

UMRA U NEWSLETTER

A Communication of the University of Minnesota Retirees Association

APRIL 2008

Discover adventures in Minnesota history with writers Ann Pflaum and Hy Berman

Who decides when a state history should be written and who should write it? Minnesota fortunately has a resident “Dream Team” of historians, starting with Hyman Berman and Ann Pflaum, both University faculty,



both known as scholars, leaders, and speakers. Together, with Mary Lethert Wingerd and Kirsten Delegard, they are preparing a new history of Minnesota, to be

published by the University of Minnesota Press, for the state’s 150th anniversary. At the April meeting, they will recount some of their discoveries and adventures in this labyrinthine process.



U history professor from 1961 to 2004, Hyman Berman is widely known as Minnesota’s public historian. Through media appearances, news articles, and documentaries,

he has made history come alive for Minnesotans. This earned him, in 2002, the U’s Outstanding Community Service Award. Hy holds a Ph.D. degree from Columbia University and taught at Brooklyn College and Michigan State University before coming to Minnesota. He was the first professor

to teach classes on the Holocaust. Primarily, he taught labor history (for which he is internationally known), Minnesota history, and 20th century U.S. history. Hy says that he is proudest of his work in attempting to make the latest historical scholarship available to the public.

University historian Ann Pflaum co-authored, with Stan Lemberg, *The University of Minnesota: 1945–2000* for the U’s 2001 sesquicentennial. A Minnesota native, she holds an undergraduate degree from Smith College and a M.A. from Harvard. In 1975, she received her Ph.D. in history from the U, where, since 1976, she has been an administrator, serving as a central contact for strategic planning, and as associate dean (1988–2001) of the College of Continuing Education.

— Julie Medbery, Program Committee

Menu for the April luncheon

Herb-roasted chicken, shaved potatoes, and broccoli; fresh berries and cream for dessert. Please note: Vegetarian and gluten-free meals are available upon request; please make your request with your reservations.

Reminder to all: Be an early bird—send prepayment for your lunch when you make your reservations and pay \$12 per person, rather than \$14 at the door on the day of the luncheon program.

And, the Membership Committee reminds us we are welcome to invite prospective members to the next lunch program — just register their names with Ben Zimmerman.

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

APRIL
LUNCHEON MEETING

Tuesday
April 22, 2008
11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Featured Speakers

Hy Berman, University professor emeritus, and Ann Pflaum, University historian

“Writing a New Minnesota History for a New Century”

Location

Conference Room ABC
Campus Club, Fourth Floor
Coffman Memorial Union,
East Bank Campus, U of M

Cost

Prepayment, \$12 per person;
\$14 at door for those not prepaid.

Reservation Deadline

Thursday, April 17

To reserve your place(s) and take advantage of prepaid pricing, send a check, payable to UMRA, to Ben Zimmerman, 2225 Folwell Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55108.

Contact him at 651-645-1662 or by e-mail: zimme003@umn.edu.

Reservations requested after April 17 will be on a waiting list. Cancellations must be received by noon, April 17.

Parking

Parking is available in the East River Road Garage at UMRA’s membership discount, \$4.50 for the entire day.

Board Meeting at 10 a.m.

UMRA NEWSLETTER

FROM THE PRESIDENT

On Coring the Strawberries

When Win Jordan died at his home in Oxford, Mississippi last year, my first memory was of his coring strawberries for his and my breakfast. I had not had strawberries with the cores carefully removed before. Win was the second husband of my college friend and 1961 bridesmaid, Cora, and Cora was his second wife. I met him on a professional visit to the University of Mississippi when I saw Cora for the first time in several years, she being a law student there after “going home” to Mississippi following her divorce from her career Navy officer first husband. At the conference reception I was talking with Cora when she, to my surprise, turned and introduced me, “Gayle, this is my new husband, Win.” My chin dropped.

His name tag said “Winthrop Jordan,” a name most historians and American Studies scholars would recognize as the nearest thing to a celebrity we academics have, for his book on American slavery, *White Over Black*, was path-breaking, prize-winning, and well known. Some of us also recognized the pedigree Win’s name revealed, his Winthrop ancestor having been John Winthrop, the first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony after the colonists arrived in the New World in 1630 on the *Arbella*. I was later to learn that the ancestor about whom he was most proud was maternal—the abolitionist and feminist Lucretia Mott, for whom his mother was named in the fifth generation. But on this day of meeting, I was just startled that my college friend Cora was now suddenly married to someone I had heard about professionally and in very high regard.

In the more than 20 years that Cora and Win were married, I had several occasions to be at the University of Mississippi, and often at those times was their house guest. They became my friends as a couple.

Not long into the marriage, Cora learned she had multiple sclerosis, which curtailed their lifestyle. Win was a gentle soul, a Quaker gentleman, actually, like his maternal ancestors. He was indeed brilliant, as many professors are, but was also kind, generous, and self-abnegating. Not long after Cora’s diagnosis, I was visiting again, and Win and I went for a long walk around a lake with the dog, Bessie, Cora being unable to walk with us. In a kind of halting way, with full New England reserve, he said to me, his wife’s friend, “Cora and I are going to be all right. I wasn’t sure at first; but we are going to be all right.” In later years, he had a motorcycle accident and was seriously injured, had cancer and recovered, and then had cancer again. Yet, together, Cora and he persevered. Each time I was in Oxford I stayed in their home and had great visits, and Win provided food—barbecue from a local restaurant, take-out from a deli, and breakfasts. Cora needed to sleep late with her illness, and Win got up to have breakfast with me, or, rather, to provide me with breakfast—and he cored the strawberries.

To me, my story of Win Jordan is a kind of comforting parable of reassurance in older people’s lives. While one’s accomplishments are important and one’s genealogy is often interesting, what matters most is the details of one’s living well.Win Jordan cored the strawberries.

— Gayle Graham Yates, President

UMRA Board actions

On March 7, the Board of Directors held a “retreat” at the home of the president to discuss a number of issues including the structure of the board and job descriptions involved in executing the work of the association, as well as collaborative relationships with other University entities.

The outcomes of these discussions were presented for board consideration and action at the regular March meeting.

Among the new directions are:

- Expanding the offices of the Secretary and the Treasurer to create assistant officers with the idea of sharing the important work of these offices. To experiment with this

structure and as a temporary measure, in this coming year there will be a First Secretary, elected, and a Second Secretary, appointed; a first Treasurer, elected, and a second Treasurer, appointed.

- A committee was appointed to meet in the fall of 2008 to further develop titles, job descriptions, and by-laws changes necessary for the expanded offices of secretary and treasurer. The committee is Frank Miller, chair; Judy Howe, Ginny Hanson, and Dave Wark.
- The role of the newsletter editor will be expanded to assist the president, who for several years has been serv-

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Annual Meeting will take the form of a Festive Luncheon planned for May 27

Responding to suggestions that a daytime event is more suitable for many members, the board has scheduled the gala Annual Meeting event for midday this year

The new venue: The Dolly Fiterman Riverview Gallery, Weisman Art Museum on May 27, 1 to 3 p.m.

Cost: \$25 per person. Reservations will need to be made by May 18, 10 days in advance.

Program: Tenor Clif Ware will sing with Bettye Ware accompanying in a program of “half classical-light and half classical-pop” music.

The Annual Meeting will include election of new officers and board members as well as reports from selected UMRA committees and the outgoing president.

Come early to visit the museum, if you like.

What Gray Gophers are doing...

Having fun away from home have been **John and M. Barbara Killen** in Brownsville, Texas; **Earl Nolting** and his wife in southern California; and **Marty Rossman** and her husband in New York City.

George (Rip) Rapp reports that he is writing more books than he is reading, recent titles being *Archaeomineralogy* (Springer-Verlag, 2002); *Geoarchaeology*, with Christopher Hill, 2nd edition, (Yale University Press, 2006); and *Pharaonic Inscriptions from the Southern Eastern Desert of Egypt*, with R.D. Rothe and W.K. Miller (Eisenbrauns, 2008).

Robert P. Sonkowsky is writing and publishing poetry as a retirement activity, having entered contests in *Poets against the War* and *Trellis Magazine* where he won third prize for a witty verse portfolio.

What UMRA members are reading...

In March, President Graham Yates suggested sharing about what we are reading, and the response was overwhelming! Below is a list of some of our members' recommendations.

Ted Galambos—*The Bridge on the Drina* by Ivo Andric (Chicago, 1977), a Nobel-Prize winning novel “about the relations among Bosnians, Serbs, Croats and Austrians...very apropos for our present condition.”

Kenneth Koeneman—*Identity Crisis: How Identification is Overused and Misunderstood* (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute), in which author Jim Harper argues that identification technologies do not always offer the protection expected and can sometimes be harmful.

Rodney G. Loper—David Hackett Fischer's *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (Oxford, 1989). The English regional stereotypes that came with migration to America continue in characteristic American behaviors, which Rod believes “are alive and well in our discourse in this election year.”

John Mauriel—*White Guilt* by Shelby Steele. “Thought liberals might not like his conservative perspective....he provides an interesting psycho-social interpretation of the '60s and beyond with respect to race relations, generational gap, and the loss of moral authority of the dominant class.”

Frank Miller—*The Serenity Prayer: Faith and Politics in Times of Peace and War* by Elizabeth Sifton (W.W. Norton, 2003). “A memoir about the author's father, Reinhold Niebuhr, and an informal intellectual history of a period of great ferment, 1930–1960.”

Ardis Nier—*The Children's Blizzard* by David Laskin, “a fictionalized account of the 1888 killer blizzard on the Great Plains states.

Peter Reed—*The Nine* by Jeffrey Toobin—about the inner workings of the Supreme Court and lives of current justices.

Mariah Snyder—*Beasts of No Nation* by Nigerian-born (1982) American Uzodinma Iweala. “Fiction about boy soldiers in Africa—very moving.” Also, *Spirit Car* by local author Diane Wilson, who “traces her Sioux background (although some is fictitious conversation between family members in the past, it is based on historical data).”

Frank Souraf—*Irene Nemirovsky, Suite Française*, “two of seven projected novellas about France during World War II by a Ukrainian-born woman living in France and writing about events contemporaneously. She died in Auschwitz with only these two completed.” Also, *The Looming Tower* by Lawrence Wright, “a history of the rise of Al Qaeda combined with a political biography of Osama bin Laden.”

Pat Tollefson is enjoying “biographies of the founding fathers of our country—Washington, Adams, Franklin, Hamilton—particularly *Alexander Hamilton* by Ron Chernow.”

Clifton Ware—*Slaves in the Family* by Edward Ball, a descendant of Charleston, South Carolina slave owners. The author “traces his family genealogy and slaves' history from the late 17th century...including that of some descendants who were the result of male slave owners' affairs with female house servants.” Also, *A Short History of Nearly Everything* by Bill Bryson covers everything “from the Big Bang to the rise of civilization.”

ing as the point person in securing and gathering news articles in addition to leadership duties. The editor will work in consultation with the president and committees and serve as an ex-officio member of the board.

- Defining the role of President-elect—in the past two years, after Frank Miller instituted the Program Committee, this officer has chaired that committee as well as serving as the liaison to the University Retirees Volunteer Center (URVC). The board voted to remove both these responsibilities from “required roles” of the president-elect, suggesting that the board appoint a member to be the URVC liaison and that the president-elect serve on the program committee, but not necessarily to chair it.
- The board voted to authorize continuing cooperative efforts with the URVC and to plan a meeting among UMRA officers and URVC officers to work on pursuing the details. The UMRA group will be Hal Miller, chair; Judy Howe, Gayle Graham Yates, and Frank Miller.

**Encourage your friends to visit the UMRA Web site,
www.umn.edu/umra**

Encouraging membership in UMRA serves retirees

UMRA will thrive only so long as it has a vital and expanding membership and willing volunteers. When you meet a fellow University retiree or someone who is about to step into that role, invite them to see what UMRA has to offer.

Besides stimulating monthly programs and occasional workshops, members of UMRA are granted some very special benefits—parking for \$4.50 per day in three selected parking facilities on all parts of the Twin Cities campus as well as discounts in the University bookstores and for Intercollegiate Athletics and on-campus sports events.

UMRA creates Council of Past Presidents

Under the leadership of Past President Frank Miller an UMRA Council of Past Presidents is being formed and will meet for the first time on April 17. Ten individuals, who have served UMRA as president, who live in the Twin Cities and are able to participate, will attend along with Miller and the current president and president-elect. Miller proposes that “the mission will be to nourish UMRA’s institutional memory, enhance continuity, offer advice to the officers when requested, and strengthen the social bonds among us.”

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UMRA
Retirees Association
University of Minnesota

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