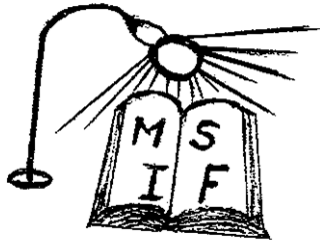


The Minnesota Scholar

Journal of the Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum

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MISF Study Groups offer round table discussion and enlightenment in an informal setting

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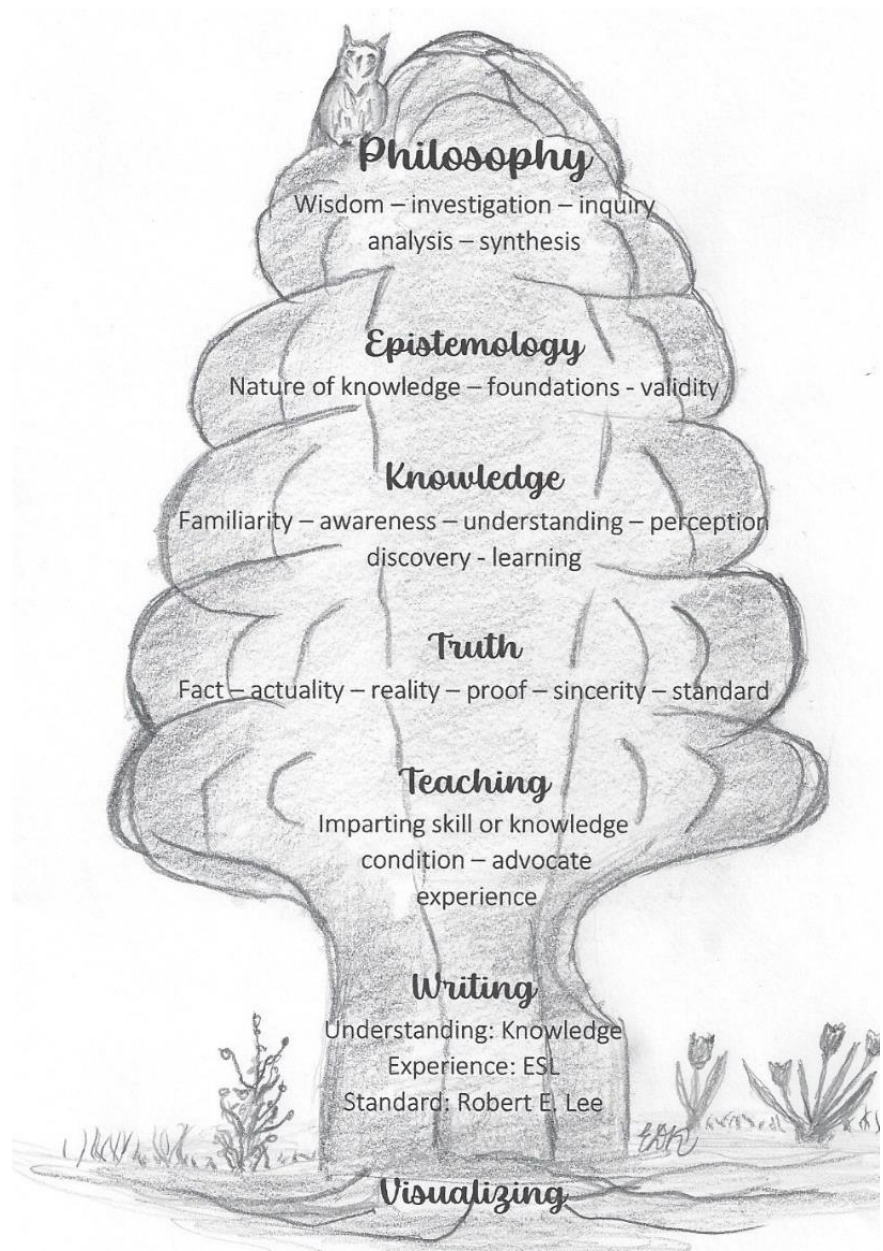
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Study Group Uncovers Knowledge

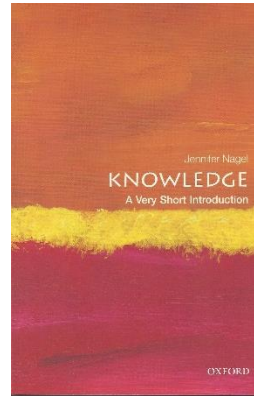
by Curt Hillstrom



One of the surprises from the last survey that the Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum took of their members was how important the Study Groups are. As a member of three of them, this probably should not have been such a surprise. The satisfaction I have received from them is abundant. They have introduced me to some really great books and provided many personal insights and deeper understandings. In addition, there are also the different points of view, camaraderie, and friendships that happen whenever a group gets together for a good discussion.

One of the discoveries the Philosophy Study Group has made is a series of books from Oxford University Press called the Very Short Introduction (VSI) series. This series has proved to be so popular that the publisher is in the process of putting out book number 700. Calling them “Very Short” is a bit misleading, though, since they generally run between 150 to 200 pages. They fill a space between reading publications that really are very short, like “Cliff’s Notes” or Wikipedia articles, and reading histories of philosophy or all the salient texts. The VSI books not only provide an excellent overview of a topic; they are great reviews of subjects that one may have studied years before. While any sort of compendium such as VSI will inevitably vary in quality, of the two we have read so far, neither was disappointing.

One of the two was *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction* (2014) by Jennifer Nagel. She writes for a general audience in clear, non-technical language, and covers every significant philosophical aspect of knowledge from classical Greece to contemporary arguments. This was of particular interest to me since, when I started studying philosophy many years ago, I quickly decided that what is often considered the most basic philosophical question – “What is Truth?” – is less important than, “How do you know what is Truth?” However, in the intervening years other things have overruled spending much time examining this topic. This book provided not only a good review, but also an update of what has been going on in the



discussion of knowledge in the intervening decades. One of these things is what is called “the Gettier problem.”

But before we get to the Gettier problem, we should review what led up to it. Like so many other things in philosophy, it goes back to Plato. Discussing knowledge in his dialogues *Theaetetus* and *Meno*, Plato said that

knowledge is better than true belief because it is justified, whereas true belief is not. This led to a tripartite definition of knowledge: For someone *S* to have knowledge of *p* requires that (1) *p* is true, (2) *S* believes *p*, and (3) *S* is justified in believing *p*. This is referred to as justified true belief (JTB), which has become a handy starting point for discussions of knowledge, even though there is little evidence that anyone, not even Plato, ever fully adopted this definition. Nonetheless, for the next couple of millennia or so after Plato, this was a respected definition of knowledge and never became a major point of philosophical discussion, at least in the West.

In 1963 the American philosopher Edmund Gettier (GET-tee-er) wrote a short paper in which he offered two counterexamples which he claimed fulfilled the JTB requirements but which were not knowledge. While Gettier was not the first person to ever do this, his paper inaugurated a flurry of other papers and discussions that tried to solve the problem of defining what knowledge really is, thus bestowing his name to it as the Gettier problem.

I will cite just one of Gettier's counterexamples. Smith and Jones apply for the same job. The president of the company tells Smith that Jones will get the job. Ten minutes before the announcement of the decision, Smith counts all the coins in Jones' pocket. There are ten. Thus, Smith believes the proposition (a): “The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket.” However, Smith

is, actually, the one who gets the job. Furthermore, Smith happens to have ten coins in his pocket. So Smith did not have knowledge of the outcome of the job selection, but his belief in proposition (a) is true and justified.

Actually, Gettier was not the first to come up with a JTB counterexample. Bertrand Russell presented “the stopped clock case” in 1948: Alice looks at a clock to check the time. It reads two o'clock. Unknown to Alice, the clock is broken. Fortunately, it really is two o'clock. Alice's belief that it is two o'clock is true and justified, but it is not really knowledge.

And we can go back even further. Peter Alboini of Mantua in the 14th century and the Indian philosopher Dharmottara, around 770, offered similar counterexamples. Dharmottara's was about a thirsty man who sees a mirage and believes it is water. When he gets there, the mirage disappears, but he finds water under a rock, making it a case of JTB but not knowledge.

Epistemologists have tried to address these counterexamples in ways that rescue genuine knowledge. This has produced more counterexamples, which has caused more efforts to define knowledge more precisely, which has, in turn, produced even more counterexamples. One important one is Fake Barn County. Henry is driving through a county where residents have erected barn facades that look like real barns from the road. Henry thinks that he is seeing real barns, but just one of them is actually real. When Henry is looking at the real barn, does he have knowledge that it is a barn? Most epistemologists say no, since Henry's barn-perceiving system does not work accurately in Fake Barn County.

I find myself bothered by the whole discussion around Gettier problems for three reasons. First, because the counterexamples are contrived and are true only by coincidence (referred to as epistemic luck). Many are quite bizarre, and some even invoke Cartesian demons to mislead the characters. In short, they are trivial. While it makes sense to start out with simple situations for better understanding, this is often not the best approach. Philosophy is supposed to be about the big questions. Where do we come from? How do we know? What is the right thing to do? Discussions of the Gettier problem seem to be moving away from this.

The second reason I am bothered by Gettier problem discussions has to do with subjectivity. Knowledge is purely subjective. Knowledge needs a knower. Sometimes we speak of knowledge in books or traditions, but these are artifacts of someone's knowledge that has been written down or codified. Some of it is better classified as information. Books and traditions don't think.

When Plato wrote his dialogues, there was no philosophy of mind as we know it today. Like the other ancient Greeks, he believed in a soul as that which animates life and broadly includes reasoning as well as most of our other mental and perceiving functions. But it wasn't until Immanuel Kant, responding to David Hume's analysis of how the mind interprets such things as causality and morality, wrote his *Critique of Pure Reason* that we get to a more modern understanding of mind.

Kant realized that when our senses perceive things in the world (which Kant refers to as phenomena), our mind builds an image which becomes our model of the world. It uses this model in reasoning and determining our actions. Furthermore, Kant said, the way our mind is structured influences how we selectively perceive these phenomena, using *a priori* concepts (which Kant refers to as categories) to build something that works to help us reach our goals, such as surviving in a dangerous world. Significantly, what is actually underlying these phenomena (which Kant refers to as noumena) is something that we cannot directly know.

In nearly quarter of a millenium since *Critique of Pure Reason* was published, many of Kant's ideas have been attacked, denied, defended, and greatly modified with new learning and insights. But his basic idea of a mind that builds an image of the world from our perceptions, filtered by how our brain is structured with concepts, has been supported by contemporary cognitive science. The science is, of course, more complicated, but Kant was on the right track. What is called objective knowledge is simply subjective knowledge that some community of people – geographical, religious, scientific, etc. – agree upon.

Finally, I am bothered by the Gettier discussions as to how the word knowledge is used. Epistemologists feel that a key part of knowledge is that a belief must be true. Okay, but as I noted previously, knowledge needs a knower. Let's say that when Alice sees the clock that reads two o'clock, it's

really one o'clock. Thus, we could say that Alice "knows" that it is two o'clock. Is this really knowledge? Epistemologists would say no. But for Alice, deluded as she is, it *is* knowledge, and she may act on it. Joe, who's aware of the broken clock, knows that it is really one o'clock. He also knows that Alice thinks it's two o'clock. To him, Alice does not have knowledge. But this is Joe's knowledge. To ask if it is knowledge *in general* is an attempt to reify knowledge. There is no such thing as knowledge as an independent entity. Knowledge is a concept that requires a knower.

Asserting this does not lead to an extreme relativity where anyone's knowledge is just as true as anyone else's, such as Plato ascribed to the leading sophist, Protagoras. There is still (presumably) a common objective world in which all of us are living. Each person perceives it differently, and it is through reasoning and argumentation that we try to ascertain what is really true (which is what Protagoras was probably really saying).

Epistemologists argue that what they are trying to do is examine the relationship between knowledge and truth, and to be fair, they are. What difference would it make, then, to claim that

knowledge is a purely subjective state instead of trying to define it in general? To be honest, not a lot. But it would help to define our terms more clearly and, moreover, to eliminate spending unnecessary time on Gettier problems.

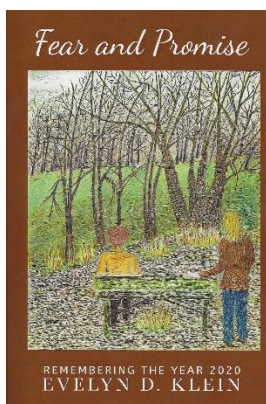
This is, of course, not the end of the matter. We have only been discussing the Gettier problem, and there are epistemologists who do not find that JTB is the right way to understand knowledge in general or at all. And we could complicate matters further by distinguishing between phenomenal and noumenal knowledge. And there is much more to be said about objectivity and subjectivity. As usual, we have barely scratched the surface of another philosophical problem.

~Curt Hillstrom is a retired systems analyst, graduate of the University of Wisconsin, having studied philosophy and mathematics. He attended graduate school in systems science at the University of Louisville, leaving after becoming disenchanted with the traditional educational system. Past president of MISF, he has been a member since 1984.

Publication News

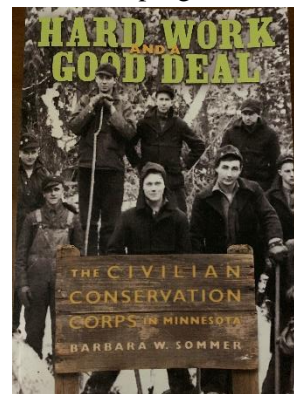
Evelyn D. Klein, TMS editor and MISF board member. Her fourth book of poetry, *Fear and Promise, Remembering the Year 2020*, was released by Kirk House Publishers this spring. The book chronicles the story of the year with its various happenings from both the personal and public side.

It is available at Barnes & Noble, Amazon, from the publisher and the author.



Publication launch reading and celebration will be held **Sunday, July 17, 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. at Central Park Valley Creek Room B** (Downstairs from the R. H. Stafford Library) 8595 Central Park Place, Woodbury, MN 55125

Barbara W. Sommer, MISF board member. The Minnesota Historical Society Press has recently issued a soft cover edition of *Hard Work and a Good Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps in Minnesota*. Drawing on oral histories and archival research in Minnesota and at the National Archives, the book tells the story of the popular Great Depression-era New Deal program, the Civilian Conservation Corps



(CCC) and its work in Minnesota.

It won: Minnesota Book Award, Northeastern Minnesota Book Award, and Award of Merit from the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH). It is available through The Minnesota Historical

Society, bookstores in the state, and on-line sources.



My Passion

by Charlie Roger

The pandemic has caused many changes to our lives and our daily routines. It has also allowed us to determine what was most important in our lives and what we missed most when it was gone. For me, this was teaching English as a Second Language (ESL). With the pandemic, in-person classes and one-to-one tutoring stopped. At first, it was thought to be a short break, but of course it continued for many months, and the school where I volunteered stopped the in-person classes. Our school did begin offering virtual classes. I tried this, but my hearing is so bad that it just didn't work. I was able to converse virtually with a more advanced student. After a while, I missed the contact with the students and the other volunteers. My interest in ESL is more personal than academic. I missed getting to know new students, watching them gain confidence and progress in their English learning and seeing how hard the students work to learn.

English as a Second Language

I began teaching ESL to adults 15 years ago, when I saw a small notice that volunteer opportunities were available through Literacy Minnesota to teach ESL classes. The notice caught my attention, and I thought 'I could do that'. I was disposed to doing this because of a job change I had made a few years before. Previously, I had worked as a respiratory therapist in the University Hospital, and as such, I had contact with patients and staff from many states and many countries. Then I changed jobs to the computer department of the hospital. I no longer had this daily informal contact with a variety of persons, and I realized that I missed it. So, the opportunity to teach ESL seemed a way to get back this interaction with people of different cultures that I was missing.

Literacy

Minnesota

I went through the training sessions provided by Literacy Minnesota and then began teaching classes at one of their centers. Classes met for two hours four times a week in four different levels. The teachers are all volunteers, and the students have a different teacher each class. Luckily for me, my initial

classes were small, and I could adjust to the new environment. The accuracy and importance of the training became more evident with each class that I taught. I had to learn to limit the 'teacher talk,' and that silence was okay. When I asked a question, it was okay that it took a while for a student to formulate an answer; someone would almost always break the silence.

After I had been teaching for a couple of years, I had an 'aha' or, in this case, a 'seeya' moment. We had the word 'later' in a story and we talked about the meaning. I put the word in a common sentence, 'I will see you later.' Then I began to reduce the sentence, as we do in our speaking, resulting in 'see ya'. Some of the students' eyes got bigger. They all knew what it meant but had assumed that 'seeya' was a word. I realized that in addition to teaching 'proper' English, I needed to model 'regular' English, too.

Another revelatory moment for me happened after an introductory level class I taught for the first time as a substitute. I had been teaching the more advanced classes. After class, a couple of the students went to the director and told her that they liked the class, because I went slowly, with much repetition which gave them an opportunity to learn. After this experience, I began to teach and substitute in all the levels. Every level has its challenges and I think they can be the biggest at the most introductory level. We have some adult students who never went to school in their home countries and do not read or write their native languages. So, learning to read and write English with our weird pronunciation and spelling is hard for them. We have to start with letter sounds and progress from there. We teach in English, as a class may have students that speak 2 or 3 or 4 different languages. Sometimes the students can help each other. A class with different language speakers is usually good, as the students have to use English to talk with each other.

In addition to learning new methods, I also had some to unlearn. I enjoy doing crossword puzzles and considering all the various meanings of words. When I first started teaching, I sometimes would describe too much detail about the words. The

students' blank stares indicated to me that I needed to describe the meaning more precisely in the context of the passage.

I had studied Spanish

After a couple of years of teaching, I decided since the students could speak more than one language, I should, too. Since I had studied Spanish in high school many years before, and since Spanish is a useful language to know, I decided to study it again. At first, I only wanted an academic or reading knowledge of it, but then after a few years, I realized I needed to speak and understand it, which is much harder. I think my learning a second language has made me a better teacher. I realize the importance of repetition and repetition and repetition in learning new words and grammar structures. I am not dismayed when students mix up words like "receipt" and "recipe," because I mix up "atravesar" and "atreverse."

Teaching ESL in Mexico

I am by nature a shy person and have trouble initiating conversation. I need a reason to talk with someone. Being a teacher gives me a role and a reason to talk with others. My wife and I like to spend a few months each year in Oaxaca, Mexico, escaping the Minnesota winters. Being a tourist is fine for a while but then it is nice to have something to do, to connect with the local people. One year we volunteered to teach ESL classes twice a week to adults and children in a village with the group En Via, a group that makes microloans to women for their small businesses and also offers English classes in a couple of villages. We taught a couple of times a week for six weeks.

Getting to the village was a bit of a process for us but one, I realized later, many Oaxacanos make every day to get to work or school. We had to walk from the En Via offices for 10-15 minutes to the bus stop. The bus stop was a bit chaotic, with a lot of people and the buses were not marked well. Once we found the right bus, it was a 30-minute ride, often standing. When we arrived at the crossroads, we got off the bus and took a mototaxi, or tuk-tuk, a mile to the village.

Then we set up tables and chairs for the classes on the veranda on the municipal building. After teaching for two hours, we reversed the process to return back to Oaxaca.

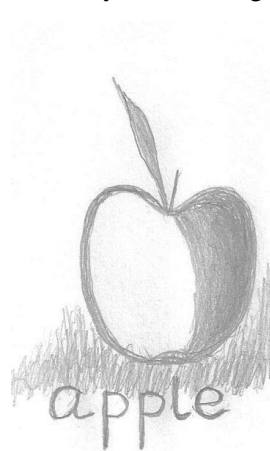
One of my endearing memories of my time in Mexico is the ride by mototaxi back to the bus stop on the highway. It was always in the late afternoon with the sun going down. The sky was dark blue and the light and shadows on the hills and mountains were

strikingly beautiful. The air was clear and cool, and we were jammed into this little mototaxi. This moment is a favorite memory of Mexico.

Another way to help the locals with their English is through intercambios or language exchanges in which you spend an hour speaking in English and an hour in Spanish. It's a good way to practice speaking in Spanish and a good way to meet the locals and learn about the local culture. One year we were invited to visit one young man's farm and another year I was invited to coffee by an architect, and we had coffee and conversation weekly for seven weeks.

Besides the personal benefits, teaching ESL has given me a new appreciation of the English language, its complexity and its difficulty. Students ask why English is the way it is and all I can say is that it is English. Explanations and rules don't help in the daily use of English. We speak and pronounce

without thinking about the rules and explanations. We have heard the words so many times that it is automatic, and we can correctly pronounce words like "fear" and "bear" that look like they should have the same sound. Or words like "heard" that looks like "beard" but sounds like "word" and "bird."



My school is back to teaching in-person classes, and I can

participate again. Some of our previous students have returned, and we have new students also. It is fun to reconnect with the old students and get to know the new students. After two years of virtual teaching, I am looking forward to pursuing my passion for ESL in person in the coming years.

~ Charlie Roger retired after careers in respiratory therapy and information management. He has a B.S. degree in Physical Education from the University of Illinois and an AAS degree in Respiratory Therapy from St. Paul College. He likes to travel, read, and teach English.



Book Review: by Lucy Brusic

Robert E. Lee – A Life

by Allen C. Guelzo. Alfred Knopf, 2021. 588 pages.

In this book, Allen Guelzo traces and recounts the life story of Robert E. Lee, whom Guelzo will label a traitor at the end of the book. Why would anyone decide to write a book about a traitor?

This is a significant question that I have been pondering since I finished the book, and I will return to this question at the end of this review.

I should explain why I chose to read a book about Robert E. Lee. My parents were both brought up in the South—my father in East Tennessee and my mother in western Missouri. My father's father fought for the North, having snuck through the Cumberland Gap to join the Union Army. My mother was born in and had her early education in Monett, Missouri—a sunset town (that is a town in which blacks were not allowed on the streets after dark) and wrote a debate paper in eighth grade on how Robert E. Lee was the greatest general of the Civil War. (I still have this paper.)

After my parents graduated from college in Chicago, where they met, they moved to Detroit, where I was brought up. Neither of my parents retained southern sympathies (or accent for that matter). But I had relatives in Tennessee. And the South and Robert E. Lee have always held a special fascination for me. In addition, I have several times enjoyed the presentations by Allen Guelzo on the Great Courses and in other books, so I was pleased to receive Guelzo's recent biography of Robert E. Lee as a Christmas present.

Guelzo excels as a biographer. He has a fluid writing style while documenting everything he says. The book has 78 pages of notes. Like any good biographer, Guelzo begins at the beginning of the Lee family of Virginia, recounting their history and, of course, their participation in the American Revolution. This is important because R. E. Lee's father, Light Horse Harry, was one of Washington's star soldiers. Nonetheless, Light Horse Harry effectively deserted his family when Robert was five-years old; Harry had gambled or speculated away his

inherited money. Therefore, R. E. grew up without a father. Guelzo attributes Lee's desire to do things perfectly to the fact that he grew up with an "absent" father.

Guelzo carries on through R.E. Lee's attendance at West Point (where he graduated second in his class without any demerits on his record) to Lee's service in the West and in Mexico before the Civil War. Lee, in general, did not direct combat but rather built roads and bridges. He enjoyed such service; he had a mind and an eye for construction, especially the details of dams and waterways. He really hoped that he could spend the rest of his time in the Army, building and repairing roads and bridges.

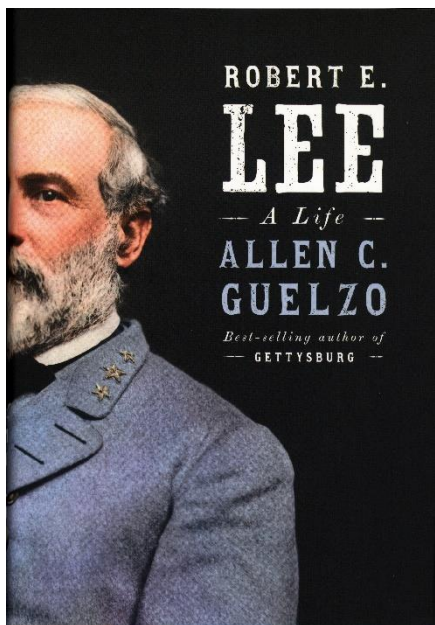
Nonetheless, by the time of the Civil War, Lee had gained a reputation as a calm and competent commander. When the war broke out, Lincoln asked Lee to be the commander of the Northern Army. Lee did not believe in desegregation, but he did not condone the institution of slavery. However, realizing that he would condemn his wife and the rest of his family to ostracism or worse from fellow southerners, he could not oppose slavery. So Lee agreed to lead the Confederate Army to (one might say) "protect" his family's position in Southern society.

The rest of the story is well known to anyone who has read about the Civil War. Lee was a stately commander. He stood a little over 6 feet tall and was an excellent horseman. He was methodical, quiet, and polite. His strategy was to gather his generals before a battle and let them decide what the plan of attack would be. So long as Stonewall Jackson and James Longstreet were serving, Lee had good success, because both men were very competent and confident commanders. However, Jackson died in May 1863, after being wounded at Chancellorsville and Longstreet was seriously wounded in the Battle of the Wilderness, also in 1863.

After his defeat at Gettysburg and the surrender at Appomattox, Lee accepted the position

of president of Washington College in Lexington, Virginia, which is about as far away from Washington DC as you can get and still be in Virginia. He enjoyed this position very much. He was in complete charge and could interact with students, make plans, and not have the plans go awry. Of course, the college was segregated, for Lee did not give up the political stance for which he had gone to war. Lee died in Lexington, Virginia, in 1870 and is buried in the college chapel in a crypt built for him and his family.

In his epilogue, Guelzo reflects on the adulation (which my mother reflected in her eighth-grade essay) that surrounded Lee both before and after his death. This adulation eventually became the so-called “Lost Cause,” and worse, the justification for continuing segregation and racial discrimination. Only now are we coming to terms with this piece of our past as a nation. It is hard to give up fairy tales such as the Lost Cause in which the past is made to look good.



In spite of his compassionate account of Lee's life, Guelzo concludes by saying that, by any standard, Lee committed treason against the United States.

Nonetheless, this is a merciful book. Guelzo tries to show what made Lee who he was. It is sometimes (maybe always) easier to understand why people do what they do if you understand where they come from. Without judgment, Guelzo gives us an insight into the push and pull of the Confederate

world—how proud people could not back down once they had taken the southern position.

I would recommend this book for its scholarship, its readability, and for its long look into a world less weaponized than our own and a world in which we know the outcome—and its long-term consequences.

~ Lucy Brusic is a writer and a 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 a longtime member and board member of MISF and past editor of TMS.

At Large

Possible Future Research Grants for Authors

The State Historical Society of Iowa officially opened the 2022-2023 cycle of application for their Research Grants for Authors earlier this year. They offered 15 grants for original research about the history of Iowa, in particular, or Iowa within the context of the Midwest.

They invited and encouraged applicants from a variety of backgrounds – academic and public historians, professors, graduate students, and independent researchers and writers – to submit applications on diverse, innovative topics. They were looking for publishable work, including manuscripts targeted for *The Annals of Iowa*, the *State Historical Society of Iowa's* scholarly journal.

The information was submitted in early 2022 by Andrew Klumpp, PhD, Editor of *The Annals of Iowa*. The deadlines for current submissions, however, have already passed.

Interested Scholars may want to keep this information for future reference and visit the website of the State Historical Society of Iowa, iowaculture.gov/history, for future opportunities.

January 22, 2022

Layered History: Russian Alaska

Presented by Carol Veldman Rudie

Never before has an understanding of Russia been so important as in today's turbulent times. In Alaska, however, this interest in Russian culture has existed since the 17th century. In her presentation on Russian Alaska, Carol Veldman Rudie, outreach coordinator for The Museum of Russian Art, illustrated how important this Russian era was in the development of the US' 50th state.

Entitled "Layered History: Russian Alaska," the presentation began with an overview of current available sources for understanding this topic. Since 1991, for example, archives within Russia have become available for scholarly review. So, ships' logs, records of the various voyages made by Russian explorers, have proved valuable sources for plotting itineraries and pinpointing landfalls, camps and towns. Native traditions provide another source as oral histories give details from another perspective. Given the anthropological interest in the 18th century, various museums in both Russia and the US preserve artifacts collected during these trips. Artists accompanied voyages and often supplied portfolios of "views." Church records prove important as well.

Deep scholarship, however, also requires a solid ability to research in Russian, English and Native communication methods. Thankfully, Alaskans in almost every historical era were conscious of preserving artifacts and perpetuating their history. All of that has led to a growing collection of written materials, translated and collected by scholars.

After examining the various sources for scholarship, the presentation gave a short overview of the Russian interest in North America. That interest was the result of the expansion of Russian fur-trading through Siberia. After the first tsarist land grants were made beyond the Ural Mountains, Russian and Cossack traders followed the extensive Siberian river system in pursuit of furs. They hunted and also traded with the tribes already occupying this land. The

traders simply pushed west until they were stopped by the Pacific Ocean. As furs diminished in Siberia, they turned their attention to the new continent. Following the Aleutian Island chain led them finally to the Alaskan mainland itself.

Once there, the Russian pattern of land use remained focused on fur-trading. Russian settlements were often merely fortified trading posts. The Russian American Company, chartered by Tsar Paul I and built on the foundation of previous companies, became the major business. Its representative, first in Kodiak and then in New Archangel (Sitka) was also the Alaskan governor for the tsar's government. The Russian Orthodox Church sent its clergy to, successfully, create churches in both the settlements and among the various tribes.

Not everything was positive. Early traders, for example, killed the Aleutian natives, until they learned that hunting sea otters required skills that Siberian hunting didn't give. Early exploration often engaged in violence, especially with the Tlingets who were, themselves, fierce warriors. New Archangel was wiped out by that tribe; reclaiming that spot took the Russians several years and at least one defeat. Rebuilding happened at Tlinget village of Sitka and took on that name. On the other hand, native placenames were often maintained. Intermarriage meant a mingling of peoples in ways still evident today. The Orthodox clergy were often on the side of the tribes, protecting them from the worst and furthering interest in their culture. One became so supportive of indigenous spiritual identity that he was canonized as St. Herman of Alaska.

Everything that the Russians did in Alaska aimed to enhance, maintain, and defend the fur trading business. Because the supply chain from St. Petersburg was so long and farming difficult in Alaska, Fort Ross was established just 20 miles north of the Spanish San Francisco in California. Designed as a supply center and boasting several farms and settlement, it nevertheless proved inadequate and

unsustainable. Tsars Alexanders I and II created boundaries against both the Spanish (coming up from the south) and the English (coming across the continent from the east). The US and Russia also negotiated boundary agreements. During the US Civil War, Tsar Alexander II assisted the Union Navy by using its ships to guard the New York harbor and the Pacific coastline.

By that time, however, Russia was feeling the economic impact of the Crimean War as well as the difficulties of supplying its North American fur-trading colony. So, it negotiated the sale of Alaska to the US, thereby resigning its territorial interest in that part of its empire.

The Russian roots, however, remain deep. Inter-marriage, religion, and cultural adaptations of

many kinds continue to influence a distinctly Alaskan culture. Genealogical studies, language usage, visual symbols and the dynamic influence of the Orthodox church highlight the importance of this period in Alaskan history. The need for scholarship remains strong as does the support of scholarship and of preservation.

Highly recommended resources are below:

- Russians in Alaska: 1732-1867 by Lydia T. Black
- Russians in Tlingit America: The Battles of Sitka 1802 and 1804 edited by Nora Marks Dauenhauer, Richard Dauenhauer, and Lydia T. Black

~Reviewed by Carol Veldman Rudie

February 26, 2022

Rent Control

Presented by Edward Goetz

Professor Edward Goetz examined various approaches and influences affecting the housing market regarding rent control. He began by stating that on November 2, 2021, Minneapolis gave voters a ballot question to authorize the City Council to regulate rents on private residences. At the same time, St. Paul posed the question whether to enact a specific program of rent regulation. As the question went to voters, the government was prohibited from adopting rent control, unless authorized by general election. This turned out to be a loophole.

The Minneapolis City Council voted to discuss the matter further. Generally, industry was opposed to the idea. They interviewed 30 industry people, and they, unanimously, opposed the idea and spent four million dollars in opposition.

However, proponents waged a grassroots campaign and made 154,000 contacts with voters. To them, rent control was common sense.

Rent control in the U.S. had its beginning in World War I and had a strict ceiling, calling rent increases rent profiteering. The OPA Rent Office in World War II established price controls. But these early approaches disappeared in most places by the 1950s because of a housing shortage and only existed in New York City.

National action reappears in 1971 with inflation in a war time-period and price freezes including on rent. The Nixon era established “Moderate Rent Control” to effect “Rent Stabilization” with allowable caps, exceptions to caps, exemptions of housing stock, such as new construction, rentals in small units, single family homes, and decontrol which allowed a lifting of rent after vacancy. The approach spread rapidly in the 1970s, where some cities and states applied them. But in the 1980s and 1990s, in a turn towards neoliberalism, several states preempted rent control laws.

In the third wave of rent control, in a post-housing crisis, more cities adopted rent control. The State of Oregon enacted statewide rent control. St. Paul became the first city in the Midwest to adopt rent controls and Minneapolis is on the way.

A number of program design options exist, including flat % increase, exceptions to cap, exemptions, vacancy control. The St. Paul program has a flat 3% cap, no new construction or small building exemption, vacancy control, and reasonable rate of return provision. The city cannot amend the provision for a year.

Research on the impact of rent control is mixed and depends on numerous factors, such as

program design. It prevents large rent increases, provides lower rents than would exist otherwise, creates housing stability. It does not appear to slow new housing or loss of rental units, as these are replaced by new construction. It points to the need for complementary policies for tenant protections and preservation.

The likely impact of rent controls may be lower increases that benefit mainly median and top renters because of their salary increases but not the lower income renters. For white renters, income increased over rent, while for black renters, rents increased over income. Lower income households

pay a higher percentage of income for rent. In St. Paul, change is coming. In Minneapolis no plan is on the table.

Goetz noted, there is no easy solution for this complex problem of rent amounts and increases, level of income, availability of units, types of housing, and new construction.

Edward G. Goetz is professor of urban planning at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs and Director of the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs at the University of Minnesota.

Approximately 17 participants attended this informative meeting.

March 26, 2022

GDP vs. GPI

Presented by Ken Pentel

In consideration of Earth Day, Ken Pentel, grassroots organizer and candidate for public office in Minnesota, addressed the topic of reducing social, economic and ecological stress relating to the wellbeing of earth. He explained it is best achieved with the GPI or Genuine Progress Indicator as opposed to the GDP or Gross Domestic Product. He feels the GDP is unsustainable in the long run because of its negative effect on the environment on which we depend for our and earth's wellbeing in the long run.

Pentel feels, seen from a human ecological perspective, our goal needs to be to focus on the earth to reverse the ecological overshoot human progress has effected. Population growth has dramatically grown in modern times, and we are about 70% beyond the point for the earth to restore itself. With human population growth came species extinction by use of the land. A century ago, 15% of earth's surface was used for crops and livestock. Now it is about 80%.

The Ecology Democracy Network seeks change in the way we work our economy. Rather than consider our economic successes with the GDP, we need to change to a GPI based on an economy that takes into account the whole cost involved. The GPI considers the true cost involved, the life-cycle cost and ecological truth in pricing. It is impossible to afford the current monetary system of increased profits and disposable acquisitions on a finite planet. The GDP is used by the White House and Congress

to plan spending and taxes. Further pricing, interest rates and budgeting is set by it. However, Pentel feels the limitations of the GDP are that it is not an adequate representation of actual wellbeing or actual cost.

A number of states have adopted the GPI as the most economically accurate indicator, because it includes economic, social as well as environmental indicators. They include Maryland, Vermont, Washington, and Hawaii. Twenty states have calculated the GPI to be the most economically accurate indicator. The difference between the GDP and the GPI is that the GPI includes environmental indicators, the effects of growing food on land that cannot replenish itself. The GDP only recognizes money expenditures, whereas the GPI invests in restorative practices in a holistic approach.

Social indicators of the GPI approach are that the work invested on farms, in households, even volunteer work, though not paid in wages, need to be recognized by the economic indicator which in the GDP it is not. Furthermore, the GPI sees things more long-term, not just one time. Migration from the land is affected by the GDP. At the same time, some work is not acknowledged on the global worksheet, affecting particularly women, who do most of the work.

Many items on the GDP are credits, when they actually represent a cost. At the same time, overproduction is considered good by the GDP.

In 2021 GPI legislation was introduced in Minnesota with the Genuine Progress Indicator Act. But it has been difficult to pass because of powerful interests. Yet Pentel explains the GPI in terms of durability and sustainability, the GDP in terms of disposability.

Ken Pentel, three-time gubernatorial candidate with the Green Party, has devoted the past 36 years to these concerns, to a great extent at his own expense, and as of 2022 continues to develop the projects of the Ecology Democracy Network.

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April 23, 2022

## *This Was 2020, Public Library Publishing and Community Voices*

Presented by Paul Lai

In 2020, Minnesotans lived through a particularly difficult year with the pandemic and the murder of George Floyd at a volatile political time. Paul Lai's experiences were particularly close to events after George Floyd's death, as he lives near George Floyd Square and saw much of the activities pass by. He feels, at present, we are in a moment of transition.

He and fellow librarians asked the question: "What can a library do in the face of events?" In the book, *This Was 2020*, Lai hoped to capture the energy of "comunitas." He and his colleagues discussed how Ramsey County Library could help connect people and proactively engage with public health, equity, and anti-racism. Yet the lockdown created difficult conditions for something so volatile, the protests, demonstrations, the destruction.

Public libraries had closed during the pandemic and were considering different activities. Paul Lai first formed a phone poetry group, then formed an online platform. The challenge was to work around the Microsoft system until the library shifted to Zoom for a historical program. It then did an average of 100 to 150 programs per week to about 300 to 400 people.

The library was shut down fully for two weeks. The primary issue was to reopen computers and internet to public use, but it was decided to open to curbside pickup first.

The library created book lists. They also wanted to have ephemeral documentation of street art because of its usually temporary nature. The next step was to bring together people for a lasting remembrance. The library wanted community voices and not necessarily published voices but everyone's voice. The Loft worked with the library by giving

workshops for 2020. Students got specific writing prompts, such as George Floyd, Pandemic, Political Situation.

Once ready, the library called for submissions. They received 160 submissions and were able to include 51 in the book. Minnesota Writes/Reads helped with publishing and printing what became a Web-based publication and e-book.

The book, *This Was 2020*, carries local specificity. The most important thing about it is that the writing makes us want to come together as a community to show how can we heal as a community. After publication, various readings were held around town, with the aim to give each of the authors an opportunity to read.

Paul Lai concluded the presentation with a reading of some five selections of authors that had not read before to a specific audience for one reason or another. He then summarized that the purpose of the book had been to collect community voices from people not ordinarily heard. The speaker explained that "comunitas" refers to a moment in time, where things are thrown into the air, where people can grasp for a better future.

The library's approach was also to demystify publishing and promote archiving of historic events by the library. It was a way for libraries to publish books that need to be read.

Paul Lai has a master's degree in American and English literatures and a master's degree in library and information science. He published literary criticism essays on Asian North American authors, edited scholarly journals on Asian American literature and on alternative contact in Native American studies. Paul Lai was a librarian and coordinator of public programs for adults at Ramsey County Library in Shoreview.



May 28, 2022

## Ginny Hanson Poetry Day

Presented by Donna Isaac

Teacher and poet, Donna Isaac, holds English degrees from James Madison University, the University of Minnesota and an MFA from Hamline University. Her published works include three chapbooks and a poetry collection. She read from each of her publications, followed by poems on which she is currently working.

Her first poem came from *Tommy*, a chapbook about her brother who died at a young age. It was entitled “Turning” and revolved around an area he used to frequent.

From her Red Bird chapbook entitled *Holy Comforter* she read “The Bells.” Born in the South and having grown up there, she and her friends acted out religious practices as children.

Published by Pocahontas Press, Virginia, she read from *Footfalls*, a poetry collection, which celebrates her father and the Appalachian Mountains. The poem “Wedding” includes her great grandparents and uses lines from folk music.

Her chapbook published by Finishing Line Press, *Persistence of Vision*, deals with movies and film making. The poem “Song Catcher” is based on a movie about a woman who collects songs in the Appalachian Mountains.

The poet also read some of her new poems that she has been working on more recently, such as “Mississippi Night,” a poem about coming out of the pandemic. Another poem is based on a poetry prompt from G. K. Chesterton on Ukrainian cheese, entitled “The Cheese.”

The poet enjoys writing about food. At one point she was inspired by *Bon Appetit Magazine* that had a poem on future food. It inspired her poem, “Out to Eat 2050,” a futuristic poem on going out to eat.

Another poem, “Primarily Colors,” made fun of color choices people make.

She closed with a prose poem entitled “Circle Dance,” where she expounded circles initially inspired by a doughnut that took in a world of other meanings in its various existences as circles.

Donna Isaac helped found the performance chapter of the League of Minnesota Poets, Cracked

Walnut and serves on its Board of Directors, and co-hosts a reading series, Literary Bridges featured by Next Chapter Booksellers, St. Paul. She believes in the power of poetry to transform and uplift, especially in lyrical and narrative work. See [donnaisaacpoet.com](http://donnaisaacpoet.com)

The meeting was attended by fourteen people.

### *The Minnesota Scholar*

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Submission deadline for the next issue is October 14, 2022.

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# Study and Discussion Groups

Groups meet once a month over Zoom until otherwise determined. Books and topics are chosen by participating, attending members. See [meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com)

**History Group** meets first Wednesday of the month at 7:00 p.m., facilitated by Curt Hillstrom.

Current discussion: *The Light Ages: The Surprising Story of Medieval Science* by Seb Falk.

**Philosophy Group** meets second Wednesday of the month at 7:00 p.m., facilitated by Curt Hillstrom.

Current discussion: *A History of Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* by Christian Delecampagne.

**Futures Group** meets third Wednesday of the month, facilitated by Tom Abeles, [tabeles@gmail.com](mailto:tabeles@gmail.com)

Current topic: Plant-based meat.

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## Upcoming Programs and Meetings

MISF plans, for the upcoming season, to return to in-person meetings, barring unforeseen circumstances. We hope to return to the Washburn Library in Minneapolis, but as of this writing, we have not been able to reserve the space. Therefore, watch your MISF e-mail announcements and website for the location of meetings. If necessary, we may return to Zoom meetings. However, the day and time of meetings will remain the same, **the fourth Saturday of the month at 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.** (except for November, when it will be the third Saturday because of Thanksgiving). July, August, and December no regular meetings are scheduled.

**August 27, 2022, 11:00 a.m.**

### **MISF Annual Picnic**

Location: Cherokee Park, Saint Paul

We will meet again at the small shelter, the usual place. Since Covid is still around, we can bring each our own picnic lunch or a dish and lots of conversation to share.

**September 24, 2022**

### **Global Climate Summit in Egypt November 2022: The Role of Fresh Energy in the Push for Meeting the U.S. Commitment of 50% Reduction in Carbon Emissions**

**Presenter: J. Drake Hamilton**

J. Drake Hamilton, Senior Director, Science Policy, Fresh Energy, will explain that President Biden, on November 1, 2021, was at the Global Climate Summit held in Glasgow, Scotland. To 40,000 people assembled there from 198 countries, Biden committed to reducing U.S. global warming emissions by 50% by the year 2030. She will discuss the factors in meeting the bold American goal, and especially the role of Minnesota and the Midwest in leading the decarbonization of our economy. J. Drake Hamilton will represent Fresh Energy at her 7<sup>th</sup> climate summit November 6-18, 2022 (just six weeks after this presentation).

J. Drake Hamilton is Fresh Energy's senior director of science policy. An expert in climate and energy policy at the state and national levels, her responsibilities include scientific analysis and policy development of clean energy solutions to global warming that will maximize economic opportunities.

She represented Fresh Energy at global climate summits, such as the one in Glasgow, Scotland in 2021 and will do so at the one in Egypt in November of 2022, leading a panel of five Minnesotans. Her work at global summits has been featured in the *Star Tribune*, *Pioneer Press*, on Minnesota Public Radio, and other stations.

J. Drake Hamilton earned undergraduate and graduate degrees in physical geography from Dartmouth College and the University of Minnesota, with emphasis on climatology and water resources. *Minneapolis-St. Paul Magazine* named her "one of Minnesota's 100 influential people who make things happen." Her organic fruits have won 25 blue ribbons at the Minnesota State Fair.

**October 22, 2022**

### **Minnesota and the Ultra-Resistance**

**Presenter: Peter Simmons**

Based on his 2018-2019 oral history project, "We Don't Want You to Go Either," Peter Simmons will

talk about Minnesotans who, during 1967-1970, took part in raids on Selective Service offices (draft boards) in Minnesota and elsewhere, aiming to cripple the ability of the government to conscript young Americans into the military during the never-declared Vietnam war.

Mr. Simmons was born in North Minneapolis in 1950 and has been a life-long Minneapolis resident. After involvement in the draft resistance and peace movements, he was convicted in 1970 of violating the Selective Service Act and spent twenty months in Federal Prison in Colorado. His "We Won't Go..." project was assisted and made possible by the Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum.

**November 19, 2022**

**The Civilian Conservation Corps in Minnesota  
Presenter: Barbara W. Sommer**

The Great Depression New Deal-era program, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), has been recognized as the largest conservation program in U.S. history. Its Minnesota story is a fascinating one, involving young men from the state and from nearby states, young Black Minnesota citizens, and enrolled men from Minnesota's Indian Reservations. Drawing on more than 100 Oral histories, combined with research at the Minnesota Historical Society and the National Archives, in this presentation, she will review the impact of the CCC on the people who were part of it, the work they did in Minnesota's state and national forests, its state

parcs, and on soil conservation in various locations, and its ongoing impact on the state today. She will illustrate the presentation with photographs, many taken by CCC enrollees themselves. Additional information about the history of the CCC in Minnesota may be found in her award-winning book, *Hard Work and a Good Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps in Minnesota*, available from the Minnesota Historical Society, bookstores in Minnesota, and through on-line sources.

Barb Sommer has over thirty-five years of experience as an oral historian. She has directed major oral community history projects and has taught oral history. She is the author and co-author of several key publications in the field and of the award-winning book *Hard Work and a Good Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps in Minnesota* (2008). She holds degrees from Carleton College and the University of Minnesota.



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## Quotables

**Albert Einstein:** Intellectual growth should commence at birth and cease only at death.

**Ludwig Wittgenstein:** The limits of my language are the limits of my world.

**Virginia Woolf:** Language is wine upon the lips.

**Sherman Alexie:** If one reads enough books, one has a fighting chance. Or better, one's chances of survival increase with each book one reads.

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