Information: Who Wants It?

by Roger Sween

The Twin Cities Metropolitan Council issued a study in July 1994 on The Role of Twin Cities Libraries in a World of Information. A portion of the report with which I am in heartiest support appears on page 66. In outlining a vision for the future, the report offers as one of the goals: “Physical, psychological and cultural barriers to library services will be eliminated to the extent possible.”

Pondering questions of library and information services over the past 30 years has led me to conclude that the challenge of what we call here “psychological barriers” lies at the crux of all our other problems.

I am not a psychologist or social psychologist, but I have studied the literature of both these fields in an effort to unravel why some people seek information to a greater degree, at least as observed in libraries, than others who do not. The phenomena of psychological barriers run contrary to our beliefs and assumptions as library and information professionals. We enter this field because we expect that those whom we wish to serve want what we have to offer them. Once at work, we are puzzled to learn that most people do not want our services.

As a relatively young reference librarian, I worked at a state university in Wisconsin. At the reference desk, right at the entrance to the library, between the card catalog and the reference collection, I found that I was consistently busy. Running at full tilt, I could answer 12 questions an hour. This busyness seemed wonderfully effective until it began to dawn on me that many students and those who do not seek information are not there to use the library. Instead, they are there to learn what they can about what the library can do for them.

President’s Message

by Ross Corson

I imagine that most new presidents of any organization enter office with grand ambitions, big plans and bold new ideas. As it turns out, though, these seem to be exactly what the Minnesota Independent Scholars’ Forum does not need at this time.

This conclusion is based on a few “facts of life” about the Forum. They include: a small membership base (which we nonetheless hope to increase); limited funds (more than in the past, but still modest); and no paid staff. These facts of life mean that we have a very limited capacity to carry out projects, despite the many good ideas our Board has about what the Forum could or should do.

My suggestion, therefore, is that we go “back to basics.” What the Forum needs above all is to concentrate on a few fundamental priorities, and to do these well. So here are three for the coming year (which I hope I won’t regret a year from now):

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continued on page 10
Editor's Column

by Tom Abeles

Remember the future, imagine the past.

Carlos Fuentes

Scholarship and the scholar are timeless in a time-bound world. Yet, snapshots of the perceptions of scholars over time are not congruent; both the past and the future change as we move the present.

Ozymandias reminds us that our monuments are not timeless. And history has a strange way of forgetting and canonizing.

A quarterly newsletter in today’s information age is in the past before it is written. It can only hope to convey connective threads within a microdot of human history. How, indeed, can such a production weave together the disparate, dynamic, nature of the scholars and the organization s/he represents?

Only by capturing the spirits of its members as the dynamics are manifested and by creating an interactive medium for membership in time and space can one hope to remain evolutionary.

The Minnesota Independent Scholars’ Forum newsletter is committed to pushing the edge by encouraging members to introduce interesting ideas to their colleagues in form and content, within a time-dissipating context. It seeks to display the links of the members with larger communities in time, space and ideas by exposing new concepts to our membership and others.

Submissions should show and provide pointers to the larger connected web exploring these ideas both locally and internationally. Singular events are interesting if they have a connectivity. And ideas are interesting if not presented in a dimensionless vacuum.

Starting in the spring of 1995, we hope to have this newsletter appear in cyberspace as well as in hard copy. The web of the Internet creates a tenuous permanence, a connectivity which is both obscure and yet tied through global links. The newsletter is seeking participation and not just ideas; it seeks examples and demonstrations.

With the Internet and cyberspace, the scholars are not limited to color or format, only the flat screen, printers and imagination.

Ours is not a linear existence. Ours is not an existence which is continuous and without surprise. Humans are complex, dynamic and evolutionary. Scholars are only one of the many glasses through which we access this world.

The newsletter needs its members to create virtual reality lens for their colleagues and the larger community.
New Grants Available for Scholars

Beginning in 1995, the Minnesota Humanities Commission will award grants to scholars in support of research and writing. This “Works in Progress” program will provide at least ten grants per year of up to $2,000 each.

The grants are available to scholars whose work will reach a general non-academic audience.

The research must include plans for reaching the public in an appropriate form. This could mean publishing an article in the popular press or a general circulation magazine, publishing a book that will be of general interest, developing support and planning materials for an exhibit, presenting research at a public program off-campus sponsored by a community group, etc. This grant program will not fund research intended solely for academic publication.

Grant funds can be used for expenses related to research — including sabbatical support, publication subvention, release time, travel to archives, computer services, student workers or secretarial assistance. The grants are not intended to support travel to academic conferences, nor can they be used for purchase of equipment.

Applicants must be independent and/or college-affiliated Minnesota scholars. Applicants must also designate a fiscal agent — a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization — to receive the grant.

The research must be part of a work in progress. The “Works in Progress” grants are intended to support scholars in their current research and writing. This restriction does not preclude a scholar returning to a subject of prior interest, but it does preclude funding of preliminary research.

The Minnesota Humanities Commission supports and promotes the public humanities in Minnesota. The Commission’s scholar grants are intended to encourage scholars not only to pursue specialized research but also to consider how their research can benefit community cultural organizations and non-specialist audiences.

Celebrate MN Books on April 8

The 1995 Minnesota Book Awards ceremony will be held on Saturday, April 8, at 7 p.m. at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul. The event is free and open to the public, and will be followed by a reception and a sale of nominated books at the Hungry Mind Bookstore.

This year’s program features 68 nominated books in 15 categories. (36 of these books are published by Minnesota presses.) For each category, a team of three judges will read all of the nominees and agree on an award recipient. The nominated books will be on display during March in the arcade showcases of the downtown Minneapolis Public Library.

Now in its seventh years, the Minnesota Book Awards program recognizes, celebrates and promotes the works of Minnesota resident creators of books — authors, illustrators, editors and publishers. Coordinator of the Minnesota Book Awards is MISF Board member Roger Sween. For more information, contact him at 612/296-2821. Scholars who are seeking funding for research intended solely for an academic audience should contact the National Endowment for the Humanities Division of Fellowships or Division of Research Programs.

The Minnesota Humanities Commission will accept “Works in Progress” grant applications until March 31, 1995. Awards will be made in early June. For an application or more information about the grants, call Mark Gleason or Jane Cunningham at 612/224-2264.
A Natural Affinity

Independent Scholars & Independent Booksellers

by Rhoda Gilman

I think Isaac Asimov was the source for a description I once read of the ideal information storage and retrieval technology for the citizen-scholar of the 21st century:

- It must have a large capacity and yet be light and compact, preferably pocket size.

- It must be durable and not subject to damage from heat, cold, heavy impact, long storage or from ubiquitous electrical and magnetic currents.

- It must need no external power supply and be usable in any location.

- It must be easy to access, not requiring exceptional skills or training.

- It must be inexpensive and widely available.

- Finally, in authoritarian societies or police states, it should be easy to conceal and, when in use, not detectable by electronic eavesdropping.

Answer: A book.

So, when you stop to think about it, it seems inevitable that books, book publishers and booksellers will be with us at least as long as independent scholars. The only questions are: Where? How many of them? What kind?

There has been a good deal of discussion in recent years about the galloping consolidation of the publishing industry. What used to be a field of many small and medium-sized firms, judged almost as much by intellectual and artistic prestige as by monetary returns, has become in the last 25 years a fiefdom of multinational corporations and their financial empires.

Now it is the turn of retail book outlets. Not only are locally owned bookstores being crowded out by chains, the chains themselves are merging into corporate kingdoms. K-Mart now owns three major chains, including Border Books, Waldenbooks and Brentanos — more than a thousand stores in all. The Barnes and Noble stable includes not only its own supermarkets, but B. Dalton, Bookstop, Bookstall, Scribners and Doubleday — not to mention five or six hundred college bookstores across the country.

The next step is obviously consolidation with television networks, computers and the whole field of electronic information and entertainment. (Currently, Viacom is said to be dickering with K-Mart for purchase of Border Books.)

What does all of this mean for locally owned bookstores?

The answer is only too obvious. Nor does it rest solely with competition for customers.

Last spring, the American Booksellers Association filed suit against six major publishers (including Viking-Penguin and St. Martin’s Press) for collusion with book chains. Not only did the chains get better prices than the independents, they also got more liberal credit terms, faster shipment of new titles and other advantages. The Federal Trade Commission had previously filed a similar suit. So much for the free market!

The demise of independent bookstores will unquestionably have a domino effect on small independent publishers. While computer technology facilitates production of limited-market books in small editions, their distribution will become almost impossible if left to national and international chains. And independent scholars need not be told what that means for them.

David Unowsky, owner of the Hungry Mind and a recognized spokesman for independent book dealers nationwide, lists three reasons for supporting independent publishing and bookselling:
1. To maintain a competitive economy;

2. to prevent the stifling of artistic and intellectual diversity; and

3. to prevent control over what information reaches the public.

In the Twin Cities, the battle has already commenced. Minnesota has long been a stronghold of small literary presses and an independent book trade. But since 1989, Barnes and Noble alone has opened eight new stores in the metropolitan area.

There are only six or eight (depending on how you define the area) locally-owned general book stores, plus 15 or 20 specialty stores (science fiction, mystery, art books, New Age, women’s, etc.). Three general stores have closed in recent years: Odegard’s (Minneapolis), Gringolet and Savran’s.

As long as competition is fierce, the book supermarkets will go out of their way to accommodate groups like the Independent Scholars’ Forum. But there are persuasive reasons why we should stick with independents. I urge our members to do so.

Baxter's in Minneapolis gives all Forum members a 10 percent discount; the Hungry Mind in St. Paul gives a similar discount on anything bought for a study group or book discussion.

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On the Power of Magnets — and Books

by John Parker

Remember the magnet someone gave you as a child? How with its magic power you pulled a train of pins across the dining room table? And the compass needle that pointed northward with an inexplicable persistence?

Not many of us think about magnetism in our everyday work or pleasure. But being asked to write an encyclopedia article on medieval navigation, I soon found myself at that watershed, circa 1300, when European sailors learned to guide their ships by the magnetic needle, thereby hastening the work of bringing people of all parts of the world into closer commercial and cultural relationships. I needed a library to get me past that watershed.

So where does a scholar go to learn about magnetism, all that there is to know about it? Fortunately, one of the best libraries on the subject in North America — and surely the most convenient — is in Minneapolis.

The Bakken Library and Museum of Electricity in Life, at 3537 Zenith Avenue South, is a great source for the study of magnetism and all aspects of the relationship of electricity to medicine.

Established in the late 1960s by Earl Bakken, one of the founders of Medtronic Inc., and housed in a handsome mansion on the west side of Lake Calhoun, the Bakken collections include some 10,000 books, journals and manuscripts, and nearly 2,000 machines and instruments.

The focus of the collection is on the historical role of electricity and magnetism in the life sciences and medicine — including the history of electricity, electrophysiology and electrotherapeutics. The materials in the collection date from the 13th century, but are strongest in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. The 18th century natural philosophers are well represented, Benjamin Franklin being one of the most notable.

Journals include such stellar titles in complete runs as the Philosophical Magazine, Annalen der Physik and the Proceedings and the Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society. An outstanding manuscript collection covers mesmerism and animal magnetism.

Collections of advertisements, instructional pamphlets, trade catalogs and price lists take the researcher into the nitty-gritty of a world of gadgetry, instrumentation, x-ray and medical appliances, and offer insights into the society that used them. The continued on page 10.
Who Wants Information?

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few faculty who came with questions were regulars. When I went to the student union to eat, I saw hundreds of students ensconced for the duration at tables with their buddies, none of whom I ever saw in the library.

I theorized, what if every one of the 5,000 students had a question once a week that they could not answer themselves and required reference assistance? So, 5,000 students at 12 questions per hour would require 400-plus staff hours per week to meet the demand. This imagined demand did not then, and does not now, seem excessive to me — especially within a university community where the shared purpose is to engender questing learners. Since the library operated 80 hours a week, meeting the seemingly potential demand translated to staffing the reference desk with five librarians at a time. Why was this apparently reasonable demand for information services not manifesting itself?

For a long time I faulted the students’ lack of information-seeking skill and the faculty’s lack of resource-based and intellectually challenging teaching. However, when I taught library science courses, I found my own stimulating teaching equally ineffectual and most students as reluctant to learn information skills as they were to pursue questions to which they did not know the answers and could not answer by themselves. I felt my world as a library and information professional crumbling away, and I had to find out why.

In studying this issue of what lies at the base of information-seeking behavior, which we are calling here “psychological barriers,” I have come to understand that the condition is ancient, indeed part of the human condition — well identified by past thinkers, well explored by psychologists and sociologists, and well documented in a variety of ways all around us. For the most part, people do not want information; they want confirmation. Here are some explorations.

In that Pilgrim year of 1620, Francis Bacon struggled to establish science in our modern sense. In working against the dogmas and conventions of the past, he published The New Organon in which he set out to move beyond the predilections that saddle the human mind and stop it from the investigative search for new knowledge. He wrote in aphorism xlvi:

The human understanding when it has once adopted an opinion (either as being the received opinion or as being agreeable to itself) draws all things else to support and agree with it. And though there be a greater number and weight of instances to be found on the other side, yet these it either neglects and despises, or else by some distinction sets aside and rejects; in order that by this great and pernicious predetermination the authority of its former conclusions may remain inviolate.

Let us jump from 1620 to the present when newspapers carried a report, as in the Star Tribune (October 6, 1994), relevant to this point. For two generations, the rumor has been alive that Anastasia, daughter of the last Czar of Russia, survived the execution of the rest of the family and escaped. For several years, a woman named Anna Anderson Manahan claimed to be the “lost” Anastasia. Three years ago, with the break-up of the Soviet Union, authorities released information that the skeletal remains of the Ekaterinberg firing squad had been examined and Anastasia was among them. Scientists compared by DNA testing blood samples of Anna Anderson with...
tissue remains from the Anastasia skeleton. The DNA in the samples did not match. The granddaughter of Czar Nicholas’ physician, one Marina Schweitzer, had worked to have these tests done. She had believed, as her father before her and so many others, that Anna Anderson was Anastasia and wanted the tests to confirm that belief. Now, hearing the information of these scientific tests, she said, “I’m disappointed in the results, but they don’t change my opinion.”

As Bacon wrote, “by this great and pernicious predetermination the authority of its former conclusions may remain inviolate.” Or, as we might say in more modern terms, “My mind is made up, do not confuse me with the facts.” But how widespread are these barriers?

A revealing analysis of the psychological barrier phenomenon appeared in a September 1961 issue of *Science*, where Bernard Barber published on “Resistance by Scientists to Scientific Discovery.” Of course, the very notion that scientists resists scientific discovery clashes with our picture of the scientist as open-minded. Nevertheless, even a cursory review of the biographies and writings of such luminaries as Galileo, Copernicus, Faraday, Helmholtz, Pasteur, Lister, Mendel or Planck shows the intense resistance that each met from the other leading intellectuals of their times.

Over and over, the history of science demonstrates that scientists, because of their substantive conceptions and theories, can miss discoveries that are literally right before their eyes.

Arthur Koestler, in *The Act of Creation* (1964), discusses how each of the major scientific breakthroughs had to be achieved not only against the truths of Platonic, Aristotelian and Christian dogmas, but also “in the teeth of what appeared to be self-evident and commonsensical.” In establishing the paths of heavenly bodies, Kepler had to contend against the obvious, widespread belief of uniform circular motion. Galileo contended against the idea of a mover responsible for what moves in space and an earth that stands still; Newton against the certainty that only way one body can act on another is through contact; Rutherford against the prevailing view that the atom is basic and indivisible; and Einstein that all clocks will run at the same rate.

Edison, on the other hand, credited his numerous inventions to the fact that he had been so poorly educated in science and had to learn for himself rather than in any received way. The same may be said of Einstein, who had been autistic as a child and whose early education was minimal. Others not so fortunate must practice what Koestler calls “the art of forgetting.”

T.S. Kuhn, who had published *The Copernican Revolution* in 1957, expanded his examination and announced the hold of “paradigms” in *The Nature of Scientific Revolutions* (1970). Paradigms (patterns of viewing the world) develop in fields of knowledge for the purpose of assembling facts. Until paradigms are established, fact-finding remains an incoherent morass. Kuhn says:

*If that body of belief is not already implicit in the collection of facts — in which case more than ‘mere facts’ are at hand — it must be externally supplied, perhaps by a current metaphysics, by another science or by personal and historical accident. No wonder, then, that in the early stages of the development of any science different men confronting the same range of phenomena, but not usually all the same particular phenomena, describe and interpret them in different ways. What is surprising and perhaps also unique in its degree to the fields we call science, is that such initial divergences should ever largely disappear.*

Kuhn finds that paradigms persist until the accumulation of observations no longer fits the model, and a new model must be found, one that will encompass the facts that do not fit the present model. Finding that model, we have “paradigm shift.” We change our minds, if we are able.

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Following Kuhn, Mahoney and DeMonbreun published in the journal *Cognitive Therapy and Research* (1977), "Psychology of the Scientist: An Analysis of Problem-Solving Bias." They used a little test, as follows: The triad of numbers (2, 4, 6) conform to a simple relational rule. Generate another triad of numbers and announce them. The subject of the test is told whether the triad conforms to the rule. The subject is told to continue generating triads and hear whether they conform until sure of a hypothesis that states the relational rule. It went like this:

The examiner says "2, 4, 6"; the subject says "8, 10, 12." "Yes, that conforms." The subject says "40, 42, 44." "Yes, that conforms." "100, 102, 104." "Conforms." Now the subject announces triumphantly that the relational rule is a series of even numbers increasing by two.

Well, that offer is true for the triads generated, but it does not conform with the relational rule that the examiner had in mind. When I taught reference, I used this illustration with my students. No student ever did any differently than this example. What happens here is that subjects think they know the rule and offer triads that confirm rather than disconfirm what is in their minds. A breakthrough in thinking would come is a subject offered a disconfirming triad. "7, 9, 11?" "Conforms." "1, 3, 400?" "Conforms." "6, 3, 1?" "Does not conform." The relational rule is three successively increasing numbers.

Mahoney and DeMonbreun found, as others before them, that typically people do not follow disconfirmatory investigation processes but confirmatory ones. In this experiment, only 17 of 45 subjects ever tested any of their announced hypotheses via a falsifying triad. Further, no differences could be found among the three groups of subjects — 15 undergraduates, 15 Protestant clergy and 15 scientists.

Perhaps we can best see these psychological barriers at work in riddles. Since the riddle of the sphinx that Theseus had to face, the deviousness of riddles has been to trick the mind into a commonsense understanding of the problem which fails to grasp the alternative mode of thought that is necessary to find a solution. For example, this riddle: A man in a mask and hat will not let you go home. Who is he? The answer is solved if we think about the possible uses of the word "home." The man who won't let you go home is a baseball catcher.

I believe that "psychological barriers," however we term them to be at the base of library and information use questions. If we want to affect the usefulness of information, we will do far more by attending to the removal of psychological barriers than by pumping in more supply. To reach that effect, we need a model of the information-seeking process to establish where and how we can productively intervene. I offer the following model. I base it on several years of working with information seekers, studying the patterns of seeking and reading the relevant literature. I am especially indebted to the 20 classes of reference students I taught over my career.

Doubtless, psychological or cognitive problems may intervene between steps in this process. This outline, however, provides a starting point for examining the human and psychological components of information-seeking behavior.

- an individual encounters and frames a question or problem.
- The individual recognizes the problem at a conceptual level.
- The person checks their own mental resources to find an answer.
- No answer can be discovered, recalled or deduced.
- The person determines the criticalness of the problem in terms of their own perceptions; in this decision they are informed by experience, internal-
ized needs and their own hierarchy of values.

- For critical problems, alternative search strategies are considered from the repertoire of known procedures.

- The person tentatively chooses a search process likely to deliver an answer.

- The person determines to continue if the problem is critical enough to warrant anticipated search costs (usually effort), based on past experience.

- The searcher approaches the source that is expected to most readily give a desired solution; such trial continues as long as the level of frustration encountered does not exceed the threshold of criticalness.

- The searcher articulates the problem as a question.

- The search negotiates the question with the source.

- The searcher finds or receives information, regarded as bearing on the question.

- The searcher judges the extent to which the information satisfies the question.

- The searcher checks their level of dissatisfaction against the anticipated additional costs of further searching.

- The searcher continues the search process until reaching satisfaction or exhaustion.

- The searcher reinserts the search process as alternative search strategies are considered, selected, pursued and evaluated.

- Dissatisfaction with a search results in a determination that 1) the information found only partly answers the problem; 2) a full answer is not possible either in terms of available resources or present knowledge; 3) no more effort can be expended in searching; 4) the original problem needs to be reexamined for possible other approaches to a solution; or 5) the problem may be returned to at another time when conditions are expected to be different.

In my career, I have come to reject the expression of information “haves” and “have nots” as not being determinative of how people approach information. I think we should explore, rather, concepts of “information active” and “information passive.” As my outline is a paradigm of information-seeking behavior, it suggests various hypotheses that may be tested:

- Criticalness of a problem is a matter of meaning, interpreted through individual perceptions.

- Appreciation of criticalness can be increased by relating a problem’s impact to the social world(s) of the individual.

- Criticalness is more compelling in furthering the search process than an individual’s level of ability.

- Anticipated or experienced ease of use will dictate which problems of equal criticalness will be searched.

- Despite similarities in appreciation of criticalness or abilities, individuals will vary significantly in their information-seeking behaviors.

- Final satisfaction with information is not significantly related to the appreciation of criticalness.

These hypotheses, I believe, provide a framework for working with psychological barriers. While such examinations are still in their infancy, I hope that we can see their importance to library and information service work. I hope that others will conclude with me that it is far more beneficial to have organizations that are sensitive to these questions than it is to expend our resources on supply-side information that goes only to the information active.

Roger Sween, with the State Office of Library Development and Services, is president-elect of the Minnesota Association for Continuing Adult Education. This essay is excerpted from a longer paper, one of four in response to the Metropolitan Council Library Study. These papers are available by contacting Roger at 612/296-2821.
President’s Column
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1) To publish this newsletter on a regular quarterly schedule, with contents that are well-written and stimulating and with an appearance that is simple and orderly. The Forum should serve as an important source of information and inspiration for our members and as a vehicle for recruiting new Forum members.

2) To organize one or two major public programs on topical issues. Independent scholars have a special responsibility — and ability — to contribute to intellectual discourse about matters of concern to the broader public. (Consider us a counterweight to Rush Limbaugh!) We would like to bring a few other groups or organizations on board as co-sponsors of these programs.

3) Finally, to initiate a new series of discussions, called “Works in Progress,” to remedy one of the more serious liabilities of being an independent scholar — the lack of what I call “intellectual collegiality.” These discussions are an opportunity for independent scholars to discuss their research with a thoughtful group of people.

I’m delighted to announce that we already have three “Works in Progress” discussions scheduled for this spring. Our inaugural program will be at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, March 11, at the East Lake Street Branch of the Minneapolis Public Library. Our featured scholar is Pat Hirl Longstaff, who is doing research on new legal and regulatory challenges in the changing field of telecommunications.

On April 8, we’ll hear from Jeremy Iggers, a Star Tribune staff writer, who is writing a book on Americans’ attitudes toward food; on May 13, our discussion will feature Minneapolis attorney John Bessler, who is writing a book on the history and politics of capital punishment in America.

If you’re interested in presenting your own work in progress, please let us know.

My hope is these three priorities will strike a balance between the needs and aspirations of our membership and the Forum’s own modest resources.

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Forum Member to Perform Solo Show at NCAA Game

Jane Curry, a member of the Minnesota Independent Scholars’ Forum, will be performing her solo show on women and sports, “Nice Girls Don’t Sweat,” for the NCAA Women’s Basketball Final Four Tournament events in Minneapolis on March 30-31. For information, call Kim Babiak at Women’s Athletics, University of Minnesota, 612/624-1058.

Jane is beginning work on a new show which centers on themes of women and science (math, engineering, health studies, etc.). If you have bibliographic suggestions or personal anecdotes to pass along, please send to her at 5048 37th Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55417, or call at 612/729-6457.

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Bakken Library: Magnets and Books
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museum features the most notable such items, including electrostatic generators, induction coils, recording devices and accessories. Outstanding examples of these machines and appliances are on permanent display.

The collections of original materials are supported by a fine library of secondary sources, bibliographies and specialized dictionaries and encyclopedias.

It’s a quiet place, nurturing the wonder of school children whose excitement takes us back to those magnets of our youth, and nurturing also wonder in our mature years as we contemplate compasses and these lines from Homer’s Odyssey:

In wond’rous ships, self-mov’d, instinct with mind
No helm secures their course, no pilot guides;
Like man intelligent they plough the tides...
Independent Scholar Notes

How to Start a Study Group

by Curt Hillstrom

Near the heart and soul of what the Minnesota Independent Scholars' Forum is all about are our study groups. To encourage the formation of more of them, we are trying to make it as easy as possible to set up and run one. For anyone who is interested, here are step-by-step instructions:

1. Decide what it is you want to study. It should be broad enough to appeal to several people, but specific enough to keep you happy. It can be in your area of major interest, or something else that you always wanted to know more about but never had the time to learn.

2. Decide on a place to meet. Usually study groups meet in someone's home, but other places can do as well. Libraries sometimes make rooms available at no cost and, as long as you buy something from them, coffeehouses and restaurants are often glad to have you come.

3. Here's the first place where the Forum can help. Tell someone on the Board of Directors about your plans. (Forum study groups must be approved by the Board, but in practice this is just a formality.) Your study group will be announced in the newsletter or included in a special mailing.

4. Once you know who is in your study group (usually after the first meeting), call us with their names and addresses or send the information to us. You can call and leave a message on our voice mail, at 612/870-1859, or you can call me personally at 612/823-5132. By the way, study group members do not have to be members of the Forum. The person starting it does, however.

5. Here's the second place where the Forum can help you. Every time you need a mailing to your study group members to inform them about the meetings or for any other reason, just call or write and let us know. We will, at your option, either do the mailing for you, or we will send you a set of mailing labels and some stamps for you to do it yourself.

By taking these steps, you should not think that you are making an indefinite commitment. Once you know everything about a topic you want to know, you can quit. There is a time to end everything, including study groups. In the meantime, enjoy the discussion.

The Religion And Culture Study Group had their first meeting on January 5. The group decided to read The Kingdom of Matthias: A Story of Sex and Salvation in 19th Century America by Paul E. Johnson and Sean Wilentz (Oxford University Press, 1994).

The wildfire revivalism of the Second Great Awakening spawned a class of entrepreneurial evangelical reformers who flourished at the helm of a market revolution. The prophet Matthias was their enemy, and created a world of his own to stand against it. This is not a story of fundamentalism or social deprivation so much as it is an account of a rebellion in the name of Ancient Truth. The similarities with alternative spiritualities in the "Golden Dawn" tradition are remarkable and help make the book of strong current interest.

For more information, call Susan Smith at 612/871-1125 or Curt Hillstrom at 612/823-5132.

The Science and Humanities Study Group has completed discussion of Ian Barbour's book, Religion in an Age of Science. Next, the group will make its excursion into the field of science fiction. The selection will be The Dispossessed by Ursula K. LeGuin. This parable of two contrasting societies has become a classic, known and read far beyond the sci-fi world.

New members are welcome — as many as can fit around Ginny Hansen's hospitable dining room table. For information, call Ginny (612/377-5960) or Huldah Curl (612/926-0003).
1995 Independent Scholars Calendar

March 11, Saturday
10:00 a.m.
MISF Works in Progress
Discussion with Pat Hirl
Longstaff on “Communicating Complexities: New Challenges in Telecommunications Policy”
Location: East Lake St. Branch,
Minneapolis Public Library
Contact: MISF, 612/870-1859

March 16, Thursday
noon
Minnesota Freedom of Information Day Ceremony
Location: State Judicial Center,
St. Paul
Contact: Metronet, 612/646-0475

April 8, Saturday
10:00 a.m.
MISF Works in Progress
Discussion with Jeremy Igers
on “The Worm in the Apple: America’s Troubled Affair with Food”
Location: East Lake St. Branch,
Minneapolis Public Library
Contact: MISF, 612/870-1859

April 8, Saturday
7:00 p.m.
Minnesota Book Awards Ceremony
Location: University of St. Thomas, St. Paul
Contact: Roger Sween, 612/296-2821

May 13, Saturday
10:00 a.m.
MISF Works in Progress
Discussion with John Bessler on “Death in the Dark: The History and Politics of Executions in America”
Location: East Lake St. Branch,
Minneapolis Public Library
Contact: MISF, 612/870-1859

November 17, Friday
“Learning from the Culture”
Annual Conference of the Minnesota Association for Continuing Adult Education
Location: TBD
Contact: Roger Sween, 612/296-2821

Minnesota Independent Scholars’ Forum
P.O. Box 80235
Lake Street Station
Minneapolis, MN 55408-8235

Address Correction Requested