A POCKET WEBSTER COMPARISON

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In the February 1974 Word Ways, Murray R. Pearce presented a most helpful corrective dissertation on errors abounding in the specialized word books published by various contest firms. He rendered a distinctive service to the puzzle-solving readers of this magazine, and to all logologists. His list of omitted words and detected errors are a welcome blessing to prize seekers.

However, Mr. Pearce could have pursued his subject further. Had he possessed the research experience of some of the veterans in the puzzle pastime, he would have suspected, and research would have verified, that the publishers of the New Pocket Dictionary (G. & C. Merriam Company, Springfield, Mass.) revise their little lexicon about every ten years. In each such revision there are always changes, either of omission or commission. This was true of the 35-cent edition of twenty years ago, and is true of the current 75-cent version.

Most contest sponsors of word-building puzzle promotions require that all words used in the construction (or, as they call it, solution) of tie-breaking word-building problems be taken from the 75-cent edition of the Merriam-Webster New Pocket Dictionary. Unfortunately, the dictionary in question, first published in 1964 (and without changes in 1968), is different in some details from the same dictionary published in 1970.

Here are several words and phrases in the 1970 edition that do not appear in the 1968 one:

AQUALUNG, on page 23, becomes AQUALUNGER two years later
TRANSISTOR does not appear on page 521 in the earlier work, but it is very much in evidence 24 months later
SONATINA is omitted from page 469 in 1968, but pops up in 1970
BONE MEAL, a two-word phrase, can be found only in 1970
HEPPED UP, another two-word phrase, can be found only in 1970

As for the word NO-GOOD in the earlier work, it is definitely indicated as a hyphenated term because the double hyphen is shown there. It appears at the end of a line of text, and the hyphen is double-lined, making the word totally ineligible according to the rules of most contests.

There are other differences, but these are minor and do not affect the outcome of a final word-building puzzle. For example, there are...
at least 21 changes on page 322 (money tables) between the two printings. Since these are in light-face type, they cannot make any difference in certain word-building contests.

If the non-contest-oriented reader wonders what all the shouting is about, it is this: contest promoters are leaving themselves wide open to a damaging lawsuit if some disqualified contestant uses the earlier edition of the official word authority, the MWPD. Conversely, some wealthy (or subsidized) but disqualified competitor can win that lawsuit if he can prove that his 1968 (or earlier) printing of the 75-cent work contains words that do not appear in the later version.

With the aid of the information given above, I hope that some reader of Word Ways can be helped to win a puzzle.

REVERSIBLE TAUTONYMS

Quite a few of the six-letter tautonyms that have come to light over the years can be spelled backward to produce other tautonyms. For instance, the word MOTMOT (a tropical bird), on being reversed, becomes the TOM-TOM (a kind of drum). Eight-letter reduplications have, however, stubbornly resisted all attempts to read them in reverse.

Until now, that is. An authentic pair has finally turned up. Take the word AGAL-AGAL (a gelatinous substance used as a food medium) and read it backward: what you see is LAGALAGA (a town in southeastern Assyria conquered by Assurbanipal). Although you may not be able to find this in your favorite gazetteer, it is listed in Cooper's Archaic Dictionary (Gale Research Company, Detroit, 1969).

PIANO WORDS

A piano word is a word such as BAGGAGE or DEFACED which can be played on the piano, using the notes from A to G inclusive.

Many years ago, in the comic strip Mandrake the Magician, there was an adventure that took Mandrake to the planet Venus, where he encountered creatures with lettuce-like heads. It is obvious that these Venusians were really CABBAGE-FACED -- and that is a twelve-letter piano word, the longest one known to man!