

THE TRICORN

A NEWSLETTER PUBLISHED JOINTLY BY THE NEW ENGLAND ♦
LONG ISLAND ♦ PHILADELPHIA GREAT BOOKS COUNCILS

AUGUST 1997

THE GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY OF GREAT BOOKS

Half a Century...50 Years...600 Months...18,263 Days

This chunk of time has provided the opportunity for numberless readers to meet and discuss innumerable ideas about our world and how to live in it. These ideas, of course, exist between the covers of great works of seminal thinkers of many times and places. Naturally people have always met to talk about books, but nothing near the scope of our network of discussion groups could have materialized without the Great Books Foundation.

In 1947, fifty years ago, Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler decided to launch the Great Books program. It proved to be the right time for such an undertaking. Back then, most households were buying their first television sets, but the couch potato syndrome had not yet dulled many minds. Life moved at a somewhat slower pace; people were not stressed by far too many demands on their time. Now, fifty years later, we live smack in the middle of a Vanity Fair that offers us every sort of seduction. We could fill our dance programs many times over with support groups as marginal as "Women Who Have Lost One Earring," "Enablers of Body Piercers," or "Abductees of Alien Spacecraft," or other more mainstream offerings such as the community outreach courses given by school districts and colleges, investment clubs and fitness programs. In fact, a whole huge panoply of time-filling enticements exists. How wonderful then, that despite this fierce competition for our time, the Great Books Program continues to exist, and indeed, to flourish.

One reason for the continuing viability of Great Books is that meetings have always been open to all who wished to come. Never have dues or diplomas been asked for. Literacy is really the only requirement. Surely a goodly percentage of Great Books members consider what they have learned through this program to be a far more significant part of their education than what they had gleaned in little red schoolhouses and college classrooms.

So sound the trumpets and hang out the banners! Let's celebrate the golden anniversary of the Great Books Foundation, and let's cheer ourselves as well, for we are its core, its innermost heart and soul.

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FALL INSTITUTE WEEKEND

SHADOWS ON THE INSIDE

SHADOWS ON THE INSIDE

SHADOWS ON THE INSIDE

November 7, 8, 9 - 1997

Pocono Manor

House Made of Dawn..... N. Scott Momaday

Broken Glass Arthur Miller

Snow Falling on Cedars David Guterson

Learn what you are, and be such.

Pindar

COST: \$215 per person, double occupancy.
\$275 for single occupancy. Price includes
meals, lodging, books, entertainment and
tips.

TO REGISTER: Please send a deposit of
\$115 per person for double occupancy and
\$145 for single occupancy with your registration
form to:

CANCELLATION: Your deposit less a charge for
books and mailing will be refunded if notice is
postmarked no later than October 3, 1997.

Sylvia Perelman
8214 Marion Road
Elkins Park, PA 19027

REGISTRATION FORM

Enclosed is a deposit of _____ \$115 per person double occupancy or \$145 per person single occupancy - (if available) - made payable to Fall Institute Committee.

Names (please give the first and last name of each person)	Non-smoking group	Smoking group	No Preference
(first) _____ (last) _____	[]	[]	[]
(first) _____ (last) _____	[]	[]	[]

Address (street) _____
(city) _____ (state) _____ (zip) _____ (Phone) _____

Special requests should accompany this form. They will be honored if possible.

(Optional) I would like to room with _____

PHILADELPHIA NEWS

Help Us Celebrate Our Golden Anniversary

The Great Books Program is 50 years old! Help us celebrate this golden anniversary on Sunday, October 19, 1997, at the main library on the Parkway at 19th street. (The celebration is being cosponsored by the Philadelphia Great Books Council and the Free Library of Philadelphia.)

The day will include the following events:

- * Dr. Sanford Pinsker, Professor of Humanities at Franklin and Marshall College will speak on "The Relevancy of Great Books in Today's World."
- * Plato will be interviewed by a WHYY book reviewer on how his philosophy would relate to today.
- * There will be a mini-demonstration of a Great Books discussion of one of the classics.
- * The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County will demonstrate his skill.
- * Icarus will give free flying lessons.

(Sorry - we just received word that the frog and Icarus had to cancel: the frog has become a prince, and Icarus is suffering a severe sunburn.)

Refreshments will be served after the program.

At 50 years, WE are a classic! Join us! Admission is free.

Bob Blumenthal - for the 50th Anniversary Committee

WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN ATTENDING ADVANCED LEADER TRAINING?

So, you have taken a GB Leader Training Course and you don't feel very sure of yourself when you agree to lead a session.

- ◆ Or, you lead a discussion and it does not go as well as you would have wanted and you don't know quite why or what you could have done to make it better.
- ◆ Or, you think it went OK but you learn that someone else wasn't too happy with it, and you can't imagine why, or you do know why and you still can't think of what you could have done to make it better.
- ◆ Or, you read the work that you have agreed to lead, and you find it not discussable and cannot imagine what you can ask that still fits all of the primary criteria of a good discussion question.
- ◆ Or, you have never thought about what the primary criteria of a good Great Books discussion question might be.

(Continued on following page)

PHILADELPHIA NEWS (Continued)

Advanced Leader Training (continued)

Well, then, if any or all or other than the above apply, you might be interested in attending the Advanced Leader Training Workshop that Philadelphia Great Books Council is planning. We have not worked out all the details of when or where yet. We hope to have the workshop some time in the autumn either on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon. There will be a reading to be done in advance and probably a small fee to cover our expenses. If you are interested and wish to be notified, please contact Sibyl Cohen, 1812 Penn Center House, Phila., PA 19103; (215) 568-9827; e-mail: cohen@alpha.lasalle.edu, and provide your name, mailing address, telephone number, e-mail address and any preferences concerning the time and any suggestions concerning issues to be covered by the workshop.

The On-Going Conversation Goes On

Knowledge: The Enemy of Prejudice

In 1995 the Philadelphia GB Council received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to join in Chairman Sheldon Hackney's "Great Conversation" on the meaning of American pluralism and national identity. The public meeting in July led to an ongoing conversation, as a number of the original attendees wanted to go on exploring the subject.

On September 11 (and all future 2nd Thursdays) from 7-9 P.M. the group will meet at Friends Select School, 17th Street and Benjamin Franklin Parkway. The book to be discussed at the first meeting is Makes Me Wanna Holler, a deeply felt memoir by Nathan McCall. Group facilitator Anne Cramer promises that excellent books have been selected for subsequent meetings also. Attendance at all meetings is not required. For further information, call Anne at 609-346-3621.

How Old Are We, Anyway???

We in the Philadelphia area are excited and delighted at being part of an organization celebrating its 50th, or golden anniversary. However, our own local program did not come into being until 1960, when it sprang full-grown from the head of Is Wachs.

In 1985, our 25th, or silver anniversary year, Emil Bix researched our history and produced a document which entertainingly (with just a few built-in Bix Biases) recorded our Philadelphia Great Books activities.

From the Bix history:

[Philadelphia] Council came into being in 1960 amid great clatter and hoopla. Veteran Booker Aaron Bechtel's bulging files attest to this in great detail. Not as much may be said for the rose-colored reminiscences of chief movers and shakers Elizabeth Flynn and Larry Kovnat, captained by Council's patron apostle Is Wachs. They recall no more than a dozen discussion groups ... yet a 1960 directory proves 36 groups tackling GB series One through Thirteen even then.

(In 1985, we had 55 groups at work; now in 1997 we have 42, still a considerable number.)

After carefully chronicling the creation of Colby Week, the Spring and Fall Institutes, and our other activities, Bix concluded, "Fifty-five groups of eggheads united in action can't be bad. Their proud past foretells pleasant prospects for the next twenty-five years in the history of Philadelphia Great Books Council."

We have thirteen more years to go before then, but so far Emil Bix seems to have called it right.

PHILADELPHIA NEWS (Continued)

Once More, the Changing of the Guard

Based on the principle that a busy person is the best candidate for a big job, the Philadelphia Great Books Council elected Olga Wallace president. This soft-mannered Great Books leader runs her family business, and serves as staffless chatelaine of a large and lovely home that she likes to fill with family and friends to be fed. A while ago, Olga even found time for flying lessons. Her vice president, another Renaissance person, is Bill Meiers. Nancy Washburne continues as the recorder of every sneeze and sigh at board meetings. Bill McConeghey will be sending out meeting notices and more of those excellent letters on our behalf as he continues as corresponding secretary, and Coordinator Clark Simons will be keeping all those many balls spinning in the air, as he consults with new and ongoing groups. Last, brand new board member Joy Oelenschlager inspired such instant trust that we gave her the key to the treasury.

The Unwanted and the Unread

Your friend presses on you the book he has just finished reading. "You'll love it," he says. "You wouldn't believe how fascinating mushroom hunting in old Ceylon could be." Or perhaps, with the best of intentions, your small children have all emptied their piggy-banks to greet you on your birthday with a copy of Irving Wallace's *The Book of Lists*, a title that fits the contents to the last letter. Or maybe your gaze touches the armful of abused paperbacks (still in their original pile) that you picked up for a song ("I Got Plenty of Nothin'") at that library sale five years ago. You'd like to make a bonfire of the unwanted and the unread, but your P.C. conscience won't allow it. A gloom compounded of equal parts of shame, guilt, and resentment settles in, thickly filling all the corners of your mind.

Twenty-four hours later, the obvious solution comes to you: your library is holding another used book sale this very afternoon. You'll contribute your orphans. Let some other fools give them shelf space. But hold! Before you go, you must solemnly perform an essential rite: Stare into your own eyes, reflected in the hall mirror, and say ten times, with conviction, "I WILL NOT look at the books on sale when I'm there, for therein lies my own undoing." If you clearly hear sincerity in your tone, it might be safe to go. But if you can foresee any possibility of weakening, abandon your plan immediately and double-lock your door.

As an educated person, you're aware that Nature abhors an empty shelf. You're no naïf, cutting your baby teeth on your first picture book. You've lived long enough to know that the myth that books procreate as soon as the library lights are turned off IS NO MYTH. So what could be more foolish than to create shelf room, only to refill it immediately with the jettisoned junk of strangers? The recovering bibliophile knows not to place himself squarely in the path of his desideratum.

What, then, are you to do with that pile of trash? Perhaps you could look beyond the printed word to see your discards in new ways. You might be able to see that your cloud has a silver lining: you now have a lifetime supply of insomnia fighters, paperweights, doorstops, adjusters of uneven table legs, and missiles to hurl at squirrels climbing the bird feeder. Things could be worse.

Great Books on the Internet

Since the electronic age is upon us, we are making use of its quick and easy sharing of information. News of several Great Books councils are now on some of the 50 million pages that make up the World-Wide Web:

G.B.Foundation information (with links to all Regions): <http://www.greatbooks.org>
New England Council news: <http://members.aol.com/NewEngGbks/index.htm>
Philadelphia, Delaware, and Colby news: <http://www.dol.net/~greatbooks/gbevents.htm>
Nationwide calendar of Great Books events: <http://www.dol.net/~greatbooks/newslett.htm>
Questions? e-mail to greatbooks@dol.net (Klaus Traumann's e-mail address) or call 302-478-4058.

REPORT FROM LONG ISLAND

The World of Art

The question most frequently asked by Spring Institute participants was, "When did Kenneth Clark write *The Blot and the Diagram*?" (his essay on why modern art has taken its peculiar form and how long it will continue). The answer is that he wrote it in 1963.

His conclusion should cheer up the lovers of Pollack paintings and the Lever building. He sees these works as representative of our times, "not a mere whim of fashion, but the result of a great change in our ways of thinking and feeling.

"...it looks to me as if we shall have to wait a long time before there is some new belief which requires expression through art rather than through statistics or equations. And until this happens, the visual arts will fall short of the greatest epochs, the ages of the Parthenon, the Sistine Ceiling, and Chartres Cathedral...No amount of goodwill and no expenditure of money can affect that sort of change... We can only be thankful for what we have got-- a vigorous, popular, decorative art, complementary to our architecture and our science, somewhat monotonous, somewhat prone to charlatanism, but genuinely expressive of our time."

Charles Ferrara

Meet Rose Ermidis

We can't think of anyone with a greater zest for living and learning than Rose Ermidis. Her travels have taken her to Italy, France, Spain, England, Scotland, China, Japan, Israel, Egypt, Mexico, Greece and Peru. And these trips were no shopping jaunts, but serious cultural explorations.

After recently retiring from her long career working in early childhood education in New York City schools, Rose found herself with an unaccustomed amount of leisure time. When she was asked to lead a new Great Books group for the senior program at Farmingdale, she accepted with her usual spirit. Now in its second year, her excellent weekly group gives Rose much satisfaction, though of a different sort than that of her earlier professional work.

Fred Friendly's Federalists in Wilmington

The Delaware Great Books Council came up with the excellent idea of viewing the tapes of last season's four public TV programs about contemporary applications of the **Federalist Papers**. In preparation for each meeting participants read the pertinent papers. The meetings followed the format of first discussing the papers, then viewing the Fred Friendly tape, and last discussing the tape in relation to the wisdom of the federalists two hundred years ago. The Wilmington sessions drew not only many local members, but also a number of GB people from Philadelphia. For a look at the New England Council's plans to use the same materials, see page 7.

NEW ENGLAND NEWS

Fall One-Day Institute

Saturday October 25 is the time; the First Unitarian Society in Newton is the place, but perhaps we can join artists and mystics in transcending time and place at our fall one-day institute and annual meeting. James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man* and Joseph Campbell's *The Inner Reaches of Outer Space: Metaphor as Myth and as Religion* trace paths "From Fantasy to Reality." Joyce's hero struggles with the beliefs of family, church, and county in forging his own truth. Campbell surveys the role of myth, metaphor, and art in shaping our internal and external worlds and experience of esthetic wonder common to art and mythology.

Liberty & Limits: The Federalist Idea 200 Years Later

Thanks to PBS station WNET in New York, the Council will receive a \$1000 grant as an outreach partner for their Fred Friendly Seminar on the Federalist concept today (see p. 6 of the Feb. 1997 *Tricorn*). Distinguished panelists from the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government, the media, and public interest groups debate the separation of powers between the President and Congress, state and federal government, the individual and the state as well as the electoral process. Local groups were notified of the series in April and offered readings and access to the tapes. The Council will hold several screenings of the series followed by a discussion of the corresponding *Federalist Papers*, the tapes, and the *Viewer 's Guide* prepared for the series. Since the tapes emphasize the contemporary relevance of enduring concepts, they are an excellent tool for recruiting new members to Great Books. Therefore, screenings are scheduled for areas without local groups but near existing groups.

Of course, current members are welcome to attend the sessions at the following locations:

- The John F. Kennedy Presidential Library in Boston Sept. 9, 16, 25, 30 (Tuesdays, 1 Thursday);
- The Burlington Public Library Sept. 8, 15, 22, 29 (Mondays);
- The Needham Public Library Sept. 4, 11, 18, Oct. 9 (Thursdays).

The Kennedy Library requires preregistration; call the Library at (617) 929-4554. For Needham and Burlington registration would be appreciated (508) 667-9610. The first meeting will include a short sight-reading from the *Constitution*; other readings will be distributed at that meeting. We are grateful to the Great Books Foundation for initiating the contact with WNET and to the libraries providing meeting rooms.

Other Screening/Discussion Opportunities

The Media & Community Relations department at WGBH in Boston is willing to work with organizations interested in holding screenings and discussions. Tapes of Conrad's *Nostramo* or Austen's *Persuasion*, shown *On Masterpiece Theatre* last season, might motivate prospective members to read the novels and try the GB program. For information call WGBH at (617) 492-2777, extension 4267.

Jean Mcgreehan

In the (Mail)Bag

To the Editor:

Although my group has been going for 41 years, we still have to struggle to keep membership at an optimum level. To help us do this, here's a note we send to members who have missed three meetings in a row. The front of the card says, "We've missed you!" The inside of the card reads:

"We're saddened to learn that you are no longer interested in improving your mind."

Presley Brown

In the (Mail)Bag (Continued)

Aaron Bechtel's "Criteria for Great Books Leadership" in the August 1996 Tricorn is missing one necessary item. Potential leaders should also know the purpose of "shared inquiry." Painful experience has shown that even some long-time leaders are unaware that shared inquiry was designed not to teach Great Books, but to help people learn HOW TO READ GREAT BOOKS FOR UNDERSTANDING.

Mortimer Adler was a founder of the Great Books movement. His 1940 classic, *How to Read a Book*, is an explication of the rules of reading. Reading for understanding is active reading, Adler wrote. Active readers ask questions of a book and answer them from the text as they read. He lists four basic questions for readers:

1. What is the book about as a whole?
2. What is the author saying in detail, and how?
3. Is it true in whole or in part?
4. What of it? (What is its significance?)

Questions 1 and 2 are interpretive, 3 and 4 are evaluative. All are short, open-ended, and address only the text.

Shared inquiry is the group exercise of active reading. The leader asks questions similar to those an active reader would ask a text as he reads. They should provoke thought, draw out the group's opinions of the reading, stimulate discussion, and keep it focused on the text.

For shared inquiry to work, it is crucial that the leader lead by the rules. They require the leader to ask questions only; to make no statements, to express no opinions even when he thinks an answer is wrong; and never to lead the discussion in a pre-determined direction. The leader doesn't take part in the discussion; he acts solely as facilitator. Anything else defeats the true purpose of Great Books shared inquiry.

William Irby



**GREAT BOOKS COUNCIL
OF PHILADELPHIA**

A. & R.

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