

Shirley Whittington



More boring than babysitting or Bartok or baseball on television -- that's what stamp collecting is to me.

Yet the Squire finds such joy in watermarks and mint coils that I always feel sad that I can't share in his hobby. Alas -- philately is something he has to do without me.

(Ed. note: Maybe that's why he likes it.)

Still, he has made attempts to interest me in his pasties. The only time I bit was last week when he showed me an album full of ancient letters beautifully addressed in brown ink and copper plate calligraphy.

Collectors call these old things covers, and while many of them are simply empty envelopes (with valuable stamps attached) some actually contain letters.

Letters? That one could actually read?

Yes! This discovery got me more than merely interested. I haven't been so excited since last Friday when the A. and P. marked its bread down to three for a dollar.

Sarah Buckner's letter was written in 1833, before the invention of penny post or mail strikes. It didn't even have an envelope but was inscribed on a large piece of heavy paper, which was then folded several times and

sealed (once) with a blob of wax.

Imagine Sarah, 34 years before Confederation, wearily pushing her quill across the paper by the light of a guttering lamp and writing the following:

"Dear Mr. Street: I have taking this opportunity to inform you that I received your letter and bought me a cow. I received \$15.00 in the letter and it perched me the cow and I return you my harty thanks for the same."

Sarah's spelling is weak, but her calligraphy is splendidly hung with graceful flourishes and curlicues.

A letter written in 1848 is similarly ornamented. "Dear Sir:" says Laurence Schram of Grimsby to Thomas Street of Chippewa, Upper Canada. "I have been informed that you want to sell a lot, it being 40 acors on five consion. Plese sir, rite your terms and direct your letter to the writer for Laurence Schram."

No less businesslike, but a bit pathetic, is the plea contained in the following letter written in 1873 from Orwell Upper Canada to the Eureka Manufacturing Company, Drawer 22, Montreal.

"Dear Sirs:" begins Thomas Evans with

firm indignation. "I have been waiting very impatiently for two months for that watch. Suspect your game is to puzzle me. If not, send it immediately. Yours etc."

Sounds like a swindle to me, Mr. Evans.

During the first world war, the Canadian government distributed field service post cards to troops in security sensitive areas. They were intended to allay fears back home, and protect military secrets at the same time. Soldiers who used them were warned that if they added anything more than a signature, the post cards would be destroyed.

The cards went as follows: "I am quite well / OR / I have been admitted to hospital (sick) (wounded) and am getting on well. I have received your (letter) (telegram) (parcel). Letter follows at first opportunity. I have received no letter from you (lately) (for a long time)."

There followed a space for a signature.

It's a pity the government didn't continue to issue these wonderful pre-written communications. They would be perfect for kids away at camp or college.

Finally, here's a sad letter from Coronation Alberta, written in 1930. In part, it says,

"...harvest only fair at Coronation. Many hundreds of acres were blown out before the rains came last week of June and there was never known to be such hail as there was this year. Business is very bad, and practically nothing is being paid on machinery or land accounts. Wheat is the only grain that can be sold. Barley and oats are worth 12 to 15 cents and ry (sic) 9 or 10 cents a bushel. I have not enough crop to pay expenses and have to buy about half of the feed for my cattle and horses. However, we are hoping things will improve."

Eventually in Alberta, they did, although I doubt that J. G. Milne, the writer of that letter, lived to share in the wealth.

There are dozens of other covers in the collection but none as fascinating to me as these. They seem in their handwritten simplicity to be windows looking back into our past. They are history.

The Squire is pleased I think that I have finally shown an interest in the hobby of kings and presidents. He thinks it's because philately is intrinsically interesting, but that's not the reason at all. The real reason is this -- I never could resist reading someone else's mail.

Bill Smiley



LAST week I was whining about what a bum summer I'd been having. I shouldn't have.

My wrenched elbow cleared up and I was able to play some golf. With my putter. If I tried to swing with any other club, it was just like having a hot poker rammed through my elbow. But my wife bore up under my pain very well.

The summer ended with a burst of something or other. If I were a farmer, I might compare it to a plague of locusts. But there were only two of them and they didn't strip my crops. They just ground me to the bone, physically and emotionally. My two grandboys, who are this generation's answer to the perpetual motion machine.

From 7 a.m. to about 9 a.m., they're delightful. They play with their complicated toys, scarcely fight at all, eat a big breakfast and generally are good little boys. But from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. they want action, novelty, excitement and constant motion. At the centre of this, rather resembling a whirling dervish, is Grandad, whom they seem to believe is about 18 years old.

However, we got through it with no more than the usual amount of breakage, soilage and personal outrage.

But the old lady and I were so frazzled we didn't even have the strength to embrace on our 35th anniversary, which came along soon after the locusts.

Holy old Moly, isn't that a long time to be married to a strange woman?

I've never been able to figure out what has

kept us together for half a life-time. We are completely opposite in temperament, disagree violently and continually, and our tastes in general are almost completely dissimilar.

She does everything as though it were the last day of her life and she had to face the Lord or whoever, with everything done. That is, at top speed.

By the time I have finished my morning's ablutions, for example, she has made the bed, put on a laundry, vacuumed the living-room, prepared breakfast, and probably done some ironing or cleaned a couple of windows.

And then she's sitting there, impatient and even cranky, when I stroll down, pick up the morning paper, drink my tea and behave like a normal citizen. She wants to talk about Life, or our children, or her insomnia, or some other damfool thing.

All I want to do is read the paper.

I rather enjoy shopping in a supermarket. By myself. I never have a list. Just poke around watching the weird people, admiring the skill and speed and stamina of the cash register girls, walking past the meat counter shaking my head dolefully, buying some cottage cheese which I invariably forget about until it goes rotten, picking up half a dozen bananas (and discovering we have another half dozen when I get home), enjoying a coffee at the coffee counter, where the waitress is like a robot on speed.

Generally, I shop in low gear. I buy things we already have or don't need (maybe a can of smoked oysters) and I forget to buy things we are out of, like toilet paper. But it doesn't

bother me.

I hate shopping with my wife. She goes at it as though it were the 400 meter women's Olympic race. Sometimes she has left me three or four aisles behind as I push the cart at a civilized pace.

She always has a list as long as your arm in one hand, pencil in the other for crossing things out, glasses on to read the small print, and pocket calculator in her purse to ranslate the metric system. The last item never proves anything except that whether it's ounces and pounds or litres and milligrams, the cost of food is going up.

She plays golf the same way, hitting the ball and rushing after it as though she were going to kill it for not going where it was supposed to, while I waddle along, at about two miles an hour, looking at the trees and the clouds and the other idiots whacking their ball into the woods.

She even eats fast. I have just got my first cob of corn nicely buttered and salted, and she's well through her second cob.

She doesn't sleep well because she's always thinking about tomorrow's race against time, or a wedding present to buy, or her children, or the fact that she might not sleep and will only be able to gallop tomorrow, instead of running flat out. I sleep like a babe.

When we're going somewhere, she wants to be ready an hour ahead, so we'll get a good seat, or avoid bad traffic, or whatever. Thanks to me, we usually arrive just before the bride, or just before the curtain goes up.

Well, that's temperament. She's crazy. I'm normal, or a little below, if you want to

get picky.

We disagree. Any healthy couple does. But they "talk things out" and reach a consensus that everybody has a right to his/her peculiar ideas. We don't. I say flatly, "That's a lot of B.S.". She promptly retorts, "Well, I've been listening to your B.S. for blank years." and away we go, whether it's politics, the economy, religion, or who took the garbage out last week.

And as to tastes, we're miles apart. She likes classical music. I like blues and ragtime. She doesn't like hunting or fishing or boating. I'm not mad about sewing, and I go a bit glassy-eyed when she starts, and goes on and on about nips and tucks and darts and hems and how to make button holes.

I like reading, and have a book on every toilet top, stair landing, counter-top and under every bed, to prove it. She does, too, but she reads stuff I wouldn't touch with a six-foot Pole: Henry James, George Eliot. She's never read Catch-22, the funniest, saddest book of the century.

I could go on and on. She likes poker, but doesn't like it when I play poker with the boys, even when I come home limping because my right pocket is full of quarters.

I could write a book. How can two people, one nuts and the other eminently sane, reach a 35th anniversary?

Some kind of early Krazy Glue, I suspect. Maybe it'll hold for another 25 years. I doubt it. There's five years between us. She looks 38. I look 68. It's a long time to live with a strange woman.

Investor's Inquiry



by Charles Colling

This week I feel I must deal with and try to explain a very touchy subject, namely Margin accounts. Margin is the practice of buying securities on credit and of course, interest is charged on the unpaid balance.

Most stocks selling over two dollars a share can be bought on a fifty percent margin basis; that is if a client buys a thousand shares of stock at two dollars a share the client is required to pay a minimum of one thousand dollars and the brokers hold the stock in the client's account as collateral against the other thousand dollars owing. If the stock drops in price additional money has to be paid into the account to maintain the fifty percent margin value.

Now three of the main areas of confusion in margin accounts arise from the following:

On some exchanges or jurisdictions the margin requirements are sixty percent instead of fifty percent. This is quite prevalent at the present time on the Vancouver Exchange where most stocks are of a very highly speculative nature.

The sudden withdrawal of a stock from the approved margin lists because of irregular trading patterns in the stock or questionable reporting of company news or affairs by management of the company.

The suspension of trading of any stock for any reason during the time of an investigation or the drop in price of a marginable stock from two dollars or above to a price of one dollar and sixty cents per share.

Another area of misunderstanding on the

part of the client is this:

Fortunately there are very few people who cause any difficulty when such conditions arise.

No broker or salesman wants to cause hard feelings among the investing public but when certain situations arise it is sometimes unavoidable. I hope this will help to resolve any misunderstandings.

If an account is one thousand dollars undermargined the client has the option of either paying a minimum of one thousand dollars cash to bring the account into line, or selling sufficient securities to achieve the same purpose. Here is where the confusion arises, as the original equity in the security was only fifty percent, two thousand dollars worth of securities would have to be sold to cover the one thousand dollar deficit.

These regulations were set up for the protection against excessive loss of both the client and the broker. It is the salesman's and broker's duty to police all margin accounts and they are subject to very heavy fines and/or suspension for allowing such accounts to exist.

In sending in questions to be answered in these columns, please remember Securities Commission Regulations will not permit giving opinions or recommendations on any specific securities.

All other signed inquiries will be answered as soon as possible. In all answers only the inquirer's initial will be used. Address all questions to "Investor's Inquiry" c/o The Midland Times, Box 609, Midland, Ontario.

Very touchy subject explained