



Practical Thinking

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A Reflection on *The Handbook for Independent Scholars*

by Lucy Brusic

David McCullough has written many well known and well reviewed history books. Although he does not call himself an independent scholar, nothing in McCullough's bio suggests that he has an academic connection. He is a good example of an independent scholar who has made a name for himself.

Henry Wiencek is another contemporary independent scholar. He is the author of *Master of the Mountain: Thomas Jefferson and his Slaves* (Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux: New York, 2012). Recently, Wiencek conveyed his main ideas in an article in the *Smithsonian* (publicity any scholar likes to have); but Jefferson scholars have taken him to task for "disrespecting the historical record." I will not enter the controversy here, except to point out that the issue depends on a close reading of a 1792-note from Jefferson to Washington. The publicity has not hurt the sales of Wiencek's book, and it indicates that independent scholarship is viable in modern America.

These two examples (among many others that could be cited) show that independent scholarship is alive and well in twenty-first century America.

But what is an independent scholar?

Over the years, some MISF members have reflected on this question. Here are two answers.

After being turned down as a speaker for a conference on "Knowledge: Production, Distribution and Revision" in 1994, Ginny Hansen defined the outsidership of independent scholarship. She wrote "One of the ideas behind the Independent Scholars' movement in America is that fast-moving developments of whole new areas of knowledge require that the 'old wine-skins' be replaced by vessels that can handle 'new wine.' Often this is a matter of a single multidisciplinary scholar working on something fairly radical within a department...or...a scholar working quite aside from academia at all, often [with funding] from the practical world." Hansen then went on to explain how difficult it was to obtain funding, or recognition, or a place on the platform if you were not in one of the standard fields of discipline. "There's no department to plug them into, so they don't exist."

For a second definition of independent scholarship we turn to Curt Hillstrom, past president of MISF. In 2009, he compared independent scholarship to underground music. "[S]ome [scholars] just don't want to be a part of the mainstream, because of philosophical differences or because they simply want to avoid the pressures and politics of academia. Others are interested in topics with a limited focus that would not ordinarily interest academia, such as local history or sports trivia. Many

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Scholarship, continued from page 1

are simply unqualified, not having the proper credentials. For the most part these scholars are intelligent, capable people with busy lives that don't always allow the time to develop their ideas as they would like. There are some who may never produce a satisfactory intellectual product. But, like underground musicians, they have two things that are common to them all: they are pursuing knowledge for its own sake, and they are very happy to be doing it."

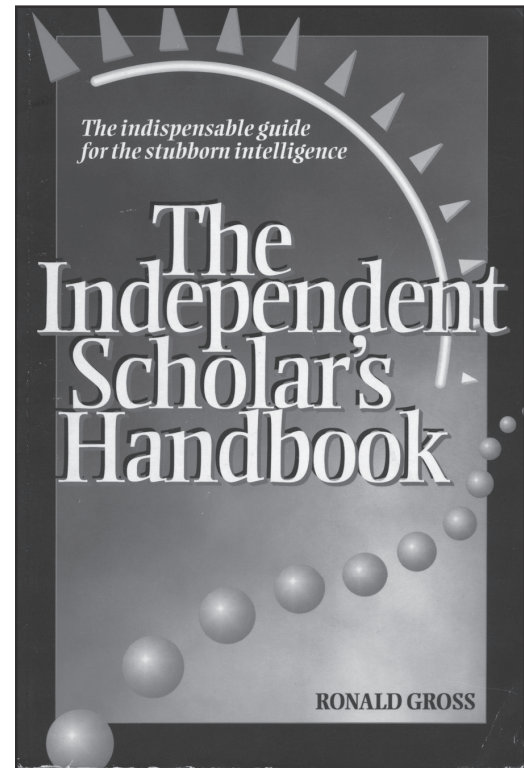
Hillstrom went on to say that independent scholarship does not have to be lonely scholarship: "[E]ven for independent scholars, total independence is not desirable. Networking can be useful and an audience is desirable. This is where MISF comes in... We want to connect independent scholars and help them find an audience and expand their opportunities. We feel that this is one of those cases where the parts add up to more than the whole. We also want to make it possible for the genuinely talented scholar to emerge into the mainstream. But mostly we want to be here to pursue our intellectual interests because, after all, it's something we love."

What these reflections have in common is that the place of the independent scholar is regarded as outside the mainstream. Someone has said that if you are obsessive about something, you are probably an independent scholar. (Incidentally, as our recent marketing statement says, MISF membership is open to anyone who supports the cause of independent scholarship.)

In my time with the MISF, I have noted that our scholars have investigated many and varied topics: capitol punishment, memes, Henry David Thoreau and photographer Herbert Gleason, Henry Sibley and aspects of early Minnesota history, mathematics, poetry, the authorship of Shakespeare's plays, the assassination of JFK, rural Minnesota churches and their disappearance, the relationship of music and culture—to name only those that I can quickly call to mind. Truly our interests and obsessions have been varied and, in all these cases, handled with scholarly expertise.

How can I think like a scholar?

Having set the stage, we can move forward to talk about what a scholar does. *The Independent Scholar's Handbook* by Ronald Gross (Ten Speed Press: Berkeley CA, 1982, 1993) is a good place to begin. The organization of this book takes the reader through (Part I) Starting Out, (Part II) The Practice of Independent Scholarship, and (Part III) Independent Scholars in Action. Some of the book is dated. For example, Gross is a great deal more positive about the possibilities of outside funding than is justified



in the present decade. He says (p. 195) he does not want to be "beamish" (bright, cheerful, optimistic), but he is. After a while I began to be annoyed with the casual way in which he just assumes that everything will work out. The most obvious way in which the book is dated, however, is that Gross does not talk about the internet, which has changed and continues to change all scholarship.

In spite of my demurs, I turn to Gross's chapter on "Intellectual Craftsmanship" (page 97 ff) which I found to be especially pertinent to the questions of who is a scholar and how to think like a scholar. On page 101 and following, Gross lists the kinds of skills that scholars need to develop to do research. He divides these skills into four types. As I tried to work these research skills into a specific example, the many genealogists in my family came to mind. They have all read the printed material on their lineage; they know where all the research libraries are and what is in them; they track down every lead in search of a specific piece of information; and they sometimes find things in unexpected places. And like a conscientious scholar, they are not satisfied until they are sure they have the correct answer.

I paraphrase from page 101 and following and add my reflections to Gross's comments.

1. A research librarian has a masterly grasp of printed material. Specialized librarians will be acquainted with almost everything in their collection. I would add that even in the internet age, independent scholars must

be well acquainted with the printed material on their subject. In short, libraries are still indispensable.

2. Similarly, a university scholar probably knows every important book and collection that covers his or her speciality. Likewise, an independent scholar needs to know the location and subject matter of every important source for his/her field. The downside of this mindset, according to Gross, is that in the quest to know everything, the university scholar often produces nothing.

3. The investigative reporter combines the best aspects of research librarians and university scholars; s/he can find information, research it thoroughly, and then produce a written book or article under the pressure of a publication deadline. In Gross's terms the reporter "combines speed with thoroughness." It is clear that Gross is more sympathetic to this skill set than he is to university scholars.

In a fourth paragraph, Gross describes the detective who can find information in hidden places. In a final short paragraph, he refers to scientists who do experiments, clinicians who seek fresh perceptions, philosophers who seek improved understanding, and activists who find new ideas through action and reflection. However, it is clear that his heart is with the investigative reporter who seems to combine the best of all the research methods toward a specific end.

What is the aim of scholarship?

In Gross's opinion (p. 161), a focus on a product is "frequently beneficial." In his thinking, the end product does not have to be a publication (though books and articles are the traditional result of scholarship). He cites as possible products a set of photos, a work of art, a film, an exhibit, a park, a space shuttle, a murder mystery, and an authentic native American village. (He also lists an "A-bomb" as a research outcome; see his page 164 for the story.)

How do you do independent scholarship?

As I have said, my biggest criticism of Gross's book is that he is much more optimistic about the possibilities of outside funding for independent scholarship than my experience has born out. Nonetheless, whether he is overly positive or not, his discussion of how to get started by writing up your project is a useful thoughtlist. Anyone who wishes to embark on a project of independent scholarship, no matter who is funding it, could profitably work through personal answers to the list of questions that follow. Coincidentally, this list of questions is similar to those on grant applications.

Generally, Gross advises a scholar to be specific, to use simple language, to make the project obvious, and to be

yourself. This general advice when combined with careful and complete answers to the questions below will go far in defining a project, whether you are asking for funding or not. Gross advocates writing out the answers to these questions. Again, I have shortened and paraphrased from Gross's discussion on page 105 and have added some comments from my own experience.

1. Describe the project, including its objectives. Explain why you picked this project. Be honest about the problems you foresee in achieving your objective and explain how you intend to meet them. Specify a realistic time line for the project. Specific answers to these questions are very important, because they will help to focus your efforts and keep the project from getting unmanageable.

2. Tell how you expect to present your project. (Gross is in favor of a specific outcome.) Do you have an organization or a person whose help you need? Get a letter from the person or the organization whose help you need saying that they are willing to help you.

3. Write a budget. Grant applications often succeed or fail on the accuracy of the budget.

4. List books or libraries that you will use, or people you will interview. This category is where the bibliographic and scholarly skills of university professors give them an edge. You must be as knowledgeable about your sources as a professor would be.

5. Identify someone who will critique your project. This feature of an application (or proposal) can be very helpful to a person who is an unaffiliated scholar, especially if the critic has an academic connection.

6. Identify your audience. Explain who or what your project will benefit or influence.

It should be obvious that working through these questions for yourself will help you define what your project is, how complex it is going to be, and how long it will take you to get to the end of it. Two results are possible here: you may find that you have a well-defined project that can qualify for a grant or some other assistance. Or you may find that you do not have a defined project and you decide that you will be happy to go on being a knowledgeable independent specialist in your chosen field. In either case, the exercise of writing out what you want to study is useful in defining your role as an independent scholar.

Mistakes in research

Another part of the chapter on "Intellectual Craftsmanship" is a list of "Pitfalls in Research" (p.

99). I resonated with all of this list, partly because as an independent scholar I have made many of these mistakes at one time or another. Once again I am paraphrasing and editing Gross (p. 99 and following).

The first pitfall is an enthusiastic, but poorly defined interest in a new subject. The definition of a research objective is paramount. It is embarrassing not to be able to explain clearly what you are researching. If the scholar has written a project plan as outlined above, answers to this question will have been clarified. Further you need to know what you are looking for in order to enlist the help of archival librarians.

A second pitfall is that in unbounded enthusiasm for a subject that is new to them, independent scholars may not be aware of previous work in their field of interest. More than once, I have been warned off a research topic that was already being pursued by another independent writer. Similarly, an independent scholar may not know which sources are reliable. An independent may get part way through a project only to discover that s/he has ignored a basic source. It is common sense to consult a librarian or a university professor to make sure you have adequately or appropriately covered the field.

A third pitfall, which is the bane of all independent research and writing, is that an independent without some training in scholarly research may not realize how vital it to read accurately, cite correctly, and write clearly. I have read many amateur histories with no recoverable citations. Furthermore, an independent scholar may not be aware of the dangers and risks of plagiarism.

Finally, an independent may inject modern prejudices and assumptions into his/her work; it is very important to read with an open mind and even with some suspicion.

Mike Woolsey, president of the MISF, especially recommends *The Craft of Research* by Wayne Booth, Gregory Colomb, and Joseph Williams (Chicago: U of Chicago, 2003 2nd edition) as an aid to research and writing. Some of the topics in this book are Starting a research project; Asking questions, finding answers; Making a claim and supporting it; Preparing to draft; and Drafting and revising. Although this book does not deal directly with independent scholarship, a book like this one is a necessity for anyone who is doing systematic research—especially someone who expects to produce a written or public report on that research.

The new elephant in the room—the internet

As mentioned above, Gross is completely out-of-date because he does not mention the Web; he wrote his book

before the internet existed for public use. Without doubt, the internet has completely changed the face of scholarship. Not only can we check the holdings of any library in the world at any hour of the day or night, we can often read a whole document on the Web. We can easily check small details—the founding date of a university, the birth and death dates of a famous person, the spelling of a Spanish word, the exact details and composition of a painting—without leaving our desks. Furthermore, with a little research, we can often find the name of a knowledgeable person to whom we might direct a question or a comment and can write directly to them. We might also find a chat room or a message board or a forum in which other people may be discussing subjects that we are researching.

Still, a constant danger is that the scholar may be taken in or misled by information on the Web. Ironically, I will now paraphrase a website on “How to Tell if a Website is reliable” <journalism.about.com> 2013 March 21, 2013. Although this list is written for journalists, I think of it as being as a useful extension of Gross’s list of pitfalls in research. Numerous other lists can no doubt be found in other places on the Web. Again I paraphrase.

1. A website from an established institution, such as a university, is more likely to be trustworthy. Longevity is more desirable than novelty, but websites that look old may not be reliable. Recent information may be more reliable.
2. Watch out for bias—political, religious, philosophical—or any other kind. You need to be very suspicious of anything you read that has a bias or a tilt toward a particular point of view, even though you may agree with it. Avoid hearsay, rumor, gossip, and wild theories. Sales websites are also tilted.
3. Avoid anonymous articles; you wouldn’t cite them anyway. Google an author to find out if s/he is reliable.
4. Check the links. When reputable sites link to each other, they tend to reinforce their mutual reliability.

Notice how similar the cautionary notes in this list are to the cautions in the pitfalls list. A scholar is looking for reliable sources, backed up by reliable institutions or thinkers. The fact that we have so much information easily available means that scholars need to be more careful about sources and reliability.

Citing the Web

Most researchers are acquainted with the established forms for citations from print sources. If not, a quick look at a style manual (I prefer the *Chicago Manual of Style*,

Civil Discourse in Politics

but many others exist) will regularize the citation process. On the other hand, protocols are still being established for citing from the Web.

Mostly, the Modern Language Association (MLA) suggests the following format for a citation from a Web source. I quote from <www.VirtualSalt.com> "Citing Web Sources MLA Style" 12 February 2013. Web. 18 Mar. 2013.

Harris, Robert. "Evaluating Internet Research Sources." VirtualSalt. 22 November 2010. Web. 20 Apr. 2011.

The first date is the publication date of the page; the source itself is an internet publication. The second date is the date on which the scholar read or printed the information.

Another way to cite an internet source is to include a url at the end of the citation. Under this system, the same citation would read as follows:

Harris, R. (2010, November 22). Evaluating Internet Research Sources. Retrieved from <http://www.virtualsalt.com/evalu8it.htm>.

Note that this citation, in the APA (American Psychological Association) style, does not include the date of the retrieval.

I suspect that systems for Web citation will become more sophisticated and regularized as we do more publishing and researching on the Web, but the important part is to make it possible to relocate the citation. Note the importance of listing the date of the citation as it relates to rule #1 in determining reliable internet sites. Information around us is changing so rapidly that we need to be conscious of the date on which it was posted. Once again, old information may not be reliable.

Conclusion

Nothing in this article is intended to say that there is only one way to do independent scholarship. Rather my intention is to say that there are many ways and many subjects open to the scholar who, for whatever reason, is not in an academic setting. My hope is to encourage people to do research and writing about subjects in which they have a passionate interest. An organization like the Scholars stands ready to help people find research facilities and resources, and to provide a place to discuss, critique, and publish their ideas and findings.

Elizabeth Beaumont of the University of Minnesota and the League of Women Voters spoke to the Minnesota Independent Scholars' Forum, Saturday September 15, 2012, on the subject of Civil Discourse. Her question was "Is civil discourse possible in political discussion?"

Beaumont pointed to the fact that we have a long history of political incivility in this country. To make her point, she cited the duel between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr, which resulted in Hamilton's death in 1804; the mob fighting that took place over the issue of abolition of slavery during the 1850s; the violent protests against woman suffrage; the vitriol of the McCarthy era; and the protests against the Vietnam War and for Civil Rights that took place during the 1960s. Her idea was to demonstrate that violent disagreement is a repeated problem in American democracy, as it is in fact a problem for all democracies.

She cited several reasons for this conflict: if we are conflict-free, then we are not airing disagreements. She also pointed out that the passionate involvement of the abolitionists brought an end to slavery. Actually passion is good in that it gets people involved. Democracy does not work if no one cares.

On the other hand, it is important to keep things under control. Speaking as she was during the presidential campaign, Beaumont had plenty of examples of things getting out of control. For example, she said that the sheer quantity of negative ads had increased during the campaign and pointed out that such negativity reshapes how people think about candidates. Unfortunately, negative ads do get people's attention and are politically effective. Furthermore, the level of incivility rises around issues that people consider to be vital; such negativity creates a cycle that it is difficult for people to break out of.

Her suggestions for creating a better political climate included creating a culture for listening. Additionally, she suggested advocating for guidelines of reason and for pushing these guidelines out to media and candidates. Furthermore, she suggested that we need education about politics in general, and away from controversial issues. People need to know about politics but they are not comfortable with arguments.

Although many people proclaim that they are dissatisfied with current politics, it is very hard to change things. Negativity from ads has seeped into the society; the internet

has allowed people to be anonymous; the texting generation has a short attention span and finds it hard to sustain discussions. Furthermore, the money necessary in politics has diminished the pool of people who can afford to run for office. Publicly funded elections would change the tone of politics, Beaumont pointed out.

Critical listening is a learned skill and we can learn how to be critical without being uncivil. Furthermore, research shows that information and discussion can shift people's views and even change their behavior. The League of Women Voters devotes itself to trying to foster political and non-partisan discussion. The meeting concluded with several discussion groups.

For more on the subject of Civil Discourse, see the review of Harry Boyte's book, *The Citizen Solution: How You Can Make A Difference*, on page 11 of this issue.

October 20

Thoreau Symposium

Henry David Thoreau might be pleased with the simplicity of this report. The Thoreau Country Minnesota meeting October 20 doubled as the MISF meeting for that month. Around forty (varying throughout the day) attended the sessions at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge, which were sponsored by the Thoreau Society, the Bloomington Historical Society, the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge, and Refuge Friends, Inc. Few of the attendees were MISF regulars; most were Thoreau enthusiasts. The program, which commemorated a trip by Mr. Thoreau to Minnesota in 1861, consisted of four presentations, including a very fine reading by Mr. Thoreau himself from his essay "Walking." Mr. Thoreau was only able to speculate on modern issues, since his direct experience ended in 1862.

Bill McTeer

November 17

The JFK Assassination

Mike Woolsey, independent scholar and current president of the MISF, addressed the group on November 17, 2012, on the subject of "Investigative Progress into the Assassination of John F. Kennedy." Woolsey divided his talk into a discussion of the evolution of the investigation, new ideas that have come forth, and whether rules of good scholarship have been followed in the investigations.

Woolsey began by reviewing the literature, which is extensive, on the assassination. It has been said that more words have been written about the assassination than about any other single incident. Most people know about the Warren Commission findings (1964), which said that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in the assassination. However, some 75 percent of the American people do not believe the Warren report findings are accurate and as Woolsey said, "a veritable cottage industry has arisen discussing conspiracy theories about the JFK assassination." A time line of investigative reports includes in part: *Rush to Judgement* by Mark Lane, (1966), *Six Seconds in Dallas* by Josiah Thompson (1967), *The plot to kill the president* by George Robert Blakey (1981), *Reasonable Doubt* by Henry Hurt (1985), *Reclaiming History* by Vincent Bugliosi (2007) and of course the recent book, *Killing of Kennedy: The End of Camelot* by Bill O'Reilly. Oliver Stone's film *JFK* introduced the assassination to a generation of viewers who were not alive in 1963, when the event took place. Interestingly, only three of these books support the Warren Commission's finding that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone.

Some of the controversy revolves around the question of how many shots were fired. Most "ear" witnesses say that they heard three shots, in a one and then a pow-pow cadence. The question is whether it is possible to fire three shots from a single rifle in the time frame captured on the video tapes—about six seconds. Many people question whether such a sequence would have been possible for a lone shooter. This question opens the door to conspiracy theories.

Another question arises as to whether the official autopsy report accurately described the president's wounds. Some theoreticians think that the entry wound was too low to cause the wound in the throat. Others say that the autopsy reports "raised" the head wound by 3.5 inches to agree with the exit wound. The hospital reports from Dallas say there was a large exit wound in the back of the president's head.

The official autopsy performed at Bethesda Naval Hospital after the president's body was flown back to Washington does not mention such a wound. A persistent suggestion is that the autopsy reports were altered to support the single shooter theory and to protect the American people from things they did not want to know.

Bugliosi, who is the strongest supporter of the Warren Commission, says there is no reason to doubt that Lee Harvey Oswald was the single shooter. The supposed motive is that Oswald wanted to move to Communist Cuba and felt that by assassinating the president, he would ingratiate himself with the Communist party. Oswald denied that he had anything to do with the assassination. Then he was shot by Jack Ruby, who is generally agreed to have acted alone.

Woolsey's opinion, after years of study, is that everyone is somewhat right in the controversy. Though he favors the theory that there were multiple shooters (he finds the "ear" evidence compelling), he does not think there was a conspiracy to cover up government involvement. Nor does he think that anyone will come forward with evidence that will prove a conspiracy. Although he acknowledged that new scientific investigations have sharpened our perceptions of the event, he closed with the profound question of What do we know about any human history?

January 19

The Terra Cotta Warriors

Robert Brusic, longtime independent scholar and docent at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, addressed the Scholars Forum, Saturday, January 19 on the subject of "The Quest for Immortality: The Emperor and his Warriors." His talk was especially timely because the traveling exhibit of the Chinese Warriors had been extended for an extra week at the museum.

Brusic addressed the cultural situation in China before the brief reign of Qin Shi-huangdi (221-206 BCE). His talk was illustrated with pictures from a recent trip to China and from the catalog that accompanied the exhibit.

The first period covered in the museum show was the Spring and Autumn period, 770 to 460 BCE. China was at that time a group of small feudal states; this period is also the time in which Confucius and Lao Tzu were born. China had advanced metal working by this time and had developed the kite, the compass, and the art of kung fu were developed during this period.

The succeeding period was the Warring States (475-221 BCE). In this period the small feudal states began to fight amongst themselves. Because of the war activities, China made many significant advances in weaponry, inventing both the crossbow trigger and more effective crossbow arrows.

Following the Warring States period came the time of the Emperor Qin (pronounced *chin*). Although his reign was of only fourteen years duration, Qin had many significant accomplishments: he unified China; he standardized weights, measures, and currency; he regularized written Chinese; and he began construction of the Great Wall. On the inhumane side, he was rigid, suspicious, and cruel. He killed many scholars and burned many books.

Early in his reign, Qin began to build his tomb complex. It is estimated that it took 700,000 workers to create the complex, which covers 22 square miles. Elements of the complex include three pits containing warriors, as well as several other areas which have not been opened. In addition, there is the tomb mound itself (said to be protected by spring-loaded weapons and a river of mercury) which has not been excavated and probably never will be.

Pit 1, discovered by accident in 1974, has been the most fully cleared. The pit is 750 feet long, 200 feet wide, and 16 feet deep; it is estimated to contain more than 7000 terra cotta warriors (of which eight and two horses traveled to the MIA this past winter). The warriors, made from clay molded and fired in ovens, are somewhat bigger than lifesize. Although the bodies are standardized the heads show remarkable individuality. The discovery of this pit is regarded as one of the most significant archeological finds of the past century.

Brusic showed pictures of some of the warriors. Some were kneeling archers and others were standing. Although the figures are now the color of terra cotta, they were brightly painted when they were put into the tomb. Unfortunately, the color faded almost immediately when the pits were opened.

Qin's legacy was certainly the tomb, but he also had a great influence (through historical accounts) on Mao-Tse-Tung who is supposed to have said: "We have acted like ten Qin Shihuang...he buried 460 people but we have buried 46,000." Sometimes, the uses of history are very strange indeed.

The Farm Bill and Hunger in Minnesota

Colleen Moriarty, director of Hunger Solutions, MN addressed the February meeting of the MISF. Her topic was “Farm Bill 2013: Hunger in Minnesota.” Her objective was to explain to the group the importance of the Farm Bill for hungry people and to explain how surplus food distribution works in Minnesota (and other states.) Her talk was timely because the biennial farm bill was to be voted on in March.

Beginning with the statistic that one person in ten in Minnesota is “food insecure”~meaning that they do not know where their next meal will come from, Moriarty explained how the emergency food network works in this country.

Although food stamps have been around since the 1930s, the present emergency food network began in the 1980s after Ronald Reagan cut funding from national food programs. A documentary *Hunger in America* (first shown in 1968) had shocked Americans and George McGovern and Bob Dole began a bipartisan effort to do something. A form of the current Farm Bill was the result.

The Farm Bill, which has to be re-ratified every year, is the backbone of the response to the problem of hunger. Eighty-two percent of the money involved in the Farm Bill goes to poor people in the form of two programs: SNAP and TEFAP. SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) is the food stamp program and supports some 580,000 people who are living at 130% of poverty or less. (That figure is roughly \$31,000 for a family of four and requires extensive paper work for proof.)

TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program) supports people through the distribution of surplus food. In Minnesota, the food distribution sites are usually called *food shelves*, though in other parts of the country they are called *pantries*. The food shelves are supplied by food banks, which take large contributions, have cold storage or other facilities, and can arrange distribution of food to food shelves. Second Harvest is one of six food banks in Minnesota.

To get food from a food shelf, you have to self-attest that you are at 200% of poverty or lower. (That number is roughly \$47,000 for a family of four.) Food shelves work reasonably well because people get to make choices about the food they select. In the last decade there has been a 164% increase in the number of people visiting food shelves.

The Farm Bill supports both these programs. However, a proposed \$16-billion dollar cut would eliminate 38,000 people from these programs. Moriarty praised the work of both Minnesota senators (Klobuchar and Franken) on the Farm Bill.

Moriarty went on to discuss the weaknesses of these programs. In both cases, the greatest weakness is that help is not getting where it is needed. Food shelves have to serve everyone who comes to the door, but for SNAP, there are many rules that have to be followed to qualify for assistance; “it takes a lot of paper work to be poor,” she said.

Ideally the goal would be to have everyone who could qualify participate; to have every qualifying child have a breakfast; and to have every qualifying child participate in the school lunch program. However, a serious problem for the program is that seniors who do qualify for help are ashamed to shop at food shelves or to take any other kind of assistance. In spite of educational programs and cooperation with AARP, it is very hard to get seniors to sign up for SNAP.

Moriarty also stressed that while church food drives are helpful in raising people’s awareness, monetary donations are much more useful to emergency food organizations.

So what happened to the Farm Bill?

After Moriarty’s talk, the U.S. Senate and the House voted to extend the 2008 farm bill until September of this year in order to avoid automatic cuts that the sequester would have imposed.

As of early May, a new farm bill is being crafted by the House Agricultural Committee. Unfortunately, the chairman of this committee is proposing to take \$20 billion out the food stamp program, while leaving in place most of the crop insurance programs. Many lawmakers are expected to oppose the food stamp cuts and have proposed instead to cut the crop insurance program.

One of the leaders of the opposition to cuts in food stamps is Kirsten Gillibrand (D, NY) who has said:... “tightening our belts around the waists of children and veterans and active duty service members is not how we should be balancing our debt and deficit.”

March 18

Today's Reference Libraries— Depth and Breadth

Who knew that brick-and-mortar libraries had so much to offer in the twenty-first century? On Saturday morning, March 16, at Hosmer Library in Minneapolis, Ted Hathaway, Lisa Vecoli, and Kimberly Clarke described the joys and the challenges of managing archives and special collections, incorporating technology into preserving and disseminating information in all its forms, and how potential users can best obtain the greatest benefit from the libraries in our community. Hathaway is the manager of Special Collections, Preservation and Digitization for the Hennepin County Library System (HCL). Vecoli is a curatorial assistant for the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota, and Clarke is an instructional librarian who assists UM students who are using library resources for research in their degree programs.

Hathaway described the materials and history of the HCL Special Collections, what each includes and how they evolved over time. The collections are the Minneapolis History collection, the Nineteenth Century American Studies collection, the Huttner Abolitionist and Anti-Slavery collection, the History of Books and Printing collection, the Hoag Mark Twain collection, the Kittelson World War II collection, and the Dodge Autograph collection. The Nineteenth Century American Studies collection began with a focus on the Northeast Transcendental authors and has grown to be one of the largest collections of its kind. The Huttner collection was purchased in 1974 from Chicago attorney, Robert Huttner, and HCL has continued to add to its materials. The Kittelson collection began in 1944 and includes posters, periodicals, ephemera, and in recent years has begun to focus on Minnesota-related items. The Dodge Autograph collection was donated in 1932 by the widow of Minneapolis physician Louis Dodge and includes a number of autographed photos. The Minneapolis History collection was started in 1940 by Ruth Johnson with clippings and articles, and in the mid-1990s began to include other types of materials such as photographs, pamphlets, yearbooks, and reports.

Vecoli described the variety and worldwide content of the Tretter Collection for GLBT studies. The collection includes not only books and periodicals in 58 languages but also organizational records, movies, and ephemera from coffee mugs to T-shirts. Its archives are stored in the UM Andersen Library caverns built into the sandstone of the Mississippi river bluffs.

The speakers described how archives differ from libraries. You can't just browse through the aisles of shelves. Sometimes the materials are in boxes and not yet fully cataloged. There is frequently limited access to historical materials—so a potential user needs to be sure to call ahead. This enables the curators to begin locating materials that will be useful to your research and assures that the most knowledgeable staff person is available to assist when you visit. The benefits of the latest technologies are a recognized aide to curators and users of special collections. For example, digitization recognizes current users' expectations for access anytime and from anywhere, and preserves the original materials from deterioration. This also reflects the changing role of libraries from a source of reference materials to collection development.

Clarke completed the presentations with a discussion of current and future trends for community and academic libraries. The areas of e-books and e-learning go beyond the books we now read on e-readers to include optimizing text book content made available for specific courses and the question of who really owns purchased content and for how long? (Scholars need to be aware of how copyright ownership is managed when the content is digital.) A big challenge is that while everyone, everywhere wants everything to be digital—and we all acknowledge the benefits of digitization for historical materials—libraries must also plan to preserve all the new content being developed today that starts out digital and may never exist in a “hardcopy” form?

More information on special collections and making the best use of your library can be found at <www.hclib.org> and <www.lib.umn.edu>.

Valerie Bauer

News from the National Coalition of Independent Scholars

A recent communication from the National Coalition of Independent Scholars, with which MISF is affiliated, reports that NCI is adding a bookstore to their website. <ncisbookstore@gmail.com>. Their intent is to feature books by members, members of affiliate organizations, and books useful or relevant to independent scholars.

For more information on NCIS, follow the above information to their website. They are based in California, but publish a newsletter which may also be accessed on their website.

April 20

Crackle Weave and Independent Scholarship

What makes an independent scholar? Lots of things. How about teacher, weaver, ghostwriter—and possibly the editor of your first (or next) book. These all describe Lucy Brusic, the speaker at the April 20 MISF meeting. “Weaving” together her years of experience with both crackle weave and the book industry, Brusic’s adventure in completing her most recent book provided lessons in what needs to be done to get a book written and published.

Introduced to the United States from Sweden about 90 years ago, crackle is a particular type of weaving determined by the pattern and setup of the loom. Brusic’s first teacher suggested that she learn crackle weave because it makes cross shapes, a theme in her liturgical weaving. Recently, after many years of weaving and teaching, Brusic realized she had completed most of the crackle patterns from most of the available sources. She then began a concerted effort to complete examples of all the known crackle patterns, sometimes weaving several examples of a single pattern to explore pattern and color combinations. Through this effort she found that changing what is done with the weaver’s feet (treadling) might allow for more options than had previously been done with crackle.

The concept for her latest book developed out of this idea—providing new variations on old patterns by varying the treadling in the patterns. In addition, she wanted to provide correct known mistakes in the patterns.

Any writing project is challenging and *A Crackle Weave Companion* (Kirk House: 2012) was no exception. First was a friend in Colorado, known as the “Crackle Queen,” who had also recently begun a book on the weave. They reached a mutual agreement to neither collaborate nor comment on each other’s book. A second challenge was determining how “fair use” applied to Brusic’s ideas for her book. Fair use involves consideration of the conditions under which one can use material copyrighted by someone else. Rights for many of the older crackle patterns are owned by others. In some cases copyright agreement could be negotiated. For the other cases, she worked out a unique method of recording patterns and only showed full patterns for designs she was correcting.

A third challenge was that her first publisher thought her approach for the book was too technical. To address this concern, Brusic drew on her own book design and editing experience. Having designed and ghostwritten books on

weaving for other writers, she knew her audience and her market. She also had twenty years’ experience teaching crackle weave workshops and a list of former students who represented potential customers. A draft version of the book had been used by her workshop students and Brusic had collected their comments on the manuscript. So she had clear ideas about what her book needed to succeed. For example, a key to success for Brusic was top notch photography for illustrations of the weaving patterns.

Brusic discussed the pros and cons of different publishing approaches such as self-publishing, e-books, and working with Amazon.com; described the different services provided by a few Midwest publishers and printers (such as Kirk House, Quill-House, and Sexton Printing); and suggested joining the Midwest Independent Publishers Association as a place to meet publishers and make contacts in the industry.

Other suggestions from Lucy’s experience:

Review your ideas with a project manager or a writing group.

Know whether there is a market for your idea or concept.

Be willing to sit at a computer and write—an editor can edit bad writing, but they can’t edit a blank page.

If self-publishing, know that you will need to design and format the book on your own—or hire this done.

Have a reasonable deadline—such as an upcoming conference where your book, if completed can be introduced or sold.

If undecided between writing an e-book or a paper book, be aware that in the current market a major publishing house is not likely to pick up a book that has previously been published as an e-book or through Amazon.

The half way point is a good time to start asking friends and family to review your book. A reviewer needs to be someone who will provide input and advice but not steal your ideas.

Publishers can be a source of editors for text, spelling errors, and consistency of references.

A good graphic designer for the cover design will be a good investment.

How long will it take? Twice as long as you think it will and four times longer than your family thinks it should!

Some web sources for Minnesota authors:

<http://www.kirkhouse.com>

<http://sextonprinting.com>

<http://www.snowfallpress.com>

<http://www.mipa.org>

Valerie Bauer

Book Review

The Citizen Solution: How You Can Make a Difference

by Harry C. Boyte. MN Historical Society Press: 2008

With the arrival of Barack Obama on the national scene, some of us learned a new term: “Community Organizer.” And while Republican vice-presidential candidate, Sarah Palin, denigrated the efforts of community organizers, many of us wondered just what constituted the skills and duties of community organization. This was especially true when we saw how effectively Barack Obama implemented them.

Turns out, we have a nationally known community organizer and activist here in Minnesota in the person of Harry Boyte, senior fellow at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs. In his recently published book, *The Citizen Solution: How You Can Make a Difference*, Harry Boyte lays out the necessary frameworks for developing grassroots citizens movements that avoid the so-called “slash and burn” techniques aimed at winning elections at all costs but leave so much ill-will in their wake that governing becomes increasingly difficult for the winners.

Slash and burn techniques break down civic discourse and leave isolated groups feeling disenfranchised. In addition, the 24-hour news cycles, the amount of money needed by candidates to run, and the gradual demise of newspapers all contribute to the sour political discourse.

Increasingly, there is a need to find civic spaces where people can gather and discuss their issues of concern. Boyte cites Hubert Humphrey’s autobiographical reference in *The Education of a Public Man*; much of Humphrey’s civic education came as he witnessed discussions in his father’s drug store in South Dakota. Nowadays, libraries and community centers provide such spaces, as do coffee shops and churches, park and recreation centers and settlement houses.

The number of civic spaces in our area is impressive. One of the most effective in the black community is the Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House, which provides a “creative commons” for residents of North Minneapolis. The Powderhorn Phillips Cultural Wellness Center provides a setting in that neighborhood for people of diverse backgrounds to mingle and learn from each other. Others are part of a college setting, such as MacCares, the Macalester Conservation and Renewable Energy Society. Still others, like the Isaiah group, are multiracial, nonpartisan, economically diverse and advocate for non-violence, justice for all, and broad-based citizen involvement in the democratic process.

In sections throughout the book called Tips and Tools, Boyte lists the many ways that community organization takes place from how to find people who share your concerns, to how to map free spaces to hold meetings, to how to focus and evaluate the contributions of attendees.

He also lists Ten Civic Skills to implement the ideas of the book:

- 1) One-to-One Interview: an intentional process of getting to know what motivates another person;
- 2) Mapping Power and Interests: learning the culture, networks, and power dynamics of a particular place, and learning how to act with attention to the larger context;
- 3) Holding a House Meeting: getting to know friends and acquaintances more deeply and uncovering issues that can be addressed by the group;
- 4) Finding Free Spaces in your community to socialize, discuss, learn and do public work;
- 5) Discovering cultural resources: the traditions, norms, values, practices, rituals, symbols that express and sustain relationships;
- 6) Evaluating your public: help citizen groups learn from experience, expose tensions and conflicts in constructive ways that can be the source of growth;
- 7) Taking Action, as distinct from activity: action is thoughtful collective effort informed by understanding difference, self-interests, and power relationships;
- 8) Getting to Know Your Neighborhood: the history, cultures, interests, power dynamics, and institutions of your neighborhood are a foundation for effective action.
- 9) Developing a Citizen Identity: to learn collaborative ways to work together across disciplines;
- 10) Building Partnerships: to avoid looking at leaders as either saviors or enemies, but to establish relationships that allow you to move from protest to governance.

In an Afterword that addresses the Right-Left dichotomy of politics, Boyte stresses the complexity that goes into these terms and the importance of the Ten Civic Skills for building the structures that hold the ground for the democratic process to take place. If read first, the Afterword would provide compelling reasons to take the entire book to heart as a Community Organizer’s Handbook. All the needed information, models, and instructions on how to proceed are in *The Citizen Solution: How You Can Make a Difference*.

For anyone concerned about our political processes today, and the seeming befuddlement we find ourselves in, this book is a must read.

Shirley Whiting

Remembering Rhoda Lewin

Rhoda Lewin, a founding member of MISF, died December 31, 2012, at the age of 83. She was a journalist and an oral historian and wrote several articles on related subjects for this journal. She was also a member of the National Coalition of Independent Scholars, and frequently attended their national meetings. MISF will dedicate its June 15 meeting to Rhoda Lewin's memory. Rhoda is survived by her husband Tom, who has also been a member of the Scholars.

A short note from the editor

Since most of this issue involves words from me, I really have nothing more to say here, except to note that I always welcome words from other people. Writing for this journal is a great way to get yourself into print.

The theme for the next issue will continue to be scholarship—broadly interpreted. The deadline is October 1, 2013. I look forward to hearing from you.

Lucy Brusic, <lucy@brusic.net>

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Contributors to this issue:

Valerie Bauer, Bill McTeer,
Mary Treacy, Shirley Whiting

Minnesota Independent
Scholars Forum (MISF)

POB 80235, Lake Street Station
Minneapolis, MN 55408-8235

www.mnindependentscholars.org

MISF

PO Box 80235, Lake Street Station

Minneapolis MN 55408-8235

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