

Biblio File

Many exciting titles were submitted for the 2015 SMA book awards. Mark your calendar for the annual dinner on May 1. ... Oops. Literary License's report on *Immigrant Voices*, edited by **Achy Obejas**, should have mentioned her co-editor is **Megan Bayles**. ... **Susan Aizenberg**, whose new collection of poems, *Quiet City*, is forthcoming from BkMk Press in 2015, received the Mari Sandoz Award in October for "enduring contribution to the Nebraska book world through writing" for her poetry. ... **Dan Dinello's** story "Ebola's Not the First Racial Germ Panic: The Long History of Xenophobia and Scapegoating" was published by Juan Cole on his Website "Informed Comment" on Nov. 4. ... **Timuel Black** is completing his autobiography, tentatively titled *Sacred Ground*. ... The Chicago Sun-Times profiled **Harry Mark Petrakis**. ... Out in paperback in October: **Rich Cohen's** *Monsters*, **Mary Losure's** *The Fairy Ring*. Also, Pioneer Press in Minneapolis-St. Paul listed Mary's new book *Backwards Moon* (Holiday House) among its recommendations for fall reading ... The Dec. 18 Chicago Tribune reviewed **Robert Hellenga's** *Confessions of Frances Godwin* ... The Indiana Magazine of History has accepted an article by **Ray E. Boomhower** on how and why John Bartlow Martin wrote *Indiana, an Interpretation*. Ray's article will appear in 2015. Also, Ray listed six historical Hoosier movers and shakers for IndyStar.com on Nov. 13. ... To provide the proper atmosphere at the release party for his latest clown noir mystery, *The Wet Nose of Danger* (See New Books, Page), at the Book Cellar, **James Finn Garner** hired a pair of fire performers and Gypsy musicians. He also dressed like his hero – Rex Koko, Private Clown – and tossed popcorn balls to the audience. ... A Sun-Times letter writer wrote, "**Patrick T.**

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Author: Why I'm in mood for 19th century writing

BY THOMAS FRISBIE

Speaking at the Nov. 11 Society of Midland Authors program at the Cliff Dwellers Club in Chicago, **Stuart Dybek** said one of things that he loves about 19th century writing is that "mood was the mover and shaker. When you think of Poe, Hawthorne, Melville – those were great, great writers of mood. Even Emily Dickinson and, to some degree, Whitman. The writers I've been attracted to in the 20th century have frequently been writers who hung onto that whole notion of mood.

"For me," Dybek said, "including descriptions of weather is the making of mood."

Dybek has won the Society of Midland Author's award for adult fiction two times – for his 1990 book *Coast of Chicago* and his 2003 book *I Sailed with Magellan*. His most recent books are *Ecstatic Cahoots*, a collection of short and very short stories, and *Paper Lantern*, a collection of love stories.

"The writers I've been very attracted to in the 20th century have frequently been writers who hung on to that whole notion of mood," he said.

For a writer, including descriptions of weather "is for me, the making of mood," said Dybek.

Dybek opened the evening by reading from some of his work, and then took questions from the audience.

"You can get an interesting effect by

combining real verisimilitude of place with stories that are happening in the fantastic realm. I like messing around in that direction," he said in response to one question. "... There are just so many great writers of place. You think of all the great writers Chicago is known for.

"How do you evoke an urban landscape beyond the names of the streets? A lot of it is just evoking the urban landscape. It could be any city with some of the descriptions. That fact that you have already called it Chicago and

given it Chicago street names now has that kind of an effect where the reader is participating."

As for weather, "Irving is right, you don't put weather in a piece unless the weather is what T.S. Eliot in a very academic term called the objective correlative. ... What Eliot says is the way a writer writes is you don't say, 'I am so lonely.' You make loneli-

ness. And the way you make loneliness is you find an object that correlates to loneliness and you create that object."

One form of weather he discussed was snow. "The beauty of snow is that it slows time, don't you think?" Dybek said. "It muffles sound, it slows time. Snow is the original slo-mo."

In response to a question about modernism, Dybek said, "One of the things that typifies modernism and, even more, post-modernism, is that writers ... have become aware of the artificiality of art."



Stuart Dybek

The truth about
ghost evidence

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Reardon's essay in Saturday's Sun-Times was well-written, enjoyable and right on." ... **Milton Nieuwsma** created a one-hour pilot episode for a proposed PBS-TV show "Inventing America" that tells the story of the American republic and applies the founders' ideas to the present. ... Wendella Boats will offer **Patrick McBriarty's** Chicago River Bridges Tour again for the 2015 season. ... The Dec. 23 Chicagoist listed **Rob Christopher's** best-movie list for 2014. ... **Jim Schwab's** blog at <http://www.jim-schwab.com/Hablarbooks/> has topped 2,000 registered users. ... **Lori Andrews** wrote a December Chicago Tribune essay headlined "This Christmas or Hanukkah, ask Congress for Internet privacy laws." ... On Nov. 11, the New Yorker reviewed **Jonathan Eig's** "absorbing history," *The Birth of the Pill: How Four Crusaders Reinvented Sex and Launched a Revolution*. The Los Angeles Times called it a "deft study." ... The Chicago Tribune reported Oct. 25 that **Richard Lindberg** unearthed the IDs of thousands

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'No good ghost evidence, only cool ghost evidence'

BY THOMAS FRISBIE

Today's ghost stories aren't as good as they should be, author **Adam Selzer** said Oct. 14 at the Society of Midland Authors monthly program.

"I really feel like fans of ghost stories deserve a lot better than they are getting these days," said Selzer, whose books include *Ghosts of Chicago* (Llewellyn Worldwide, 2013), a critical examination of what we really know about some of Chicago's most famous ghost tales.

Some spectral escapades are widely repeated, but carelessly researched, Selzer said.

"It is notoriously hard to find first-hand accounts of ghost sightings. A newspaper article says, 'Dozens of people saw apparitions running down the hallway,' but you never actually meet these dozens of people."

Although Selzer runs about 300 bus tours a year for Chicago Hauntings and writes about ghost lore at the Mysterious Chicago Blog, he tries to "separate fact from fiction."

For example, to gather real data, he slid a "Tomb Snooper 500" – an iPhone attached to a piece of wire – under the door of a supposedly haunted tomb in Chicago's Lincoln Park. He got a picture – of another, more ornate door.

But lack of evidence never discourages the telling of ghost stories, he said.

"People have been saying Lincoln Park is haunted since the very first days of the park," said Selzer, whose other nonfiction books include *Your Neighborhood Gives Me the Creeps*, *Jerks in Chicago History*, *Fatal Drop* and *The Smart Aleck's Guide to American History*. (He has also written young adult novels, including *I Kissed a Zombie and I Liked It* and *Play Me Backwards*.)

But many of the stories are "absolute nonsense," which is unfortunate, he said.

"The real stories are very good to begin with," he said. "You don't need to make stuff up."

Not that he hasn't made up stories himself. Inspired by something that resembled a hand sticking out of a wall at Chicago's venerable Congress Hotel, he once jokingly concocted a story of a man who had been walled up there, leaving only his hand reaching out for freedom. He also took a photo of the alleged hand.



Adam Selzer

That story and the photo – both taken very seriously – have circled the globe, Selzer said.

"I learned a valuable lesson about making up ghost stories," Selzer said. "Even if you are just making it up as a very obvious joke, you never know what is going to turn up on television."

But even when he isn't making up a story as a joke, he is hesitant to go on cable TV shows.

"I know they are going to chop up what I say ... to make it go against what I actually told them and to make it go along with what they actually wanted [me] to say."

Although "I don't believe you can talk to the dead using your toothbrush or anything like that," it's difficult to be a serious ghost researcher because so many people will approach with unvarifiable information, including stories about Judgment Day.

"Sometimes, I think I have a sign on my back that says, 'Tell me about Judgment Day,'" he said.

But even the ghost stories with the best supporting evidence don't have much, he said.

"I often tell people there is no such thing as good ghost evidence," he said. "There is only cool ghost evidence."

Sometimes when you dig deeply into a story, you find "more and more interesting stuff," he said.

And there there are the times where he isn't inclined to do much extra digging at all.

"Sometimes I don't do too much of the research into what else it could possibly be because sometimes if you have a good story, why ruin it?"

Scott Turow will discuss authors' rights in digital age

On Tuesday, Jan. 13, 6 p.m., at Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State St., Chicago, best-selling author **Scott Turow** will discuss authors' rights in the digital age. It is a Society of Midland Authors program at the library.

Turow is not only the author of 10 best-selling works of fiction, including *Presumed Innocent* and 2013's *Identical* — he's also an outspoken advocate for the rights of authors in the digital age, at a time when Amazon dominates book sales and Google pursues the scanning of copyrighted materials.

Here are some of the remarks Turow has made about this issue:

"... [T]he global electronic marketplace is rapidly depleting authors' income streams. It seems almost every player — publishers, search engines, libraries, pirates and even some scholars — is vying for position at authors' expense." (New York Times, April 7, 2013)

"[B]ookstores are critical to modern bookselling. Marketing studies consistently show that readers are far more adventurous in their choice of books when in a bookstore than when shopping online. In bookstores, readers are open to trying new genres and new authors: it's by far the best way for new works to be discovered." (Letter from Scott Turow, Authors Guild Bulletin, March 9, 2013)

"To me, the current situation proves that the Justice Department's view was wrong and Amazon is not strictly interested in low prices for consumers. They are interested in using their market power to their own advantage and to pad their bottom line. The problem that Hachette is experiencing right now is that there really is nowhere else to go." (Interview with Chicago Tribune on Amazon-Hachette dispute, May 28, 2014)

Jan. 13, 2015, program
Harold Washington Library
400 S. State St., Chicago
6 p.m. - Program
Free

"Amazon was using e-book discounting to destroy bookselling, making it uneconomic for physical bookstores to keep their doors open. ... The irony bites hard: our government may be on the verge of killing real competition in order to save the appearance of competition." March, 2012, letter to U.S. Justice Department.

Literary
Landscape
Scott
Turow



"... [T]here are many e-books on which authors and publishers, big and small, earn nothing at all. Numerous pirate sites, supported by advertising or subscription fees, have grown up offshore, offering new and old e-books free." (New York Times, April 7, 2013)

"They have somewhere between 60 and 70 percent of the e-book market (at Amazon), so they would love to get rid of physical books altogether. But what it really does is threaten to bring the day closer when they can get rid of the publishers altogether." (Interview with Chicago Tribune on Amazon-Hachette dispute, May 28, 2014)

"It's a fight over who is going to make money. All of these issues revolve around the concept of copyright." (July, 2012 discussion at the Newberry Library in Chicago.)

"The Constitution's framers had it right. Soviet-style repression is not necessary to diminish authors' output and influence. Just devalue their copyrights." (New York Times, April 7, 2013)

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buried in a mass grave in the Chicago neighborhood of Dunning. ... Modern Farmer on Sept. 11 in an article about Mrs. O'Leary and the Chicago Fire wrote, "There really is no Mrs. O'Leary's cow," says attorney **Richard F. Bales** of The Chicago Title Insurance Company. "She owned at least five cows, and they didn't have names — everything about the Chicago fire in that respect is a myth — the cow is a myth." ... Bales is 'one hundred percent convinced' that the true culprit of the fire isn't Mrs. O'Leary's cow, but rather, a neighbor named Daniel 'Pegleg' Sullivan, who likely hobbled across the street and into the O'Leary barn to smoke a pipe, which then fell into a pile of wood shavings and subsequently started the fire." ... In November, **Scott Turow** received the 2014 Nashville Public Library Literary Award. ... **Jim Schwab** was project manager for a new 200-page report, "Planning for Post-Disaster Recovery: Next Generation." ... A third generation author is **Matt Frisbie**, nephew of **Thomas Frisbie** and grandson of **Richard and Margery Frisbie**. His book, just published by Packt Publishing, is *AngularJS Web Application Development Cookbook*. In his book, **Matt Frisbie**, a computer engineer, offers more than 90 "recipes" to help web developers deal with common problems. ... **Jim Schwab** writes to say of **Phyllis Choyke** (See Final Chapters, Page 6), "My main recollection is that Phyllis was a very real, very compassionate individual. When we met at my house, she didn't just show up for a meeting. She very much wanted to know how our girls were doing and showed real interest in their progress. She was very down to earth in that way. She was also an eager learner, taking on data management tasks as I moved on to other positions, and patient as I showed her how to use spreadsheets and other tools that I am sure were unfamiliar to her. But she would take on tasks like membership records anyway. For someone as accomplished as she was in her own right, she had a noticeable humility about such things. She was an easy friend to acquire, and a hard one to lose."

New Books

WIDOW

In **Martha Miller's** new book (Bold Strokes Books, Nov. 18), County Judge Bertha Brannon's life blows up when her partner of 12 years, Police Sgt. Toni Matulis, the love of her life, is killed during a domestic violence call gone bad.

Bertha is still trying to accept what's happened when she gets the first of several threatening phone calls. One dangerous incident after another follows, one dead body after the last. Police are no help, so Bertha starts her own investigation and learns that Toni was working on a case that no one wanted her to solve, a case of corruption that goes all the way to the top.

Bertha first appeared in *Nine Nights on the Windy Tree*.

DRAWBRIDGES OPEN AND CLOSE

How a drawbridge works, with explanations of gears, controls, locks and procedures of operation is the topic of **Patrick McBriarty's** new book (CurlyQ Press, Oct. 7). The book follows his *Chicago River Bridges* (University of Chicago Press, 2013).

GUIDE TO WRITING THE MYSTERY NOVEL: LOTS OF EXAMPLES, PLUS DEAD BODIES

In this book (CreateSpace, \$14 softcover, \$5.99 ebook), **Barbara Gregorich** addresses those who are contemplating writing a mystery novel and those who have written one or two but are looking for fresh insights on how to think like a mystery writer. The book illustrates and illuminates the author's points with numerous examples from her mysteries,

as well as with charts, graphs, and diagrams that show how much or how little is called for in the way of planted clues, exposition, and presence of a minor-character villain, for example.

An index serves as an additional aid for those who want to seriously pursue advice on any particular topic such as dialogue, foreshadowing, or casting suspicion on the innocent.

THE WET NOSE OF DANGER (REX KOKO, PRIVATE CLOWN BOOK 3)

James Finn Garner's new book (Amazon Digital Services, 2014) is set in Top Town, a ghetto full of washed-up circus lifers in the shadow of a big city. Audiences come every night for cheap thrills, both wholesome and not. Witness to it all is one of the most loved and notorious figures in Top Town, a tough joey with a deadly past and a nose for picking all the wrong fights: Rex Koko, private clown.

The Wet Nose of Danger yanks Koko out of his element when he is hired by a high society dame to get to the bottom of a dognapping epidemic. At the same time, he is asked to hunt down two missing sideshow freaks.

Bryan Gruley wrote, "A clown as a PI? Really? Garner pulls it off with splendid writing, cutting humor, and that requisite of all superb books: a great story."

BACKWARDS MOON

In **Mary Losure's** new book, two young witches, Bracken and Nettle, venture outside their mountain valley and find a world that's always been hidden from them – our world. An unabashed fantasy for magic-loving children ages 7-10.

School Library Journal said, "The story's pace is just right for younger readers. ... The resolution is satisfying, even though it is tinged with sadness. With interesting characters and a skillful blend of realistic and fantasy elements."

Upcoming programs

Tuesday, Jan. 13, 6 p.m., at Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State St., Chicago: Best-selling author Scott Turow will discuss authors' rights in the digital age, at a Society of Midland Authors program at the library (See Page 3).

Turow, a north suburban resident who recently served as president of the Authors Guild, wrote a New York Times op-ed under the headline "The Slow Death of the American Author." Turow is also a partner in the Chicago office of the law firm Dentons. When Newcity put Turow No. 1 on its 2013 "Lit 50" list, the alternative newspaper said that he "is using his lofty profile to wage war on issues more important to the culture at large than to his personal wellbeing."

Turow will sign books after his talk. Admission is free, and no advance reservations are required.

Tuesday, Feb. 10, 6 p.m. social hour, 7 p.m. talk, at Cliff Dwellers Club, 200 S. Michigan Ave., 22nd floor, Chicago:

Thomas J. Gradel and **Dick Simpson** discuss their new book, *Corrupt Illinois: Patronage, Cronyism, and Criminality*, to be published in February by the University of Illinois Press. Naming names, the authors lead readers through a gallery of rogues and rotten apples to illustrate how generations of chicanery have undermined faith in, and hope for, honest government.



**Dick
Simpson**

Tuesday, March 10, 6 p.m. social hour, 7 p.m. talk, at Cliff Dwellers Club, 200 S. Michigan Ave., 22nd floor, Chicago:

Patrick T. McBriarty discusses his book, *Chicago River Bridges* — the untold history and development of Chicago's iconic bridges, from the first wood footbridge built by a tavern owner in 1832 to the fantastic marvels of steel, concrete and machinery of today.

Tuesday, April 14, 6 p.m. social hour, 7 p.m. talk, at Cliff Dwellers Club, 200 S. Michigan Ave., 22nd floor, Chicago: TBA.

Chicago Book Expo features more than dozen SMA authors

BY MARLENE TARG BRILL
AND ROBERT LOERZEL

The Chicago and Midland writing scene is hopping – new groups, new missions and renewed purposes. But too often one individual or group has no knowledge of the other.

That's the premise behind Chicago Book Expo, put together by an independent committee as a day-long event to honor books and writers from metro Chicago.

Did you know that there are plans for a Chicago Writers Museum? Or that Chicago now has a Literary Hall of Fame? This is what between 800 and 1,000 participants discovered at the expo that brought together everyone interested in writing.

Originally, the concept was conceived several years ago by Zayd Dohrn of Northwestern. But the expo was abandoned after its first year. Recently, literature-lovers **Emily Victorson**, Lynn Haller and John K. Wilson reinvigorated the idea.

This year's Chicago Book Expo at Columbia College Chicago on Dec. 6

hosted 16 writing craft and learning sessions. Meanwhile, 90 individuals and organizations, including the SMA, exhibited local talent. SMA members who showcased their work included **James Garner, Barbara Gregorich, Stan "Tex" Banash, Joan Kufrin, Jim Bowman, Pete Nolan, Jim Reiss, June Sawyers, Gerry/Janet Souter, Judith Fradin, Libby Hellman and Marlene Targ Brill**.

They were among more than a dozen Society of Midland Authors members who sold their books Dec. 6 at the expo, a free pop-up bookstore and literary extravaganza, which was held at Columbia College Chicago.

SMA board member Marlene Targ Brill oversaw our tables, taking the opportunity

“Did you know that there are plans for a Chicago Writers Museum? Or that Chicago now has a Literary Hall of Fame? This is what participants discovered at the expo that brought together everyone interested in writing.”

to spread the word about the Society's book awards contest.

Patrick McBriarty was there, too, selling books at his own table.

SMA associate member Emily Victorson helped to coordinate the whole expo as well as selling books for her Allium Press.

The daylong expo also featured talks by local authors, including some who have spoken at Society of Midland Authors events: **Rick Perlstein, Cristina Henriquez, Rebecca Makkai and Ian Morris**.

As the expo wrapped up, **Paul Durica** of the Pocket

Guide to Hell – who emceed the Society's awards banquet in May – led a free Chicago literary tour, including stories about early SMA members such as Lorado Taft.

And that evening, the 2014 Chicago Literary Hall of Fame held its induction ceremony, adding six writers to its esteemed list: Margaret Anderson, David Hernandez, Edgar Lee Masters, Willard Motley, Shel Silverstein and Margaret Walker. It all made for a day to celebrate Chicago writers both past and present.



Joan Kufrin



Rebecca Makkai

New members

Crystal Chan, author of *Bird* (Atheneum Books for Young Readers, January 2014) grew up in a mixed-race family in the middle of Wisconsin cornfields and has been trying to find her place in the world since. Over time, she found her heart was in public speaking, performing and, ultimately, writing.

She has given talks and workshops across the country; facilitated discussion groups at national conferences; is a professional storyteller for children and adults alike; and contributes to Wisconsin Public Radio.

In Chicago, where Chan now lives, you will find her biking the city streets and talking to her pet turtle.

Bird is her debut middle-grade novel. Chan was nominated for membership by Society member **Esther Hershenhorn**.

Jeannie Morris, who won the 2014 Ring Lardner Award for Excellence in Sports Journalism, is author of the best-selling 1971 biography *Brian Piccolo: A Short Season*, (Rand McNally).

Morris, who had a 24-year career as a Chicago sports broadcaster, also worked in partnership with her daughter, Holly Morris, on a PBS documentary series meant to empower women by traveling to exotic locales and seeking out "divas": women creating positive change in their societies through passionate and often convention-defying actions.

Brian Piccolo: A Short Season tells the story of Chicago Bears running back Brian Piccolo who died in 1970 at age 26 from an aggressive form of testicular cancer.

At the age of 63, Morris climbed Mt. Aconcagua, Argentina, with a group of breast cancer survivors and, based on that experience, produced the award-winning PBS documentary "Expedition Inspiration."

Her memoir of the historic Carol Moseley Braun U.S. Senate campaign of 1992 will be published this coming fall under the Midway imprint of Agate Publishing.

Final Chapters

When the Society of Midland Authors Board of Directors met for its monthly meetings, its members always were pleased when the location was the home of **Phyllis Ford Choyke**, who knew how to put on a good party. Board members credited her with keeping up the morale of the all-volunteer board. Ms. Choyke, who formerly served as president of the Society, died Oct. 21. She was 92.

Ms. Choyke, author of *Apertures to Anywhere* (Harper Square Press, 1979), also was a former reporter for the City News Bureau of the Chicago, a former feature writer for OWI, a former editor for Harper Square Press, a former member and regent for DAR, and a member of the Academy of American Poets and the Poetry Society of America.

"She was a gentle, loving person who loved all creatures great and small," said former SMA President **Stella Pevsner**. "She fed and protected strays that found their way to her patio ... in spite of neighbors' objections."

Ms. Choyke, who served the Society in several roles before becoming president, remained on the board after stepping down from the top job. When the board had trouble finding a corresponding secretary, she stepped in. Many of today's SMA members recall receiving a letter from her informing them that the Board had invited them to join the Society.

At the annual dinner in 2008, she was given SMA's Distinguished Service Award and plaque for her many contributions to the Society.

"I joined SMA just as **Jim Bowman** was completing his term as president and Phyllis was coming in," recalled former SMA President **Richard Lindberg**. "I remember Phyllis' gentle and welcoming demeanor most of all. She was a very gracious lady, and under her tenure we had some very fine and well-attended programs. The board meetings in her Victorian-era home near Rush Street were so enjoyable, and that historic building spirited you back to an earlier era of Chicago history."

Ms. Choyke, whose work also appeared in Poetry Northwest, Rhino Magazine and Voices Israel, also served as president of the Mystery Writers of America and the Arts Club of Chicago.

"A few of us as longtime members of the Board of Directors of SMA served in various officer roles," said former SMA President **Bernard Brommel**. "None served longer and more effectively than Phyllis Ford Choyke. In meetings she was one to listen carefully, let others debate the issues, and then help to find a solution that would further whatever the project was for SMA. She was one of several women who effectively served on the board. During the same years that she was on the board, she also had her good friends **Dorothy Haas** and Stella Pevsner to share committee work and especially the work needed for the annual meetings.

"For years, we met monthly at Phyllis' home. She lived in a beautiful home filled with bookshelves of great works. At the end of any meeting, she laid out a table of desserts that would have been fit for any literary kings or queens.

"After she moved to the suburbs we also had several wonderful meetings with fabulous buffet suppers.

"Last, Phyllis over the many years was a donor for additional prize money to reward Midwestern winners at our annual awards affair. Her generosity we all appreciated, especially the authors."

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