Welcome New Board Members!

At the annual meeting of the Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum on June 25, 2016 new officers were elected to serve beginning July 1, 2016. They include:

Lionel Davis, Jim Hart, Kim Heikkila (who resigned October 2016), Dave Megarry, Peter Riola, Barb Sommer, and new President, Steven Miller.

Continuing board members are: Gus Fenton, Curt Hillström, Evelyn Klein, Bill McMcTeer, Emily Pollack, and Shirley Whiting.

Advisory members include: Joe Amato, Lucy Brusic, Dave Juncker, Mike Woolsey.

MISF Annual Meeting President’s Report

Out-going president, Mike Woolsey, presented his report on the accomplishments of his term and some of his ideas for the future of the Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum to the membership during the business part of the meeting.

Fiscal Agency
- Completion of study of mid-800s Ojibway Indian in Minnesota.
- Inception of History of Independent Scholarship in Minnesota, led by Lucy Brusic.

MISF Journal
- Renamed from Practical Thinking to The Minnesota Scholar.
- Editorship transitioned from Lucy Brusic to Evelyn Klein. Thank you to Lucy Brusic for her dedicated scholarship producing the journal for the past ten years.

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The Belonging Addiction

by Steven C. Miller

I am a groups’ groupie. I seem to spend my time reading stuff to discuss or listening to other people talk, followed by discussion. And when I facilitate a group, I like to see where we agree on topics and discuss them. How could this happen to an introvert?

It all started in 1996; I have the dated ticket, so I know. A notice in the newspaper mentioned a one-man show by someone impersonating G.K. Chesterton. I’d read his detective stories, especially the Father Brown series and believed this would be a harmless diversion. Then a Chesterton Society meeting was announced in which a tape of the Orson Welles radio adaption of one of my favorite Chesterton books, The Man Who Was Thursday, would be played. What could be the harm? I began to haunt the last Tuesday of the month meetings at the University Club on Summit Avenue. (They start at 7 PM. You could go, too!)

Without much conscious volition, I spoke three times at Chesterton conventions. I write two articles on detective fiction per issue in their magazine, Gilbert, (Chesterton’s first name). I invited the society’s president to speak last June at an MISF meeting. However, being a contrarian, while others of a Protestant background were converting to Catholicism just like Chesterton, I, with a non-religious background, became a Baha’i.

But this was just the beginning. I read of a local Sherlock Holmes convention. I went to a meeting discussing a story. Over time, I learned that showing up and being opinionated enough to share observations, apt and otherwise, makes one highly draftable. I wound up being one of three or four (it varies) discussion group leaders.

Then the dam began to break in a massive torrent. I learned of and joined the Science and Religion Roundtable which seeks to learn if science and religion are in any way compatible. A person, who mentioned another group, Secular Bible Study, which talked about the Bible as literature and part of our culture, appeared. Both theists and atheists attended. To go, I only had to join a group hosted by Meetup.com. Little did I know how Meetup would take over my life.

Secular Bible Study fed into a personality trait which may or may not be good. From time to time I learn of people who generate suspicion. For example, I was told in a Chesterton meeting that Muslims are a menace and going to one of their mosques would prove it. In Iran Baha’is are persecuted by its Muslim government. Maybe I should find out. So when I saw a Muslim-Christian Dialogue with FREE FOOD advertised in the paper, I couldn’t resist. Although a challenging group at times, the Islamic Center of Minnesota became a destination.

When you have always believed in God (although not always sure in a lovable God), atheists seem a little doubtful. But if I went to Secular Bible Study, where I was promised other religious fanatics for company, I should be safe. Again, this was uncomfortable at times, but one learns that there are nice atheists and not so nice atheists and sometimes a few doubts beneath the bluster. Some believers are like that, too.

SBS was sometimes a dramatic group. The original founders vanished, based on health and other jobs. Others filled their place. They vanished. The group met at one Methodist church, then another, and then at a Unitarian-Universalist church. It had an ambitious schedule of meeting twice a month. Recruiting speakers could be difficult. I even did a presentation on religions in America, using power point slides another Baha’i lent me. Attendance numbers were becoming less than ideal. Perhaps we should try a new idea.

In the meantime, I explored the wonderful world of Meetup.com. I found Great Books groups,
where I rediscovered authors who had disappeared from my life somewhere in college. There were other groups I checked out and have attended off and on like Does God Exist?, Bible for Heathens, Futurists, and Critical Thinking. Apparently there is something for everyone. There is even a group called Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum which promotes independent thought and hosts monthly meetings. It has interest groups which discuss philosophy and history, proof that there is a Meetup group for everyone!

As a Baha’i, Interfaith is a natural. We believe in the truth of all religions; i.e., the big ones and most native ones. About ten years ago, St. Paul Interfaith Network began a fall program series where representatives of different faiths discussed elements of their religions. Programs one year even went into what turns people off about religion. After the formal presentations participants engaged in small group table discussion with a table facilitator trying to avoid acrimony and disintegration. For those who were not satiated by the big program, there were some monthly activities. One of these was Interfaith Conversation Café.

There is a web site for Conversation Cafés which started appropriately enough in the Starbucks birthplace of Seattle. It follows a format similar to Socrates Café. A topic is chosen at the beginning of the meeting. Attendees suggest them and then vote on them until one is the winner. The gathering agrees to ground rules such as open-mindedness, acceptance, curiosity, discovery, sincerity, brevity, and confidentiality. A talking object is passed around for the person who speaks to hold. A timer is used in initial rounds to keep it pithy. Then comes open discussion with a hopefully skilled facilitator preventing total chaos. At the end folks give a short summing up of what they took from the meeting. Next month they do it again, repeat until the world is finally a better place. It’s been going on for about ten years.

Another who is a personal coach for a living started Interfaith Conversation Café. After a few years, I began to show up. Regular attendance and some facilitation training led to being assistant facilitator. Turnout was initially good but seemed to dwindle. As we saw the same problem in Secular Bible Study, a natural solution suggested itself. If both groups met together, maybe the combination would be viable.

While not happening overnight, the groups combined, meeting at St. Paul Interfaith Network. The amalgamation worked; the religious people liked the atheists and vice versa. Suggestions were made often by people who then vanished never to be seen again. Undaunted we tried them anyway. Topics were chosen at the end of the meeting, so they could be publicized on the SBS Meetup site and by SPIN. A time limit was put on introductory explanation of the process with a commitment to get to discussion immediately.

But the secular element raised the issue of whether Interfaith Conversation Café is an appropriate label for a group with a significant atheist component. The concept of Inter-belief Conversation Café was floated. Exultant pronouncements that this would be a precedent setting and perhaps world changing event led the facilitator and me to wonder if perhaps we should ask SPIN if this were all right. This resulted in a mass dialogue meeting between atheists, humanists, secular types, and SPIN in which it was decided to give the new name a try.

By this time, being around a lot and always opinionated, I was on the Executive Team of SPIN. The baton was passed to me to be facilitator since after seven years the regular responsible adult for the Café felt ready to move on to other projects. The group varies from around 20 to as many as 35 participants. With support from regular participants, managing a group which ranges from fundamentalists to atheists is no more difficult than lion taming or alligator wrestling.

I go to events on religious and faith issues hosted by churches, synagogues, mosques, and other places. I help out with Minneapolis Area Interfaith Initiative, go to a military history discussion group, and find other ways to have a perhaps virtual life through group activities. And of course, at least for the time being, I am President of MISF.

Fortunately, my wife is my chief enabler. She feels that if she doesn’t complain about my outside
activities, then I can’t object to hers. Also, she believes that if I’m President, then she is First Lady. My writing for Gilbert, co-leading a Sherlock Holmes study group, and other such activities reflect credit upon her as my inspiration and better angel of my nature. Possibly, I should join a support group. But possibly, all these activities are my support groups.

~Steven Miller, President of Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum and participant in a, perhaps, unhealthy number of discussion groups, is a sole practitioner attorney practicing labor and employment for management. He has a B.A. and M.A. from George Peabody College (now part of Vanderbilt University) and a J.D. from Duke University School of Law.

MISF Mission Statement

The Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum (MISF) exists to foster scholars, whatever their formal credentials or academic achievement. MISF strives to be encouraging and critical, always aware of what distinguishes good scholarship. We encourage all projects of disciplined intellectual inquiry.

Our membership is open to anyone who supports these goals.

To achieve its mission, MISF provides scholars with:

1. Opportunities to collaborate with other scholars of similar interests;
2. Regular opportunities to exchange ideas on designated topics in small groups;
3. Opportunities to present to the critical eye of other scholars and to the public, the fruits of study, both in oral and written form;
4. Fiscal agency for scholarly grant submissions.

In an age of ever more sophisticated means of communication, MISF promotes face-to-face interaction among scholars as an irreplaceable means to scholarly excellence.

The Minnesota Scholar

*TMS* gives voice to its members by publishing relevant articles, essays, and poetry. Topics in response to current events, scholarly topics and topics of general interest fall into that range.

At the moment, we are still running our series on “Why Genealogy” (see *TMS* Volume 11, No. 1, June 2016 for specifics), describing our “scholarly” passions. Concurrently, we also include articles of general interest as well as a book reviews.

If you have an idea for an article, or if you have read a book of particular interest and you need feedback, please contact the editor. Or, simply send in your submission as a word document, following guide lines.

~Evelyn Klein, Editor
Now that the election is over, many of us feel a sense of relief from the chaos of negative campaigning, where it was easy to lose track of who did what, when and why, especially if you relied totally on what came through in the media. And regardless of how we see the election outcome, life does go on. Some say change is good. Some say the only things certain in life are death and taxes. But so is the fact that life is change.

Recently, when I found myself wide awake in the middle of the night, I settled in front of the TV with a warm glass of milk, remote in hand, channel surfing past western, war movie, horror flick, worn-out situation comedies to the Smothers Brothers on PBS TPT2 (Nov. 25, 2016). The music was pleasing, until the comic brother with the guitar, Tommy, stopped abruptly and said: “You can’t sing the song, if you don’t know the words.” It sounded like poetry to me. The straight string bass player, Dick, went on to explain that this type of song went back to the time of the madrigal, and anyway people at that time were illiterate, and that the accompanist was to sing his part “Fa, la, la, la, la.” And the comic brother wondered about being illiterate, which people no longer are, and something to the effect of how singing without words would work out in the song, until Dick, who sang the lyrics, said Tommy was just to sing “Fa, la, la, la, la, and they broke into a harmonious duet.

While I chuckled along as they bantered and played music, before I knew it, the next group of folk singers came on extolling thoughts of the past. I started to drift off thinking, which is what I sometimes do in the middle of the night when I am neither fully awake nor asleep, but then I began to wish the Smothers Brothers had kept up their act, as I was just beginning to get into it.

It all began to remind me in such a musical way of the 2016 election campaign, a campaign like no other the U.S. has experienced in recent history. It started like an Argentine tango and broke into a free style dance. You don’t have to be an experienced politician to run for office nor can you be an experienced politician, if you’re a woman, at least not at this time, and win. What seemed clear at the outset became confusing and foggy to many, when the campaign veered away from the country’s issues to personality disputes and emotional appeal, polls and media contributing to the confusion, polls actually predicting one candidate ahead when in effect the other candidate won the election. It left the country divided. Yet many voters, who relied heavily on various media for their information found it difficult to sort out the incongruities, misconceptions, distortions and outright lies of the campaign rhetoric, as countless news sources and editorials have pointed out since. Of course, it is fair to say that many things promised in election campaigns never actually do reach reality in most election years.

But as a result of outwardly foggy and emotional political rumblings, even on an international scale, keeping in mind Brexit, the Oxford English Dictionary has chosen the word “post-truth” as the international word of the year. Post-truth is defined as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” Most of us do have emotions, including fears, and strong personal beliefs, not subject to party affiliation.

How, then, do we find out about the real issues and the candidates? The media love celebrity and controversy. They attract audiences, sell papers, and have emotional appeal, even if the controversy upends no real grounds. Add to it that social media have given us fake news, and some hackers have had their field days. Post-election, the people who saw their candidate win look forward with hope to promised change. Those whose candidate lost were shaking their heads, while some, in various U.S. cities, demonstrated to voice their concerns about the
future. At the same time, election recounts were scheduled in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. In the meantime, the new administration is gradually taking shape, filling posts with new faces, while many concerns over issues raised during the campaign persist.

All of this makes me think of the book we are currently reading in the MISF Philosophy Group, *Plato at the Googleplex*, by Rebecca Newberger Goldstein. For everything you ever wanted to know about political processes and things that make life worth living turn to the ancient Greeks, particularly to Plato, the author leads readers to believe. In the Prologue, she sets forth that the questions and conclusions posed by Plato are so pervasive, they have become, part of the collective unconscious, as we might conclude. At the base of “living the good life,” philosophically speaking, lies knowledge, according to Plato. She lists about seventeen questions as they arise in contemporary disagreements, questions already addressed by Plato, among them, the role of the state,” whether it is there to protect or perfect us,” our susceptibility to “demagoguery and the dangers of mixing entertainment values with politics,” “whether all truths – even the scientific – are no more than cultural artifacts,” (57) among them. All of these may sound strikingly familiar. Goldstein feels that though philosophers are not always taken seriously the way scientists or mathematicians are, partly because they do not show “progress,” they hold an important place in society. For those people who do not have the inclination toward acquiring this “knowledge” or drawing conclusions about moral and ethical values, for whatever reason, philosophers hold the answers to important questions that life poses in order to live the “good” life. Obviously, no one can direct someone else on how to live the “good” life. That is a most personal decision in today’s America.

But to return to the question: How do we find out about the issues and the candidates? It would be prudent to say that we, as voters, have to do our own research and learn to choose information from first-hand sources and journalists that have proved to be reliable. What this election has demonstrated more than any other is that it helps to read up on issues and candidates beforehand, because it is so easy to be carried off by fear and other emotions that may have little or nothing to do with solving real issues at hand, particularly if they have barely been discussed.

Implications for the future suggest we teach our young people in civics classes the fundamentals of our democratic government, initiated by the Founding Fathers and added to over the years by successive generations. Students need to be familiar with the Constitution, The Bill of Rights, the structure of Congress, the function of the Cabinet, the Checks and Balances, and so on. Political rhetoric and the art of persuasion can be studied and practiced in communications and language arts classes to learn to distinguish between hype and reporting, fact and fabrication, etc., yes, in classes right along with science, technology and math. When we have done our part to create an informed citizenry so important to a democratic society, according to Thomas Jefferson, third President of the United States and proponent of public education, we are prepared for the next election.

We, the voters, can decide in the voting booths whether we sing the lead or the accompaniment. Those who opted not to vote country-wide passed on that important privilege, the one voice they do have.

And regardless of how we view the outcome of the 2016 election, it is what it is. For now, the season of Advent includes a waiting to see what the new season of government will bring, placing our faith in the democratic process of the United States. Borrowing a quote from my book, *Seasons of Desire*, in Plato’s *Theatetus*, Socrates says: “…nothing ever is, but all things are becoming.” Life never stays the same as it moves forward.

—Evelyn D. Klein, Editor of *The Minnesota Scholar*, has a B.S. in Secondary Education, and an M.S. in Teaching of English. She taught in the public schools, at Century College and is a frequent teaching artist at the Loft Literary Center. She is the author of three books of poetry, essays, and art.
Joe Amato is a second generation Sicilian-American who has recently retired from Southwest Minnesota State University in Marshall, where he was founder and chair of the History and Social Science Department. He is the author of more than twenty books. In his latest book, *My Three Sicilies*, Amato has given us a unique and layered exercise in genealogy, history, and remembrance.

Amato’s grandmother was Rosalia Notaro, who emigrated from Sicily in 1906. She crossed the Atlantic to marry Antonino Amato, lived first in Kelayres, Pennsylvania, and then in Detroit. Amato uses her life as a framework to write three sorts of reflections: first, he writes a series of short stories to imagine what immigrant life was like in Sicily and America. Second, he writes a series of poems, which tell us how Amato envisioned Rosalia’s old life when he visited Sicily. The third section is an account of his grandmother as Amato remembers her. Together, these accounts create a trifocal look at the experience of immigration and arrival in early 20th century America.

The first group of reflections is a set of fictitious accounts about Sicilians in Sicily and in America. My personal favorite was the story of “War of the Saints” about a young Sicilian priest assigned as his first parish a Sicilian Catholic church in Kelayres, Pennsylvania. After study in Rome and a long farewell to Sicily, Father Antonino arrives at San Mauru in Kelayres, where the membership of the church is deeply divided between the first-to-arrive Sicilian supporters of San Mauru and the later-coming Neapolitan adherents of San Gennaro. Just as Father Antonino arrives, the supporters of San Gennaro have ordered a life-size statue of their patron saint to replace the previous devotional statue of Saint Mauru in the place of honor in the front of the church. Anyone who has ever been in an organization (churchly or not) divided against itself will enjoy this skillfully written story. Sadly, Father Antonino is transferred by his bishop (for plot complications I won’t explain here) and, sadly, is killed in the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

The second set of reflections is a group of poems about Sicily. It is very difficult to evaluate poetry by reading it silently; so it took a while for me to appreciate what Amato was doing in describing the landscape, agriculture, history, and architecture of Sicily. Eventually he began to tell the story of his grandparents and his parents in poetry. Some of these poems are deeply personal and as the poetry became more personal, I found that I appreciated it more. Here is the third verse of “A Sicilian Father” (102).

As sons everywhere,
I am drawn to and repulsed by
My sleeping father.
Fleeing him,
I seek out the land
Of his father and mother[,] .

My favorite part of the book was the final essay entitled “Nunna Rosalia.” The essay opens with a long apologia on the importance of grandparents a “gateway to the past and the point from which to begin our research and thought on family history” (137). Amato, then, recounts the story of his
grandmother, Nunna Rosalia, in straightforward and moving prose. The essay is in effect an eulogy; it ends with the death of Rosalia in a Detroit hospital in 1964.

The question for me as I read this book, which basically tells the story of Amato’s grandmother in three different ways—fiction, poetry, and straight out prose—was to figure out which method of story-telling was most effective. Although I found the third, historical, account of Rosalia’s life the most moving, I have to allow that the placement of the essay at the end of the book certainly colored my preference. After all, I had already heard the story twice with different details. Further, I was influenced by the fact that as a historian and a Lutheran, I resonate with the Catholicism of the author. I also felt that the final essay best showed Amato’s talent as a writer; it is very hard to keep eulogistic writing under control and Amato did so.

This book would be an appropriate gift for someone who is going to visit Sicily (which seems to be prominently on tourist itineraries at present). I would also recommend this book to anyone who is thinking about history in general and about family history in particular. Amato’s poetic descriptions of Sicily place his grandparents in a context that personalizes and perhaps explains them. Furthermore, his imaginative stories about their lives—while not history as such—give context and life to the paper record of genealogy. In effect, this book offers a hint as to how we might look deeper into our own family histories.

~Lucy Brusic is a writer and hand weaver. She is the author or co-author of five books under her own name and the editor or designer of at least a dozen books written by other people. She is the former editor of this journal.

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**Scholarly Reflections**

But while we are confined to books, though the most select and classic, and read only particular written languages, which are themselves but dialects and provincial, we are in danger of forgetting the language which all things and events speak without metaphor, which alone is copious and standard. Much is published, but little printed. The rays which stream through the shutters will be no longer remembered when the shutter is wholly removed. No method nor discipline can supersede the necessity of being forever on the alert. What is a course of history, or philosophy or poetry, no matter how well selected, or the best society, or the most admirable routine of life compared with the discipline of looking always at what is to be seen? Will you be a reader, a student, or a seer? Read your fate, see what is before you, and walk on into futurity.

….My days were not days, bearing the stamp of any heathen deity, nor were they minced into hours and fretted by the ticking of a clock; for I lived like the Puri Indians, of whom it is said that “for yesterday, today, and tomorrow they have only one word, and they express the variety of meaning by pointing backward for yesterday, forward for tomorrow, and overhead for the passing day.” This was sheer idleness to my fellow townsmen, no doubt; but if the birds and flowers had tried me by their standard, I should not have been found wanting….

~From “Sounds” in *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau
Meetings and Programs

MISF Annual Meeting President’s Report  Continued from Page 1

Study Groups
- Philosophy – Two different meeting sessions are held each month to accommodate the number of regular attendees, approximately 20-25.
- History – Regular attendees range from 4 – 6.
- Meetup.com – 450 members.

Monthly Forums
- Location change from Hosmer Library, 36th Street, east of 35W, to Washburn Library, 5244 Lyndale Ave., Minneapolis, MN.
- Regular advertisement of our upcoming forum presentations by the Hennepin County Library System.
- 2015-16 Forum Topics:
  - War and Art: Russian Artistic Expression during WW I, Carol Veldman Rudie;
  - A Trip to Cuba, Gus Fenton;
  - Sad Stories of the Death of Kings, James Hart;
  - World without Genocide, Ellen Kennedy;
  - Annual Poetry Day with readings by Shirley Whiting, Elizabeth Irwin, Joe Amato, and Evelyn Klein.

Upcoming Events
- Annual August picnic, open to all MISF members and would-be members;
- A July tour of “Forbidden Art” at the MIA, led by docent Bob Brusic;
- My Three Sicilies by Joe Amato (Sept.);
- “Using Nonviolence to Protect Civilians” by Marna Anderson (Oct.);
- “Political Polling and the 2016 Election: An Insider’s View” by Scott Perreault (Nov.).

Membership
Dues paying membership remains at 50 members, more or less.

Next Year’s Goals
- Increase membership;
- Revamp website;
- Complete Phase I of the “History of Independent Scholarship in Minnesota” project.

Outgoing President, Mike Woolsey, closed the report by stating that the Independent Scholars Forum is an eclectic group whose scholarship is broad.

My goal is simple. It is complete understanding of the universe, why it is as it is and why it exists at all.

Steven Hawking

CORRECTION:
In the June 2016 issue of TMS, Volume 11, Number 1, in the program “World without Genocide,” page 12, The Minnesota Scholar incorrectly listed some of the estimated death figures for 1960-2006. They should read as follows:

Armenia, 1915-18, 1,500,000;  
Holocaust, 1933-1945, 11,000,000;  
Cambodia, 1975-1979, 2,000,000.
Although well known in his time as a writer, journalist, and critic, G. K. Chesterton, 1874-1936, was also known for his Roman Catholic and conservative political views. Ahlquist pointed out that because of his many-sidedness, it was historically difficult for Chesterton to be classified into any specific category, such as literature, history, or theology, to each of which he made significant contributions. A prolific writer, his works encompass essays, articles, books, and poetry.

The purpose of Dale Ahlquist’s talk was to show “How to turn a local literary society into a worldwide phenomenon. Fascinated by this extraordinary and universal writer so adept at the art of controversy, Dale Ahlquist held the first meeting of the Twin Cities Chesterton Society at Barnes & Noble in Edina in 1996. Regular discussion of Chesterton’s work in this group of only seven people quickly led, however, to the creation of the American Chesterton Society the same year. Over the following years, this grew to 70 local Chesterton societies around the U.S.

Dale Ahlquist is a Senior Fellow of the Chesterton Library at Oxford and co-founder of Chesterton Academy, a high school in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He is currently president of the American Chesterton Society and publisher of its magazine, Gilbert. He is creator and host of the EWTN television series, The Apostle of Common Sense, and author of four books and editor of eight books of G. K. Chesterton’s writings. He has also lectured on the topic internationally.

Ahlquist stated that Chesterton is considered the Shakespeare of aphorism, such as “It’s easier to have wit than imagination,” or “Angels fly, because they take themselves lightly.”

Famously absent-minded, he said: “To be absent-minded is to be present-minded about something else.” Chesterton liked to laugh, because according to him, life is so much the opposite of what we expect. Consequently, he wrote the entry on humor for the 1911 encyclopedia.

Chesterton used to be required reading, yet he disappeared in the 1960s. But he is making a revival now. He is controversial, because he is politically incorrect, defends the catholic church and smoking, the latter certainly not in vogue today, among other things.

Chesterton’s foray with mystery was anti-Sherlock Holmes. He wrote Father Brown mystery stories, though hardly the same as those aired by British TV. Nevertheless, he paved the way for stories like Miss Marple and Colombo.

His novels are about the common man, such as The Man Who Was Thursday, his greatest novel. He wrote an epic poem, and his poetry follows form and meter. In literary criticism his favorite subject was Charles Dickens.

In other writings, he said about history, “It is full of mystery about people who have not been murdered.” He wrote about democracy, defending socialism and capitalism. He was a critic of big government and business. At the same time, he was critical of big school systems which make it harder for parents to be involved. He also felt schools should have a classical approach to teaching, rather than just what is expedient at the moment, because there is a whole truth in things.

After the lecture the speaker had his magazine and books available for perusal and sale.
Annual Picnic

The annual picnic of the Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum was held in the beautiful setting at Cherokee Park in St. Paul in one of the shelters, near bluffs of the Mississippi River. Despite the promise of stormy weather, about fourteen hearty members arrived, and after a little drizzle, the sky began to clear.

The variety of tempting salads and dishes, including a sampling of elk sausage, and concluding with a luscious chocolate dessert were only second to the inspiring conversations that were carried on simultaneously, so that it was hard to decide which dishes to select and which conversations to join.

It was great to gather in this beautiful setting of nature with its variety of trees and bird life and touch base with fellow members informally and become better acquainted with them on what turned out to be not such a gloomy day after all.

Joe Amato Discusses His New Book, *My Three Sicilies*

Joe Amato brought his enthusiastic energy to the September meeting of a good crowd with his new book, *My Three Sicilies*.

The author thrives on writing and says he produces one and one-half books per year. He explained that everyone who writes helps us be who we are. And history, he noted, helps him understand things, accounting for the fact that his recorded experiences are enhanced by historical references.

Joe Amato explained the book is made up of stories, poems, and family histories. Joe is the only son of an only son in an Italian family whose grandparents immigrated into the United States. They were motivated to leave Sicily by its poverty, the fact that things never changed. The portrayal began with a slide show showing the Amato family’s connection with the Old World, and people and foods, and a description of “the woman in black.” The author expressed his fascination with Sicily’s nature and landscape, history and pageants, architecture and homes, markets, and its many saints.

He continued his discussion by readings from his book, often bringing together past and present in Sicily as well as in America. He explained he found some of the threads of Sicily transported to America. Amato began his reading with “A Sicilian Father,” because his father was part of his inspiration for the book. Yet Nunna Rosalia, as he refers to his father’s mother, is the subject of much of the book. He expresses his sentiments about why he writes in the following poem:

> Why I Write of Sicily
> If I could take back from time
> What God so generously gave
> In flesh and form,
> And time stole back
> Through accident,
> Disease,
> Chaos and death,
> I would have life,
> Given in freshness and love,
> Be my daily Eucharist
> And grace-given memory
> The evening chalice of the morrow’s hope.

Following selected readings, Amato described the four stories in part one of the book.

After the presentation, asked about his writing, Amato indicated he is now writing about Paul Bunyon.

The meeting ended in a question and answer session, where influences of the Mafia in Italy and the United States were brought up. It was followed by discussion of Greek, Norman and Arab architectural influences evident in Sicily.
Kathleen Laurila of the Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) addressed the October meeting of the Scholars about the work of the organization she represents. She is the Grants and Outreach Manager for the Nonviolent Peaceforce, whose purpose is to protect civilians living in areas under violent conflict. The American headquarters of NP are in Saint Paul. The global headquarters of NP are in Brussels and Geneva, Switzerland.

Laurila opened with a quote from Filippo Grandi, the United Nations Commissioner for Refugees: “The world...witnessed record levels of forced displacement in 2015. More than 65 million people were uprooted by war, conflicts, persecution or human rights abuses by year end, including over 10 million displaced during the year.”

Laurila went on to remind her audience that some people now spend their whole lives in refugee camps, where their lives are continually at risk. The work of the Nonviolent Peaceforce is to use unarmed and non-violent strategies to provide direct protection to people living in such risky situations. These strategies consist of protective presence and accompaniment, building relationships, facilitating dialogue, and monitoring ceasefire agreements.

For the most part, NP volunteers, who have been trained to protect themselves and others, are involved in patrolling and accompanying people in hostile settings, such as leaving a camp to find firewood. NP volunteers proactively facilitate discussions between rival parties in villages. In some cases, they have specifically negotiated the release of captured children to reunite families. In other cases, their presence has prevented rapes. They have been successful in heading off local gang fights.

In no case are NP volunteers armed, and they are usually outsiders to the situation, which means that they have no reason to take sides. They can seem to be neutral in internecine conflicts. They are often able to strengthen and build upon local infrastructure.

Such tactics have been successful in the Mindanao section of the Philippines; in South Sudan; in Myanmar; and in the Middle East. (A feasibility study is being done in Greece.)

Laurila pointed out that a peace protector costs $50,000 a year, which is about 4% of the cost of one soldier in Afghanistan. In other words, the cost of one soldier would equal 24 peace protectors. (The UN uses the term “peace keeper” for a very specific group of people, so NP calls its workers peace protectors.)

NP was founded in 1999 by Mel Duncan and Dave Hartsough. They both had been intrigued by Gandhi’s idea of a peace army, an “army” of unarmed civilians that could transform the world’s response to conflict. The ultimate vision is a world in which unarmed peace workers are always available to de-escalate conflicts and prevent violence.

The organization exists through grants from European governments and from UNESCO but often finds it difficult to raise general operating expenses. If you would like to get in touch with Nonviolent Peaceforce, contact <nonviolentpeaceforce.org>.

~Lucy Brusic

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Editor’s Note

The Pioneer Press reports in the article “Minnesota gets refugee allocation for 2017,” Sunday, December 4 edition, that the U.S. State Department indicated the State of Minnesota will be permitted to resettle 2,505 refugees in 1917. For the same year, the nation as a whole will accept a total of 110,000 refugees.

In the article, Eric Schwartz, dean of the University of Minnesota’s Humphrey School of Public Affairs said Minnesota has a reputation for welcoming refugees and for being a model for resettlement. Minnesota has taken in refugees from many countries. Currently, the origin of refugees is about 40% from Somalia and 20% from Myanmar (Burma). Minnesota, also, took in 21 refugees from Syria as of that date.
Political Polling and the 2016 Election: An Insider’s View
presented by Scott Perreault

Scott Perreault began his discussion by indicating that the system, as it has gone before, is broken. As CEO of a polling firm, USA Instant Poll™, he considers himself non-partisan. He stated that polling is about numbers. Polling depends on the number of people contacted to keep the margin of error down. We can come to polling for different answers. Of course, polling costs money to find out the desired information.

Polling generally takes place after lists are obtained, usually purchased from some organization or agency. Callers are then hired to do the calling, asking carefully prepared questions.

Generally, there are five steps involved in polling:
1. Questions. They address what the poll is about. Not everyone, necessarily, runs to win. Perreault, subscribes to a conspiracy or incompetence theory when preparing the questions.
2. Responses. Responses are set up in an a-b-c-d or true or false format for easy answering and to yield the desired answer.
3. Calling Lists. Up to this point, calling lists have been limited to land lines. Calling lists are purchased from various parties. But in recent times, particularly after the 2016 election, the people who are actually being called came into question.
4. Person Asking the Questions and Recording the Poll. These are usually located at call centers, staffed with people who are paid very little. It is not unusual for a caller to make 50-60 calls before getting an answer, and many of the callers do not “step up” to the job, Perreault said.
5. Interpretation of the Polling Data. After collecting the data, polling places who have collected them do not hand back the raw data to clients. Instead, they are interpreted for them.

Pointing out the present limitation of polls, Perreault feels our mentality is to treat politics like sports. According to the speaker, polling was not a big issue until the year 2000. Polling is expensive and can be unpredictable and cannot be expected to nail the outcome. He stated questions 3 and 5 on the polling list need to be eliminated from the polling process.

He feels his company represents the future. And the future, he asserts, lies in our wallets, our keys, our smartphones. We need to do hand-held polling, preferably by GPS coordinate rather than by list or land line. Looking forward to 2017 instant polls, he will never go with the current polls again. Polls are important, however, because they can give candidates an advantage in an election.

~All program notes are by Evelyn Klein, Editor, unless otherwise noted.

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I – 
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

~Robert Frost
Upcoming Programs 2017

January 28
The Limits of Liberalism: A Study of Liberal Disillusionment in Twentieth Century America
Speaker: Mike Woolsey

At its inception America was considered the embodiment of political liberalism, the realization of the highest political ideals of the European “Age of Enlightenment.” But over the past half century in the United States, it has become commonplace to hear both liberals and liberalism spoken of with disrespect and derision. What explains this transformation? Have Americans become disillusioned with the ideals embodied in the founding documents of their country, or are the words “liberal” and “liberalism” now understood to mean something different than they originally did? An answer to this question may be approached by examining alternative perspectives in the meaning “liberty.”

Mike Woolsey is a retired software engineer and the immediate past president of MISF. He has a B.A. degree in Liberal Arts from St. John’s College, Annapolis, MD, an M.A.T. in Secondary Education from the University of St. Thomas, and an M.A. from the University of Minnesota in Liberal Studies. This talk is based on his Master’s Thesis from the University of Minnesota.

February 25
Education by Democracy
Speaker: Evelyn D. Klein

This discussion takes a look at current attitudes and practices in education, along with some of the trends in America’s time-honored quest to improve test scores and close the education gap but without much success. An examination of the notion “from equal opportunity to equal outcome” takes an unexpected twist. The discussion will lead to an expanded view of educating an increasingly diverse student population in the twenty-first century, outlining steps that can easily be implemented for a rounded public school experience.

Evelyn Klein, editor of “The Minnesota Scholar” is an educator who taught in the public schools, at Century College and at the Loft Literary Center. Essayist and prize-winning poet, she has published poetry and articles in numerous publications and is the author of three books of poetry, essays, and art. She has a B.S. in Secondary Education and an M.S. in the Teaching of English.

March 25
The East Side Freedom Library: Producing Knowledge Outside the Walls of Academia
Speaker: Peter Rachleff

Peter Rachleff taught history at Macalester College for 32 years, but he always tried to keep one foot off campus – in the labor movement, in community history projects, in movements for racial and social justice. Over the years, drawing on the work of scholar-activists and activist-scholars, he began to think about the importance of knowledge production outside the walls of academia. When he decided to leave Macalester, he and his partner, Beth Cleary (Associate Professor of Theater and Dance at Macalester), turned their attention to the creation of a community institution in their neighborhood on the east side of St. Paul. They formed a non-profit, recruited a board of directors, found some smart advisors, and formalized a network of partnerships with educational, immigrant community, and labor organizations. In June 2014 they took possession of a historic Carnegie Library building and, with a lot of help, began to create the “East Side Freedom Library.” They see it as a place where diverse people come not only to access the knowledge that has often been held from them (labor, immigration, African American history, and more), but also where they can create new knowledge. Peter is eager to speak to the MISF about the progress of their project and what he has been learning through it.

April 22
Yet Another Kind of Fusion
Speaker: David A. Wesely

When Pons and Fleischman announced the results of their “cold fusion” experiment in 1989, they were greeted with skepticism and dismissed as a hoax. However, in the twenty-eight years since, many other

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investigators have sometimes found unexplained excess energy when attempting to duplicate the work of Pons and Fleischman. These seemingly random successes have forced skeptics to accept that something is going on which is not a hoax. Major Wesely will discuss a possible explanation of the excess energy that is now reported in the more recent of these experiments: in “Yet Another Kind of Fusion.”

David A. Wesely, born in St. Paul Minnesota on March 16, 1945, received a B.S. in Physics from the University of Kansas in 1969. A Major in the U.S. Army Reserve, 1970-1990, he was employed as a firmware engineer at Medtronic, Inc. and retired in 2011.

May 27
Poetry Day: The Ginny Hanson Poetry Event
Poets: River Maria Urke and Morgan Grayce Willow
These poets will read from their work:

River Maria Urke has the heart of a poet and the eyes of an artist. She lives in Stillwater with her daughter, Willow. Her poetic writings and artistic touches reflect her Ojibwe heritage along with the ponderings she has, being a forty-something American mother living with the progression of multiple sclerosis.

Morgan Grayce Willow has received a 2017 MSAB Artist initiative grant to complete her fourth poetry collection. Earlier titles include Dodge & Scramble, Between, Silk, The Maps Are Words. An award-winning essayist, her prose has appeared in Water~Stone Review, Imagination & Place: Cartography, Riding Shotgun, and recently the online BoomerLitMag. Morgan completed the book arts core certificate at Minnesota Center for Book Arts and exhibited her artist’s book Collage for Mina Loy in 2016.

An Open Mike will follow the reading.

June 24
On the Road: Automobile Travel in the 1920s
Speaker: Lucy Brusic

Long before Dwight Eisenhower mandated the transcontinental highway system (in the 1950s), adventuruous Americans were traveling cross country in primitive autos on primitive roads with early camping equipment. Using photos from the period and a postcard diary, Lucy Brusic will discuss the phenomenon of early American auto-camping in the mid-1920s. This presentation will be light-hearted but will provide insight into the beginnings of the great American highway system.

Lucy Brusic is the former editor of the MISF journal and has written, edited, or designed more than a dozen books.

All programs will be held at the Washburn Public Library, 5244 Lyndale Ave. S., Minneapolis. We begin gathering at 9:30, and meetings start at 10:00 a.m. with a brief business meeting first. Free and open to the public.