

CALGARY PHILATELIST

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The CPS was founded in 1922 by Dr. Edward George Mason. It is Chapter 66 of the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada, Chapter 1360 of the American Philatelic Society, and Chapter 91 of the American Topical Association. The CPS address is Box 1478, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2L6.

Membership dues for the 1996-97 season are \$12, plus a \$5 initiation fee for new members. Mail to Membership Chairman, Box 1478, Calgary, Alberta, T2P 2L6.

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A PRELIMINARY HISTORY OF ROUND ROBINS

by Dale Speirs

A round robin (RR) is a circulating packet of letters or zines (amateur magazines). Each participant adds their contribution as the packet comes round and takes out their old letter. The RR editor may make copies as it comes by, but often not, thus making RRs almost impossible to collect. The history of RRs, if it has been recorded, is so obscure as to be almost non-existent. Zine RRs are definitely known from the middle 1800s because some of these amateur magazines were preserved in libraries. Letter RRs probably predate them, since they would be a good method for families and friends to stay in touch. Since RRs circulate only amongst a small group of friends and come only in one copy, it is not surprising that bibliographers and librarians are silent on the subject.

RRs are popular in hobby groups. As an example, I am a participant in the American Philatelic Society club newsletter RR. Each time it wends its way to me, I insert the latest issue of CALGARY PHILATELIST and read the other club newsletters in the RR. I remove the older issue of CALGARY PHILATELIST and send the packet on its way. The Cactus and Succulent Society of America has had a large number of letter RRs going since 1951, with dozens going on about specialized topics such as one genus of cactus.

RRs remain the cheapest method of circulating bulky letters and photographs. On the Internet, RRs are used by hobbyists such as quilters who, although they use e-mail, circulate via snail mail boxes of quilt squares to trade: take one out, put one in. The Usenet group rec.crafts.textiles tracks the boxes and carries on general chitchat. The rec.craft.rubberstamps circulates boxes of used maps for mail art.

Many RRs will probably appear on the Internet, but will always exist in snail mail, there being no method of transmitting physical items through wires. I am only writing this article about written RRs, but it can be noted in passing that they exist on audio or video tapes as well. The major vulnerability of RRs is that if it goes astray in the mail, or more commonly, is detained or lost by one of the participants, then there will be difficulty restarting the RR and recovering the data.

When did RRs begin? It seems to me that they almost certainly had to be a result of Rowland Hill's postal reforms. It may well be that a few RRs existed prior to 1840, but the expense of postage was too much to allow it to exist on a widespread scale. With the introduction of penny postage, and the spread of postal reform to other countries, RRs would have come within reach of the populace. The rise of the middle class in the late 1800s provided the other necessary condition to trade packets of letters and zines, that of a literate class with discretionary spending powers. Zines themselves began to be published as a hobby in the middle 1800s, as cheap printing presses suitable for home use became available. No doubt some rich Venetian family might have had an RR circulating by private courier back in the 1600s, but that would have been rare; 1840 had to be the trigger date for widespread RRs.

Where does the phrase 'round robin' come from, and how did it become applied to a packet of letters circulating through the post? When I start any historical research, I always go to old dictionaries to get my citation search kick-started. The peculiar case of 'round robin' is that almost all of the references are for other meanings of the phrase and seldom for the literary meaning.

Dictionaries for the era from 1623 to 1780 were blank on the phrase. I found citations starting in the 1800s, most commonly for round robins as a petition where the signatures were written in a circle or on a ribbon looped through a hole in the paper, in order to prevent the ringleader from being identified. Another use of the phrase is in sports competitions where each contestant plays each other. This use is traced back to 1895 (for lawn tennis) by the OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY, which also adds a definition for a specialized type of horse race bet.

Not until the 1960s do many dictionaries give the postal meaning. This is surprising, since RR letters and zines date back to the 1800s, and being used by literary folk, should have drawn the attention of lexicographers. In fact, many modern dictionaries have dropped this meaning while still listing other meanings of the phrase.

And why 'round robin'? Most dictionaries repeat the same origin, that of derivation from 'ruban ronde', the round ribbon on which French sailors of the 1600s signed their names when protesting against an officer. When I took my next step in researching the phrase, consulting the indexes of NOTES AND QUERIES, I found that this had been a subject of dispute in the 1800s. In 1851, R.W.E. queried this phrase, saying that he had found a quote: "That the sacrament of the Altar is nothing else but a piece of bread, or a predie round robbin". In 1896, F. Adams blasted the French origin as improbable, and suggested that either the little round pancakes of the same name were the origin, or that the term is corrupted from 'rope bands'. A year later, F. Chance agreed that the term could not have derived from French, traces it to at least 1643, and suggests that all the known meanings are alliteration or assonance from 'round ro - n' or possibly 'round robert'. Mr. Chance listed all the known definitions of the phrase, none of which included anything postal. Yet there is no doubt that postal RRs were common during his life.

Philately is no help, as it concentrates on the stamps and postmarks. Postal history considers the routes and procedures by which the mail moves, and seldom looks at the actual use of the mails by people. If a cover should survive from an RR, it would be noted as paying the triple rate, etc., but not what the contents were about. To be fair, postal historians seldom have the contents to judge the cover by.

RRs were an outgrowth of the postal reforms that brought inexpensive communication within the reaches of the average person. In this, they were paralleled by the rise of newspapers and magazines which also depended on cheap postage.



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WE'RE ON THE WEB!

Thanks to our Vice-President Tim Presber, the CPS now has its own Web page on the Internet. It is indexed on the search engines or you can reach it directly at the following address:

<http://www.agt.net/public/tpresber/CPS.HTM>

The home page is designed to be fast-loading by reducing graphics to a minimum, just the CPS logo. The opening screen has an introduction to the club and its activities, and you can click over to other pages such as a list of club executives, hot links to local stamp dealers (who helped defray the cost of the Website), and back issues of the CALGARY PHILATELIST. Other links include a youth page, which advises about connections with school boards and the public library, and the club schedule of meetings and special events. There are also links to home pages of the British North America Philatelic Society and the American Topical Association.

Expect further additions as time goes by, and if you have a Web browser then add our address to your bookmark list.

Not to be forgotten is that if you have a small ad in this bulletin, it will appear in the Web page. So you are not just advertising to a group of 200, you are advertising worldwide!

AUTHOR OF THE YEAR

Each year we present an award for authors appearing in the pages of the CALGARY PHILATELIST. For the 1996 calendar year just concluded, the Author of the Year goes to Phyllis Weston. Congratulations, Phyllis! The cumulative list of winners is as below.

1990 - Mirko Zatka	1993 - Jim Karr	1996 - Phyllis Weston
1991 - Georg Gerlach	1994 - Bob Monilaws	
1992 - Perry Holinshead	1995 - Ed Harris	

CHRISTMAS PARTY

The December 4, 1996, meeting was our usual Christmas party, held on the main floor of the Kerby Centre in a more spacious room than our regular meeting room. At least 65 people attended (it's difficult to count heads when the heads keep moving!) and enjoyed the food and activities. As in past years, the Seredas tended bar. Food was prepared by Isobell Attrell and Doug Kollar. Bob Monilaws did the programme quiz, and Michael Teekens was the gopher (go for this, go for that, ...). And the proverbial good time was had by all.

YOUTH MEMBERSHIPS

At the January 15th, 1997, meeting, a motion was passed to establish a Youth membership rate with some restrictions on privileges. Details to follow elsewhere or contact Isobell Attrell for details.

SMALL ADVERTISEMENTS

These ads are free to paid-up CPS members. Mail your ads to Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, T2P 2E7, or hand them to me at meetings. Next deadline is March 5 for the April bulletin.

FOR SALE: Brand new Harris United States Liberty stamp album incl. 1994. Phone Agnes at 252-0007.

WANTED: Centennial issue covers addressed to foreign destinations. No USA or UK please. Price individually, as a batch, or ask for my offer. Will give generous trade of MNH Canada for items I need. Call Ed Harris at 274-0021 or see me at any meeting.

BUY, SELL, TRADE: British Commonwealth and worldwide topicals. Please write to George Tsang, Box 20229, Calgary, T2P 4L2.

WANTED: would be interested in older Scott Specialty Series albums in used, decent condition. Phone Ron at 251-7460.

FOR SALE: "history of the Calgary Philatelic Society" book for \$2 each from Dale Speirs at meetings. Mail orders add an extra \$2 for postage and remit to CPS, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, T2P 2E7.

WANTED: Postmarks of western Canada on cover, piece, or stamp. Phone Al at 282-1030.

FOR SALE: British Oceania mint sets LH. Also new circuit books of country collections via our circuit book manager. Call bob Perry at 282-4520.

WANTED: Postal history of the following Alberta towns: Eckville pre-WW2 postmarks and postcards, Hespero and Pitcox any era, Everts and Leslieville pre-WW1. Postmarks must be good strikes; no fragments or weak strikes please. See Dale Speirs at meetings or leave message on answering machine at 243-1752.

ROYAL 97 ROYALE will be held at Coast Plaza Hotel on September 19 to 21. Volunteers are needed to assist; please contact Hugh Delaney at 255-0422.

FOR SALE: Ukrainian and Russian stamps new and used. Also Ukrainian FDCs and special cancels from 1991 to date. Call Andy at 236-2037.

FOR SALE: 1967-73 Centennial issue definitives. Singles, plate blocks, coils, booklets, and varieties. Get together your want list and you won't be disappointed. 60%-75% off Unitrade prices. Doug Kollar at 547-3838 or see me at the meetings.

WANTED: 1870-1893 Small Queens, used, in any quantity. Also want F1-F3 registration stamps, mint or used in any quantity, top prices paid. Call Doug at 547-3838 or see me at meetings.

FOR SALE: The complete printing of BNAPS Re-entry Study Group from Vol. 1 to 1993, in 2 binders. Excellent study of all BNA re-entries. Call Doug at 547-3838.

MEETINGS AND SPECIAL EVENTS IN 1997

January	5	.....	Sunday bourse
	15		General meeting
	15		Deadline for February bulletin
February	2	.....	Sunday bourse
	5		General meeting
	19		Auction
March	2	.....	Sunday bourse
	5		General meeting
	19		Auction
April	2	.....	General meeting
	6		Sunday bourse
	16		Auction
	26		BNAPS Spring Regional Meeting
	27		Stamp Day
May	4	.....	Sunday bourse
	6		Worldwide Philatelic Party #2
	7		General meeting
	7		Deadline for June bulletin
	21		Auction
June	4	.....	Election meeting
	18		Auction
August	2	.....	Deadline for August bulletin
September	3	.....	General meeting
	3		Deadline for October bulletin
	19 to 21		ROYAL 97 ROYALE
October	1	.....	General meeting
	15		Auction
November	5	.....	General meeting
	5		Deadline for January bulletin
	19		Auction
December	3	.....	Christmas party

MEETINGS and AUCTIONS are at Kerby Centre, 2nd floor, 1133 - 7 Avenue SW, at 730 pm. Auction lots should be in before 730 pm to allow viewing.

SUNDAY BOURSE is at Rosscarrock Community Hall, 4411 - 10 Avenue SW, from 10 am to 4 pm. Details from Mirko Zatka at 547-1435.

ROYAL 97 ROYALE is at the Coast Plaza Hotel (formerly Marlborough Inn), 1317 - 33 Street NE.