



# Practical Thinking

## Minnesota, Land of 10,000 Lakes & Almost as Many Crime Novels

by Robert Brusic

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On a recent visit to Barnes and Noble I walked my cup of coffee to a table via the New Mystery shelf. I was somewhat taken aback when I saw a rack of books claiming to be Mysteries in Minnesota. It was clear that these crime stories were written by Minnesota authors or set in Minnesota. Surprisingly, I counted no less than ten authors on the shelf, including John Sandford, Larry Millett, Pj Tracy, Kent Krueger, and others—some of whom I've read, others not. Moreover, I know there are many other Minnesota mystery writers who were lurking elsewhere in the bookstore.

As I sipped my coffee I found myself puzzling over the copious quantity of fictional mayhem that shelf of books exhibited. When I moved here in 1989 from Connecticut, I was assured that I would encounter and enjoy Minnesota Nice. And to a large extent I have. All those crime novels, however, suggest that there is also a high degree of Minnesota Noir out here, at least in the fictional sense. So, I asked myself, why is there so much *noir* in a part of the country reputed for its *nice*?

Certainly other major urban settings have their fair share of mystery writers. Chicago, Los Angeles, London, and New York come to mind. In fact, there is a series of "Noir" books that are set in cities all over the United States and the world: Brooklyn Noir, Dublin Noir, Istanbul Noir, Addis Ababa Noir, Zagreb Noir, etc—a total of fifty-nine volumes of Noirs as of this writing. And, yes, there is a Minnesota Noir. There are, as well, other collections of Minnesota tales which feature mayhem and mystery, such as *Resort to Murder*, *The Silence of the Loons*, and *Fifteen Tales of Murder, Mayhem, and Malice from the Land of Minnesota Nice*. Altogether those collections represent the work of thirty-two different authors. And I know there are many other Minnesota mysteries like Andie Peterson's riveting Duluth-area *Murder for Mayor*; or the thriller centered around Father Baraga's Cross on the North Shore, *Land of Dreams*, by Vidar Sundstol; not to mention Rick Shevchik's Vikings/Green Bay football thriller, *Frozen Tundra*. And the list goes on and on.

### Minnesota Noir?

Minnesota, while large in area, is far less dense in population than other parts of the country where there are profitable mystery markets. So why does the bitter seed grow and thrive in the land of lakes? What makes Minnesota so crime worthy? I asked myself these questions. I also asked them of several mystery writers who were conducting an evening class at the University of Minnesota. The course had to do with importance of the locale in which the story is set.

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The speakers emphasized the importance of place. They asserted that the setting of a story has a voice that tells the reader where they are. Like a painting that fills in a colorful background, the setting of Minnesota contains a rich voice which mystery writers evince and mystery readers enjoy.

To the specific question ‘why Minnesota for so many writers,’ one author pointed to the support of the arts in our state. We live in a place far from other urban centers, so the arts (including mystery fiction) are encouraged and supported. The Loft was cited as the largest opportunity for writers in the country. Such care and support for the written word extends in many directions and genres; mystery fiction is one of the literary areas that benefit from all that mindful attention.

I suspect there is more to the matter. Readers seem to like a good story that gives insight into matters of good and evil, morality and social interaction. People get a lot of that from newspapers, television, and Independent Scholars’ forums, of course. But a well-crafted story can add a bit of spice for thought and imagination. For example, Andie Peterson’s book cited above contains the requisite amount of mayhem; but it also contains a spicy subtext of political chicanery that makes one nod in recognition. Larry Millett has written no fewer than seven Sherlock Holmes books set in Minnesota. While they stand as ripping tales on their own, the books also paint pictures of life, politics, and architecture in the Twin Cities in the late nineteenth century. They also weave a great deal of historical material into the plot so that the reader learns about the 1894 Hinkley fire or the great 1896 Winter Carnival (see *The Red Demon* and *The Ice Palace Murders*).

Well written mystery fiction allows readers to contemplate and investigate their context, both noir and nice, in ways that are safer than bodily walking down those mean streets or through those frenzied forests. John Sandford has written two dozen gritty books of breathless Minnesota mayhem; the body count is high in his Prey books and the action is practically non-stop. Lock the doors and stay off the streets.

One of my favorites is Roger Steljes’s *The Saint Paul Conspiracy*. My notes recall this book as “A slam-bang, thank you Sam home-grown nasty bunch of grapes (in which) a serial killer finds his prey along University Avenue...but Mac the Cop nabs him in a shoot out in the Science Center Ramp.” Not everybody’s cup of tea, perhaps; but the story, the setting, and the insights into local politics make books like this worth an afternoon or two. Steljes

also wrote *Stillwater* which contains not only a lot of local color, but also depicts first-rate police work and a successful outcome of good over evil, nice over noir.

### We see ourselves

Reading Minnesota mystery novels can be like looking into a mirror. The genre reflects and gives the reader insights into the troubles and opportunities of the local culture in which we live. For example, Mary Logue’s books are set in the area around Lake Pepin and give a sense of the fabric of small town life, often in the dead of winter (see especially *Frozen Stiff*). On this side of the Mississippi River Elizabeth Gunn has written a series of mysteries set in a small town, the detective being a person of color (see *Triple Play*). In a series of well-written books Ellen Hart details the investigative work of Jane Lawless, a lesbian restaurateur (see, for example *Hallowed Murder* and more than twenty others in the series). Pete Hautman in *Mortal Nuts* gives a spot-on spoof of life and crimes at the Minnesota State Fair. Without belaboring the point, it might fairly be said that by reading a mystery novel set in Minnesota one is immersed in the culture of the upper midwest.

It must also be said that people read and often forget mystery stories. There are many of them; not all are that memorable. One also might make the claim that we eat and forget countless meals, yet we are fed and nourished in the eating. I would suggest that the very best mysteries, like the very best dinners, can be both memorable and sustaining. Such a book is Kent Krueger’s *Ordinary Grace*. Krueger has written over a dozen very fine books featuring Cork O’Connor which give a realistic picture of the Minnesota wilderness area as well as trenchant insights into the Anishinabe way of life. *Ordinary Grace* breaks the pattern, becoming a story about tragedy, crime, death, and grace. It is a haunting mystery novel, set in a small Minnesota town in the early 1960s. Krueger admits that the setting augments the emotion of the story. He took pieces of New Ulm, St. Peter, and Granite Falls and created the small town of New Bremen. This mystery is not a religious book; but it is a spiritual book. It builds a sturdy bridge between noir and nice.

Many people may and do dismiss mystery stories because they seem light weight and forgettable. Yet they are the bread and butter of the publishing world; and notably they boost the circulation figures in most public libraries. In this regard it might be said that the mystery story performs an economic and public good. But I submit that Minnesota mysteries, which are plentiful and bountiful, do more than

boost trade. They often tell a good story with believable characters, a story that gives insight into the human condition as it is shaped by the landscape of our state. Good and evil work their way into the lives and activities of the people in fact as well as in fiction. The landscape, the weather, our political life, and our various institutions are all part of our collective narrative. All that, drawn together with a fertile literary scene, makes our state a pretty good place to live; but it also makes for crime fiction where mysterious suspicions are confirmed and confirmed expectations are suspicious.

As if to demonstrate this state of affairs one need look no further than an advertising blurb for a recently published thriller by Nevada Barr, *Destroyer Angel* (the third crime novel she has set in Minnesota). “In this gripping installment of the Anna Pigeon series,” goes the blurb, “the

park ranger’s survival skills are put to the ultimate test in the Minnesota backcountry when armed thugs kidnap her four friends from their campsite—and only Anna can track them down before it’s too late.” And she does, barely.

Without doubt, Minnesota mysteries have become a recognizable and acceptable arena for crime and sleuthing, for sin and grace, for nuttiness and hopefulness, for speculation and conciliation, for crime writers and crime readers...for fire and ice, for noir and nice. To invoke Augustine of Hippo, who long ago wrote: *Tolle lege*, take and read!

*Robert Brusic is pastor emeritus of Luther Seminary and an avid mystery reader.*

## ***Tracking a National Obsession: the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the JFK Assassination***

*by Mike Woolsey*

Last November 22 marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. As expected, the event was accompanied by a plethora of journalism. Much of it was merely nostalgic, but some of it focused, yet again, on solving that mystery of all murder mysteries.

Two questions arise in response to the media barrage. First, was anything new revealed about the case? Second, will our national obsession with the case ever end? To the first I answer, yes and no; to the second, not yet.

One item that was news to me is that despite the release of 5 million pages of documents by the Assassination Records Review Board (ARRB) in the 1990s, there are still some 1,100 documents that the ARRB “agreed” to withhold for national security reasons. As reported, “several hundred of the still classified pages concern a deceased CIA agent, George Joannides, whose activities just before the assassination and during a government investigation years later, have tantalized researchers for years.” By law, all records pertaining to the assassination are to be released by 2017, but it is unknown if the CIA will petition to keep some classified beyond that point. As one frustrated researcher says, “You have to wonder what is so important in a 50-year-old document.”<sup>1</sup> I agree it’s suspicious, but, thus far, it’s no more than that.

More compelling is a new, video documentary that was shown multiple times on cable television late last November: *JFK: The Smoking Gun*.<sup>2</sup> Almost none of the evidence presented in this documentary is new. Virtually all of it is gleaned from other sources: a) a 1992 book, *Mortal Error: The Shot That Killed JFK*;<sup>3</sup> b) eyewitness interviews conducted by the ARRB in the mid-1990s; and c) the Warren Report of 1964. What is new is the amount of attention the documentary pays to this evidence.

### **New look at evidence**

In large part, it’s the story of Howard Donahue (1922-1999), one of three ballistics experts employed by the Warren Commission to test fire Oswald’s rifle to see if three shots could be fired at, and hit, a moving target within the time frame of 5.6 seconds. Donahue was the only one who could do it, and only after three tries. This experience piqued Donahue’s interest in the Warren Report, and he spent the next 25 years examining the evidence that supported its conclusions. He finally concluded that the Warren Report is largely bogus, based on six pieces of alleged evidence:

- 1) The trajectory of the fatal head shot had been based on rough estimates and untenable assumptions. Donahue’s analysis of the angle from which Oswald fired, the position of JFK’s head (as shown in the Zapruder film of the event), and the location of the

*continued on page 4*

entry wound, taken together, indicate that the fatal shot was more likely to have originated from some position other than Oswald's window in the Texas School Book Depository.

2) The bullet that hit JFK's head was of the frangible, or exploding, type, inconsistent with the ammunition Oswald's rifle fired. This conclusion is supported by test firings of both kinds of ammunition, as well as by autopsy x-rays that revealed about 40 tiny pieces of metal embedded in JFK's brain.

3) The entrance wound in the back of JFK's head was too small (6 mm) to have been created by a bullet of the size fired from Oswald's rifle (6.5 mm).

4) Numerous witnesses smelled gunpowder in Dealey Plaza, at ground level, immediately following the shots. But Oswald was 60 feet above ground level with a 15-mile-an-hour wind blowing toward him. As alleged in the documentary, gunpowder smoke does not descend 60 feet against a prevailing wind in a few seconds.

5) Numerous witnesses, including several Secret Service agents at the scene, reported hearing the last two shots so close together that they were nearly simultaneous.

6) There was a Secret Service agent in the car immediately behind the President's limousine who was brandishing an AR-15 rifle at the time of the fatal head shot (and Donahue's reconstruction of the fatal bullet's trajectory led directly back to him).

The first three of these "facts" are of the ballistics variety, and each may be challenged to some extent. On a televised, panel discussion following the documentary, a forensic expert disputed that an exact bullet trajectory could be determined in this case, due to there being only a entry wound to go by, and no corresponding, bullet-sized exit hole in JFK's skull. There was only a gaping wound on the right side of the skull, which measured 10 x 13 centimeters. Donahue acknowledged this difficulty (both for the Warren Commission and himself), but contended that his thesis was based on a more tenable set of assumptions.

Second, a forensic pathology expert of the House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA) testified in 1978 that the fatal head wound was, in fact, not inconsistent with the type of ammunition fired by Oswald's rifle. Eventually, there were as many as five other ballistics experts who sided with his opinion, all of them objectively documented in *Mortal*

*Error*; but Donahue remained adamant, confident that his knowledge of ballistics was second to none.

Third, the .5 mm difference between the caliber of Oswald's ammunition and the measurement of the entry wound in JFK's head is so small that it is easy to imagine that the measurement could be mistaken. Donahue alleged, however, as a well known fact, that a bullet typically makes an entry hole slightly larger than its caliber. So, the entry hole should have been larger than 6.5 mm if made by Oswald, making the bullet/entry-wound discrepancy more believable.

The second three pieces of Donahue's evidence are of the eyewitness variety, and are, accordingly, harder to dispute. It's difficult to explain away so many witness accounts, both of gun-smoke at ground-level and the nearly simultaneous shots. Likewise, there is photographic evidence of the AR-15 in the hands of a Secret Service agent riding in the back-up car, but there is conflicting testimony as to exactly when he had the gun in his hands. The photographed agent testified that he did not pick up the rifle until after the fatal head shot, but other witnesses, including three of his Secret Service colleagues, indicated that he had already picked it up by that time.

### **An astounding conclusion**

**F**rom all this alleged evidence, both ballistic and eyewitness, Donahue drew the astounding conclusion that JFK's fatal head shot was accidental, caused by an inadvertent pull of the trigger as the car in which the Secret Service agent was standing lurched forward.

Admittedly, this conclusion is hard to swallow. The idea that a chance, unintentional shot would hit, of all the possible points in Dealey Plaza, JFK's head, and at nearly the exact moment that Oswald was attempting to shoot at the same target, seems so improbable as to defy belief. Famed, courtroom prosecutor Vincent Bugliosi, in his Oswald-did-it-alone epic, *Reclaiming History: The Assassination of John F. Kennedy*,<sup>4</sup> argues this exact point. But I would observe, in passing, that probability is not certainty; and, in arguing from probability, Bugliosi ignores the rule of logical deduction made famous by Arthur Conan Doyle's fictional Sherlock Holmes: "...when you have eliminated all which is impossible, then whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."<sup>5</sup>

But even waiving the improbable conclusion, there is much in Donahue's analysis and argument that is compelling. Although each of his ballistic "facts" (i.e. different bullet trajectory, frangible bullet, too small an entry wound)

may be challenged, if any one of them is true it proves that Oswald was not a lone assassin, and that he couldn't even have fired the fatal head shot. Of the less disputable eyewitness evidence, the gun-smoke testimony either supports this same conclusion or contradicts the Secret Service contention that no shots were fired by its agents that day.

Most compelling of all, though, is the "ear-witness" testimony concerning the closeness of the last two shots. It has long been established that Oswald's rifle could not have been fired twice within 2.3 seconds. Donahue himself, the only one of the Warren Commission's ballistics experts who was able to hit the moving target three times within 5.6 seconds, was not able to fire two shots in less than 2.3 seconds. But witness testimony indicates much less time than 2.3 seconds between the last two shots.

In another recent, video documentary, *JFK: The Lost Bullet*,<sup>6</sup> two witnesses who had been standing on Elm Street directly below Oswald's window each separately testified that the cadence of the three shots was "bam..., bam, bam," with no pause between the last two "bams." One Secret Service agent who was riding in the car five feet behind the presidential limo testified that he actually saw the shot "that hit the President about four inches down from the right shoulder. A second shot followed immediately, and hit the right rear high of the President's head" (emphasis added). Another Secret Service agent at the scene testified that after hearing the first shot "I opened the door and prepared to get out of the car. In the instant that my left foot touched the ground, I heard two more bangs and realized that they must be gun shots" (emphasis added). Yet another Secret Service agent testified that "I heard two reports that I thought were shots and that appeared to me completely different in sound than the first report and were in such rapid succession that there seemed to be no time element between them" (emphasis added). Ironically, this agent is the one Donahue thought accidentally fired the fatal bullet.

None of this exonerates Oswald. Bugliosi makes the definite, prosecutorial argument for Oswald's guilt, but

he proves no more than that Oswald fired his rifle at the President and that he intended to kill him. In other words, he proves assault, and perhaps battery, but not murder. On the other hand, Donahue's investigation provides strong evidence that somebody else was responsible for JFK's fatal head wound that day.

To those who are weary of this 50-year-old investigation, I would observe that it has progressively gotten better. Most of the wild-eyed conspiracy theories of past decades now seem exhausted for lack of evidence. They have been replaced by a more focused and scholarly view of the case's hard evidence. *Mortal Error* and *Reclaiming History* are cases in point. Each of them was at least 20 years in the making and deserves praise for painstaking scholarship. Of the two, however, *Mortal Error* takes the more objective view, despite its improbable conclusion. For all its extensive detail, *Reclaiming History* too often betrays the adversarial spirit of the prosecuting attorney, more concerned with a conviction of probable guilt than a discovery that accounts for all the facts.

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<sup>1</sup> David Porter, "Still a Mystery, 50 years later," *Minneapolis Star Tribune* 18 August, 2013: A9.

<sup>2</sup> *JFK: The Smoking Gun*, dir. Malcolm McDonald, perf. Larry Day and Tod Fennell, Muse, 2013

<sup>3</sup> Bonar Menninger, *Mortal Error: The Shot that Killed JFK*, (Kansas City: Hunter's Moon, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Vincent Bugliosi, *Reclaiming History: The Assassination of President John F. Kennedy*, (New York: Norton, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Sherlock Holmes Quotes, ed. Kameron Kent Searle, 2013 <<http://www.sherlockholmesquotes.com/Sherlock-Holmes-on-Deduction-and-Deductive-Reasoning.html>>

<sup>6</sup> *JFK: The Lost Bullet*, DVD, 1 disc, National Geographic Channel, 2011.

## *Buoyancies: A Ballast Master's Log*

*Buoyancies: A Ballast Master's Log.* by Joseph A. Amato. Crossings Press (Marshall MN) & Spoon River Poetry Press (Granite Falls MN), 2014, 135 pp, \$20. Also available online: <[www.Josephaamato.com/publications.html](http://www.Josephaamato.com/publications.html)> and <[www.ellispress.com](http://www.ellispress.com)>

Poet used to be a cabinet-level position. The king and his nobles sat around the fire pondering past events and those who acted in them. To call up “past,” they were served by their bard (or “scop,” in Anglo Saxon) who, partly as historian, partly cheerleader, recited vivid details of persons and events. To aid in memory (for much of this was before books), poets used beat or metrics and also metaphors and sometimes rhyme, as mnemonics.

Lately it might seem, if one judges by the too-frequent measure of how much money we allot, that the nearest we come to a communal poet might be Taylor Swift—not exactly cabinet-level. But good poets remember that they are speaking to, and sometimes for, particular hearers.

Joseph Amato, a member of MISF who as it happens is an historian, keeps in mind to whom his poems speak, and he speaks with a personal honesty and a wide-ranging curiosity. He uses rhyme or metrics only occasionally, as grace notes rather than a form, but his focus remains on communicating something that engages him.

Often it is family, a big part of his life, e.g. his remembrance of his grandmother Frances Boodry, a neat, colorful portrait. Other portrait-poems, some full of complexities he himself struggles with, seem less accessible to those of us who do not know the person and the relationship to him.

Observations of locations or thoughts also appear as he sees them, perplexities and all. I enjoyed the poem on page 53, on the periodic table and nuclear power, and the poem on page 52, quoted below.

### *Near the Headwaters*

Here, far north,  
In Minneapolis,  
A bridge cascaded down  
Into the spring-flushing Mississippi.  
In one submerged car  
A driver was found  
Floating free of his safety belt.  
He had scratched a single word  
On the windshield  
With a new wedding ring—  
“Love.”

The book is handsomely produced, with fine cover art and a thoughtful title and general metaphoric frame. We hope to see more contributions published in greater Minnesota and more members and visitors to our programs who come in from Marshall and other out-state areas. They are welcome additions to MISF.

Ginny Hansen

November 16

## Joe Amato: *Compass of Twos*

Joe Amato, a popular speaker for MISF, brought his latest project, *Compass of Twos*, to the group for their November 16, 2013 meeting. *Compass of Twos* is a book that Mr. Amato has written; he has not been able to sell it to a publisher. Most publishers have told him that idea is too big and not well defined. He hoped that presenting his ideas to a Scholars' meeting would gain him some insight into how to make the book more acceptable to a publisher.

The thesis behind *Compass of Twos* is that humans tend to group things into opposites: warm vs. cold; left vs. right; Republican vs. Democrat; moving vs. stationary. (This last distinction is very important in human survival since the recognition that something “is moving wakes up the synapses.”)

Such classification is part of the way in which humans organize the world around them. Even our prepositions (in, out, around) express how things are organized relative to one another.

Amato involved the group by putting a collection of shells and rocks from the sea shore in Florida on the desk and asking how people would sort them. Some people would sort by use; others, by origin; some, by parts vs. whole. It was clear that no one would have any trouble sorting the items, but that several classification systems could be applied.

Mr. Amato sees such human-made groupings as points on a compass with East being the point at which similar and dissimilar meet. West is contradictions and North and South are polar opposites. He allowed that paradoxes (things that seem to mean two things at once) are a big problem for this image.

Audience comments tended to support the publishers' objections. Twos were not the only way to organize things. Threes and fractions would work as well. In fact it was suggested that the opposition of “you're with us or against us” was an especially harsh way to organize the world.

Amato himself could see some of these criticisms. He agreed that metaphors tend to jump around and join or separate things in ways that do not necessarily correspond to classification. Further he was willing to admit that opposites (as in A or B) can be changing all the time so that comparisons do not remain valid. In fact, he wound up saying that the book was probably about distinction and comparison, rather than about twos as such.

Echoing French philosopher Eliade, he said that we create classification systems because we cannot deal with chaos. We think we can organize time, but find we cannot. Being and thought outrun our number systems.

Dr. Amato is a retired professor of history from Southwest Minnesota State in Marshall. He is the author of several books, among them *Surfaces; A History*, which was reviewed in the last PT journal and *Buoyancies: A Ballast Master's Log*; which is reviewed on the preceding page of this journal.

*Editor's note:* A short segment of a YouTube video interview with Joe Amato can be found at <[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J\\_FPHcTjgM0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_FPHcTjgM0)>. In this video Amato talks about local history and other stories.

**January 18**

## Gus Fenton: Wolves and Humans

Gus Fenton amply demonstrated the validity of his topic when he addressed the MISF meeting January 18, 2014 on "Wolves and Humans: What a long strange trip it's been." Fenton, a biomedical researcher, who is now a volunteer for the Wolf Center in Ely, MN, described the love-hate relationship that persists between humans and wolves. Which is say, we have no idea how the wolves feel, but most humans either love them or hate them.

Wolves are appealing to humans because they have some characteristics that are close to human behavior: they live and work in cooperative family groups for rearing their young. A theoretical pack will have a breeding couple and three pups. In a typical spring a couple will have perhaps as many as five more pups, which the older pups will participate in rearing. This group will roam an area as large as 50 square miles. A wolf is sexually mature at the age of one year and has a life span of about seven years. It is a vicious, short life, said Fenton.

Wolves have historically been hated and hunted by humans because they are predators on deer, elk, and cattle. Wolves are entirely carnivores, eating once every 7 to 10 days. How

people feel about them depends on how close the wolves live to livestock. A good indication of their iffy status in current culture is their position on the endangered species list. Wolves were in all parts of the US in the 1800s; the Ojibwe, for example, venerate wolves, and Lewis and Clark saw many wolves on their epic journey to the West. However, a war of extermination began in 1818 as the West began to be settled and settlers protected their livestock. There was a wolf bounty in Minnesota as early as 1849; by 1914, wolves had been entirely eliminated from Yellowstone Park; and by 1970, Minnesota was the only American state where grey wolves still existed in the wild.

In 1973, wolves were put on the Endangered Species list (which meant they could not be hunted). Under the protection of the act, wolves expanded from Minnesota to Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. In 1995, they were reintroduced (over objections from local ranchers) into Yellowstone Park and the surrounding area.

Between 2003 and 2012, wolves were on and off the endangered list. There are now about 100 wolves in Yellowstone in spite of local opposition. As of 2012, wolves are off the list and the population has stabilized in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the Upper Peninsula. Today we have between 2200 and 3700 wolves in Minnesota.

Wolves are critical in controlling the deer population, which is estimated at about 1,000,000 for Minnesota. Wolves kill about 45,000 deer a year. (Hunters kill 200,000 and cars, about 40,000.)

Fenton wanted to address the question of why we need to protect wolves. In the first place, we do not know enough about the balance of nature to be sure of what will happen if we kill off the wolves. Wolves keep coyotes and deer in check. By keeping the deer in check, wolves protect the undergrowth and trees that deer (who are very prolific) would destroy.

Furthermore, wolves were revered by the first peoples. They function in packs and families as humans do. In addition, they are striking to see and their howling is inspiring. Actually, Fenton pointed out, we have taught wolves to fear people. There are only three incidents of attacks by wolves on humans in the last 100 years.

Fenton is currently involved in research to see if it is possible to use sound waves to deter wolves from attacking cattle.

February 15

## William Hoffman: Shifting Currents of Bioscience

The “Shifting Currents of BioScience Innovation” was the topic of the talk by William Hoffman at the February meeting of the MISF. Hoffman is the author (with Leo Furcht) of a forthcoming book *The Biologist’s Imagination; Innovation in the Biosciences*. Hoffman gave a preview of some of the material in his book. The book is published by Oxford University press and was released at the beginning of June.

Hoffman began by giving an overview of the advances in biological innovation and invention that have taken place in the last three-fourths of a century: the invention (1952) of the polio vaccine is a convenient starting point, followed by such things as modified corn, synthetic bacteria, and genome sequencing, to give just three examples from hundreds that could be cited. Hoffman’s point was that the speed of technological change challenges economics and economic life; our purposeful intervention in the biological sciences has passed beyond making agricultural crops more productive to tinkering with human life.

Molecular sciences have led the change. About 1970 there was a revolution in molecular biology and it now seems as though it might be possible to restore extinct species. Another rising field is the invention of biological drugs, which can be vastly effective but are also very expensive. It is now possible to engineer a species of bacteria and may soon be possible to produce a synthetic life form. Money spent on Research and Development in the Life Sciences is “the highest of any field,” said Hoffman.

Hoffman also pointed out that bioscience research tends to concentrate in clusters around research information. One such cluster is here in Minnesota, where both UMN and Mayo contribute to information. Another large cluster is the Biopolis in Singapore, which is drawing talent from all over Asia. The scope of the Biopolis is not limited to biomedical research but also includes agricultural research.

Moreover, information, such as genetic sequencing, can be digitally distributed quickly around the world. Compare this transmission to the time it took to introduce potatoes from the New World to the Old World, or the time it took for Old World diseases to show up in the New World. We have entered an entirely different biological (and philosophical) landscape.

Ethical concerns arise in this encounter with biological technology. Genetically engineered crops will have an effect on the environment; human stem cell research impacts the concept of human dignity; genetic research has a bearing on human privacy. Hoffman especially pointed out that privacy is very hard to protect in the world of biometric engineering.

Biohacking is a now serious threat in this new world. As technologies come into the hands of “young” people, there will be challenges, says Hoffman. Neither hackers nor companies have much motivation to protect either privacy or environments. Our future depends on strong government structures, he said. Nonetheless, neither the private sector nor certain large corporations (Monsanto in particular) accept regulatory governance. He predicts that some incident involving hackers will eventually cause the government to intervene with stronger regulations about the sharing of genetic and biological information.

In answer to audience questions, Hoffman articulated a point of view that we have to distinguish between fear of change and the evidence that things can be changed for the better. As we advance into the unseen world of bioscientific exploration, we “have to take on faith that it will all work out.”

March 15

## Chiat and Kilde: Houses of Worship in the Twin Cities

Lectures presented through the MISF lecture series are always stimulating and challenging. The presentation on March 15 was doubly so when two of the leading authorities on religious architecture and sacred space presented a program on Twin Cities Neighborhoods: Houses of Worship: 1850 to 1924.

Dr. Marilyn Chiat and Dr. Jeanne Kilde met at the University of Minnesota and since then have shared an interest in America’s religious architecture. A particular focus has been the role of the houses of worship built by the many different ethnic and religious groups that have settled in the Twin Cities neighborhoods.

Chiat began the presentation by reminding the Scholars that it is diversity that make the United States unique. We often take our freedom to worship for granted, yet it is this freedom that has surrounded us with an incredible diversity of religious architecture and faiths.



The study of ethnic diversity and religion is often approached with a focus on one group at a time, even when neighbors of other faiths and traditions were right next door to each other. Chiat and Kilde wanted their work to acknowledge not only the wide diversity of religions and ethnic groups but they also wanted to “uncover the complexity of interactions.

Ten neighborhoods along the river were chosen: Downtown Minneapolis, St. Anthony, Near North Side, Northeast, Cedar-Riverside, Downtown Saint Paul, West Side Flats, Rondo, Frogtown, and Lowertown. They began documenting all houses of worship within these areas but realized that to understand what they were looking at, they needed to look also at other places where people gathered such as schools, clubs, social and political halls and even saloons.

With the expanded research, the second stage moved into oral interviews. Twenty-seven interviews were completed which represented all of the selected neighborhoods (including several interviews with individuals over 100 years old.) Previously untold stories led in new directions. For example, Chiat told about research on the 510 Hebrew peddlers who were a common sight at one time in the Twin Cities but now are mostly forgotten.

By now their project had grown far beyond the original expectations. Original thoughts of writing a book changed to plans for developing a website. Other challenges remained. How was the historian to show change over time? As Chiat said, congregations were enormously peripatetic. How could one illustrate the relationships groups had with each other? What could be done to help historians think spatially when looking at a neighborhood’s history?

Such questions led to the third stage of the project, a sequence of three time-specific interactive online maps for each neighborhood which illustrated locations and identities of ethnic enclaves, houses of worship, and settlement houses. The historians and researchers in the audience were captivated as Kilde talked about a new process of digital humanities which she referred to as the wave of the future. She showed how layers of maps were created and how layers can be added on an ongoing basis. She cautioned that the technology is changing so rapidly that the researcher needs to be careful and attention needs to be paid to what is accurate data as hundreds of sites are included.

Even though this is still a work-in-progress, it has already found applications in a number of areas, not the least of

which is helping to show recent immigrant groups that what they are experiencing is not new.

The research has been given to the Immigration History Research Center at the UMN and can be accessed through them at <[www.housesofworship.umn.edu](http://www.housesofworship.umn.edu)>.

Nancy Luther Powell

April 19

## ***Klein: The Poetic Life***

April is national poetry month and in honor of poetry, Evelyn Klein spoke to the Scholars on April 19 about the writing of her recent book, *Seasons of Desire: What I Discovered Along the Way*. (Northstar Press: St. Cloud, 2012)

She began by describing how the book happened. In 2008, when many people lost their jobs, Klein also found that she had to re-educate herself. Her public education job ended, so she decided to write full-time and teach writing as a side line—rather than the reverse.

Since she came from a family of engineers who had persistently reinvented themselves, she realized that she should not be discouraged by having to re-imagine her world. Education, according to Klein, goes on throughout adult life. She described how education had helped her grow up in various stages: physically, professionally, spiritually, and psychologically.

*Seasons of Desire* was written to help people deal with and be comfortable with change. (*Editor’s note: Klein’s book was reviewed in this journal in October of 2012.*)

(Klein had formerly worked in South Saint Paul and crossed the Mississippi River every day on the way to work; she observed that the river changed everyday, a sort of a metaphor for the change all around us in our lives.)

Illustrating her book was a step into new territory for Klein. She had had art lessons from her father and one of her previous books (*From Here Across the Bridge*) was illustrated by him). Now she finds that she enjoys doing the drawings for her books and that the artwork is another dimensions for her poetic vision. In addition, some of the illustrations have an independent appeal outside of the book. She had some of them with her.

Klein credits her parents for her success as a writer. Her father was an artist who did not follow rules and recipes. On the other hand, her mother kept the family in reality.

She was self-disciplined and showed that the physical side of life supports the creative side. “Mom set the scene and we revolved around her.”

Klein’s experience as a writing teacher makes her think that there are lot of books “resident in a lot of hearts.” The most difficult hurdle is self-censorship and self-criticism. For some reason, both editors and friends try to discourage writers. She advised that people write and then ask for advice later. “Definitely don’t put too much stock in writers groups.”

May 17

## Schwie: Writing Biography

In his talk titled “Writing Biography: A Curious Succession of Circumstances,” Dale Schwie told his audience both about Herbert Gleason and about how he (Schwie) came to be writing a biography of Gleason.

Herbert Wendell Gleason (1855-1937) was a Congregational minister from 1885–1898. After he retired from the ministry, he became a photographer. He was especially interested in nature photography and took many photos of places that Henry David Thoreau wrote about.

Gleason was married to Lulie Wadsworth Rounds Gleason, a talented musician and artist in her own right. “And worthy of a biography of her own,” according to Schwie.

Dale Schwie is a member of the MISE, a retired photographer, a Thoreau enthusiast, and an independent scholar who came upon a trove of Gleason’s photos “though a curious succession of circumstances.” He is now writing a biography of Gleason which will be published by Nodin Press.

Gleason, ordained in 1885, was an excellent administrator and church builder. After graduating from Anodver seminary, his first call was in Otter Tail County where he built a church.

He served several other churches in Minnesota, but eventually became the editor of *The Kingdom*, a Congregational newsletter. Gleason was a prolific writer and an energetic networker, but *The Kingdom* had somewhat socialist leanings and was eventually put out of business by a lawsuit.

Then the Gleasons moved to Boston, where Gleason began to photograph places that Henry David Thoreau had visited. Eventually Gleason broadened his sights to take photos of many of the national parks and other natural sites. Gleason went on to become a sought-after lecturer on nature and the national parks.

So how, in this curious succession, did Dale Schwie come to find out about Herbert Gleason? Schwie was visiting in Concord, Massachusetts, in 1976, when he saw a poster for an illustrated lecture by Roland Robbins, a “pick and shovel” historian who had found the exact location of Thoreau’s house at Walden Pond. Schwie attended the lecture (he still has the advertising poster) and introduced himself to Robbins.

When Robbins found out that Schwie was a photographer from Minnesota, He was overjoyed. He explained to Schwie that he (Robbins) had boxes of Gleason negatives—7000 or 8000 negatives to be exact. The first 100 or so of these photographs were from Minnesota and Robbins hoped that Schwie would be of assistance in identifying them.

Further, wondered Robbins (in the days before the internet) whether there was any more material on Gleason in the libraries in Minnesota. It turns out that there is a lot of material on Gleason, and/or correspondence with him, in various archives here. The University and the Minnesota Historical Society have extensive files, as does the Otter Tail Historical Society.

Schwie became intrigued and has built up a fund of new information about Gleason. As an independent scholar, Schwie wondered if he would ever have a chance to share his knowledge. His first break was an opportunity to present “Literature and Landscape: the photography of Herbert W. Gleason and the Writings of Henry David Thoreau” at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts in a program sponsored by the Minneapolis Athenaeum. This talk was a great break because it gave Schwie coverage in *Arts* magazine which eventually brought him a wider audience.

With this exposure, Schwie found that Nodin Press was interested in publishing a biography of Gleason, on which Schwie is currently working.

## Editor's Note: On mystery and history

We have jokingly called this issue of the MISF journal our mystery issue: partly because it deals with mystery stories and partly because it deals with the assassination of JFK—still one of the unsolved mysteries of American history. I am grateful to both Robert Brusica and Mike Woolsey for their thoughtful contributions on this theme. Since mystery stories are regarded as frivolous by some, as Robert Brusica says, it is probably worth underlining his conviction that for many people mystery stories play an important role in the assessment of the world, whether there is truly right and wrong, and which one will prevail. Probably the enduring fascination of the JFK assassination also lies in this nexus, since, as Mike Woolsey points out, we still do not know exactly who the bad guys were and we definitely do not know why. This lack of knowing unsettles our world view and makes us anxious for a clear answer which history, unlike most mystery stories, does not seem to want to provide.

While I am on the subject of history, I want to relate a short account of another project on which I am working—a book for the Weavers Guild of Minnesota on the occasion of their 75th anniversary. Anyone who has worked with a committee will likely sympathize with me when I say that books written by committee are far harder to produce than books written by an individual.

But I am aiming at a deeper point. In putting together a brief history of the guild, I used the newsletters, which while not a deep source, at least provided me with the thoughts and words of several people—on paper. I drew from the sources what I needed and filled in a fairly complete history of the organization up to late 2012. At that time, the guild went to an entirely on-line newsletter which is mostly written by one person. Not only it is frustrating to a researcher to have to read through digital information (which is far harder to keep track of than printed information) but I miss the breadth of voices that showed up in the printed newsletter.

I can do nothing about the historical records of the Weavers Guild, which after all is not a historical, research, or scholarly organization, but I do urge everyone who reads this editorial to think about writing down on paper things you would like people to know about what you are doing and thinking. The records you create as letters, diary entries, scholarly reports, family albums, or articles in journals such as this one may someday be an important record of our “digital” age.

To return to my opening theme, some mysteries are inevitable, but, for the sake of those who come after us, we should shed as much light as we can on what we are doing and thinking at the present time. Do let me know if you have an illuminating article that is begging to be written.

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## Upcoming MISF Events

**Saturday, June 21, 10 a.m., Hosmer Library.** Annual meeting and Rhoda Lewin Annual Lecture: **The Arab Spring and Developments in Egypt and Syria.** Speakers: Amin Kader and Wael Khouli

The Arab Spring has been one of the most dramatic and important events of the 21st century. To help us understand what is going, we have enlisted natives of the countries currently most in the news, Egypt and Syria.

**Amin Kader** is an associate professor at Augsburg College where he has taught in the Department of Business Administration as well as Islamic Studies since 1974. He is a native of Egypt where he received a Mcomm from the University of Cairo. **Wael Khouli** is a Syrian American physician and hospital administrator at Health East Care System in Saint Paul. He earned his medical degree from Damascus University and received an MBA from the Yale School of Management.

This regular meeting will take place at Hosmer Library in Minneapolis. The speakers will begin at about 10:30, after a short annual meeting at which we will elect new board members for MISF. This meeting is free and open to the public.

**Thursday, July 24, 7 p.m. Minneapolis Institute of Arts.** "Landscape Remembered: Art and the Changing World." A tour of paintings at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts led by docent and MISF member Robert Brusich. Meet at the information desk in the museum lobby. All are welcome.

**Saturday, August 16, MISF picnic at Cherokee Park in Saint Paul.** Bring a dish to pass. We'll start to gather around 10:30 and eat around noon. Guests are welcome.

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