"Gentiles Preferred"

Weber Wins Solon J. Buck Award

Ed. Note: The focus of this issue of the Forum is the blatant clash of meaning that often surrounds the defense of "Truth." Two writers address this issue from the point of anti-Semitism; others from other viewpoints. LB/DJ

Laura Weber, vice-president of MISF, won the Solon J. Buck Award for the best article published in Minnesota History. The article, "Gentiles Preferred: Minneapolis Jews and Employment, 1920-1950" appeared in the Spring 1991 issue. We congratulate Weber and are pleased to print the following summary of her article.

Minneapolis was a declining commercial center during the period 1920-50. Jews had been relative latecomers to the city; they did not arrive in large numbers until the turn of the century. Although other ethnic groups, including Scandinavians, Germans, and Irish, were not part of the economic or social elite, neither were they denied job opportunities the way Jews were. By the end of the 1920s, Minneapolis Jews were restricted in their economic, social, and civic activities and lived, worked, and socialized among themselves.

In the 1930s the Jewish press began reporting job discrimination nationally. Jewish leaders attempted to call attention to the problem, and magazine articles and books written at the time also testify to its existence. Documentation of anti-Semitism relating to jobs and employment in Minnesota can be found in oral history testimonies of Jews describing Minneapolis during the Great Depression, and in numerous places in the archives of Jewish groups in the Minnesota Historical Society. However, no scientific surveys were taken during the period to measure or document employment discrimination, nor did the 1936 Jewish community census ask any questions about economic status.

Saturday, December 5

Lifelong Learning To Be Topic of Annual Meeting

The annual meeting of the MISF will take place Saturday December 5, 1992 at 10 a.m. in room 310 of the Minneapolis Public Library, 300 on the Mall in downtown Minneapolis. After a business meeting which will include the election of new officers, Finn Jorgensen will address the group on the subject of "The Folk High School Movement in Denmark: Founding Philosophy and Social Development."

Folk high schools are a form of continuing education for adults that is unique to the Scandinavian countries. They were begun by Nikolai F. S. Grundtvig (1783-1872), a Danish bishop, poet, historian, educator, hymn writer and philosopher, who wanted education to be accessible to all people at any time during their lives. In the past century the idea of the "folk high school" has been adapted to meet changes in the culture that surrounds it. Nonetheless, the idea is still strong and vital in modern Scandinavian culture.

Jorgensen is an independent scholar specializing in Scandinavian-American cultural exchanges. He has recently taught in a Scandinavian Studies course at Augsburg college.
President's Message
David Wiggins

Are Free Thoughts Worth the Price?

Anyone who has had the experience of uttering ideas that challenge orthodox thinking knows that it sometimes seems stupid to go against the majority. Most good thinkers can quickly come up with a list of ideas that deserve discussion but are unlikely ever to be brought up because of the flak that would prompt. This restriction was in place long before the phrase “politically correct” came into the lexicon, and politically incorrect ideas are not the only ideas that dare not speak their name.

There are ideas that are considered “discredited” in the sense that only a fool would think them true. No “reasonable” person believes that the earth is really flat or that the idea is worth debating. There are ideas that are considered “dishonorable” in the sense that only an immoral person could think them true. Only a monster would consider exterminating the “surplus population.” There are ideas that are considered “inconceivable” in the true sense of the word; they cannot be born in the mind because the mind cannot hold them.

Yet, yesterday’s discredited, dishonorable, inconceivable idea can become tomorrow’s orthodoxy. Cultures living side by side can have radically different orthodox views, and kill for them. We need not judge the thoughts of others to be right or wrong; the relevant question is: what are the boundaries of our own thoughts? What do we believe to be true? What questions do we ask?

The old theoretical and semantic debate about what constitutes a shifting paradigm is less important than the modern experience of such shifts. We find that with new paradigms both the view of what is true and the method of seeking and assessing truth change.

Perspectivist history, complex dynamics and chaos theory, and multiculturalism are ways of seeing the world that have become fairly standard in MISF programs. The Forum is and should be a haven for cutting-edge ideas, but are there ideas so far out, so over the edge, that the Forum should stay away from sponsoring programs that help these ideas get a hearing? What would you as a member or donor to the MISF think of a program that advocated Martian conspiracy theories? When the board of directors decides the programs the organization will sponsor, we do our best to try to give new ideas or unheard old ideas a hearing. However, the broader considerations of image and reputation inevitably enter into the discussions in ways that act to keep us away from ideas that could be considered “crackpot” notions.

Although we defend independent scholarship as a way of avoiding some of the pitfalls of being “politically correct in institutions,” we might also just be substituting another set of values and restrictions. And since our group is small, might these restrictions be even more severe than those at a larger, multi-faceted institution?

I believe we must be braver.

We need to risk being labeled a collection of crackpots, because only then can we provide a voice for the politically incorrect, discredited, dishonorable, inconceivable ideas that just happen also to be true. We don’t need to be a farm team for the big leagues. We should perhaps be playing a different game.

* * * * *

A special MISF program is planned for December 30th: “Oblique Perspectives on 1492.” The location will be announced in a forthcoming mailing.

Three papers will be presented. John Parker will present a paper entitled “A Great Sign of Land: Columbus and the Sea Birds. Ornithology and Navigation in 1492.” A FORUM reader will present Lionel Davis’s paper entitled “Christopher Columbus: 1892—A Time for Myth-Making.” Rhoda Gilman will present her paper entitled “Vikings and the Pre-Columbian Tradition.”

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

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The deadline for the next issue of The Forum is May 10.

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Apples of Our Eyes

Brusic Tells Story of Apple-ied Research in Connecticut

On Saturday, October 10, a small band of Forum members travelled to Sponsel's Minnesota Harvest Orchard near Jordan to hear Lucy Brusic give a lecture-video presentation on the history of apple farming in Connecticut.

In 1988, just before their centennial, the Connecticut Pomological Society contracted with Brusic to prepare a history of commercial apple-growing in the state. Using grants from the NEH, the American Association for State and Local History, and the Connecticut Historical Society, Brusic interviewed fifteen apple growers including several whose orchards had been in business before the turn of the century, duplicated old photographs and film (including footage of a Depression-era hurricane that changed the mix of fruit varieties available thereafter), and did research for a traveling exhibit and a beautifully illustrated catalog. After moving to Minnesota, Brusic designed a fascinating 20-minute video using the old films, photographs, and voices of those interviewed.

Sitting in the MN orchard's fireplace room, Forum members heard how the project came into being, viewed the video and catalog, and asked questions about the project. (Some excellent questions were asked by the young son of one of the members.) At the same time, we enjoyed the atmosphere of the Minnesota Harvest Orchard. This second-generation family orchard nicely illustrated the trends shown in Brusic's work—away from hand-sprayed small orchards to Pick-Your-Own and on to aggressively marketed entertainment complexes. Visitors to Sponsel's not only enjoy tours of the packing house and tractor rides to the picking area but also gift shops, eateries, a sales floor, and helicopter rides over the fall leaves. —Ginny Hansen & Dave Juncker

Unconventional History and Independent Scholarship

In the fall of 1989, the first issue of The Journal of Unconventional History appeared. Published in California by two women scholars disaffected with the politics and intellectual blinders of academe, it was small in size, modest in appearance, and unabashedly expansive in its mission. With refreshing "chutzpah" the editors took as their province "publication of original, unconventional, and controversial historical essays." They defined history as "the study of past processes in human affairs" and imposed no restrictions on time, place, or subject. Articles, however, were expected to meet scholarly standards of research and courtesy.

Now, three years later, the little journal is still coming out despite all odds and has begun to make a place for itself in the world of independent scholarship. Thoroughly irreverent, it is a source of diverse ideas and often of good reading. Subjects have included the origins of the carousel, historical examples of mooning, criminal proceedings against animals in the Middle Ages, psychosexual symbolism in the conquest of Mexico, and a three-part essay on the beginnings of thought, language, and culture, written by a Vietnamese scholar. Articles on plural marriage among the Mormons and on clothing as an instrument of repression in Puritan New England have sparked submissions by other authors on the same or parallel subjects. Ongoing discussion of topics is also encouraged in a regular "Forum" section.

Each issue contains an interview by the editors with some independent scholar of note. These have ranged from publishers to classicists to folklorists to museum curators, but each interview pulls into focus the historical insights provided by non-traditional and interdisciplinary perspectives. The editors clearly have a feminist bias and a preference for art, cultural, and social history—but, after all, those are the areas in which most non-traditional work is being done these days.

As with any experimental venture, some things work and some things don't. The content of The Journal of Unconventional History is uneven, seldom profound, but usually provocative. Promised for the future are pieces on the social significance of aprons, history as collage, and the travails of independent scholars. A year's subscription ($20) gets you three issues. Send check or money order to Box 459, Cardiff-by-the-Sea, CA 92007-9900.

—Rhoda Gilman
Forum Focus

The Walls
Lucy Smith

Our recent past is becoming history. You can see it in the exhibition at the Janet Wallace Fine Arts Center of Macalester College where the history of the Berlin Wall is displayed in photographs around the walls of the center. You may also see in there a small car, the size of a motorcycle, where people hid to escape from behind the wall. You can even buy a piece of the wall—concrete covered with faint paint—for 50 cents.

There are many other walls: the Great Wall of China, and the Wailing Wall, which became the Western Wall. I remember other walls from my childhood—ghetto walls, which surrounded me in the small town of Tarnow, and later the ghetto walls of Warsaw, which I watched from the outside while people were burned inside. The smoke covered the sky, spreading over the whole city and its suburbs, physically visible but ignored by people outside, who went about their business as if nothing had happened. Those invisible walls worn by outsiders were the most powerful of all walls ever raised to divide people.

Three years ago (yes, it’s been that long) in 1989, the wall dividing Germany crumbled. To many it seemed an end to all walls. But when a physical wall tumbles down, like the one in Jericho, it is only to make a place for another wall. We feel so elated when the walls tumble. The Bastille walls gave us the right to celebrate July 14th, but the reasons for attacking the Bastille then, or Los Angeles now, have not changed since 1789. Why do we think that the bricks or stones are responsible for what we do to each other?

Watching history in the making I felt that though I was not responsible for the wall dividing Germany, there was a measure of justice that the Germans also had had their ghetto, and though no one was separating them from their families and systematically deporting them to death camps or burning them locked in their houses, they too were desperate enough to risk death in the attempt to escape from their walled-in half-country.

The pain of what was done calls for revenge, and revenge itself comes in various forms. Some seek active revenge. I just watched history unfolding. Still, I am glad that in spite of their terrible losses no Jew or Roma (Gypsy) ever used explosives or other means to kill Germans indiscriminately.

The worst walls are the walls of pain, anger, and revenge. It never ends. We know that. Shakespeare wrote about it. Others wrote about it. Over the centuries it has not changed.

Our stored missiles and nuclear weapons are remnants of potential revenge. We spend much time protesting their build-up and storage and the depletion of our economy, but we forget that even the most terrifying weapons are immobile without the feelings of hate or fear that animate them.

We were sure, when the walls were crumbling, that they were just the walls of Communism, but when we looked at this spectacle, while Bush and Reagan patted themselves on the back for this deed, we did not see the cracks in our own less visible walls. We may be the next to go, because we too promise universal happiness to anyone who follows our way—our American Way of democracy without equality and consumerism without end.

We must start to look at ourselves—at our feelings toward each other; at group loyalties that prevent us from knowing and respecting other groups, as loyal to their ways as we are to ours; at our fears, big and small, real and imaginary. We need to look carefully at the broad implications of what we prophecize to be the truth. We need to see that there are many truths—each with its good side for someone. We need to look carefully at all leaders and learn to distinguish the wisdom from the folly. Maybe all that we can do now is to try for another universality—the one that respects the differences. We need to do it soon, before fear forces groups to build multitudes of walls and crisscross the world with them.

If we want to connect and communicate, if we truly dream about a world which is one blue planet, then respect for each other as we are, rather than what we should be, is a beginning. It is a very tenuous proposition now, but the only one worth trying. All that we can do now is to figure out how to do it. We could start right here with our own neighbors. As one rabbi asked a friend of mine who wanted to change the world: “Do you know the names of your neighbors?”

Lucy Smith, a 5+ year member of MISF, conducts workshops on Inter-cultural Communication.

"FORUM FOCUS" comments are the author's and may, or may not, agree with the MISF Mission, its policies, or goals.
Seven members of the Science and Humanities Study Group drove to the St. Croix Valley September 12 for their second all-day retreat. As usual, there were about two hours more of discussion than of day left at the end. Not even stopping to walk in the autumn woods, the group heard six and a half presentations; the seventh was heard October 14 at a "regular meeting."

Over coffee and muffins the discussion turned to the kind of knowing that can intuit visual information of another's unresolved situations: ESP, déjà vu, the concepts of transmitter systems and messenger chemicals in the brain. Next a presenter talked about the kinds of knowledge inherent in pattern, including corporate patterns, which predispose certain kinds of knowledge over others. Rhoda Gilman read aloud her article soon to be published in Noms magazine, and it was discussed. A surprise entry (written by the only participant trained in epistemology) was a good two-page poem, "Fragments of Knowing" (and excerpts from dictionaries). After a delicious lunch from the produce of Wilder Forest's own gardens, the group proceeded to hear a member read her manuscript prepared for the day. A brief discussion of communications using colors and other perceptions, group synchrony, and the workings of language, was followed by another presenter's orally annotated bibliography on how women know, with samples of books. Then there was only time to describe (then fully present October 14) a dramatic reading of another poem accompanied by a painting from an exhibit at the Minneapolis Institute, later to evolve in concert with responses from the viewers/hearers. Discussion ranged from how the zeitgeist affects what is known/seen, to how emotions trigger observable perceptions and how responses of hearers are reflected.

The group proceeded September 29 with regular discussion (and viewing real fossils) for their current book, Stephen Jay Gould's Wonderful Life. By December 2nd they will read through p. 290 for discussion. Call 374-5505 for information on future meetings.

Ginny Hansen

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The hard fact remained, however, that during the 1930s and into the 1940s it was very hard for Jews to get jobs in Minneapolis. On top of the generally impossible economic conditions, Jews found that even when jobs were to be had, they often were rejected for them, solely on the basis of their religion. To combat this situation, the Jewish Free Employment Bureau was expanded in 1931 to fight job discrimination against Jews. It placed only a fraction of its applicants, over the course of the decade, but the work it accomplished was significant. Besides finding jobs for people who badly needed them, the employment bureau was a visible presence actively working to overcome stereotypes and promote toleration.

Jews were blamed by both labor unions and employers for labor unrest during this period. During the Teamsters' strikes of 1934, the union accused Jews of provoking the strike, while others felt the stinginess of Jewish trucking company owners caused the strike. The role of a local rabbi, Albert Gordon, as a labor mediator contributed to speculation by some that Jews "ran the city" at a time when many could not even find jobs. Regardless, the Central Labor Union of the AFL and its affiliated unions worked actively in the late 1930s and into the 1940s to promote anti-fascism and tolerance.

The war, and post-war attitudes concerning racial and religious discrimination brought about by the common national effort to defeat totalitarian and racist governments abroad, contributed to a change of attitude in Minneapolis as well. Things did not change overnight, but by the beginning of the 1950s, attitudes about Jews and employment that had been matter-of-fact in Minneapolis were becoming openly unacceptable. The fact that Jews of Minneapolis occupy a spectrum of occupational positions from corporate executive to secretary to postal clerk in today's economy, and the fact that young Jews in Minneapolis today would find the story told here as remote from their own experience as the Depression itself, is a testament to that change.

Laura E. Weber
Op-Ed Page

Fill this page with your thoughts! Let us hear your opinion! Write us a letter! Send us a cartoon! We'd like to know what you're thinking—about what we have printed or about topics of interest to scholars in general. For this time, we have decided to run this collection of cartoons because they speak (more aptly than prose?) to the MISF world.

B.C. / By Johnny Hart

WANNA HEAR A GREAT ETHNIC JOKE?

ABSOLUTELY NOT! ETHNIC JOKES ARE AN ABOMINATION TO SOCIETY.

I TRULY APOLOGIZE FOR OFFENDING YOU.

THAT'S MIGHTY WHITE OF YOU.

Doonesbury / By Garry Trudeau

HEY, GOOD GUY ON THE NATIONAL MERIT SCHOLARSHIP, RIGHT? REALLY COOL! AWESOME!

THANKS, SEAN.

MIGHT BE EASIER TO BE A JEW IF YOU GROW UP IN AN ASIAN FAMILY.

I WOULDN'T KNOW.

HUNT.

I'M ADOPTED.

MY PARENTS ARE JEWISH.

JEWSHT? YOU SAY NO MORE!

I AIN'T PLANNING TO.

MIRROR, MIRROR, ON THE WALL, WHO'S THE MOST LIBERAL AND TOLERANT OF THEM ALL? NOW CUT THAT OUT!

"I was well aware of the typical white stereotype of the Negro, that he is always late, that he's loud and always laughing, that he's dirty and messy, and for a while, I was terribly conscious of trying to avoid identification with it."

Martin Luther King Jr.

"This is my first book, but if I like it I may buy another in the near future."
Member News And Notes

Tom Abeles will present a workshop on “Applications of Complex Dynamics to Futurism & Planning” and a possible talk on “Sustainable Agriculture” at the World Future Society Conference in June, 1993.

Rhoda Gilman received the Theodore Blegen Award from the MN History Society for “How Henry Sibley Took the Road to New Hope,” in Minnesota History News, Summer 1991.

David Wiggins’ article “Origins of the Future,” will appear in Encounters, the publication of the Science Museum of MN.

David Megarry’s Company, 4D Interactive Systems, is producing Interactive CD-ROM games for Compton’s New Media.

“Overview of Endowment Programs,” a listing of funds available from the National Endowment for the Humanities, can be obtained from the Public Information Office, National Endowment for the Humanities, 1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. Room 406, Washington D.C. 20506. (202) 606-8438. Some of these funds are available (and have been awarded) to independent scholars.

The MISF Grants Committee, Chaired by Ramona Asher, has issued a call for copies of successful grants proposals that might be made available as examples to scholars who are applying for funds. Call her at 929-8434.

Dr. ’J’ continued from page 8

quickly amended his statement, saying “but 5 or 6 of the calls were from the same person.” From my vantage point this was not an improvement. I let him know it. Pressed, he guessed it would take several weeks before anything “might” be done and wanted me to know that the jurisdiction of the sidewalk was in question, and that his budget had been cut several times, in the face of this and similar requests.

I replied that a neighborhood crew would be assembled within two days to cut any and all nearby bushes and trees. I then called a politician. Somehow?... a professional crew materialized and an excellent clearing and thinning job was performed.

When services are being lost, you quickly learn to recognize the symptoms:

the problem is said to be complex, the jurisdiction is said to be under question, ownership of the responsibility to solve the problem becomes elusive, and the local politician is seen as the only one who might get the job moving quickly. In management circles this process is known as “top-down fire fighting” and “seat-of-the-pants” managing. It is doomed from the start, especially when large, complex problems arise.

--Sr. Mgmt, DFJ ’86

One wonders how many other city services have been degraded, or lost? I can only hope that we will awaken in time to assist the technical specialists in widening their knowledge base of, and recognizing their responsibilities to, the very people and neighborhoods that keep the city viable.

Membership Application to the Minnesota Independent Scholars’ Forum

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715 E. 57th St.  
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CIVIC RESPONSIBILITIES
by Dr. 'J' Oct.'92

A signpost stands in the shadow of the 35W bridge spanning Minnehaha Creek. "E. Minnehaha Parkway" and "Luverne Ave.," it proudly states. Homes in the area are either well-built, expensive classics from the '20's and '30's, or up-scale homes and townhouses built on a former school site.

Directly across the Parkway is the well groomed bike path, then Minnehaha Creek, and finally the walker's pathway. The walkway is tucked into the hillside and partially hidden by a narrow woods. As the Parkway winds its way East, open grassy areas, park benches, and flower gardens add to the beauty of the area.

Yet this area is under attack—a neighborhood now more fragile than it's ever been before. Consider . . .

- In two of the last four years, drug-suppliers have used the dark areas under the 35W bridge and other nearby bridges for late-night planning meetings. Individuals from the neighborhood fought long and hard to remove these parasites: by policing the areas almost daily, removing litter immediately, and petitioning City, County and Parkway Boards for fencing.

- Last year a young woman was knifed, and died, in this same woodsly section of the parkway in what the police say was a drug deal turned sour. Neither she nor her assailant were from the neighborhood, but somehow this rationalization isn't comforting.

- While rollerblading this past summer, I happened to choose the sidewalk on the south side of the Parkway, passing under the street sign at Luverne & Minnehaha. Rounding the curve, I was confronted with bushes and small trees that were so thick and overgrown that the sidewalk was completely covered and impassable. A foot path in the grass skirted the area. It was a spot just waiting for someone's possible use in an abduction, rape, or knife assault.

Calls to the Park Board, City, and County finally yielded the number of a gentleman whose duty it was to schedule maintenance work along the Parkway. He listened to my description and tried to be helpful. "We've received fifteen or so calls on that stretch in the last month or two." When I reacted with incredulity, he

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Address Correction
Requested