

# FUL SCENES OF OLD WEST ON

## Chuck-wagon Dashes Down Eighth Avenue; Flapjacks And Syrup for the Crowd

Pungent Odor of Wood Smoke and Sizzling Range Fodder Arises from Miniature Cow Camp in Heart Calgary's Business Section. — Hooting Cow-Punchers Sweep Along "Main Drag."

## STAMPEDE SPIRIT KILLS LAST VESTIGE OF GLOOM

Morning Stampedes Bring City Is Harking

## WHEAT ACREAGE SLIGHTLY LESS THAN IN 1922, REPORT SHOWS

Total Area This Year Is 22,169,300 Acres Against 22,422,693 Last Year

## FALL AND SPRING RYE FOUR PER CENT LESS

Increase in Acreage of Clover and Alfalfa

### TODAY'S RACES

#### First Race

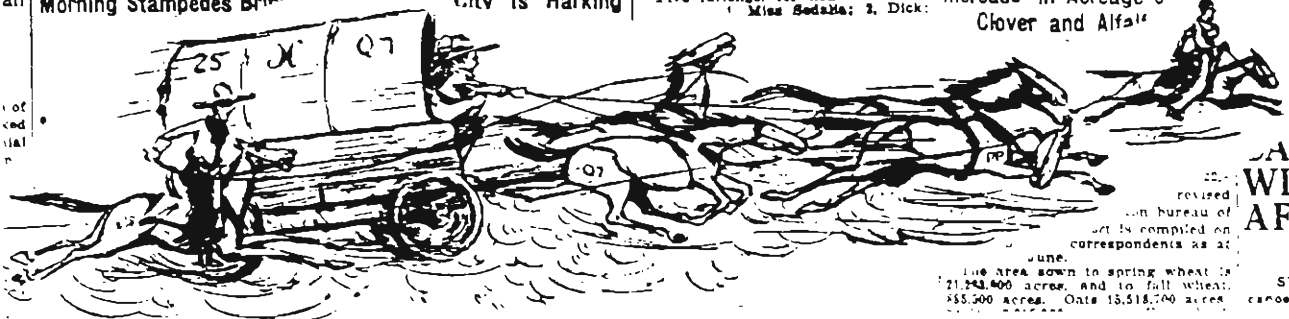
Four and a half furlongs, for two-year-olds—1. Mountain Chief; 2. Pat H.; 3. Jermey O'Neal. Mutuels paid \$2.66 straight.

#### Second Race

Five furlongs for three-year-olds—1. Ringleader; 2. Mildred Boone; 3. Lucky Hayes. Mutuels paid \$8.16 straight.

#### Third Race

Five furlongs, for non-winners at Miss Sedalia; 2. Dick;



... revised  
... bureau of  
... art is compiled  
... correspondents as at  
... June.  
... the Area sown to spring wheat is  
21,243,400 acres, and to fall wheat,  
\$55,500 acres. Oats 15,518,700 acres.  
ST  
canoe.

OPUNTIA #10.5A

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OPUNTIA is published irregularly by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. Whole-numbered issues are sercon, .1 issues are reviews, and .5 issues are per-zines. Available for \$1 cash, letter of comment, or trade for your zine.

Please note there was no issue #10.1; I didn't have material enough to justify an ish. #10.5 will appear in two consecutive issues, as I had more than enough material, what with a referendum and two elections.

ART CREDIT: The collage on the front cover is the front page of the July 13, 1923 issue of our local broadsheet THE CALGARY HERALD. The chuckwagon stampeding across the bottom is from an interior page of that HERALD and was done by an artist signing him/herself as Dalrymple.

#### WHERE QUALITY IS A SLOGAN

I was looking through the Yellow Pages for some listings, and couldn't help but notice some strange slogans in the advertisements. One store advertises itself as "Calgary's largest and only computer book store". If it is in fact our only computer bookstore, it seems redundant to declare itself the largest as well. Another bookstore tells its customers "We specialize in special orders", a phrase that perhaps could have been reworded to better effect.

PERSONALLY IT DOESN'T BOTHER ME, I'M JUST WRITING TO CLEAR THE RECORD

I bought a large batch of zines a while back, and as I read through them, noticed certain trends that can be spotted with more ease if going through a set of zines in a short period of time rather than over a period of years if read as issued.

An interesting collection of quotes is that of the injured author responding to an unfavourable review.

Ben Bova (Science Fiction Review 13:40): "I don't usually respond to fan publications, but ..."

Terry Carr (Algol 31:73): "I once swore a mighty oath never to argue with reviewers of my work, ..."

Poul Anderson (SF Review 32:7): "Ordinarily I don't reply to reviews of my work, ..."

Robert Silverberg (Amazing, Sept. 1988, page 6): "I don't often quarrel, especially publicly, with reviews of my books. ... But once in a while ..."

#### THE TOMB OF THE UNKNOWN DEVELOPER REVIVED

In a previous .5 issue, I told the story of a skyscraper that stood unfinished for ten years in the west end of downtown Calgary. Its concrete skeleton towered over a busy intersection, left sitting when the developer went bankrupt in the crash of 1982. The property drifted into legal limbo; nobody wanted it and the City Council refused to seize it for unpaid taxes because they would then be stuck with it. But finally the Catholic School Board took it, and are now finishing it off as their new headquarters.

YEEEEEE-HAW!

The Calgary Stampede, the world's largest rodeo, starts about the same time the rainy season ends in Alberta. We get half our annual precipitation between Victoria Day and Canada Day, while the Stampede begins on the first weekend in July. Some years it's rainy, other years it's hot and sunny, and often it is both. Attendance figures are determined by the weather but an average Stampede has 1.1 million visitors, give or take 100,000 or so.

PARADE DAY

1992-7-3

The Stampede parade kicks off the events, and goes Friday morning. It is a half-day holiday in Calgary. No point in trying to do any business before noon, as almost every store and office is closed. The parade route circles the downtown core, and this year about 250,000 people watched it under overcast skies. Just cool enough that we had to wear light spring jackets, but certainly better than frying under a hot sun. Some parade watchers set up camp at 06h30 or earlier, but I can't see the point unless you're short and need a front-row seat, and don't want to pay for a bleacher seat. I time my arrival for about a half hour before the parade starts, as with my height I don't have a problem seeing over the crowd.

Police shut off the downtown core to vehicle traffic at 07h30. Even without it, most people rely on public transit to get downtown, rather than sit in traffic jams and then have to park a kilometre away. I left my car at an LRT station halfway along the route to downtown. I had to park two blocks away from the station since the carpark was full. The trains going downtown were jammed like a Japanese commuter train. At each LRT station an inspector held the train while trying to put a few more passengers in. Just before reaching the downtown, an unscheduled halt was made, as a passenger emergency alarm had gone

off in the lead car. The driver made the announcement on the public address system, then forgot to shut off the microphone. We could hear faint mutterings and fragments of conversation, then the sound of the driver re-closing his compartment door. The alarm turned out to be false; no doubt someone had accidentally bumped the alarm button in the crush of passengers. I detrained at the west end of downtown. I've learned from past experience where the crowds are usually thinner, and so went to my usual spot on 9th Avenue SW. Another reason I always watch the parade from this location is that it is across from the television cameras, so bands and groups stop and do a performance instead of just marching by. TV cameras line the road, and aerial bucket trucks hang overtop with a camera on board. The parade didn't start until 09h00 but they send a few groups out at 08h00 to keep the crowd entertained during the long wait.

The theme of this year's Stampede is Canada's 125th birthday. Elsewhere it was celebrated the traditional way by having constitutional meetings, but that is a different story. The movie star Leslie Nielsen was Grand Parade Marshal. Back when, he was a disc jockey for a Calgary radio station. His brother Eric was M.P. for the Yukon riding and Deputy Prime Minister. Following behind Leslie's car in the parade was an aboriginal float, with a sign "Reunification of the Nations", a reference to attempts by aboriginal tribes to be recognized in any constitutional reform. The tribes refer to themselves as "first nations", but that too is a different story. There was the usual crowd of minor dignitaries, the kind who have to be identified by signs, otherwise no one would know who they were. Aldermen, M.P.s, Stampede officials, etc.

On each side street was a tow truck, ready to haul away any floats or vehicles breaking down in the parade. Parades are hard on engines, which are lugging under load at low speeds.

Hawkers were strolling up and down the street working the crowd, selling souvenirs or film. One man was wearing a sandwich board "Get Ready, Jesus is Coming". I looked, but didn't see Jesus in the parade. Throughout the parade there were St. John Ambulance Brigade volunteers, police constables, and paramedics walking on the sidelines. I later heard on the radio that things went quite well, with only one heart attack and a few faintings to deal with. The weather helped, as a hot day would have had extra faintings from the heat, especially among band members.

There were the standard sections in the parade. A group of Alberta Olympians, both Summer and Winter Games, and fixtures in the parade ever since Calgary hosted the 1988 Winter Olympics. Bands, Shriners, lots of horses, aboriginal tribes (there are several tribal reserves in the area) riding in full ceremonial dress, pipe bands (strong Scottish influence) and military (Calgary is a garrison town). The parade is punctuated by street sweepers. You can't have horses without droppings. The sweepers usually run just behind a troop of horse riders and just ahead of a marching band. Horses are skittish at the best of times. There are a lot of thoroughbreds in the parade but quarterhorses are preferred because they tend to be calmer. A number of eight-horse teams pulling stagecoaches. One stagecoach was from Fort Worth, Texas, carrying their mayor Kay Granger. Fort Worth and Calgary have a joint tourist committee to market the Old West to European visitors. Two different square-dance troupes, one of the normal kind and the other on horseback.

A gap in the parade allowed us to contemplate election posters on the telephone poles, there being a by-election in a Calgary provincial riding. The Confederation of Regions party had colourful green and yellow posters declaring "Alberta for Albertans", a motherhood phrase meaning nothing but sounding as if it were a bold statement. Lots of helium balloons floating up into the sky; the little kids can't seem to hold onto them. Getting on my nerves was the constant tweet-tweet of a whistle. There should

a law preventing anyone from giving a whistle to a small child.

One thing that struck me was that almost without exception all the bands, American or Canadian, civilian or military, had drums made by Yamaha.

The effect of one aboriginal float, loaded with natives in ceremonial gear, was rather ruined by a kid in tribal gear munching from a bag of cheese puffs.

A time-honoured attraction in the parade is old Scotty Stewart herding a flock of sheep along with his collie dogs. They keep them under excellent control, too.

Lots of chuckwagons, which will be racing in the rodeo every day of the Stampede. One carried a sign "Valerie, Will You Marry Me? Love, Brian". It is hoped she said yes.

Parks Dept. had no float but the Calgary Zoo did. I was rather startled to see Donna and her children riding it. Donna and I went to university together and took our horticulture degrees at the same time. She is now gardener at the zoo.

Maclin Ford, a local automobile dealer, sponsored a group of Scottish Country dancers. (I thought I'd throw that in for Andruschak.)

The parade ended in a flotilla of tow trucks and fire trucks. As they went by, the crowd surged into the road behind them. I walked down the middle of 9th Avenue back to the centre of downtown to pick up my mail at the post office. It takes three hours for the trains to clear the crowds out of the stations, so in the meantime I did various errands and had a bite to eat.

A tradition of the Stampede is the free breakfast. Merchants of a shopping plaza or mall will get together and put on a breakfast in the parking lot. Larger corporations will have their own. Many chain stores and service stations, such as Co-op, Esso, or Petro-Canada, rotate the breakfasts to a different outlet each morning of the Stampede. Community associations put on breakfasts, although many make a nominal charge since they can't deduct the cost the way that merchants can. If you plan properly, you can go two weeks eating for free.

You will, of course, be prepared to stand in line for a half hour or more. Some places have bands to entertain the queue, but in most places you make your own amusement such as chatting with the people around you.

The menu is identical wherever the breakfast is. There will be flapjacks (a type of pancake), maple syrup, sausages, bacon or ham in some places, scrambled eggs, orange juice, and coffee.

Free breakfasts began in 1923. During the Stampede that year, some chuckwagons were passing through downtown Calgary on their way to the fairgrounds. It was an informal parade of sorts, as a group of cowboys had met up while on their way to the races from the ranches. In those days the chuckwagons that raced nightly at the Stampede were genuine working chuckwagons straight off the prairies. A chuckwagon was the cook's wagon, from which he fed the cowboys. At the end of cattle drives, the chuckwagons would race each other back to the ranch house. They were drawn by teams of two or four horses, depending on how rough the land was. Today's chuckwagons are to the old ones as race cars are to the family station wagon.

But on that fateful day in 1923, Horace Inkster, the camp cook for the C-X Ranch, stopped his wagon on an impulse and set up his stove. He fired it up, made some flapjacks, and gave them out to pedestrians. So began a sixty

year tradition of handing out free food of variable quality on Calgary's sidewalks and parking lots.

The chuckwagon races as we know them today began in the period between the two world wars. They replaced stagecoach races, which were becoming hard to find. A chuckwagon is basically a buckboard with a tent on the back, and easy enough to build even today. But more about all that later.

#### DOWN TO THE GROUNDS

1992-7-4-noon

Have had my free breakfast. I went down to the grounds via LRT train. Not so crowded as for the parade yesterday. Indeed, I was rather surprised at the light crowds at the fairgrounds, but by late afternoon the place was filling up rapidly. Admission to the Stampede grounds is \$7.50, about the same as a movie or amusement park. The price is up 50¢ from last year, which led to the usual bleeding-heart moaning about how it would prevent a family from attending. ("This is a recession, you know") I can't take such whining seriously. For a family of four the extra cost would be \$2, and if they cannot afford this, they wouldn't be going anyway. This reminds me of what happens whenever City Council puts up the property tax \$50 on a \$1300 bill. People immediately predict that many will lose their homes because they can't pay. Well, if they lost their home because of \$50, they would have lost it anyway trying to meet the \$600 monthly mortgage payment.

The admission price includes hours of free entertainment once on the grounds. Bands every block or so, displays, novelty acts, in short, enough multitrack programming to make any SF concom green with envy. The rodeo and chuckwagon races are separate admission but their tickets are free admission into the grounds.

WANDERING AROUND

1992-7-4-afternoon

Where do I start?, there was so much going on. Canada Square was a collection of tents containing displays from each of the provinces, plus the inevitable band. Each day of the Stampede was dedicated to a different province or territory, and today it was Newfoundland/Labrador. If you were from the province being honoured that day, and had a birth certificate or driver's licence to prove it, then you got in free to the fairgrounds. There was no day for Alberta, partly for the obvious reason that the Stampede didn't want too many people getting in free, and partly because the official slogan was "Alberta Welcomes (name of province)", which makes it look peculiar to announce "Alberta Welcomes Alberta". You could make free phone calls anywhere in Canada from the Square, courtesy of Alberta Government Telephones. (Despite its name, AGT is now a privatised corporation) There were restaurants for each part of Canada, but I had to wonder about the menus. The Northwest Territories booth offered musk-ox sausage, and the Manitoba booth had wild rice, both logical items. But chicken pita from Saskatchewan? That province was colonized by Ukrainians, and I would have thought a more logical choice would be perogies. Steamed mussels were certainly an apt choice for the Maritimes, but pizza for British Columbia? (Although they did have Naniamo Bars on the dessert list, a genuinely Canadian sweetcake.)

I had a look at the commercial booths in the Big Four Building (named after the four founders of the Stampede). I'm sure your local fair has exactly the same sort, with hucksters frantically working the crowds to sell every sort of gadget imaginable, none of which you need. I have to wonder about one slogan used by several booths, "As Seen On TV!". This doesn't make sense to me. Are they expecting people to believe the product must be good if it was advertised on TV? Or perhaps if you see it in the booth, you don't believe it exists unless it was shown on television. Ah well. Elsewhere, Imperial Hotel of Las Vegas had their traditional display, a car from

their automobile collection. Each year it is different. Last year it was Al Capone's limo, and this year it was Elvis Presley's Eldorado that he kept in Vail, Colorado, for his skiing trips.

Some places at the Stampede are actually open year-round such as the Frontier Casino, the Grain Academy, and (I'm not making this up) O'Reilly's Irish Pub & Chuckwagon Restaurant. The Grain Academy is more interesting than it sounds, being a free museum sponsored by the Alberta Wheat Pool, depicting the history of grain growing in western Canada. There are cutaway models of grain elevators, old-time tools, grain samples, etc., but what is the most fascinating part is the model train display. It covers about one-third the floor area of the museum and takes about fifteen minutes to fully see everything. The toy trains move through landscapes from the flatlands of grain-growing, up through the tunnels of the Rocky Mountains and into the grain terminals of Vancouver. The toy trains are exact replicas of grain trains and are computer controlled. They move past typical prairie villages where they load up, then proceed to Vancouver.

Went over to the Frontier Casino. Didn't look any strangers in the eye, but spent half an hour at the roulette wheel. I don't know how to play any card games. I broke \$4 down into quarters and played the same bet all the time. The odds don't change if you change the bet, and in any event are in favour of the house. I just play the cheapskate wheel (maximum bet \$5) for the fun of it, and more for the conversation with other gamblers. Playing the same bet all the time gives even odds. I would be up 50¢ from where I started, then lose all but one quarter, build back up to \$2, etc.. But finally I had a losing streak and busted.

Ate my share of food. Pizza, perogies, chocolate-covered ice-cream sticks, hamburgers, all the stuff that gives one more than the recommended daily intake of fats and carbohydrates.

The previous two Stampedes had a dog act put on by Real Canadian Superstores, held in the Corral hockey arena. It was replaced by a different dog act this year, sponsored by Safeway, but the new act was the same each show and was not as interesting. The old act had five shows daily and each show with a different set of acts, so those of us with sore feet could rest and relax. (A free show, by the way) One aspect of this year's show that was enjoyable was the flyball race. The dog leaps four hurdles and grabs a tennis ball, then returns to its owner via the hurdles. It is a relay race with four dogs running on a team. Quite a number of different breeds were used and what really impressed me was the incredible speed of the border collies, faster than any others. The borzoi was actually the slowest of all the dogs; I had been of the impression they were bred for speed.

The livestock exhibits are the reason for the Stampede, although they have been pushed into the background somewhat over the years as Calgary became less a cowtown and more an oiltown. All kinds of livestock, my favourite being the rabbit and poultry display. There were sheep shearing demonstrations, cattle, and horses. While wandering through the horse barns, I heard the sound of music and joined the crowd watching a group of Western country dancers. This should not be confused with square dancing or Scottish country dancing. It is occasionally known as black armpit dancing because it requires very strong physical activity and the dancers are soon sweating profusely. I suppose one way to describe it is for you to imagine a group of cowboys and cowgirls moving the feet like a Highland dancer, swinging about like square dancers, and stomping like Texas clog dancers. Impressive actually, as long as everyone stays on the same step.

I was looking for the blacksmith competitions, but the program schedule must have been changed because I kept getting the horse events. There was the Percheron heavy horse draft team competition. Four of these horses are

hitched to a buckboard wagon. The teamster is tested by the judges on how he handles the horses, speed control, backing up, and so forth. There doesn't seem to be any dressage aspect to this, as several of the buckboards were rolling on car tires instead of wagon wheels. I sat through a different horse event, thinking the blacksmith event would follow, but no such luck and left without ever seeing it. My grandfather was a blacksmith, hence my interest.

The horse show I sat through was one of the hokeyest shows of any kind that I have ever seen. It was an all breeds show, commemorating Canada's 125th birthday this year. "Horsebreeders Salute Canada's 125th" tried to tell the story of Confederation by showing the part played by each horse breed in Canada's history. Draft horses were obviously important to farms, quarterhorses to the rancher; all that was reasonable. Where they got into trouble was trying to represent each province or territory with a breed. Some actual quotes from the commentator I wrote down: "The Tennessee Walker helped develop the riches of the Yukon" and "The Peruvian horse represents the bright future of this country". When I heard that latter statement I wondered if the person who wrote that line knew anything about the Shining Path guerrillas.

The midway, with its rides and concession stands, was the same as any other city, mainly because it travels from fair to fair. I watched the bungee jumping for a little while, which was located adjacent to the Medical Treatment post. This was a 43 m jump, at \$79 each or \$130 for a tandem jump. A free T-shirt with each jump, but still pricey, even with a video of the jump. When I arrived, a 30ish couple had just jumped, but the video camera had run out of tape, so they got a free jump. I wouldn't consider this much of an inducement, but they went back up again, their son watching from below. They were strapped tightly together, and hugged each other even tighter. They rebounded four or five times before the jump ended. One way to put love into the marriage.

AND THEY'RE OFF!

During the afternoon, the grandstand infield is busy with rodeo events such as calf-roping or bronc riding. Lots of people buy tickets to see the rodeo, but the big crowds appear in the evening, when the chuckwagon races are on. I haven't attended, mainly because I saw enough of rodeo when I was a young lad in Red Deer. My father is a farm animal veterinarian, and for many years was track vet for the Red Deer rodeo, now known as The Westerner.

But before I can tell you that story, I'll have to tell you this one. If you already know how chuckwagon races are run, you can skip ahead to the next paragraph. There are four chuckwagons competing in each heat. The wagon is pulled by four horses. Riding along side it are four outriders, who must stay even with the wagon. The wagons are lined up in the infield. At the sound of the starting horn, the outrider loads the wagon with the stove, which today is simply a wooden box symbolic of it. The wagon is then driven in a figure-eight pattern around barrels before heading onto the track and once around the course. The outriders also do the figure-eight. Time penalties are assessed for various infractions such as knocking a barrel over (5 seconds), losing the stove (2 seconds), or an early or late outrider (1 second).

The Calgary Stampede chuckwagons use thoroughbred horses, while the Red Deer Westerner uses ponys. I've thought the pony chucks are more exciting since they run faster and harder. Ranchers train them by tying them to the back of a pickup truck and then go out for a drive. The problem with many horses is holding them back; they love to run and can't bear the sight of another horse ahead of them.

Since my father was track vet, he got us into the infield free of charge, and we could mingle with the cowboys or hang on the fence and watch the barrel turns close up. My most favourite memory is the time when a wagon lost its front left wheel coming out of the barrels onto the track. Any other wheel and it would have crashed, but since the

race is counterclockwise around the track (that is, the wagons turn left once on the track), all the weight of the wagon is on the right wheels. The driver not only finished the race, he won it. As he crossed the finish line a metre or two from me, I saw him laughing and hooting with delight.

GETTING NEAR THE END

1992-7-10

Only a couple of days left now in the Stampede. It has not been a good one this year as Calgary has had rain all week. Attendance will probably be just over a million, and certainly no records will be set. Today is Friday, my regular day off, so I went downtown on errands. Traffic was held up on Macleod Trail southbound by a band of natives on horseback heading to the Stampede. I finally found a parking space, did my errands, then went on a stroll down the Stephen Avenue pedestrian mall in the downtown core. Starting off at the Olympic Plaza at the east end of the mall (where the medals were handed out during the 1988 Olympics) I walked westward. Olympic Plaza has pipe bands performing during the day, and a Shakespearean troupe performing at night (which they do throughout the summer). This week, the actors are doing THE TEMPEST, a very appropriate play considering the continual thunderstorms we've had.

Every block on the mall there is a band or novelty act. One band performing at Speakers' Corner was playing the hymn "How Great Thou Art", but they were singing it to a slow country-and-western, complete with twanging steel guitars and the nasal whine that C&W singers like to use. It took two verses before I figured out what the song was, never having heard it before at such a tempo and style.

Further down the mall, there was a large billboard sign that people could autograph. The sign read "Mon Canada comprend le Québec", and will be sent to that province after the Stampede.



One thing about the Stampede that I don't like is traffic jams, caused mainly by tourists and parades. Street parking is not allowed on downtown streets during peak hours, but tourists leave their cars and motorhomes at the parking meters. This jams up the curb lane, which is normally clear during rush hour. The commissionaires are lenient about this, which is good for the tourism industry but annoying to those stuck in traffic in the homeward commute.

I mentioned on the previous page about being held up by a parade. I bought the newspaper today and discovered that even more inconvenienced were some thieves. At about the same time that I was fuming in my car about the delay, a pair of house burglars were being arrested by police a few blocks away. It seems they had broken into a house and stolen various items. The police followed their trail and located their car. The thieves were sitting in the traffic jam, unaware of their impending doom. The car was quietly surrounded and the suspects taken into custody. A number of bystanders who saw the takedown thought it was a demonstration event, part of the parade, and applauded under the impression that the whole thing was a staged event.

RED DEER: A COYOTE-FREE ZONE

1992-8-3

Drove north to Red Deer (population 60,000) to spend the holiday Monday with my parents. They just got back from a fortnight's vacation in the USA, touring with my brother, his wife, and baby Calandra across to Winnipeg, down to Graceland, over to New Mexico, and back up through all those rectangular western states. Mom brought me a Ross Perot campaign sticker ("He doesn't owe ANYBODY a favor") which has a copyright symbol by something called L.D.F..

I get a chuckle out of the sign at the entrance to the city: "Welcome to Red Deer. A Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone". Now if Red Deer was a port city and wanted to keep out visiting military ships as New Zealand does, I could see the sense. But Red Deer is about 500 or 1000 km from the nearest missile silo or ship, so it is not exactly taking a dangerous stance. Nor is it a garrison town; there are no military base commanders to offend. Although Red Deer is small-c conservative as a whole, it tends to elect left-of-centre to City Council. The mayor is, I believe, a Liberal, and some aldermen are active in the New Democratic Party (labour/social democratic). In the event of nuclear war, Russian and American missiles would be intercepting each other over Alberta (and Red Deer), so any declaration of a nuke-free zone is irrelevant at best and pathetic at worst. It reminds me of the story about the jackrabbits who declare their prairie coulee a coyote-free zone.

My main reason for going to Red Deer was to get more information about my father's life from him. September 1st will be my parent's 40th wedding anniversary, and in honour of the occasion I am preparing a booklet on their lives and genealogy. Mom's biography is written, and I'll have illustrations of the four fossil species named after her. Her genealogy goes back to the early 1700s, as she still keeps in touch with relatives in Finland. The family there has lived on the same land for at least 250 years, probably more, but written records don't go back further. Dad's family, on the other hand, only knows the last four generations since the Speirs' got off the boat. We know they emigrated from Scotland, but not when or what town from. In writing Dad's biography, I discovered he had forgotten many details, but fortunately Mom kept a scrapbook and his brother Arn (who farms at Olds) had much info. Dad will be eligible for the pension later this year, but I suspect he will keep up his veterinary practice and real-estate dealings for a while. Now is the time to

ask him about his life; it may be too late if I let it go as often happens in many families.

Dad grew up in southern Saskatchewan on a dairy farm during the Great Depression, and attended veterinary school at what is now the University of Guelph, in Ontario. In his time at Guelph, the family moved to Calgary, and he worked summers for a local vet. Dad established his first practice at Eckville (about 50 km west of Red Deer) in 1951, and it was there he met and married my mother. He was the first vet in the Eckville district, and for many years was the only one in western Alberta between Calgary and Edmonton. I had always wondered how he came to choose Eckville, so I asked him today. It had been recommended to him by one of the vets he had interned with. He originally stayed in a boarding house, and the local newspaper THE ECKVILLE EXAMINER took phone calls for him until he got an office.

Eckville was colonized by Finnish and Icelandic settlers; even today those surnames still predominate. My mother's grandparents on both sides came from Finland about the turn of the century. As with most settlers, the men were younger sons who could not inherit the farm back home and could not afford to buy one, so \$10 for a quarter-section of land in Canada (a section is a square mile) was a golden opportunity.

Eckville was on the railroad line but the highway bypassed it in the 1950s, and the village went into suspended animation. It has grown a bit since I was born there, but only a bit. I am not exaggerating by much when I say that half the population are elderly widows.

#### THE KONDRATIEFF NADIR AND CANADIAN THIRD PARTIES

Historically, most political parties other than the two main ones (Progressive Conservative and Liberal) began in western Canada. The Quebec separatists are an obvious exception, but the 'third party' phenomenon is mostly ev-

ident in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Some lived a brief time, some are with us still. Western Canada Concept was a separatist party that flared in the political sky in the 1980s, electing one member in an Alberta by-election. But while the W.C.C. knew what it was against, it couldn't capitalize on what it was for. It fizzled out like any nova.

Sixty years ago, a group of farmers and labour leaders met in the Calgary Labour Temple to establish a socialist party called the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, led by the Rev. J.S. Woodsworth. They knew what they were for, as well as against, and had their first success in 1944 when they formed the government in Saskatchewan. The C.C.F. reorganized itself as the New Democratic Party in 1961 under the leadership of the Rev. Tommy Douglas. The N.D.P. has been the government in many provinces since then, and currently controls British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Ontario. But it has always been an opposition party in the House of Commons. Voters don't trust them federally. I suspect this may be because deep down everyone knows that the issuance of currency is the prerogative of the federal government, and no one trusts a socialist in charge of the Royal Canadian Mint.

The Social Credit League began in the Great Depression as a monetary reform party, lead by the Rev. Bill Aberhart. The financial experts of the time had all the wrong answers about how to improve the economy, creating a vacuum for the Socreds, C.C.F., etc. What would have been a recession at the bottom of the sixty year Kondratieff economic cycle was instead turned into ten years of misery. The Socreds were one group that had answers, and as a result, they roared into power and stayed there for four decades in Alberta. As a federal party, they peculiarly had two wings, one in western Canada and the other in Quebec, but were never more than an opposition party. In British Columbia, they were a stalking horse for the Tories. But they failed to adapt and bring in the next generation, now

being extinct in Alberta and federally, and dying in B.C. where they were tossed out a couple of years ago. Socreds were mostly right-wing, but were never monolithic. The monetary-reformist branch was quickly bypassed in early days because monetary policy is the constitutional duty of the federal government, not the provinces. Since the Socreds could only get elected in Alberta and B.C., this left the reformists with not much to do. The pragmatic faction quickly took over, and in Alberta the premier for decades was Ernest Manning. The Socreds of this time are criticized as right-wingers, but to be fair it must be pointed out that they only reflected the times, and any other party in power would have been the same. The populist branch of the party was originally led by Rev. Aberhart, but he was an incompetent premier and fortunately died shortly after the Socreds were elected to power. (It was one of his students, Manning, who succeeded him.) In Quebec at the federal level, Réal Caouette was the party populist in the 1960s. In B.C., the party was Socred in name only, having been founded by W.A.C. "Wacky" Bennett because no other party would have him. After decades, he handed the torch on to his son Bill Jr. ("Miniwac") who tarnished the party name by sleazy behaviour. Just before it looked as if he would be defeated, he passed power on to Bill VanderZalm, who was even sleazier, and cost the party its grip on the government in the last election.

There is another third party called Confederation of Regions, who started off out west but had their first wins in New Brunswick. There they campaigned against compulsory bilingualism in a province that is officially bilingual, and did well in the last election.

Last, but not least, is the Reform Party, led by Preston Manning, son of Ernest (long since retired). Preston is a lot smarter than the Socreds; he avoided provincial politics and kept Reform strictly federal. The Socreds divided their energies over two levels of government and were never a serious threat federally. Reform is devoted only to federal politics and has the ruling Tories scared

silly. The Liberals are in first place in the polls, but the Tories spent millions putting up billboards attacking Preston by name. This backfired on them as the Reform party thrived on the free publicity. The Tories aren't worried about the Grits because the only party the Liberals will seriously damage is the N.D.P. but the Reform is taking away Tory votes. Preston is mocked by pundits but the Tories know he will hurt them. Preston is motivated by a coherent ideology but the Tories are motivated only by lust for power.

You'll have noticed that many politicians were ministers, mostly Baptist or Methodist. An N.D.P. ideologist recently attacked Preston because he attends a church regularly. This attack was immediately silenced when someone pointed out that the N.D.P. and its predecessor the C.C.F. were both led by preachers. It is interesting to note that in Canada the clergy tend to be involved in leftwing politics more than rightwing. Aberhart is thought of as a rightist because he was an evangelist, but he had no love for the Establishment. He often referred to them as "banker's toadies".

#### LAST IMPRESSIONS COUNT, TOO

In its death throes, the Alberta Social Credit League was infiltrated by the lunatic right, led by Holocaust revisionist Jim Keegstra. I knew Keegstra long before he gained public attention for his Jewish-conspiracy beliefs; I detested him because he was a fundamentalist who considered Calvin a wimpy liberal. Some day I'll write more about him. People say that first impressions count, but so do last impressions. Those who only know what the mass media tell them believe that all Socreds were like Keegstra, but he drove out most of the party membership (with a little help of course) who had nothing to do with such hate-peddling.

The result is that many people only associate the Socreds with the lunatic right, and never stop to think how it could have been that they were in power for decades when the voters of Alberta are no worse than anywhere else.

My father belonged to the monetary-reform branch of the party but dropped out after Keegstra dropped in. He once told me that as a boy he never ate an orange until he was a teenager, yet he saw pictures in the newspaper of California farmers soaking their crops in diesel fuel for lack of a decent market. It is no surprise that Dad's family was Socred. A cousin of his stood as a candidate during a Depression election, and Dad campaigned in the 1970s. The Tories and Grits could not explain why it was that oranges had to be destroyed in California when Saskatchewan farmers would have loved to feed them to their children. It all comes down to the basic question of economics: "Who finances surplus production?". (And I'll write more of that sometime in the future.)

But back to my father. He first attempted the nomination as Socred candidate in the 1970 Alberta provincial election but lost to a turncoat who had seen the light after many years as an NDPer. In 1974 he was successful in obtaining the Socred candidacy for the Rocky Mountain constituency. This was a federal election, and he lost to none other than Joe Clark, who later became Prime Minister and is currently Unity Minister. One thing that all candidates agreed on was that the Rocky Mountain riding had to go, and a few years later it was in fact redrawn. It was the weirdest riding in Canada, about 400 km long but in its populated middle only about 50 km wide, the rest being wilderness. It went from the American border, running along the west side of the province halfway up to the Peace River district, far north of Edmonton. The long axis of the riding was north-south, but most of the roads went east-west. It wasn't gerrymandering that made such illogical boundaries, just poor planning. Clark lived in High River, at the south end, my father lived in Red Deer in the middle, and both found themselves soliciting votes

in lumber camps north of Edmonton. Nobody mourned when the riding was eventually cut apart. Dad later campaigned in the Red Deer riding in the 1975 and 1979 provincial elections and the 1980 federal election.

#### LLOYD GEORGE KNEW MY FATHER

I bought my house in 1982 and soon learned that it was located in a blank spot, politically speaking. It made no difference if there was a municipal, provincial, or federal election, the incumbent always got back in with 70% of the vote. The ridings next door would be on the front page, but mine might get a four-line paragraph if it was lucky. On election night, the television pundits would discuss other ridings all night but mine would only be mentioned in the part where one anchorperson turns to the other and says "How about a quick rundown on the rest of the province?".

But patience pays off and after waiting ten years, we humble folk have a good one. None other than Preston Manning himself is running here, against a junior cabinet minister. When the Prime Minister calls the next federal election, we shall have our moment of glory.

I've usually voted third parties anyway, mostly as a protest vote. When I lived in Red Deer I naturally supported my father. Down here, I've gone Confederation of Regions, N.D.P. (but only once), and Reform. I'll go with Preston next time. After all, his father knew my father.

#### FORTY YEARS ON

1992-9-6

Normally I am involved with the Calgary Aquarium Society annual show on the Labour Day weekend, but this year I gave it a complete miss. On the Friday of the weekend, the plumber was over to install a new water

[continued next page]

heater, the old one having given up the ghost earlier in the week after 35 years of service. I've had to take cold showers most of this week; they say such is good for you but I don't believe it myself. After a hard day of work I would rather soak in a hot bath.

The main reason I'm not at the aquarium show is that this weekend there is a family reunion at my brother's house to celebrate my parent's 40th wedding anniversary, they having been married September 1, 1952. I distributed my booklet on their biographies and genealogies to all the relatives, with extras to be sent to others who couldn't make the gathering. The family trees in the booklet got a lot of people reminiscing about the old days, and it was interesting to hear some new stories. The Cowies are a collateral branch of the Speirs', and it was a surprise to learn that they are descended from Missisauga aboriginals. My grandaunt Vickie married a man from the tribal reserve named Cowe (for some reason later changed to Cowie).

Uncle Arn told a story about my father, which Dad elaborated on, about the early days of veterinary medicine when he was only the 52nd vet in the entire history of Alberta (today there are hundreds, but when I was a lad I knew or at least had heard of, all the vets in the province). Dad and another young vet, Dr. Atkins, were called out to a farm to do an L.D.A. (lateral displacement something-or-other, I can't remember) on a cow. An L.D.A. is when one of the cow's stomachs is displaced out of position, and is treated by opening up the animal and pulling the errant stomach back into place. This was a new procedure at the time, and neither Dad or Atkins had studied it in veterinary school. So Atkins held a book explaining the procedure and read it aloud as Dad performed the surgery. The operation was a temporary success, but a couple of weeks later it had to be done again, as the stomach had displaced itself a second time. This time, Dad invented a modification; after pulling the stomach back into posi-

tion, he sutured it to the body wall to keep it from moving again. This particular cow was quite familiar to him, as it was forever coming down with one problem after another. A few years later, it finally died of milk fever (calcium deficiency in the blood caused by calving). The old cow was much mourned by all knowing her because she was within a few weeks of setting the all-time record for milk production in a cow.

Talking with some of my other uncles, I found out how it was that my father became a vet in the first place. Roy, the oldest brother, had hoped to be a vet but WW2 broke out. In those days, compulsory service could be avoided if you were a farm worker (somebody had to feed the soldiers), so when Roy got his callup notice, he claimed exemption. This meant, however, that he was frozen as a farm worker indefinitely. The next oldest brother was Floyd, and the same thing happened to him, callup and exemption. But just as my father was about to be called, the war ended, and he was able to go directly into Ontario Veterinary College.

Dad told a story about the time he was pregnancy testing some cows and forgot to remove his wristwatch. The farmer suggested Dad write an unsolicited testimonial to Timex about how the watch kept on ticking. If you don't understand this anecdote, I should mention that this procedure involves sticking one's arm up a cow's rear end. It would have made an interesting TV ad; millions of viewers would have lost their dinners.

We had shirtsleeve weather in February, rain most of the summer, snow in August, and now, in the last part of September, record-breaking heat, up to 28°C. Summer has finally arrived. Most of the seasonal labourers have been laid off, parks maintenance has dwindled down, and we are concentrating on mowing the major freeways, whose slopes are only cut once a year in the autumn. A crew does the trimming around light poles, fences, etcetera, with weed-eaters. Small ride-on mowers or walk-behind mowers are used for the places a big machine cannot go. Most of the cutting is being done by a variety of big machines, which are all triple-deck mowers. They cut a ten-metre wide swath or so. They are not ordinary rotating-blade decks, which can't handle the rough terrain. A rotating blade, such as on a lawnmower, would soon plug up in the tall grass or shatter (and break the driveshaft) on boulders or debris hidden in the grass. We use a mixture of machine types, such as flails or gyros. A flail is a horizontal cylinder with L-shaped knives dangling all along it. If the knife hits an obstacle, it may be blunted but will simply flap backward on its hinge, preventing jamming or driveshaft damage. Each flail unit has hundreds of knives, which have to be replaced every so often, a job that takes two people most of the day. The gyro unit has a rotating disk on each mowing deck. Cutting blades are mounted on the edge of the disk and are hinged so that they too will whip backwards out of the way on impact. A gyro cuts faster than a flail, but a flail chops up grass and mulches it without leaving a swath the way that gyros do. Six of one, half a dozen of the other, as the saying goes.

The mowing today finished up Deerfoot Trail out to city limits on the Marquis of Lorne Trail (he was a Governor General of Canada away back when). Next the machines do the M. of L. Trail, which is the southern boundary of my district as well as the city limits. Since we only cut it once a year, I never had any reason to be out there in

the summer. So today I took a drive to inspect it. I drove out to the east end of the Trail, turned north to follow the western boundary of the city, and west again to double back into my district.

This took me through rural countryside. The wheat harvest is well underway, and many fields had semitrailer or pup trailer trucks loading up with grain from combines. Right on the southeast corner of Calgary city limits is the hamlet of Shepard, whose major sources of industry are the Calgary sewage lagoons, the landfill site, a tree nursery, and a sewage-sludge recycling plant.

SALT OF THE EARTH

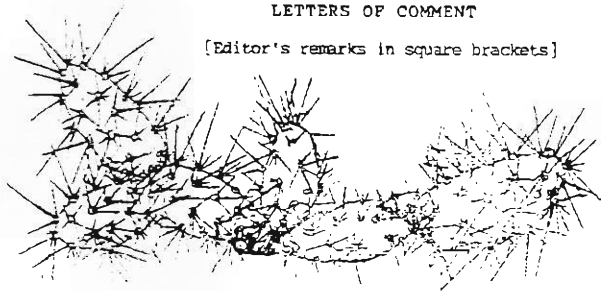
But I was saddened to note that the most prominent feature of the countryside was soil salinization. It seemed that every slough was ringed with a brilliant white beach, every ditch had a shining stripe of white along its bottom. Alkali flats were everywhere, with bright red patches of a small succulent plant called Salicornia, the only thing able to grow in such salty soil.

Salinization, it has been said, has destroyed more civilizations than war. The Sumerians ruined the lower part of Iraq because of salts left behind by irrigation. Even today, the general rule of thumb around the world is that about 25% of irrigated land is no longer arable, be it in United States, Canada, India or China. The total will gradually increase over several generations until the land is no more fertile than the ruined areas of the Mediterranean that once fed the Roman Empire.

The Shepard lands will eventually disappear from view, buried under a sea of asphalt as the area is industrialized.

LETTERS OF COMMENT

[Editor's remarks in square brackets]



FROM: Joseph Major 1992-9-16  
4701 Taylor Boulevard #8  
Louisville, Kentucky 40215-2343

The fuel shack problem sounds like the story of the town that passed two resolutions: 1) Resolved, that a new jail be built using the materials of the old jail, and 2) Resolved, that the old jail be used until the new jail is finished.

As for your architectural qualms, I think immediately of FROM BAUHAUS TO OUR HOUSE and THE PSYCHOLOGY OF EVERYDAY THINGS (changed in paperback to THE DESIGN OF EVERYDAY THINGS because it was being put in psychology sections by the same bookstore employees who put St. Augustine's THE CITY OF GOD under urban planning.)

The problem with anime is that all the characters have the same face. I have heard that the heart-shaped huge-eyed button-nosed small-mouthed face came from a book of standard art drawings, and now it is indelibly inscribed in the bedrock of anime. Hey, now there is an alternate-world story for you: If Amine Had Used A Different Standard.!

FROM: Chester Cuthbert 1992-9-13  
1104 Mulvey Avenue  
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3M 1J5

I support the idea mentioned by Steve George that specialization is essential to success. Specialist rather than general book dealers tend to stay in business over long periods of time. My own decision to follow my unorthodox economic ideas resulted in being financially independent against all odds. No one has to be a genius or have assimilated all knowledge to survive. All that is necessary is to know and apply a basic and sufficient specialty. Collecting scarce items which are always in demand guarantees a profit which the abundance produced by our efficient technology denies currently to farmers and other efficient operators.

FROM: Buck Coulson 1992-9-15  
2677W-500N  
Hartford City, Indiana 47348

Dialogue between readers and authors is definitely scarce in other fields. I make it a point to write to authors in other fields whose work I've liked, and get generally somewhat surprised and delighted answers. One English mystery author sent me a copy of her out-of-print SF novel because I'd mentioned stf in my letter. Several other fan letters developed into regular correspondences. Rosicrucionism does have a fan-nish air about it, except that fans would have done it as a joke.

Independent scholarship: Some years back, Nils Hardin recommended me to the editors of DICTIONARY OF LITERARY BIOGRAPHY, and I had an article on paperback SF history in Volume 8. All contributors were listed in the back of the book, 41 of them. All but 7 of us had university addresses. It's possible, probably more so in SF than anywhere else, but it's not that frequent.

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

1992-9-19

You shouldn't assume that all those drivers who make U-turns near your office are forced to make the maneuver because of mistaking an intersection.

[I do in fact get a number of outlanders coming in to ask directions to the Trans-Canada Highway or Macleod Trail, both of which are a considerable distance away. If we had spare money in the budget, I'd ask for one of those "You Are Here" signs to put by the entrance to our depot.]

Here in Hagerstown, U-turns are rapidly replacing baseball as the favourite pastime. I encounter at least one or two drivers in the middle of U-turns per mile of driving through the city. There are neighbours living in this block who haven't driven away from their homes without starting via a U-turn since the time the city repaved the street's surface and only one lane was open at a time. I have a tentative theory that so many people have U-turns as a hobby because it's a way they can create danger without the time and expense involved in preparing to become a drunk driver. My home is just a hundred feet or so from the crest of a moderately steep hill; the street is marked with a solid double yellow line throughout the entire length of the block. Even though the speed limit is 25 mph, most traffic moves along at 35 to 40 mph under normal conditions, going faster when it's raining or foggy. Sooner or later there's going to be a monumental crash when someone scooting over the top of the hill cannot stop in time at the obstacle of a U-turning vehicle. The street isn't wide enough for a simple U-turn if there are parked vehicles in the vicinity of the turn, so drivers must stop two-thirds of the way through the turn then back up before finishing the turn.

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

1992-9-25

The problems with the destruction of the Douglasdale park seems to be all too common in the USA, where parks and wilderness areas are slowly being destroyed by overuse. I am thinking in particular of my favourite hiking/backpacking/camping area, the Joshua Tree National Monument. The rules are clear and strict. All dead wood stays on the ground. No fires, except what you bring in as camp stoves. Yet for all the warning signs about leaving dead vegetation on the ground, it does slowly disappear around the campsites and popular hiking trails.

Buck Coulson: I have grave doubts about the proposed separation of California ever happening. How do you divide the state debt? Would Congress go along with a scheme that would give ex-California four seats in the Senate instead of the current two? Doubtful. Congress would have to approve any split of this or any other state.

[Interestingly, the constitutional referendum in Canada includes a proposal to reduce our Senate from 104 seats to 62. Unfortunately, the House of Commons would then increase from 295 to 345 members.]

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Rodney Leighton, Henry Welch