

# OPUNTIA

# 65

ISSN 1183-2703

May 2008

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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.

## CANADIANS DID THEIR PART: WORLD WAR TWO RATION COUPONS

by Dale Speirs

### Introduction.

Among the other things I inherited from my mother's estate were her ration books from the war. They are alien things to today's society, where instant gratification is a constitutional right, and self-sacrifice scorned. World War Two brought with it rationing and price controls. Rationing was not begun because there was an actual shortage, but because much of Canada's food production had to go overseas to feed its soldiers and for distribution to its war-torn allies who could not feed themselves. The labour shortage caused by all the young men going into the armed forces did crimp food production as well, but this was met by volunteers and women workers (who had traditionally not participated in the labour force in large numbers). Unlike modern wars, where there is opposition to troop deployment in Afghanistan or the Balkans, World War Two had the advantage of strong citizen support, and rationing was accepted as a necessary evil.

The rationing system in Canada was run by the Wartime Prices and Trade Board (WPTB). It started off on September 3, 1939, with many glitches, but as experience was gained became more efficient. It should be noted that ration coupons were only part of

its duties. The WPTB also looked after price controls and allocating supplies on an industrial scale to war factories. The earliest ration coupons were crude and poorly done, but the later ones were nicely produced.

The WPTB published a weekly display newspaper advertisement beginning March 18, 1943, called "Ration News", which gives many specific details (Figure 1).

The coupons had no cash value in themselves. They merely entitled the bearer to purchase x units of a commodity at market price, but the purchase couldn't be made without presenting the coupon(s) to the retailer. A coupon's worth also fluctuated during the war, and the amount of goods it purchased varied depending upon supply. Without coupons, one could not buy sugar, meat, tea or coffee, butter, or gasoline. All Canadians were issued with ration books, including children. Parents of children under 16 had possession and control of their kids' ration books.

Figure 1: (at right) Newspaper ad advising the latest rule changes.

Figure 2: (on page 3) One of my mother's ration books. She was 10 years old.

# RATION NEWS

## Meat Rationing by Chart

Meat Coupon Value Charts will shortly be published in the press and will be supplied to retail stores that sell meat. The chart will explain clearly the number of Coupons which must be surrendered for each cut of rationed meats. It is necessary to cut Canadian consumption of meat by about 15 percent. This will allow approximately two pounds per person per week, carcass weight. The brown Spare "A" Coupons in Ration Book 2 will be used for the meat ration.

## Butter Coupons

Butter Coupon No. 7 which became good on April 24, does not expire until May 31. Coupon No. 8 becomes good on May 1; Coupon No. 9 on May 8. Both Coupons expire May 31.

## Spare Sugar Coupon

Dates for marketing rhubarb vary in different parts of the country. But this does not prevent housewives from using their No. 1 Spare "B" (blue) Coupon now for the extra pound of sugar for this purpose. This Coupon expires May 31. Your dealer has no right to insist you buy rhubarb when you use this spare sugar Coupon.

## Wartime Emergencies

Branches of the Ration Administration can supply all information necessary to anyone seeking rationed food supplies in

situations arising as wartime emergencies. Special arrangements have been made to meet such situations and anyone may obtain the necessary information and application forms at Ration Branches.

## Small Arms Ammunition

The manufacture of cartridges for civilian requirements is being cut to about one-third of ordinary quantity. Fifty percent of the amount manufactured is being allocated to remote areas in the far North where people rely to a large extent on the hunting of game for food and for their livelihood. Any person may use whatever ammunition he has on hand but cannot buy ammunition without completing a certificate to establish that he is an authorized purchaser. The supply situation is such that small arms ammunition is not available for sporting purposes.

## Barter or Exchange of Rationed Commodities

The Ration Orders explain how rationed commodities may be acquired. Consumers may only acquire rationed commodities by surrender of Coupons whether the goods are paid for in cash or whether they are exchanged for other goods. Any barter or exchange of rationed commodities is considered as a purchase. Dealers in rationed commodities are described in the Orders and they are the only persons from whom rationed commodities may be obtained.

This column will appear in this newspaper every week to keep you up-to-date on Ration News. Clip and keep for reference

RATION ADMINISTRATION

THE WARTIME PRICES AND TRADE BOARD

**RATION  
BOOK 1**



**CARNET DE  
RATIONNEMENT 1**

Serial Number

CY 188394

No de série

**DOMINION OF CANADA**

Name

Nom

Address

Adresse

*Mackie, Betty*

*Lockville*

*Alta.*

Age if under 16

*12*

Age, si au-dessous de 16 ans

**ISSUED BY THE WARTIME PRICES AND TRADE BOARD**

**ÉMIS PAR LA COMMISSION DES PRIX ET DU COMMERCE EN TEMPS DE GUERRE**



## Honest Citizens.

Although Canadians generally accepted the necessity of rationing, and usually observed the rules, there were black markets and sharp practice. This was particularly true in rural areas where farmers kept an extra cow or two in the back forty to feed their families, out of sight of government inspectors. All of the coupon books in my collection were inherited from my mother, who was a young girl during the war (born 1931) in the rural village of Eckville, Alberta. The books are in her name (Betty Mackie), her grandparents name (August and Anna Koski), or her mother's brother (Ernest Koski). The Koskis lived on the original homestead a few miles north of the village, and supplied my mother's family with meat and other farm products without the fuss and bother of ration coupons. The only coupons used up completely in my family were for non-farm products such as sugar, tea, and coffee. Most of the meat coupons were untouched.

It was a regulation that coupons could only be detached from the books in the presence of the retailer, and the use of loose coupons was strictly forbidden. In actual fact, loose coupons circulated widely throughout Canada as a barter currency. Someone who wanted beef could buy it from farmers and give them coupons to account for the meat, but since the farmers never needed to give coupons to themselves for their own personal consumption, they accumulated the coupons.

A story in my family is that August Koski had fistfuls of loose meat coupons that he used for barter or as gifts. A farm visitor from the village might mention the difficulty in getting meat, at which August would give the visitor a batch of coupons, on the understanding that someday he would ask a favour in return.

Another popular wheeze was to buy an old car without any intention of driving it, but to apply for the gasoline coupons anyway. These could be bartered readily. It was also the law that children under 12 could not use their tea/coffee coupons, but this was widely ignored by their parents, who had actual control of the books. This practice was halted by requiring that new ration books for children could not be obtained unless the tea/coffee coupons from the old book were surrendered. The majority of people were discreet, and if you weren't piggish and kept quiet, you could get away with sneaking a few extra coupons here and there, or buying small quantities on the black market. Dealing in large quantities would be detected sooner or later. A retailer who turned in suspiciously few coupons or far too many for the size of his stock was waving a red flag at the government inspectors. Then too, local ration boards were staffed by volunteers from the area, who knew who was who and doing what, and would go after the big-time offenders. Gossip could bring down a hoarder faster than a formal investigation.

**GASOLINE LICENCE and RATION COUPON BOOK**

CATEGORY

**AA**

CATÉGORIE

**1945**  
**1946**

**A 986653**



*lyn b. o'neill*

OIL CONTROLLER FOR CANADA

RÉGISSEUR DES HUILES POUR LE CANADA

For Motor Vehicle Licence Plate No.

	4	5	7	5	2	
--	---	---	---	---	---	--

Pour la plaque de licence de véhicule automobile No

**PERMIS D'ESSENCE et COUPONS DE RATIONS**



## Sharp Practice And Criminal Fraud.

When rationing began in early 1942, it was on the honour system, which of course worked poorly, thus forcing the use of ration coupons. From July 1942, the WPTB ceased leniency and began enforcement. From then to March 1943, only 253 cases were prosecuted by the WPTB for ration coupon violations [2]. Enforcement did not mean instant prosecution, as it also consisted of forcing compliance with the rules on an administrative basis. Court proceedings were only a last resort or where the violation was blatant and excessive. A 1942 case in Calgary, for example, brought a man who had 500 pounds of sugar before the judge, a bit much for an average family household.

There were also cases where the violation was not that serious but the WPTB wished to make an example of the offender to encourage others to toe the line. It was much like enforcing traffic laws today. The majority of speeders get away with it but if the constable photographs you at a radar trap you have no right to complain even if you were only 11 clicks over the speed limit. In a 1943 case in Ontario, a company employee was given loose gasoline coupons to compensate for the use of his private car on company business. There was no suggestion of criminal intent, but a conviction was registered anyway. The presiding judge remarked: *"It is essential that these war regulations be scrupulously observed by everyone."* [3] In a 1945 Saskatchewan

case, a wholesale grocer had been giving retailers credit for coupons at the time of supplying bulk orders for sugar, instead of demanding the coupons before delivery as the law required. The customers were good for the coupons and did deliver them later. This sort of extension of credit to reliable customers is standard in the business world for money payments, but as the wholesaler found out in court, it was an offense for coupons.

In other cases, blatant illegality triggered the prosecutions. A Calgary man was fined \$50 in September 1943 for fencing stolen loose gasoline coupons. He had received \$5 from a buyer for the coupons [5]. The prosecution was not so much for the loose coupons but for the fencing. Counterfeiting was a problem, especially since many issues of coupons were crudely printed and thus easy to copy. In September 1945, a Quebec merchant was caught trying to deposit 11,493 counterfeit butter coupons [6].

The ration books were distributed to citizens from government offices, schools, and churches. While they had some security, most of it was nothing more than a locked cupboard or a small safe. Organized crime targeted these outlets with planned heists that took thousands of new ration books at a time. Major hits occurred in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver. These books were worth good money on the black market [8].

## **If All Else Fails, Read The Instructions.**

More so than criminal activity, many of the WPTB's problems with ration coupons were generated by the general public who could not understand the rules or would not read the instructions. When ration book #1 was issued on August 31, 1942, it contained a postcard to be mailed in only when advised and only to get a new book. Ottawa was forced to issue warnings to the citizenry after it began receiving a flood of postcards immediately after book #1 was issued. The WPTB was put to the trouble of returning the postcards and advising people that they were not to mail it until public announcements were made.

It took a while to educate people that ration books were like cash and deserved the same kind of security. To impress upon the citizenry the importance of this, ration book #2 was not mailed but could only be picked up in person. Book #1 had to be presented in order to get book #2 and, of course, the postcard filled in without being removed from the book. Despite extensive publicity, the WPTB estimated that about half of all applicants got it wrong. As the war went on, and people learned that lost book claims went to the bottom of the list, they started to become more respectful of the rules.

Some ration books were mis-collated at the printer and had extra sheets of coupons. The WPTB appealed to citizens who received

such books to return them for exchange. One wonders if even a handful were returned Canada-wide. There can be no doubt that citizens who received short-collated books were very quick to make a claim for missing panes of coupons.

To be fair to the general public, the ration rules were very complex and constantly changed. Coupons were valid, then not, then valid again. Amounts of goods that could be bought with a coupon changed frequently, sometimes up, sometimes down, depending on availability of goods. Sugar rations were very complex, as in addition to regular sugar there was canning sugar control, but only if you did not use pectin.

## **The Handling Of Ration Coupons.**

Once the ration coupons were presented to retailers, there had to be a way to account for them and recycle them back to the WPTB. The government approached the chartered banks and other financial institutions, and asked them to handle the matter. The banks were anxious to do their part for the war, and since they already had the staff and system for handling large flows of money, they were ideally situated to do the same for ration coupons [7].

Coupon accounts were set up for retailers. The returned loose coupons were pasted onto special sheets

for ease of handling. Deposited coupons were credited to the account before they were physically destroyed by the bank. These accounts were not in dollars but in coupons. The account holder then wrote two cheques to buy fresh goods from wholesalers or producers: one denominated in coupons to have the right to buy the goods, and the other a regular cheque in dollars to actually pay the value of the purchase. Vouchers representing large amounts of coupons could be obtained by remitting that number of coupons. These vouchers circulated between businesses without having to go through a bank.

One interesting end-disposal process was that the postcards used to apply for new ration books were turned over to the Dominion Bureau of Statistics after the WPTB no longer had use for them. The Bureau used them as a rough-and-ready database for a census. Since every Canadian, adult or child, received a ration book and had to turn in a postcard, there were 11 million cards to process. The Bureau received the cards sorted by municipality, but rather than count them, they weighed 3,000 cards and used that number as a basis to weigh all the others. From this sample, the Bureau then estimated that the procedure was accurate to within 1% or less [9]. The ration cards were thus used to estimate internal migration in Canada, an important point because of the huge numbers of citizens moving about the country or overseas, far more than peacetime. The war had the effect of mixing the gene pool of Canadians.

## Temporary Ration Cards.

-8-

When rationing first started, temporary cards were issued (Figure 4). No ration books were issued for servicemen, and civilians who joined up had to surrender their ration books at the enlistment centre. Initially, servicemen on leave had to rely on the generosity of family and friends. This was soon altered, and anyone on leave was given a temporary ration card to see him through. Tourists were eligible for temporary cards if they were staying seven days or more.

FORM NO. R-13-2

**DOMINION OF CANADA**

Temporary War Ration Card  
Rationnement de Guerre Carte Temporaire

Serial No. 384561  
No. de série

Name  
Nom Maggie Betty  
(Last Name—Nom de famille) (First Name(s)—Prénom(s))

Address  
Adresse 111 Belleville, Alberta  
Number—Numéro Street—Rue City—Cité County—Comté

Age if under 16 yrs.  
Age, au-dessous de 16 ans 16

Issued by The Wartime Prices and Trade Board  
Émis par Le Commission des prix et du commerce au temps de guerre

Figure 4: Part of a sheet of temporary ration coupons.



## Gasoline Ration Book.

Gasoline rationing began in April 1942 and was terminated on August 15, 1945 after V-J Day. Unlike today, Canada in the early 1940s was an importer of oil, and thus needed strong controls for gasoline supplies [11]. Ottawa originally imposed a limit of 300 to 380 gallons per passenger car per year for non-essential use. The car owner was required to have an annual gasoline licence, and books of 60 coupons were \$1 each. Initially each coupon was valid to purchase 5 gallons but as the war went on this amount shrank to 4 and then 3 gallons. Other types of vehicles had greater rations.

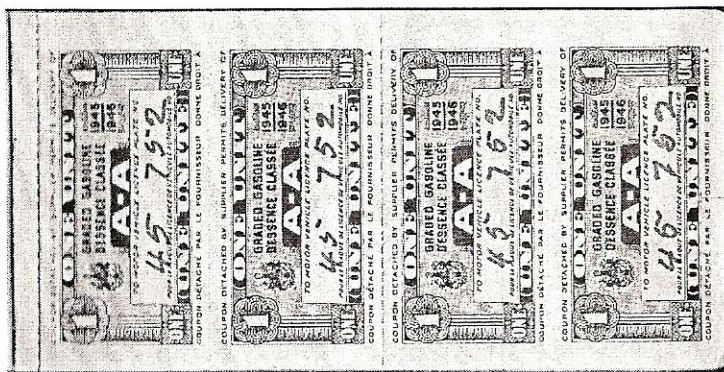


Figure 5: A booklet pane of gasoline ration stamps.

The general rule was that everyone thought their personal classification should have been more. Senators, for example, got huffy because M.P.s in the House of Commons got a 300 gallons per year ration, while senators had to make do with 120 gallons [13]. The official explanation was that M.P.s had to visit constituents, whereas senators are unelected and did not need to travel on government business.

Unlike the ration books #1 to #6 which were issued by the WPTB, the gasoline ration books were issued by the Oil Controller For Canada. The books were distributed separately through the Oil Controller. The classes of gasoline rationing were as follow.

- Class A and AA: non-essential private cars, originally allowed 60 coupons per year.
- Class B1: rural schoolteachers and clergymen, farmers, and home guard units, allowed 88 to 116 coupons.
- Class B2: war production employees, flying school students, allowed 132 to 172 coupons.
- Class C: government officials, news reporters, MDs, rural veterinarians, commercial travelers, allowed 168 to 216 coupons.

Class D: Red Cross and other social welfare organizations, allowed 280 to 356 coupons.

Class E: rural mail carriers, diplomats, allowed 388 to 500 coupons.

Commercial: trucks, farm equipment, government vehicles, buses, taxis, ambulances. These vehicles had unlimited gasoline use as needed but were subject to spot checks by government inspectors to verify legitimate use.

### Ration Book #1.

The first ration book was mailed to citizens by the WPTB in August 1942. This created a huge surge in the postal system, since every Canadian received a book, not only adults but children in care of their parents. Canada's population at the time was about 11 million people. One Calgary postal worker commented that it was "*just like a Christmas card rush*".

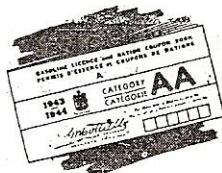
### Ration Book #2.

This book was distributed only in person, and was available beginning late February, 1943. The change in distribution was partly to shape up the citizenry into taking the distribution

Figure 6: Ration coupons were the same as money.

# WARNING TO MOTORISTS

## Guard Your Gas Ration Book



Your gasoline ration book is valuable property. Its loss or theft will deprive you of the use of your car—temporarily, perhaps permanently. Remember—*under no circumstances will a lost or stolen book be replaced within thirty days of the time its loss*

*is reported to the Oil Controller.* In some instances a new book may not be issued even after that period.

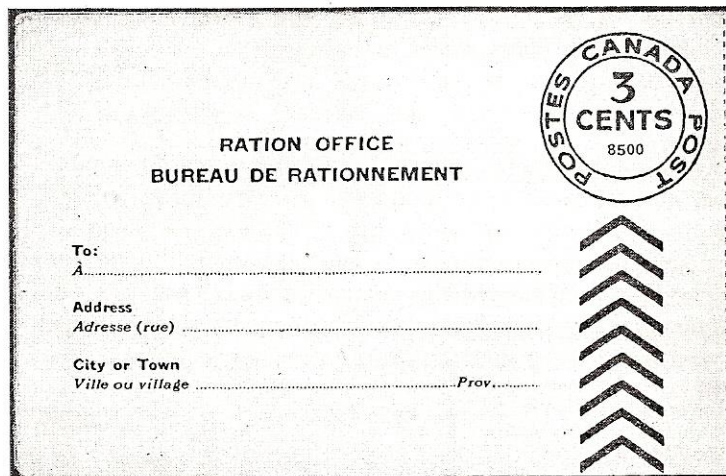
If you wish to continue to drive your car, guard your book carefully. Locking it in your glove compartment is not safeguard enough—thieves always look there first. Carry your book carefully on your person when needed. Keep it under lock and key at home, when not in use.

DEPARTMENT OF MUNITIONS AND SUPPLY  
Hon. C. D. Howe, Minister



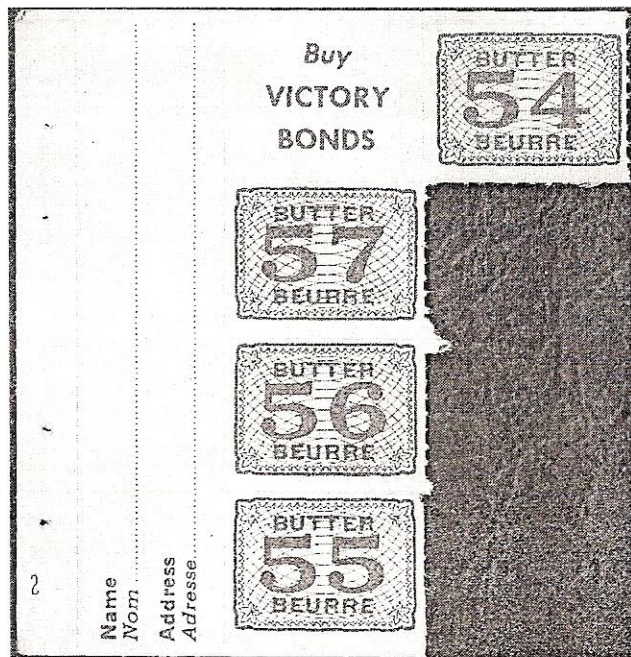
seriously, and partly to verify their addresses. When book #1 had been mailed out, large numbers were returned to sender due to address failures. Toronto alone had 62,000 books returned. This set off a chain reaction of complaints by citizens that they had not received their books, with considerable clerical work required to straighten things out. By forcing citizens to pick up their books in person, the local ration boards could clean up their address lists [12]. There was also another consideration. The coupons became valid March 8, and some were dated. If sent by mail, some late recipients would have received them past their due-by date.

Figure 7: Ration book #2 postcard.



### Ration Book #3.

With book #3, extra panes of coupons were no longer marked as Spare, but simply had letters. The book was issued in late August 1943. Figure 8 below shows a partial pane of butter coupons.



### Ration Book #4.

Book #4 could be obtained by mail using the Book #3 postcard, and was mailed out to arrive by middle April, 1944. Presumably the WPTB had more confidence in their mailing lists. Children's applications had to include the E pane (tea/coffee) from Book #3 as a check on cheating. I don't think that part was severely enforced, as my mother's ration book was missing some of the coupons, evidently used by her parents, yet she still got a new book.

### Ration Book #5.

This book was issued in October 1944. To obtain it, citizens had to have Book #4 with the sheet of K coupons still in it.

### Ration Book #6.

Book #6 was the last one issued, in September 1946, and had to be applied for in person. The postcard in Book #5 had to be filled out but could not be removed; it had to be presented intact in Book #5.

Figure 9: Ration book #5, for my mother's brother Norman, R coupons.



### Winding Down.

The start and ending of rationing for specific items did not follow a consistent pattern but depended on fluctuations in supply and demand. Meat rationing was introduced in 1943 but was



suspended on March 1, 1944, because of a temporary glut in Canada due to lack of transport to export it. It was re-imposed in July 1945 despite the war's end due to overseas commitments to feed allied nations. Tea and coffee rationing was introduced in 1942 but ended in September 1944. Sugar and butter rationing lasted until late 1947. After rationing ended in 1947, price controls remained in effect into the 1950s. The Wartime Prices and Trade Board did not shut down until 1951 because of their work in trying to control inflation and to supply fallen nations.

The USA had mismanaged its meat supply, as a result of which there were severe shortages even after the war ended. In Canada, because rationing had continued, its citizens could still buy meat at controlled prices and there was enough to go around. Americans learned that tourists to Canada would be issued ration coupons. They began going across the border for the joy of sitting down to a juicy steak at a reasonable price. Some tried to bring back meat, but American Customs confiscated it. Overall, the Canadian system of rationing seemed to work better than the American system [10].

## References.

[Editor's note] Most of the specific details mentioned in this article I have obtained from back issues of the CALGARY HERALD between 1941 and 1947. I have also relied on the CANADA YEAR BOOK published annually by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, and which summarized the activities of the

WPTB. After the war, a bibliography of government economic controls was published which lists hundreds of citations about ration coupons [1]. Some details about the actual use of ration coupons, as opposed to what the newspapers wrote or government bureaucrats pronounced as gospel, are from conversations with my elderly relatives who lived through that era.

1] Stewart, S.I. (1947) Statutes, orders, and official statements relating to Canadian war-time economic controls. CANADIAN JOURNAL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE 13:99-114

(1950) Supplement to ... 16:515-528

2] Gordon, D. (1943) REPORT OF THE WARTIME PRICES AND TRADE BOARD, SEPTEMBER 3, 1939, TO MARCH 31, 1943. Published by the Minister of Finance, Dominion of Canada. Pages 11, 59 to 66.

3] Ontario County Court of the County of Lincoln (1943-11-18) Rex v Edwards. Docket #1943 O.W.N. 750

4] Saskatchewan Court of Appeal (1945-10-02) Rex v Western Grocers Ltd. Docket #3 W.W.R. 451

5] Anonymous (1943-09-28) Fined \$50 for loose coupons. CALGARY HERALD, page 14

6] Quebec Court of King's Bench, Appeal Side (1947-06-12) Wartime Prices and Trade Board vs Cote. Docket #5 C.R. 237

7] Anonymous (1943) Ration coupon banking. CANADIAN BANKER 50:29-32

8] Anonymous (1946-09-12) Thefts imperil ration program. CALGARY HERALD, page 1

9] Cudmore, S.A., et al (1945) Count of Ration Book #4 as an indication of post-censal migration. Published by Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Government of Canada. Microfiche #CA1BS91D53A

10] Anonymous (1946-10-21) Steakleggers. TIME 48(17):42

11] Derber, M. (1943) Gasoline rationing policy and practice in Canada and the United States. JOURNAL OF MARKETING 8(2):137-144

12] Ilsley, J.L. (1943-02-15) Rationing. DEBATES OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS DOMINION OF CANADA Session 1943, 1:391-392

13] Beaubien, A.L. (1943-04-20) Gasoline rationing discrimination as between Commons and Senate. DEBATES OF THE SENATE OF THE DOMINION OF CANADA, Session 1943/44, pages 185-186

## **WORLD WIDE PARTY #15 IN 2008**

Founded by Benoit Girard (Quebec) and Franz Miklis (Austria), the World Wide Party is held on June 21st every year. At 21h00 local time, everyone is invited to raise a glass and toast fellow members of the Papernet around the world. The idea is to get a wave of fellowship circling the planet. Face to the east first and toast those who have already done the WWP, then north and south for your time zone, and finally to the west for those yet to celebrate. If you are a zinester, it is a reminder that you are not alone, but a node on the Papernet.

## **SCIENCE FICTION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA**

**-14-**

by Gail Jamieson

[This article is reprinted with permission from PROBE #134 (2007 August), the publication of Science Fiction South Africa. Ms. Jamieson can be reached c/o SFSA, Box 781401, Sandton 2146, South Africa.]

In the late 1960s, Tex and Rita Cooper were in touch with Dorothy Jones of N3F (National Fantasy and Fiction Foundation) in California. There was a notion of joining up with them, but a better idea seemed to be to start up a South African club. Letters were sent to the newspapers and enough interest was shown to make a decision to go ahead.

At last on a cold Friday winter's night, June 9, 1969, about nine fans met and "The Science Fiction Club of South Africa" was formed. Another 25 people soon joined. Meetings were held once a month, and the first volume of PROBE, the clubzine, was printed using ancient technology (a roneo machine and stencils). A smaller newsletter called ROBE was occasionally published. The idea was that even smaller ones would be OBE, BE, and maybe even E, but I haven't been able to find these in our archives.

The club grew from small beginnings and held regular meetings. In August 1978 we held our first convention. It was a two-day



affair with speakers, debates, and movies (on 16mm film), with the highlight being the wine-and-cheese supper. We had a number of eminent medical professors discussing "Medicine in the Future", and over 200 attendees. There were articles in the local newspapers, and we felt that we were fulfilling our mission of bringing SF to the people of South Africa.

We contracted our name to "Science Fiction South Africa". Sometime in the early years of the club, our first published SF author Claude Nunes joined the club. He did not attend many meetings, being deaf and preferring to communicate in writing. His novels were all Ace Doubles. The first one, INHERIT THE EARTH, was published in 1966. His short stories made the top ten in our annual competition as late as 2001.

Our annual short story competition has been running for about 28 years. The winning and other highly-place stories are regularly published in PROBE. The first editor was Tex Cooper. Gail Brunette (later Jamieson) took over at issue #39. Tony Davis (now in Toronto), Neil van Niekerk, Derek Hohls, Deirdre Byrne, Cedric Abrahams, and Liz Simmonds have taken over through the years, and back to Gail (now Jamieson). The magazine runs to 64 A5 pages and compares favourably to other magazines which come from countries that have far larger SF reading populations. We have also published two collections of the competition-winning stories. These are THE BEST OF SFSA, volumes 1 and 2.

At the moment, volume 3 is being prepared and we hope to print it in the next six months.

We have over the last few years entered the electronic age and gained a number of international members. PROBE is traded with other clubs and fans throughout the world. Our Website is at: [www.sfssa.org.za](http://www.sfssa.org.za)

Since 1998, SFSA has also been represented at Worldcon. At least a couple of members have been at each one since then, with the largest number having been to Bucconeer and Torcon 3. We hold a South African party and like to show off our bright new flag and talk to as many people as possible. We feel that although we are very small, we are keeping the spotlight on science fiction in South Africa.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

**I Heard From:** Tom Hendricks, Donny Smith, Sue Jones, Brant Kresovich, Randy Robbins

noticed by Dale Speirs

Atkinson, Q.D., et al (2008) **Languages evolve in punctuational bursts.** SCIENCE 319:588

*“Linguists speculate that human languages often evolve in rapid or punctuational bursts, sometimes associated with their emergence from other languages, but this phenomenon has never been demonstrated. We used vocabulary data from three of the world's major language groups, Bantu, Indo-European, and Austronesian, to show that 10 to 33% of the overall vocabulary differences among these languages arose from rapid bursts of change associated with language-splitting events. Our findings identify a general tendency for increased rates of linguistic evolution in fledgling languages, perhaps arising from a linguistic founder effect or a desire to establish a distinct social identity.”*

Cross, P., et al (2008) **Comparative assessment of migrant farm worker health in conventional and organic horticultural systems in the United Kingdom.** SCIENCE OF THE TOTAL ENVIRONMENT 391:55-65

This study found no difference between the health of farm workers on organic farms versus conventional farms. However,

psychological tests administered

to the farm workers showed that those on organic farms were happier than those on conventional farms. This may be because the former did a wider variety of jobs during the day than the latter.

Searchinger, T., et al (2008) **Use of U.S. croplands for biofuels increases greenhouse gases through emissions from land-use change.** SCIENCE 319:1238-1240

*“Most prior studies have found that substituting biofuels for gasoline will reduce greenhouse gases because biofuels sequester carbon through the growth of the feedstock. These analyses have failed to count the carbon emissions that occur as farmers worldwide respond to higher prices and convert forest and grassland to new cropland to replace the grain (or cropland) diverted to biofuels. By using a worldwide agricultural model to estimate emissions from land-use change, we found that corn-based ethanol, instead of producing a 20% savings, nearly doubles greenhouse emissions over 30 years and increases greenhouse gases for 167 years. Biofuels from switchgrass, if grown on U.S. corn lands, increase emissions by 50%. This result raises concerns about large biofuel mandates and highlights the value of using waste products.”*