

When Stanley Smith speaks it's a tall tale or spicy history

By ADRIAN EWINS

Sentinel-Review Staff Writer

Stanley Smith is a good liar and proud of it.

In fact, he is so good a liar that in 1939 he was runner-up in the World Championship of the Liar's Club.

Mr. Smith, 83, of Ingersoll, is not only a good liar and a member in good standing in the Liar's Club of the United States, but he is, by his own admission, an authority on among other things Abraham Lincoln, Wyatt Earp, Billy the Kid, Wild Bill Hickock, John Brown, Aimee Semple Macpherson, Cattle Kate, Kitty Leroy, the original first Canadian Division that left Canada in 1914 and the complete histories of Chatham, Sarnia and Ingersoll.

And he can speak for two hours on each without a note, he said in an interview recently.

But back to the Liar's Club. What does it take to be the second-best liar in the world?

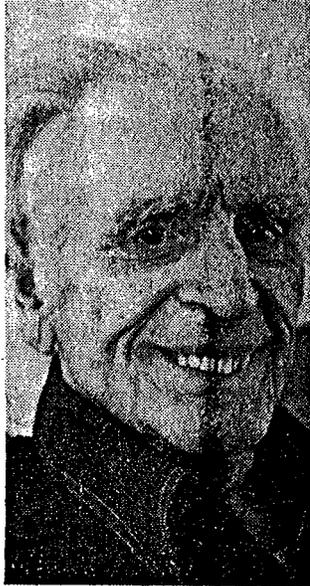
This was Mr. Smith's entry: "I said I knew a farmer in West Oxford Township who was so strong he could bend over and pick up an acre of ground and stand it on end.

"Then he would sow wheat on one side and oats on the other so he could reap a double harvest."

GOOD PUBLICITY

He said he always mentions Oxford County in his stories to give it some "good publicity."

The Liar's Club is an organization based in Burlington, Wisconsin, which can be joined by sending in 10 cents, he said. He joined in 1933 and he's now in the process of working on a good tall tale for



Stanley Smith
... story teller

this year's contest.

But Mr. Smith is definitely telling the truth when he claims to be an authority on all the people and places mentioned earlier.

His list of credentials is as impressive as the stories he tells.

He has been director of research for the Oxford Historical Society, a member of the National Executive of the John Brown Memorial Association, a member of The Westerners Club of Chicago and he is one of the surviving members of the Originals, the first Canadian Division that left

in 1914.

The reason he is an authority on Aimee Semple Macpherson, the famous evangelist in the United States during the 1920s, is quite simple. He knew her.

Aimee came from Salford, and Mr. Smith even paid her a visit when she was at the height of her fame in California.

"She was the P.T. Barnum of religion - she really put on a show for the money, although she started out seriously," he said.

Another reason for her success was that "she was the most attractive girl you ever saw" - except for her biggest fault "swollen ankles."

THERE'S MORE

Aimee was not the only notorious female to come from Oxford County.

"In fact, Oxford County holds the record for famous and infamous women", according to Mr. Smith.

Such lovely and admirable examples of womanhood as Cattle Kate, Kitty Leroy and Catherine Chadwick - the "Cleveland Bankers' Headache" - all hail from this area.

Cattle Kate's claim to fame, Mr. Smith said, is that she was the first woman hanged in Wyoming for cattle rustling. She came from somewhere in the county, although Mr. Smith said he couldn't recall exactly where - probably East Oxford.

A reward had been put out by the Cattlemen's Association, and Cattle Kate was the prize.

"She was hanged back to back from the same tree as James Averill", her cohort in crime.

As if that wasn't enough, Cattle Kate was probably the most famous "madam" in the old west at the time.

Kitty Leroy?

She was Oxford Centre's contribution to the culture of the old west. She was the first stripper in Deadwood, S.D.

She met her demise by being shot to death in the Lone State's Saloon in Deadwood, Mr. Smith said, sometime during the 1860s.

The other famous (or infamous) Oxford County woman on whom Mr. Smith is an authority is Catherine Chadwick.

BANKING HEADACHE

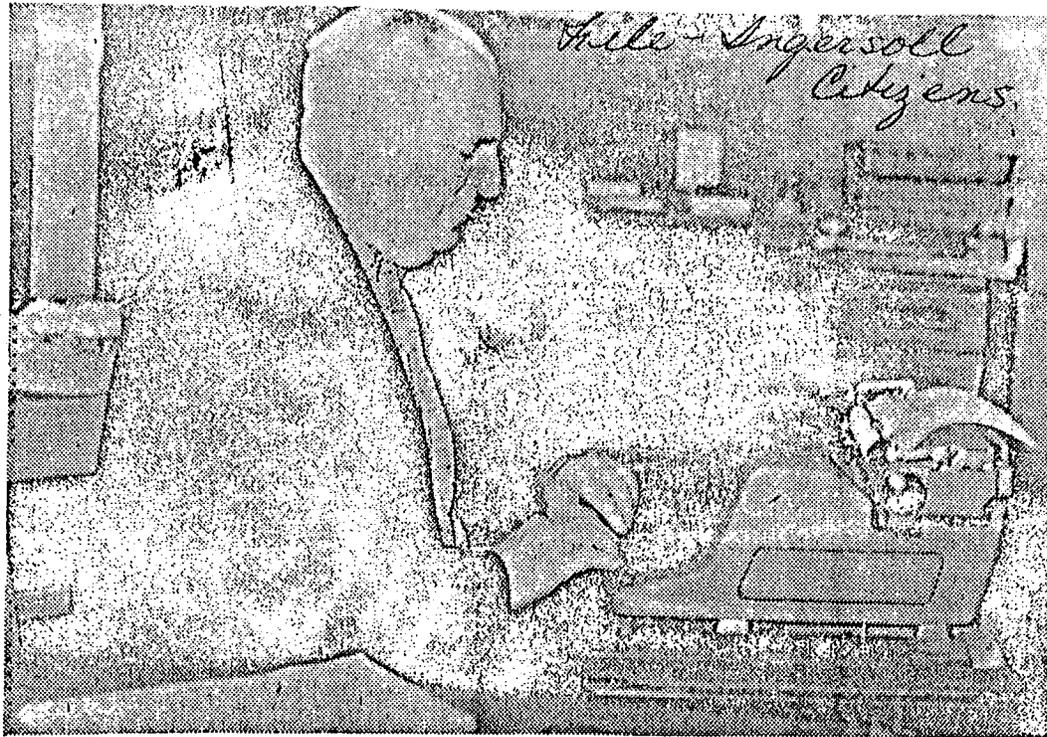
Affectionately dubbed "the Cleveland headache" or the "Bankers' headache", all she did was swindle banks throughout Ohio of between \$2-\$3 million.

Her method, according to Mr. Smith, was to claim to be the daughter of well-known industrialist and millionaire Andrew Carnegie.

She came from the Eastwood area and eventually died in jail in Woodstock in 1906, doing time for all her frauds.

Stanley Smith lives in a world of books, newspapers, and history - both from what he reads and personal experience.

He has enough stories - true ones in addition to his tall tales - to fill a book. Although probably not enough to fill the 45 pound dictionary that sits in his living room.



*Wille Ingersoll
Citizens*

Sentinel

SMITH,

Stanley J.

STANLEY J. SMITH, former railroadman and councillor is now busy writing the activities of old John Brown's sojourn in present day Southwestern Ontario which culminated in the

famous Harper's Ferry Raid in West Virginia and his subsequent hanging. The outcome of this foray was the curtain raiser to America's greatest drama, the Civil War, and Mr.

Smith's book will cover the period embracing the war and the participation of thousands of young Canadians in what he terms "the greatest tragedy of modern history." (Staff photo).

AUTHORITY ON OXFORD HISTORY

Colorful "Character" Disdains "Cut, Dried"

By YVONNE MOTT

"Well, guess it's safe to go home now — my wife should have the lawn all cut" . . . with these words Stanley J. heaved himself out of the chair, grabbed his bag of groceries off the desk and with a flip of his hand left the Sentinel-Review office.

Oh yes, "Stanley J." is all that is needed to introduce the illustrious Mr. Smith to our readers. The remark quoted above is a typical Smith-ism.

When reporters learned that veteran councillor Stanley J. Smith was not going to stand for re-election in 1960 they were more than a little disappointed. For Councillor Smith could always be counted on for one good quote during a meeting and quite often it was his violent objection to a bit of legislation that rescued the meeting from the fate of a dull report.

Probably called a "character", "clown", "fool", "riot" and "Screwball" more often than any one else in local public life, Stanley Smith certainly does not seem to resent the adjectives tossed his way. In fact he has been accused on a number of occasions of deliberately provoking battles and making "smart" remarks to gain publicity. This the former councillor did vehemently deny.

He told this reporter on more than one occasion that he could not stand to see the open council meetings so "cut and dried"; he hated to see "all the discussion take place in a closed committee meeting and then a rubber stamp put on it in the public meeting" and could never understand "why the taxpayer doesn't insist on knowing more about what council does and how it reaches its decisions". On many occasions his sudden unexpected attack on a councillor's move would generate a heated discussion that brought out facts which would otherwise never have been published. "That's why I did those things" he told the S-R the night he retired from public life, "and not to get my name in the paper."

LIKES THE TRUTH

His passion for truth and making things public goes hand in hand with his intense interest in all things historical and his particular interest in Oxford County history.

His home is a collector's paradise of rare old books, beautiful antique glassware, clocks, photographs, old newspapers and all things relating to the study of history. The newspapers, books and clocks are touched by no one except Stanley J., but the lovely display of glassware is arranged by and cared for by his wife, May.

Mrs. Smith not only shares her husband's interests and encourages him in his research, but fortunately possesses a good sense of humor. One can understand the necessity for this after hearing of her husband's trip to Vancouver and his return gift to her — a tin of salmon from a local grocery store. We recall being shown Stanley's den after his return from hospital a few years ago. "Look at it" he moaned. "She went and cleaned it all up, filed everything away; I can't find a thing." After more of this bitter complaining about his wife's annoying habit of being tidy he turned to us and whispered "Isn't she wonderful?"

Admittedly, this man who in the past two decades has probably been discussed as much as anyone in Ingersoll, will "do any-

thing. By simply refusing to think of losing a leg as becoming disabled, Stan has proven that you're only crippled when you think you are. Most of his jokes are on himself and his leg is often the reason for the joke. (Eg., the time the dog bit him — on his wooden leg.)

Incidentally this same leg does not prevent him from marching with the veterans of World War I in the Remembrance Day parades.

shrapnel; 26 days later hospital was bombed and I was rewounded in the head. Finally got something into my head at last so wrote to Dad with the good news."

In 1919, Stanley J. notes, "Returned to Canada; felt tired so went to California to rest up and went broke; worked as dishwasher for a Greek; dock walloper for an Italian and went paperhanging. Went to Mexico to see a bullfight and was so mortified that I let the remaining creatures out of the corrals and was deported as an undesirable for cheering for the bull."

On his 40th birthday Stan decided he had had quite an interesting life and began to record some of the events. "If Life Begins At Forty I've Been Only Fooling" would make anyone shake his head in disbelief, but Stan swears everything in it is true.

With his permission we print a few excerpts:

"1902 — Built a straw and newspaper fire against a barn door to keep warm; no insurance on barn and crops, but all the livestock was saved.

"1903 — Moved into the city of Chatham and was placed upon the top of the furniture load to save a railway fare. Curiosity prompted me to pull a slip knot in the rope to see what would happen. A walnut-finished table turned into a finished walnut table and all the dishes were broken. Wrist sprained."

SERIES OF JOBS

After a series of jobs including a newspaper route, delivery boy, newsboy, theatre usher, elevator operator, working at unloading freight boats, Stanley J's father apprenticed him to a Sarnia newspaper. In 1913 he finished his apprenticeship, resigned and got a job on the railway.

In 1914 he was promoted to switchman and freight brakeman and promptly enlisted in an infantry battalion with the Overseas Military Forces of Canada. He saw a great deal of action, the inside of a few jails and a couple of hospitals. Of interest is his note pertaining to 1917: "Over the top of Vimy Ridge and Hill 70. In hospital with

Wrecks and derailments, prospecting, barnstorming, starting his own aviation company, air crashes, experimenting with balloons and he kind of adventures most boys and young men dream about occupied Stan's life for the next few years.

It was in 1926 that he first entered municipal politics in Sarnia. In 1933, following an airplane crash, he came to Ingersoll, "broke" and 26 months later, he recalls, he was a member of council.

Stanley J is still missed around the council chambers and often one of his remarks is recalled during an argument. According to parliamentary procedure Stanley J. Smith was probably out of order more times during one council meeting than most councillors are during a year, but as one of his colleagues stated once, "At least you always know how he feels".

Today, retired from politics and from the railroads (after about 50 years "on and off") Stan is by no means inactive. He finds more time than ever to devote to his historical research and is presently continuing his work on the story of John Brown.

Whether you agree with Stanley J. Smith's politics or not, you've got to admit he isn't ashamed to state his opinions and if you do happen to think he's a "character", you've got to admit he is a colorful one — and wouldn't the world be dull without him!



Sound off with Gordon Sanderson

Before we tell you what happened to Stanley J. Smith of Ingersoll, we should mention that he is 81 years old and that we believe his story, even though he is an old-time member of the Liar's Club.

Mr. Smith wrote to Sound Off on Jan. 7, complaining he had not received his November disability pension cheque from the Workmen's Compensation Board.

This did not strike us as too unusual, since a postal strike was in progress throughout November. However, the strike ended Dec. 3 and Mr. Smith should surely have received his cheque shortly thereafter.

What made his letter stand out was the style of personal notepaper he uses. Printed at the top centre of the page is Mr. Smith's name and occupation: Free Lance Journalist.

And, down the left side of the page, like a social register, are printed the names of organizations with which Mr. Smith is associated, including veterans' groups in such widely separated cities as Vancouver, Chicago and Muenchen, Germany.

And the second-last name on the list is the aforementioned Liar's Club of Burlington, Wis.

In his letter, Mr. Smith was tilting his lance at WCB employees for not following his instructions. He said he was well aware of the postal strike and called the WCB's London office Nov. 6.

"I gave them my claim number and asked the girl who answered the phone to send my cheque to the CNR agent in Ingersoll because the CNR maintained their own postal service."

Mr. Smith then stated that the girl who took his phone call "deserves a putty medal" because he still had not received his \$194 cheque.

His letter brought swift action. E. W. (Bud) Swartz, area claims supervisor at the WCB's London office, phoned us within a few days. Investigation showed that Mr. Smith's pension cheque had been mailed after the postal strike ended and had been cashed. However, the endorsement signature did not look like Mr. Smith's signature.

"I think we have a forgery here," said Mr. Swartz. "I am going to visit Mr. Smith personally in Ingersoll, and if he will sign an affidavit that this is not his

signature, I can issue a replacement cheque on the spot."

The claims official said the WCB had no way of following Mr. Smith's instructions by using CNR internal mailing facilities. During the postal strike, cheques for claimants in this area were available for pickup at the London office. Those that were not picked up were held and mailed as soon as postal services resumed.

The next time we talked with Mr. Smith by phone it was to hear from him the embarrassing news that Mr. Swartz had arrived and showed him the cashed cheque — and the endorsement signature was not a forgery.

"I never knew I had cashed that cheque until I saw my own signature, then I remembered what I did with it," he confessed. "I cashed it on a Monday morning after I went and got a haircut, then I went down to the liquor store and stocked up on my Christmas liquor. I've still got some of it left."

It was a "legitimate mistake," he said, and we agreed with him. But while talking, we asked Mr. Smith about his membership in the Liar's Club.

Seems that back in 1935, he submitted an entry to the Wisconsin organization which was chosen as one of the best lies of that year.

"The one I sent in was about a North Oxford farmer I knew. He was so strong he could bend over and pick up half an acre of ground and stand it on edge. On one side he'd plant wheat and on the other he'd sow oats, thereby reaping a double crop."

Mr. Smith, a First World War veteran who "didn't dodge fast enough" when the shells were bursting over Vimy, also didn't get out of the way quickly enough while working as a train conductor in the Sarnia yards of the old Grand Trunk Railway on July 19, 1925.

"I had my right leg cut off when I was run over by an engine coming down the tracks," he said. He has collected compensation ever since.

"It started out at \$48 (a month) and now it's up to \$194 — that's how good the government has been to me," he said.

And he takes back any unkind words he wrote about his "undelivered" cheque.

Stanley

J. Smith

Stanley J. Smith of Carroll Street, Ingersoll died at the age of 84, on July 23, 1979. He was a patient at Alexandra Hospital when he died.

Born in Harrow, England, Mr. Smith came to Canada as a child with his mother and father.

He served as a private with the 7th Battalion of

the First Canadian Infantry Division in France during the First World War, and was wounded in action.

He moved to Ingersoll from Sarnia in 1931, and remained an Ingersoll resident ever after.

He was an active member of the Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 119 and was a research director of the Oxford Historical Society.

Mr. Smith was predeceased by his wife, May, in 1969. He is survived by two sons, James of East Wood, and Stanley J., of Gaffney, South Carolina, seven grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

Funeral services will be held Thursday, July 26, at 2 p.m. at McBeath Funeral Home. Reverend Tom Griffin will officiate and interment will be at Ingersoll Rural Cemetery.