Someone Had To Do It: The Beginnings of MISF by Cheryl Dickson

All That Fiddle a poem by Morgan Grayce Willow

Reflections on the Annual Meeting by Judy Yeager Jones

Scholars' Use of Libraries by Roger Sween
Editorial Notes

Recently, my husband and I attended the 90th birthday of the minister who has been my husband’s mentor, who married us, who baptized our children, and has remained a central figure in our lives. I was impressed with how much his vision seemed to project into the future—even as we were recalling and celebrating the past. I was reminded of the passage in Joel 2:28 where God says, “Your old men will see visions”—a reversal of the normal scheme of things. (Usually it is young men who have vision.) It has always seemed to me that the capacity to work for a better future—beyond one’s own life span—is a mark of maturity and wisdom.

This recent celebration brought back to mind the celebration of the twentieth of MISF, which took place last November. This issue of the Forum grew directly out of that meeting. Cheryl Dickson’s speech, “Someone Had to Do It,” documents the beginnings of MISF and celebrates our survival. Morgan Grayce Willow, a longtime scholar, read some of her poetry at that meeting. One poem is printed in this issue of the journal. Then Judy Yeager Jones, a returning member of MISF, wrote a reflection about the importance of Humanities Commission funding to her endeavors in Women’s Studies. I have printed a portion of Jones’s reflection in this issue.

But while we are celebrating twenty years of MISF, we need also to look to the future. It is cloudy. I was sobered by a less than celebratory conversation with Sal Salerno, a former member of MISF. Salerno raised serious questions about the future of independent scholarship—particularly in this time of budget cuts, downsized faculties, and general retrenchment. He wondered if there is a future for the independent scholar at all. This question is central as we ponder the future of this organization and perhaps of our personal endeavors.

Another retrenching and restricting change is that borrowing privileges at UMN for MISF members have ended. Roger Sween, another longtime scholar, explains that even as library borrowing has been restricted, something has been given back in terms of general interlibrary access and digital connections. But it is a change.

Standing under these clouds, can we imagine MISF twenty years from now? Shirley Whiting tries to conceive some answers to this question in her editorial; “intellectual peer group” and “organizational base” are two ideas that come to her mind. But the larger question remains: Do we as an organization have the maturity and wisdom to conceive and create a future for independent scholarship? Somebody has to do it—it might as well be us.

Lucy M. Brusic

The deadline for the next issue of the Forum is September 10, 2003.

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Thank you for inviting me to be with you to celebrate your accomplishment. Twenty years is a good long time and I am so pleased to see how long and how far you have come since the idea for the Independent Scholars Forum first landed. … Because I was director of the Humanities Commission, my talk will center on the concern for humanities scholars—more specifically, those with Ph.D.s in the Humanities. But more about that later.

I want to remind you of conditions for the humanities in the sixties when the National Endowment for the Humanities (the NEH) was founded by the Congress, and the early seventies, when the NEH began what they called the state programs. Under pressure from Congress, the NEH somewhat reluctantly began the programs in the states, beginning in 1971. The Congress was aware of the state arts boards and wanted parallel, or similar, organizations for the humanities. NEH conducted start-ups in eight states in 1971, Minnesota being one of them. In the fall of 1971, the Minnesota group, four men from the Twin Cities who were picked by the NEH, named the organization, formulated guides for grants, received their first operating grant of $100,000, and hired an executive director. In January of 1972, they opened an office and began accepting applications for grants for public humanities projects.

**Humanities in the 1970s**

Please remember that in the early seventies, there were few nice catalogs for museum exhibits, even fewer with essays by scholars. There were identifying, but not contextual, labels on the walls at exhibits; there were no after-play discussions led by scholars; there were few public lecture/discussion programs in public venues; and humanities scholars were never on the radio or on television. The state humanities agencies welcomed all of these ideas and supported them with grant dollars.

I joined the Minnesota Humanities Commission in April of 1975 as an intern. I was completing a BA in Humanities at Metropolitan State University, and the internship was beyond my imagining. The Commission was still inventing itself as it went along. Questions such as could any one “do” the humanities on the radio, could anyone do justice to the humanities in less than fifty minutes, could a slide presentation be a humanities program, continually arose. Such questions seem downright silly now, but at that time, the humanities were so firmly imbedded in the academy and held so closely by the priesthood, that wrestling them away became one of the biggest battles.

My consciousness was raised, and my conscience pricked, at the second meeting of the Humanities Commission board of directors I attended. The board was discussing grant applications and the definition of “humanities scholar” was a hot issue. Could someone be a “humanities scholar” and not hold a faculty position? Could someone be a “humanities scholar” and not be a full-time member of a college faculty? “ Definitely not,” said one board member, “I hold two full-time positions myself.” I knew then that if that logic and those ethics prevailed, I would have a short tenure at the Humanities Commission. It was also clear to me that an intern had no standing; if I wanted to change things, I would have to be in a different position.

I worked on and off for MHC for a year and a half until the fall of 1976, when I accepted a full-time job. The following fall, the director was offered a job at the National Endowment for the Humanities and I moved into the director’s position.

At the time I took the job with MHC, me with my Metropolitan State University BA, the National Endowment for the Humanities was even more obsessed with credentials than the board of the Minnesota Humanities Commission. I remember the outcry over Barbara Tuchman, author of *A Distant Mirror* and *The Guns of August*. She was termed a popularizer, a very dirty word at the time. (I must add that such snobbery still exists…) My first hire at MHC was a newly minted Ph.D. who, I believed, would stave off the NEH’s criticism of me. It worked.

I remember the mid and late seventies as a time of real excitement for the Humanities Commission. There was a large group of scholars in the state in Scandinavian studies, so MHC funded endless conferences, videos, and movies on Danes, Finns, Swedes, and Norwegians. Because of an NEH rule that conferences funded by the state councils had to be for the public, and because the conference stars had to be humanities scholars, and because no one had yet figured out a way to connect the two, I sat through many conferences in the company of bewildered immigrants and first generation Americans as they listened to esoteric papers on obscure Scandinavian writers. While the audience, including me,
DICKSON, continued from page 3

couldn't understand a fraction of the proceedings, we were all
proud that the conferences were taking place.

The arrival of Women's Studies scholars on the scene provided
the partner MHC needed for a long and happy marriage. The
Humanities Commission had money for public programs and
the Women's Studies scholars needed audiences. Furthermore,
women's history was "hot," interesting to the public, and a
natural for the kind of programs MHC was founded to fund.

Meanwhile, my colleague and I were working to get the board
to accept barely employed, or unemployed scholars. In nearly
every meeting, we found ways to counter those arguments of
"who is a humanities scholar and who isn't." We figured out
pretty early that some of our best public teachers did not have
the security of a faculty position. This is not to say that no full-
time faculty joined our cause of bringing the humanities to
the public. But we found many unemployed, under-employed,
or other-employed scholars who were eager to teach in public
settings and were good at the work.

No work for Ph.D.s

My interest was not only professional. By 1981, I had married
my present husband, who was working on his Ph.D. in
Philosophy at UMN. He had a number of part-time teaching
jobs, but was unable to find a tenure track position and had
gone to work outside the academy. My oldest son was about
to graduate from the U, summa in English, and I did not
courage him to go on to graduate school in English. There
were no jobs. At this time, when I advertised a position at the
Humanities Commission, I got 300 to 350 applications, many
of them from Ph.D.s in the humanities who were looking for
something, anything, related to the field. One morning when
I arrived at the office, there was a man sitting on the floor by
the door waiting for me. He had a Ph.D. in the humanities and
was looking for work.

Clearly, someone had to do something and I had the position
and the resources to do it. I talked about the problem with
John Wallace, who taught philosophy at UMN. John wanted
to do what he could so he and I hosted a meeting at UMN,
introducing Human Resource directors of large companies to
University humanities scholars to talk about employment for
humanities Ph.D.s. It was a disaster. The business people were
doubtful and uneasy, and the humanities scholars were badly
behaved. They sneered at the idea of anyone who had earned
a Ph.D. in the humanities working for a corporation.

Professor Wallace and I had a number of discussions regarding
the moral position of the people in charge of graduate
programs. If there were no jobs, how could graduate programs
continue to encourage students to invest their time and money
in a Ph.D.? The Chronicle of Higher Education reported that a
survey of graduate students in the humanities revealed that
they knew there were few or no academic positions awaiting
them, but some 65% thought they, nevertheless, would get a
job. I don't know what kind of discouragement it would take
to counter that confidence, hopefulness, or denial but at least
they were not being deceived and lured into the programs by
false promises.

Although our business/humanities meeting was not what
we had hoped, I still believe that there might be a way
to encourage some corporations to hire humanities Ph.D.s
because they said they wanted people who could think
critically, write, and speak. I called an acquaintance who
had risen very high at General Mills and asked him if he
ever employed humanities Ph.D.s. He said, "No, they are too
selfish." Selfish, did I hear him correctly? "Yes," he said. "They
do what they have to do here as quickly as possible so they can
get on with their own work. Working here is just a way to get
money so they can do what they really want to do."

These, and a few other failed attempts and revelations, made
me realize that people would still pursue doctoral degrees and
that corporate Minnesota was not going to be much help in
any way I could help structure, so I turned to the foundation
world.

First meeting

On May 12, 1982, we sent out an invitation for the first
meeting of independent scholars. The meeting was held
May 19 at the Humanities Commission's office to "discuss
the possibility of establishing an institute for independent
scholars in Minnesota... The institute would encourage
scholarly work in the humanities by providing some of
the services that unaffiliated scholars need most, including
some administrative support, access to libraries and special
collections, opportunities for colloquia and study groups,
and information regarding opportunities for participants in
conferences, symposia, and public programs."

Forty-five people showed up, which was more than capacity
for the room. I was pleased and dismayed, hoping, I think,
that my concern was mine alone and that there would be no
interest.

At that first meeting, I said that if people wanted to found
an organization, MHC offered some support, such as a mail
drop, an affiliation on the letterhead, photocopying, and
clerical help. We did not have computers, so the offer was for
use of our secretary and typewriters. There was interest and the Forum’s true birth was that evening.

Although we had no national organization, we decided to hold a national conference in the fall of 1982. Harry Day of Sprinhill Conference Center in Wayzata and John Taylor, President of the Northwest Area Foundation (NWF) agreed to host and fund the conference... The conference, November 3-5, attracted the top people in the country. This list included Ronald Gross, director of the Independent Scholarship Project, funded by a Foundation for Improvement of Post-secondary Education (FIPSE) grant; Steven Welland of the Federation of State Humanities Councils; John Bennett of the American Council on Education; Malcolm Scully of The Chronicle of Higher Education; Catherine Rolzinski of FIPSE; Richard Schlatter of the American Council of Learned Societies and independent scholars representing their organizations in New York, Denver, Wisconsin, and Berkeley.

The group participated in sessions on “Independent Scholarship and the Public Interest,” “Needs and Current Responses,” and “Identifying New Ways to Meet Needs.” The conferees concluded that independent scholars are important to national life and they should be encouraged and supported. John Taylor of NWF called me after the conference and offered funds for independent scholars to the Humanities Commission. The grant, for $12,000 a year for five years, was broken down into the following categories: $3,000 a year to the Independent Scholar of the Year; $7,000 for a publication subsidy for a book, and $2,000 for small grants for projects by independent scholars. The Humanities Commission named an Advisory Council to make the awards and grants. Before the five years elapsed, Mr. Taylor left the Foundation and his successor was not interested in renewing the grant. I believe that grant of $60,000 was the first substantive grant ever awarded to a state humanities council and it was of critical importance to the independent scholar movement.

Meanwhile, the Minnesota Independent Scholars’ Forum was begun and I am happy to see, continues to this day and, I understand, is still receiving grants from MHC. And both MHC and the Forum, I am happy to say, have expanded the definition of “scholar” to “one who does scholarly work.”

The future
I want to talk about the future because I see change coming faster than it ever has. This past summer, Governor Ventura appointed me, among others, to the board of trustees of the MN State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU). MnSCU has 35 four-year, community, technical, and comprehensive colleges on 55 campuses in 46 MN communities. The system serves 230,000 individuals a year, in college courses, certification courses, apprenticeships, and re-certifications. The system has a huge inventory of buildings and grounds, more than 22,000,000 sq. ft. of roofs, for one thing. Maintaining the physical plants is getting more and more expensive. The first thing I hear from legislators when they learn I am on the board is that “MnSCU must close some of its campuses.” That sounds just fine until you ask which one and then it is always “not the one in my district.” I know the legislature will be looking for solutions to the budget shortfall and I have some inkling of where they might go if they cannot close campuses.

In these first months, I have visited a number of the MnSCU campuses and what I have learned is that the students in these institutions are not 18-22 year olds who can go to another place and live in a dormitory for four years. They are mostly grownups with spouses, children, jobs, and aging parents. They are place-bound and they need postsecondary education.

Every college I have visited has demonstrated their fastest growing area: on-line education. I have been astonished to see that biology teachers have figured out ways to create virtual lab courses and humanities teachers talk about the richness of their on-line offerings. Many faculty members resist on-line teaching, of course, but those who embrace it are excited about the results.

Colleges tell us that many students go on-line at 10:00 P.M. on Fridays and work off and on all weekend. These students expect someone to be on the other end of the line all weekend, too, and that does not fit the image of the work week many academics want for themselves.

It appears to me, that there is a real opening soon for people outside the academy who want to teach. I expect that sometime in the next very few years, the MnSCU system will have an on-line office to “vet” courses that community faculty want to teach. I imagine that, in the beginning, degrees will be very important.

If we try to look twenty or thirty years into the future, it can look very bright or very dark for scholars and scholarship. In the worst case, if money remains scarce, eventually some campuses will have to be closed and there will be hiring freezes. I envision very small departments whose members spend their time vetting on-line courses proposed by people who are not employed by the colleges. If your goal is to save money, and for some the only goal is to save money, then it makes sense to shrink physical plants and full-time, tenured
faculties and pay on-line teachers for piecework. They would not need offices or classrooms, and they would not get benefits. Education could be delivered anywhere at anytime.

Let’s spin this even further. Imagine a legislative session when MnSCU is asking for more money to develop more on-line courses and imagine a legislator saying, “Why should we spend money to develop courses, why don’t we just buy our courses from the best places, MIT, Harvard, and places like that? That way, everyone gets the best and there is no second or third-rate institution or degree?”

Thinking such thoughts makes me worried about the future of scholarship. In my worst moments I imagine a new dark age when a few of you will have to keep the lamps of learning and scholarship alive.

In another scenario, I can imagine that courses will be put on the web, vetted and certified or not, and millions of people around the world will teach millions of others. The opportunities to teach and learn will be unbounded and most people will have the opportunity to educate themselves, at home. I can imagine girls and women who are not allowed out of their homes, still able to learn—at home. I can imagine people who are disabled, given a new freedom to learn. I can imagine a new flowering of learning and scholarship.

We may have to go through a dark period to get to the light, but we know how to do that, we have done that. We know that learning and scholarship will always lead to the light.

Cheryl Dickson delivered this speech to the MISEF annual meeting in November 2002. We thank her for letting us reprint it here.

On “All That Fiddle”

In recent decades, poetry has found itself at the center of controversy. Some critics argue that American poetry has imploded on the self-conscious “I.” Others claim that the proliferation of MFA writing programs has homogenized the lyric by supporting too many generations of poets who write by committee. Others say poetry violates its own tenets if it includes even the remotest political reference, while still others insist that American letters are well past the time when poets need to take a “heads-up” stance to the world, to lift their gaze above their navels and engage once again. Some even attack the notion of free verse, charging that it’s really nothing more than prose with hard returns tossed in. These critics want poets to return to a traditional prosody, to the use of what are popularly called “received” forms: sonnet, villanelle, rhymed couplets, pantoum, ballade, rondeau, sestina, and the like. They wish, in other words, to return American poetry to the time before Ezra Pound and the Moderns. Leaping into the fray are recent poets laureate who have contended, on one side, that poets have shut themselves up in an air-tight room and closed off all doors to the broad audience that is the public, and, on the other, that we live in a time of unprecedented resurgence of public interest in poetry. Meanwhile, in 1992 Dana Gioia (who, incidentally, was recently appointed to head up the National Endowment for the Arts under the Bush Administration) published a book entitled Can Poetry Matter? which both codifies and adds fuel to the controversy.

Triggered by all this, A View from the Loft (edited then by Ellen Hawley) put out a call to writers and readers for reaction. They invited answers to the question: Of what use is poetry? “All That Fiddle” is my answer. I ask the reader to recall, as you enter the poem, that the great American poet Marianne Moore, expressing our American love-hate relationship with poetry as perhaps no one else can, opened her own poem entitled “Poetry” by saying: “I, too, dislike it.”

Morgan Grayce Willow holds an M.A. from Colorado State University. Her awards include: a SASE/ Jerome Fellowship, Minnesota State Arts Board Fellowships in poetry and prose, a Loft-McKnight in poetry. Formerly an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter, Morgan received a translation grant from The Witter Bynner Foundation for Poetry. She published the first-ever guide to making literary events accessible to deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences entitled Crossing That Bridge. Morgan teaches at The Loft Literary Center and Minneapolis Community & Technical College. She read “All That Fiddle” and several other poems at the Annual Meeting in November.
All That Fiddle
by Morgan Grayce Willow

There is no use for it.

Except when recycling old ones for fresh drafts of prose, poetry's more saleable cousin. Or for holiday gift wrapping: Longfellow papers on a great aunt's package; Shel Silverstein swaddling a toddler's toy; moist pages from Gertrude Stein packing stems of roses.

Use poetry in the home to line kitchen cupboards. Cut poems in strips for to-do lists: buy plums at the coop, find receipts for the IRS, select perennials for next spring's planting. Jot down screw sizes needed to fix the storm door; measurements for new window blinds. Put down names of potential parents for the stray cat in your alley.

Poetry's narrow stalks of color add interest to your bookshelves, breaking up those wide columns of fiction. On your refrigerator poems adorn, entertain, enlighten. Fold a poem to mark your place in Prevention magazine. Use one to relieve eye strain caused by ads on billboards, buses, bumpers, and TV.

Poetry. It's what we search for when we read graffiti. It's the one clear sound byte rising sharp above static.

It's music whose sole instrument is language.

Use poetry to help babies sleep. Use it to teach them to read. Use a poem as recipe for surviving lost love. Use poems to clear away clutter in your mind. Use them as greetings; save money on cards. If your camera is stolen, let poems replace snapshots, souvenirs from your trip. Let a poem find the words when you stand beside a grave.

Let poetry stir your soup of language, adding spice to an everyday cadence. Steal liberally from poems when your own words fail. Use them as your getaway car. Let poems be your umbrella when harsh words hail.

Use them at work. If you are a physicist, search poems to name new particles you discover. If a pipefitter, let poems model the tight line. If a cabbie, set your meter to the Rubáiyát of Umar Khayyam.

Because metaphor means miracle, use poetry to heal. Let poetry escort you through your valley of madness. After centuries of experience, it knows the way out. Follow Rilke. With poetry, live in the questions. Or, Mickey Rooney. Let poetry prove there's still stardust in life's dirty old pan.
Recently, the courtesy use of libraries to non-faculty scholars has changed. As a career librarian and member of MISF, I have been asked to respond to this situation. I am responding from the vantage point of one who is steeped in the service issues of libraries and the peculiarities of their delivery in Minnesota.

Formerly MISF members enjoyed the borrowing privileges of the University of Minnesota libraries as part of the University's service population. That status has changed. This change is due in part to new technologies that make walk-in service less necessary for Minnesotans. But there is another reason, more fundamental to the nature of libraries: information can be accessed from a distance.

All libraries exist to provide resources to their publics. Depending on the publics that different libraries serve, they acquire and make available some combination of resources that variously entertain, inform, educate, or support scholarship, dependent upon the choices of their users. In the United States, the vast majority of libraries (school and public) emphasize the former two uses; these are the libraries close at hand. A smaller number of libraries emphasizes the latter two.

The libraries most useful to the scholar are the types fewer in number and generally more distant than public and school—those in academia at the graduate level, those that specialize in some particular subject, and the largest of public libraries in major metropolitan areas.

**Ways to find resources**

For scholars as for anyone, two principal ways exist to discover resources suitable to their use—first-hand examination and second-hand reference.

To take the latter item first, what "second-hand" reference means in this context is that the reference follows from the existence of the resource. Often second-hand reference helps the searcher to actual first-hand examination. Three means of second-hand reference exist:

1) A common way to learn of potentially useful resources is from associates and colleagues who tell one another what they know.

2) Another abundant source of second-hand reference is internal bibliographic citation. My professor for Research in the Humanities was fond of stating that "scholarship is knit together by bibliographic citation," which she portrayed as the happiest blend of academic integrity (attribution of the evidence used) and courtesy (to those who would come after).

3) Outside bibliographic citations are those resource-finding devices that exist primarily or exclusively of citations with little other content than what supports the searching and finding function. These are the literature reviews, indexes, abstracts, bibliographies, and catalogs that load the reference areas of libraries. They are neither as friendly as the personal references, nor as readily encountered as the internal citations. Their full use requires intention and energy. Whether they deliver on their potential is arguable.

Now, to go back to the examination method: the phenomenon of open stack access in the United States encouraged nearly everyone to use classification systems and catalog lookups as a shorthand way of zeroing in on the examination method. Library users accept the generalization that what libraries do in classification is locate related subjects together; and actual experience confirms this for them. But what might be missed unless front-end searching goes deeper is that the same interest that clearly appears in one topic can just as readily appear as an aspect of other topics and will, therefore, be scattered in the collection.


This example only deals with cataloged items under a widely used classification system. It does not pertain to a good share of most research library collections in unclassified periodicals,
government documents, archival materials, microform collections, electronic resources, and other specialized collections such as local history, rare books, and other particulars.

Because there is no single all encompassing approach to research, a variety of finding devices—bibliographical tools and other location systems—need to be used in a search of what will satisfy the scholar—especially when stacks are closed.

**Change in research methods**

When I was a young reference librarian, two tools that were often essential to research were *Psychological Abstracts* and *MLA International Bibliography*. However, they were extremely cumbersome and time consuming, and only the most dedicated could at first comprehend and then would willingly struggle through them. Full use of *Psych Abstracts* required arduous searching in numerous yet to be cumulated indexes and carefully recording abstract numbers in order to refer back to the citations. Use of *MLA International Bibliography* meant cracking the hierarchal-chronological order established by the Modern Language Association to find the desired entries. Now these and many other tools have been streamlined and replaced with online databases where retrieval is infinitely easier. And if search strategies are well-thought through, online searches prove more productive and precise in the hits captured.

Today’s technology moves towards increasing ease, at least in some areas.

One ongoing project is the establishment of an online catalog and information system, MnLINK. This project began with a desire, embraced by the legislature, to have one statewide online catalog, big and open enough to take any library that wants to participate. Of course, no state has this in the way imagined—service to everyone, anywhere, any time—but progress has been made. MnLINK is to do two things: provide for automatic forwarding of interlibrary loan requests and provide one generalized metacatalog to dozens or hundreds of discrete local library catalogs. The latter goal has been achieved.

Today the MnLINK Gateway joins together the twelve regional public library systems’ 370 library outlets; the libraries of the University of Minnesota and 50 other academic libraries among Minnesota State College and Universities and private college campuses, 18 state government libraries and the special libraries of Hill Reference and the Minnesota Historical Center, and even 55 school libraries or school library districts. Under a flexible design these libraries can be searched either individually, in groups by type, as academic or public libraries, by seven regional configurations, or by a searcher’s own preferred combination.

A few major libraries are not current participants in MnLINK for certain structural reasons and the limited number of available ports to link catalogs. Among them are Carleton College, St. Olaf College, and the Duluth Public Library. Nevertheless, these and many other libraries worldwide are otherwise searchable online in various other ways.

**Interlibrary loans**

The hundred twenty-five year-old history of interlibrary borrowing in the United States is due to the fact that no library, whatever its immensity, has everything. The late Hugh Atkinson was a champion of resource sharing; although he directed the largest publicly supported university library in the United States—Illinois at Champagne-Urbana—and loaned to thousands of smaller libraries, UICU libraries themselves borrowed hundreds of thousands of items each year. What linked catalog systems demonstrate today is that even the smallest libraries have some things that no other library in their network has.

Concomitant with the development of linked catalogs is the use of online catalog terminals, including personal computers, as workstations that also can access other electronic databases in addition to library catalogs. A host of these databases exist, and Minitex, the statewide interlibrary loan, document delivery and backup reference service, brokers a number of them for academic and government agency libraries. Individual libraries may have their own subscriptions. Often outside use of specialty databases is limited to client population and this lack of access can be an obstacle for independent scholars who do not have adjunct faculty status or other authorization to use subscription databases. Some libraries will provide fee-based use, depending on their contracts.

Minitex also makes available statewide the Electronic Library of Minnesota (ELM) which among its package of databases includes statewide access to *Expanded Academic ASAP* (Gale Group) and *Article First* (OCLC First Search). State funding has made this core of databases available nearly everywhere in Minnesota and at-home access is available to registered public library borrowers who are thereby authenticated as part of the population being served by these contracts. User satisfaction with these databases rates high, and Minitex has documented hundreds of successful user stories on the
Reflections on the Annual Meeting
by Judy Yeager Jones

After rejoining the Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum, I was delighted to see the Annual Meeting would feature Cheryl Dickson. A recently made friend Morgan Grayce Willow was to read her poetry so the program looked quite worth the trip to another old haunt, St. Anthony Main.

The years slid away as Cheryl Dickson recalled her tenure at the helm of the Minnesota Humanities Commission. A nontraditional student herself, Dickson went from an intern’s position to paid staff and shortly thereafter, Director and a highly rewarding career. I learned that she had been one of us! So that’s why we in the women’s history and women’s studies fields could so often count on the Humanities Commission to fund our programs!

I first became a member of a loosely knit coterie of women’s historians at work in various traditionally oriented institutions when I became treasurer of WHOM—Women Historians of the Midwest—after I was recruited by Susan Hill Gross who headed the Upper Midwest History Center for Women in St. Louis Park. Susan and Marjorie Bingham, Ph.D. were high school teachers during the 1970s who saw the need for gender-based curriculum and began the Women In World Area Studies materials and book series that would, ultimately, become the basis of materials used by the Peace Corps to familiarize recruits with women in Other World cultures.

In 1984, I received my first humanities grant for a Women’s History Month program: Images of Women with Disabilities. Although I had not yet myself received my bachelor’s degree, I had published a paper (about my aunt Serena who had required a wooden leg during the 1890s) and had become interested in what today is known as Disability Studies. Cheri Register, Ph.D., was our Scholar as our panel of women with first-person stories joined two historians in what I have been told was the first such panel held in Minnesota. The audience was sparse but I recall Cheryl Dickson herself who took notes and appeared quite interested in what her essential funds had wrought.

I went on to found the nonprofit Minnesota Women’s History Month Project and specialized for many years in the history of Minnesota women. We were only the fourth state-based project in the country and the only one without institutional backing. I never truly felt this lack; we had the Minnesota Humanities Commission and the State Dept. of Education along with the Upper Midwest History Center. We had a cutting edge constellation of historians of women and women’s studies activists; we had At the Foot of the Mountain theater; we had a network throughout the area colleges and women’s organizations like the Minnesota Women’s Consortium and Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.

In retrospect we owe much of our success to the support by the Minnesota Humanities Commission and Cheryl Dickson.

In 1990, Jane Curry and I, under the then-largest grant ever awarded by MHC, organized the first, and to date, only national conference for solo performers. We were co-sponsored by Kathy Adams and the College of St. Catherine. “Culture Under Canvas” asked the complicated question of how to combine accurate history with educational, entertaining theater? From a group of over 100 varied videos, 18 presenters from across the country showcased their personages in a three-day event. I still keep in touch with some of the folks I met through that conference.

MHC funded cutting edge scholarship on the 1862 Dakota War and funded discussions by Lakota women on racism within the women’s movement and within us. We explored the topic of Women and the Law with the Honorable Diana Murphy during the Bicentennial years. I don’t recall attending any March, Women’s History Event hosted by Women Historians of the Midwest that was not enabled by MHC grants—even the memorable year that Gerda Lerner was our keynote but remained snowbound in a car trying to exit the airport.

I was proud to rise and offer my warmest “thank you” to Cheryl Dickson on behalf of all of us in women’s history and women’s studies who have succeeded in cutting-edge programs partly because of her vision of scholarship and the tremendous variety of support the MHC and Dickson provided for so many of us.

Judy Yeager Jones is working on the most exciting and complex women’s history biography project she’s ever done. She found the personal papers of “Howard Glyndon” for whom the Minnesota town of Glyndon was named. Howard was not a he. Howard was a she and the nom de plume of Laura C. Redden, a 19th-century poet and journalist who took the name for her first book in 1862. Redden began as a Civil War correspondent and then became a European traveler and a poet. She published four books after her 1858 graduation from the Missouri School for the Deaf. Gallaudet University Press will publish the first of four planned books on Laura in June of 2003, Sweet Bells Jangled: Selected Poetry of Laura C. Redden Searing (1839-1923) which Jones is coediting with Jane Vallier of Iowa State University.
As often happens when I’m trying to clarify my thinking, a book jumps out at me to provide the direction I need. Jung called this occurrence synchronicity. In this case the book is *The Unconscious Civilization* by John Rakston Saul. The book comprises Saul’s 1995 Massey Lectures broadcast in Canada as part of CBC Radio’s *Ideas* series.

Saul states that knowledge alone does not make us conscious and that much of higher education does not follow its mission to teach the habits of thought. He points out how, instead, universities are fitting into the corporatist structure. Each professional school has its box within the larger entity. Specialization within each field can result in ever deeper knowledge about ever narrower categories while practitioners lose the humanistic ability to communicate their insights to others across fields.

Barriers constructed by specialized language, in addition, burden the democratic process when efforts are not made to retain and fortify the channels of civic discourse. Increasing stratification by economic, educational, gender, class, and religious considerations can pit the interests of segments of the population against each other in conflicts that are detrimental to society’s larger goals. Saul makes trenchant arguments for reconnecting language to reality and clarifying what we mean when we speak of democracy and freedom.

The way language is being used in our political life today seems to me worthy of discussion. As Saul says, “This splitting of language into a public domain and a corporatist domain makes it very difficult for anyone—outsider or insider—to grasp reality. Without a language that functions as a general means of useful communication, civilizations slip off into self-delusion, and romanticism, both of which are aspects of ideology, both aspects of unconsciousness.”

What led me to Saul was my wish to sharpen a vision for MISF. As I seek input from members, I have found two who have given me language that helps capture needed concepts. Suzanne Mahmoodi recognizes our need for “an intellectual peer group” and Wally Conhaim supports my view that each of us should assess our spheres of influence and, she suggests, function as an ethical “thought leader” within those spheres.

Many independent scholars do not have an organizational base other than MISF and part of our mission is to help members discover resources and persons who share their interests. There are other concerns as well. Such questions as “How do we build circles of relationships to explore ideas and share resources?” “What kind of programming needs to be developed?” “How do we make our services and ideas available to other parts of the state?” “What should be our relationship to other organizations which share our values?”

As we apply ourselves to answering these questions we may discover the “thought leaders” we need, for surely that term describes each of us. Programming has a chance to evolve from the common interests we share. While our membership is diverse, that very diversity can work to our advantage as we stimulate each other with our interests and ideas.

To develop our vision we call on all of you to assume your stance as leaders. In this fast changing world we cannot afford to be complacent about the need to share knowledge, especially with the young. I invite you to consider the wisdom you’ve gained and how you might share your insights with the rest of us. We, in MISF, are looking for more than head knowledge — we’re looking for cooperation and collegiality. We invite your ideas and participation.

*Shirley Whiting*

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