

Smoke Signals From Incinerators Say Ad Men Have Solved Zip Code

By Monte Noelke

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MERTZON, Texas — The Zip code system of addressing mail is gradually taking effect in the Shortgrass Country. The postmistress at our local office is overcome by its wonders. However, quality of the mail is as bad as it has ever been.

Mail order houses have ferreted out their customers' zip addresses. Owners of correspondence schools, ranging from pyramid-building colleges to zither instructors, have broken the code. Worst of all, credit departments have been tipped off on how to use the numerical designations.

I had hoped that the code method would cause enough confusion to give us some peace. Oh, I don't mean that I wanted the world to completely lose track of us, as Washington apparently has, but it would have made life a bit easier if 15 or 20 tons of junk mail had been displaced in the changeover.

Six weeks of going without a dozen or so bales of "special introductory offers" would have afforded some relief. Being able to awake in the morning in the knowledge that the book and record clubs had lost contact would be equal to a week's vacation. The thought of catalogs piling up in some distant dead letter box would have added years to our lives.

Sad to say, this didn't happen at all. In fact the situation seems to have worsened.

To get a check on my incoming mail under the Zip Code system, 30 days ago I started weighing and recording each day's receipts. At the end of the period, this how it looked:

A baby chick hatchery maintained a steady 62 ounces of advertisement per week. At this rate, by autumn the company will have sent out enough printed matter to bed down half the laying hens in Texas.

Advertisements from a music school in the East, which had me listed as an ideal prospect for 16 flute lessons, showed no change in volume; material from this institution had already reached the proportions of the litter found around the Astrodome after a sell-out crowd.

Request to send cash to all parts of the nation could be termed steady to strong. The Deep South Association To Outlaw Swamp Rats missed one week but the Rocky Mountain Association To Preserve Tree Moss filled the gap with an extra copy of their plea for money. Strangely, racist organizations were quiet, and the various refugee organizations ignored my post box.

Interstate and local insurance companies swooped in with the strongest attack. In three mail calls I received four dozen certificates of gold-plated ball point pens; a gross of coupons with which I could claim laminated copies of my children's birth certificates; and a once-in-a-lifetime offer by a burial society for a free tailor-made shroud, regardless of my size at the time of death.

This inventory of my mail undoubtedly proves that dispersers of unwanted and unwelcome mail have converted smoothly to the Zip Code era. I suppose nothing will save us from the paper onslaught now.

The Indians have been called wild savages. But at least their drums and smoke signals did not present the disposal problem that has come with our modern methods of communication.