COLLOQUY

Webster's Dictionary defines colloquy as mutual discourse. Readers are encouraged to submit additions, corrections and comments about earlier articles appearing in Word Ways. Comments received up to a month prior to publication of an issue will appear in that issue.

Better late than never, Don Laycock of Canberra, Australia submitted the following Crazy California entry entitled " Mental Lament":

> It wouldn't matter
> if California's crazy
> fell off it, into the ocean -
> everyone's underwater there anyway.
> So they'd go on living,
> hanging on somehow.
> But wet or dry, who cares?

Inspired by Crazy California, Albert Wilansky of Bethlehem, Penna. jotted down a short poem, and then arranged the words alphabetically for Word Ways readers to unscramble:

> a blessing comes down each evening from God
> his infinite joy keeps loving our pod

Two readers commented on the May article " A Survey of Letter-Frequencies". Ralph Beaman pointed out that the empirical rule presented at the end of the article is reminiscent of Pareto's Principle in economics (a logarithmic law quantifying the fact that a small fraction of the people hold a large fraction of the wealth) and Zipf's Law (if objects competing with each other in size, such as cities, are listed in rank order, the product of the rank and the size is a constant). Consequently, he does not find it surprising that a pattern of this sort occurs in linguistics. David Shulman of New York, N. Y., an experienced cryptanalyst, felt that the tables presented in the article were far too specialized to be of any use to the practical cryptanalyst interested in solving substitution ciphers. (Actually, he pointed out, the use of letter-frequency tables plays a relatively small role in the solution of substitution ciphers -- letter contacts, letter-patterns, probable words and the like can be much more crucial to success.) At the outset, the article should have stated that its intention was not to deal with cryptanalysis but to extend our knowledge of words and their ways.

Dmitri Borgmann notes that Darryl Francis overlooked a large number of given name transposals in the February Word Ways. A sampling of his additions: ABEILS (Basile, Blaise, Isabel, Lesbia), AJNOS (Janos, Jason, Jonas, Sonja), ABDEELRT (Adelbert, Delberta), AEILL (Allie, Leila), ADEEILN (Adeline, Daniele), AACELLMR (Carmella, Marcella), ADEILN (Aldine, Daniel), AADIN (Diana), AEEILN (Elaine), AEHLMT (Hamlet, Thelma), ACELMR (Carmel, Marcel), AAKLR (Karla, Klara), AEENNTT (Annette, Nanette).

In regard to the article "Scrabble a la Russe" in the February issue of Word Ways, it is now clear that Nabokov's Ada played her ancient game of Flavita with the Russian edition of Scrabble manufactured by Selchow and Richter. Don Laycock, who owns such a set, reports that T, O, R and N have values of 1, U has a value of 2, Ya has a value of 3, Yu has a value of 8, and F has a value of 10 (but is doubled for being on a brown square) -- a total of 37 points, in precise agreement with the fictional game. Furthermore, his Scrabble set, unlike the English one, has 125 tiles. Don Laycock feels that this is far too many, as one gets very blocked toward the end of a game. Russian turns out to be a fairly inflexible language for adding on to existing words; although it readily compounds, there are usually minor variations in the spelling that make the compounds impossible to reach by addition of letters. The Russian "hard sign", dropped from most Russian words after 1910, is much harder to get rid of than the English Q; to date, he has found only three words that employ this letter short enough to use in a game.

Darryl Francis points out that OK has a considerable number of meanings unrelated to the well-known one whose origin was discussed in Ralph Beaman's May Word Ways article. The Times Index-Gazetteer lists a mountain in Iceland called Ok, as well as a river in New Guinea called Ok Om. Webster's Second gives ok as an obsolete past tense of the verb ache. Checking this against ache in the OED, one finds that ok is given as a 12th to 14th century form of ached. The OED also records ok as a 12th to 14th century form of ac, an obsolete conjunction meaning "but". Further checking in the OED reveals that ok is a 13th century form of the adverb eke, meaning "moreover". Finally, the OED claims that ok is a 13th to 15th century form of oak. OK?

Ralph Beaman writes in response to the article "Erotemes" in the May issue: "No, M. X. Houdini, I have no trouble in watching the COMINGS and GOINGS of my neighbors, since both words are nouns in Webster's Third. In fact, I also watch their TOINGS and FROINGS, also in Webster. Now that Webster has elected to form nouns by adding -INGS to prepositions as well as verbs, there will be no STOPPINGS. I'll go to ball games on OUTINGS and watch the INNINGS. At the sevenths come the UPPINGS and DOWNINGS for the STRETCHINGS, LOOKINGS for the AROUNDINGS, ONNINGS, OVERINGS, and UNDERINGS, both the BEFORINGS and AFTERINGS. Where is the limit? 'It doesn't sound right' is much too subjective a criterion."

Philip Cohen completes Frank Hardington's May 1971 survey of tri-
grams containing a Y and two vowels with the following five place
names from the USSR Official Standard Names gazetteer: IIYushka,
UUYekyulya, UYYaly, YUUvan-Yoki, and YYYezu (most of these
are variant spellings). Furthermore, EIY, IAY, YAA and YAO can
be upgraded to Websterian sources: Seiyuaki, piay, kyaak, and lum-
bayao. YUY is marked "foreign" in Webster; Jayuya, from the ga-
zetteer section, may be an improvement.

Dmitri Borgmann has found an even later reference to Oklahoma City
as Oklahoma than the one reported in the May Colloquy: the 1945
printing of the Funk & Wagnalls Unabridged Dictionary. However, by
the time of the 1953 printing the editors had corrected this to Okla-
homa City. He adds that the present town of Whitefield, in Haskell
County, Oklahoma, was known as Oklahoma from 1881 to 1888. Too
bad it wasn't in Oklahoma county!

David Shulman takes the editor to task for suggesting in the February
article, "A Readable Polyphonic Cipher", that a polyphonic cipher can
be adapted for secret communications. Since there is no unicity of sol-
ution (i.e., there are options for the selection of the correct letter
even when the key is known), it is an impractical cipher -- the message
recipient has to waste time making decisions as to which are the correct
letters.

Corrections: fiQH, an example of a QH bigram, is not found in Web-
ster's Third but is in the Random House unabridged. In "A Survey of
Letter-Frequencies", the first F .0228 entry should be P .0229. QN,
UO and YX should have been included in the want-list at the end of
Philip Cohen's "Initial Bigrams".

Commenting on "Web 2: Imperfect But Lovable", Darryl Francis
writes: "There can't be many errors in W2 and W3 still awaiting dis-
covery. However, it seems to me that the OED is a virgin field. I
suggest that logologists thoroughly check the spellings and orderings
of words in that dictionary. I am sure that a multitude of errors will
come to light. To start the ball rolling, the entry REUILDE appears
to be out of place, appearing between REULCERATE and REULE. If
the spelling is correct, then the word should appear between REUHDE
and REUIN. However, the word might be in its correct position but
spelled wrongly. If REUILDE is a misspelling of REULDE, then its
position is correct. However, checking the entry at RIVELLED,
which is what REUILDE is meant to be an obsolete form of, gives no
indication of this."