pages. It is the little details that take up much of my time. It is also a mental wrench to come home from yeehawing at the Stampede and then realign my thoughts to a convention.

Deadlines. 2017-08-04

Today was the deadline for copy for the show catalogue. All 64 pages are filled and the cover ads sold long ago. This last week was mostly a matter of nitpicking the schedule of events and dealer bourse list.

I spent the previous two weeks editing the hotel floor plans. The first was easy, a map showing all the function rooms. The second was a lot of converting between different computer formats, standardizing everything into jpegs, and then layering the jpegs on top of one another in MS Paint or WordPerfect. (And yes, I heard the news about the death of Paint.)

All but two of the ballrooms in the hotel will be opened up into one giant ballroom, wherein will be the exhibits and dealers. The other two will be used for the auction. As is standard practice in most stamp shows, the exhibits are in the centre and the dealer tables line the walls.

The Exhibits chairwoman has her mapping scheme for the display frames and the Dealer Bourse chairman has his for the tables. The software they use is incompatible with each other but that is why God gave us alt-PrtSc. I converted the two plans into jpegs via Paint, then pasted the exhibits plan into the centre of the dealer plan. All the tables and exhibit frames are numbered to correspond with lists elsewhere in the catalogue. Those who want a last-minute change after the catalogue is locked up will feel the wrath of God and myself, not necessarily in that order.

All Done. 2017-08-14


After spending the weekend at the When Words Collide readercon (see OPUNTIA #387 for the report), I returned to the philatelic world today. Last week I had taken both the copy for the BNAPEX show catalogue and the August issue of our regular club bulletin CALGARY PHILATELIST to the printers for pickup today.

Tonight is the final BNAPEX committee meeting before the show, and I had the privilege of hauling boxes of catalogues to the show chairman's house. About half will be used to stuff goodie bags for delegates, some go to philatelic libraries and archives (about ten in North America), the dealers and volunteers each get a copy, and the remainder go to the registration desk for walk-in

visitors. A free pdf of the catalogue is posted at www.bnaps.org; click on BNAPEX, find the 2017 show, and click on the Seminars tab.

Printing costs minus advertising income for the catalogue equaled a loss of \$235, basically break-even for a show handling a cash turnover of about \$30,000. Since the planned subsidy was \$1,250, this will free up a grand to be used elsewhere as needed.

BNAPEX 2017 CALTAPEX



September 1 to 3, 2017
Hyatt Regency Hotel, Calgary, Alberta

My part in the show isn't entirely done. I will be helping with the set-up and teardown, and have an exhibit. Looking forward to the day. The August CALGARY PHILATELIST was the last before the show, and I mailed that. The envelopes were prepared ahead of time. All I had to do was stuff them and take them to the post office. That issue of the bulletin had nine pages of BNAPEX publicity material. It will arrive about a week before the show, and serve to remind the membership of our big event.

Let The Show Begin. 2017-08-31

It's just as well that I was at BNAPEX, because I certainly couldn't go out to the mountains. Calgary is under yet another "Special Air Quality Statement", as Environment Canada (the national weather bureau) likes to call smoke warnings. Forest fires in British Columbia continue to burn, and the westerly winds send all the smoke down the Bow River valley directly into Calgary. Nevermind not seeing the mountain skyline; we can't even see the opposite side of the valley.

Thursday I arrived at the Hyatt Regency Hotel at 15h30, lugging my exhibit. A quick stop at the registration desk procured me my badge and a goodie bag. The bag, which was a leather portfolio, held the show catalogue, which I obviously didn't need so I turned it back in for someone else, and all sorts of tourist brochures for sights and events around Cowtown, which I set out on the freebie table for outlanders.



I stashed my exhibit behind the desk and went into the ballroom to help set up the exhibit frames. The dealer bourse tables were set up by the hotel staff.



The two-sided A-frame displays are aluminum with heavy plexiglass covers. They are hinged at the top and held open by a pole while sixteen pages are inserted. They are then locked with four special screws requiring non-standard screwdrivers not available in stores.

The Calgary Philatelic Society bought these frames from AMERIPEX 86, held in Chicago in guess what year. That was an international show with 200,000 attending. The SF Worldcon people like to think they are a big show but often it isn't even the biggest convention in town that weekend, with only a few thousand attending.

Countries usually host an international show every ten years but it is not a rule. The USA had one in New York City in 2016, and Boston will host it in 2026. Canada hasn't had one since CAPEX 96 due to lack of affordable space in Toronto, the only Canadian city that can host such an event. Calgary does not have sufficient contiguous floor space for thousands of display frames and hundreds of dealers other than the Stampede grounds, which are far too expensive for us. The Calgary Comic Expo, which had 100,000 attendees in 2017 at the grounds, charges hundreds of dollars at the gate for admission, with all kinds of extra fees for this, that, and the other things, none of which stamp collectors are willing to pay.

The American international shows buy new display frames for each event because it is cheaper than storing them for a decade. After the show, they are then sold off to local stamp clubs at cost. Calgary needed new frames back then because its old ones were falling apart, so we bought 150 of them at \$50 each plus shipping, which cost about the same as the frames. Not inexpensive, but we've been using them ever since, so we've gotten our money's worth.

My exhibit is shown below after the frames were up. Having done my part for the day, I headed home.



Friday.

2017-09-01

Registration desk at the official opening of the show. I didn't notice until sitting down later at home to look at this photo on my laptop, but everyone seems to have had their attention called to something off camera. Someone must have been making an announcement but because I was so intent on framing the shot, I never paid attention.



A close-up of the woman in the stamp shirt.

She is, incidentally, the world authority on the history of Bolivian airmails, and has won gold medals for her exhibits at several international shows in South America.

The official opening ceremony was like any other anywhere in the world. A lineup of dignitaries, brief (fortunately) speeches, and "I now declare", followed by the doors opening wide and the audience rushing into the bourse.

Part of the dealer bourse.



Stamp exhibits are normally two-dimensional, but an exhibitor on the history of postage stamp vending machines had this antique machine next to his frames.



Nowadays the dwindling number of users of real mail download postage as barcodes from the post office Website. Tell the kids of today that we once got stamps out of vending machines and they won't believe you.



There was an auction in the early evening. Collectors and dealers submitted auction lots of stamps, covers, albums, or other philatelic material. I brought in a box full of modern covers postmarked in Ontario; it sold for \$15 to spirited bidding from easterners. Had I consigned it to a regular club auction, I would have been lucky to get \$3. In reverse, easterners brought out prairie material that wouldn't sell in Ontario but got an equally good price here.

Viewing of the auction lots by potential bidders.



“What am I bid?”, said the auctioneer.

Digression: A Rant About The Future Of Clubs.

Philatelic club auctions don’t raise that much money, and often just barely cover the room rental. They are still done because they serve a useful purpose, one that online or mail auctions can’t do. Bidders like to look over lots, especially box or album lots. A club exists to provide services wanted by its members that can’t be had elsewhere. It is why there are still dealer bourses and exhibit frames, because scans and 300 dpi photos don’t tell the whole story.

The Calgary Philatelic Society has passed its 95th birthday because it has always been its philosophy to have stamps and covers at the meetings or shows, and to let members strut their stuff in exhibits. Members also want a Website with a moderated blog and other services, and so they have it.

I was once quite active in the Calgary Aquarium Society and even served a term as President. In the early 2000s, we passed the baton to the Internet generation. They decided the annual show was too much work, and people could instead post photos of their fish. They decided a monthly bulletin was too much trouble when members could instead post comments instead of reading articles.

I don’t know the rest because the new Treasurer decided that an automated Paypal system was better than cheques or cash for membership dues, nor was it necessary to remind members to pay their dues. I was fafiated in early 2004 after the print bulletin ceased and no one reminded me that dues were due. Not that it mattered, since the CAS shrank down to a dozen paid members.

The club executive decided that once they set up a Website, they need only sit back and let people come to it. The members didn’t come to it because there was no substantial activity to draw visitors. Comment sections bring only trolls who contribute nothing useful. There has to be substance, not off-topic comments or shout-downs of politically incorrect remarks.

Tweeting snippy remarks is not volunteering. Neither is setting up a Facebook page. (And I laugh at those who think that liking a political Facebook page constitutes real action.) Someone has to set up the tables and display frames, and sit at the registration desk.

In the science fiction hobby, there has been a massive dichotomy over the past couple of decades. The vast majority of SF fans pay hundreds to attend

commercial events such as comic cons. Dragon*Con and San Diego Comic Con get more people in one show than all the volunteer-run fan conventions do in a decade. The Millennials prefer to pay someone else to do the work.

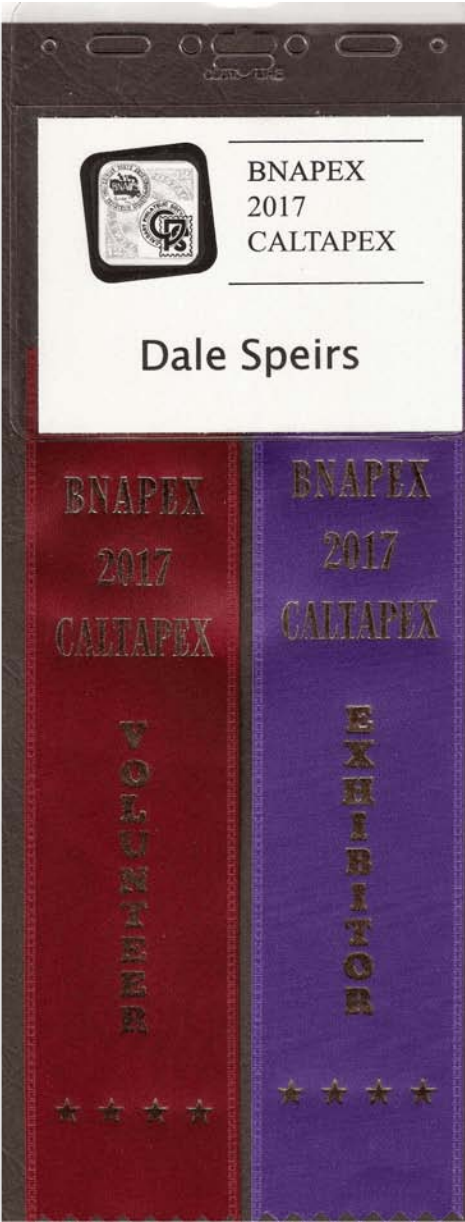
In Calgary, the Comic Expo gets 70,000 to 100,000 paid admissions, depending on which news source you read. The anime con Otafest gets 8,000 paid members. The big American cities easily surpass these numbers with their comic cons. The 75th SF Worldcon bragged that they had 7,119 members on site (ref. ANSIBLE #362, Spetember 2017). Indeed.

Saturday.

In a weak moment, I said yes to the Volunteers Chairwoman when she asked me to sit at the registration table on Saturday from 10h00 to 13h30. It turned out to be more enjoyable than I thought. There were chairs but I stood most of the time because I find it easier to talk to people at eye level. There was enough business to do that the time went by quickly.

All but a half-dozen registered delegates had picked up their goodie bags on Thursday or Friday, so that workload was gone. Mostly the three of us at the tables answered questions and sold show souvenirs. I sold three memberships in the Calgary Philatelic Society and was told that the day before about two dozen had been sold.

I sorted out misunderstandings by delegates and gave quick geography lessons about Calgary tourist attractions. The most common question was answered with “Down that hallway, first door on your left”.



The Awards Banquet is Sunday night, deliberately done to force come-from-away exhibitors to stay an extra night and bump up our hotel room bookings so we got the comped facilities. I’ve seen other types of conventions make the mistake of having the awards on Saturday night. Competitors or nominees then check out the following morning. They may check their luggage and stay for the Sunday events or they may decide to fly out in the afternoon and leave by noon, which depresses afternoon events.

Our Saturday night event is to give easterners a taste of western steakhouse cooking. The roadhouse is directly across the street from the hotel. I told enquirers that it was a 30-second walk over there, and a 5-minute crawl back on hands and knees after closing time. I always got a laugh; maybe I should go into stand-up comedy for a second career.

The show souvenirs were covers and personalized stamps prepared by Dave B., one of our many volunteers named Dave, so we had to refer to them with surname initials. He ordered Picture Postage stamps, as Canada Post calls them, plus a custom postmark from them. He printed covers and did all the work preparing them. There were eight all together, at \$3 each or the lot for \$18. Dave B. had to attend the occasional seminar, so I covered for him. Sales were steady, and a lot of toonies handed out in exchange for a \$20 bill. Scans are shown below.





SIR JOHN A. MACDONALD
CANADA'S FIRST PREMIER (PRIME MINISTER)
1867



BNAPEX 2017 CALTAPEX • CALGARY ALBERTA
DRAWING BY JOHN DELANEY

BNAPEX-2017-CALTAPEX September 1-3, Calgary, AB



SIR JOHN A. MACDONALD
CANADA'S FIRST PREMIER (PRIME MINISTER)
1867

**Celebrating 150 Years of Confederation
1867-2017**



VISCOUNT CHARLES MONCK
FIRST GOVERNOR GENERAL OF CANADA
1867



BNAPEX 2017 CALTAPEX • CALGARY ALBERTA
DRAWING BY JOHN DELANEY

BNAPEX-2017-CALTAPEX September 1-3, Calgary, AB



SIR JOHN A. MACDONALD
CANADA'S FIRST PREMIER (PRIME MINISTER)
1867

**Celebrating 150 Years of Confederation
1867-2017**



NORTH WEST MOUNTED POLICEMAN
FOUNDERS OF CALGARY
1875



BNAPEX 2017 CALTAPEX • CALGARY ALBERTA
DRAWING BY JOHN DELANEY

After finishing my tour on the registration desk, I spent the rest of the afternoon in the dealer bourse. None of the seminars left in the day were of any interest to me. Bought some nice covers, chatted with other collectors, and finally had time to peruse the exhibits. Mine won a bronze.

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On my way up to the show venue on the third floor, I spotted this little lost Star Wars stormtrooper on the second floor, consulting a map. Don't ask me. He was the only thing science fictional that I saw anywhere near the hotel. As far as I know, there wasn't another convention going on. I was late for a meeting so I didn't have time to stop and ask him and his mother.



Who's Up For Another?

I sent a recommendation to the Calgary Philatelic Society executives that they bid for Royal 2022 Royale, the national convention of the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada. That year is the centennial of the CPS. I wrote that we should lock in the date well ahead of time in case another club goes for it. The detailed planning can come later.

Sunday.

The final day. Up in the morning with some of the more sluggish birds, and headed downtown. A quick breakfast, then to the show for more dealer browsing. Teardown of the show began at 15h00. The banquet was that evening but I never go to banquets anymore. Too many speeches, pompous ceremonies, and lukewarm hotel meals to suit me.

THEY SHALL MOVE OUT OF THEIR HOLES LIKE WORMS OF THE EARTH: PART 5

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 4 appeared in OPUNTIA's #307, 308, 331, and 347.]

Alberta Tea.

“The Cavern World” by James P. Olsen (1930 June, ASTOUNDING) begins with the world’s oil fields going dry for an unknown reason. Oil company geologist Blaine Asher thinks there is an underground civilization that resents its oil being stolen by topdwellers. He proposes to be lowered down a 36-inch drill hole to take a look and see what is happening. They did have cameras in those days, but that doesn’t seem to occur to the company man as a safer way to investigate.

There is a remarkably prescient discussion about horizontal drilling to recover more oil from the formations. The technology to do so economically didn’t exist until the first decade of the 2000s, so the author made a good prediction.

Remember how you laughed when I told you that oil would some day be mined instead of pumped or flowed from the earth? You couldn't see how one central shaft could be sunk, then tunnels run back underneath the oil strata, tapping the sand from the bottom and letting the oil run down to be pumped out one shaft. Yet, that way, we would get all the oil, instead of the possible one-eighth of the total amount as we get by present methods.

Asher’s compartment will have environmental controls against the heat and pressure of the depths, as well as a doubletalk device that uses electrified helium to enlarge a cavern around the compartment after reaching bottom. An air hose will supply cool oxygen to breathe. He’s thought of everything apparently.

Except, of course, things go wrong, otherwise there wouldn’t be a story. Asher steps out into a cavern filled with gibbering Things: *Frozen with soul-chilling fear, Asher stared with eyes that bulged. What were they? Spawned neither of God nor Satan, what could they be? Black-skinned, or was it skin?, like rubber, with round bodies, like black basket balls inflated to triple size; bodies that seemed to ripple, distort, swell and contract with life within life.*

Short, foot-long stems that must have been legs, ending in round balls that served as feet, no doubt. Tentacles, Asher would have called them, six feet in length, thick as mighty cables and dotted with suckers like the tentacles of an octopus. And heads; Asher gagged and vomited!

Not heads. Just masses of the black body substance as large as the two fists of a man. In each head was a crooked black gash for a mouth. There were no eyes that Asher could see. Yet, these Things seemed to see one another, and emitted strange, chill, squeaking sounds!

He finds that two mad scientists have been there before him, one Chinese and the other Russian. They refer to the things as Petrolia. That is an unfortunate choice of name by the author. The first oil well in North America was drilled in 1858 at Petrolia, Ontario. California, Pennsylvania, and Texas later established towns with the same name.

Drs Lee Wong and Krenski had the same idea about horizontal drilling, and have been sucking dry the world’s oil fields. The Petrolia are made of crude oil, just as humans are 80% water, so the mad scientists are using them to build up an invincible army that will rule the world someday, bwah ha! ha!.

James Bond not being handy, it is Asher who destroys the central control room (no backup room, and no circuit breakers, as per standard mad scientist practice). There are fights to the death, things go ka-boom, and Asher makes it back up to the surface. The stolen oil re-floods the oil fields and the Petrolia are heard no more, having strutted and fretted their hour underneath the stage.

There’s Radium In Them Thar Boreholes.

“Four Miles Within” by Anthony Gilmore (1931 April, ASTOUNDING) is a chase for radium, not oil. Professor David Guinness, aided by his handsome young assistant Phil Holmes, has built a human-carrying machine that can descend to a radium mother lode that no one has been able to reach before.

The fifteen-foot sphere was an earth-borer, Guinness’s own invention. In it he had utilized for the first time for boring purposes the newly developed atomic disintegrators. Many holes equally spaced over the sphere were the outlets for the dissolving ray, most of them on the bottom and alternating with them on the bottom and sides were the outlets of powerful rocket propulsion tubes, which

would enable it to rise easily from the hole it would presently blast into the earth. A small, tight-fitting door gave entrance to the double-walled interior, where, in spite of the space taken up by batteries and mechanisms and an enclosed gyroscope for keeping the borer on an even keel, there was room for several people.

The earth-borer had been designed not so much for scientific investigation as the specific purpose of reaching a rich store of radium ore buried four miles below the Guinness desert camp. Many geologists and mining engineers knew that the radium was there, for their instruments had proven it often; but no one up to then knew how to get to it. David Guinness did, first. The borer had been constructed in his laboratory in San Francisco, then dismantled and freighted to the little desert town of Palmdale, from whence Holmes had brought the parts to their isolated camp by truck. Strict secrecy had been kept. Rather than risk assistants they had done all the work themselves.

Like any self-respecting mad scientist, the Professor has a beautiful daughter named Sue: *The elderly scientist murmured aloud to his daughter: “You know, it's good to realize that my dream is about to become a reality. If it hadn't been for Phil ... Or no, I really ought to thank you, Sue. You're the one responsible for his participation!” And he smiled fondly at the slender girl by his side.*

“Phil joined us just for the scientific interest, and for the thrill of going four miles down into the earth”, she retorted at once, in spite of the blush her father saw on her face. But he did not insist. Once more he turned, as to a magnet, to the machine that was his handiwork.

Lurking in the underbrush is the Professor's ex-partner James Quade, who may not be foreclosing on a mortgage but nonetheless is up to no good. While Phil is distracted, Quade hijacks the earth-borer with the Professor and Sue. Down they go to the radium deposit, where the hapless pair are tied up in a cavern and left to die while Quade sets about harvesting the stuff.

Meanwhile, back at the camp, Phil finds an incomplete earth-borer Quade had been working on before deciding that theft was the better part of indiscretion. Phil jury-rigs the machine and descends into the radium cavern. The place seems rather cool despite being four miles below the surface, and there is a cool draft blowing in from somewhere.

The action and adventure begin, starting with a giant amoeba chasing them hither and yon through tunnels and caverns measureless to man. When they have to ford an underground river, it is home to a giant electric eel. Further on, a second giant amoeba, which takes care of Quade. Finally the trio escape with their radium and head back to the surface, doubtless to die from cancer.

“The Thing On The Fourble Board”, written and directed by Wyllis Cooper, was a 1948 episode of QUIET PLEASE, an old-time radio show. (This and hundreds of other OTR shows are available as free mp3s at www.archive.org) A fourble board is the catwalk at the top of a drilling rig, so-called because it is four drill pipe segments above ground.

The story is narrated by a roughneck who tells of the time a deep borehole brought up an invisible creature that came up the hole. He and the wellsite geologist are the only ones at the rig. The hole had flooded so the crew had to cement the bore walls. While the concrete was setting, the rest of the crew went into town to relax.

The geologist examines the core samples brought up. One of them, from a mile below the surface, had a gold ring embedded in it. The ring had markings and filigree on it. Then the roughneck finds a stone finger, which turns invisible when the drilling mud is cleaned off. Finally, they notice something on the fourble board. It is not friendly, and the geologist departs this world abruptly.

The crew return the next day, the death is written off as an accident, and drilling resumes. Another roughneck dies when the traveling block that lifts the pipe mysteriously snaps and falls onto him from the top of the rig. Everyone quits on the spot because no one believes in coincidence.

The roughneck returns to the abandoned rig a few days later. He climbs up to the fourble board to confront the creature. He splashes paint on the creature, which appears as a girl with a deformed body. No battle to the death, but instead he sympathizes with it, yanked from its home far below and no way to get back because the wall of the borehole had been cemented. He takes it home. Just one problem; it eats raw meat only.

The show is one that could be redone for today's audience as a movie. It is not the cliched monster-torcing scenario, as the final twist demonstrates.



Olympic Plaza,
2017

*They're watching
you, they really
are.*

The Worms Turn.

“The Revolt Of The Worms”, written by Arch Oboler, is a 1942 episode of the OTR series LIGHTS OUT. A horticulturist develops a growth hormone intended to produce better roses, but which instead affects earthworms. (And why not all the other underground animals?)

The story is told in annoying flashbacks of multiple viewpoints. The mad scientist who wants to grow the world’s biggest and best rose. His laboratory assistant who doesn’t understand the great plan. His neglected wife who can’t take his obsessions anymore. Everyone keeps repeating their sentences. They keep repeating their sentences. No one says a thing once, but twice. Always twice. Well, that’s a good way to pad out the script.

The lab assistant goes missing without explanation. The ground is ploughed by unknown forces. The scientist finally decides to investigate in the dead of night.

At that point, the story switches to his interior monologue to explain the plot. He is so busy explaining the plot that he doesn’t have time to rescue his wife from the worms.

The story ends as it begins, with the scientist waiting for the giant worms to come and get him. Instead of running away to alert the rest of the world and fight another day, he just sits there waiting to be eaten.

Alternative Geology.

“The Ninth Volume” is a 1977 episode of CBS RADIO MYSTERY THEATER, written by Percy Granger. (This and other episodes of this series are available as free mp3s from www.cbsrmt.com) A drilling rig hits an air pocket 6 km below and brings up a mysterious powder. (Very good drilling, by the way, as few wells go anywhere near that deep.) The company says five days to hit oil or they shut the rig down. The geologist finds an old silver mine whose shafts descend near the spot and investigates. Again, highly unusual, since the deepest mines in the world in South Africa only go about 4 km deep.

They find the air pocket, a chamber with a modern house in it. They also see the drill bit sticking into the chamber so they know they’re in the right place. They test a faucet in the house and find it flows light sweet crude oil instead of water. The library contains a set of eight volumes of world history. The ninth volume would contain the future history but it is missing.

The rock dust is analysed and dates to 12 billion years old, even though Earth is dated to 4.5 billion years ago. No one above believes the geologist’s story. His assistant Sharkey won’t back him up because he thinks there isn’t a ninth volume. Sharkey believes that human history will end shortly, hence the missing volume.

A second trip down the mine shaft eventually results in the discovery of the ninth volume. Just as the geologist is about to open the book, the drilling rig starts up again and causes the destruction of everything in the chamber. No one will ever know what the ninth volume was about.

The number of logic gaps in this story render it nonsensical. There is talk about how a past civilization existed 12 gigayears ago, while the universe was still being born, although they do admit Earth’s age of 4.5 billion years. (Current estimate of the universe’s age is 13.8 gigayears.)

Assuming that an American silver mine would be a third deeper than the current world record holder in South Africa is quite a jump. More so that two men could wander down into its depths without concern for the heat or rock movements. They were drilling through deep thicknesses of yellow granite, yet oil is only found in sedimentary rocks.

No one took a camera down on the second trip to prove what they saw. The ancient civilization duplicated Shakespeare and television sets. They lived in contemporary houses and had books in the English language. It’s all nonsense from a late 1920s pulp magazine story, unacceptable for 1977.

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Timms, N.E., et al (2017) **Cubic zirconia in >2370 °C impact melt records Earth’s hottest crust.** EARTH AND PLANETARY SCIENCE LETTERS 477:52-58

Authors’ abstract: *Bolide impacts influence primordial evolution of planetary bodies because they can cause instantaneous melting and vaporization of both crust and impactors. Temperatures reached by impact-generated silicate melts are unknown because meteorite impacts are ephemeral, and established mineral and rock thermometers have limited temperature ranges. Consequently, impact melt temperatures in global bombardment models of the early Earth and Moon are poorly constrained, and may not accurately predict the survival, stabilization, geochemical evolution and cooling of early crustal materials.*

Here we show geological evidence for the transformation of zircon to cubic zirconia plus silica in impact melt from the 28 km diameter Mistastin Lake crater, Canada, which requires super-heating in excess of 2370 °C. This new temperature determination is the highest recorded from any crustal rock. Our phase heritage approach extends the thermometry range for impact melts by several hundred degrees, more closely bridging the gap between nature and theory. Profusion of >2370 °C superheated impact melt during high intensity bombardment of Hadean Earth likely facilitated consumption of early-formed crustal rocks and minerals, widespread volatilization of various species, including hydrates, and formation of dry, rigid, refractory crust.

Bardeen, C.G., et al (2017) **On transient climate change at the Cretaceous-Paleogene boundary due to atmospheric soot injections.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 114:E7415-E7424

Authors’ abstract: *A mass extinction occurred at the Cretaceous-Paleogene boundary coincident with the impact of a 10-km asteroid in the Yucatán peninsula. A worldwide layer of soot found at the boundary is consistent with global fires.*

Using a modern climate model, we explore the effects of this soot and find that it causes near-total darkness that shuts down photosynthesis, produces severe cooling at the surface and in the oceans, and leads to moistening and warming of the stratosphere that drives extreme ozone destruction. These conditions last for several years, would have caused a collapse of the global food chain, and would have contributed to the extinction of species that survived the immediate effects of the asteroid impact.

Climate simulations that consider injection into the atmosphere of 15,000 Tg of soot, the amount estimated to be present at the Cretaceous-Paleogene boundary, produce what might have been one of the largest episodes of transient climate change in Earth history. The observed soot is believed to originate from global wildfires ignited after the impact of a 10-km-diameter asteroid on the Yucatán Peninsula 66 million years ago.

Following injection into the atmosphere, the soot is heated by sunlight and lofted to great heights, resulting in a worldwide soot aerosol layer that lasts several years. As a result, little or no sunlight reaches the surface for over a year, such that photosynthesis is impossible and continents and oceans cool by as much as 28 °C and 11 °C, respectively. The absorption of light by the soot heats the upper atmosphere by hundreds of degrees. These high temperatures, together with a massive injection of water, which is a source of odd-hydrogen radicals, destroy the stratospheric ozone layer, such that Earth’s surface receives high doses of UV radiation for about a year once the soot clears, five years after the impact.

Temperatures remain above freezing in the oceans, coastal areas, and parts of the Tropics, but photosynthesis is severely inhibited for the first 1 y to 2 y, and freezing temperatures persist at middle latitudes for 3 y to 4 y. Refugia from

these effects would have been very limited. The transient climate perturbation ends abruptly as the stratosphere cools and becomes supersaturated, causing rapid dehydration that removes all remaining soot via wet deposition.

Speirs: I'm not convinced that the soot layer did as much damage as this computer model suggests because although the K-Tec extinction was massive and notable, it was not the greatest on record and many groups of animals survived. Indeed, the puzzling aspect of the K-Tec extinction is the odd lots of animals that died, from dinosaurs to ammonites, but not other vertebrates or shelled marine life. Suggestions from previous papers are that the climatic impacts were not worldwide.

Wright, I.J., et al (2017) **Global climatic drivers of leaf size.** SCIENCE 357:917-921

Authors’ abstract: *Leaf size varies by over a 100,000-fold among species worldwide. Although 19th-century plant geographers noted that the wet tropics harbor plants with exceptionally large leaves, the latitudinal gradient of leaf size has not been well quantified nor the key climatic drivers convincingly identified.*

Here, we characterize worldwide patterns in leaf size. Large-leaved species predominate in wet, hot, sunny environments; small-leaved species typify hot, sunny environments only in arid conditions; small leaves are also found in high latitudes and elevations. By modeling the balance of leaf energy inputs and outputs, we show that daytime and nighttime leaf-to-air temperature differences are key to geographic gradients in leaf size.