

Biblio File

Gannett's The Town Talk on April 4 wrote "There is a rash of new Katrina books coming out in time for its 10th anniversary in August. If you read only one, it should be **Margaret McMullan's** *Aftermath Lounge: A Novel in Stories*. It manages to make you laugh and weep, and see what happened to people and places when the reporters and camera crews went away." ... **James Swanson** wrote the cover story in the March Smithsonian magazine about Abraham



Ann Bausum

Lincoln relics ... Congratulations to **Ted McClelland** and his wife, Kristen, now proud parents of daughter Lark. ... On April 7, **Jim Reiss** was scheduled to read from his sixth book of poems, *The Novel*, at the Glenview (Ill.) Public Library. ... *Stubby the War Dog* by **Ann Bausum** has gained recognition as: A Junior Library Guild selection; California Reading Association 2014 Eureka! Gold Award winner; One of the New York Public Library One Hundred Titles for Reading and Sharing in 2014; As a Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People selection by the National Council for the Social Studies & Children's Book Council; As one of the 2014 Choices by the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC); And a Pennsylvania Young Reader's Choice Awards nominee. ... On April 15, **Bill Yarrow** (see New Books, Page 5) and other writers will read at The Book Cellar in Chicago at 7 p.m. He also will be one of the readers at The Brothers K Coffeehouse in Evanston, Ill. on May 29, 2015, at 6 p.m. and at Powell's in Chicago on July 20, 2015, at 7 pm. ... The resignation of U.S. Rep. Aaron Schock, R-Ill., has brought a lot of new attention

Turn to Page 2

Upcoming: poetry, book awards, Centennial program

Poet **Roger Bonair-Agard**, winner of the Society of Midland Authors Award for his 2013 book *Bury My Clothes*, will speak Tuesday, April 14, at the Cliff Dwellers Club, 200 S. Michigan Ave., 22nd floor, Chicago. He will speak at 7 p.m. A social hour, with complimentary snacks and a cash bar, begins at 6 p.m. The Society of Midland Authors program is free and open to the public. No advance registration is required.

Bonair-Agard is a native of Trinidad and Tobago and moved to the United States in 1987. His collections of poetry include *Tarnish and Masquerade* (2006); *Gully* (2010); and *Bury My Clothes* (2013), which was also a long-list finalist for a National Book Award. He is a two-time National Poetry Slam champion and has appeared on programs such as HBO's "Def Poetry Jam" and the PBS "NewsHour."

A Cave Canem fellow, Bonair-Agard performs his work and leads workshops internationally. He is writer-in-residence with Vision Into Art and poet-in-residence with Young Chicago Authors. He is the co-founder and artistic director of the louderARTS Project and teaches poetry at the Cook County Temporary Juvenile Detention Facility in Chicago.

Two weeks after the poetry program, the Society of Midland Authors will celebrate its 100th birthday with festivities on May 1 and 2 in Chicago.

On Friday, May 1, the Society will hold its annual awards banquet, honoring the best 2014 books by Midwestern authors, at the Cliff Dwellers Club.

The master of ceremonies will be

April 14, 2015, program

Cliff Dwellers
200 S. Michigan Avenue
22nd floor

6 p.m. - Social Hour
7 p.m. - Program

Free - donations accepted

Robert K. Elder, the author of six books including *Last Words of the Executed* and *The Film That Changed My Life*. He is also the director of digital product development and strategy at Crain Communications Inc., a journalist and founder of Odd Hours Media, LLC.

The awards night starts with a cocktail hour at 6 p.m., followed by dinner at 7 p.m. and then the awards banquet.

Tickets are \$75 and can be reserved by mailing a check with a reservation form – via PayPal (with an extra \$1 fee) at: midlandauthors.com/online_banquet_form_14.html

As in past years, attendees can expect to take home free copies of many of the award-winning and finalist books.

(Please note that that awards banquet is on a Friday this year rather than the typical Tuesday schedule we've followed in past years.)

On Saturday, May 2, the Society will celebrate its centennial with a day of literary speakers and panel discussions from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at University Center, 525 S. State St., Chicago. Admission is free, and the event will be open to the public.



Roger
Bonair-Agard

Biblio File

Continued from Page 1

to **Thomas J. Gradel** and **Dick Simpson's** book, *Corrupt Illinois*. ... The Rogers Park & Edgewater edition of online DNAinfo



Chinelo Okparanta

featured **Helen Lambin** in December and the more than 50 tattoos she has gotten since her 75th birthday. "It's made life much more interesting and positive," Helen told DNAinfo. "I'd say it's been therapeutic." ... **Achy Obejas** visited Harvard Feb. 20 to discuss her novel

Days of Awe. ... **Chinelo Okparanta's** *Happiness, Like Water*, a 2014 SMA Adult Fiction finalist, is one of three finalists for the 2015 Etisalat Prize for Literature. The pan-African prize is given for first published fiction books. ...

Patricia Polacco visited Putnam County's (N.Y.) Matthew Paterson Elementary School in March. ... **Scott Turow** is scheduled to be at this summer's Nantucket Book Festival. ... **James W. Graham** will speak July 31 at the

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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.

Author raises awareness of Chicago's drawbridges

BY THOMAS FRISBIE

The magic of Chicago's drawbridges opened up for **Patrick T. McBriarty** in 1999 when he was photographing the bridges at Kinzie Street over the Chicago River's North Branch. Two bridges cross the river at that point, one for the street and a rarely used railroad drawbridge that is kept in the raised position and has become an iconic image of the city.

McBriarty said that, while taking the photos with a camera he had shared with his siblings for high school photography classes, he was enchanted by the "gritty aesthetic" of the city's huge bridges, some of which have been opening and closing for more than 100 years.

"You walk across these bridges and the fact that they could actually open up is sort of a thrill," McBriarty said at the Society of Midland Authors March 10 program at the Cliff Dwellers club in Chicago. "The bridge tenders are very good about making sure the bridge deck is clear ... but that whole idea just brings out the little kid in me."

It also brought out the author in him.

"I just thought with Chicago's great history, and a very rich history as I dug into it, that somebody ought to put together a book, and share that with people and raise the awareness of Chicago's bridges, which are very much taken for granted," he said.

The result was *Chicago River Bridges* (October 2013, University of Illinois Press), which traces the city's bridge history from the first wooden bridge to today's hulking steel spans. The book describes more than 175 bridges along the branches of the Chicago River.

McBriarty said growing up in the steel city of Youngstown, Ohio, from age 10 gave him a fascination for how the steel made in mills such as Youngstown's was used. Also, after he already had a master's degree in economics, he took a career placement test that said he should have

“As I dug into it [I thought] somebody ought to put together a book.”

been an engineer.

"So I still have that sense of wanting to understand how things work and then [wanting] to pull out the essence of those things and explain it to people," said McBriarty, a writer and creative producer based in Chicago. "These bridges sort of resonated with me."

Chicago often is called the world's drawbridge capital, but McBriarty said his research showed Amsterdam has more moveable bridges. He documented that by using Google Earth to count Amsterdam's bridges and by zooming in to see which were drawbridges.

Yet Chicago can still lay claim to the title because it has more different types of moveable bridges – more than a dozen – than any other city, more drawbridges than any other city except Amsterdam, and a large share of patents granted for moveable bridge technology.

"I spent a couple weeks looking at the patents from the late 1700s to the 2000s and found Chicago had a lot of innovative design and patents for bridges, particularly drawbridges, where we held 120 of the some 350 drawbridge patents," McBriarty said. "When it comes to bascule bridges [a type of drawbridge Chicago is known for], we hold over 60 percent of the bascule bridge patents. So we had a really strong center here in Chicago for innovation and design and development."

McBriarty admits that he "used to not care about bridges," and only started photographing the bridges at Kinzie Street because it was too cold to get out his sailboat that day.

But it was, yes, an uplifting experience. "Now I can't look at a bridge the same way," he said.



Patrick T. McBriarty

A Century of Midland Authors: How the Society of Midland Authors began

This is Part One of a history of the Society.

In 1914, Carl Sandburg called Chicago “Hog Butcher for the World.” Edgar Lee Masters, a Chicago lawyer born in Kansas, was giving voice to the common folk buried in a cemetery in the fictional town of Spoon River. Other writers scattered around the prairies, like Kansan William Allen White and Hoosier James Whitcomb Riley, were drawing attention with the craft of their words. The Midwest was teeming with creativity.

But when John M. Stahl looked at the condition of the local literary scene, he decided that the region’s authors needed an organization. Stahl, who’d published magazines for farmers, noticed that New York, Boston, and other Eastern cities had more literary organizations and events than Chicago did. “It was rare that a foreign author of note came farther west than Niagara Falls,” he observed.

Stahl (1860-1944), who was born in Mendon, Illinois, never achieved fame as an author, but he came up with the idea for the Society of Midland Authors, which is still going a century later. “Mr. Stahl wrote six books, now deservedly forgotten, but he had a feeling for the better things of literary life and it was his idea to form a society of really top-notch Illinois writers,” Chicago Tribune book critic Fanny Butcher (a later SMA member) once remarked.

With help from fellow writers Mason Warner and Douglas Malloch, Stahl invited Illinois authors to a meeting. As Stahl later recalled, they believed the group should include “those authors who stood for decency and, of course, only those whose work had been recognized as highly meritorious.” And they wanted to “keep out those who had created ill feeling toward and contempt of Chicago.” Stahl loathed modern literature, like the avant-garde stuff that Chicagoan Margaret

Anderson had begun publishing in her influential journal, *The Little Review*, in 1914. Anderson and her ilk “gained a measure of notoriety in Chicago and brought discredit on not only that city, but on a wider territory,” Stahl wrote later in his memoirs. “They wrote bizarre prose or poetry and larded it well with filth. They thought that which was not vulgar was puerile.”

Stahl wanted to see authors from the Midwest—or the Midland, as he preferred to call it—writing more wholesome literature about the places where they lived. “The Midland

authors have not made their own country loved because they have not taken the characters or scenery that lay right at hand,” he told the *Christian Science Monitor* in 1915. “You can pick up any hundred books

produced by the Midland authors, and you will find less than five per cent have stayed at home in their stories. I believe in the West and its authors. They have not appreciated themselves. They will, however, gather strength by association.” The way Stahl saw things, the region’s “decent authors” needed to make more noise to get their books noticed. And he believed an organization would help them to make that noise. That’s the idea that gave birth to the Society of Midland Authors – but thankfully, the group did not follow Stahl’s narrow-minded views of what qualified as “decent literature.” It turned out to be a group open to writers of styles across the literary spectrum.

“None but a bold man would have sought to weld such individualistic – dare I say egotistic? – creatures as authors into a society of any sort,” said one of the

authors Stahl roped into his fledgling club, Hobart Chatfield Chatfield-Taylor.

“...Invitations were sent to Midwestern authors to come to Chicago for the purpose of breaking bread and uniting in the spirit of friendship and common

bond. Some of them might have even met Stahl’s rigid criteria for ‘literary decency’ and unabashed civic boosterism.” This wasn’t the first crusade in Stahl’s life. Earlier, he’d been a leading voice for better roads and rural mail delivery. “Having the vision of getting the authors together was just one of his many constructive ideas which he put into action with

Napoleonic strategy and energy,” wrote playwright Alice Gerstenberg, one of the writers Stahl recruited. “A small man, he compensated as a dynamo as often happens. Always courteous with a bit of French gallantry, he gave me reason to remember him most sympathetically and kindly. Some people were aggravated by his overall eagerness to make a success of the SMA, but then, most people never even try to exercise the second commandment, they are so busy looking at the outside of a fellow without taking an accompanying glance at the inner soul. I admire people who have the initiative to put something worth while into the world as against those who remain lumps of criticism in the path.”

Despite Stahl’s qualms about modern literature, he invited one of the movement’s leaders, Harriet Monroe (1860-1936), the publisher of *Poetry* magazine. In his memoirs, Stahl wrote that “some of the things she has helped to build would better never have been aided.” He admired and respected Monroe, but he also knew that she had contempt for his ideas about poetry. She considered him “hopeless” because he liked Victorian literature and the poetry of Whittier and Longfellow. Monroe, a Chicago native, had written poetic odes for two of the city’s most



Carl Sandburg



Literary Lore
Robert Loerzel



Edgar Lee Masters

momentous ceremonial events of the Gilded Age. When the grandiose Auditorium Building, designed by Louis Sullivan and Dankmar Adler, opened on December 9, 1889—becoming the largest building in the world at that time—Monroe’s “Auditorium Festival Ode” was performed with musical accompaniment. Her verses described the Auditorium as a place where liberty and democracy would triumph against the evils of anarchism: “The loving arts shall ease thy breast of pain.” Then she wrote a poem marking the four-hundredth anniversary of Columbus’s discovery of America, which an actress recited on October 21, 1892, when the city was dedicating buildings for the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition. The crowd inside the enormous Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building in Jackson Park was estimated at 140,000, but it’s likely that only a few thousand were able to hear Monroe’s words: “Columbia! on thy brow are dewy flowers.” She was paid \$1,000 for the poem, but she got another \$5,000 by suing the New York World after it published it without her consent.

But Monroe quickly discovered how little money poets earn. Few people bought copies of her “Columbian Ode.” “So all that winter I used the ode for fuel in the little stove which heated my bedroom-study,” she recalled. Recounting that story, *The Encyclopedia of Chicago* observed: “In a city dominated by economic interests and lacking in literary traditions, even the most genteel efforts to boost literature’s cultural importance had limited influence.”

Monroe could not find a book publisher to print a volume of her poems, and she fumed, “No poet can pay his shoe bills.” She also remarked, “The minor painter or sculptor was honored with large annual awards in our greatest cities, while the minor poet was a joke of the paragraphers, subject to the popular prejudice that his art thrived best on starvation in a garret.”

Monroe wrote art reviews for the *Tribune*, including one that declared: “Modern art is a huge democracy, an arena of the many, not the few.” But her

dream was to start a poetry magazine. On June 23, 1911, Monroe told Chatfield-Taylor about that dream. He suggested that she could persuade a hundred men in Chicago to pay her fifty dollars a year upfront for a five-year subscription, giving her \$5,000 to try out her “hazardous experiment,” as she later called it. The

key, he said, was that she had to go to their offices and make the plea in person. And, she later said, “It proved easier than I had expected.”

She published the first issue of *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* on September 23, 1912. “We believe that there is a public for poetry, but that it is scattered and unorganized,” Monroe wrote in an advertisement for her magazine. “Poetry has no organ to speak for it, and its public does not

know where to find it.”

After Rabindranath Tagore, whose poetry had been published in the magazine, won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913, Monroe said, “I drew a long breath of renewed power and felt that my little magazine was fulfilling some of our seemingly extravagant hopes.” In *Poetry*’s March 1914 issue, she published Sandburg’s poem “Chicago,” which came to define the city in the public’s mind.

“Harriet Monroe found in Sandburg’s liberated, dissonant poetry – as well as that of Masters, Vachel Lindsay and many others – exactly the sort of unconventional work she wanted for her new journal,” *Chicago Tribune* Book World editor John Blades would write in 1983. But others, including *The Dial*, a patrician literary journal published in Chicago, “disapproved of the spoken, proletarian cadence of Sandburg’s poems, refusing even to acknowledge that they were poetry.” *The Dial* called it the “hog-butcher” school of verse.

On March 1, 1914, *Poetry* hosted a banquet in honor of the legendary Irish poet William Butler Yeats, who was visiting Chicago. The guests included many of the authors who would soon join the SMA. When Yeats spoke, he praised a poem

he’d read by Lindsay, “General Booth Enters Into Heaven.” “This poem is stripped bare of ornament; it has an earnest simplicity, a strange beauty,” Yeats said. And then it was Lindsay’s turn to perform a brand-new poem called “The Congo” for the assembled literati.

“Only a few of us had ever heard Lindsay recite his poems: the audience was quite carried away with his gusto,” Monroe recalled.

And yet, like so many poets, Lindsay wasn’t making much money. Earlier, when he accepted Monroe’s invitation to attend the Yeats banquet, he’d written to her from his home in Springfield, Illinois: “I am sorry you will have to pay my carfare, but I am dead broke. Can’t you advance me what the poems are worth that you have on hand?—I don’t want to be an extra expense. My plan of life is very simple, you see—to live at home—on nothing. I only notice my empty purse when people ask me to go places.”

“Sandburg, Monroe and other Chicago novelists, poets and editors were at the vanguard of a revolt—a revolt both from rural values and from the genteel literary tradition that had prevailed in Chicago since the 1871 fire,” John Blades noted in his essay about the era. “At the time, they were considered vulgarians by the contemporary literary establishment; its exemplars included such Jamesean disciples as Hamlin Garland, Henry Blake Fuller and Hobart Chatfield-Taylor...”

The group Stahl assembled that fall included writers from both sides of this apparent divide. Garland (1860-1940) was one of the biggest stars he invited. This Wisconsin native was celebrated for *Main-Travelled Roads*, his 1891 set of stories describing the hardships of a boy’s life on the prairie. Garland had moved to Chicago in 1893,

announcing soon afterward: “The rise of Chicago as a literary and art centre is a question only of time, and of a very short time.” And he was determined to help make that happen. “This is where I belong, here in the great Midland metropolis,” he wrote.

Part II will appear in the next issue of LITERARY LICENSE, APRIL 2015



Harriet Monroe



Hamlin Garland

New Books

STONEWALL: BREAKING OUT IN THE FIGHT FOR GAY RIGHTS

Ann Bausum's 12th book (Viking, May 5), for ages 12-up, tells the story of the struggle for civil rights for gay citizens, tracing it to the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York City's Greenwich Village. It is the first nonfiction book for teens about gay rights history.

Publishers Weekly wrote: "Bausum (*Stubby the War Dog*) offers a powerful and moving account of the pivotal Stonewall riots of 1969 and the struggle for gay rights in the U.S."

School Library Journal called it "Powerful, well-researched. . . an essential purchase."

It will also be published as an audiobook by Listening Library.

RISE FROM THE RIVER

Kathie Giorgio's new novel was released by the Main Street Rag Publishing Co. on April 1.

Main Street Rag wrote, "*Rise From The River* is a brave novel, addressing many social and taboo issues, treating them with honesty and compassion. Readers will go through this ordeal with Rainey, and come out of it with a new perspective, a deeper realization and a greater appreciation for the strength and resilience of women."

CHIPS (CHICAGO HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT)

CHIPS (Chicago Hidden in Plain Sight) (Amazon Print Book, March) is **Joseph and Sandra Korom's** five-book image-driven series. After four years, thousands of man-hours, and the

researching and recording of hundreds of Chicago's buildings, this series includes 1,000 images taken from all parts of Chicago to tell a unique story of the city's architecture – from the bits and pieces of the physical city. Volume Three of the series was written just for children.

BLASPHEMER

The poems in **Bill Yarrow's** collection (Lit Fest Press, March 15) "are not so much narratives or experiments in form, but explorations, and not just explorations even, but celebrations of poetic conceits turned inside out so that only the star-crawling blood of the imagination remains," wrote John Goode, author of *Graduating From Eternity*.

Heather Fowler, author of *Bare Bulbs Swinging*, wrote, "With inquiries into both faith and love, Bill Yarrow's *Blasphemer* provides the irreverent gaze you were looking for in subversive poetries. The hot blush, too."

Society of Midland Authors Annual Dinner Registration Form

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

Robert McClory, author or editor of eight books and a longtime member of and donor to the Society of Midland Authors, died on April 3 at age 82.

A former priest, Mr. McClory was a professor emeritus of journalism at Northwestern University and a longtime contributor to the National Catholic Reporter.

His books were *Radical Disciple: Father Pflieger, St. Sabina Church, and the Fight for Social Justice* (Chicago Review Press, 2010); *As It Was in the Beginning: The Coming Democratization of the Catholic Church* (Lawrence Hill Books, 2007); *Faithful Dissenters: Stories of Men and Women Who Loved and Changed the Church* (Orbis, 2000); *Power and the Papacy: The People and Politics Behind the Doctrine of Infallibility* (Triumph Books, 1997); *Turning Point: The Inside Story of the Papal Birth Control Commission and How Humanae Vitae Changed the Life of Patty Crowley and*



Robert McClory

the Future of the Church (Crossroad, 1995); *Racism in America: From Milk and Honey to Ham and Eggs* (Fides/Claretian, 1981); and *The Man Who Beat Clout City* (Swallow Press, 1977).

Mr. McClory, who frequently appeared in the pages of *Literary License*, also edited *From the Back of the Pews to the Head*

of the Class: The Remarkable Accomplishments of a Segregated Catholic High School in the Deep South (ACTA, 2013) and co-wrote a play, "Haunted by God: The Life of Dorothy Day."

As It Was in the Beginning won first prize in the 2008 Catholic Press Association history category. Mr. McClory also received an Excellence in Teaching Award from the Northwestern University Alumni Association and was inducted into the Medill Hall of Achievement.

In 2001, *Commonweal* magazine wrote, "One expects him to write clearly and persuasively; that expectation is met. ... Though not a professional theologian, he is quite capable of writing about theology

and does so lucidly."

Mr. McClory grew up in Chicago's Garfield Park neighborhood and attended Quigley Preparatory Seminary and St. Mary of the Lake Seminary in Mundelein. He was ordained in 1958 but left the priesthood and married Margaret McComish in 1971.

He started his journalism career in 1971 as a reporter for the Chicago Daily Defender. In 1978, he turned to freelancing. He was a contributor to the Chicago Tribune, the Chicago Reader (for which he also worked as a staff member), U.S. Catholic, Chicago Lawyer, the Chicago Sun-Times, Chicago magazine and Sepia magazine. He also was the first editor of Call to Action News & Notes, the publication of Call to Action, a Catholic activist group he co-founded. He joined Northwestern as adjunct professor in 1983 and became a full-time faculty member in 1987.

Kathleen Moroney Porreca, whose father was McClory's cousin, on Facebook called Mr. McClory "a social justice warrior" and wrote, "He was a brilliant man and always witty and thoughtful."

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