

# OPUNTIA

## 56.3

ISSN 1183-2703

April 2005

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 OPUNTIAs are sercon, x.1 issues are reviewzines, x.2 issues are indexes, x.3 issues are apazines, and x.5 issues are perzines.

### WHAT IS FAPA?

This issue is for the Fantasy Amateur Press Association. (Details from Robert Lichtman, Box 30, Glen Ellen, California 95442) For those of you receiving this issue who do not know what an apa is, please read on.

Modern zine publishing as we know it today began in the middle 1800s as cheap, home-use printing presses became available to the general public. Zinesters developed a distro method called the amateur press association (apa) where members sent x number of copies of their zine to a central mailer (also known as the official editor). The zines are collated into bundles, and each member gets back one bundle of everyone's zines. There is an annual fee to cover postage. Apas have a minimum level of activity required, such as publishing 8 pages a year. It must be emphasized that apas are not for passive subscribers; you must commit to the minimum activity level or you will be booted out. FAPA has been going for more than 65 years; the oldest apa is the National A.P.A., founded 1876.

x.3 OPUNTIAs are for FAPA. In addition to articles, there will be mailing comments on other apazines in the last FAPA bundle. I usually quote the remark I am commenting on, so hopefully an outsider can still read the comments with interest.

**FAPA CLEARCUT AWARD** (for most pages published in a mailing) goes to A. Langley Searles for 174 pages in FAPA #269 and Robert Sabella for 31 pages in #270.

## MAILING COMMENTS ON FAPA #269

FAPA #269 received in Calgary on November 24, 2004.

**Ben's Beat #78:** Sorry to hear about your fall. Hope you're up and tap-dancing again soon. Likewise for your wife's health.

Re: Clark Ashton Smith. One thing that bothers me is that many mediocre authors such as him are getting disproportionate attention in relation to the actual value of their writing. This seems to be an artefact of people looking for new literary fields to conquer. There has been nothing new to say about Shakespeare for a century, so critics and graduate students turn their attention to lesser writers who should have been consigned to oblivion. Asimov et al are the giants of SF, but little remains to be said of their works, so instead Smith, Howard, and assorted pulp writers are studied for the sake of studying them. Lovecraft's fiction has been commented on ad nauseam, and his ancestry traced back, so now people study his third cousin's landlord's genealogy. The same is true in movies. All those bad monster films of the 1950s, which should never have been made, are on DVD for future generations to analyze.

**Nice Distinctions #7:** Re: Temporal retromingency. A good phrase for retroactive political correctness. I must try to remember it for the next time someone remarks that Social Credit was a white supremacist neo-fascist party in the 1930s, or the Liberals have always based their power on uniting ethnics behind them (I have a copy of a Liberal ad from 75 years ago promising to expel the Chinese from Canada).

**Alphabet Soup #44:** Re: Noreascon IV. Was anyone actually recruited into zinedom at the fanzine lounge? I wonder about the cost effectiveness of such venues for recruiting. You mentioned you were on panels without being told. I never made it to Torcon 3, but apparently spoke on the programme anyway. One week before the convention I got an e-mail asking me to confirm the panels I had been assigned to, despite the fact that I hadn't volunteered.

**Voice Of The Habu V7#4:** Re: 'alternate' versus 'alternative' history. This is one of my pet losing causes, since the correct name for this genre is alternative history, referring to choices. 'alternate' is to switch back and forth. But we are as a distant shout in the wind.

There is another explanation for alternative history besides the 'many worlds' theory of quantum mechanics. A paper was recently published [Seife, Charles (2004-07-23) Physics enters the twilight

zone. SCIENCE 305-464-466] discussing a different type of alternative universe history generation. If our universe is infinite, the number of local spheres within a universe would also be infinite. A local sphere is the limit of our vision beyond which we cannot see anything because the light hasn't arrived. A local sphere would be about 100 billion light years. There are only a finite number of ways to arrange matter and its history, therefore some of the local spheres would have duplicates of Earth with alternative histories. We can never find them since it is impossible for information to travel such great distances for us to ever learn about events in the other sphere and compare them with ours.

Let me throw in a plug here for another apa to which I belong, the Point Of Divergence APA. Membership is US\$10 annually and 30 copies of your zine at least every other distro. Zines must be 8.5 x 11 because this is a bound-volume distro, not a bundle of loose zines. OE is Jim Rittenhouse, 577 Hitchcock Avenue, Lisle, Illinois 60532. This apa specializes in alternative history. Members are writing alternative history fiction, speculative fact articles, and reviews and commentary on alternative history books. Topics include such staples as the Confederates winning the American Civil War and the Germans winning World War 2, but also such things as obscure people who died young living on to affect history, or what California would be like if it were an island out in the Pacific (hint: sabertooth cats are still extant).

**Flicker #3:** Re: the high cost of traditional print zines. You quote \$400 to \$600 for a 30-page zine in 200 copies. For comparison, OPUNTIA #54.3 cost \$50.08 to print 130 copies. About 50 copies go in a lump to FAPA, which was \$8.50 to mail as a parcel, and the rest were mailed individually at a total cost of about \$65. Call it \$125 per issue. I don't drink or smoke, so what I save on that, I can easily apply to zine publishing.

When I established OPUNTIA, I chose this format for a specific reason. 16 pages of text on four sheets of paper is just under the cut-off for the first increment of postage, so I can mail a single issue for the same price as a postcard or letter. It has long been known that a small but frequent zine is less work than a doorstep zine, and generates the same response.

I saw no reason to be confined to the mundane format of most zines. If you are selling on a newsstand, your magazine has to be 8.5 x 11 with the title at the top, but a networked zine can be any format. I knew from previous experience that SF fans are the most reactionary type of zinesters and least able to deal with anything out of the ordinary, so I have ignored comments about the numbering system or the horizontal format.

I believe that the Papernet has one virtue that will keep it going. It cannot be searched by Google, so your boss or local constabulary cannot find it at random.



More and more people are losing their jobs because they didn't realize their bosses aren't as dumb as they think. Companies regularly search the Internet for mention of their name or their employees' names. One recent example was a staff member of a tourist bureau who got fired because her personal Web site showed pictures of the local dump sites. A paper zine has to be physically intercepted by your boss, and they have to know in the first instance that it is being published. By contrast, the bosses may not even suspect that you have an e-zine or Live Journal site, but Google will lead them to it.

Re: Joyce breaking her ankles. First Ben, then her. I wonder who the third one will be? You realize that fanzine fandom is poorly enough already without zinesters going about snapping bones. Get well and get plenty of calcium.

**Extraordinary Fuggheads:** I have filed this next to my copy of WARHOON 28. I wonder what electronic fandom will produce that would be equivalent to the Enchanted Duplicator. Certainly the discussion groups will have nothing, since they generate nothing but brief quips that quickly veer off topic, which is why I no longer subscribe to such lists. The verbal diarrhea is forgettable and leaves nothing to posterity that any future generation would be interested in. E-zines, as mentioned, do not produce dialogue or response, so no shared culture can be built up there. Blogs have flooded the electronic ecosystem. How many

Web links will still be working even five years from now, and how can anyone be certain that a Web site that people gushed over still has the same content? The basic problem with the Internet is that there can be no shared culture, not even in theory, because there are so many sites and lists and so little time to view them all.

In the past, I referred to apas as black holes, where zinesters vanished from sight, but now I'm beginning to think I should be only in them. As you say, there is much better response. The best apas are the small ones such as Point Of Divergence (limited to 30) rather than some monster such as NAPA with a 450 copy requirement.

**Corflu Blackjack:** A good convention report read with interest. Re: *"I'm not sure a newszine is the right approach, because listservs do such a good job of disseminating the latest happenings ..."* Listservs are so cluttered up with off-topic posts that some people such as myself gave up trying to skim them for any solid content. A properly edited e-zine a la ANSIBLE, would be the best. What we need is a North American Dave Langford. As much as I prefer the Papernet, I acknowledge that the Internet is faster for breaking news and ephemeral information. But who pray, will take on that job? The key word here is 'edit', in that off-topic responses must be deleted, libelous rants calmed down, and unsupported statements substantiated.

**A Different Drummer #2:** Enjoyed your account of Rod Serling's hometown of Binghamton, NY. Samuel Johnson once remarked that every man wishes to return to his birthplace as a hero.

Re: carousel horses. You can collect them on stamps as well. The USPS issued a set in the late 1980s depicting various carousel horse heads.

**Feline Mewsings #18:** Re: movies with mixed-up geography. Calgary and southern Alberta have often doubled for American locations. "Exit Wounds" used Cowtown as a double for Detroit. The big explosion scene on the bridge was actually the upper level of Centre Street bridge. The lower deck of that bridge appeared in a car chase in the Richard Pryor movie "Silver Streak", with doubled various locations around Alberta for Kansas and Colorado. All three Superman movies were partially filmed in Alberta. "High Noon", "Lonesome Dove", "Little Big Man", "Doctor Zhivago" and "Heaven And Earth" all made use of the southern Alberta prairies and mountains. That last title was a medieval Japan epic that soaked up just about every horse in the province for the battle scenes. Most of the riders were local ranchers' sons and daughters dressed in Japanese battle gear; teenagers were judged the right size to represent the underfed warriors of yore. The more developed girls had to have their breasts bound.

Re: names for the Richardson ground squirrel. *"I assume that 'picket pin' is Canadian ..."* I have never heard that name used. The uneducated call them gophers (which are a different species seldom seen because they are nocturnal); the educated call them ground squirrels. Supposedly they are sometimes known as flickertails but I suspect that name died out a century ago, if it ever even was used in daily lingo. I worked in pest control for the Parks Dept. during the 1980s, and it was a lost cause to poison them, since more came in from the surrounding countryside. The only control that really succeeds is tall grass, because ground squirrels are adapted for shortgrass habitats.

**Western Romance #8:** Re: your mis-treatment by the night shift at the rehab hospital. This would be worth hiring a barrister on contingency and suing, if not for your personal benefit then to ensure that others after you will not suffer.

*"I'm told the Nevada desert's white gypsum rocks are made up of the decayed bones of prehistoric marine life. Only Stephen King could begin to guess what horrific monsters might be sleeping beneath our feet."* Gypsum is an evaporite mineral, a hydrated form of calcium sulphate left over when a sea dries up. Alternatively, the white rocks might be compressed diatomaceous earth, which is the silica shells of countless marine algae. Raptors are birds such as hawks and eagles. Rest easy.



**A Propos De Rien:** *“Do aquarium or philately fans publish fanzines?”* 99.99% are clubzines. The goal for ambitious authors in these fields is to publish a book someday, not a zine. Interestingly enough, in the early days of stamp collecting, from 1850 to about 1900, many philatelists did publish zines on their own, but that died out. I think the reason for lack of zines in these two hobbies was that both were well supported by dealers’ house organs and countless specialty society journals, so there has never been any need to do one’s own. SF fans, by contrast, had no other outlets but what they could create on their own, given that SF clubs were fewer and prozines could only publish a fraction of the letters they received.

Herman Herst Jr, who was to philately what Harry Warner Jr was to SF, noted that during the Great Depression in New York City it was possible to attend a different stamp club meeting every night of the month. Today there are hundreds of specialty philatelic organizations, not to mention national societies and local clubs. I belong to only a few dozen, such as the American Philatelic Society, Royal P.S. of Canada, British North America P.S., American Topical Association, Postal History Society of Canada, Calgary P.S., Ukrainian Philatelic and Numismatic Society, Postal History Society (USA), Post Mark Collectors Club, and others, as well as subscribing to a dozen stamp periodicals. There are societies for people who collect cats on stamps, or other topics such as waterfalls, archaeology, plants,

aviation, music, and famous people. One can join thematic societies such as the Errors, Freaks and Oddities Club (stamps that were mis-printed) or the American Air Mail Association. In short, there was never any need for philatelists to go out on their own with perzines. Much the same is true of the aquarium hobby.

*“The price of crude has gone up because Bush wanted to increase reserves.”* Don’t blame that one on him. Bush, and the USA, no longer have any control over oil prices, nor does OPEC for that matter. China is industrializing rapidly to prevent revolution against the Communist regime, which means that a billion people are going to soak up huge amounts of minerals and petroleum. That is why China is trying to buy up Canadian mines and oilfields, so as to have a guaranteed supply of resources.

**Lofgeornost #77:** Re: your youthful interest in shortwave radio. Did you collect QSL cards? One of my radios has a shortwave band on it. I used to listen to one frequency that was nothing but irregular chirps and beeps. I finally found out that this was how Canadian banks and credit unions transmitted their clearing house reports to the Bank of Canada in Ottawa each night. They used encrypted one-time-pad compressed bursts to send lists of cheques drawn that day on various banks, and their representatives would settle up each night in Ottawa. I suspect nowadays they use the Internet, although as I type this, the Canadian Imperial Bank of

Commerce is in a scandal because its branches were transmitting internal customer clearing data by fax, to the wrong number, a junkyard dealer in the USA who was getting thousands of faxes per day with account names and numbers.

**Janice Morningstar [untitled publication]:** *"I've heard that visits to Canada's immigration Website have gone up dramatically since the [American] election ... "* I can't imagine why anyone would panic just because the Shrubbies won the election. I suspect few, not even a dozen, would actually stay long in Canada. Bear in mind that we have a corrupt federal government (Liberal), Tories running Alberta since 1971 (where all the oil power is), and real language police (not just a figurative expression). And, of course, real winters.

**Placeholder #1:** *"People that I know from their writing in other places are capable of intelligent, entertaining writing, when placed in an Internet mailing list seem to become capable only of petty bickering ... "* Which is why I no longer subscribe to SF listservs. I still subscribe to horticultural, philatelic, and aquarium listservs, whose members tend to be more intelligent and adult than SF fans, and actually stay on topic.

**Synapse:** *"Canada, without wars of its own, doesn't have much history."* A provocative statement to a Canuck if ever there was one. There was all that to-ing and fro-ing between the British and

French that didn't finish up definitively until 1759 on the Plains of Abraham. The Americans were determined to liberate us in 1812 whether we wanted to be or not. The Rebellion of 1837 spread across what is now southern Ontario and southern Québec and took two years for the British army to put down. Louis Riel didn't start the Red River Rebellion of 1869-70 but he won it, resulting in the formation of the province of Manitoba. Just as the feds were settling back after that one, the Fenians raided into Canada in 1871. Riel came back to haunt the Tories in 1885, when the Northwest Rebellion broke out in northern Saskatchewan. Riel lost that one and was hanged, as a result of which to this day he is simultaneously recognized as a Father of Confederation and a traitor. Canadians fought in the Sudan and the Boer Wars. Canada was in both World Wars from the beginning, unlike the USA. For more details, search on Google for Vimy Ridge, Dieppe, and Juno Beach. In October 1970, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau suspended civil rights in Québec and sent the army in to combat the FLQ terrorists. Canada has contributed troops to every United Nations peacekeeping mission. Our squaddies are currently in Afghanistan and the Balkans.

**Fantasy Commentator #57:** Staggering issue of 174 pages of commentary on Fritz Leiber. The Jungian analysis was the usual psychiatric analytical nonsense, but many of the story criticisms were interesting to read. Leiber's brief connection to H.P. Lovecraft will probably garner

a few sales of this issue to HPL collectors. Justin Leiber comments on page 81 that his father said no one had noticed the source of the title for A SPECTER IS HAUNTING TEXAS. I find this difficult to believe. The title is so obviously taken from the opening line of THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO that no one would feel the need to draw attention to it or mention it in a review.

**After The Crash:** You are the third one after Ben and Joyce.

**All other zines:** Read but couldn't think of anything to comment.

## MAILING COMMENTS ON FAPA #270

FAPA #270 received in Calgary on February 25, 2005.

**Ben's Beat #79:** *"I think that senior artists, as I call them, will soon swamp the market ... "* I've always wondered how the market for macrame, vases, velvet paintings, and anatomically-correct male dolls can continue to absorb this stuff. House fires could only account for a small reduction, so I assume that spring cleaning and executors of the estate account for most of the cleansing process to eliminate it and make way for the next generation of clutter. Garage sales don't count since they only recycle junk to another household.

## Alphabet #45:

Re: Canadian convention committees having both an Author Guest of Honour and a Canadian Author GoH. This tradition arose specifically because of the low odds of a Canadian author being a GoH in any other country, and to highlight the literary scene of Canada. Québec also has francophone author GoHs. Up until the 1980s, the major Canadian SF authors could be counted on one hand, and most of them were immigrants, not Canadian-born. Robert Runté (now a professor at the University of Lethbridge but at that time a graduate student at the University of Alberta in Edmonton) and other Edmonton SF fans began a campaign to recognize and encourage more Canadian authors. They worked via two routes, that of conventions and by starting up semiprozines such as ON SPEC. This activity through the 1980s and 1990s was productive, and now being named a Canadian Author GoH isn't just a matter of default but something that requires a convention committee to do quite a bit of short-listing.

Paradoxically, the Canadian Worldcons used mainly American GoHs to encourage more fans from south of the border to come up here. The only Canadian SF author that average American fans would recognize as Canadian is Robert Sawyer, Canada's answer to Harlan Ellison. Judging by the fact that the current generation of fans are mostly anime fanatics, any future Worldcon up here would do well to import Japanese authors.



**Alphabet Soup #45:** Re: people not having time to research SF collections in university libraries. The Bob Gibson collection at the University of Calgary Library is not even fully unpacked or catalogued but has already produced two studies. Since nothing remains to be said of Shakespeare, there are a lot of graduate students desperately searching for thesis topics, and thus willing to mine the collection. Robert Runté is a professor of sociology and although his specialty is education, he was considering a study of fandom as a future project, albeit under the title of “avocational subcultures” to make it sound more academic.

I spend a lot of time in the microforms section of the U of C Library going through old newspapers for my research on postal history. It is pleasing to note how many people still scroll through microfilms for their researches as I do. I suspect they are doing the same thing as I am; mining for obscure information that will never be on the Internet.

*“Jack Benny was a real person who had a comic persona of the same name.”* should read “Benjamin Kubelsky was a real person who had a comic persona named Jack Benny.”

**Visions Of Paradise #102:** *“Are you frightened by the threat of biological warfare as I am?”* No. Biochemwarfare is nothing new; nations have had the capability to employ it for centuries. The Americans gave blankets to aboriginal tribes that had been

previously slept in by smallpox victims. The Germans used gas in World War One. But no wide scale attack, even by terrorists, has been employed because the perpetrators realize that biological agents are unreliable, uncontrollable, and difficult to disperse. The anthrax attacks of October 2001 showed just how difficult it is to kill people with spores. Even though two major postal sorting plants were heavily contaminated and their air filled with floating spores, only two posties out of hundreds died. The diseases that will produce pandemics will come from the usual unintended sources, such as avian flu from Chinese farms, or AIDS from people whose sexual drive is stronger than their intelligence.

**Lofgeornost #78:** Re: your work in bibliography and thesaurus term selection. I have prepared or currently maintain a number of indexes in the aquarium, SF, and philatelic hobbies, and found that the most difficult part of the work is selecting terms. I do a lot of cross-referencing. I can appreciate your trouble and strife in getting international agreement on terms for your specialty.

Re: shortwave Dxing and getting CBC Radio International. I never got into collecting QSL cards, but did like to listen to faraway transmissions, although most of what I picked up was some evangelist station in Nebraska or squirted data from the banks settling overnight clearings. CBC still has its shortwave service, based in New Brunswick, so it shouldn't be that difficult to catch it.

**Target FAPA #271:** *“Seems to me the Moon’s radius should figure in the computation of Roche’s limit. Wonder why not?”* Because the Moon will enter the Earth’s Roche limit long before the Earth enters the lunar Roche limit. Thus, if the Moon starts to approach the Earth too closely, it will break up before the Earth would. Size does matter.

*“Why do popular flowers lose smell as they are bred up? There seems to be no necessity for this.”* This occurs because the breeders are emphasizing shape or colour of the flower above all else and choose the most vigorous seedlings that carry the desired traits. It is a basic principle of biology that every metabolic process has an energy cost that reduces vigour. Most metabolic reactions are essential and cannot be dispensed with, such as photosynthesis or respiration. Others, such as nectar or scent production, cannot be dispensed with in habitat, but can be eliminated in a greenhouse because the plant will still reproduce by the intervention of humans without those traits.

The more metabolic traits a plant or animal has, the slower it grows. Evolution is therefore a balancing act that requires a new trait to have advantages that outweigh the disadvantages. An example is resistance to disease or pests, which costs energy and slows a plant down, but is still more advantageous than having no resistance. This has come to prominence in recent years because of the introduction of transgenic crops which can survive

herbicides that are designed to kill weeds growing with them while leaving the crop plant alone. The corporations that developed these plants said that the possibility of transfer of herbicide resistance from a transgenic crop to a wild, weedy relative was nil. A few years after introducing herbicide-resistant crops, that resistance was showing up in weeds due to cross-pollination. Such weeds grow slower than normal weeds because of the metabolic cost (the same applies to the transgenic crop plant) but the advantage is worth it. Scientifically this is referred to as cross-platform resistance. In common idiom, the correct term is hubris.

Highly-bred flowers therefore lose scent because the breeders are selecting for colour or shape, and discard the seedlings that grow slower because they are diverting energy to scent production. This trend has been changing in recent years, as breeders now select scent along with other attributes, due to complaints by gardeners that modern roses and other popular flowers have no scent.

**All other zines:** Read through but couldn’t think of anything to comment upon.

## VIGNETTES AND BAD POETRY OF THE PICTON POST OFFICE

by Dale Speirs

The Picton, Ontario, post office was established in 1820 in the village of Hallowell. In 1829, the post office moved across the harbour bridge to Picton and took that name. The name changed back to Hallowell in 1831, and finally settled itself as Picton in 1837 when the two villages were amalgamated. David Barker was appointed postmaster in 1848 after his predecessor William Rorke got caught with his hand in the till [1]. Barker served until 1872, and died while still in office [3].

### Sycophancy In Extremis.

Normally I would not be writing about local postal history of Ontario (I am an Albertan born and raised) except that while doing a keyword search on the Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproductions Website I came across a mention of a poem dedicated to a postmaster. This turned out to be a selection from a privately-printed chapbook published in 1865 by J.T. Breeze [2]. The poems praised various local businessmen and personalities in Picton, and no doubt the chapbook had most of its sales to them [8]. One such poem was titled "Mr. Barker; Postmaster". I print it below in its entirety.

### Mr. Barker; Postmaster

*"Deep in thy heart trembles the love of right,  
It sways thy soul with more than temp'ral might,  
To every object of a lofty aim  
That power is lent, void of the love of fame.  
Thy soul doth shed its gen'rous sympathies wide,  
To raise what's good to this our land of pride.*

*The Post, an agent that doth swift convey  
Our holiest thoughts to distant friends away,  
And in return may learn of joy or woe,  
That they through time have oft to undergo.  
The office rears her towering head on high,  
Where hearts of love do guide the anxious eye.  
Here young and old seek out the building grand,  
That raised by wealth to decorate the land,  
To its fond shrine the youth are on th' alert,  
Love swiftly moves them to its doors expert;  
To hear and know of some fond wandering heart,  
That's left our land for other climes apart.*

*The seal is broke! the dew-drop fills the eye,  
The heart beats swift and sends affection's sigh,  
Weeps that the hand that pen'd the pensive line  
Could not be grasp'd with warmth all but divine.*



*A mother's footstep often wanders here,  
Seeking some knowledge of an object dear,  
Sends and receives the fruit of holy love,  
To offspring dear in distant lands that rove.*

*Here friendship, too, exchanges hallowed thought,  
Whose silken threads on Earth can ne'er be bought.  
And kings may know that friendship is not sold,  
For Damon spurn'd the offered royal gold.  
And here may meet the great commercial mind,  
Whose brows with thought and sorrows deep are lined,  
Waiting to know if their success be sure.  
Should doubts remain, what woes their hearts endure;  
Their minds' a wreck, and reason leaves the throne,  
The heart is broke and life's bright hopes are gone.  
Poor prostrate man, seek commerce with thy God,  
Get from His throne the purchase of his blood.  
Then wealth eternal shall they soul secure,  
Long as the throne of mercy shall endure."*

Certainly something to think about as you open your morning mail, especially if you have a past-due notice from your friendly banker.

As was common with many post offices at the time, unclaimed letters were advertised in the local newspaper. Barker, in his capacity as Picton postmaster, had a list of names in most issues of the PICTON GAZETTE [5]. He also advertised changes in the regulations of the post office, such as the one announcing the closure of the post office on Sundays [6].

### Sunday Closure.

Shutting down postal operations on Sundays was a political issue for many years in the 1800s. The Post Office Department did not like the idea because it disrupted the otherwise steady flow of mail. Sectarian politics reared its ugly head though, and legislators were plagued by petitions got up by ministers and their congregations for Sunday closure.

P.O.D. Order #49, dated March 10, 1860, read as follows [6]:

*"To Post Masters in Canada West –*

*1. Referring to Article 9 of the regulations of this Department, Postmasters in Canada West are informed that they are relieved from the obligation to open their offices for the delivery of letters, &c, on Sunday.*

2. *The letter box for the posting of letters must nevertheless be kept accessible to the public at all times, and, as directed by the Regulations should have an opening in the road or street for this purpose, so that letters may be posted during the night, or when the office is shut.*

3rd. *When under the authority of this order, an office in Canada West is closed to the public on Sunday, it must be closed to all persons alike, and no exceptional and partial delivery to particular individuals can be sanctioned."*

David Barker added a postscript: "*N.B. In accordance with the above instructions, the Post Office in this town will cease to be opened for the delivery of letters, &c, on Sundays.*"

Sunday openings were then as now, a subject of controversy. It is impossible to say if Barker was that religious, or, what seems more likely, going along with the flow and secretly relieved at getting a day off work.

### **Mail Conveyance Contracts.**

I found an 1860 advertisement in the PICTON GAZETTE soliciting for bids to convey the mails between Picton and Milford, a distance of about ten miles [7]. The mails were to be carried by horse or wagon in summer, and via cutter in winter. Travel time was to be five miles an hour inclusive of all stops.

There were to be three round trips a week on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, each round trip taking four hours. It is interesting to note that the Post Office Inspector supervising the contract was located in Kingston but the bids were to be sent to Québec City.

### **References.**

1] Rosenthal, Max (1985) Postal beginnings in Prince Edward County. PHSC JOURNAL 42:6-11

2] Breeze, J.T. (1865) Mr. Barker; Postmaster. *in* THE POET'S MOMENTO OF PICTON. Privately published chapbook. Available on microfiche as CIHM #89368. Seen at University of Calgary Library.

3] National Archives of Canada (downloaded 2002-03-06) Post offices and postmasters. ARCHIVIANET, [www.archives.ca](http://www.archives.ca)

4] Anonymous (1878) ILLUSTRATED HISTORICAL ATLAS OF THE COUNTIES OF HASTINGS AND PRINCE EDWARD, ONTARIO. Published by H. Belden and Co., Toronto. Page 55.

5] Barker, David (1860-01-20) Letters remaining in the Picton Post Office. [advertisement] PICTON GAZETTE, page 3

6] Barker, David (1860-04-06) Post Office Department. [advertisement] PICTON GAZETTE, page 3

7] Sweetnam, N. (1860-04-27) Mail contract. [advertisement] PICTON GAZETTE, page 3

8] James Thomas Breeze, of Brockville, published a number of such chapbooks dedicated to the glory of Toronto, Kingston, etcetera. The poems cover a wide range of buildings (mostly churches and lunatic asylums), local dignitaries, and news events such as Abraham Lincoln's assassination. The few chapbooks I have seen do not mention anything postal, other than the Picton poem I have quoted.

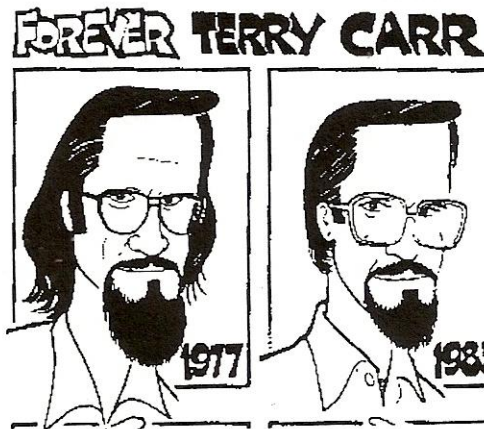
## TO TELL THE TRUTH

by Dale Speirs

I previously published a photo of a goateed man with glasses, after telling an anecdote about how a shop girl told me I looked like actor Rip Torn. A number of years ago I was compared to SF author Terry Carr. I invited readers to guess who the photo was. It was, in fact, me. Some responses were:

Sheryl Birkhead:	Terry Carr
Ned Brooks:	Dale Speirs
Randall Fleming:	Dale Speirs
Kris Mininger:	Rip Torn
Steve Jeffery:	Terry Carr

Steve sent the cartoon below, from the back cover of Carr's FANDOM HARVEST. Excepting that my forehead wasn't so prominent, the 1977 sketch is exactly how I looked in 1977 as a third-year university student. It's too bad I wasn't in fandom then; I would have loved to have met my doppelganger.



-14-

And yes, to a number of correspondents, those telephone sanitizers depicted previously were real, which is why I cited the sources. I later came across other ads for other brands of them. If I didn't have such a backlog of articles waiting to be written, I would research and write the history of telephone sanitation.

I mentioned in a previous issue that I had trouble with my computer clock running fast. No answers as yet; people supplied reasons why computer clocks run slow, but that isn't the problem. My computer is a 1998 Toshiba Satellite 300CDS laptop, running Windows 95, WordPerfect/QuattroPro 8, and Works 4.5. No Internet access at home; I check my e-mail once a week at the University library and that's good enough.



## AS OTHERS SEE US

noticed by Dale Speirs (wearing his philatelic hat)

*“Before this year, blogs were a curiosity, a cult phenomenon, a faintly embarrassing hobby on the order of ham radio and stamp collecting.”*

Lev Grossman, in an article on Weblogs in the 2004-12-27 issue of TIME (Canadian edition, page 65).

It isn't just SF fans who suffer condescension from the mundanes.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor's remarks in square brackets.]

FROM: Ned Brooks  
4817 Dean Lane  
Lilburn, Georgia 30047-4720

2004-10-20

Not all apas [amateur press associations] have dues and minac [minimum activity]. I have been a member for 34.75 years of Slanapa (Slanderous A.P.A.), which has no minac and no dues. The job of collating and mailing is done by the Temporary Official Editor, a position that rotates through the roster. In

theory, each TOE is autonomous and might drop or add members or not do the mailing at all. I don't think we have ever missed a mailing, though the latest was a bit late; the TOE couldn't get home because of roads blocked by the hurricanes.

**I Also Heard From:** Jose Roberto Sechi, Chester Cuthbert, Ficus, Joseph Major

## SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

noticed by Dale Speirs

Durda, D.D., and D.A. Kring (2004) **Ignition threshold for impact-generated fires.** JOURNAL OF GEOPHYSICAL RESEARCH 109:E08004

*“Widespread fires can be generated after large impact events by atmospheric heating caused by re-accretion of high-energy, vapour-rich plume material. The threshold ejected plume mass for continent-wide spontaneous ignition of wood is  $\sim 2$  to  $6 \times 10^{15}$  kg, independent of impact location but dependent on the details of the ejecta speed distribution. The threshold ejected plume mass for global spontaneous ignition of wood is in the range  $\sim 1$  to  $2 \times 10^{16}$  kg. Impact craters of at least 85 km diameter are needed to produce continental-scale fires, and craters of  $\sim 135$  km diameter are needed for global-scale fires.”*

Anonymous (1870-10-22) **Law and police.** ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS 57:434

*“There being no prisoners for trial at the Chester City Sessions yesterday week, the Recorder, Mr. Horatio Lloyd, was presented with a pair of white kid gloves.”*

Speirs: I stumbled across this paragraph (this is the complete quote) while searching old issues of the ILN looking for other information. This is what makes research so much fun. Why was the judge given a pair of kid gloves? Was it because he handled prisoners with them? Was this a spur of the moment joke on the part of the barristers and clerks? No prisoners being there, perhaps everyone was standing about the courtroom trying to think of something to pass the time. Or perhaps it was a quaint English custom like peppercorn rents or the Dunmow Flicht?

Rockwood, K., D.B. Hogan, and C.J. Patterson (2004) **Incidence of and risk factors for nodding off at scientific sessions.** CANADIAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION JOURNAL 171:1443-1445

The authors, stuck at a boring two-day upgrading session for physicians, were inspired to objectively analyze the various lecturers. They sat at the back of the room and counted the

number of heads falling forward during two days of lectures. This was used as the indicator of nodding off. For practical purposes they were unable to count people who can sleep sitting up with their eyes open, but it is presumed that this would be in proportionate ratio to nodders and thus not affect the results. -16-

Nod-off episodes per lecture per 100 audience members (NOEL) ranged from 3 to 24. The median NOEL was 16. Risk factors were correlated and it was determined that the lecturer’s characteristics were the prime cause, subject to the dose-response effect. The following table was prepared.

<u>Risk Factor</u>	<u>Odds</u>
dim lighting	1.6
warm room	1.4
comfortable seats	1.0
early morning	1.3
post-prandial	1.7
poor slides	1.8
failure to speak into microphone	1.7
monotonous voice	6.8
lecturer wearing tweed jacket	2.1
lecturer losing his place in the lecture	2.0