



Saturnalia 2019

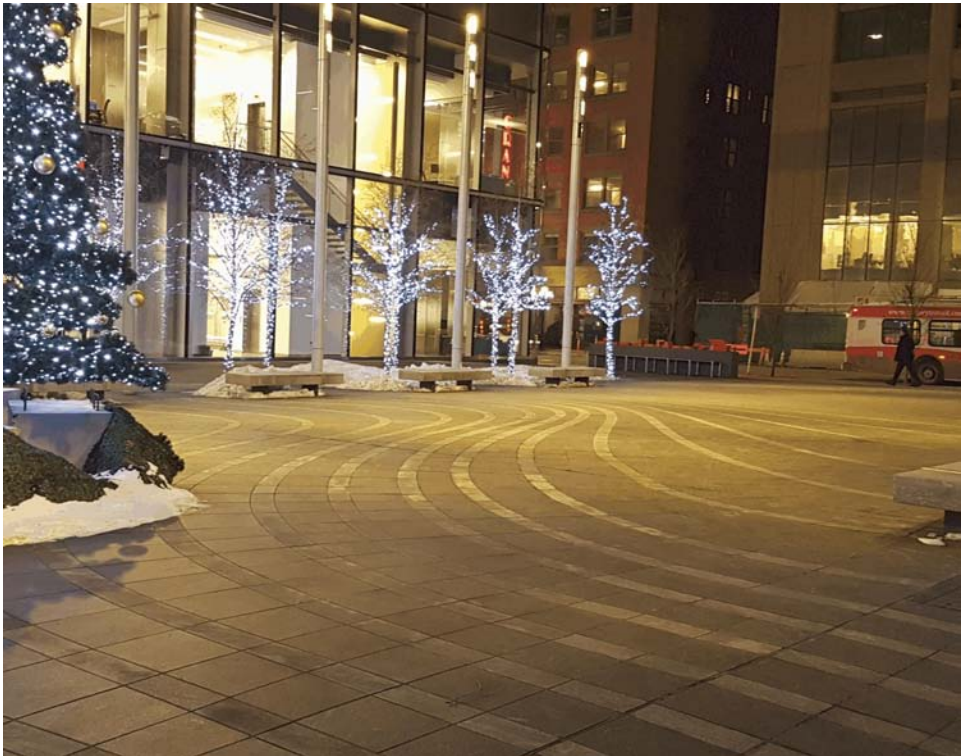
Opuntia is published by Dale Speirs, Calgary, Alberta. It is posted on www.efanzines.com and www.fanac.org. My e-mail address is: opuntia57@hotmail.com When sending me an emailed letter of comment, please include your name and town in the message.

About The Cover: Seen in the New Central Library. I'm sure there was an explanation.

AROUND COWTOWN
photos by Dale Speirs

At right: Christmas lights at Brookfield Place on 7 Avenue SW downtown. Look closely at the plaza, which appears to be sloped. It is actually perfectly flat and the slopes are illusions created by the lines and countershading. Very clever work by the architect.

Below: Same place, looking back from the opposite side. You can see the plaza is flat. The shadows are painted, not because of the shading from the lights.



Kitty-corner from Brookfield skyscraper is the Suncor tower. A couple of views of the plaza. At right, the Bow Tower can be seen in the distance on the lefthand side of the avenue. A full moon shone down the avenue.



Inside the Suncor skyscraper was this food bank display made from cans of food. It was located in the food court to maximize the guilt of people and get them to cough up spare change for the polar bear.



Santa Claus in the TD Square, part of a complex of skyscrapers connected by a long atrium.



Below: This bear and cub sculpture in the Municipal Building was dressed up for Christmas.
Bottom: Seen downtown, although the truck didn't have 18 wheels.
At right: Seen in the southwest suburb of Altadore.



I suspect that most of the younger generation have never written by hand a letter of any kind, much less one to Santa Claus.

At left: Seen at Walmart in the Westbrook Mall.

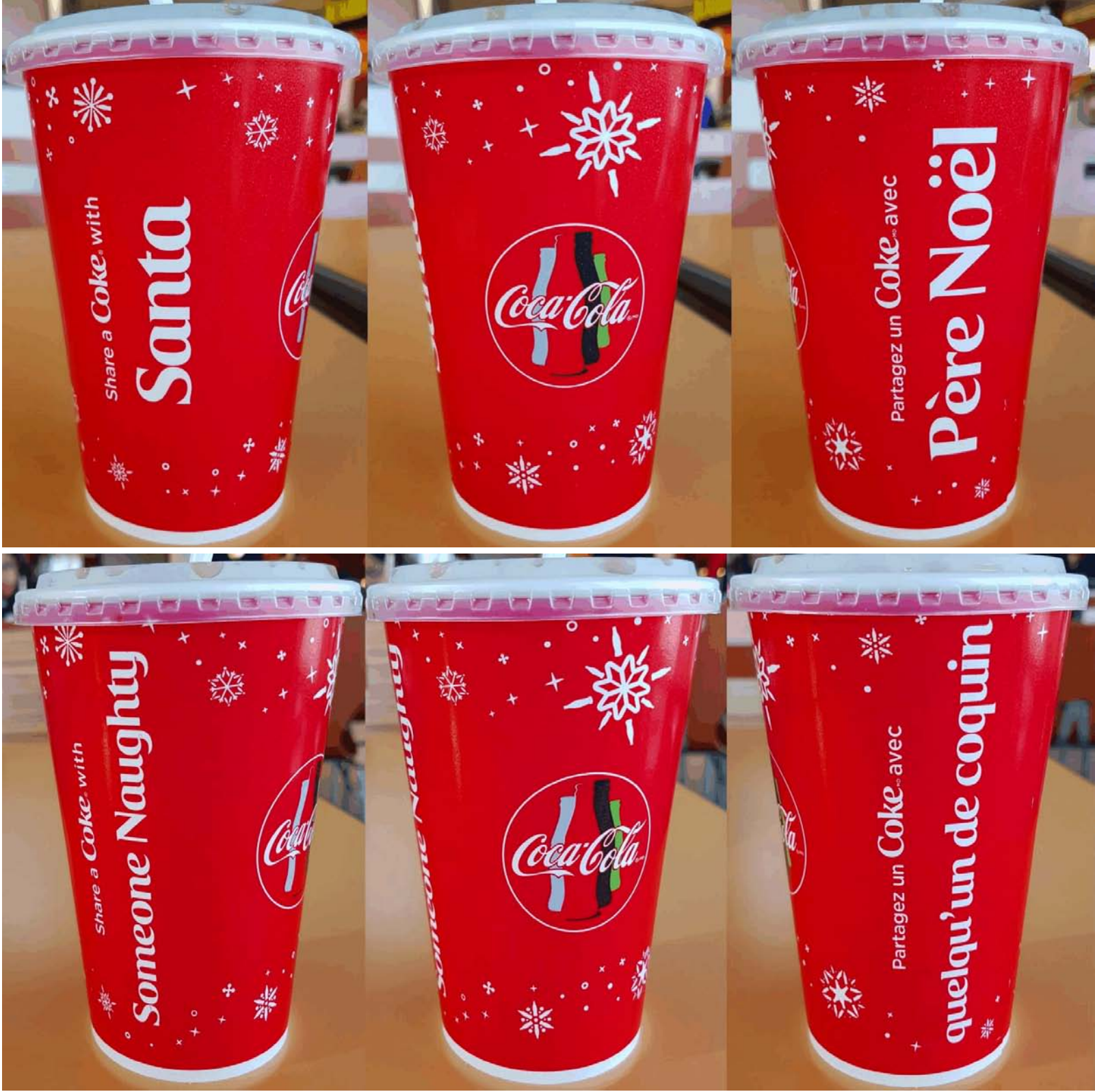
Below: Canada Post has had for decades a letter-writing service to Santa Claus and assigned him the postal code H0H 0H0. The letter box on the table was at a retail postal outlet in southeast Calgary in the Deer Valley mall.

Canada Post has only three post offices in Calgary, but about 80 retail postal outlets in numerous shops such as drug stores or convenience stores. The outlets have all the same postal services as a regular post office but are staffed by non-union staff employed by the stores. The businesses like them because they draw in customer traffic.





Seen on Stephen Avenue pedestrian mall downtown was this vendor, who made Christmas lawn ornaments from paper birch logs.



The fast food outlets do their part with paper cups. Here are a couple I photographed. Three views of each cup to show how bilingualism is handled.

Calgary Transit buses have electronic signs which flash in alternation the route number and a brief text message. During the summer construction season, the message is all too often “Detour on route”, but the signs are used for seasonal greetings as well.



This time of year the standard message is “Merry Christmas” but I was surprised to see one oddball variation.

I only saw it once and got a smartphone snapshot. I have seen hundreds of buses from dozens of routes go past me since, but never again with that message.



CHRISTMAS FICTION: PART 3
by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 2 appeared in OPUNTIA #430 and 431.]

Cozy Mysteries.

Miss Marple was the progenitor of the modern cozy novel. The book titles usually are puns. The main protagonist is an amateur sleuth who busily snoops about contaminating evidence, indirectly obstructing police, and getting into the line of fire from the murderer.

HOLIDAY GRIND (2009) by Cleo Coyle (pseudonym of Alice Alfonsi and her husband Marc Cerasini) was a novel in a cozy series about Clare Cosi, manager of a coffee shop in Manhattan, New York City. It’s the season to be jolly but not for Alfred Glockner. He was a seasonal Santa Claus and a friend of Cosi, but never got to unwrap his presents. Cosi found his body in an alley near her store. The police wrote it off as a mugging. She knew better, for was she not a Miss Marple?

Cosi spent a lot of time thinking up new Christmas coffee blends and food items that weren’t already clichés. Not so much time that she couldn’t play Miss Marple in between mixing the Fa-la-la-la Lattes.

Glockner had a varicoloured life. His restaurant failed after the Panic of 2008, he was in debt to a loan shark, and in turn he was a blackmailer. No shortage of suspects with motives. I had to re-read the denouement several times to sort out who did what to whom and why. There were a multitude of low-lives tangling with each other, and Glockner was only a supporting character in many of those other dramas.

The recipes appendix was the longest I have ever seen in a food cozy, about 80 pages. There was a detailed history of coffee, numerous latte recipes, and baked goods to go with them. The lattes included Eggnog, Snowflake (white chocolate), and Candy Cane. For nibbles, try the Red and Green Biscotti, Jamaican Rum Cake, and Candy Cane Brownies. Fa-la-la-la-la.

HOLIDAY BUZZ (2012) renewed the Christmas bloodshed a few years later. The Great New York Cookie Swap was underway, with Clare Cosi providing the coffee to wash them down. The Fa-la-la-la Lattes were selling well. It

couldn't be that simple and it wasn't. Cosi found the beaten body of a baker's assistant. Police said the murder was part of what they dubbed the Christmas Stalkings, done by a serial killer.

By now, Cosi had enough murder cases that she dared lecture the police on how they should investigate. That went over about as well as you might expect, and backfired badly when the police made one of her baristas a suspect. The Cookie Swap finally staggered to an end. Cosi sold her last latte, and another baker died the hard way at the show, beaten to death behind her stall.

The death toll was the result of a blackmail victim lashing out in anger, not just at her tormentors but witnesses to her crimes who might tell a tale to the police. There were some complicated twists, some based on old events. All ended well, except for the dead, their next of kin, and the accused.

The rest of the characters consoled themselves with Gingerbread Crackle Cookies and a wide variety of fattening baked goods, washed down with Candy Cane Lattes.

HANDMADE, HOLIDAY, HOMICIDE (2014) by Joanna Campbell Slan was a novel in a cosy series about Kiki Lowenstein, who operated a scrapbooking store in Saint Louis, Missouri. While teaching a class at a community centre, one of her students, Eudora Field, dropped dead from an apparent heart attack.

Field wasn't mourned, being a bipolar borderline psychopath. Lowenstein was eight months pregnant and had a store to run in the busy Christmas season, but nonetheless did some investigating.

It being the holidays, a horde of relatives descended on the house. Plus, she over-volunteered for the activities of the season, although doing so gave her more opportunities to interview people about Field's life.

Lowenstein in turn was investigated by the police, who insisted on making their own enquiries. Even more annoying was a second amateur detective, a security guard who felt he was even more qualified. Nothing annoys a Miss Marple more than another Miss Marple barging into the case.

The murderer was trying to prove himself for a job, and resented Field interfering with him, so he eliminated that roadblock. All ended well after the usual confrontation. The Christmas pageant was almost a complete success.

There was an embarrassing moment during the Nativity tableaux when the donkey head-butted the Baby Jesus doll.

CHEDDAR OFF DEAD (2016) by Julia Buckley was part of a cozy food series about Lilah Drake, a home-delivery caterer in Pine Haven, Illinois. Christmas was the busy season for her, and got busier when she witnessed Santa Claus murdered in a parking lot.

The man inside the suit was Brad Whitefield, a young but failed actor who was a skirt chaser and a gambler with heavy debts. He was shot with a silenced pistol. There was a high probability the hitman would come looking for Drake.

In between delivering food, guest starring on a cooking show, and dealing with all the Christmas festivities, Drake was a busy woman. The alarms and excursions included shots fired and a jealous Mafia wife. Drake couldn't help but contrast the cheerful and snowy Christmas season with the death and destruction around her.

The killer was originally motivated by jealousy but then kept finding other threads to deal with. After the last shooting victim was carted away, it was on to the recipes appendix, cookies of several types but with an odd-one-out French Toast Gingerbread Casserole.

AS THE CHRISTMAS COOKIE CRUMBLES (2018) by Leslie Budewitz was a novel in a cozy series set in Jewel Bay, Montana, where Erin Murphy managed a general store. She made a new friend with Merrily Thornton, who was a woman with a past, disowned by her parents, and not good at mixing with the right people.

Thornton only survived to Chapter 5, when she was apparently strangled with a string of Christmas lights. The autopsy, however, revealed that she had been given an overdose of insulin. Thornton's parents were fanatics about Christmas decorations, but all their displays and lights seemed depressing now. Besides running a store and preparing for Christmas, Murphy was engaged to be married, so she was busy indeed. She managed to get in some sleuthing though.

What broke the case was the string of lights Thornton had been strangled with. Every store or home putting up Christmas lights had a different brand or style. One place was a string short, which narrowed down the list of suspects. The killer was an angry sibling who was acting out because of family issues.

The denouement was original, a snowball fight with hard-packed snowballs. The assorted Christmas cookie recipes in the appendix might help assuage the reader.

SILENT KNIFE (2013) by Shelley Freydon was a novel in a series about Liv Montgomery, newly arrived in Celebration Bay, New York State, as the village's event planner. The Christmas season was underway and a temporary store Trim A Tree was not spreading good cheer. The proprietor Grace Thornsby and her store had a list of offences too long to enumerate here.

It was therefore all the more surprising when it was not Thornsby who was the first murder victim. Phil Cosgrove, the man she hired as a Santa was found dead in the store under a toppled Christmas tree. The police learned he was a private investigator but no one knew what he was investigating.

The plot threads tangled up with family feuds, business feuds, and a 1969 antiwar protest bombing that extended its reach four decades into the future. Cosgrove was on the trail of the bomber, who struck first to protect herself.

Thornsby became persona non grata in the village for her commercial behaviour but was innocent of more venial events. The Christmas dinner went well though, at least for the survivors.

TWELVE SLAYS OF CHRISTMAS (2017) by Jacqueline Frost (pseudonym, and a rather blatant one, of Julie Anne Lindsey) was the first novel in a cozy series about Holly White of Mistletoe, Maine. Her fiancé dumped her two weeks before their Christmas Eve wedding, so she ran home to Maine, where her family operated the Reindeer Games tree farm.

Her credentials as the new Miss Marple in town were established when someone bludgeoned to death Margaret Fenwick of the Mistletoe Historical Society. The killer left her body in a sleigh display at the farm. The murder weapon was a heavy tree stake.

White's father and a farm employee had both argued with Fenwick before her demise. That was good enough for the Deppity Dawg, although to be fair, as the novel progressed he later changed his mind as the evidence changed. Fenwick had her problems, although she hadn't acted from malice.

Someone was sending threats to White and the farm, but the Gingerbread contest went on in the village, and so did the farm's Christmas Tree Ball. The confrontation with the killer, every bit as traditional as Christmas, took place out on the snow and ice.

The murderer had embezzled funds from the Historical Society, and Fenwick found him out. It all ended happily at the farm, with white cupcakes served all around. Just the thing to recover from being left standing at the altar, finding a body, and almost getting killed by a murderer.

Donna Andrews has written a long cozy series about Meg Langslow of Caerphilly, Virginia, sometimes a blacksmith but often far away from her forge in her capacity as the village Miss Marple. She had an extended family of cousins, aunts, and uncles, scattered about the village and the countryside.

LARK! THE HERALD ANGELS SING (2018) began in December as Langslow was directing the children's nativity play. She found a live baby, not a corpse, in the manger, with a note implying her brother Rob was the father.

Langslow went investigating to determine the real identity and father of the baby girl, named Lark to justify the title of this novel. Grandfather suggested Cuckoo or Cowbird because those are two brood parasite species that have others raise their young, but that didn't go over well.

Caerphilly and the contiguous Clay County were never friendly neighbours. Not only was there no Christmas spirit between them, they were almost at actual physical war with each other. Langslow had family mixed into the feud, enough to distract her.

There was corruption, missing people, competing law-enforcement agencies at all levels of government, and grand theft of several kinds. Not to worry though, as it all worked out well in a lengthy denouement. Only the worst part remained, staging the school play.

Not So Cozy Mysteries.

Sherlock Holmes was no stranger to old-time radio. Various series on as many different networks aired from 1930 to 1956. The best was a run from 1939 to 1946 which had Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce in the parts they were most famous for in the movies.

“The Night Before Christmas” aired on Christmas Eve in 1945, written by Denis Green and Anthony Boucher. It was set on Christmas Eve 1886. Dr Watson had dressed as Santa Claus for a children’s party Mrs Hudson was giving elsewhere. Just as they were leaving Baker Street, Lord Whiticum arrived as a client for Holmes.

Whiticum wanted Holmes to dress as Father Christmas to guard jewelry presents he was going to give out at a party that night. He had received a threatening letter saying that if he didn’t pay protection money then the jewels would be stolen. Holmes recognized the handwriting as that of Prof. Moriarty.

Meanwhile, near the children’s party, Watson saw another Santa take a bad fall and stopped to help him. After helping the man to his feet, they went their separate ways, not realizing they had accidentally traded sacks of presents. While that was happening, Whiticum and Holmes had arrived at the former’s townhouse to discover a man dressed as Santa had sneaked off with the jewelry presents.

Watson and Moriarty discovered the switched sacks about the same time. The Professor sent his gang over in the guise of carolers to recover the stolen jewels. Simultaneously Holmes and the police realized the same thing, and went off to the same destination also as carolers.

Both sides tried not to frighten the children and fought a battle singing loudly while berating each other with truncheons. The police won, and Holmes reassured the kiddies it was all in fun. They got their toys and Whiticum got the jewels back. All ended well with the children singing “Silent Night”.

CANDY MATSON was an old-time radio series that ran from 1949 to 1951, about a female private investigator. (This and other OTR shows are available as free mp3s from www.otrrlibrary.org.)

The series was unusual for the time. Candy Matson didn’t scream or have fainting spells in her job and was as tough as her male counterparts when it came to violent situations. The episodes were written and produced by Monte Masters, whose wife Natalie Park played the lead role.

The dialogue was snappy and the action brisk. Matson lived in a penthouse apartment on Telegraph Hill in San Francisco, from where most of her cases began. Her boyfriend was SFPD Detective Ray Mallard. Her best friend and

confident was Rembrandt Watson. He was a blatant poofster, rather surprising in those days when homosexuality wasn’t just a sin but a felony offense. His part was played seriously, not as a comic turn.

“Jack Frost” was a 1949 episode. Matson was hired by a department store to locate a missing Jack Frost, one of Santa’s helpers. They also needed a replacement promptly, so she talked her friend Rembrandt Watson into replacing him while the missing person investigation went on.

The original Jack Frost soon made the front page as a John Doe murder victim. The reporters and the public didn’t know about the department store connection but Matson and Mallard certainly did. While Watson was helping Santa with the kiddies at the store, someone slipped him a threatening note.

From there the investigation proceeded. The killer was found to be an ambitious middle-management supervisor who thought he could get ahead by disrupting the existing manager’s operations. He tried to scare off the original Jack Frost at the height of the Christmas season, and when that didn’t work, silenced him with a gun.

The ending was contrived, so much so that Matson had to spend the last five minutes explaining who did what to whom. The plot moved along quickly but tangled up in a mess that only an infodump could straighten out.

What interested me was the use of Jack Frost as an assistant to Santa Claus. In Canada, the assistants are elves, always played by young women. Jack Frost is a separate character not associated with Christmas but with the winter season in general. He is seldom heard of in modern times.

YOURS TRULY, JOHNNY DOLLAR was an old-time radio series that aired from 1949 to 1962, and was the last old-time radio survivor. Johnny Dollar was an insurance investigator with an action-packed expense account. He was famous for padding his expenses.

Each line item would be read out loud and served as a bridge to the next scene. Fascinating to today’s listeners, as he would fly cross-country first-class for \$100, stay in a luxury hotel for \$25 a night, or have a steak dinner for \$2.

“How I Played Santa Claus And Almost Got Left Holding The Bag”, written by Paul Dudley and Gil Doud, aired on Christmas Eve, 1949. The title was

misleading because Dollar didn't actually dress up as Santa, just had a run-in with him.

Dollar was hired by a group of department store owners in Manhattan to investigate a swindler who went to a store during the busy Christmas shopping season, posed as a sales clerk, and then disappeared with the cash from a register. As Dollar began his investigation, matters suddenly worsened.

A store detective spotted the thief but was shot dead. The only witness was a boy named Bobby, who was much too traumatized to describe the culprit. Dollar took him to the store's Santa Claus in an effort to allay his hysteria. Bobby wanted an air rifle but Santa told him no, not unless he helped the nice people who wanted to know what the nasty man looked like.

Bobby had bitten the killer on the hand, so the store was sealed and the search began. Every man attempting to leave the store had his hands checked by police. Shortly after, the real store Santa was found; he had been mugged and bound, and the killer used the costume, which traditionally includes white gloves.

From there, a gun battle raged across the floors. The murderer made it to the shipping department and hid in a crate. Dollar didn't realize that until the following day, by which time the crate had been shipped out. The good news was that the crate contained supplies ordered by the Sing Sing prison.

THE FALCON aired on radio from 1943 to 1954. It was based on a popular series of movies which in turn were based on a story by Michael Arlen. As with The Shadow series, there was no continuity between the different media appearances. The Falcon was Gay Lawrence in the movies, then later Lawrence's brother, and for radio he became Michael Waring.

"The Unwelcome Christmas Present", no writer credited, was aired 1950-12-24 on Christmas Eve. It opened with Larry Stirling being accosted on the street by a spiv named Walter Haines, who offered for sale a silver fox jacket for \$75. A steal at the price and it obviously was, but Stirling needed a Christmas present for his girlfriend. She was pleased to get it and hoped that Stirling didn't pay more than \$20 for the dyed rabbit coat.

Meanwhile, Haines was in trouble with his supplier Renault, who wanted the jacket back and was prepared to be rough about it. One of Renault's goons

tracked Stirling back to his apartment but he was gone, over at his girlfriend's apartment. When Stirling came back, his landlord tipped him off that some big ugly guys had called.

Stirling got the fur coat back and took it to Waring for advice. He took it to a furrier for appraisal, left it there, and returned home to find Renault and company waiting for him. From there the alarums and excursions accumulated, with the fur coat as the MacGuffin that everyone was chasing. Since it was a cheap rabbit coat, there had to be some other reason for it being in demand.

Pausing only for the beating death of one of the goons, the climax came in Waring's apartment. The bad guys got what they deserved, but the mystery remained as to what they were searching for. Waring suddenly realized that the fur coat had come in a box, which he had tossed in his garbage can, and about which no one else paid any attention.

Some forensic testing, that is, ripping open the layers of cardboard, revealed a list of smugglers. It could be used for blackmail, or handed over to prosecutors, and the listener can guess what happened to it.

The episode was listenable but a routine mystery story. Since it lasted a decade on radio, it was obviously pleasant listening, but nothing to inspire future generations of fans. Worth listening to once.

THE FAT MAN aired on radio from 1946 to 1951. It was based on a character created by Dashiell Hammett, who did not write any of the episodes. Notwithstanding that, when Hammett was named as a Communist during the Red Scare the series was abruptly terminated.

The few mp3s available are distorted to the bass end due to the wrong transcription speed. Tolerable if you want to listen to an example.

"Murder Sends A Christmas Card" probably aired in December 1950, no writer credited. Brad Runyon was the Fat Man, a private detective. The episode began when he saved a distressed woman from walking in front of a passing vehicle. She was Myra Davis and told Runyon that she thought her husband Sam was in some kind of trouble.

Sam had been out looking for extra work to buy Christmas presents, then vanished after telling her he had found a trucking job that paid \$100 for one

short trip (about \$1,000 in today's currency). Runyon said he'd help her and gave her his business card.

He caught the track of Sam by talking to a bartender in a pool hall. This was a favourite trope of OTR radio, the bartender who could remember every patron who came in, even weeks ago, what drinks were ordered, what time the suspect arrived and when he left.

(DRAGNET was well populated with these barkeeps, who could state to Sgt Friday that a man of average build, brown hair, and ordinary business suit came in last Thursday at 18h35, had a whiskey with a beer chaser, and left at 18h55 carrying a package wrapped with brown paper.)

There was an attempted robbery nearby as Runyon left the poolroom. Shots were fired and a policeman killed. Runyon ran over to check on the casualties. In the snow he found a silver cigarette lighter inscribed "To Sam, Love Myra". Pocketing it, he telephoned the police, then went back to the poolroom.

He fingered Sam because the man needed to borrow matches to light a cigarette. Sam denied any involvement in the shooting and said he had been briefly at home with Myra. Runyon telephoned her and she backed up her husband's story, but of course that was a worthless testimonial.

Sam said he had lost the lighter in a pool game a week previous to pay off his debt to the shark. Runyon didn't believe the story, took him into a private room for roughing up, and then found his business card in Sam's pocket. He could only have gotten it from Myra.

The ending was inconclusive. The police arrived. Runyon vouched for Sam, then told him they were going out in search of the characters who did the killing. No doubt they would be well assisted in their future investigations by garrulous bartenders with eidetic memories. Runyon told Sam he'd help him find a job to buy those Christmas presents.

SUSPENSE was an anthology old-time radio series that aired from 1942 to 1962. The stories were mostly mysteries but there were numerous science fiction, fantasy, and weird stories. Sometimes just plain dramas were aired, such as "Twas The Night Before Christmas" on 1953-12-21, written by Morton Fine and David Friedkin.

The episode was about a young girl named Cathy, who was awaiting the return of her parents on Christmas Eve from their trip to Europe. They were late, and the housekeeper babysitting her would not answer any questions as to why. What she was trying to keep from Cathy was that the passenger plane the parents were on had run into a storm between Ireland and Newfoundland and was reported overdue.

The news had been broadcast on the radio, and news reporters had tried to enter the house. The housekeeper contacted Cathy's uncle and everyone was desperately trying to keep the news away from her. They tried to distract her with Christmas celebrations, but she could see the adults weren't in the spirit.

Unfortunately Cathy soon realized that her parents weren't coming home Christmas Eve. The situation went from bad to worse, with no news of the aircraft's fate. After every last tear had been jerked from this story of pathos and lament, the good news finally came. The aircraft managed to make it to an uninhabited airstrip in Newfoundland, and the parents eventually came home.

The first three-quarters of this episode is a rough ride to listen to, and certainly pulled on the emotions. Well acted and enough to make one think what it would be like today.

Short Stories.

"My Christmas Story" by Steve Hockensmith (2019 Jan/Feb, ELLERY QUEEN MYSTERY MAGAZINE) was part of a series set in the American Old West. Otto and Red Amlingmeyer were brothers who were inspired by the then-current Sherlock Holmes stories to set up their own detective agency in Utah.

It must be remembered that while we think of Doyle's stories as gaslight period pieces today, they were originally published as contemporary fiction.

The first case of the brothers was the discovery of a dead man dressed in a bear suit near the railroad tracks. He had been shot in the back. Sleuthing revealed that the deceased had been on his way to a fancy dress party when he panicked a stranger who had a gun.

Tracking down the stranger wasn't an easy job, him being dressed as Santa Claus for a different private function, but it was done. A humourous story, except, of course, to the next of kin.

“Let Nothing Ye Dismay” by Chris Patrick Carolan is from the 2018 anthology ENIGMA FRONT: ONWARD, produced by the Imaginative Fiction Writers of Alberta workshop. It was set in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on Christmas Eve 1880. A young girl had gone missing and the police were out in full force searching for her.

Inspector Eddings had a run-in with a big ugly guy who was arrested and brought in chains to the jail. The culprit revealed he was an Icelandic troll, one of a group who had emigrated to Canada for a better life. Some of them, however, could not break old habits, such as kidnapping naughty children.

Old-Time Radio Miscellany.

“Trying To Solve The Mystery Of Packages”, written by Ellamae Casteel, was the ninth episode of MYSTERY CASTLE, a mini-series aired in 1947 December which terminated just before Christmas Day. It was a children’s show in 15-minute episodes, about Happy the Rabbit and a boy named Ronnie. I downloaded it thinking it was a mystery drama but decided to listen to it anyway.

This installment had the two characters meandering through the Enchanted Forest a long way from the castle they lived in. They had stolen a key to Santa’s workshop. While the jolly fellow slept, they snooped about looking for presents.

Later they tangled with a wicked witch in the forest. She didn’t seem to notice them because she was busy cooking up some sort of magic potion. She flew off on her broomstick, carrying the potion.

Happy and Ronnie vowed to follow her and find up what evil she was up to, ignoring the fact that they had just been burglarizing Santa’s workshop. To be continued, although I didn’t.

Broadcast Humour: Old-Time Radio.

FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY was an old-time radio comedy that ran from 1935 to 1953 as a half-hour show before a live audience. Those were its glory days. It then straggled on as a 15-minute show in a studio without an audience. From 1957 to 1959 it was a 4-minute act on a radio variety show before finally being put out of its misery. The episodes were mostly written by Don Quinn.

Fibber McGee and his wife Molly lived in Wistful Vista, state never specified, and did not seem to have gainful employment yet always had money to be doing things. The early shows were rough, but over time the characters were refined and their social circle elaborated. Molly always called her husband by his surname. Try that with your spouse and see what happens.

The series was sponsored by the Johnson Wax Company. The announcer of the show was Harlow Wilcox, who had bit parts within each episode but whose main duty was to barge into the plot at intervals and extol the merits of Johnson’s floor wax and furniture polish.

In old-time radio sitcoms such as this one, the middle commercial was integrated into the episode as part of the story, not as an interruption. Wilcox would cross paths with the McGees and tell them he was on his way to show a lonely housewife how to wax her linoleum, or have lunch with executives from the Johnson Wax Company. This gave him an opportunity to tell the McGees and the audience of the wonders of wax and polish, and why the Johnson brand was the best.

One problem with the early shows was their pacing. Even in Shakespeare’s time it was known that a comedy had to have serious or musical interludes so the audience wouldn’t get laughed out. This radio series didn’t pace its comedy properly, putting a musical number at the beginning of the episode before the comedy began, and inserting a singer at a wrong moment.

The normal format was a parade of regular characters. Mayor La Trivia was a pompous man usually reduced to red-faced sputtering by the McGees misinterpreting his remarks. The Old Timer had a different job every week.

During the war years, Alice Darling was a sweet young thing who roomed with them while working at the aircraft factory.

“Christmas Shopping” was aired on 1935-12-09, and was an example of the earliest episodes. Fibber and Molly were shopping at the Wistful Vista Department Store, packed solid with customers. They pushed their way into the Toy Dept., where Fibber played with every toy he could like a 10-year-old boy. Molly had trouble keeping him under control.

One of the toys was a Jack-in-the-box. When it popped open, the head was that of Wilcox, who then went into his spiel about floor wax. Meanwhile Fibber

was trying to stuff the head back inside but only succeeded after the commercial was done.

Molly was trying to find a doll for a child on her list. She wanted an ordinary type of doll but the store only had talking and/or walking dolls at a premium price and did not want to or could not sell her a basic doll. Sort of like cellphone stores today, where you have to hunt around to find a basic cellphone that dials numbers and does nothing else.

Fibber, meanwhile, continued to play with all the toys. Both Molly and the floorwalker had to keep slapping him down. He worked his way around the room, and finally came to what he thought was a very realistic toy cash register. It even had realistic looking banknotes inside it.

The shopgirl spotted him and screamed for the store detective. It was, of course, a real cash register, and she thought he was stealing from it. His protestations of innocence were drowned out by the closing music.

“Christmas Shopping at Bon Ton”, written by Phil Leslie, aired on 1953-12-16, after the series had gone down to 15-minute episodes without an audience. Fibber and Molly were braving the crowds at the local department store. The two decided to split up so they could buy presents for each other without giving away the surprise.

They ran into the Old Timer, who had taken a job as Santa Claus. It wasn’t working out as well as he thought it would. Instead of innocent children, he was dealing with rotten kids who were upset that last year Santa didn’t bring them what they wanted.

Fibber had bought Molly perfume for the last three years and was desperately trying to think of something different to surprise her this year. Using his standard reasoning facilities and logic, he surmised that she figured he wouldn’t buy her perfume four years in a row. Therefore if he bought her perfume again, it would surprise her because she was expecting something else.

In the declining days of the series was the 1954-12-12, episode “Buying Christmas Cards From Kremer”, written by Phil Leslie. This is one that has been made obsolete by the march of time. The generation now being born will have to have explained to them what a Christmas card was and how they were used.

The McGees went shopping for Christmas cards. Yes, people used to do that. They didn’t like the crowds and couldn’t find what they wanted in the stores. Fibber heard of a woman who sold cards in the home, so they invited her. (She was played by Natalie Park, better remembered as Candy Matson.)

For years, the McGees had been sending out a card design with a Santa and straightforward inscription. They sorted through the sales lady’s entire stock at great length of time. Either the design was nice but they didn’t like the inscription or vice versa. After working their way through all the cards, they settled on a design with a Santa and straightforward inscription. They then ordered a dozen cards for \$1.25.

Even in 1954 this had hardly been worth the time and effort of the sales lady, who was expecting a standard order of 100 or more. She was polite about it though. I am old enough to remember my mother had an address book for Christmas cards with well over 100 people.

That was not unusual, for the tradition was that cards were sent to people one never saw in person any more, distant and near relatives alike, business associates of the breadwinner (ie, Dad, since mothers stayed at home in those days), and local shopkeepers (before chain stores in shopping malls ran them all out of business). I remember in the 1960s my brother and I being press-ganged to stuff and stamp all the envelopes like an assembly line. Those were the days.

Broadcast Humour: Christmas 1941.

The shock of the attack on Pearl Harbor was still reverberating through the USA during Christmas 1941. The radio shows did their part to mobilize the public, although it took a while for some of them to come up to speed. Some shows immediately did propaganda to rally the citizens, while others minimized it on the premise that they should be a relief from the depressing news.

THE GREAT GILDERSLEEVE was a long-running old-time radio series from 1941 to 1957. It was about Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve, who was a spin-off character from the FIBBER MCGEE show.

The premise was that he was called to the town of Summerfield as the guardian of his young niece and nephew, Marjorie and Leroy. They had been orphaned when their parents were killed in an accident. There was a Negro cook named Birdie, who filled out the household.

One week after Pearl Harbor, the episode “Selling The Iron Deer”, written by Leonard L. Levinson, aired on December 14. There can be no doubt that the original script had been tossed in favour of a revised episode.

The story began with Gildersleeve doing the family budget and coming up short, not so much because of a lack of money but because in a burst of enthusiasm he had used up all his ready cash buying war bonds and stamps.

The kids wanted money to buy Christmas presents but with none available, Gildersleeve could only suggest they look through the house for unwanted items that could be sold. They did, and came across a large ornamental lawn ornament, a deer. Gildersleeve told them, and Birdie, that they could sell it to a scrap dealer and keep the money. In the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, commodities such as scrap metal really were worth something.

The three of them independently began soliciting bids from dealers and from there the complications developed as the iron deer was sold and resold multiple times. Everyone was grasping for money but it all ended in confusion.

The old-time radio series THE JACK BENNY SHOW, written by his stable of regular writers, always made good use of Christmas. Benny played a tightwad, was vain about his blue eyes, but never hiding the fact that he wore a toupee.

Not quite his girlfriend was Mary Livingstone, played by his wife Sadie Marks. She had mild dyslexia and occasionally mis-read words in the script. Her most famous garble was on another episode where, in a diner, she ordered a chiss sweet sandwich.

Benny’s announcer Don Wilson was a tall and rotund man who participated in the script. He enthusiastically touted the sponsor’s products, particularly when it was Jello. The band leader at this time was Phil Harris, who played himself as a heavy drinker and party man. Most of his musicians were on parole or had past records, and dressed like street bums because Harris was too cheap to buy them uniforms.

Benny’s Negro valet Rochester van Jones wasn’t the clichéd “yes massa” type that Hollywood took as a standard. He was sarcastic and poked fun at his boss’s cheap ways. The two men were closer to friends than a master-servant relationship. That occasionally got Benny into trouble with his Southern audiences, who thought Rochester was a little too uppity at times.

“The Christmas Tree” was first aired on 1941-12-21, but didn’t mention the war. It began with a variety of gags, including Benny bragging about his Christmas party and all the famous actors he invited who weren’t coming and had sent regrets. The radio series had a long-running gag about Benny’s next-door neighbours, actors Ronald and Benita Colman, and all the trouble and strife he caused them.

The significance of this show is that it mentioned for the first time a fictional cowboy actor Rodney Dangerfield, who was coming to Benny’s Christmas party. The actor was an occasional gag thereafter and appeared in a number of later episodes. Dangerfield constantly complained that he got no respect in the business. Decades later, a stand-up comedian who worked the Catskills circuit adopted the name and tag line. Yes, that guy.

Eventually Benny went home where Rochester told him of letters and cards from more famous people who had sent their regrets and flimsy excuses. Benny and Livingstone began to decorate the Christmas tree, but discovered that mice had eaten all the popcorn balls. Not a problem; Benny just went outside and picked oranges off a tree belonging to the Colmans.

WHEN WORDS COLLIDE

The tenth annual When Words Collide will return to the Delta South Marriott Hotel on the weekend of August 14 to 16, 2020. It will incorporate the Aurora Awards and Canvention 40. WWC always sells out by June, as do the banquet and hotel. Details from www.whenwordscollide.org

ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST

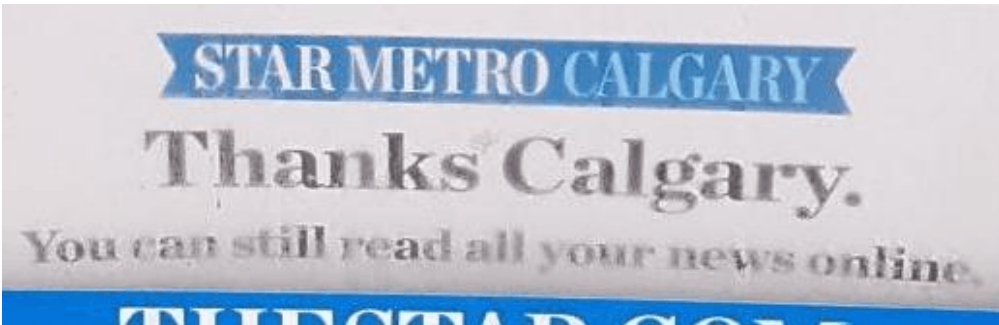
by Dale Speirs

When I bought my house in 1982, the CALGARY HERALD had street boxes every second block in residential neighbourhoods like mine. Each morning on my way to work I would first walk down to the corner and buy a newspaper. Sometime in the late 1990s, those boxes disappeared. I didn't notice exactly when because like most people I stopped buying the print editions years before. We had noticed that the print editions only had the news we had read yesterday online so there was no point in buying a physical copy.

The CALGARY SUN persisted for a while by concentrating their boxes at bus stops and LRT stations, but those eventually vanished. The CALGARY METRO, a free newspaper, arrived and lasted longer, again only at bus stops. But in late 2019, the publisher announced the final edition was December 20. Now they are all online only, for better but usually for worse because online ads aren't as profitable, so they can't afford to keep the same editorial staff.

The final edition was nothing spectacular. It was just a run of regular news with a few paragraphs on page 3 saying so long and see you on our Website. They ask a subscription fee, like the others do. I'm sure there are people who subscribe to dozens of news feeds, video games, fan sites, and streaming sites. Those fees add up in a hurry.

Not for me. I'll skim the free headlines, which pretty much tell the story and need no further research. Most of the news headlines are noise, while the real stories are ignored by the mass media and can only be found on alternative news Websites.



SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Sofue, Y., et al (2019) **Giant elephant trunks from giant molecular clouds.** PUBLICATIONS OF THE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY OF JAPAN 71:doi.org/10.1093/pasj/psz106

Author’s abstract: *We report the discovery of large elephant trunk (ET)-like objects, named giant elephant trunks (GETs), of molecular gas in star-forming complexes in the Scutum and Norma arms using the 12 CO(J = 1–0)-line survey data with the Nobeyama 45 m telescope.*

Their lengths are ~20 to 50 parsecs, an order of magnitude larger than ETs. GETs show a cometary structure coherently aligned parallel to the galactic plane, and emerge from the bow-shaped concave surface of giant molecular clouds (GMC) facing the Hii regions, and point down-stream of the gas flow in the spiral arms.

The molecular masses of the head clumps are ~103–104M_⊙, about three to four times the virial masses, indicating that the clumps are gravitationally stable. Jeans masses calculated for the derived density and assumed kinetic temperature are commonly sub-solar.

We suggest that the GET heads are possible birth sites of stellar clusters, similarly to ET globules, but at much greater scale. We discuss the origin of the GETs by Rayleigh–Taylor instability due to deceleration of GMCs by low density gas stagnated in the galactic shock waves as well as by pressure of the H ii regions.

Wysoczanska, R., et al (2020) **First stars that could significantly perturb comet motion are finally found.** MONTHLY NOTICES OF THE ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY 491:2119-2128

Authors’ abstract: *Since 1950 when Oort published his paper on the structure of the cloud of comets it is believed that stars passing near this hypothetical cometary reservoir play an important role in the dynamical evolution of long-period comets and injecting them into the observability region of the Solar system.*

The aim of this paper is to discuss two cases in which the data obtained from observations were used and stellar perturbations (of different intensity, strong case of C/2002 A3 LINEAR and weaker case of C/2013 F3 PANSTARRS) on cometary motion were detected.

Using the best available data from the Gaia DR2 catalogue and some other sources, we searched for close stellar passages near the Sun. Our study took into account that some of the stars are parts of multiple systems. Over 600 stars or systems that approached or will approach the Sun closer than 4.0 parsecs were found.

Having the list of perturbers completed, we studied their influence on a sample of 277 Oort spike comets that were observed since 1901 and discovered that two comets might have their orbits fundamentally changed due to a close stellar encounter.

Our results show how much different the dynamical evolution of comets would have looked when their motion was considered only in the Galactic potential. Uncertainties both in stellar and cometary data were carefully taken into account. Our analysis indicates that the occurrence of stellar perturbations on cometary motions is very rare and the uncertainties of these effects are hard to estimate.

Klimczak, C., et al (2019) **Principles of structural geology on rocky planets.** CANADIAN JOURNAL OF EARTH SCIENCES 56:1437-1457

Authors’ abstract: *Although Earth is the only known planet on which plate tectonics operates, many small- and large-scale tectonic landforms indicate that deformational processes also occur on the other rocky planets.*

Although the mechanisms of deformation differ on Mercury, Venus, and Mars, the surface manifestations of their tectonics are frequently very similar to those found on Earth. Furthermore, tectonic processes invoked to explain deformation on Earth before the recognition of horizontal mobility of tectonic plates remain relevant for the other rocky planets.

Earth is commonly regarded as special among the planetary bodies in our solar system, as it is the only planet known to possess plate tectonics. With the recognition of a lack of Earth-style plate tectonics on the other rocky planets,

many planetary scientists invented new terms to describe, categorize, and analyze surface structures.

But structural and tectonic phenomena resulting from shortening and stretching of the rocky rinds of Mercury, Venus, and Mars are not substantially different from those observed and described on Earth, as all of these bodies are rocky planets possessing lithospheres that share many geophysical and geochemical characteristics.

We have shown here that numerous phenomena observed on the rocky planets have previously been described on Earth and that some historic hypotheses, later proven not to be valid on Earth, seem applicable to the study of tectonics on the other rocky planets. Even if these hypotheses turn out not to have global applicability, the interpretations of individual structures seem robust and, as happened on Earth, they could be easily placed within the framework of newer hypotheses.

The idea of the theory of the contracting Earth, for instance, provides a global-scale example of an historic concept that finds applicability on Mercury and even on Mars and the Moon, and structures in intraplate tectonic settings may serve as analogue field sites for the characterization and understanding of landforms on these bodies.

Deamer, D., et al (2019) **Hydrothermal chemistry and the origin of cellular life.** ASTROBIOLOGY 19:1523-1537

Authors' abstract: *Two processes required for life's origin are condensation reactions that produce essential biopolymers by a nonenzymatic reaction, and self-assembly of membranous compartments that encapsulate the polymers into populations of protocells.*

Because life today thrives not just in the temperate ocean and lakes but also in extreme conditions of temperature, salinity, and pH, there is a general assumption that any form of liquid water would be sufficient to support the origin of life as long as there are sources of chemical energy and simple organic compounds.

We argue here that the first forms of life would be physically and chemically fragile and would be strongly affected by ionic solutes and pH. A hypothesis

emerges from this statement that hot springs associated with volcanic land masses have an ionic composition more conducive to self-assembly and polymerization than seawater.

Here we have compared the ionic solutes of seawater with those of terrestrial hot springs. We then describe preliminary experimental results that show how the hypothesis can be tested in a prebiotic analog environment.

Lechte, M.A., et al (2019) **Subglacial meltwater supported aerobic marine habitats during Snowball Earth.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES 116:25478-25483

[Anoxia is oxygenless water, aerobic eukaryotes are cells with nuclei and which need oxygen, whether a microbe or a human.]

Authors' abstract: *The “Snowball Earth” ice ages featured global ice sheets for millions of years, leading to oceanic anoxia and threatening the perseverance of aerobic life on Earth. Crucially, aerobic eukaryotes survived, possibly including early animals. Iron-rich chemical sediments preserved in glacial deposits offer insights into the synglacial marine redox state.*

We provide evidence for oxygenated waters near ice sheet grounding lines, where oxic subglacial meltwater would be supplied to the anoxic oceans. The energy released from this mixing of oxic and anoxic waters could have fueled microbial communities and sustained localized aerobic ecosystems. This meltwater oxygen pump may therefore have been critical in the survival and evolution of aerobic eukaryotes during episodes of extreme glaciation.

The Earth's most severe ice ages interrupted a crucial interval in eukaryotic evolution with widespread ice coverage during the Cryogenian Period (720 to 635 Ma). Aerobic eukaryotes must have survived the “Snowball Earth” glaciations, requiring the persistence of oxygenated marine habitats, yet evidence for these environments is lacking.

We examine iron formations within globally distributed Cryogenian glacial successions to reconstruct the redox state of the synglacial oceans. Iron isotope ratios and cerium anomalies from a range of glaciomarine environments reveal pervasive anoxia in the ice-covered oceans but increasing oxidation with proximity to the ice shelf grounding line.

We propose that the outwash of subglacial meltwater supplied oxygen to the synglacial oceans, creating glaciomarine oxygen oases. The confluence of oxygen-rich meltwater and iron-rich seawater may have provided sufficient energy to sustain chemosynthetic communities. These processes could have supplied the requisite oxygen and organic carbon source for the survival of early animals and other eukaryotic heterotrophs through these extreme glaciations.

Dong, Y., et al (2019) **Physiology, metabolism, and fossilization of hot-spring filamentous microbial mats.** ASTROBIOLOGY 19:1442-1458

Authors' abstract: *The evolutionarily ancient Aquificales bacterium Sulfurihydrogenibium spp. dominates filamentous microbial mat communities in shallow, fast-flowing, and dysoxic hot-spring drainage systems around the world. In the present study, field observations of these fettuccini-like microbial mats at Mammoth Hot Springs in Yellowstone National Park are integrated with geology, geochemistry, hydrology, microscopy, and multi-omic molecular biology analyses.*

Strategic sampling of living filamentous mats along with the hot-spring CaCO₃ (travertine) in which they are actively being entombed and fossilized has permitted the first direct linkage of Sulfurihydrogenibium spp. physiology and metabolism with the formation of distinct travertine streamer microbial biomarkers.

Results indicate that, during chemoautotrophy and CO₂ carbon fixation, the 87 to 98% Sulfurihydrogenibium-dominated mats utilize chaperons to facilitate enzyme stability and function. High abundance transcripts and proteins for type IV pili and extracellular polymeric substances are consistent with their strong mucus-rich filaments tens of centimeters long that withstand hydrodynamic shear as they become encrusted by more than 5mm of travertine per day.

Their primary energy source is the oxidation of reduced sulfur (e.g., sulfide, sulfur, or thiosulfate) and the simultaneous uptake of extremely low concentrations of dissolved O₂ facilitated by bd-type cytochromes. The formation of elevated travertine ridges permits the Sulfurihydrogenibium-dominated mats to create a shallow platform from which to access low levels of dissolved oxygen at the virtual exclusion of other microorganisms. These ridged travertine streamer microbial biomarkers are

well preserved and create a robust fossil record of microbial physiological and metabolic activities in modern and ancient hot-spring ecosystems.

Guido, D.M., and K.A. Campbell (2019) **Plastic silica conglomerate with an extremophile microbial matrix in a hot-water stream paleoenvironment.** ASTROBIOLOGY 19:1433-1441

Authors' abstract: *A new and unusual type of fossil, siliceous hot-spring deposit (sinter), comprising monomictic, quartzose conglomerate encrusted with silicified microbial laminates, has been recognized in distal portions of Jurassic and Miocene paleogeothermal fields of South and North America, respectively.*

The siliceous clasts are inferred to have originated as conduit-delivered hydrothermal silica gel, owing to their general plastic morphologies, which were then locally reworked and redistributed in geothermally influenced stream paleoenvironments.

Today, hot spring-fed streams and creeks, in places with silica-armored pavements, host microbial mats coating stream beds and/or growing over, and silicifying at, stream air-water interfaces, for example, in Yellowstone National Park (USA) and Waimangu Volcanic Valley (New Zealand). However, the modern deposits do not contain the plastically deformed silica cobbles evident in Mesozoic and Cenozoic examples described herein.

Moreover, the fossil microbial laminates of this study are relatively dense and strongly coat the silica cobbles, suggesting the mats stabilized the clasts under fully submerged and hot, high-energy conditions. Thus, this new sinter facies, typically found a few kilometers from main spring-vent areas, is a perhaps unexpected extreme environment in which life took hold in hydrothermal-fluvial settings of the past, and may serve as an additional target in the search for fossil biosignatures of early Earth and possibly Mars.

Strullu-Derrien, C., et al (2019) **The Rhynie chert.** CURRENT BIOLOGY 29:doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2019.10.030

Authors' abstract: *In 1912, William Mackie, a medical practitioner surveying the regional geology west of Aberdeen, Scotland, happened on some unusual rocks near the village of Rhynie. Dark gray to nearly black and shot through*

with cylindrical structures a few millimeters in diameter, these rocks differed markedly from the shales and volcanic rocks of local hills.

Mackie had discovered the Rhynie chert, paleobotany's most iconic deposit, with its exceptionally preserved fossils that provide a uniquely clear view of early terrestrial ecosystems *in statu nascendi*. Early research by Robert Kidston and William Lang showed that the cylindrical structures in Rhynie rocks were the axes of early plants, preserved in remarkable cellular detail.

A century of subsequent research confirmed that Rhynie provides not only an unparalleled record of early tracheophyte (vascular plant) evolution, but also offers additional paleontological treasures, including animals (mostly arthropods) and microorganisms ranging from fungi, algae, and oomycetes to testate amoebozoans, and even cyanobacteria. A captivating snapshot of life on land more than 400 million years ago, the Rhynie chert provides our earliest and best view of how terrestrial ecosystems came to be.

Weissert, H. (2019) **Mesozoic C-cycle perturbations and climate: evidence for increased resilience of the Cretaceous biosphere to greenhouse pulses.** CANADIAN JOURNAL OF EARTH SCIENCES 56:1366-1374

Author's abstract: *The Mesozoic C-isotope record traces the history of the global carbon cycle. Major perturbations of the carbon cycle triggered by extraordinary volcanic activity are recorded in negative spikes coupled with positive C-isotope excursions. Prominent examples are the C-isotope anomaly events at the Permian-Triassic boundary and at the Triassic-Jurassic boundary, in the Toarcian or in the Aptian.*

While the major volcanic pulses at the Permian-Triassic and Triassic-Jurassic boundaries are considered as the main trigger of mass extinctions, carbon cycle perturbations in the Jurassic and Cretaceous were not accompanied by comparable extreme changes in marine or terrestrial biota.

The data suggest either that changes in degassing of large igneous provinces explain the difference in the biota's response to perturbation or (and) that the resilience of the Mesozoic biosphere to volcanic pulses changed through time.

It is hypothesized that two factors contributed to the increased resilience of the biosphere in the Late Mesozoic:

- (1) starting in the Middle Jurassic, pelagic carbonate developed into an important sink of CO₂ in the long-term carbon cycle, contributing to increased resilience of the carbon cycle to perturbations, and*
- (2) increasing fragmentation of Pangea resulted in the establishment of a trans-equatorial current system coupled with equatorial upwelling. This circulation pattern was intensified during greenhouse pulses.*

Increased marine productivity and widespread basinal anoxia favoured burial of organic carbon. Increased resilience of the Cretaceous biosphere against volcanic activity may explain why Deccan Trap volcanism was no longer sufficient as a trigger of a mass extinction at the Cretaceous-Paleogene boundary.

Truman, J.W. (2019) **The evolution of insect metamorphosis.** CURRENT BIOLOGY 29:doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2019.10.009

Author's abstract: *Amphibians and insects provide most people with their first contact with metamorphosis. The striking transformation of a tadpole into a frog is relatively rapid but one can track its progression from day to day as its limbs extend and its tail is resorbed.*

Metamorphosis in insects, though, seems more mysterious as their external exoskeleton hides the gradual changes occurring inside, and one only sees the results when the old outer cuticle is abruptly shed, such as when the butterfly emerges from its chrysalis.

Metamorphosis is an ancient life history trait that extends deep to the roots of the amphibians and many groups of invertebrates. Insects are unusual, though, in that their metamorphosis is a derived trait that evolved well after they colonized the land.

Insect orders approximating different steps in the evolution of metamorphosis exist today, so that comparative studies allow a piecing together of the molecular, developmental and endocrine changes that accompanied this transition.

The evolution of insect metamorphosis is one of the most important sagas in animal history, transforming small, obscure soil arthropods into a dominant terrestrial group that has profoundly shaped the evolution of terrestrial life.

The evolution of flight initiated the trajectory towards metamorphosis, favoring enhanced differences between juvenile and adult stages.

The initial step modified postembryonic development, resulting in the nymph-adult differences characteristic of hemimetabolous species. The second step was to complete metamorphosis, holometaboly, and occurred by profoundly altering embryogenesis to produce a larval stage, the nymph becoming the pupa to accommodate the deferred development needed to make the adult.

These changing life history patterns were intimately linked to two hormonal systems, the ecdysteroids and the juvenile hormones (JH), which function in both embryonic and postembryonic domains and control the stage specifying genes Krüppel homolog 1 (Kr-h1), broad and E93.

The ecdysteroids induce and direct molting through the ecdysone receptor (EcR), a nuclear hormone receptor with numerous targets including a conserved transcription factor network, the ‘Ashburner cascade’, which translates features of the ecdysteroid peak into the different phases of the molt.

With the evolution of metamorphosis, ecdysteroids acquired a metamorphic function that exploited the repressor capacity of the unliganded EcR, making it a hormone-controlled gateway for the tissue development preceding metamorphosis. JH directs ecdysteroid action, controlling Kr-h1 expression which in turn regulates the other stage specifying genes.

JH appears in basal insect groups as their embryos shift from growth and patterning to differentiation. As a major portion of embryogenesis was deferred to postembryonic life with the evolution of holometaboly, JH also acquired a potent role in regulating postembryonic growth and development.

Details of its involvement in broad expression and E93 suppression have been modified as life cycles became more complex and likely underlie some of the changes seen in the shift from incomplete to complete metamorphosis.

Moller, A.P., et al (2019) **Comparative urbanization of birds in China and Europe based on birds associated with trees.** CURRENT ZOOLOGY 65:617-625

Authors’ abstract: *Urbanization effects on living organisms are spatially heterogeneous. Here we quantified the abundance of birds per tree in forested urban and rural habitats for 85,829 trees mainly in China and Europe.*

A population model was based on the assumption that:

- 1) birds have a normally distributed habitat preference;*
- 2) an increase in population size linked to the habitat preference;*
- 3) a population size dependent on the habitat preference; and*
- 4) the removal of a certain fraction of individuals giving rise to extinction.*

We tested for large-scale differences in the impact of urbanization on the frequency distribution of the difference in abundance between urban and rural habitats in China and parts of Europe.

The difference in the frequency distribution of urban population density of birds in trees minus rural population density of birds in trees in China and Europe was statistically significant, suggesting that the abundance of birds differed between trees in urban and rural habitats, but more so in China than in Europe.

*We hypothesize that more pronounced differences in China than in Europe may have arisen due to the Four Pests Campaign in 1958 to 1962 that resulted in death of hundreds of millions of birds (mainly tree sparrows *Passer montanus*, but also numerous other less common species that were starting to become urbanized around 1960).*

Species that were less common in 1960 could not sustain reductions in population size in urban areas and hence these species are still rare or absent in urban areas today 60 years later.

Speirs: I had never heard of the Four Pests Campaign, so I looked it up on Wikipedia. An eye-opener.

Worm, A.J., and T.J. Boves (2019) **Bringing home the bacon: A *Lanius ludovicianus* (Loggerhead Shrike) caches an anthropogenic food item in an urban environment.** SOUTHEASTERN NATURALIST 18:doi.org/10.1656/058.018.0412

Authors’ abstract: *Shrikes (Family Laniidae) are songbirds that are known for their behavior of impaling prey, and in parts of the southern United States, Lanius ludovicianus (Loggerhead Shrike) is relatively common in urban areas. Here we describe the first case of a shrike scavenging and caching an anthropogenic food item.*

On 12 May, 2018, in an urban setting in Port Allen, LA, we observed a Loggerhead Shrike scavenge a fully cooked piece of bacon from a hotel parking lot and cache it in a Lagerstroemia indica (Crape myrtle). Although a single observation, we believe it warrants further research to assess the prevalence of shrikes scavenging anthropogenic food items and, overall, how urbanization affects Loggerhead Shrike behavior, individual fitness, and populations.

Satoh, S., et al (2019) **Bi-parental mucus provisioning in the scale-eating cichlid *Perissodus microlepis* (Cichlidae).** BIOLOGICAL JOURNAL OF THE LINNEAN SOCIETY 128:926-935

[Teleosts are the common bony fish such as trout, perch, or cichlids. Tilapias are cichlids widely sold as food.]

Authors’ abstract: *Although parental care is known to occur in a wide range of teleost fishes, postnatal provisioning of nutrition has been documented rarely. Here, we describe a novel example of bi-parental care in a teleost, i.e. mucus-provisioning behaviour in the scale-eating cichlid Perissodus microlepis endemic to Lake Tanganyika.*

Field observations revealed that young guarded by their parents frequently glanced [that is, bounced off their parents’ bodies] towards the body surface of both parents. Furthermore, analyses of stomach contents of the young found the presence of ingested mucus, confirming that the young feed on the mucus secretions of their parents. The frequency of glancing behaviour increased with size of the young up to ~13 mm in standard length, but then declined with further growth.

Additionally, the frequency of glancing of young towards their parents was higher when the frequency of foraging on plankton was lower. Underwater cage experiments revealed a higher rate of growth in the young kept in direct contact with their parents than in those not allowed direct contact.

*We conclude that glancing behaviour in young *P. microlepis* is a form of direct parental nourishment that confers growth benefits to the young when food abundance is low.*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Lloyd and Yvonne Penney sent an actual Christmas card by real mail from Etobicoke, Ontario. The only other real card I got was from my lettercarrier. I get all my mail at a box number in the downtown post office, so the mail at the house is just advertising flyers and unaddressed circulars.

When I was a boy and it were all fields around here, or at least on the cattle ranch where I grew up near Red Deer, it was different. Every house either had a basket full of Christmas cards received on a coffee table or strung them on twine across the living room ceiling.

It was customary that when Christmas visitors had idle moments and the conversation lagged, they would look at the cards. This always pepped up the conversation. Looking through the cards could provide topics along the line of “Geez, I thought old Bob was dead by now” or “Who are Marian and Jim?”

Theo Nelson of Calgary sends me a mail art postcard four times a year on the occasion of a solstice or equinox. The next two pages are his postcard for the December 2019 solstice.

tnelson@bexx.com

The advent of Winter,
You may colour it cold.
Cold comes in many colours,
Brilliant white or saturnian blue,
A darkness pushing out
All warmth,
The Winter Solstice signals
Its frozen intent.
Snow, ice, and bitter cold,
Northern climes drink fully
From the cup this season fills.

"Seasonal
Greetings!"

Winter Clouds

©2019 Theo Nelson



To:

Date -

Bundle Up!



Handwritten signature

