

Biblio File

Raymond Benson's *The Black Stiletto: Stars & Stripes: A Novel* won the "Lovey" Award for Best Suspense Novel of 2013. **Gail Lukasik's** *Peak Season for Murder* won for Best Traditional Amateur Sleuth. Lovey awards are given at the annual Love is Murder conference dinner, and are selected in a vote by conference attendees. ... On Feb. 1, **Keir Graff**,



Keir Graff

who's been working on a new novel, co-hosted the 90-Second Newbery Film Festival with James Kennedy – "It was a lot of fun to be in front of a young audience again," he told Biblio File. On Thursday, Feb. 27, he was scheduled to present at the Off Campus Writers' Workshop in Winnetka. He was to discuss two topics: how a pre-pub journal such as Booklist selects books for review, and social media dos and don'ts for authors. And his just-for-fun (for now) project, a soccer blog he writes called "American Born Villan," brought him a little bit of attention overseas. He was interviewed for an article in a "football" magazine called When Saturday Comes – on English newsstands now! ... **Beverly Offen's** essay, "Chicago: Belmont El Station" was the lead-off piece for about two weeks in the online Great Lakes Review. ... On Feb. 6, **Sylvia Hubbard** told WWJ in Detroit: "I want everybody to love reading. My mother put it in me a long time ago, just the power of words, just everyone fall in love with every single letter of the alphabet, 26 times, over and over again. That's



Sylvia Hubbard

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Making it up on volumes: Indie publishers find niche

BY THOMAS FRISBIE

At a time when everything else is getting bigger – large publishers are consolidating and Amazon is dominating ebook sales – small independent publishers are finding a niche in Chicago.

That's what four proprietors of local publishing houses said Feb. 11 at a program sponsored by the Society of Midland Authors at Chicago's Cliff Dwellers club.

"Chicago is such a great vibrant city for literature," said **Emily Clark Victorson**, publisher of Allium Press of Chicago, which is celebrating its fifth anniversary this year and publishes fiction with a Chicago connection. "I had no idea when I started this what an incredible literary community there is here in the city. ... I have no idea what it is like in New York, but I can't imagine that it is anything like what we have here, where it is a real community and people really want to work together and help each other."

Small publishers also have been helped by advances in technology that bring down costs, said **Ian Morris**, founding editor of Fifth Star Press.

"Because of innovations in technology, this is a time when small publishers can

thrive, and are thriving," Morris said.

This year, **Sharon Woodhouse**, founder of Lake Claremont Press, launched a new imprint, S. Woodhouse Books, for serious nonfiction and will publish her first hardcover in 20 years.

"There are definitely challenges for book publishing, but there are just as many opportunities for small presses," Woodhouse said. "We help authors make a cottage industry out of their books."

Victor David Giron, president of Curbside Splendor, said his company "looks at our authors as partners ... our mission is to help them fulfill their vision for their books."

All of the publishers said social media help them spread the word about their new titles.

"I can't imagine starting a small independent press and not having social media to promote the books," Giron said.

Allium Press has published 11 books so far and has four coming out this year. Lake Claremont, now 20 years old, has published 60 histories and guidebooks, selling about 500,000 copies. It now publishes about two books a year. Fifth Star Press, which publishes "fiction of all sorts" brought out its first title in 2012, and has created a separate imprint called

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what I view my role in the metro Detroit area – is to get a book in every child’s hand and encourage adults to read more.” Also, Sylvia is scheduled to be on an April 7 panel at the Royal Oak (Mich.) Public Library on self-publishing. ... **Lise McKean** writes to say, “I have shifted from full-time employment in research and public policy to working independently as a writer, editor and translator. My essays on contemporary art appear in the online publication *Bad at Sports* and elsewhere, and I’m working on a book about civil rights in India and translating a Hindi novel.” ... A revised and updated second edition of **Ruth Duskin Feldman’s** book *Whatever Happened to the Quiz Kids?* will soon be published as an e-book under an arrangement with the Authors Guild. ... **Susan Aizenberg** has a new collection of poems, *Capote in Brooklyn and Other Poems*, forthcoming from BkMk Press in early 2015. Poems from the collection appear in the current issue of *blackbird* and in recent issues of *Spillway*, *The Journal*, *Prairie Schooner*

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Literary License

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Society of Midland Authors members can now pay their membership dues, buy tickets to the annual dinner and make donations on our website with PayPal (there is a \$1 fee to help cover PayPal’s fee). To make a donation, visit our home page at www.midlandauthors.com and click on the “Donate” button in the upper right corner.

Publishers

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20th Century in Chicago.

Curbside Splendor, which is four years old, published 12 books last year. It has eight more in its 2014 spring/summer catalog and plans an additional 12 in its next fall/winter catalog, Giron said.

“As of now, our plan is to do 20 books a year,” he said. “I would describe us as a hybrid publisher. We experiment with different genres from poetry to experimental short story collections to novels to creative nonfiction and essay collections.”

Morris said to succeed, small publishers need to create a clearly defined vision.

“You can take advantage of desktop publishing to get the book typeset. Then there are infinite social media outlets to begin publicizing books,” he said.

But the most interesting reason that small publishers are succeeding is that they collaborate with each other, he said.

“It may not be a fast track to an easy life, but it is an exciting time to be involved,” he said.

Victorson said small publishers don’t need costly big warehouses, shipping departments or Manhattan offices.

“You can do it without investing huge sums of money,” she said. “On the other hand, you don’t actually make huge sums of money.”

Victorson agreed that cooperation is important to Chicago’s small publishers. She has created a cooperative entity called Chicago Books United that does such things as allowing small publishers to share a tent at Chicago’s annual Printers Row book fair.

Giron said his company looks at its role as helping authors “fulfill the mission for the book.”

Curbside works with authors from all over the country, he said.

But with all the changes in technology,

“It may not be a fast track to an easy life, but it is an exciting time to be involved.”

it’s hard to predict what additional changes are in store for publishers, Morris said.

“No one knows where this is heading,” he said.



Upcoming programs:

Tuesday, March 11, 6 p.m. social hour, 7 p.m. panel discussion, at Cliff Dwellers Club, 200 S. Michigan Ave., 22nd floor, Chicago: A tribute to **Leon Forrest**.

Chicago novelist Chicago Leon Forrest (1937-1997) is one of the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame’s newest inductees. He also served as president of the Society of Midland Authors.

The Chicago Literary Hall of Fame’s Donald Evans will present a panel discussion about Forrest’s life and literature. (See Page 3 for more).

The panel discussion will include:

– Ronne Hartfield, a poet, essayist, international museum consultant and author of the 2004 memoir, *Another Way Home: The Tangled Roots of Race in One Chicago Family*.

– Kathleen E. Bethel, African-American studies librarian at Northwestern University Library and an advisory board member for the Project on the History of Black Writing.

– Donald G. Evans, founder and executive director of the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame, author of the novel “*Good Money After Bad*” and editor of the anthology *Cubbie Blues: 100 Years of Waiting Till Next Year*.

Tuesday, April 8, 6 p.m. social hour, 7 p.m. at Cliff Dwellers Club, 200 S. Michigan Ave., 22nd floor, Chicago: The Society of Midland Author’s annual poetry program.

Details TBA.



Sharon
Woodhouse



Ian
Morris

Leon Forrest: 'One of our city's best writers, ever'

Donald G. Evans will lead a March 11 panel discussion with **Ronne Hartfield** and **Kathleen E. Bethel** about **Leon Forrest's** life and literature.

Here's what Evans tells Literary License:

Literary License: *Why was Leon Forrest selected for the Hall of Fame?*

Donald Evans: Leon Forrest is one of our city's best writers, ever. That is the criteria for selection into the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame, and with Leon Forrest the selectors were unanimous in their feeling that he belonged in that rarified company. He produced a superb body of work – six astounding books, the best of which will be relevant for a long time to come. In addition, he was a lifelong Chicagoan – he was born, raised and died here, and other than

his time in the service never fled our borders. Like Algren, Brooks, Bellow, Sandburg and other CLHOF inductees, Forrest used Chicago as a setting and in so doing showed us a Chicago

we at once knew intimately and had never before encountered.

LL: *Do you have favorite among Forrest's novels?*

DE: *Divine Days.* It's not just Leon Forrest's masterpiece, it's a masterpiece, period. Henry Louis Gates Jr. called it the *War and Peace* of African-American literature, and others have said the novel was to Chicago what James Joyce's *Ulysses* was to Dublin. Both of those comments are broad-sweeping and dramatic, but also ring true. The epic quality of the book is apparent from the onset – a vast number of characters, layers upon layers of history, myth co-mingled with something like the truth, criss-crossing relationships, ambition and despair. As a reader, you're constantly untangling the story, and the more you untangle it the more its internal logic reveals itself. And like Joyce's *Ulysses*, the story's setting – both its time and place – are incredibly narrow, and yet within these tiny parameters we see a spectrum of life almost dazzling in its scope.

March 11, 2014, program

Cliff Dwellers

200 S. Michigan Ave., 22nd floor

6 p.m. - Social Hour

7 p.m. - Program

Free - donations accepted

LL: *Divine Days was greeted with "unanimous critical praise." Is it read as widely today as well as it deserves to be?*

DE: No, of course not. Very few novels of its length and ambition find a large number of readers. The novel is more than a thousand pages of dense prose, and the reader is burdened with the task of mak-

ing sense of it all. Even on a superficial level, it can be a challenge to keep the proceedings straight and correct. But relative to other highly successful novels of this scope, *Divine Days* is obscure, even among so-called

serious readers. I can only guess at the reasons. But teachers, librarians, writers and students, if not the reading public at large, should be reading this still. That they're not (not much, anyway) speaks to a lot of different cultural deficiencies.

LL: *What influences helped shape Forrest's writing?*

DE: I don't have great insight into this, except for some conversations with Leon's widow Anne. Leon grew up in a house with great story tellers – stories about New Orleans on his mother's side and Mississippi on his father's side – and in an environment that encouraged and nurtured reading. William Faulkner and Joyce and Ralph Ellison certainly impacted Leon Forrest to some extent or another. Leon started writing at a very young age – probably around the second grade – and published a piece when he was 18. All that time, and throughout his life, he was reading voraciously, and also experiencing Chicago in ways that confirmed or contradicted the literature he was absorbing.

Literary Landscape
Donald Evans



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and elsewhere. ... The Forest Park Historical Society's *Des Plaines River Anthology: Historic Voices from the Graveyards of Forest Park* was named a finalist this month for a 2014 award from the Illinois State Historical Society.

Among the authors contributing to the book were SMA members **Jay Bonansinga**, **Frances Dean McNamara**, **Richard Lindberg**, **Robert Loerzel** and **Arnie Bernstein**.

Publisher **Emily**

Victorson contributed

as well. Winners will

be announced April

26. ... **Anton**

DiScaffani braved

stormy weather to

appear at the Feb. 13-

16 Savannah Book

Festival. "The

Savannah Book Festival is both intimate and special," she told Publishers Weekly.

... In just a little over a month, **Patrick T.**

Reardon had four essays published in

Chicago-based publications – a piece on

the meaning of the new year (Dec. 30)

and one on the joy of snow shoveling

(Jan. 3) in the Tribune; an essay on the

need to recognize Lincoln's failings to

understand his greatness (Jan. 18) in the

Sun-Times; and a look at basketball as a

personal church ministry (December) in

U.S. Catholic. ... **Mark Binelli** wrote a

Feb. 13 cover story about Pope Francis in

Rolling Stone. The Huntsville (Ala.)

Times called Mark's tone "detached and

urbane." ... **Achy Obejas** visited Harvard

on Feb. 20 to talk about her novel *Days*

of Awe. ... A play based on **Kent Haruf's**

Plainsong, winner of the 2000 Society of

Midland Authors Adult Fiction Award, is

"beautifully nuanced" and "an altogether

remarkable production," the Feb. 4

Chicago Sun-Times said. ... **Bill**

Yarrow's chapbook, *The Lice of Christ*,

is now available from MadHat Press. ...

Aleksandar Hemon co-authored a Feb.

23 op-ed in the New York Times' Sunday

Review headlined "Stray Dogs and

Stateless Babies" about Bosnia. Also,



Robert Loerzel

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James Wood wrote in the Feb. 20 London Review of Books that Hemon writes, “brilliant, Nabokovian English (a feat in some sense greater than Nabokov’s because achieved at a steroidal pace).” ... On Feb. 24, the Shae Has Left The Room blog called **Elizabeth Fama’s *Plus One*** “a brilliantly imagined drama of individual liberty and civil rights, and a fast-paced romantic adventure story.” ... **Sam Weller’s** new story, “Roadside Cross” will be published by Amazon Story Front on March 12. ... **Mary Kay Shanley, Harry Mark Petrakis and Stuart Dybek** were



Sam Weller

among 30 “notable” fiction writers, food journalists, memoirists, restaurateurs and chefs who either live in the Midwest or were born here who contributed essays to *Fried Walleye and Cherry Pie: Midwestern Writers on Food* (University of Nebraska Press, 2013). The anthology’s editor was Peggy Wolff of Chicago. Mary emails to say, “The resulting book provides a rich panoramic view of where we live, and how we eat.” ... **Gerry Souter** reports the Associated Press picked up the Southern Illinoisan newspaper’s story on Gerry and Janet’s upcoming book, *Outlaw Guns – Weapons of the American Bad Men*. The book, due out in November from Zenith Press, an imprint of the Quayside Publishing Group in Minneapolis, describes firearms chosen by American outlaws and the lawmen who pursued them from the Revolutionary period to 1940. For their research, the Souters toured museums and crime scenes in the West last summer. ... On Feb. 27, **Lori Andrews** told public-service.org Americans often are perceived as their digital doppelganger. “I think people don’t realize how really important things – life insurance, credit, whether they get a kidney or not in a transplant – may depend on some misimpression that has come from information collected by marketing entities based on where people go

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New Books

RAGBRAI: AMERICA'S FAVORITE BICYCLE RIDE

Greg Borzo’s new book (The History Press, June 2013) had its launch party Feb. 27 at the Harold Washington Library Center in Chicago.

Begun in 1973 by a newspaper as a publicity stunt, RAGBRAI (the Register’s Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa) has developed into the world’s largest, longest and oldest bicycle touring event. Every summer, thousands of cyclists from all 50 states and dozens of countries ride across Iowa for a weeklong festival.

Borzo has done RAGBRAI several times, pored over 40 years of news coverage and interviewed hundreds of people about the ride. In the process, he gathered countless stories that reveal the essence of this world renowned event, including the story of Tina Castle, who is 27 and has ridden RAGBRAI 29 times. Borzo has also gathered more than 100 photographs and cartoons – most never published before – that illustrate the kaleidoscopic character of this carnival on wheels. The 168-page book is Borzo’s third in the past three years.

Also, if you are thinking of ever taking part in the ride, Borzo cautions that Iowa is not flat as many people think it is.

CHICAGO RIVER BRIDGES

Patrick McBriarty’s book describes the evolution and history of Chicago as the drawbridge capital of the World. It details the innovation, design, and major contributions to drawbridge technology by Chicagoans.

Chicago River Bridges chronicles more than 175 bridges spanning 55 locations along the Main Channel, South Branch, and North Branch of the Chicago River. Throughout, McBriarty delivers new research into the bridges’ architectural designs, engineering innovations, and their impact on Chicagoans’ daily lives.

THE COMMANDANT OF LUBIZEC: A NOVEL OF THE HOLOCAUST AND OPERATION REINHARD

Although **Patrick Hicks** has published plenty of poetry in the past, this is his first novel. It’s called *The Commandant of Lubizec: A Novel of the Holocaust and Operation Reinhard* and it will be published by Steerforth/Random House on March 25. It’s a tale of a death camp that never existed but could have in the Nazi state.

Hicks says, “It has already generated some strong reviews and I’m delighted that both Tim O’Brien and Robert Olen Butler have given it high praise. I’ve also got readings lined up so far in Minneapolis, St Paul, Iowa City, Fargo, Sioux Falls, Chicago, Providence, Fresno, and the United Kingdom.”

THE PAT BOONE FAN CLUB: MY LIFE AS A WHITE ANGLO-SAXON JEW

Sue William Silverman’s new memoir is *The Pat Boone Fan Club: My Life as a White Anglo-Saxon Jew* (University of Nebraska Press). In it, Silverman describes her conflicted feelings toward Judaism and her efforts to pass as Christian – a refuge from an abusive Jewish father. The theme examines what happens to a girl who grows up lacking a true spiritual and religious identity. This is explored, most notably, in three separate encounters with the overtly Christian, 1960s pop-music icon Pat Boone, who represents someone wholly other from her father, a kind of talisman reflecting her desire to belong to the dominant culture. She “tries on” other identities as well – Baby Boomer, hippy, kibbutznik, rebel – seeking an authentic self. The book simultaneously celebrates the inclusivity of American culture and subverts the notion of belonging.

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New Books

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A KIND OF DREAM

In **Kelly Cherry's** new book (University of Wisconsin Press, May 1), five generations of an artistic family explore the ups and downs of life, discovering that for an artist even failure is success, because the work matters more than the self.

The selves in this book include Nina, a writer, and her husband, Palmer, a historian, who, having settled into marriage and family life, are now faced with the bitter-sweetness of late life; BB and Roy, who make a movie in Mongolia; Tavy, Nina's adopted daughter, a painter in her twenties who meets her birth mother for the first time; and Tavy's young daughter, Callie, a budding violinist. Other vivid characters confront the awful fact of violence in America; try to cope with political ineptitude; and one devises his own code of sexual morality.

A Kind of Dream is the culminating book in a trilogy Kelly Cherry began with *My Life* and *Dr. Joyce Brothers and The Society of Friends*.

Each book stands alone, but together they take us on a Dantean journey from midlife to Paradise.

HOME OF THE BRAISED (A WHITE HOUSE CHEF MYSTERY)

With a crucial state dinner in the works that could improve relations between the United States and the fictional nation of Durasi, the last thing Washington needs is a slew of murders, including the death of a senior Cabinet member.

But that's what faces White House executive chef Olivia "Ollie" Paras and her fiancé, Secret Service agent Leonard "Gav" Gavin in **July Hyzy's** new book (Berkley Prime Crime), the seventh novel in her series featuring Ollie, a savvy solver of dastardly deeds.

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on the web," Lori said. On the same say, she was quoted in the Chicago Tribune about the liability risks of software that could monitor what students do at home with school-issued tablet computers. ...

Ann Bausum was scheduled to speak Feb. 12 at the Beloit (Wis.) Public Library on "Armed with Nonviolence in the Fight for Civil Rights." ... Naming ATF headquarters after Eliott Ness would be a lousy idea, **Jonathan Eig** wrote in the Jan. 16 Wall Street Journal. The headline on the essay: "Actually, Eliot Ness Was Just a Nuisance to Al Capone."

Meanwhile, **Edward Burke**, who moonlights as a Chicago alderman when he isn't writing books about the city's history, drafted a city resolution in opposition. "He's a Hollywood myth," Burke told the Los Angeles Times. "He probably never laid eyes on [Capone]." ... **Scott Turow** is one of six authors who will speak and sign books at the Brandeis Book and Author Event March 17 in Phoenix. ...

The Jan. 28 Seattle Post-Intelligencer said of **Arnie Bernstein's** *Swastika Nation: Fritz Kuhn and the Rise and Fall of the German-American Bund*, "Stupid people are dangerous in large groups and Mr. Bernstein proves it on every page." ...

Harry Mark Petrakis wrote a Jan. 24 essay in the Chicago Sun-Times headlined: "Lost voice from Golden Age of Bronzeville." ... **Jack Ridl** and his daughter, artist Meridith Ridl, were scheduled to lead a Feb. 1 workshop titled "Visual Journaling" at the Saugatuck (Mich.) Center for the Arts. Also, on Dec. 31, the Writer's Almanac with Garrison Keillor featured one of Jack's poems, "The End of This Year." ...

Richard Cahan helped curate a Vivian Maier exhibit at the Chicago History Museum that continues through summer. ... **John Koethe** was scheduled to open the Woodland Pattern Book Center's poet laureate series on Feb. 15. Koethe is a former Milwaukee poet laureate. ... **Christine Sneed** reflected on the Chicago Tribune book blog Feb. 28 on Mavis Gallant's life and writing. ...

John Presta wrote a Dec. 15 report "Megyn Kelly of Fox News backtracks, admitting that Jesus may not be 'white'" on examiner.com. ... In a Feb. Q&A with

The (Madison, Wis.) Cap Times, **Deborah Blum** said her next book will be about the invention of "chemically-manufactured, -altered, -poisoned food" in the early 20th century. "The story I'm writing is about a scientist who ... destroys his career trying to fight this. It's both the story of the chemical altering food, but man, it's a story of corporate and government politics undermining



Gillian Flynn

every step he takes." ... **Gillian Flynn** will write the script for HBO's U.S. adaptation of the British conspiracy thriller series "Utopia." ... The Feb. 6 Clinton (Iowa) Herald wrote **Greg Borzo's** new book, *RAGBRAI* (See, New Books, Page 4) "might well entice you out of your favorite easy chair and onto the road." ... After months of cold and heavy snow in the Chicago area, **Jim Bowman** posted this thoughtful sentiment on his Blithe Spirit blog: "Shovel the damn sidewalks!!!" ... **Eldon Ham** wrote a Feb. 5 essay for CBS Chicago titled "How A-Rod Could Be Guilty And Still Win." ... **Richard Frisbie** was quoted on NBC's Chicago 6 p.m. newscast Feb. 21 in a report about the wide swings in local weather that week. In a man-on-the-street interview,

Richard said it was the first time in his life he'd been cross country skiing (on frigid Monday) and biking (on '40s Wednesday) in the same week. ...

Steven Lubet was quoted in a Feb. 8 Pittsburgh Post-Gazette article about the nation's first fugitive slave law. ... **Peter Geye** will speak April 15 at the Roseville (Minn.) Library. Also his SMA award-winning book *The Lighthouse Road* is a 2014 World Book Night selection. Among the other books selected was *Presumed Innocent* by **Scott Turow**. ... On Feb. 18, **Justin Isherwood**, who the Wisconsin Rapids Tribune says is "well known for



Eldon Ham

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his writing on a farmer’s point of view” visited the Rome (Wis.) Writers Club and shared the story of his writing career. ...



Ted Kooser

Milton and Marilee Nieuwsma celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary this month with their children and grandchildren in Kraków, Poland, and in the Republic of Georgia. ... On Feb. 22 **Rick Kogan** wrote a Chicago Tribune essay headlined, “CNN’s

Rahm-heavy ‘Chicagoland’ will be hard to ignore.” ... On March 2, **Ted Kooser** wrote in the (S.D.) Rapid City Journal about Li-Young Lee, “an important American poet of Chinese parentage who lives in Chicago. ... Much of his poetry

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Editor, writer Paul Durica to emcee SMA book awards

Paul Durica, the founder of “Pocket Guide to Hell,” will be the emcee at the Society of Midland Authors annual book awards banquet on May 13.

“Pocket Guide to Hell,” is a series of free and interactive walks, talks, and reenactments dealing with Chicago’s past, which have been featured in the Chicago Tribune, Huffington Post, and the New York Times among other places.

With Bill Savage, he is the editor of *Chicago By Day and Night*:

The Pleasure Seeker’s Guide to the Paris of America (Northwestern UP 2013), and his writing has appeared in Poetry, Tin House, Mid-American Review, The

Chicagoan and elsewhere.

As former SMA President **Jim Schwab** wrote in 2012, “There is a lot to be said for hanging out with the best. Their bestness rubs off on all of us. Every year, I feel smarter after rubbing elbows with winning authors, hearing their explanations of the challenges they overcame to put together remarkable books that are a pleasure to read.

“And you get to take one home after it’s all over. They’re on the tables, they’re your souvenirs, and if enough other people fail to show up for the banquet, there may be enough left that you can take home more than one.

“[The winning books] are the ones I could never put down, the ones that gave me a sense of their destiny, the ones I wanted to come home to, night after night, until I finished.”



Paul Durica

Society of Midland Authors Annual Dinner Registration Form

The Society of Midland Authors annual awards banquet will be held May 13 at the Cliff Dwellers Club, 22nd floor, 200 S. Michigan, Chicago.

The reception with a cash bar will start at 6 p.m. Dinner will begin at 7 p.m.

Paul Durica is the emcee.

Name: _____

Number of medallions of pork tenderloin dinners at \$75 each. _____

Number of vegetarian (wild mushroom ravioli) dinners at \$75 each. _____

Number of grilled filet of salmon dinners at \$75 each. _____

Donation. _____

Total _____

Please clip above form and mail to: Dinner Reservation, Society of Midland Authors, P.O. Box 10419, Chicago IL 60610
You may also download a similar form at our website, www.midlandauthors.com or pay via PayPal.

Final Chapters

Joseph C. Morton, 1932-2014

Joseph C. Morton's fascination with early American history was clear to anyone who stepped into his Northeastern Illinois University office and saw his large painting of Thomas Jefferson on the wall. As both a history professor and author, Mr. Morton, who died Jan. 22 at age 81 at Advocate Good Shepherd Hospital in Barrington, was focused on America's colonial period.

"He grew up with a love of the colonial period," said former Society of Midland Authors President **Richard Lindberg**, who attended Northeastern Illinois.

Mr. Morton, who lived in Crystal Lake, was author of two books, *The American Revolution* (Greenwood Guides, 2003) and *Shapers of the Great Debate at the Constitutional Convention of 1787* (Greenwood Guides, 2006). He also served as a biography judge for the Society of Midland Authors' annual book awards.

"Not only did he publish while he was teacher, he did what few retired professors do, he continued to publish," said former Society of Midland Authors President **Bernard Brommel**, an author and Northeastern Illinois professor emeritus in the communication, media and theater department. "A couple of his finest works came out after he retired. Many professors just go to seed after all the pressure to publish and perish, but he relished it. He enjoyed having full time in retirement to focus on his research and writing."

Starting in 2010, he also wrote a weekly "On This Day" history column for his local newspaper, the Northwest Herald.

"He was a gentleman, scholar and teacher," Brommel said. "He was judicious and thoughtful in all academic committee work. On controversial matters, he had a objective search for the truth. Thus, he was an excellent faculty colleague."

Deanne Morton, Mr. Morton's wife of 59 years, said his interest in history was sparked in the third grade when his father made him read Carl Sandburg's six-vol-

ume biography of Abraham Lincoln as a punishment for playing hooky for three days.

"Joe Morton, a close neighbor for many years, was always ready for a street corner conversation about our town or interesting research he was doing for his books about American history, his specialty at Northeastern Illinois University," said SMA member **Margery Frisbie**. "He was always gentle, low-key and thoughtful; he was a genial force for liberal views in our sometimes uptight community."

SMA member **Steven Riess** said Mr. Morton grew up in an academic family and that his father was an eminent physician. Mr. Morton also was heavily involved in administrative matters at Northeastern Illinois, Riess said. He also served on the board of trustees at Harper College in the 1970s, Deanne Morton said.

Mr. Morton earned his bachelor of arts, master of arts and doctorate degrees at the University of Maryland. He served in the Air Force from 1953-1957, and from 1964-1967 he was an associate professor at Waynesburg College in Waynesburg, Pa.

At Northeastern Illinois, he was an American History professor for 34 years, serving as History Department chairman for part of that time, until he retired in 2001. In 1990, he also was a visiting professor at Nanjing University in Nanjing,

China.

He earned the Northeastern Illinois University Alumni Association's Faculty of the Year Award in 1973 and the association's Faculty Excellence Award in 1990, 1992, 1996, 1998 and 1999.

Mr. Morton wrote numerous articles about political and military figures of the early American Republic in various historical journals and encyclopedias as well as book reviews and other articles. He was working on a third book at the time of his death.

Mr. Morton also was a longtime Washington Senators fan — though he became a Cubs fan after he moved to the Chicago area — and he contributed an essay to a book about the team that Riess edited.



Joseph C.
Morton

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is marked by unabashed tenderness." ... On Feb. 24, Chicago magazine printed a previously unpublished 2008 interview of the late Harold Ramis by **Robert Loerzel**. ... **Martin Marty** wrote a Feb. 10 essay in Sightings, an online publication of the Martin Marty Center of the University of Chicago Divinity School, headlined, "Pipe Organs as a Niche Market." ... **Patricia McKissack** was scheduled to appear Feb. 22 at Celebrating Cultural Connections — the Evolution of the Cakewalk" at Austin Peay State University. ... **Salim Muwakkil** was featured in a Feb.



Martin Marty

15 discussion at the Chicago Cultural Center about the movie "The Trials of Muhammad Ali." ... On the 50th anniversary of the Beatles coming to America, the University of Illinois at Chicago quoted **Walter Podrazik**: "The Beatles' U.S. arrival 50 years ago was perfectly timed for a television generation reaching its teen years." ... **Davis Schneiderman** wrote a Feb. 3 Huffington Post essay titled "William S. Burroughs at 100: Exploding Five Major Myths." ... **Kathie Giorgio's** books are now available on Amazon. Also, in late March, Kathie will head to Charlotte, N.C., to be a featured reader in Main Street Rag Publishing Company's Final Friday Series. ... **Michael Corcoran** will instruct a March 19 class at the Civic Lab, 114 N. Aberdeen, Chicago, titled "Story And Performance In Social Action." ... **Sam Weller's** new story, "Roadside Cross" will be published by Amazon Story Front on March 12. ... Feb. 18 was the official paperback release date for **Christine Sneed's** second book, the novel *Little Known Facts*. ... **Jonathan Eig** was quoted in a March 3 New York Times story about Jason Collins of the NBA preparing to make his first appearance at a Nets home game.

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Board Notes

Here's what happened at the Society of Midland Authors board meeting on Feb. 20.

A committee to plan the centennial observance was appointed consisting of **Beverly Offen** (chair), **Greg Borzo**, **Keir Graff**, **Craig Sautter** and **Thomas Frisbie**.

The committee will sort out priorities, including raising funds from foundations and other donors, getting publicity, attracting new members, getting out-of-town members to think of the event, possibly on a weekend, as a sort of home coming.

Any SMA members who have ideas to contribute should contact one of the committee members.

The board voted to set the book awards dinner ticket price at \$75, the same as last year.

A total of 294 books has been entered into the awards competition.

New Members

Dennis H. Cremin, co-author of *Starved Rock State Park: The Work of the CCC along the Canal*



Dennis H. Cremin

(Arcadia Publishing, 2002) and author of *Grant Park: The Evolution of Chicago's Front Yard* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2013) is a professor of history at Lewis University in Romeoville, Ill. He also is the co-author of *Chicago: A Pictorial*

Celebration and a contributor to *The Encyclopedia of Chicago*.

He has served as director of research and public programs for the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Gaylord Building Historic Site and as a State Scholar for the Illinois Humanities Council.

He served on the Road Scholars Speakers Bureau, provided guided tours for the City of Chicago's Office of Cultural Affairs, and worked as an archivist for the Grant Park Music Festival.

Re`Lynn Hansen's work has appeared in *Hawai'i Review*, *Rhino*, *New Madrid*, *Water~Stone*, *New South*, *Poem Memoir Story*, and online at *contrary*. Her chapbook, *25 Sightings of the Ivory Billed Woodpecker* was published by Firewheel Press.

Her book of nonfiction prose poems, *Some Women I Have Known*, is forthcoming from White Pine Press.

Her novel *Take Me to the Underground* was nominated for a Lambda Literary Award.

She has won the New South Prose Prize and the Prism International Award for Creative Nonfiction.

She is associate professor in the creative nonfiction program of Columbia College.

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