From Library Stacks to Stage Door: Independent Scholars and Performance

By Jane Curry

No longer must scholars think of disseminating their research only through the publication of books, essays, and articles, or through the presentation of lectures, speeches, and conference papers. No more must the passion which drives us and the delight we derive from our investigations take flight when we share the results of our inquiries. Instead, the same kind of engagement with primary and secondary sources, the basic tenets of research, and the shaping of a vision or point of view that traditionally leads a scholar to publish can take an entirely different path that arrives "on stage." All dressed up and ready to go, scholars can perform their findings—they are historical figures, literary characters, or representatives of particular cultural traditions. This provides a "shared text" that can serve to introduce their audiences to an unfamiliar figure, or offer a reinterpretation of a figure they thought they knew, or point out connections between prevalent ideas of one time period and another.

The type of program described above is the Chautauqua, an idea that flourished for a long time in American culture. Begun in 1874 on the shores of Chautauqua Lake, New York, this popular educational movement united the respectability of the formal lecture-lecture circuit with the spangles of the stage, yielding a combination of education, inspiration, and entertainment that drew enthusiastic audiences until its demise in 1932.

Heymann's Combine Music and Scholarship

Ann and Charlie Heymann will speak on the music and myth of the Irish harp on Saturday, May 10, at 10:00 a.m. at the Hennepin County Historical Society. The lecture and demonstration by the Heymanns will feature their intriguing research into the traditions of the Clarsach (Irish wire-strung harp) pronounced klar-shuk. The rich musical and mythological tradition will be illustrated with slides from their extensive iconography, stories about the harp translated from the Gaelic, and samples of the haunting music Ann's fingers bring to life.
Message from the President

Susan Margot Smith

Mary Catherine Bateson tells us that her new book, *Composing a Life*, is about "life as an improvisatory art, about the ways we combine familiar and unfamiliar components in response to new situations, following an underlying grammar and an evolving aesthetic." She develops that theme in page after page of rich observations about its applicability to the life of the individual and to the life of the planet.

In addition to many other things, the book is a wonderful trail companion for the independent scholar. I think it’s well worth the few hours it takes to read, and I recommend it to you.

As is often the case when I discover these essays, I am also attracted to them for what they have to say that might help us to strengthen or enliven the Forum. This time I find the message reaffirming of the basic choices we have made so far. Improvisation is the perfect word for the process by which we have created programs, sought out co-sponsors, and identified mutual objectives to pursue with other organizations. The steady increase in our membership, as well as interest expressed in working cooperatively with the Forum, testify to its intellectual vitality and its staying power as an organizational entity.

I think we are ready, as a distinctive intellectual genre and structure, to establish new working relationships with traditional educational organizations. I am thinking of academic institutions, the public school systems, the state department of higher education, professional associations, and libraries throughout the state. Those are to name only a few.

Improvising a bit, the Board has taken some first steps in that direction with encouraging results. With Roger Sween’s help, 130 libraries have been sent a first mailing to introduce them to the Minnesota Independent Scholars’ Forum and to the concept of independent scholarship. Also, at the invitation of the University of Minnesota and the State Department of Education we helped formulate working issues for the delegates who will be attending the governor’s pre-White House Conference of Libraries and Information Services in September. And as president of the Forum, I recently spoke to planning committees of the Society for 18th Century Studies and the Upper Midwest Regional Meeting of the American Academy of Religion about how independent scholars can be fully included in the work of these associations. The response from the committees was resourceful and friendly, and we plan to build on it with these groups and others in the months ahead. We have similar plans with other academic and educational institutions in Minnesota.

Our financial situation has also been "improvised" as we have grown, but in this sphere improvisation is no longer adequate. It is hardly original to argue that an organization needs a steady source of income and a broad base of support, but I will advance the argument anyway.

I believe "steady income" is more likely with a broad financial base, so it is the latter that concerns me here. Breadth, for the Forum—in my opinion, involves income of three different sorts: membership dues and annual contributions, project grants from funding agencies, and private gifts from friends of the Forum. The first we obtain by acquiring and serving a strong membership, the second by creating innovative programs that interest funders, and the third by committing ourselves anew to the principle that teaching and learning are the right and responsibility of everyone in our community.

A Board committee chaired by Curt Hillstrom is developing a plan for membership and fundraising. Our treasurer, Joyce Fullard, is working with a committee to develop an operating budget for the coming year. Please contact either one of them with comments or suggestions.

Bateson’s concluding statement in *Composing a Life* is: "The compositions we create in these times of change are filled with interlocking messages of our commitments and decisions. Each one is a message of possibility." I think it’s a good statement for us to begin with.

The Open Forum in February evoked enthusiastic response to such wide-ranging topics as multicultural diversity, research in neuroscience, the intellectual implications of computer technology, Black history in St. Paul, women who write, and Holocaust history. It also generated a new study group called "The Diversity Discussion Group" and a call for another open forum, which will be held in July.

---

The Forum is a quarterly publication of the Minnesota Independent Scholars' Forum

Editor:
Merryalice Jones, 9608 15th Ave. S., Bloomington, MN 55425 888-5623

Editor’s Note: Deadline for the next issue of The Forum is April

Board of Directors:
John Carmichael  David Megarry
Joyce Fullard  Susan M. Smith
Rod Haberman  Laura Weber
Ginny Hansen  David Wiggins
Curt Hillstrom

Archivist: Brian Mulhern
May Program
The Mythology and Music of the Clarsach

Music and scholarship have been harmoniously combined in the work of Ann and Charlie Heymann. This year they celebrate their tenth anniversary playing together as "Clarsach" with a MIFS-sponsored lecture/demonstration in the morning of May 10 and concerts at the College of St. Thomas that evening and the following afternoon.

Ann and Charlie Heymann are specialists in presenting the timeless artistry and soul of the Gaelic people. Ann, a two-time champion of the Bun-Fleadh harp competition in Ireland, is the world's foremost performer, composer, and authority on the Gaelic harp. Her book, Secrets of the Gaelic Harp, reveals its playing techniques and teaching method that survived into 17th century oral tradition. Ann's husband, Charlie, is widely respected for his cittern and button accordion work. His vocal talents have won him international acclaim as an outstanding interpreter of song and story.

Like other independent scholars, their research was conducted with sustained effort over many years and done with the originality of perspective that is needed for making sense of a previously untouched field. Allison Kinnard, a well-known Scottish harpist and researcher, writes: "Ann's researches are extensive, the treatment of the music is not a purely antiquarian exercise. Piecing together the shreds of recorded evidence has been one part of the creative process, but more important has been the application of an original mind to a problem that has eluded many musicians more hide-bound by the assumptions which a modern classical education almost inevitably brings. This approach brings the music up-to-date and in line with the unbroken instrumental tradition which is so strong in the music of Ireland and Scotland today."

Prepare to be enchanted, fascinated, and impressed by the scholarship that has brought an ancient musical tradition back to life. For more information about the lecture and concerts, contact: Adrienne Wiggins, 823-5379.

Program Previews: Spring and Summer

Notices for individual programs will be sent to all Forum members. Forum programs are free and open to the public.

May 31-June 3 "Culture Under Canvas." The Forum is co-sponsoring this national conference for performers of historical characters.

June 9 "Critical Connections," 10:00 a.m. to noon, Ferguson Hall, Room 280, University of Minnesota. The Forum is co-sponsor of this round table discussion on music writing and the communication of music critics and annotators with the public. Call 224-7849 or 624-1069 for more information.

July 14 Open Forum, 10:00 a.m. Call David Wiggins, 823-5379, for more information.

August Women and Poetry. Date and time to be announced.

September 10 "Witnesses to the Holocaust: When Survivors and Liberators Tell Their Stories."

October 4-6 "A Chaos Festival." Call David Wiggins, 823-5379 for information.
"Red November, Black November: Culture and Community in the Industrial Workers of the World" was presented April 21 by Forum member Sal Salerno. The title of the program comes from the title of Salerno's recently published book by the same name. His talk was illustrated by slides of cartoons produced by IWW members in the early years of the century and was followed by a panel discussion. Panelists were Forum members Sandra Sandell and Bill Millikan, along with Peter Ratcheff of Macalester College. Laura Weber, Forum Board member, planned and moderated the program.

The thesis of Salerno's book is that conventional historians of the IWW have overemphasized its American origins and de-emphasized the contributions of immigrant artists and cultural theorists, who brought European ideas, particularly French syndicalism, with them. No one had, to this point, looked at the European influences through the lens of "Wobbly" art (cartoons, poetry, songs), contends Salerno. Rather than analyzing the IWW via a strict historical approach to labor strikes and contracts, Salerno looked at how the IWW created a "movement culture that extended the critique of capitalism beyond the factory gate."

Sandall shared stories of the IWW passed down in her own family and wondered if the appeal of the IWW was due to its internationalism. "Some immigrants weren't sure how long they might stay in the country. Some had divided loyalties," she said. Millikan commented that Red November, Black November is a new interpretation that is convincing. His perspective comes from research he is doing on the little-known Citizen's Alliance, a "pre-FBI" group of powerful businessmen who conducted private surveillance to prevent unionism and radicalism in Minneapolis. Ratcheff tied the legacy of the IWW to the present day, documenting evidence of IWW techniques he found "without even looking for it," while researching the Hormel/P-9 struggle in Austin. The audience responded with their own illuminating comments and findings about the IWW and radicalism in Minnesota.

Re-living "History that Hurts" An attentive audience was entertained at the Historic Fort Snelling Interpretive Center in March by costumed members of La Compagnie Des Hivernants de la Riviere St. Pierre as they described their trip along the voyageurs' highway in August 1989. A slide presentation and journal readings created a vivid account of rocky white water, tangled portages, and dramatic moments at such places as "the bear camp."

Now, after a lapse of about 50 years, an effort is being made to revive the Chautauqua program. Several state humanities committees have funded the revival, including Minnesota. Recently, an independent scholar Clay Jenkinson (formerly from Minnesota and a U of M graduate) was awarded a Charles Frankel Prize for his contributions to the humanities through his impersonations of Thomas Jefferson. Jenkinson, who has performed for audiences throughout the United States, including the U.S. Congress and the Minnesota State Legislature, was one of five winners of the prize awarded for the first time in 1989 by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

In the early 1980s when I first began playing Samantha Smith Allen, a literary character found in over 20 books written by 19th century humorist, Marietta Holley, it was uncommon for performance to be a part of "serious" academic conferences. Now, it is much more common and recognized as a valid vehicle for the three-dimensional dissemination of one's work. Visits to college classes, study guides, and/or workshops in conjunction with performances provide additional forums for discussing the ideas and issues brought out through performance.

This spring, MISF is co-sponsoring a gathering of scholar-performers, educators, actors, historic site interpreters, program planners, and the general public to see outstanding solo performers, to discuss philosophic and practical issues of the genre, to meet others engaged in like ventures, and to have a grand old time. CULTURE UNDER CANVAS will be held at the College of St. Catherine, May 31 through June 3, 1990, and will feature 18 solo performances by academic scholars, independent scholars, actors who have researched and written their own scripts, and collaborations between actors and scholars. Through them, we will "meet" people like Mercy Otis Warren, Oscar Wilde, Belle Starr, Donna Tules, Georgia O'Keeffe, Sojourner Truth, Ben Franklin, Mary McLeod Bethune, Mother Jones, H.L. Mencken, Jane Addams, and more.

To provide the historical context for our endeavors, Dr. John Gentile, assistant professor of Performance Studies at Kennesaw State College and author of Cast of One: One-Person Shows from the Chautauqua Platform to the Broadway Stage, will deliver the keynote address, "Alone in the Light." Spread the word and plan to attend. For more information, contact Continuing Education and Summer Sessions at St. Kate's, 612-690-6819.
Member Spotlight Feature:

Rhoda R. Gilman—senior research fellow at the Minnesota Historical Society and president of the Women Historians of the Midwest—is the author of The Story of Minnesota's Past, a text about state history and culture for grades 5, 6, or 7. It is one component of a three-part curriculum titled Northern Lights. The other components are a book of student activities and a teacher's edition. Northern Lights has been described as innovative and unique because it embodies two approaches to history: history as a body of information and history as an instruction about the process of learning about the past.

Susan Smith: What were you trying to do with this textbook?

Rhoda Gilman: Tell a story; create a narrative that didn't look like a textbook—that didn't dominate the material with the teaching agenda.

SS: How did you accomplish that?

RG: We tried to tell the story from the point of view of individuals, as much as possible. We used pictures, and used them not as illustration, but as an integral part of the information. We avoided traditional topoi headings and question and answer sections that interrupted the story; we tried to make it readable, uncluttered by the usual "classroom furniture" of textbooks.

SS: I know that you bring a distinctive worldview to the making of this text. Can you talk about that?

RG: History traditionally has been "the history of nations." It involved appropriating land and "building civilization." Our approach was to treat Minnesota as part of the planet, not as a political entity. So we included all people who had ever lived on this piece of the planet, looking at its history from the point of view of those who lived here at the time. For example, the first European contacts, the "explorers," are treated from the point of view of the American Indian.

We didn't tell about the fur trade, for example, by dividing it into the French period, the British period, the American period—the traditional divisions that have nothing to do with the Indians who were at the heart of it. And we take much of the story from a diary, so that sixth graders can see what the fur trade was like for the people who did it.

SS: Another example is your use of vocabulary. You write a section titled "Dakota Anger Explodes." As a sixth grader, I learned to call that "the Dakota Rebellion."

RG: There's no blinking the fact that a lot of innocent farmers were killed; but it was a complex situation—a tragedy for all involved—it was a clash of two world views, in which people with good intentions made tragic mistakes.

SS: How did you find a way to present the Indian point of view in this?

RG: We relied heavily on half a dozen local Indian historians and other people; and we tried to avoid presenting Indians as a faceless mass.

SS: In general, how did you attempt to write history differently?

RG: United States consensus history has changed to a multi-cultural point of view; many changes are needed to achieve that shift. We went to original sources, strove to eliminate loaded vocabulary, and tried to preserve words that were originally in the record...where we couldn't, we tried to preserve the spirit of them and the story.

SS: How did you handle the old textbook canon of preserving impartiality?

RG: There is a tendency to confuse viewpoint with partiality. So no opinion of any sort is allowed in the narrative. That is something we ignore. Conflict existed in history—if you present history where you fail to say anyone had a point of view, then you don't have history.

SS: Why don't you have distinct sections for social or economic history?

R. Gilman: The "histories" of traditional texts are fictions; they aren't separate; so we've woven them all into the same story.

SS: Why do you make some pictures—like the one of the diphtheria quarantine sign—so prominent?

RG: We were telling the story of health in Minnesota and trying to do it in a dramatic way that children could see and understand—we also used a child's diary to tell it from a child's viewpoint...

SS: What was your role in producing this book?

RG: We had total control over the production...picture selection, design, content. In a commercial publishing house, the organizational set-up wouldn't be conducive to it.

SS: Is this a work of independent scholarship, then?

RG: Well, we had the complete support of the Historical Society; at the time we began, there was a milieu at the Society which encouraged people to go ahead with their own projects.

SS: What would you say about the possibilities for independent scholarship in historical societies?

RG: One reason historical societies are more capable of innovation at this time is because they are in direct touch with the public...You can't get lost in academic theories if you have the contradictions to them talking to you face to face.

SS: This text is intellectually different. Can you describe that difference?

RG: Today's problems and today's realities are all global. Political history, that is, "the history of nations," is passe. The story we tell here is set in a global framework—that is the difference.
Study Groups

Study groups provide members the opportunity to explore ideas through reading and discussion. Depending on the group’s interests, a familiar topic may be studied in depth, or an unknown topic may be investigated. The ideas offered by group members are often thought-provoking and helpful to the independent scholar.

You are invited to “sit in” or join an established study group. Membership is not mandatory. If you are interested in convening one or more of these groups or starting a group of your own, pending Board approval, please contact Susan Smith at 871-1125. Following is a list of active study groups:

"Chaos" Study Group
Contact David Wiggins 823-5379

This newly organized group meets for the mutual exploration of the study of nonlinear dynamics as discussed in the book Chaos by James Gleick. Implications of research in nonlinear dynamics are being felt in many fields today.

18th/19th Century Study Group
Contact Joyce Fullard 333-4605

This study group’s multidisciplinary interests include art history, literature, philosophy, history, and political science, from the Restoration period to the early 19th century. Anyone interested in sampling the activities of the 18/19th century is invited to call 377-0866 for time and location.

Science and Humanities Study Group
Contact Rhoda Gilman 224-6383

The Science and Humanities Study Group is currently reading Choosing Reality: A Contemplative View of Physics and the Mind by B. Alan Wallace. The group meets every three to four weeks.

The following groups are presently inactive:

Art Historians Study Group
Contact Catherine Vesley 789-5888

Family History Study Group
Contact Susan Smith 871-1125

International Feminism Group
Contact Susan Smith 871-1125

Philosophy and Cultural Criticism Study Group
Contact Patrice Koelsch 722-3813

Social History Study Group
Contact Jo Blatti 291-7048

Writing Support for Women Group
Contact Susan Smith 871-1125

MISF board approves two new study groups

Communications and Information Technology Group is being organized with these goals:

- to study and discuss the broad implications of the developing communication and information technologies
- to assist independent scholars in making effective use of these technologies
- to cooperate with other related, non-commercial groups and organizations concerned with these technologies.

For information about a meeting date and time, call John Wickre at 222-5628.

The Diversity Discussion Group will focus on the broad subject of cultural diversity, including but not limited to: education, workplace, public policy, immigration patterns, religion, and lifeways. It is understood that diversity may come to mean different things as time elapses. Call Barbara Pirie at 926-4874 for information about a meeting date and time.
New Committee Seeks Ideas

A Membership and Fundraising Committee has formed to foster the growth of MSIF. You are invited to submit ideas, visions, concepts, suggestions, or opinions that you have concerning:

—services for Forum members,
—ways of attracting members,
—people to target for new membership initiatives,
—ways to raise money for the organization, or
—any topic you think is relevant.

Send your comments to MISF or contact any board member (names are listed in box on page 2). You can do even more by joining the committee to discuss these topics in greater depth. Contact Curt Hillstrom, 823-5132, if you would like to help.

While we are seeking funds to support the growth of the Forum, we need volunteers to help with a variety of administrative tasks. If you can volunteer even a small amount of time, your help would be greatly appreciated. Contact anyone on the Board for information on available opportunities.

Members' Services

Current services for the members of the Minnesota Independent Scholars' Forum include:

• Public programs.
• Study groups that informally explore subjects such as 18th century studies, relationships between science and the humanities, and others.
• Access to the University of Minnesota Libraries.
• A quarterly newsletter.
• Cooperative arrangements with other organizations to promote independent scholarship.

Membership Application to the Minnesota Independent Scholars' Forum

Regular
$12.00 (under/unemployed)
between $12.00 and $36.00
$36.00 (regularly employed)

Household
$18.00 (under/unemployed)
between $18.00 and $40.00
$40.00 (regularly employed)

Sustaining
$50.00 or more

Donor
$75.00 or more

Benefactor
$100.00 or more

Name__________________________
Address__________________________
City__________________________State________Zip________
Telephone (home)__________________________
(work)__________________________

Mail to: Susan Smith
2415 Third Ave. So. #A-39
Minneapolis, MN 55407

Copies 24 Hours

At the following locations:

Minneapolis
325 14th Ave SE • 331-3080
3028 Hennepin Ave S • 822-7700
St. Paul
1669 Grand Ave • 699-9671
Minnetonka
13879 Ridgedale Drive • 593-1143
Mankato • 507-388-2679
St. Cloud • 612-259-1224
Moorhead • 218-233-8035

429 14th Avenue S.E.
Minneapolis, MN 55414
(612) 331-1430

Hours
Mon.-Sat. / 10 am - 11 pm
Sun. / 12 noon - 6:30 pm
Over 100,000 scholarly used books on all subjects.

Kinko's®

the copy center

Middlemarch
BOOKS AND ART
RADISSON UNIVERSITY HOTEL • 955 WASHINGTON AVENUE SOUTHEAST
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA 55407 • 375-2755
Upcoming Programs

May 12, 10:00 a.m. The Music and Mythology of the Clairseach
Hennepin County Historical Society

May 31 to June 3 "Culture Under Canvas."
College of St. Catherine

June 9, 10:00 a.m.-noon. "Critical Connections"
Ferguson Hall, Room 280, U of Minnesota

July 14, 10:00 a.m. Open Forum--Summer Session

September 10 "Witnesses to the Holocaust: When Survivors and Librators Tell Their Stories."

October 4-6. "A Chaos Festival."

December 1 Annual Meeting