

OPUNTIA

62.5A

ISSN 1183-2703

November 2006

OPUNTIA is published by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. It is available for \$3 cash for a one-time sample copy, trade for your zine, or letter of comment. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada as the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount. US\$ banknotes are acceptable in Canada at par value; what we gain on the exchange rate we lose on the higher postage rate to USA. Do not send mint USA stamps as they are not valid for postage outside USA and I don't collect them.

Whole-numbered OPUNTIA's are sercon, x.1 issues are reviewzines, x.2 issues are indexes, x.3 issues are apazines, and x.5 issues are perzines.

STAMPING AROUND COWTOWN

by Dale Speirs

Political Correctness Rears Its Ugly Head.

2005-11-02

I went along to the monthly meeting of my fellow stamp collectors at the Calgary Philatelic Society tonight. It is like most club meetings, with a reading of the minutes of the last meeting, a business session, the speaker of the evening, and coffee and doughnuts afterwards.

As I get older and incrementally wiser, I have found that the grief of life is in the details. The Programme Chairwoman announced that, as usual, our December meeting would be the annual dinner and Christmas party, except that the name would be changed to reflect our diverse society and be henceforth known as the Holiday Season Social. Given that the average age of CPS members is retired (I am the second youngest member at age 50), this didn't go over too well with audience, many of whom still resent the advent of the metric system and photo radar.

I never truly understood the phrase "a storm of protest" until that night. The youngest member of the club (age 49) announced indignantly from the back of the room that he would resign if the name change went through. The Programme Chairwoman, a petite granny who is the same height sitting or standing, all but

challenged one member to step outside in the hallway and settle it with fisticuffs. She takes martial arts classes and probably would have won. I know I wouldn't want to mix it up with her despite my height and weight advantage. The President rapped his knuckles on the table for order but was drowned out by cries of "I've been a member for years, and in all that time I've never heard such ..." and "Bloody nonsense!", interspersed with shouts of "Resign!".

The CPS is reasonably diverse ethnically. We have a fair number of Muslim members, one Jew, and a noticeable contingent of Chinese (the largest ethnic group in Calgary). One of the biggest holidays in Cowtown is the Chinese New Year. There actually is a "Jewish quarter" in Calgary, albeit not an inner city neighbourhood but out in the southwest suburbs where the synagogue is. The Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus tend to congregate in the northeast suburbs. The Chinese dominate along Centre Street North all the way from the downtown core to the most distant suburbs tens of kilometres to the north. This is because the #3 bus runs the length of the street and enables a convenient commute to Chinatown, located where Centre Street dips down onto the south bank of the Bow River and into the downtown core.

Meanwhile, back at the CPS meeting, calm was restored when a Muslim member proposed a motion that the annual event be known as the Christmas Social. Seconded by a Chinaman and

carried unanimously. The speaker of the evening then discussed modern postage stamp design in Canada (he was against it), and a good time was had by all. Coffee and doughnuts afterwards.

A Good Time Was Had By All.

2005-12-07

And so to the Christmas Social. In past years the event was free to members and guests, but rising costs forced the CPS to impose a cost of \$10 per person for the meal (cash bar on the side). No one was particularly surprised, and most were amazed that the CPS could host a free catered banquet as long as it did. Annual attendance is about 50 people out of a membership of 200 (monthly meeting attendance is about 80 members). Calgary is a boom town because it is the capital of Canada's petroleum industry, and like boom towns everywhere, costs are rising. Almost every business has a Help Wanted sign on the door. The shortage of labour means Calgarians have come to expect poor service in shops as a matter of course, and hiring a tradesman for house repairs is a daunting experience.

The caterer worked miracles to keep costs down in past years, but finally had to jack up the prices. The head chef is a cheerful balding, middle-aged man whose appearance positively screams "poofter". If you saw him coming down the sidewalk towards you, you could instantly tell him for an aging queen a block away

by his swish walk and limp wrists. Tonight he was dressed in a red beret, a red pullover that emphasized his potbelly, and bright green slacks, in addition to his usual dangling diamond earrings. He looked like a French Resistance fighter who had blown up a Nazi textile factory and been pelted by some of the debris. It wasn't until later that I realized that he was just dressing up in Christmas colours. But a nice fellow, and a good cook. His assistant was a stout Slavic peasant woman not long from the collective farm. She ladled out the food and was shocked at the number of skinny philatelists. "Here, eat this, it'll put some meat on your bones."

The Christmas Social was the usual sedate affair. First the meal, then the annual awards for this and that in the service of the CPS, a slide show on holiday (not just Christmas) stamps, and a quiz programme. Everyone took the opportunity to chat with people they never seem to have time to talk to at regular monthly meetings, and the non-philatelic spouses made their annual appearance. The Social was over by 21h30, and a good time etcetera.

Irony.

There are hundreds of specialized philatelic societies studying everything from one particular country's stamps to narrow aspects of postal history. One such society I belong to is the Wreck and

Crash Mail Society, which studies interrupted mail. This is mail which has been the victim of ship or train wrecks, airplane crashes, postal truck accidents, post office fires, and so forth. Such mail that survives a wreck often receives a special handstamp marking explaining the delay, or is sent in an "ambulance cover" with a letter of explanation. The Society publishes a quarterly LA CATASTROPHE, formerly edited, until Hurricane Katrina, by a member living in Metairie, Louisiana.

Metairie is the first suburb west of New Orleans. No one in the Society has been able to establish contact with our editor since the hurricane. Not by real mail, e-mail, or telephone. He is not listed on the Red Cross Web site or other sites of displaced persons. I sent a postcard just after Katrina but before Hurricane Rita, but have had no reply.

Some of my contacts in the USPS (via www.postalnews.com) tell me that in all probability the mails are sitting in a warehouse somewhere, waiting for post offices to re-open. The post offices are waiting to be re-built, and for their posties to return to work (when you lose your house and can't find your family members, it is difficult to concentrate on the job). The posties are waiting for streets and lots to be tagged so they know where they are. Cluster boxes are being set up in many places since the street addresses no longer exist.

The Internet, of course, is useless, since people whose computers are covered with a thick layer of mud and fungi can't send or receive e-mails. Assuming they have electricity in the first instance.

However, the Papernet is resilient. Since the editor of LA CATASTROPHE is unlikely to return to that task anytime soon, the Society has shifted the task to England. The journal was being published as 8.5 x 11, the standard size in North America, but now the last two issues have appeared in the European standard of A4 size, annoying members who like to keep their bookshelf rows even. I had sent some articles to the American editor but have now re-sent them to the English editor.

The Things I Do For Philately.

2006-01-16

The reason I don't volunteer with the local science fiction convention is because I am too heavily involved in the Calgary Philatelic Society. I edit the bimonthly club bulletin CALGARY PHILATELIST, produce the show programme for our annual autumn stamp show CALTAPEX, and help out behind the scenes with the heavy lifting at show set-ups. The bulletin is produced on my antique 1998 Toshiba laptop (as is OPUNTIA) and produced by photocopy from hard-copy printout, since the club only has 200 members.

In lieu of our regular show this year, we will be hosting the national show of the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada, called Royal 2006 Royale. Calgary has hosted Royal Royale twice before, in 1980 and 1997. I wasn't involved in organized philately in 1980 but did do the show catalogue in 1997.

Canada Post supplies a special postmark for stamp shows (see below). In modern times, many shows are ordering personalized stamps, and since I have my own such stamps, I also looked after ordering them for the Royal (again see below).



In that distant era of 1997, the standard method of producing a show catalogue was to prepare hard copy for the printer to photograph and strip onto metal plates. Today, for colour publications such as the Royal 2006 Royale show catalogue, which I agreed to edit, printers will only take pdf files on CD-R or via e-mail. The result was that I ended up spending \$2,500 for a brand new 100 gigabyte Toshiba laptop with wide screen, a scanner/printer, external floppy drive (because all my archived files are on floppies), and a CD/DVD drive and burner. The laptop came with Windows XP SP2, but I also bought WordPerfect 12 and Adobe Acrobat 7 (which makes pdf files).

As the store clerk typed the details of my purchase into the store computer, he asked me for my name and the usual details. He was startled when I told him my name, and said that about an hour before I came in, he had sold a new computer system to Stephanie Speirs of High River (a town about an hour's drive south of Calgary). Any relation? Well yes, she is my aunt by marriage. We marveled at this coincidence. I don't see Stephanie that often so I didn't know she was shopping for a new computer as well. I must mention it at the next family get-together.

I intend to run the now tiny screen 1998 laptop as a backup and because it will take me months to learn and configure the software on the new laptop the way I like it. Both CALGARY PHILATELIST and OPUNTIA will still be produced on the old

laptop. As a semi-Luddite, I very much resent the time wasted in constantly re-learning new software and re-building template pages and forms. I still do not have and refuse to get Internet access at home. Once a week (or more often, depending on how much research I am doing) I visit the University of Calgary Library and use their terminals to check my e-mail and a couple of Web sites. This saves me the constant worry and bother about spyware and viruses.

I told you all that so I could tell you this. My new laptop comes with wireless Internet access by default. It was switched on when I first opened up the laptop at home. My computer immediately detected three local wireless networks in my neighbourhood, and started to log onto one of them. I aborted it and shut off the wireless system. I suppose I could take a chance and use my neighbours' systems for free, but I consider there is too much risk. I have to wonder how many home wireless systems have been hacked.

The next day I happened to be talking to the techie at the store that sold me my new system. He told me that he and his buddies every once in a while have some fun by driving around city streets with their wireless laptops and seeing who can pick up the most residential systems. He said the average was that six out of ten wireless systems in Calgary are completely unprotected, mostly residential and small businesses.

No passwords, no encryption, no restrictions on outsiders connecting in, and no updated anti-virus software. Calgary is the petroleum capital of Canada, and all the major oil companies have their headquarters here. The company computer systems are probably well protected, but it would be interesting to war-drive the downtown coffee shops and see how much valuable info could be snatched off petro-executives' personal laptops. The right kind of hacker could make a fortune betting on "junior pete" stocks (small or medium petroleum companies) with this sort of inside information.

My new laptop has a very bright screen, and by comparison the old laptop screen is dingy and dull, the colour of dirty snow. The first night I had the new laptop I also discovered how bright the blue LEDs on the front edge of the closed laptop are. These LEDs indicate power and battery status, hard drive running, etcetera. It happens that the computer desk is in the room facing my bedroom, directly in line with the door. The LEDs are so bright that I first assumed that the glow shining into the bedroom was a full moon. Now I have to leave the door partly closed when I go to bed.

One Damn Thing After Another. 2006-03-21

I received the latest issue of LA CATASTROPHE today. It has reverted back to the North American 8.5 x 11 size, and now has

a new editor. The editorial explained why. On January 15, the English editor suffered an aneurism and stroke, and is now partially paralyzed. If it weren't for bad luck, the Wreck and Crash Mail Society would have no luck at all. I'm wondering if I should renew my membership, for fear that the jinx will spread north to Canada.

The new editor's introduction of himself to the membership was not reassuring. He lives in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, on the Gulf coast. He admitted that Hurricane Katrina had put the ground floor of his house under a metre of water but reassured us that his philatelic collections were upstairs and mostly intact.

We Lurch Into The New Millennium. 2006-04-18

To the Royal 2006 Royale show committee meeting tonight. Since it overlaps about 90% with the executive of the Calgary Philatelic Society, one of the directors brought along a new computer projector for programme speakers to use, and demonstrated it for the rest of us. Since the days of magic lanterns, the CPS has used slide projectors for its speakers to illustrate their talks with. These days, most speakers use Powerpoint or some other software for their lectures, so the club bought the machine to replace the now seldom used slide projector. When I did the Royal 1997 Royale show catalogue, the Web was something a spider spun. In 2006, one of the first tasks

our committee undertook was to establish a Website at www.royal2006royale.com

The Royal committee has most things in hand. The Show Chairwoman is a real go-getter. She wrote to Buckingham Palace to ask the Queen if she would be willing to loan pages from the Royal Philatelic Collection for the Royal 2006 Royale show. The Queen does this for international stamp shows, and the pages selected are appropriate to the country or theme of the show. It is not a common thing done, as the considerable cost must be borne by the show committee, and normally only for international shows. This cost includes airfare and accommodation for the Keeper of the Royal Philatelic Collection as well as high security and insurance. H.M. does not simply send the exhibit by registered mail; it is always escorted by Palace staff. Fortunately the Calgary committee had a generous oilman willing to defray the costs, about \$25,000.

The Queen said yes. This is a major coup for Calgary philatelists, since it will be the first time The Queen's Exhibit has been shown in western Canada, and the first time at a national show. Toronto has hosted the exhibit four times since 1951, but only when it was putting on an international-level show. The Queen's Exhibit is different for each showing; she has a room full of stamp albums, so the pages are changed each time. In North America, the only other recent appearance of The Queen's Exhibit was at the

American international show this past June, in Washington, D.C., so Calgary is now in the front rank of philatelic cities. Washington had about 200,000 attending over ten days, but a weekend national stamp show such as Royal 2006 Royale would only expect a few thousand visitors.

Any reference to the Queen's Exhibit in press releases has to be approved by the Keeper, but we can't just send directly to him. All communications have to follow protocol, which means our Show Chairwoman contacts the President of the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada (RPSC), who then passes the message on to the Governor-General's office, who then communicate with St. James Palace (where the Royal Philatelic Collection is located, not, as many suppose, in Buckingham Palace). The reply then re-traces the route. Fortunately everything goes by e-mail, so the delay is only a few days.

The RPSC President, Charles Verge, flew from Ontario to London to pick out the pages from the Royal Philatelic Collection to be shown at Calgary. He selected early Canadian stamps and pre-Confederation stamps from colonies and Dominions such as Vancouver Island (which was an independent colony until 1866), British Columbia, the Maritime provinces (which were independent countries until joining Confederation), and pioneer trans-Atlantic airmail from the first flight across in 1919.

A book about the The Queen's Exhibit will also be prepared, using scans from the exhibit pages, but Verge will edit that one.

After the pages were selected, the Queen then gave her approval, as required. The Royal Philatelic Collection is the personal property of the Queen, not state property, and was started by her grandfather, a fanatical stamp collector. Both George V and George VI were serious collectors. The Queen has added to the collection, but more from a sense of duty, not because she is interested in the hobby. The Keeper of the Royal Philatelic Collection is known to her (many Palace servants are not) but he normally reports to the Keeper of the Privy Purse. In olden times, the Privy Purse had to be good with a sword, but nowadays an accounting diploma will suffice.

Mint Condition Black Fungus.

2006-08-10

Another issue of LA CATASTROPHE arrived in the mail today. The editor had a photo of himself compiling the issue on his new laptop while living in his FEMA trailer. He is still trying to find a contractor to rebuild his house, a year after the hurricane. He also showed photos of what was left of his postcard collection, most of which was covered by black fungus. The problem is that the stuff that wasn't submerged by the Katrina flood has been ruined by the humidity. Few people have their air conditioning back. Some places have their electricity restored, but most air

conditioners were drenched by salt spray from the storm and need a repairman. As a Calgarian, where humidity is never mentioned in weather forecasts because it is always dry, I have to wonder why anyone would want to live along the Gulf coast. -8-

Pulling Teeth.

I've been editing the CALGARY PHILATELIST since 1983, so I've grown used to nagging people to get their copy in on time. Since the club bulletin is bimonthly, if they miss a deadline and it is not time-sensitive copy, the material can appear in the next issue. With the ROYAL 2006 ROYALE show catalogue, there isn't that luxury, but by uttering threats with intent, most of the copy is trickling in before the deadline. A full-colour, glossy catalogue is not something that can be run off at a copy shop the day before.

The advertisers are the worst. One would think that by sending display ads as jpeg or pdf attachments on eek-mail, there would be no excuse for any delays or problems. Actually the worst problem is that once again I am seeing proof that possession of a computer does not automatically give someone design sense. The show catalogue is vertical format in digest size, but two advertisers want to run their horizontal ads sideways rather than do a vertical ad. One advertiser submitted a white text-on-black background ad with white margins, and another as white text on canary yellow.

Another ad crams in more text than a page in the telephone directory. One dealer apparently wanted to illustrate every stamp in his stock on a digest page.

One advertiser saved his Web page as an HTML attachment and eek-mailed it to me. Setting aside the fact that he was trying to cram a metre-long Web page into a digest-size page, the main problem was that all the graphics were tied to his computer server by internal links, not actually embedded in the ad. When he looked at the ad on his computer, everything looked fine. But when I opened the attachment, all the links were broken. I only saw snippets of text and lots of icons for broken links.

It has, however, been a useful learning experience on my new computer as I figure out how to insert jpegs into a document, convert back and forth between pdf and WordPerfect, edit images, and play my Jack Benny DVD on the laptop. Which is, as I type this, only my second DVD, the other being a Peter and Angela Netmail homemade DVD of their performance art. I now have Jack Benny on 8-track (but no machine to play it), cassette, CD audio, and DVD video (but his television shows aren't as funny as his radio shows, except the episode where he meets the Landrew Sisters). I still don't own a television set, never have since going off to university thirty years ago, and never will now that I can watch shows on a wide-screen laptop. This illustrates one advantage in being a last-adopter semi-Luddite. I can wait until

all the technology problems are sorted out, and miss all the cruddy machines and software.

To Our Appointed Places Shall We Go.

2006-09-28

To the hotel this morning for the Royal 2006 Royale set-up today (a Thursday). The show catalogues came off the press last week and look fine, so for that relief, much thanks. We have 300 display frames to set up, plus 24 frames for The Queen's Exhibit. The latter went up first, then it took a dozen volunteers, myself included, to get the remaining frames up in four hours. Not bad time; many hands make light work. Michael Sefi, the Keeper of the Royal Philatelic Collection, arrived this morning with the pages from H.M.'s albums. They were locked into the frames and the security guard to his appointed place did go.

I helped my fellow commoners set their exhibits into the frames and locked them in. Met some of the exhibit judges, from far-flung exotic locales such as Kentucky, Virginia, and Nova Scotia. An Ontario (far-flung but not exotic) judge wanted advice about visiting the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology in the town of Drumheller (exotic but not far-flung), about a two-hour drive east of Calgary. This is the largest fossil museum in the world. He was worried that he wouldn't have time to go through it and still visit the badlands. Much relieved when we told him that the museum is located directly

in the middle of the badlands (as is Drumheller) and he could see both in the same place.

Lunch was supplied to the volunteers by the Royal 2006 Royale committee via the hotel. Then I helped the Registration Chairwoman carry in a dozen boxes of impedimenta from her van. The earliest delegates to the convention were already lined up at the registration desk, raring to go. Nothing official happens until tomorrow morning, but the Hospitality Suite opened tonight, so there was a mixer and a good time was had by all.

Let The Show Begin.

2006-09-29

Yesterday was my regular day off, but since I normally work Friday to Sunday, I had to book vacation time for this show. I parked in the hotel parking lot early enough that I could get a stall next to the main door. The minivan in the adjacent stall had the licence plate NANAOF7, and belongs to one of our club members who is not only a grandmother but a great-grandmother. The plate on my car is OPUNTIA, in reference to the cactus, not the zine. Since show visitors had to walk past the vehicles, I like to think we gave them something to notice.

Today's events began with a free continental breakfast at 08h30 courtesy of Canada Post. Free food always brings out a good crowd of philatelists. That is why stamp shows have to keep

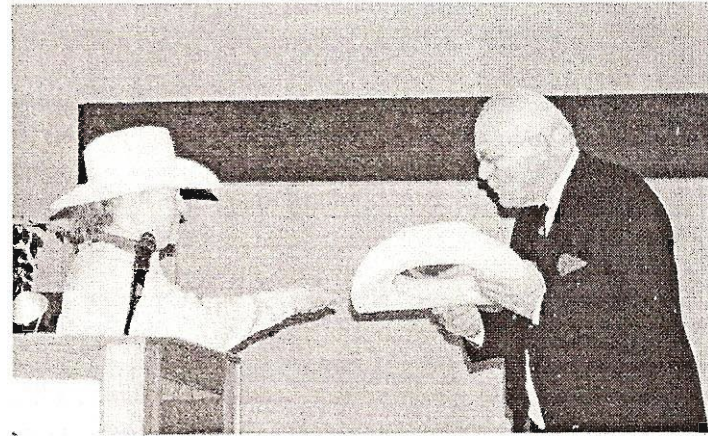
moving every few years to a new hotel. When first -10-
booked, the hotel management have visions of high-rollers drinking the bar dry and ordering the fanciest foods in their restaurants. What they don't know, but soon find out, is that stamp collectors are cheap bastards when it comes to spending money on things other than stamps. After a couple of years, the management become hostile and start booking Italian weddings instead. Fortunately, hotels change hands every five years or so, and their staff turnover is even greater. By the time we go through all the affordable hotels, we can start the cycle over again with a fresh batch of management who think stamp collectors are high-rollers drinking the bar dry and ordering the fanciest foods in restaurants.

The Opening Ceremonies began at 09h30. The Show Chairwoman, Jan Brookes, asked everyone to rise and sing our national anthem, "O Canada!". This always makes me cringe, not because I am unpatriotic, but because there are several different versions of the anthem. They all start out with the same first two lines, but then diverge to different lyrics, mainly because Parliament couldn't resist fine-tuning the words a couple of decades ago. The problem now is that each generation sings the version they learned as kids, which means the song begins loud and clear, and then suddenly drops to a confused murmur as audience members sing contradictory lyrics.

“O Canada” started life as a French religious hymn, and was then translated into English. The anglophone version had, everyone agreed, too many repeated “We stand on guard” phrases, so different jurisdictions took to using different versions before Parliament finally standardized it. Fortunately Brookes had a good loud voice, and the audience followed her lead, singing about a half bar behind her to make certain they had the correct lyrics.

Up next was a ceremony unique to Calgary, the White Hat presentation. Calgary began life as a ranching centre, although petroleum has long since supplanted cattle as the major industry, and to this day is still nicknamed Cowtown. The white cowboy hat is the symbol of Calgary; it is on the civic flag and corporate logo, and at official functions people often wear them. Distinguished visitors are presented with a white cowboy hat. Originally this was done informally, but back in the 1970s, when Prince Phillip was making a return trip to Calgary, he was presented with another white hat. He grumbled out loud at getting yet another of the bloody things (his words) and there was an outcry among the public and a brief resurgence of republicanism. Calgary Council decided it was time to put some controls on the ceremony, and did so. The lists of recipients is vetted, and the ceremony can only be hosted by the Mayor, an alderman, or a rodeo princess (present or past) from the Calgary Stampede.

In our case, it happens that Brookes is a former rodeo princess from mumble-mumble years ago (her words, but she is a grandmother so it isn't too difficult to guess what decade she was in the rodeo). She presented white hats to Charles Verge and Michael Sefi. Both tried on their hats, fumbled a bit with them, took them off, looked into the hat bands, and then exchanged hats to the merriment of the audience. Afterwards I asked Verge who had the biggest head but he declined to answer. Brookes then read out a proclamation from the Mayor declaring that September 29 would be Stamp Collecting Day in Calgary. Indeed.



Janice Brooks gives Michael Sefi his white hat.

The next segment of the Opening Ceremonies was a stamp launch by Canada Post. The Vice President himself came out from Ottawa for the ceremony, although truth be told, he would have been in Calgary anyway for a corporate meeting the previous day. He introduced members of the Stamp Advisory Board, who are responsible for stamp subjects and designs, and told us if we didn't like the stamp designs, blame them, not him. The stamp designs, depicting endangered wildlife, were then unveiled. The audience applauded. Members of the Advisory Board, who had been feeling rather exposed up there on the stage, were visibly relieved. There has never been a recorded lynching in Calgary, but on the other hand there was a streetlight just outside the hotel door, and rope could be quickly purchased from the hardware store across the street.

From there we moved en masse to the entrance of the exhibition and bourse. A ribbon of stamps had been stretched across the door, and Sefi did the honours with the scissors. A tidal wave of philatelists surged onto the floor, most to begin scouring the dealers stock in the bourse, and a substantial number lining up to view The Queen's Exhibit. A good time spending and viewing was had by all.

One of the club tables in the bourse was for the British North America Philatelic Society, of which I am a life member. This is a trans-national group of mostly American, Canadian, and British

collectors who are interested in the stamps and postal history of Canada and the pre-Confederation colonies and Dominions. The Calgary Regional Group of BNAPS is hosting their national convention next year, called BNAPEX 2007. I sat down at the table to talk to their Show Chairman, and in a weak moment suddenly found myself on the committee as the show catalogue editor. It won't be as much work as doing the ROYAL 2006 ROYALE show catalogue, especially now that I have done it once on my new computer and know how to do it. BNAPEX has stricter deadlines further in advance of the show for exhibits and there won't be any advertisements, so there will be less copy to chase.

Throughout the day there were seminars in other rooms. I only had time to attend one, given by Jeff Shapiro on the post-WWI stamps of Germany during the hyperinflation period. Hyperinflation is when your boss pays you twice a day in cash and you get an hour off work after being paid to buy food before the money becomes worthless in the afternoon. Hyperinflation is when you leave a wheelbarrow filled with a trillion Marks in cash unattended for a moment, and someone steals the wheelbarrow and leaves the cash behind. The postage rate of German postcards was used as an example in Shapiro's talk. From 1875 to 1919, it cost 10 pfennigs to mail a postcard. The rate started to creep up every few months and by April 1922, the same month that the Calgary Philatelic Society was founded, it cost 2.4 Marks

(240 pfennigs). Hyperinflation began in 1923; in January postage cost 50 Marks, on August 1 it was 1,800 Marks, and by October 1 it cost 3,600,000 Marks to mail a postcard. The German Post Office at first attempt to print stamps with the rates, but as hyperinflation revved up, conceded defeat and used non-denominated stamps, which were sold at whatever the hourly rate for postage was. The postage rate for a postcard topped out at 200,000,000,000 Marks on December 31, 1923. The following day, the Allies introduced a new currency and backed it themselves, and the postcard rate became 20 new pfennigs. We complain too much about how hard our lives are today.

In the late afternoon, I found myself at loose ends. No one was sitting at the BNAPS club table, so I sat down there to rest my feet and make the table look a bit better by being manned. I ended up selling a copy of The Queen's Exhibit book, and chatted with a number of people cruising by.

Yeehaw And Pass The Stamp Hinges.

2006-09-30

The second day of the show; I parked next to NANAOF7 again. The day's activities started at 08h00 with another Calgary tradition, the sidewalk pancake breakfast. This originated with the Stampede rodeo but is popular at other times of the summer and early autumn. Cowtown being a mountain city, the mornings are chilly this time of year no matter how warm it gets during the day.

The Show Committee hired the Bowness Rotary Club to put on the breakfast for us. They do this all the time as a fund raiser and have a purpose-built truck and trailer for the grills. Us Calgarians were content to enjoy our flapjacks, sausages, and orange juice outside, but in deference to those from warmer climes, arrangements had been made to open up the hotel's roadhouse adjacent to the breakfast crew.

The roadhouse was loaned to us free on the understanding that it wouldn't yet have been cleaned up from Friday night. We grabbed brooms and shoved all the broken beer bottles, smashed chairs, and other debris into the sunken dance floor for the hotel staff to clean out later. We used the terrace for our more dignified gathering. As we ate, the roadhouse disk jockey came in to work on his equipment and playlist for that evening and was surprised to see us there. He couldn't resist having an audience, especially a sober one, and asked us if we would like to hear any particular songs. Because there were quite a number of American philatelists present, we asked him for the song that is the epitome of Canadian culture, good breeding, and refinement. It was, of course, "The Hockey Song" by Stompin' Tom Connors, our most famous genuine folk singer. The song is Canada's unofficial national anthem, with the added advantage that everyone knows the words since there is only one version. It is traditional to perform it at hockey games, roadhouses, and in sports bars, either with a Connors recording or

a live band singing the verses and the audience joining in on the chorus. Connors wrote the chorus so that it could be sung by even the drunkest hockey fan: "Oh, the good old hockey game, is the best game you can name. And the best game you can name, is the good old hockey game." The Canucks present joined in on the chorus, the Americans quickly caught on, and a good time was had by all.

I got to talking with Jeff Shapiro, who is a Boston resident. No matter which route you drive in Calgary, you will hit traffic jams caused by oil boom construction. To make us feel better, he regaled us with stories of the Big Dig in Boston, some of which were so improbable that they must have been true. After having thirds of flapjacks and sausages, I decided it was time to waddle over to the show venue. My day mostly alternated between seminars and the dealer bourse. One of the dealers had sponsored a Québec nature artist, Pierre Leduc, who designed a long series of bird stamps and pre-stamped envelopes for Canada Post. I brought along some of the envelopes for him to autograph. He didn't speak English, and his bilingual wife had stepped away from the booth for a moment, but I indicated where I wanted his autograph on the envelopes. Both of us were mute in the other's language, but we managed to communicate by gestures and facial expressions.

I am a subscriber to CANADIAN STAMP NEWS, and got the latest

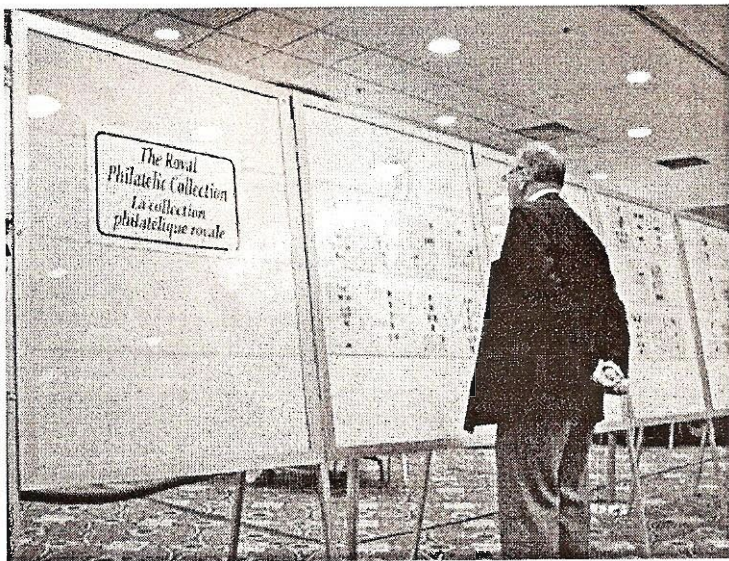
issue in Thursday's mail. Because of the show, I didn't have time to read it until tonight when I skimmed through it just before bedtime. There was an article about the Toronto annual stamp show which had been having problems but was now struggling to regain its strength. There was one sentence about the new dealer bourse in which the author meant to use the words "new faces", but which came out as: "*The presence of new feces on the bourse also means that collectors will have a chance to look at new material.*" Quite frankly, I don't care if it is old excrement or new excrement, I don't want to look at that kind of material on a bourse floor.

A Royal Like No Other.

2006-10-01

The final day of the convention, and once again NANAOF7 was there before me. I began with a buffet breakfast sponsored by BNAPS, but this one was \$15. Nonetheless, it was a full room. The breakfast speaker was Charles Verge, who did a PowerPoint presentation on his trip to London to pick out the stamps for The Queen's Exhibit.

CANADIAN STAMP NEWS had a bourse table at the show, so at the breakfast I kidded the editor about the typo. He said he had 14 calls at the office back in St. Catharines, Ontario, before leaving for Calgary. Most were from irate Toronto stamp dealers with no sense of humour. Normally the publisher looks after the business



side and is not concerned about editorial details such as typos, but this one ruffled not a few feathers in Toronto. The editor had to personally take the long walk down a hallway and tell the publisher about the typo.

I spent most of the day and my money at the bourse, where I saw plenty of new faces but fortunately no new feces. At one dealer's table I came across a cover (envelope) with familiar handwriting.

I checked the back of the cover and there was my return address. It's the first time I have come across one of my own covers being sold in a bourse. I would have been flattered had it not been that it was selling for only \$2. It was a registered letter with a \$1 stamp on it that I had sent to another collector decades ago, and the value of the cover was solely in the stamp. I passed it by.

Teardown began at 16h00 and we were done by 19h00, not bad for the size of the show. We had numerous congratulations from eastern dealers and guests that Royal 2006 Royale lived up to its billing of "A Royal Like No Other". It wasn't just politeness, as many dealers and guests had already signed up for BNAPEX next year. The show went very well, there were no horror stories, and a good time was had by all.

It's A Wrap.

2006-10-17

The wrap-up meeting of the Royal 2006 Royale committee was held tonight. Everyone patted each other on the back, and it appears there will be a \$15,000 legacy for the Calgary Philatelic Society. There had been a steady flow of visitors throughout the show to The Queen's Exhibit, and the docents worked continuously explaining the exhibit to them. The book of The Queen's Exhibit, showing the rarities on display in full colour, is available from me for \$5 postpaid (US dollars accepted at par) in case any OPUNTIA readers are interested.

The security guards had remarked that they looked on it as a privilege to be guarding such a unique display. Our security chief told us at the wrap-up meeting that it wasn't just politeness. He knew that behind the scenes the guards had been pulling seniority on each other to get the job, and some of them were actually supervisors who normally would never do guard duty. The usual security job is sitting in a skyscraper lobby signing visitors in and out, or sitting in a shack at a factory gate. Not very exciting or important. The guards were impressed at the opportunity to look after the Queen's personal property, something to tell their grandchildren about.

The hotel was also pleased. We made our room quota for the discount on function space, and apparently the stamp collectors, while not boozing it up much, did keep the restaurant noticeably busy. The hotel manager was particularly happy because four different convention attendees had contacted him about bookings for events for their companies or social clubs.

Meanwhile, Down On The Bayou ... 2006-10-18

I received in today's mail a postcard with a computer-printed message on a large label, sent by the Editor of the Wreck and Crash Mail Society to all the membership. The text read: "*The September issue of LA CATASTROPHE is still in production. I'm still in the FEMA trailer having problems with the contractor,*

utilities, Internet access, and some minor medical problems. Issue should be out by mid/late October with December issue out in mid to late December." In Calgary, the hottest economy in North America, we whine because it takes six months to get a contractor. Down on the bayou, it's 13 months and still counting.

The Aftermath. 2006-11-03

I was preparing the latest issue of CALGARY PHILATELIST, which will be filled by reports and photos about Royal 2006 Royale. The Membership Chairwoman gave me a set of mailing labels for the issue, and I was pleasantly surprised to see we have picked up about a dozen new members. During the convention I had been setting out back issues of CALGARY PHILATELIST on the freebie table, and the goodie bags given to registrants had also included a copy. The Registration Desk also had added membership application forms, and an exhibit frame had been set up adjacent to the desk, with pages and photos explaining the history of the Calgary Philatelic Society since its founding in 1922. All told, the publicity seems to have worked well.

It will be ten years before Calgary will host another Royal Royale. See you there in 2016!