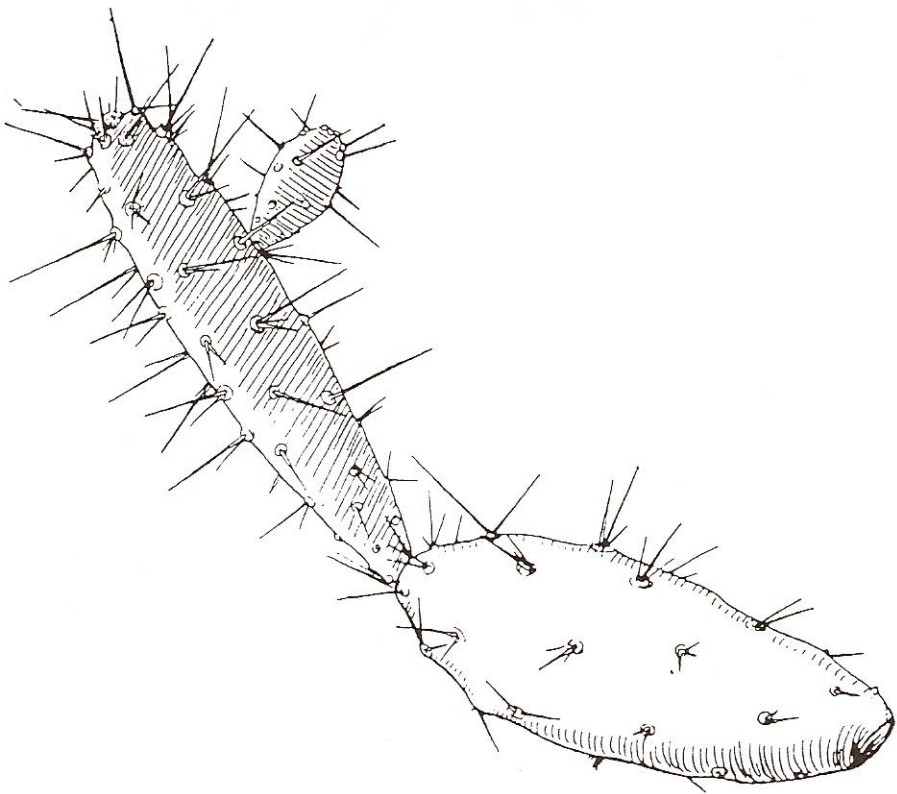


OPUNTIA

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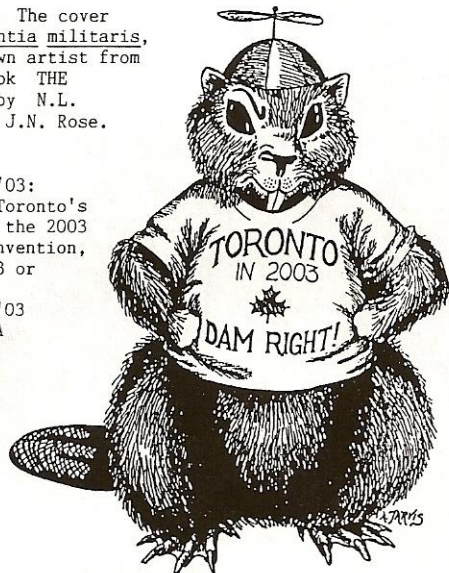


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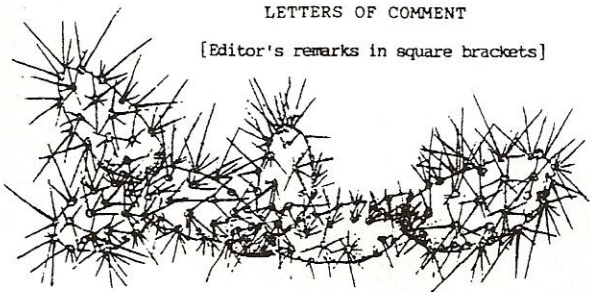
ART CREDIT: The cover depicts Opuntia militaris, by an unknown artist from the 1920 book THE CACTACEAE, by N.L. Britton and J.N. Rose.

TORONTO IN '03:
To support Toronto's bid to host the 2003 World SF Convention, send C\$20.03 or US\$15 to:
Toronto in '03
Box 3, Stn A
Toronto
Ontario
M5W 1A2
Canada



LETTERS OF COMMENT

[Editor's remarks in square brackets]



FROM: Karen Johnson
35 Mariana Avenue
South Croydon, Victoria 3136, Australia

1998-04-22

Someone suggested once that I should become the modern version of a public letter writer and do letters of complaint for people who bought dud goods and didn't know what to say. I decided there wasn't any money in it and didn't try.

[It might be alright as an occasional sideline job.]

FROM: Chester Cuthbert
Winnipeg, Manitoba

1998-04-10

I think ghost writers are a kind of survival of public letter writers.

[I hadn't thought of that. Also, speechwriters would be part of this tradition.]

FROM: Carolyn Clowes
5911 West Pay Drive NW
Depauw, Indiana 47115

1998-04-24

Public letter writing seems to have been practiced with discretion and without any legal protection of client confidentiality. I see why lawyers didn't care for it. Settling disputes with simple communication might demystify the process and give folks the idea they could do it for themselves. Letter writers were advocates for people who had none. They must have been ethical, imaginative, and sympathetic to prosper. If not actually employed as spies, I think they may have risked being questioned by police or other interested parties on what they'd written for whom or where to find someone. Composing love letters would have been fun; vicarious kicks for the romantically inclined without the complications of a relationship.

Sometimes it's still a good idea, literacy notwithstanding. Jack, my wonderful landlord, has a colourful way with words and a temper that gets the better of him. Last year a mechanic messed up his car, then kept hanging up on his phone calls for reasons I can well imagine. Jack's lawyer wouldn't touch it, which incensed him further. Every trip up here for a pleasant day of mowing or fishing, he'd turn morose after a few beers reliving the injustice of it all. I got tired of that and offered to write a letter. Jack loved the idea. "You tell that sonofabitch if he don't give me back my money, I'm gonna wait outside his shop ..." was rephrased into mentions of the Better Business Bureau, the Consumer Protection Agency, and the newspaper's complaint column. A refund came by mail, Jack avoided assault charges, and I got a free month's rent. By then I felt I'd earned it.

FROM: Harry Warner Jr
423 Summit Avenue
Hagerstown, Maryland 21740

1998-05-03

My only acquaintance with public letter writers comes through listening to Mussorgsky's *KHOVANTSCHINA*, in which one figures for part of an act. This seems to be the only instance in which the trade can be found in any of the operas that still get occasional performances. Until about a century ago, most opera librettos were based on the doings of important historic personages, legendary events, or the lives of the super-rich, so their casts would be mainly individuals who were educated enough to do their own letter writing. By the time verismo operas began appearing just before the turn of the century, education was becoming more available to the common man and public letter writers weren't as essential.

[I looked up the libretto to see what this scribe did. In Act 1, he makes a brief appearance writing a letter for the Boyard Shaklovity, denouncing the Khovanskys for plotting against the Czar. He re-appears in Act 3 and tells the crowd the Czar has repressed the rebellion.]

The primitive technology of telegraphing in the mid-19th century probably prevented it from becoming an early form of eekmail. I don't think there were any devices that could translate written letters into the correct dots and dashes, so it would have been necessary for every household with its own telegraph machine to have at least one member undergo the long and difficult task of learning to send messages at a reasonable speed and to understand incoming transmissions. If nobody was at home when someone sent a message to a residence, it would be necessary to repeat the message from time to time until there was someone to hear it.

If I were writing a history of 1960s fandom, I would probably follow the course I pursued in my book about the 1950s. In *A WEALTH OF FABLE*, I paid only passing mention to comics fandom, the main body of which had no connection to SF fandom.

FROM: Michael Waite
105 West Ainsworth
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197-5336

1998-04-15

I volunteer at a crisis centre where I am occasionally called upon to read, and reply to, letters our illiterate consumers bring into the agency. Most letters require only simple replies to school and municipal authorities. The crisis centre also supplies stationery and postage, free of charge. I guess you could call me an occasional not-for-profit public letter writer.

FROM: Harry Andruschak
Box 5309
Torrance, California 90510-5309

1998-04-15

Your question about not having e-mail a century ago may hinge on the fact that much of the telephone, telegraph, and mail services were very labour intensive. Automatic and dynamic re-routing did not exist. Today the computer takes over all that expensive stuff so that humans can be eliminated. The computer is not only cheaper, it is much faster.

FROM: Scott Crow
Box 445
Clements, California 95227

1998-04-18

I believe that with the impersonal, cold nature of e-mail, people yearn for handwritten letters. The Crane Stationery Company ran an ad campaign saying "No one ever treasured a fax". So, people long to receive personal, handwritten letters in their mailbox, yet they usually opt for the convenience of e-mail. Would these people be willing to pay a modern public letter writer to bring personal correspondence back?

FROM: Bridget Hardcastle
19 Wedgewood Road
Hitchin, Herts SG4 OEX, England

1998-04-11

If only snail telegraphy had worked! We could have performed experiments to determine the speed of travel of the information and compared it to light speed. Perhaps snails could have been the key to FTL travel. If I ever have a pet snail, now I think I shall have to call it 'Ansible'. Considering the sympathies, can snails only ever bond in pair and keep linked in perpetuity or do their sympathies change whenever a new snail comes along? Or do they join on additionally, until all the snails in the world are linked by a great hive mind? Somebody should have written an SF short story about this.

FROM: Buck Coulson
2677W-500N
Hartford City, Indiana 47348

1998-04-15

Interesting article on the possibility of telegraphs for everyone, but your comment about communicating regularly with kids gone off to the colonies jumped the gun a bit. Telegraphs required wires. Wireless telegraphy (radio) didn't get invented until 1896. I'm not sure when the Atlantic cable was laid down, but I suppose communication with Canada would have been possible after that. But England to India, or Australia, or New Zealand in the 1800s? Not likely. So personal communications would have been restricted to areas that had the wires installed.

[By 1861, there were 17,500 km of submarine cables from England to places such as United States or India. The December 1996 issue of WIRED has an excellent survey of trans-ocean cables.]

FROM: Lloyd Penney
1706 - 24 Eva Road
Etobicoke, Ontario M9C 2B2

1998-04-11

To Carolyn Clowes: Trek fandom is definitely knowledgeable and passionate. That's where I got my fan-nish start more than 20 years ago. However, I also found that many of the fans were two-dimensional, petty, and obsessive about a great many things. All areas of fandom have people like that, but the Trek fans I dealt with seemed to have nothing in their lives but Trek. After some fun times with a new Star Trek club on the west coast of Canada, I began to wonder if Trek was all there was in this thing called fandom, and once I began to break the barriers to knowledge about fandom, I looked about, and found much, much more to engage my mind.

To Scott Crow: I find that fandom, as any other group, is full of dominant and submissive personalities. It also deals with egoboo [ego boost], the good feelings you get from others, because of your competence in what you do. This means that the dominants will gather to look good in the eyes of others, and stage a convention, form a club, or do something that will enhance their enjoyment of fandom, and the enjoyment of fandom for others, with luck. The less dominants will act as secretary, or membership, or run the video room, or gaming, while the more dominants will want to be chairman of the con or president of the club. So, we're not surprised when the club splits into two. The dominants want their opinions to lead others, a classic case of too many chiefs and not enough braves. The conflicts in fandom look very open and nasty, but everyday life is full of such conflicts. We're not any different than any other group but what we see is much more visible.

There are good and bad politics in fandom. The bad politics are the petty infighting and destructive attitudes that destroy hard work and relationships,

and cause people to leave our happy little asylum. The good politics build relationships, conventions, clubs, and other social gatherings and friendships that can last a lifetime. I won't follow the old stereotype that fans are social misfits, but many people come to fandom to find friends and loved ones perhaps for the first time in their lives. It's an opportunity to be constructive in something they are genuinely attracted to.

Buck Coulson is right when he writes that Star Trek and media fandom branched off from general fandom years ago and has remained largely separate in its interests and activities, but I have found that, in my own experiences, that is changing. I divorced myself from Trek fandom in Toronto when I found my own interests leaning more to general fandom. There was more to do, and more people who were genuine, instead of the dull, boring sorts involved with Trek. Today though, those dull, boring sorts are gone, and local Trek fandom has become more knowledgeable about general fandom and WorldCons. The current Toronto in 2003 bid has educated local media fans about the greater fandom around them, and they support our bid, knowing exactly what we're involved with. In fact, should their own convention still be around in 2003, they have announced they are willing to suspend their convention for that year and support Torcon 3. We will be talking to them further in the coming year, mostly because the local Trekcon attracts about 3,000 every year, and we need fans who have dealt with high volume tasks, like registration.

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Bill Bridget, John Held Jr, Scott Garinger, Vicki Rosenzweig, Henry Welch, Stephen Perkins

THE URBAN LEGEND OF A MILLION STAMPS

by Dale Speirs

From almost its earliest days, stamp collecting managed to spawn chain letters and urban legends. The collector who wanted a million stamps has bedeviled philatelic history for the last 150+ years. It seems to have begun with the October 1, 1842, issue of *THE TIMES OF LONDON* (ref. 1): "We wish to call the attention of our fair readers to a case in which one of themselves is materially interested. A lady who has been receiving the addresses of a gentleman, with the sanction of her uncle, with whom she resides, has been promised by the latter the sum of £3,000 on her marriage, provided she can produce postage labels, which have been used on letters, to that amount. The number required (720,000) is far too great to raise amongst her own acquaintance; but we think the ladies of England will, on the case being made known to them, exert themselves in collecting these otherwise useless scraps; any number of which sent directed to P.S., at the post office, Milford, near Lymington, will be thankfully received, and duly forwarded."

While not a chain letter in itself, it was to eventually spawn a number of them based on the idea of a million stamps for some purpose, whether charitable or personal greed.

Strangely enough, a few days later, reports were published of a donor to a church who promised £2,000 if the equivalent in used postage stamps was raised (ref. 2), with a subsequent additional amount of £4,000. An ad in *THE TIMES OF LONDON* (ref. 3) appeared in the October 29, 1842, issue of that paper. It read as follows: "POSTAGE STAMPS - A young lady, being desirous of covering her dressing room with cancelled postage stamps, has been so far encouraged in her wish by private friends as to have succeeded in collecting

16,000; these, however, being insufficient, she will be greatly obliged if any good-natured persons who may have these otherwise useless little articles at their disposal would assist in her whimsical project. Address to E.D., Mr. Butt's, glover, Leadenhall Street, or Mr. Marshall's, jeweller, Hackney."

It is not entirely impossible that such a project might be underway, as rooms covered with stamps are not unheard of. For example, an inn at North Bersted, Bognor, was not only wallpapered with stamps, but the furniture was covered with them as well (ref. 4). However, the close proximity in time of people collecting a million postage stamps raised suspicions. In a letter to the editor of *THE TIMES OF LONDON*, dated October 29, 1842, (ref. 5), a correspondent signing himself Aqua Fortis wrote as follows: "I have lately seen several absurd advertisements in the newspapers respecting postage stamps, one stating that some eccentric old uncle had promised to give his niece £3,000 as a marriage portion if she could obtain the same amount in used postage stamps; another benevolent individual offers to give £3,000 to build a church on the same conditions; and in your paper of today an amiable young lady states in an advertisement that she has taken a fancy to paper her bedroom with used penny-post stamps, and each of these people solicits the aid of the public in furnishing them with these now-of-no-use trifles."

"Now, I fancy I 'smell a rat' in all these novel applications for postage stamps, and this it is. Some time ago it was stated that a chymist had discovered the means of erasing the black ink stamp which the Post-office marks on the stamps of the letters to cancel them, and this he could do without injuring the stamps, so that they could be used a second time without being discovered by the Post-office clerks. Now, I think these newspaper advertisements have a relation to some scheme of the sort; and I have a shrewd guess that the eccentric uncle,

benevolent old gentleman, and the amiable young lady are all one and the same individual, who having discovered the means of erasing the cancel marks of the Post-office (which I believe was quite practicable), is trying to make a profitable "spec" by his ingenuity."

The humour magazine *PUNCH* remarked of the a-million-stamps collectors that they seemed more anxious to collect Queen's heads than Henry the 8th was to get rid of them (ref. 6), and went on to provide some doggerel:

*"When was a folly so pestilent hit upon,
As folks running mad to collect every spit upon
Post-office stamp that's been soiled and been writ upon?
Oh for Swift! such a subject his spleen to emit upon.
'Tis said that some fool in mustachios has split upon
The rock of a bet, and therefore must get,
To avoid loss and debt,
Half the town as collectors, to waste time and wit upon,
Bothering and forcing their friends to submit, upon
Pain of displeasure, to fill a peck measure
With the coveted treasure
Of as many old stamps as perforce can be lit upon,
To paper a room, or stuff cushions to sit upon.
Do, dearest Punch, let fly a sharp skit upon
This new pursuit, and an ass's head fit upon
The crest of the order of Knights of the Spit-upon."*

Stories bearing resemblance to the October 1842 story seem a modified version of it, what today is called an urban legend. Another account places a version in 1848 (ref. 7) as follows: *"In 1848 my father was at Dr. Johnson's hydropathic establishment, Humberslade Hall, in Yorkshire. A rising poet, Alfred Tennyson, was there at the same time. Among the patients was a young lady who was helping to collect a million*

used penny stamps, and gathering them from all the company daily. Her story was that two young people of her acquaintance wished to get married. The lady's father doubted the constancy of their attachment, and as there was no lack of means or other obstacle to the smooth running of their love, he devised an artificial one, the difficulty of which would test their affection, and if it were genuine, would strengthen it into true love. He required as the price of his consent that they should collect for him a million used penny stamps. The young people accepted the test, and went vigorously and systematically to work, pressing all their friends into the service. About these facts and dates there can be no doubt. Lord Tennyson's biography shows that he was there in 1848, and my father died in 1849. I remember that we were all much interested in the matter, and that after my father's return home he got a letter from the lady-collector telling him of the completion of the task and the approaching marriage."

At first reading, this seems an impressively documented story, but it bears many of the hallmarks of the typical urban legend. Firstly, it happened at several removes from the teller of the story. Secondly, much of the detailed evidence is irrelevant (Tennyson doesn't enter into the story). Finally, the writer does not actually say that he saw this letter, as a first quick reading might imply; he only mentions that his father supposedly got one at the end of the story. Nowhere are the actual names of the lovers cited.

A chain letter reported in 1850 (ref. 8) concerns a young lady who, the story went, was to be placed in a convent by her father unless she accumulated one million used postage stamps. This story is doubtful to begin with (why would a father do that, and why would a million stamps change his mind?) but the results were documented. *"... the lady began to receive packages by post and railway from every quarter,*

which poured in in such numbers that in ten days, during last April, she received parcels containing millions of stamps. The walking postman, who was in the habit of delivering a few letters daily at the mansion where the lady resides, became so loaded with letters and packages containing Queen's heads, that it was necessary to employ another man to assist him. On one morning between ninety and one hundred letters and packets arrived by post, and on another 120 and 130. These were in addition to multitudes which arrived on other days. Boxes, bales, and packages also poured in by railway, and to such an extent that it became necessary to give public notice, by advertisements and printed circulars, that it was urgently desired no more stamps should be sent ...".

Another report says the a-million-stamps legend was circulating in the early 1850s (ref. 9): "... to provide the dowry of a lovely girl, whose hard-hearted parent would not allow her to marry the man of her choice until she had collected a million stamps".

A story appeared out of New Hartford, Connecticut, with specific names given. Perhaps it was true, then, that a gentleman did indeed agree to pay an elderly lady's way into a nursing home if she could collect a million stamps (ref. 10). Miss Chloe Lankton of that town began efforts on behalf of the old dear on October 10, 1878, and by February 3 appears to have succeeded. Donations came from as far away as Dubuque, Iowa. Oddly, the letter of acknowledgment of success that concluded the news report came not from the gentleman but from a lady in Philadelphia.

The a-million-stamps story, whatever its original veracity, took on a life of its own and developed into an urban legend. As early as 1862, a correspondent was moved to complain about the different versions of the story (ref. 11): "For what purpose

the stamps are thus actively sought after no one seems to know, but it has been said in some quarters that the possession of a large number of them will procure the admission of children into some charitable institutions, while in others it is asserted, albeit with an air of great mystery, that they will enable the holder to become the owner of a valuable gold watch, to be awarded somewhere by somebody."

In 1873, a cynical commentator remarked (ref. 12): "It may be useful to note, as an instance of the vitality of a superstition, that old penny postage-stamps are still being collected to make up the million to get the little boy into the orphan school. The little boy ought to be of full age by this time."

An editorial complained in 1905 that the million stamps were still being collected so that people could be admitted into a hospital or charity home (ref. 13). But by this time, stamp collecting had developed far enough as a legitimate hobby and business that the urban legend had actually acquired the patina of truth. This was a result of stamp dealers being willing to buy mission mixture or kiloware, whereas in 1842 there was no reasonable use for bulk stamps save as wallpaper or fraudulently re-used postage. In response to the 1905 complaint, Messrs. Whitfield King & Co. advised that two orphanages they knew in Switzerland collected stamps for re-sale to dealers as mission mixture (ref. 14). This therefore made the legends indirectly correct, as while no one would be admitted directly on presentation of a million stamps, the stamps could be sold to raise the cash. Another account (ref. 15) reported that a correspondent's aunt had gained admittance to a hospital with a million stamps, but only first selling the stamps for cash and then buying a bed with the money. The hospital itself did not take the stamps directly, and from its point of view this was merely a cash transaction.

As time passed, the a-million-stamps belief was garbled into other items. From time of the American War Between The States to an Associated Press release in 1949, there was a belief that collecting the little red cellophane strips off cigarette packages would get a war veteran a wooden leg, or buy a Seeing Eye dog (ref. 16). There was no truth to this. It is possible that the million stamps fallacy first mutated into tobacco revenue seals on packages, and from there to the cellophane strips torn off to open a pack.

In the period of the 1970s and 1980s, a belief arose that a million tabs from soda pop cans would get a little girl a dialysis machine. Setting aside the fact that the governments in both Canada and United States pay the cost of these machines, the belief persists because, as with postage stamps, you can in fact get money for tabs, if you have sufficient bulk. A scrap metal dealer will buy tabs in large quantities (not a few at a time but hundreds of kilograms at a time) and the money can thus be sent to charity. Alternative versions involve buying the little girl a wheelchair.

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- 1) Anonymous (1842-10-01) Folly - Hymington. *THE TIMES OF LONDON*, page 7
- 2) Anonymous (1842-10-06) Curious contract. *THE TIMES OF LONDON*, page 7
- 3) Anonymous (1842-10-29) [classified ad] *THE TIMES OF LONDON*, page 1
- 4) Anonymous (1905) A million stamps. *SPECTATOR*, 94:783

- 5) Anonymous (1842-11-02) Postage stamps. *THE TIMES OF LONDON*, page 5
- 6) Anonymous (1842) A new mania. *PUNCH* 2:76
- 7) Cree, T.S. (1905) A million stamps. *SPECTATOR* 94:746-747
- 8) Anonymous (1850-05-18) Extraordinary postage stamps contribution. *ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS* 16:349
- 9) Anonymous (initials C.E.B.) (1905) A million stamps. *SPECTATOR* 94:747
- 10) Anonymous (1879-02-18) A million postage stamps. *NEW YORK TIMES*, page 2
- 11) Anonymous (1862-04-10) The postage stamp exchange. *THE TIMES OF LONDON*, page 6
- 12) Clarke, H. (1873) Popular superstitions: Million of stamps. *NOTES AND QUERIES* 4th series 11:214
- 13) Anonymous (1905) A million stamps. *SPECTATOR* 94:705-706
- 14) Anonymous (1905) A million stamps. *SPECTATOR* 94:783-784
- 15) Anonymous (initials H.M.) (1905) A million stamps. *SPECTATOR* 94:747
- 16) Bloch, D. (1963) Tobacco and disability. *AMERICAN NOTES AND QUERIES* 1:136-137

Meeting of the Joint Convention at the St. Nicholas Hotel yesterday. Election of officers and delegates. Addresses by Mr. Goshorn and ex-Gov. Bigler.

The Joint Convention of the Amateur Journalists' Centennial Association was held yesterday, at 11:45 a.m. in the parlors of the St. Nicholas Hotel. W.F. Miller presided, and 47 representatives of amateur journalism were present. After some preliminary business, the constitution was read by the Secretary, C.E. Crosby, and adopted, after which the following honorary Vice Presidents of the association were elected: J.F. Sayer, W.S. Hillyer, Charles McCohn, G.S. Loudon, and M.E. Stowe. Then followed a brief speech by Mr. F. Cushman, after which Horatio Alger Jr, the author, was elected an honorary member, a compliment which he acknowledged in a pleasant speech.

After some further informal business, the following gentlemen were elected delegates to the coming Centennial at Philadelphia: Messrs. F. Cushman and W.F. Miller, New York City; W.N. Stewart, New York State; L.H. English, Connecticut; J.B. Chasseaud, Brooklyn, N.Y.; J.F. Sayer and C.H. Fowle, Boston; G.E. Tewksbury, New England; Messrs. Horstman and Williamson, Philadelphia; Mr. Loudon, Pennsylvania; W.S. Hillyer, New Jersey, W.H. Dennis, Washington; J.F. Harper, Ohio; H.S. Barber, Illinois; F. Thibault, San Francisco; and C.K. Farley, Michigan. The BOYS' HERALD, of New Haven, was chosen the official paper of the association, and the election of the active officers was then held, resulting in the choice of Mr. W.F. Miller, President; W.S. Hillyer, Vice President; W.N. Stewart, Treasurer; and J.F. Sayer, Secretary.

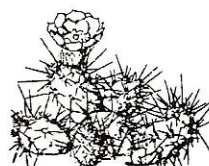
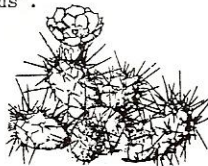
The regular business of the convention then being concluded, Mr. J.F. Sayer read a humorous account of the Concord Centennial and a parody on Shakespeare's "Hamlet".

Mr. Goshorn, Director General of the Centennial Exhibition, was then introduced to the company and spoke briefly of the favorable progress of the work of the great International Exhibition, mentioning the fact that Great Britain is to make in the coming American celebration one of the grandest displays of her industrial progress and civilization she has ever yet attempted. The speaker concluded by saying that everything thus far seemed to predict a grand and gratifying success for the enterprise.

Ex-Gov. Bigler, of Pennsylvania, was next presented to the convention, and spoke at length on the character and significance of the Centennial, predicting for it a very flattering success, from the fact that already 38 foreign governments had accepted President Grant's invitation to participate in the celebration, and were making active preparations to be fitly represented.

At the conclusion of the speaker's address it was resolved to petition the management of the Exposition for permission to represent the youth of America by the publication of a weekly newspaper, edited and printed by young men, during the progress of the celebration.

The business of the day being then finished the company retired to the dining room, where an elaborate collation was served. In the evening an interesting musical and dramatic entertainment, tendered to the association by the members of the Amaryllis Dramatic Society, was given at Lyric Hall, 6th Avenue and 42nd Street, on which occasion the programme consisted of a farce entitled "Nothing Like Paste", a selection from "Our American Cousin", and Morton's farce, "To Paris and Back for Five Pounds".



ROCKET FANS by Dale Speirs

I occasionally buy from the auctions of stamp dealer Charles Firby of Waterford, Michigan (Detroit area). In his latest colour catalogue at hand, for a general sale on June 13/14, is the Bill Kaufmann Worldwide Rocket Mail Collection. For more than sixty years amateur rocket enthusiasts, some of whom were SF fans whose exploits have been recorded in fanzines, have been launching their own rockets stuffed with letters to be delivered across the river or wherever the downrange target may be. The letters are then sold to stamp collectors who apparently think them to be a legitimate part of postal history.

Unlike selling Star Trek souvenirs, the production of rocket mail is a bit more hazardous. All rocket mail has some kind of rubber stamp marking or label to show that it made the trip. Many items have water stains or charred edges to show that it did **not** make the trip.

Lot #1265, to take an example of the latter, is described as follows: "The Roberti flight of Sept. 4, 1935 ... carried on RV3 which exploded and thus charred the envelope ...". The first night rocket flight of November 4, 1933, from Stiege to Hasselfelde in Germany " ... exploded on takeoff, 150 pieces of mail salvaged." Lot #1331 carries a familiar name: "Sept. 22, 1935, Astoria, NY. Cover w/label carried on Sykora rocket over Holmes Airport. Rocket exploded and 198 covers survived."

Not all rocket mail was gimmickry used to defray the cost of the launch. Rockets were used for ship to shore mail, to deliver goods and letters from passing ships to a lighthouse or rocky island. The military used them in India to supply Savgor Island in 1934. One lot was launched the night of December 17, but the "Ship was too far away, rocket fell to sea & mail recovered." which must have been an interesting chore.

Lot #1334 "First American Airplane Rocket 'Gloria', Feb 23, 1936. Rocket crashed when wings broke off attempting to fly over Greenwood Lake." includes not only the letter but photos of those involved in the launch. The First Parachute Rocket lot must have had an interesting story behind it: " ... carried on rocket which burst. PO confiscated covers until 1939 at which time they received stamps and postal cancel ... postmarked Newark."

There were 104 lots of rocket mail in this collection, although most contained multiples, up to a dozen covers. Average estimates were in the hundreds of dollars. The Sykora flight (or non-flight, rather) has an estimate of \$250. Although the 1930s were the golden age of rocket mail, such experiments continued to modern days. The better items are \$1000 to \$1500 a cover, but bulk lots of modern flights reduce the per cover price down to \$15 or so each.

Will Sykora was in at the beginning of SF fandom as we know it today. His story is better told elsewhere, but I will quote from Damon Knight's book about the early days of fandom THE FUTURIANS: "In the fall of 1935, in Long Island, he fired off two rockets fueled with a "secret" powdered explosive of his own composition. ... The incident was reported as follows in STAMPS magazine ... the steel rocket motor exploded with a terrific detonation scattering the fragments of the rocket and the covers in all directions. ... Wollheim ... gave me his own recollection of the incident. "The rocket flew up about a couple of hundred feet and then blew up, scattering letters in all directions, and also putting a hunk of steel through the arm of one bystander, a little boy. Will was arrested because of that and charged with manufacturing and transporting explosives in New York City without a licence: he was duly fined. He was later sued by the kid's mother and I think the ISA paid the fine out of the small profits made by the sale of the stamps."

The Gloria flight had a connection with the Futurians. A member of that group was the famous scientist Willy Ley,

misdescribed in Firby's catalogue as Will Lay. Knight tells about how a Futurian member arranged for a monument to the rocket flights at Greenwood Lake by Ley and company. The monument was established in 1961; I wonder if it is still there.

But it was not only American SF fans who were risking life and limb, their's and innocent bystanders', in the rocket experiments. British fans were just as adept at blowing things up. The zine BANANA WINGS, in a recent issue (#10) reprinted an account by Harry Turner of the case of Rex v. The Manchester Interplanetary Society.

In March 1937, Robert Snelson and Malcom Wade were reported as slightly injured when a rocket exploded at a demonstration at Clayton Vale, Manchester. The constabulary investigated and eventually charges were laid against a number of MIS members in violation of the Explosives Act of 1875. The magistrate took the case as light relief from the usual murder and theft he dealt with. As the MIS people assured him that a rocket was intended neither as a fireworks or pyrotechnic display, the case was dismissed. It seems the authors of the 1875 act had not anticipated such devices, a gap no doubt long since plugged.

Rocket mail dates back to 1928 in Austria. Friedrich Schmiedl wrote about his rocket experiments in that time and place. His account of those early days was published in the April 1978 issue of AMERICAN PHILATELIST. His biggest problem was not so much blowups but lack of support from the scientific community. As he failed to interest astronomers in rockets, he then turned to launching mail-filled rockets in the hopes of attracting support from the Post Office. But by 1935, he realized that the only major use would be in combat, so he destroyed his notes and prototypes and dropped out of space reasearch.

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There was an attempt to establish an international mail service between Canada and the USA in 1936, but this was defeated by bureacrats and all that remains is a set of labels prepared but never used for the project. Robert Schoendorf wrote about Canada's first genuine rocket mail (BNA TOPICS, January 1962) in which various rockets were launched in February 1958 and later in November. It is not too surprising to learn that none of that mail was ever found, as the rockets came down in snow, fragmented, and were never subsequently located. The launch site was the Churchill rocket range in northern Manitoba. One can imagine some curious polar bear ambling up to the debris of the rocket and paper bits fluttering across the ice, giving it a sniff or two, then carrying on in search of some tasty seal meat.

In 1959, Prime Minister John Diefenbaker cancelled the Avro Arrow fighter plane, the best in the world. He then announced that Canada would buy Bomarc missiles from the USA instead, causing an uproar in the House of Commons. In HANSARD for 1959-06-10, is recorded the following from Question Period.

"Mr. Denis: As a supplementary question, if the American Bomarc, which has been purchased by the Department of National Defence should prove inefficient for defence, might the Postmaster General consider making use of that missile for mail transportation?"

Mr. Denis was then ruled out of order by the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Looking through Firby's catalogue, one feels a tinge of that sense of wonder that excited rocket enthusiasts in the early days. The labels and cacheted envelopes are the antiquities of the Space Age. They are a reminder of a time when the possibilities of the future were glorious and seemingly unlimited.