

Biblio File

Dennis Cremin won the 2014 Russell P. Strange book of-the-year award from the Illinois State Historical Society for *Grant Park: The Evolution of Chicago's Front Yard*. ... On June 4, **Edward Gordon** was a panelist in a program on the future of work force development at which Vice President Joe Biden spoke and Secretary of Labor Thomas Perez led the discussion. A report on the discussion will be issued by Third Way, a Washington think tank that sponsored the event. Also, Ed reports he is teaming up with a British historian to write a history of World War II, which should be out in 2019. ... **Gillian Flynn** was the subject of the May 11 By the Book feature in the New York Times Book Review. ... Loyola University Chicago has acquired the papers of **Margery Frisbie** for its Women and Leadership Archives. A key part of the collection consists of taped interviews, correspondence and other materials pertaining to her biography of Msgr. John J. Egan, *An Alley in Chicago*. She has written several other books and many articles for magazines and newspapers. She was a columnist for The New World (since renamed the Catholic New World) and Marriage magazine as well as children's book columnist for National Catholic Reporter. She has served pro bono as president, Northwest Community Services; member, Board of Councilors, Alexian Brothers Hospital; chairperson, Family Life Commission, National Council of Catholic Women; and member, Family Committee, Illinois Status of Women Commission. At 91, she still writes a monthly column for the Arlington



Gillian Flynn

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'Wonderful work is still being honored, celebrated'

BY THOMAS FRISBIE

The Society of Midland Authors annual awards banquet is a valuable forum for recognizing fine work by Midwest authors, emcee **Paul Durica** said at this year's event.

"It is interesting to be here at the dinner that marks the 99th anniversary of the Society of Midland Authors," said Durica, the founder of "Pocket Guide to Hell," a series of free and interactive walks, talks and re-enactments. "Every year all this wonderful work is still being honored and celebrated."

This year's event was held May 13 at The Cliff Dwellers club in Chicago to honor the best books by Midwest authors published in 2013.

Durica said he decided to take a random look at the 49th anniversary of the Society of Midland Authors, which took place in 1964.

"It was an important year," he said. "Earlier that year, [the Society] had a special event at the Sheraton Hotel, where they honored founding member George Ade. More than 200 people attended to celebrate."

The dinner itself was held May 22. "At that time there were still a ... number of founding members of the Society of Midland Authors who were still alive, most notably **Edna Ferber** and **Alice Gerstenberg**," Durica said.

He read **Gwendolyn Brooks'** "To Be in

Love" from *Selected Poems*, the Poetry winner that year and a selection from **Harry Mark Petrakis'** *The Odyssey of Kostas Volakis*, the Adult Fiction winner.

Referring to a poster on display at the dinner that listed SMA winners back to 1957, Durica said, "All of you [should] go back and look it over and hopefully discover some sort of treasure."

Following Durica's remarks, former SMA President **James Schwab** presented the Society's Distinguished Service Award to another former president, **Richard Lindberg**, who unfortunately was not present because of an illness in the family.

"Rich has contributed in a number of ways over the years," Schwab said. "He has contributed a lot of ideas and time to this organization. He is simply someone who loves to be part of this community [of writers]."

Former SMA President **Carol Carlson** read a note Lindberg wrote when he realized he would miss his first SMA banquet in 20 years.

In the note, Lindberg lauded the Society for "championing the voice of the heartland."

Next, Tracy Friend presented the James Friend Memorial Award for Literary and Dramatic Criticism to **Chris Jones**, Chicago Tribune theater critic, arts columnist and reporter.

Friend said her father, for whom the award is named, "had a great fondness for

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The Society
at Printers Row

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Literary Landscape
Taylor Pensoneau

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Heights Daily Herald. ... The movie version of **John Green's** *The Fault in Our Stars* had a "spectacular" opening weekend, the June 9 New York Times said. ... **D. Leigh Henson** recently wrote the lead article, 11,000 words, in the Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association. It was titled "Classical Rhetoric as a Lens for Reading the Key Speeches of Lincoln's Political Rise, 1852-1856." ... On June 24, **Burt Levy** wrote Biblio File to say, "My first novel, *The Last Open Road*, has become a bit of a cult classic on the motor-sports and collector-car scenes (it's also on the recommended reading lists at many libraries and book clubs and is being used in some high school and college-level English classes) and is now heading into its ninth hardcover printing with approximately 50,000 copies sold.



D. Leigh Henson

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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.

Awards

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those who were truly skilled at writing literary and dramatic criticism, those who could effectively bring their expertise, insights and personal scholarship to their evaluation of the writings of others. This year's award winner is just that type of person."

Jones said a critic tends to get a warm reception for praising a particular work but a cold shoulder if the review is negative.

"The most wonderful thing is to get an award from fellow writers who don't have a dog in the game, so to speak, who are just there to say, 'Well done,' " Jones said. "It just means an enormous amount to me."

In the Poetry category, the winner was **Roger Bonair-Agard** of Chicago for *Bury My Clothes* (Haymarket Books), and the finalists were **Carl Phillips** of St. Louis for *Silverchest* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux) and **Averill Curdy** of Chicago for *Song and Error* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux).

Judge **Donna Seaman** said Phillips' book was "quite provocative" and Curdy's was a "particularly beautiful work."

Introducing the winner, judge **Haki R. Madhubuti** said, "When I read Roger's work, I saw the discipline and the craftiness of his language."

The book "is the sound of language breaking open," he said. "[It's] gut-level reading, one that you must prepare for with not only your head, but also your body."

Bonair-Agard said, "I've always known that ... poetry could solve, could heal, could bring truth and respite where some other methods couldn't."

The third poetry judge was **Mark Eleveld**.

For Children's Nonfiction, the winner was **Neal Bascomb**, who grew up in St. Louis, for *The Nazi Hunters: How a Team of Spies and Survivors Captured the World's Most Notorious Nazi* (Arthur A. Levine Books).

Judge **Marlene Targ Brill** said the judges' choice was difficult "because this title had a lot of quality competition."

Of Bascomb's book, she said, "Even with all the amazing detail, this book



Carl Phillips



James Tobin

reads like an action-packed spy mystery."

The other judges were **Ann Bausum** and **Andrew Medlar**.

For Children's Fiction, the winner was **Amy Timberlake** of Chicago for *One Came Home* (Knopf Books for Young Readers). The finalists were **Clare Vanderpool** of Wichita, Kan., for *Navigating Early* (Delacorte Press) and **Patricia Polacco** of Union City, Mich., for *The Blessing Cup* (Paula Wiseman Books/Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers).

Judge **Marianne Malone** said it was difficult to pick a winner because "in this swath of the country we have some amazingly great writers."

The Blessing Cup is "a touching tribute to family traditions and love with the story of Anna, a poor Jewish girl in Czarist Russia," Malone said,

Navigating Early has "beautifully rendered characters" and the prose is "absolutely astounding [and] masterful."

One Came Home "is one of these great Midwestern tales that you cannot put down," Malone said. "I loved everything about this book."

Timberlake, who grew up in Wisconsin, said she set out "with the desire to write a Western set in Wisconsin."

The story takes place in 1871 when Wisconsin was home to a nesting of at least 100 million passenger pigeons that covered an area three times the size of Chicago.

The other judges for Children's Fiction were **Charlotte Herman** and **Gary Schmidt**.

For Biography & Memoir, the winner was **James Tobin** of Ann Arbor, Mich., for *The Man He Became: How FDR Defied Polio to Win the Presidency* (Simon & Schuster). The finalist was

Awards

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Michael Shelden of Bloomington, Ind., for *Young Titan: The Making of Winston Churchill* (Simon & Schuster).

In a note read at the dinner, Judge **Gerry Souter** said the two books were “virtually tied on the strength of their storytelling.”

Reading *The Man He Became* was a “pleasure and an inspiration,” Souter wrote. *Young Titan* “leads a reader through a minefield of politicians and personages striving for power and recognition.”

The other judges were **Ray Boomhower** and **Diane Diekman**.

For Adult Nonfiction, the winner was **Rick Atkinson**, former reporter for the Kansas City Times for *The Guns at Last Light: The War in Western Europe, 1944-1945* (Henry Holt and Co.). The finalists were **Ted Anton** of River Forest, Ill., for *The Longevity Seekers: Science, Business, and the Fountain of Youth* (University of Chicago Press) and **Larry Haeg** of St. Paul, Minn., for *Harriman vs. Hill: Wall Street's Great Railroad War* (University of Minnesota Press).

Judge **Re'Lynn Hansen** said of *The Longevity Seekers*, “What we find in this really beautifully written book is that the mutability of the cell structure is a poetic metaphor for our lives.”

For his part, Anton said, “Thank you, scientists, flawed heroes, for being such compelling and funny and riveting characters.”

Judge **John Hallwas** said *Harriman vs. Hill* is “a fine, engaging volume ... a beautifully told story, very powerful, very compelling portraits of Hill and Harriman.”

The Guns at Last Light is the third volume in a trilogy about World War II in Europe, and Hallwas said it is the best of the three.

“This book is fabulous,” Hallwas said. “[It has] masterful historical perspective, great tactical analysis, personalized and compelling portraits of the leaders, empathy for the ordinary soldiers on the front lines and engaging prose.”

The third judge was former SMA



Michael Sheldon



Rick Atkinson



Christine Sneed



Chinelo Okparanta



Bryan Furness

President **James Merriner**.

The Adult Fiction winner was **Christine Sneed** of Evanston, Ill., for *Little Known Facts* (Bloomsbury). The finalists were **Chinelo Okparanta** of West Lafayette, Ind., for *Happiness, Like Water* (Mariner Books) and **Bryan Furness** of Indianapolis for *The Lost Episodes of Revie Bryson* (Black Lawrence).

Judge **Patricia Ann McNair** said *The Lost Episodes of Revie Bryson* is “remarkable.”

Quoting fellow judge **Bayo Ojikutu**, **McNair** said Okparanta in *Happiness, Like Water* “crafted a fine set of interconnected tales.”

Quoting judge **Billy Lombardo** on *Little Known Facts*, McNair said of the characters, “The surprise is that we care enough about them to understand the trickiness of the world they live in. ... Christine takes them off the big screen and seats them in the restaurant next to us.”

Sneed thanked the Society for supporting authors through the book awards.

“A night like tonight’s banquet is a true grace note,” she said.

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We are currently in the middle of an on-line promotion for the Kindle and Nook e-book versions, which have sold over a thousand downloads in the last five days. Pretty good for a book that was originally self-published back in 1994.” ... The June 21 Champaign (Ill.) News-Gazette profiled **Amy Hassinger**. ... The Chicago Reader in June called **Paul Durica** “Best Popular Historian.” ... **Rita Emmett** joined **Rick Kogan** May 31 on his radio show to talk about managing stress. ... The June 5 RedEye (Chicago) profiled **Victor David Giron**. ... **Robert Pruter** was interviewed May 13 on BBC Radio 4 by poet Selena Godden about legendary Chicago R&B star Little Miss



Rita Emmett

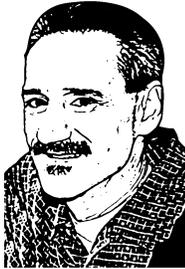
Cornshucks. Also, Robert’s article, “Ann Goldstein: Putting the Lie in Chicago to the Unathletic Jewish Female,” was published in May by Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies and Gender Issues, edited in Jerusalem and published by Indiana University Press. In addition, he presented at the national Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association conference in Chicago on April 19, discussing the Chicago woman’s basketball team of the 1920s, the Taylor Trunks. ... The Winter 2013 issue of a newsletter called the Buckskin Bulletin reminds us that **Fred Egloff** is one of Westerners International’s “Living Legends.” The late SMA President **Dick Dunlop** also was named a Living Legend, in 1983. ... **Stuart Dybek** (See New Books, Page 5) won the Near South (Chicago) Planning Board’s 2014 annual Harold Washington Literary Award. Stuart also was No. 1 and **Gillian Flynn** was No. 2 on Newcity Lit’s “Who Really Books in Chicago” this year. Also on the list were **Christine Sneed**, **Scott Turow**, **Aleksandar Hemon**, **Marcus Sakey**, **Audrey Niffenegger**, **Sara Paretsky**, **Kevin Coval**, **Chris Abani**, **Joseph Ep-**

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stein, Sam Weller, Joe Meno, Roger Bonair-Agard, Simone Muench, Rick Perlstein, Jonathan Eig, Renee Rosen, and Rebecca Makkai. ... Greg Borzo's next book, *Chicago's Fabulous Fountains*, will be published by SIU Press. Also, Greg discussed his most recent book, *RAG-BRAI: America's Favorite Bicycle Ride*, June 24 at the Glenview (Ill.) Public Library. ... **Linda Nemeč Foster** was the national judge for the 2014 Dyer-Ives Poetry Competition. She participated in the awards ceremony on June 7 in Grand Rapids, Mich., held during the city's annual Festival of the Arts. On May 18 she gave a poetry reading in Philadelphia at the Ryerss Museum as part of The Fox Chase Reading Series. Her poem, "The Dream of Maine," was selected by the Series to be printed as a limited edition broadside and was distributed at the reading. Another poem, "Mt. Fuji," was short-listed for an international poetry award sponsored by the Fish Anthology in Ireland. She also gave poetry readings at the main branch of the Grand Rapids Public Library on June 3 and at the Dog Ears Book Store in



Greg
Borzo

Northport, Mich., on June 13. On July 19, she gave a poetry presentation at the Water Street Gallery in Douglas, Mich. ...

Aleksandar Hemon has written an e-book collection of essays on soccer titled *The Matters of Life, Death, and More: Writing on*

Soccer (FSG Originals, June 3). He also wrote a June 22 New Republic article headlined, "Its Dragons Felled, Bosnia Reflects on Defeat." In addition, he will be artist-in-residence at the University of North Texas during the 2014-15 academic year. ... In May, **Gregory Harms** visited



Gregory
Harms

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New Books

NO TURNING BACK: STORIES

Dan Burns' new book (April 29, Chicago Arts Press) is an eclectic mix of stories.

Each of the stories shines light on characters who, as a result of a particular experience, realize that they can't go back – in time or to the way life used to be. Moving forward is the only option, and what comes next is anyone's guess.

Burns accompanies each story with his personal notes regarding the thoughts and ideas that inspired him to write the story.

THE DOG PARK

Laura Caldwell's 15th book, *The Dog Park* (Harlequin MIRA), will come out July 28.

The Dog Park is about a Gold Coast Chicago couple who share joint custody of their goldendoodle, Baxter. When the dog is in a video that goes viral, Baxter becomes famous, turning their lives upside down.

IMMIGRANT VOICES: 21ST CENTURY STORIES

The 18 short stories written by recent immigrants to the United States in *Immigrant Voices* (Great Books

Foundation, March 15), co-edited by **Achy Obejas**, are about daily life in a changing America.

Aleksandar Hemon is among the authors included in the book.

A reviewer in the April 11 Chicago Tribune said, "I

wanted to stand and read aloud the brilliant selections."



Achy
Obejas

THE CONFESSIONS OF FRANCES GODWIN

The Confessions of Frances Godwin (Bloomsbury USA, July 8) is **Robert Hellenga's** fictional memoir of a retired high school Latin teacher looking back on a life of trying to do her best amidst transgressions – starting with her affair with a man she later marries.

Library Journal wrote, "In this highly original novel exploring the hidden depths of one older woman, Hellenga (*The Sixteen Pleasures*) shows that he is a writer who deserves to be more widely known."

Bill Ott, 2004 winner of the James Friend Award for Literary and Dramatic Criticism, wrote, "Hellenga ... is one of those writers who inspires a special kind of devotion in their readers."

Publishers Weekly said, "Hellenga's feisty and learned narrator, who travels from the Casa di Giulietta in Verona to TruckStopUSA in Ottawa, is an entertaining guide."

EYE TO EYE: PHOTOGRAPHS BY VIVIAN MAIER

Richard Cahan and **Michael Williams'** *Eye to Eye: Photographs by Vivian Maier* (CityFiles Press, July 8) includes never-before-published photographs by Vivian Maier, the subject of Cahan and Williams' earlier book, *Vivian Maier: Out of the Shadows*.

In the new collection, the subjects in France, Italy, Malaysia, Yemen, Puerto Rico and America look directly at the camera.

The Wall Street Journal wrote, "Her work alternately brings to mind Lisette Model, Leon Levinstein, Harry Callahan, Garry Winogrand, Weegee, Helen Levitt and Robert Frank. But the uncracked nut at the core of her mystery is this: Why didn't Vivian Maier show anyone her pictures?"

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Sunny day for bookselling at this year's Printers Row

BY ROBERT LOERZEL

Sixteen SMA members sold their books June 7-8 at the Printers Row Lit Fest in Chicago's South Loop area — and it turned out to be lovely weather for outdoor book shopping.

Joseph Peterson sold nearly all 34 of the books he brought, standing behind the SMA table and giving a sales pitch to countless passersby:

"These are three novels set in Chicago, and I wrote them!"

Peterson had copies of his novels *Gideon's Confession*, *Wanted: Elevator Man*, *Inside the Whale: A Novel in Verse* and *Beautiful Piece* — or at least, he did when he arrived.



Joseph Peterson

James Finn Garner had another way of attracting the attention of fairgoers: He bought three bags of those candies people either love or hate, Circus Peanuts, and set them out in a bowl on the SMA table. That wasn't a completely random choice of candy, since Garner is the author of mysteries featuring the character Rex

Koko, Private Clown. And by the end of Garner's two-hour slot, he'd given away all of those Circus Peanuts and sold a bunch of books.

Although **Edward McClelland's** most recent publication is *Nothin' but Blue Skies*, the one that seemed to get people talking at Printers Row was his first book, *Horseplayers*. Maybe it was because the Belmont Stakes were happening later in the day.

Stan "Tex" Banash set up a laptop to play a recording of the official Illinois state song as he sold copies of his book about the state, *Roadside History of Illinois*. His cowboy hat may have attracted some attention, too.

It isn't always easy to persuade people to buy your books at the fair, but even when folks didn't plop down any cash, they often stopped to chat with the authors.

Other participants at the SMA tables included **John Knoerle, Marc Sheehan, Sue William Silverman, Scott Dominic Carpenter, Michael Raleigh, Jim Bowman, Arthur and Elena George, Patrick McBriarty, Dan Burns, Gerry and Janet Souter, Joan Kufirin and Katherine McCaughan.**

Straus and Giroux, June 3). The June 13 Los Angeles Times said his stories "occupy a territory somewhere between Vladimir Nabokov and Nelson Algren — beguiled by the play of language but also gritty and specific, fundamentally urban at their core."

The May 30 Chicago Tribune said, "... his new collections *Ecstatic Cahoots* and *Paper Lantern: Love Stories* feel more like poetry than prose, as if what drives them is less the need to tell a story than to evoke — through closely observed, carefully rendered images and free-associative visual memories — physical sensations."

On June 19, Flavorwire named *Ecstatic Cahoots* its Book of the Week.

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Amman, Jordan. Greg says, "I like Amman very much. It's relatively inexpensive — especially when one stays in hostels and eats street food and eats at the various small cafes and restaurants around downtown. A good dinner can be found for about 4 to 8 dinar, or \$6 to \$12. The people are among the friendliest anywhere, and it's genuine. Perfect strangers in a cafe routinely ask where you are from and then say 'Welcome!' about three or four times." ... **Judy Valente** had several events involving both her *Atchison Blue* and *The Art of Pausing: Meditations for the Overworked and Overwhelmed*. ... In the closing days of the recent legislative session, the Illinois House of Representatives adopted House Resolution 1124, which congratulated **Stan "Tex" Banash** on completing his third book, *Roadside History of Illinois* (Mountain Press, 2013). He is promoting the book throughout the state, speaking at public libraries, before historical societies, and at elementary schools, in addition to appearing at history-related festivals. ... Starting in June, **Patrick McBriarty** will help lead two-hour cruises touring Chicago's remarkable bridges. McBriarty will guide patrons through the history, architecture and engineering of

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New Books

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ECSTATIC CAHOOTS

PAPER LANTERN:
LOVE STORIES

Stuart Dybek has simultaneously published two books: *Ecstatic Cahoots* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, June 3) and *Paper Lantern: Love Stories* (Farrar,

SMA Support

Dues cover mailings and other organizational expenses, but the Society always needs additional money for programs such as the awards at the annual May banquet. Thanks to these members who made contributions since the last newsletter: **Richard Bales, Greg Borzo, Richard Frisbie, Edward Gordon, Shirley Haas, Haki R. Madhubuti, Marietta Marcin, Charles Masters, Patricia McNair, Margaret F. O'Hara, Robert Remer, Dick Simpson and Darwin McBeth Walton.**

"When they met, one of the things she liked about him right away was that he let her finish her own sentences, even if she had to pause for a second or two to find the right words." — *Little Known Facts*, **Christine Sneed**, 2013

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“these mechanical marvels.” ... The Seattle Times put **Rick Atkinson’s** *The Guns at Last Light: The War in Western Europe, 1944-1945* on its 2014 “summer reading” list. The Wilkes Barre Times-Leader chose **Blue Balliett’s** *The Wright 3* for its list. ... **Richard Baer’s** 2007 *Switching Time: A Doctor’s Harrowing Story of Treating a Woman with 17 Personalities* is now a movie project. Jen Kleiner, director of “Nina Quebrada,” is writing the script. ...



Blue Balliett

Catherine Browder was among the faculty and authors who attended the June 27-29 University of Missouri-Kansas City’s New Letters writers conference. ... **Polly Carlson-Voiles** was among the authors appearing

June 8 at the Ely (Minn.) Arts & Heritage Center. ... In May, **Scott Turow** received an honorary degree from Illinois’ Governors State University. ... **Michael Ebner** wrote a May 25 History News Network article titled, “You Know Jackie Robinson, but Shouldn’t We Remember Moses Fleetwood Walker, too?” ... The June 20 Richmond Times Dispatch quoted **Walter Podrazik** in a story about TV recappers. ... **Peter Geye** was the guest June 16 at the Brown Bag Lunch Summer Author Series in Brainerd, Minn. ... The June 9



Walter Podrazik

San Jose Mercury News said of **Julie Hyzy’s** *Home of the Braised (A White House Chef Mystery)* (Berkley, Jan. 7), “White House chef Olivia ‘Ollie’ Paras’ seventh adventure is a lively mixture of food and crime.” ... **Edward “Ted” McClelland** was quoted June 5 on WESA, Pittsburgh’s NPR station, in a story on adjunct professors seeking

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Society of Midland Authors set to celebrate centennial

The Society of Midland Authors is turning 100 in 2015, and we’re planning a series of special events, including a weekend festival with readings, panel discussions and social events; a more extensive than usual awards program; and a drive to sign up new members.

It’s been a colorful century since the Society was officially launched in 1915 by a group of more than 50 authors who included **George Ade, Mary Hastings Bradley, Clarence Darrow, Edna Ferber, Hamlin Garland, Emerson Hough, Vachel Lindsay, Harriet Monroe, Howard Vincent O’Brien, James Whitcomb Riley and William Allen White.** Authors who joined shortly thereafter included **Jane Addams, Edgar A. Guest, Ring Lardner, Edgar Lee Masters, John T. McCutcheon, Gene Stratton Porter, Lew Sarett, Walter Dill Scott, Vincent Starrett, Lorado Taft and Brand Whitlock.**

It hasn’t all been smooth sailing. On Oct. 23, 1922, the Chicago Daily News ran a news story with the headline “CHICAGO’S LITERARY FIELD DAY JOLTED: Future of the Society of Midland Authors Is in Doubt.”

That very same year, the Society almost was deprived of a future president when William Montgomery McGovern sneaked across an 18,000-foot-high pass into Tibet in midwinter.

The pass was blocked with snow and supposedly was closed to all travelers, even natives. But that didn’t stop McGovern, who – like all Midland authors – would do anything to get enriching details for a first-class book.

“Arrived in Tibet, I was required to disguise myself as a Tibetan coolie and to travel as such through the heart of country,” McGovern wrote in *To Lhasa in Disguise: A Secret Expedition Through Mysterious Tibet.* “... At last I arrived in Lhasa. Here I was foolish enough to reveal myself voluntarily to the authorities with the result that the Lhasa monks

“It’s been a colorful century since the Society was officially launched.”

led a popular riot against me, and the civil government, in an attempt to protect my person, was forced to declare me a prisoner of state until the popular clamor had subsided.”

Thanks to that government protection, McGovern went on to become the Society’s 14th president.

McGovern wasn’t the only Society president to encounter difficulty overseas. In April 1945, the Society’s communication with then-president Mary Hastings Bradley, who was on assignment in Italy writing about a Wac unit, was impeded by wartime censors who took “several big snips from her last letter,” according to a report in the Chicago Daily News. Just like a modern publisher.

But thanks to the efforts of Society members over the years, we’re still here.

As stated in our Constitution and By-Laws, one of the objects of the Society is the “creation of a closer association among writers of the Middle West.”

That’s why we plan events in our centennial year that not only help authors but also help to maintain the Midland states

as a literary and cultural center – as this organization has been doing for almost a century.

If you’d like to help, contact our Centennial Committee chair, Beverly Offen, at bevoffen@oakton.edu.

Or you can make a special centennial donation by mailing a check to Society of Midland Authors, P.O. Box 10419, Chicago IL 60610.

You can make a donation via PayPal by visiting our home page at www.midlandauthors.com and clicking on the “Donate” button in the upper right corner.

We hope to see you at our centennial events.



Harriett Monroe

An author and reporter looks back

Here's what Taylor Pensoneau tells *Literary License* about his new book, *Reporting on Life – and People Along the Way* (June 29). (Part of this Q&A also was published on the Chicago Sun-Times politics portal.)

Literary License: *You spent 12 years as the Illinois political correspondent of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch in the 1960s and 1970s. What were the highlights during those years?*

Taylor Pensoneau: Coverage of Illinois politics was a terrific beat. Chronicling heated electoral contests, society upheavals through the civil rights and antiwar movements, the Illinois General Assembly, the first Mayor Daley and five national political conventions, especially the raucous 1968 Democratic one in Chicago, were coverage highlights that assured me of countless front-page stories.

Literary License: *Who are the main characters in your new book?*

Taylor Pensoneau: The book traces the lives, along with my own, of persons close to me who have achieved success in life. I love Horatio Alger stories, and there are a number of them in the book. One is about Edward Pound, a poor kid from St. Louis, who – while never graduating from college – went on to become a premier investigative reporter, first in Springfield, then Chicago, and, finally, in Washington.

After breaking disclosures with me in Springfield, Ed went on with the Sun-Times in Chicago to spur the downfall of a number of Democratic machine stalwarts, including Tom Keane and Matt Danaher. Subsequently, he has figured prominently in umpteen scandalous disclosures involving the high and mighty in Washington. Another featured in the book is Mike Lawrence, who went from the Illinois Capitol pressroom to become

eventually the top aide to Jim Edgar. When Edgar was governor, the late Sun-Times political columnist Steve Neal labeled Lawrence the “shadow governor” of Illinois.

Literary License: *Some people tend to look back at the '60s and '70s as an era when Illinois legislators worked together better than they do today. Is that accurate?*

Taylor Pensoneau: It probably is true. Major issues facing the state, such as financial challenges, were dealt with then – and done so in a bipartisan fashion. This in no way does not mean there wasn't plenty of political polemics, backbiting and undercutting back then. But, in the end, ideological and personality conflicts often were set aside for the so-called common good. This is no longer the case in the current General Assembly. Extreme polarization between the parties has produced a treacherous water atmosphere in which compromise has become nearly impossible.

Literary License: *You've written biographies of former governors Dan Walker and Richard Ogilvie and former Illinois Senate leader W. Russell Arrington. How did they compare with the top Illinois political leaders of today?*

Taylor Pensoneau: First off, I think leaders like Ogilvie, Arrington and Walker were considered more dynamic in the public eye than their current counterparts. They were real newsmakers and two of them, Arrington and Walker, had feisty personalities that made for great journalistic copy. State government was more respected in their era.

Today's Illinois government leaders, for the most part, seem to wallow in a swampy quagmire of indecision that commands little respect and, indeed, has given our state a dubious reputation on the national level. Having said that, though, I

do credit Illinois House Speaker Mike Madigan with organizational prowess on the legislative scene not witnessed since the days of Arrington, a Republican highly admired by Democrat Madigan.

Literary License: *You've worked with such publishers as American Literary Press and Southern Illinois University Press, but now you and your wife operate Downstate Publications, which has published your more recent works. What's your advice to fellow authors who might be considering a similar move?*

Taylor Pensoneau: Without any hesitation, I recommend going the way Liz, my editor as well as wife, and I have traversed.

We long ago cast aside any stigma tied to self-publishing. In fact, the bulk of the regional books coming out in our Downstate world are self-published.

Assuming one is writing a book that is going to sell, the benefits of self-publishing are readily visible. You keep control of the book in its marketing and distribution. Publicity is the key to successful marketing, and in my case I can rely on my journalism contacts south of the Chicago area for feature stories, columns and reviews.

With big-time New York and other “regular” publishers, an author usually is at the bottom of the food chain even if the book sells. Not so with self-publishing. After taking into account the standard 40 percent discount in selling books to stores and other outlets, the rest is gravy. In regard to my two books on infamous Downstate gangsters, the big turnout at the initial signing in southern Illinois for each of the books retired in one swoop our costs incurred in publishing them.

Literary License: *What's your next book?*

Taylor Pensoneau: As the final chapter in my new books says, Liz and I are lucky in retirement to be living the good life.

As for my future as an author, I am open to suggestions.

*Literary
Landscape*
Taylor
Pensoneau



Final chapters

Gregory White Smith

Gregory White Smith, who, with co-author **Steven Naifeh**, won the 2012 Society of Midland Authors Biography Award for *Van Gogh: The Life* (Random House), died April 10 at his home in Aiken, S.C., at age 62.

Naifeh told the Washington Post the cause was a rare type of brain tumor.

In delivering the SMA award in 2012, Judge **James Schwab** said, "I was stunned by what these folks put together ... [an] incredible piece of research."

In accepting the award, Mr. Smith said the idea for the book began in New York when a woman asked, "Why hadn't the scholarly community attempted a definitive biography of the most beloved and best-known artist ever?"

"Her fellow scholars knew what a great task it was, and they knew better than to

try it. ... We were stupid enough [to take it on]," he said.

Mr. Smith, who grew up in Columbus, Ohio, and Naifeh also won a Pulitzer Prize for a 1990 biography of Jackson Pollock.

As for the work of authors, Mr. Smith said, "Most of us labor, I think, fairly much on our own and over long periods of time, and these things accrete like the delta of a river. This one took 10 years. The last one, the Pollock book, took eight years."

The two men, who met on their first day at Harvard Law School in 1974 and were married in 2011 in New York, wrote 18 books together, five of them best-sellers.

"We both knew to a certainty we did not want to be lawyers," Mr. Smith said. "By the time we finished law school, we had written our first book."

The two men tried a variety of co-authoring techniques, but finally settled

on one in which Mr. Naifeh did most of the "clearing of the land" – gathering information – while Mr. Smith said he would take what Mr. Naifeh found and "sift it into words."

Mr. Smith said he had appeared on the radio show of the late Studs Terkel in the 1990s, and that during a lunch afterward Terkel said he was impressed that Mr. Smith, whose parents owned a small Midwest motel chain, challenged some prevailing views of art history.

The Los Angeles Times said the Van Gogh biography, "was praised by many critics as a magisterial work, rich with insights into the personal and intellectual underpinnings of the tortured artist's influential paintings."

At age 8, Mr Smith already was dictating short novels into his father's Dictaphone, the Times said.



Gregory White Smith

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unionization on some college campuses. ... In June, **Thomas Frisbie** won a first-place Illinois Press Association editorial-writing award. ... **Kelly O'Connor McNeas** is scheduled to talk about her new novel *The Island of Doves* July 8 at Saturn Booksellers in Gaylord, Mich. ... At the invitation of the Kresge Foundation, **Jim Schwab** joined other experts in its May 27-29 symposium on climate change and community behavior at the Garrison Institute, in Garrison, N.Y. ... JSONline wrote a June 5 profile of the art in **Kathie Giorgio's** Wisconsin condo. "Every nook and cranny offers a treat for the eyes, and a story," it said. ... **Patricia McKissack** was scheduled to be on a panel "Let Our Rejoicing Rise: 45 Years of the Coretta Scott King Book Award: A Conversation with Past and Present Winners" at the American Library Association's June 26-July 1 convention in Las Vegas. ...

Gunter Nitsch attended the June 14 Chicagoland Authors Promoting Success event. ... **David Radavich** is scheduled to read July 8 from his poems at the Taste Full Beans coffeehouse and gallery in downtown Hickory, N.C. ...



John Knoerle

Arnie Bernstein writes Biblio File to say, "My friend Penny Golden is looking for authors to partake in her Author Afternoon series. It's a good time (I've done it twice) and Penny is a great live interviewer. She reads the books and knows how to drill down into the writing process and content. Penny is looking for more women writers, although men are certainly welcome, too. She can be contacted at pennygoldenrn@hotmail.com. Also, I'm participating in a Career Day panel for the Northwestern University MFA/MA Creative Writing program

May 31. The panel is on Social Networking & Writers." **Dan Burns** fielded questions from Penny on June 26 at the Beverly (Chicago) Arts Center. ... **John Knoerle** wrote in a June 5 letter to the Chicago Tribune, "The [Chicago] Machine doesn't want any changes to its rigged system and will stop at nothing to keep the status quo." Here's part John says the Trib deleted: "It reminds me of that quote from Lilly Tomlin: 'No matter how cynical you get, it's impossible to keep up.'" ... **Steven Lubet** was quoted in a June 17 Forbes article about Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling. ... **Robert McClory** on June 18 reviewed *Crisis of Catholic Authority: Faith and Power in the Diocese of Lincoln, Nebraska* for the National Catholic Reporter. ... The State Library of Kansas in June named **Clare Venderpool's** *Navigating Early* a 2014 Kansas Notable Book.

Biblio File is on Twitter@BiblioFile_SMA

"Shalom flicked his headlights, and they all knew at once that the figure cast in silhouette was Eichmann. The way he walked – bent forward, a determined gait – was unmistakable." – *The Nazi Hunters*, **Neal Bascomb**, 2013