

Stranger Things: Peculiar Sessional Papers in Alberta

When parliamentarians table material in legislative assemblies, you would likely expect to see some letter or legal-size papers. But there have been some interesting and novel items that have made it into Sessional Paper collections over the years. In this article, the author tells the story behind Alberta's quirkiest sessional papers.

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What do a hamburger, a can of caviar and Monopoly money have in common? All were tabled in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and are now part of the Legislature Library's Sessional Paper collection.

It is recorded in the *Assembly Journals* that, on March 27, 1969, the Member for Banff-Cochrane, Clarence Copithorne, "Tabled edible material (a hamburger) to sustain his argument." But what might that argument have been? Given there was no official *Hansard* until 1972, we are reliant on secondary sources for the details of what was said. According to the *Edmonton Journal*, Copithorne tabled the burger in protest of the food being served in the Legislature Building cafeteria. He commented that, "When talking about supply one thing they should supply us with right upstairs is good nourishment at noon." A foothills rancher, Copithorne later added, "I won't be happy until they fix that place up so we can get a good steak at noon."

It appears that the Member's point was taken in good spirit. The Minister of Highways, Gordon Taylor, quipped in response, "I'd like to order 65 copies of that for the house, please," one for each Member of the Assembly. Accepted as part of the official record, the burger was filed as Sessional Paper 301 and encased in resin to ensure its preservation. Included with it is a label signed by Clerk William H. MacDonald marking it "certified the original document." The burger was in the possession of the Copithorne family until 2008 when it was donated to the Library for its collection.



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Over 50 years since it was tabled in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, the hamburger is on display in the Library and continues to draw special attention from visitors. While arguably the most unusual item ever presented in the Assembly, there are other Sessional Papers that also fall outside the norm.

During his Maiden Speech in 1980, the Member for Lac La Biche-McMurray, Norman A. Weiss, tabled a can of golden caviar from Canadian lake whitefish commenting that, "You've all heard of Russian caviar; we now have Alberta-produced and marketed caviar." In 1983, Brian Lee, Member for Calgary-Buffalo, tabled a slice of LRT rail from the City of Calgary when debating a motion on urban transportation. In 1985, Lee also tabled \$4,890,000 worth of Monopoly money and two cents during a debate on the privatization of retail beer, wine, and liquor sales.

Effective February 26, 2002, the Standing Orders were amended to stipulate that tablings must be in paper form.

Sources:

"Burger Gives MLAs Food for Thought," *Edmonton Journal*, March 28, 1969, pp. 1-2.

Alberta. Legislative Assembly. *Alberta Hansard*, 19th Legislature, 2nd Session, 28 March 1980, p. 113.

Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Alberta, 16th Legislature, 2nd Session, vol. LXXV, 27 March 1969, p. 113.