Editor's note

This end-of-year issue features the annual activity reports of the APE Interest Groups – Arts Group, Book Club, Current Events, and Dining Out Group. I’ve also posted the schedule for the monthly Lunch With… events for the 2019/2020 academic year. There is a report on the last Lunch With … presentation, on March 27. Once again, the list in the In Memoriam box is sadly long, with ten of our colleagues gone. The issue closes with a reprinting of Keith Smillie’s Mousing Around article no. 60, on information overload.

Update: the site of the used bookstore in HUB is now a pretzel shop.

Ruth Gruhn

Notices

Schedule of Lunch With… events in the academic year 2019/2020

Speakers and topics will be announced in September.

25 September
23 October – AGM
27 November
22 January
26 February
25 March

All events will be held in the Papaschase Room upstairs at the University Club (formerly the Faculty Club) at 12 noon on a Wednesday. If you plan to attend, please notify Emeritus House by phone or e-mail on or before the preceding Monday.

Christmas Brunch will be held at the University Club on Saturday 14 December.
Reports

Lunch With…. Event of 27 March 2019

Dr. Colleen St. Clair of Biological Sciences presented observations of the behavior of urban coyotes in Edmonton over her ten-year research project. Coyotes are highly adaptive creatures, and their range over North America has expanded greatly over the last 200 years. They have moved into urban areas, even residential zones, subsisting on anthropogenic foods (domestic garbage, including discarded junk food and leftover dog food). They may carry parasitic infections like mange and tapeworm; and can be dangerous to pets. People should eliminate loose garbage from their property, and watch out for their cats and dogs. If seen, coyotes should be scared away; and the sighting reported to city wildlife authorities.

Ruth Gruhn

Reports of APE Interest Groups for the 2018/2019 academic year.

Arts Interest Group

A small but discerning group of arts devotees was able to appreciate the very broad range of artistic activity in Edmonton this season. Veteran actress Alison Wells entertained us with stories of her extensive experience in the theatre in various countries. We examined in awe the exquisite weaving of Kathy Buse. In a rare exercise of self-promotion, my recorder group played Christmas music from the Renaissance. Playwright and novelist Katheline Koller explained how she became involved in areas of Alberta history as she was writing her plays. Ha Neul Kim gave us a glimpse of the eccentricities and odd demands of temperamental opera singers as she manages the whole complex of backstage opera. We had a first go at audience participation when celebrated Edmonton singer and social activist Maria Dunn encouraged us to join in the choruses of some of her songs. The season ended with a Latin flourish. Fifteen people came to hear Adriana’s extensive research for her forthcoming book Sodbusters and Cowboys, which throws new light on the lives of early Italian immigrants in revealing some of them as farmers and ranchers, although the largest numbers came as labourers to work on the railroads. Adriana pointed out that many of them founded some of Alberta’s most distinguished families.

Vivien Bosley

Book Club

The Emeriti Book Club has continued its monthly meetings during the academic year with a regular membership, and an attendance rate of approximately 12-13 people. The meetings are characterized by lively discussion of the scheduled book. The books are selected in April for the next academic year in a process that includes a call for book nominations; production of a list of selected books; circulation of the list; followed by e-mail voting; and the subsequent creation of schedule of meetings for the next year. This year we read six novels, including one classic – The Warden, by Anthony Trollope – and two non-fiction books.
Judith Hibberd

Current Events Salon

After several years of successful organization of this group by Janet Robertson, there was a hiatus after Janet stepped down and a new organizer could not be found. At the beginning of the 2018/2019 season, Gordon Rostoker agreed to lead the meeting until a group leader could be lined up. There were several interesting sessions held in the last month of 2018 and early months of 2019. In December the results of the U.S. Congressional elections and implications for Canada were discussed; and in January there was a discussion of the actions of Donald Trump in changing U.S. involvement in Syria, and implications for the Middle East. The topic for February was “It’s all about China – implications of the Meng “affair”. In March, speaker Joanna Harrington of the Faculty of Law spoke on Brexit and the difficulties of negotiating a divorce from the EU. At the last meeting in April, there was a discussion on the fate of democracy as an effective means of governance. Each session involved a vigorous discussion of the topic, and led to predictions of what would happen in the future. The group is still looking for an official leader; but in any case it will continue in the coming year, starting on 3 October.

Gordon Rostoker

Dining Out Group

The Dining Out Group has had a very successful year. The group meets once a month (on the last Thursday of the month) at a local restaurant. The group attendance usually runs between and 14 and 24 people, and conversation is lively. New members are always welcome to join us. We are careful to consider accessibility and parking. This year we enjoyed the kitchens of XIX, Normand’s, Range Road, Fumaca Brazilian Steak Hour, Ernest’s at NAIT, Café Linnea, Bistro Praha, Louisiana Purchase, and Pip. Eunice Barron, Frances Cruden, Lynn Dale, and Peggy Allegretto have all helped with organizing these events; so even if some members are out of town, the group carries on with our regular gatherings. We also wish to express our thanks to Nat and Marie Rutter for their August 2018 invitation to a potluck dinner at their acreage, and to Doug and Lynn Dale for a similar upcoming event at their place on Pigeon Lake. We look forward to continuing throughout the next year, and to welcoming both old and new members.

Peggy Allegretto

In Memoriam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Department</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rikk Alderman</td>
<td>Physical Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doug Barry</td>
<td>Fine Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna Clandfield</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huge Clifford</td>
<td>Biological Sciences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mousing Around

Keith Smillie

60. Information Fatigue

The Information: A History, A Theory, A Flood by James Gleick is a large book of over 500 pages, with a paper jacket intended to give a picture of one of the book’s main themes — which is that we have too much information. It has only repeated lines of

The Information The Information by James Gleick

with the three phrases of the subtitle appearing once only in place of the main title, and “Author of Chaos” appearing in several places. Gleick is a prominent journalist and expositor of science and technology for the general reader. His first book, Chaos. Making a New Science, was first published in 1987; and has been translated into twenty-five languages. Two of his later books, Genius: The Life and Science of Richard Feynman and Isaac Newton, were short-listed for the Pulitzer Prize.

The Information begins with a Prolog giving an account of the invention of the transistor at the Bell Telephone Laboratories in 1948, and the work of Claude Shannon in the mathematical theory of communication. It was Shannon who introduced the term bit, for “binary digit”, as the fundamental unit of communication. (This innovation was followed a few years later by the term byte for eight binary digits, the number of bits required to represent a single character.) The next three chapters give wide-ranging accounts of the evolution of various means of communication, starting with an account of African drum language, and the development of the written word; and leading to the Oxford English Dictionary, described as “the greatest word book of all”.

Subsequent chapters deal such with well-known persons as Charles Babbage and the Difference Engine, Samuel Morse and the telegraph and telephone, George Boole and mathematical logic, Kurt Gödel and computability, Alan Turing and computability and cryptography, Norbert Wiener and cybernetics, James Watson and Francis Crick and the genetic code, and Richard Dawkins and memes. Gleick brings to life in a charming manner both the people and the ages in which they lived. Especially touching is his account in two short sentences of Shannon’s final years: “Shannon lived until 2001, his last years dimmed and isolated by the disease of erasure, Alzheimer’s. His life spanned the twentieth century and helped to define it.”
The last two chapters and the Epilogue are concerned with the increasing amount of information with which we are being continuously confronted, and which began with the invention of movable type in the fifteenth century. The author discusses Wikipedia, email, and the profusion of domain names, the Internet, the World Wide Web, and search engines such as Google. As an example of the proliferation of information, googling – note the verb – “james gleick” on the Web produced about 567,000 hits, and adding “the information” to the search query produced 400,000 hits. The theme of the last part of the book can be summarized by the title of this column, “Information Fatigue,” which was defined by the Oxford English Dictionary in 2009 as “Apathy, indifference, or mental exhaustion arising from exposure to too much information, esp. (in later use) stress induced by the attempts to assimilate excessive amounts of information from the media, the Internet, or at work.”

In order to express conveniently increasingly large numbers, meaningful prefixes are used; and we are all familiar with the words kilometres, kilowatts, kilograms, etc., where the prefix _kilo_- refers to thousands. With computers having increasingly larger memories, more prefixes are required; and we have _mega_- for million and _giga_- for billion. For example, the size of computer memories is now given in gigabytes or “gigs”. Now even larger units are needed, giving rise to the prefixes _tera_-, _peta_- and _exa_- representing $10^{12}$, $10^{15}$ and $10^{18}$, respectively. In the early 1990s the prefixes _zeta_- and _yotta_- were introduced; and for example, a yottabyte represents $1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000$ bytes. (We might note that there is a computer company on the Calgary Trail with the name Yotta Yotta Inc.)

There are 46 pages of endnotes that have references to the relevant pages in the text so as to not clutter up the pages with endnote references, and 25 pages of references containing over 500 items. The endnotes for Chapter 4 on Charles Babbage are preceded by over half a page of additional references to Babbage’s life and work, indicating a special fondness on the part of the author. Charles Babbage was a nineteenth-century mathematician who constructed the Difference Engine for calculating error-free mathematical tables; and then started to work on what was called the Analytical Engine, which if completed would have been the world’s first programmable computer. Babbage is often regarded as the “father of the computer”.

I can recommend _The Information_ to any person willing to take the time to gain some appreciation of the evolution of the information age in which we now live. Recently I reread parts of the book both to admire, and even envy, the author’s grasp of the subject; and also to simply enjoy his style of writing.

---

An Amur maple leafing out in the spring is just as pretty as in the fall.