THE SALEM ATHENÆUM

337 Essex Street, Salem, MA 01970 (978) 744-2540 - Fax (978) 744-7536 Email: Info@salemathenaeum.net Web Site: www.salemathenaeum.net

DIRECTOR: Jean Marie Procious

LIBRARY HOURS:

Tues. / Wed. / Fri: 1 PM to 5 PM Thursday: 5 PM to 9 PM

Saturday: 10 AM to 2 PM



Newsletter

Winter-Spring 2009

FOUNDED AS THE SOCIAL LIBRARY IN 1760

IMPORTANT DATES

Courses

April 9 - "The Brontë Sisters and Their Novels," taught by Dr. Sue Lonoff. The course will run on six consecutive Thursday evenings. \$220/\$195 for members

Lectures

March 7, Douglas Smith will come from the West Coast to discuss his new book The Pearl: A True Tale of Forbidden Love in Catherine the Great's Russia. \$10 / \$5 members/ students free

April 17, Adams Lecture (at Hamilton Hall), Delivered by Andrew Delbanco, professor of humanities at Columbia University. Time magazine has called him "America's best social critic." The title of his lecture will be "Melville in His Time and Ours." \$25 / \$20 members/ \$10 students, and \$35 / \$30 members for lecture and reception

May 1, Harvard art historian Mary Crawford-Volk will give a slide-andlecture presentation on the Boston favorite, John Singer Sargent. \$20 / \$15 members/ \$5 students

Concerts

March 17, A program of Celtic music featuring flute and whistle player David O'Docherty, Celtic singer Michael O'Leary, fiddler Jen Strom, and guitar and bouzouki player Bob Strom. Ziggy Hartfelder will exhibit some of her stunning photographs of Ireland. \$15 / \$10 members

April 18, The final concert of the season for the Cambridge Society for Early Music. The theme will be "Courtly Encounters-England and Spain-1554," featuring Douglas Kirk, commentator; James Nicolson, double virginals; and a quartet from Exsultemus. 20% member discount. Tickets only available through CSEM (www.csem.org) or 617-489-2062.

Exciting Spring Events

Lectures, Concerts and Courses



Attendance at the most recent events held at the Athenæum ("Songs of World War II" and "The Great Salem Fire of 1914") exceeded all expectations, with no available seat left unsold. In these dark and dreary economic times, the Athenæum provides a welcome environment in which to listen to music, hear a stimulating lecture, or discuss an important new book with the author. Our next series of programs is likewise geared to lift the spirits and broaden the mind.

March Lecture:

• On Saturday afternoon, March 7, 2:30 p.m., historian Douglas Smith will come from the West Coast to discuss his new book The Pearl: A True Tale of Forbidden Love in Catherine the Great's Russia, one of the most original stories yet told about this fascinating period. Filled with a remarkable cast of characters and set against the backdrop of Imperial Russia, this historical account chronicles the forbidden and tragic romance between Count Nicholas Sheremetev, Russia's richest aristocrat, and Praskovia Kovalyova, his serf, who became the greatest opera diva of her time and whom he secretly married. Douglas Smith is an award-winning historian and translator and a Resident Scholar at the University of Continued on Page 3



The second Salem Literary Festival will run March 27-29 at various locations in downtown Salem. The Athenæum will once again host a Scrabble Tournament on Saturday March 28 at 11:00 a.m., along with a tribute to John Updike and other events to be announced. Check the festival website for the most current event listings, www.salemlitfest.com.

Best-selling author and Salem native, Hannah Tinti, will be a featured speaker at this year's festival. The awards and honors are piling up for Tinti's first novel, The Good Thief, a lively, adventurous tale about a 12-year-old orphan who is missing his left hand. In November, the *New York Times* picked *The Good Thief* as one of its "100 Notable Books of 2008." The Boston Globe deemed it the "best debut by a New England author." As of January, the latest honor was an Alex Award granted by The American Library Association for books written for adults that have special appeal to young adults, ages 12 through 18.

Hannah read from her book at the Salem Athenæum last July before the book was even released and the audience was enamored of her characters and gift for story-telling. Don't miss the opportunity to see her again!



In Memoriam

A great friend and patron of the Salem Athenæum, William L. Saltonstall, passed away on January 23, 2009. Bill was civically engaged throughout his life, serving as state senator for 12 years and supporting many cultural and charitable organizations. He became a Proprietor of the Athenæum in 2006 and held the share once held by his forebear Leverett Saltonstall, a founding member in 1810. We will always be grateful to Bill for his personal generosity to the Library, and we extend our warmest condolences to his family.

¡Hola, miembros!

Our Spanish language group, *la Tertulia*, has returned to the Athenæum with an improved learning format *and* a native-speaking coach.

Members are at the level of advanced beginners and above. Their *reuniónes* include general conversation, grammar drills, vocabulary-building, Scrabble Español, and member presentations.

Want to improve your current Spanish and have some fun? Consider joining.

Time: 2nd and 4th Tuesdays of the month, 6-8 p.m. \$15/mo fee to compensate *la maestra*.

For more information, call Octavia Randolph (781 598 5523) or Dick Luecke (978 745 5325).

To let us know of your interest, please contact Jean Marie Procious at 978.744.2540 or info@salemathenaeum.net Winter-Spring 2009 Salem Athenaeum



Course:

April 9-May 21, 2009—Dr. Sue Lonoff's "The Brontë Sisters and Their Novels" (6 Thursday evenings). Dr. Sue Lonoff's course on "The Brontë Sisters and Their Novels" will meet on 6 consecutive Thursday evenings, beginning April 9, 7:00-9:00 p.m. Perhaps the most famous sister-act among fiction-writing families, the Brontës are major nineteenth-century writers whose novels continue to fascinate readers, fans, film-makers, and scholars. (Athenæum members may have caught the most recent "Masterpiece Classic" production of Wuthering Heights on PBS.) Among the novelists of this era, only Jane Austen has rivaled their popularity. How did these sisters from a little English village in Yorkshire become a cultural phenomenon? What makes their work so enduringly appealing? The course will investigate these questions as participants read and discuss four Brontë novels: Jane Eyre and Villette by Charlotte Brontë, The Tenant of Wildfell Hall by Anne Brontë, and Wuthering Heights by Emily Brontë. Dr. Lonoff will also consider the lives of the Brontës, the myths that have grown up around them, and the dissemination of their work in film, art, and popular culture.

Sue Lonoff is Senior Associate of the Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning at Harvard University and lecturer on Expository Writing and Victorian Fiction. She is the translator of The Belgian Essays of Charlotte and Emily Brontë, editor of Approaches to Teaching Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights, and author of Wilkie Collins and His Victorian Readers. She is also a founding trustee of The Center for the Humanities at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York, and is likewise a winner of Harvard's Petra T. Shattuck Excellence in Teaching Prize.

Please contact Jean Marie Procious to register for the above course.

March Lecture Continued from Page 1

Washington's Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies. He studied German and Russian at the University of Vermont and has a doctorate in history from UCLA. Over the past 25 years, Smith has made many trips to Russia; in the 1980s he was a Russian-speaking guide on the US State Department's traveling exhibition "Information USA." He has worked as a Soviet affairs analyst at Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty in Munich, and served as an interpreter for the late President Ronald Reagan. Smith has also appeared in documentaries for the A&E and National Geographic television channels. This lecture should be a fine complement to Donald Ostrowski's winter course on the history and culture of Tsarist Russia.

Spring Concerts:

**March 17, St. Patrick's Day, Tuesday, at 7:30 p.m., we will again feature a wonderful program of Celtic music. Returning to the Athenæum will be Irish virtuoso flute and tin whistle player, singer, and story-teller extraordinaire David O'Docherty (now an Athenæum member); joining him will be Celtic singer Michael O'Leary, fiddler Jen Strom, and guitar/bouzouki player Bob Strom. Photographer Ziggy Hartfelder (also an Athenæum member) will be on hand to exhibit some of her beautiful photographs of Ireland. As with the 2 previous St. Patrick's Day concerts, we expect this to be a joyous celebration of all things Irish.

◆ April 18, at 8 p.m. the concluding concert of the season for the **Cambridge Society of Early Music** will take place on Saturday, In one of its most unusual programs, the theme will be "Courtly Encounters—England and Spain—1554," featuring **Douglas Kirk, commentator; James Nicolson, double**

virginals; and a quartet from Exsultemus.

April Lecture:

April 17 (Friday), at 7:30 p.m., at Hamilton Hall. Our signature event, the Adams Lecture, will be delivered by the distinguished scholar of American literature Andrew Delbanco, the Julian Clarence Levi Professor of the Humanities at Columbia University, whom Time Magazine has called "America's best social critic." A frequent essayist in The New York Review of Books, The New Republic, Raritan, and other journals, he writes on issues ranging from American literary and religious history to contemporary issues in higher education. His literary scholarship includes Melville: His World and Work, which won the Lionel Trilling Award and was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Award in Biography; The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil; Required Reading: Why Our American Classics Matter Now; and The Real American Dream, all of which were named as notable books by the editors of The New York Times Book Review; and The Puritan Ideal, which also won the Lionel Trilling Award. Among his edited books are Writing New England, The Portable Abraham Lincoln, Volume 2 of The Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson (with Teresa Toulouse), and with Alan Heimert, The Puritans in America. In 2001, he was elected a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; in 2003 he was named New York State Scholar of the Year. He has received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. He is a trustee of the National Humanities

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On John Milton



An important event occurred on December 9, 2008: the 400th anniversary of the birth of poet John Milton, author of *Paradise* Lost, the great Puritan epic about Adam and Eve and the Fall of Man. Literary historians generally agree that Milton is second only to Shakespeare as England's greatest writer and that he surpasses Shakespeare in the vastness of his learning. Paradise Lost, published in 1671 and 1674, has been called "the greatest story ever told," "the story of all things," and "the most sublime poem in the English language." Yet unlike Shakespeare, Milton seems to be read less and less, his works kept alive chiefly in the college curriculum by the famous Norton Anthology of English Literature. There one finds only excerpts from Paradise Lost, with slightly lengthier segments given over to the more "exciting" episodes, namely, Satan's war against God; the council meeting in Hell where the fallen angels agree on a plan to wreck God's new creation, Man; Satan's temptation of Eve to eat the fruit of the forbidden Tree of Knowledge and Adam's decision to join Eve in this act; the consequences of the Fall revealed by the archangel Michael to Adam; followed by the tragic expulsion from Eden.

But why is Milton so little read these days? Three reasons, I think, account for this: first, his poetic style is often described as "baroque," which signifies a highly ornate, Latinate style, that employs formal diction, unnatural syntax, and a plethora of literary, mythological, theological, philosophical, and scientific allusions (requiring as many lines of explanatory footnotes for modern readers as lines of poetry!). Second, feminist critics have raked Milton over the coals for his treatment of his three wives (about which we have less direct testimony than we should) and his misogynistic treatment of Eve in *Paradise Lost*. Third, his reputation as a Puritan apologist and defender of Oliver Cromwell and the Commonwealth, as well as his defense of the killing of Charles I in 1649, has left behind an image of Milton as a dour, humorless supporter of Protestant fanaticism.

Genius is seldom simple, however, and few writers present as many paradoxes as Milton. He was one of the first apologists for divorce as a justifiable action when a man and woman no longer provide mental comfort to each other; however, divorce was to be available for men, not women, as a legal option. He was a staunch Puritan, yet in *Paradise Lost* he envisions sexual pleasure as one of the innocent joys shared by Adam and Eve in the Garden. He championed freedom of the press—but not for Catholics whom he considered corrupt. And he defended deposing a king—though presumed to be divinely anointed—when he turns into a tyrant, ignoring the law and the common good.

He visited Galileo in Italy and abhorred the suppression of any form of learning, whether by the church or the state, when it was supported by reason and advanced the cause of knowledge. And all the while he was writing poetry and preparing himself mentally and spiritually for a task so ambitious that few poets would have dared to imagine it: to "justify the ways of God to men."

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April Lecture continued from Page 3

Center and the Library of America and has served as vicepresident of PEN America.

Having focused his attention in recent years on Herman Melville, author of *Moby Dick, Typee*, *Billy Budd* and many other works, Professor Delbanco has come to see him as perhaps **the** central figure in American literature. He will devote the Adams Lecture to exploring "Melville in His Time and Ours." During Melville's lifetime, Salem's native son Nathaniel Hawthorne was among the few to recognize Melville's genius. But in our own time, readers often turn to Melville for insight into the peculiarities and possibilities of American life, as they do to few other authors. What Hawthorne saw in this unusual man's work and why Melville matters greatly to us today will be the focus of the talk.

■ May 1, The season will draw to a close on Friday, when noted art historian Mary Crawford Volk will give a slide and lecture presentation on that Boston favorite, John Singer Sargent. Crawford-Volk is widely known as an expert on Velasquez and other Spanish painters; among the courses that she teaches at the Harvard Extension School is the popular "From El Greco to But the American expatriate painters John Singer Sargent and James MacNeill Whistler have been the focus of her recent teaching and writing. Her published books include John Singer Sargent's El Jaleo, Rubenism, and Vicencio Carducho and 17th Century Castilian Painting; and she has contributed to exhibition catalogues produced by the National Gallery of Art in Washington and The Tate Gallery in London, and to art journals such as The Burlington Magazine. A superb lecturer, she was awarded the Petra T. Shattuck Excellence in Teaching Prize in 2002. In fact, we are encouraging her to offer a full-length course on Sargent and Whistler in the 2009-10 season at the Athenaeum. But for now, members and guests will be treated to one tantalizing lecture on the John Singer Sargent we never quite knew. This Friday evening event will be preceded by a wine-andcheese reception; so come and unwind after work with a nice glass of wine and then prepare to gaze upon some of the most beautiful paintings that Sargent created.

We hope to see you at these events and encourage you to tell your friends, neighbors, and relatives about us. Invite them to one of our talks or suggest they enroll with you in the Brontë course. You might even consider giving a ticket or a course registration as a gift! The world of books and ideas, art and music are here for the sharing. —Sue Weaver Schopf,

Chairman, Education Committee

Writers

Do you have an interest in a work of literature or a particular author that you would like to share with your fellow Athenæum members in a future newsletter? Please let us know. Submissions should be kept to 300 words or less. Inclusion in the newsletter would be subject to space availability.

Winter-Spring 2009 Salem Athenaeum

Harvard Baroque Chamber Orchestra Casts Spell for Athenæum Audience



On January 10, 2009, The Cambridge Society for Early Music presented the Harvard Baroque Chamber Orchestra performing virtuoso Italian ensemble music of the 17th and 18th centuries for an appreciative sold-out audience. In recent years the Athenæum has become known for its outstanding concert programs, and this was one of the best yet.

The final concert of the season of The Cambridge Society for Early Music will be held at the Athenæum on April 18. The theme will be courtly encounters—England and Spain—1554.

YOU CAN HELP THE ATHENÆUM

The Athenæum needs your generosity. Donations of the following items will be greatly appreciated:

- One or more laptop computers
- ·50 new comfortable folding chairs
- •Gift certificates to Staples and other office supply stores.
- •Energy efficient compact fluorescent bulbs for the stacks.

In a Year of Economic Stress Some GOOD news!

In the midst of continually downbeat economic news these days, it's a pleasure to be able to start off the new year with some truly wonderful financial news!

Thanks to the enormous generosity of Salem Athenæum members and friends, our calendar year-end appeal netted nearly \$5,300 in gifts given since the appeal letter went out in December, bringing our yearly donation total so far for this fiscal year (we go from April to April) to a splendid \$14,600.

By comparison, the calendar year-end appeal last fiscal year brought in \$1,200 of the yearly donation total of \$8,325.

"I think this is a measure of the understanding of our members and friends that the smaller nonprofits will be taking the greatest hits in this economy," said Trip Mason, president of the Athenæum's Board of Trustees. "It's also a mark of loyalty and great affection for the Athenaeum and its value to the community. This year represents sizeable challenges throughout our community, and this level of generosity shows that the Athenæum's place in Salem is greatly appreciated."

With newspapers and web sites running continuous testimony on the country's deep economic crisis, he added, the Athenæum community has truly stepped up and given us not just a financial gift, but an assurance that what we do is of deep value to Salem.

Added Jean Marie Procious, Athenæum director and librarian, "I checked our numbers twice, and am thrilled by the response. In these times of severe economic stress, these gifts are not only heartwarming. They are cause for high celebration and deep gratitude."

The Athenæum's Development Committee reported that the library would continue seeking grants wherever feasible, although members had been notified that many granting sources had suspended their grant making activities for the foreseeable future. Members said that private gifts and donations would continue to be a deeply important funding source for the library. \Box —*Francie King*

Adopt a Book

Along with our wonderful educational programs and lovely social gatherings, the Athenæum is, at its heart, a rich treasure trove of books. We strive to both maintain the health of our existing collections and acquire new books that will appeal to our members' reading pleasures now and will enrich the collection for posterity.

We are delighted to launch a new program in which members can adopt a valuable and at-risk book in our collection (for repairs and conservation) or a new book (to buy for the collection). Please consider adopting either an at-risk book we own or a new book that is near and dear to your heart, or one that you think everyone should read! For more information, please contact Jean Marie Procious or Maura Henry.

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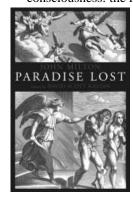
After many bloody battles, the Puritan Commonwealth failed and the monarchy was restored. Milton was in grave danger of losing his life as a supporter of Oliver Cromwell. He was briefly imprisoned and only escaped death through the influence of powerful friends. Now, completely blind, he retreated to a life of quiet solitude and worked on his great poem, which he dictated to his three daughters. It is important to remember that Paradise Lost was written in the face of this defeat. With so many of his countrymen, like himself, disappointed, confused, and fearful, Milton's attempt to "justify the ways of God to men" assumed even greater importance: for he wished to show that wisdom can grow out of suffering, good out of evil, and that God's plan, though not always understood, must be accepted as purposeful.

What does Paradise Lost offer modern readers uninterested in Puritanism? Harvard's evening program, in which I teach, had not offered a course on Milton in over 20 years, so I decided after many years of personal preparation to offer one last year. My colleagues thought I would be lucky to attract 10 students. Instead, I ended up with nearly 100, ranging in age from 17 to 70. We covered some of Milton's early poetry and most important prose works. Then we spent 12 weeks on Paradise Lost, covering one book per week. Early in the semester, I arranged an optional all-day reading of the poem aloud, something I had done many years ago when I was teaching in Harvard College. The purpose of the all-day reading was threefold: first, to give students the chance to experience an epic poem as it was meant to be experienced—as an oral recitation; second, to make sure that the sheer music of Milton's poetry would be heard—something that is often lost when the reader reads silently to him/herself and is being constantly interrupted by glancing down the page at footnotes; and third, to have them experience the entire drama of the story, as Milton so carefully constructed its action, without interruption. We did not stop to discuss the poem; we simply kept reading until the end. Each person would read 50-100 lines, and then the next person would pick up where the last left off and continue.

We held the reading on a Saturday right here at the Salem Athenæum, beginning our continuous reading at 9:30 a.m. and completing the 12 books of the poem at precisely 9:15 p.m. Students contributed \$10 each to the food budget, and a friend catered a delightful breakfast, sumptuous late afternoon lunch, and plenty of snacks and beverages in between to keep energy levels high (including both

angel food and devil's food cakes!). I can only liken the day to a kind of spiritual experience, and a truly Aristotelian experience of catharsis.

The poem is so much more than an imaginative retelling of the Genesis story. On the political level, it is about how jealousy, rivalry, the lust for power, and territoriality lead to war; how tyranny leads to rebellion; how coalitions are built and destroyed; and what defines a leader. On the philosophical level, it poses questions about the nature of free will, moral choice, justice, the tension between liberty and restraint, and the difference between foreknowledge and foreordination. On the theological level, it interrogates the Christian notion of the Trinity, gives God the chance to explain Himself, raises questions about the very nature of deity and the puzzle that it presents to human understanding, and creates a logic—in theological termsfor the unfolding of human history as it does (including everything from the onset of disease to climate change). On the psychological level, the poem covers virtually every aspect of human consciousness: the love of beauty, useful



work, companionship, the innate tendency towards worship of something higher than the self, the desire for knowledge, the joy of sharing; and the negative emotions such as vanity, duplicity, desire for revenge, shame, guilt, jealousy, and lust. The poem

explains everything about how desire overrides reason, despite all the little warning voices we have inside. And it asks us to consider whether a world free of all strife is a fair exchange for a certain level of blind obedience.

In the characters of Satan and Eve, we can sympathize with their chafing against authority, their inability to conquer the desire for equality, and, after their respective rebellions, their recognition of the tragic consequences of their actions. We struggle to understand the meaning of the Father's sacrifice of the Son that he claims to love, yet we understand more easily the sacrifice that Adam makes so that Eve will not suffer her fate alone. Yet Milton's greatest hat-trick is that, by eliciting the sympathy of the reader for these characters and their fatal choices, he demonstrates to readers their own "fallen" state and the fact that submission to a higher authority will always be a struggle against our own nature.

My students came away from the semester agreeing that, despite its linguistic challenges and the Puritan ideology that informs the poem, it probably is "the story of all things" and "the greatest story ever told." In December there were celebrations all over the English-speaking world in honor of Milton's 400th birthday, along with numerous all-day readings of Paradise Lost, events that I hope will rekindle interest in Milton's work well beyond this important anniversary. The author would no doubt be pleased that this many people are still reading his great poem and debating its merits. For even in his own day, Milton acknowledged that a poem of this magnitude and complexity would likely "fit audience find, though few." -Sue Weaver Schopf

Building & Grounds &

New lights on main floor

Three new light fixtures have been installed replacing the three existing fixtures on the main floor, providing more light for lectures and other events. The new lights are capable of being dimmed for presentations. The design is in keeping with the classic architecture of the reading rooms, and enhances the appearance of our main public space. We extend our gratitude to the Killam Canadian Fund for providing the necessary funding.

More attractive grounds

During the past season, work continued on making the building and grounds more comfortable and attractive for the current members, and more open and inviting for potential members.

Continuing with our efforts to open up the appearance of the building, the small area to the right of the entrance has been seeded with shade grass. As the grass fills in, the front of the building will present a unified, welcoming appearance. The open façade will restore the original architect's intent to provide an attractive face to the public.

The trees bordering the south edge of the grounds have been pruned to allow dappled light. The opening up of the trees will provide a lighter and more attractive setting for events and salons, and will be beneficial for the long-term health of the lawn and foliage.

→ Richard Jendrysik

In case you missed them

These are just a few of the events presented by the Athenæum recently.

November

Diane Rapaport discussed her book, *The Naked Quaker and Controversies from the Court of Colonial New England*. Her many references to Salem Quakers had her audience on the edge of their seats.





December

James A. Craig gave a slide presentation on his book Fitz H. Lane: An Artist's Voyage through Nineteenth Century America.



February

Margherita Desy and Donald Friary gave an illustrated lecture on the Great Salem Fire of 1914 before a packed house. The event, co-sponsored with Historic Salem, Inc., was sold out well in advance.

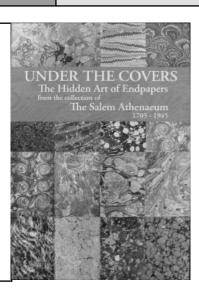
Don't miss

The Salem Athenæum Winter Exhibition

UNDER THE COVERS:

The Hidden Art of Endpapers from the Salem Athenæum Collection, 1705 to the present

Open through March 31, 2009



Trustees:

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Some of our volunteers:

Jim Austin - Collections Committee
Maria Gearhart - Collections Committee
Robert Moulton - Collections Committee
Pamela Jendrysik - Garden Coordinator
Meg Twohey - Education Committee
Jody Smith - Education Committee
Elaine von Bruns - Collections Committee
Winifred Wilkens - Collections Committee



Welcome to the following new members:

Mr. David and Mrs. Jean Alden-St.Pierre

Mr. Craig Barrows and Ms. Nina Cohen

Mr. Bryan Bolden

Mr. Gregory M. Burns

Mr. Peter Copelas & Ms. Krista King

Mr. & Mrs. Douglas Deane

Ms. Tara Dixon

Mr. Michael Eschelbacher

Ms. Jonquil Furse

Mr. Andy and Mrs. Beth Gerard

Ms. Janet Hayes and Mr. A. Ash Bowie

Ms. Jacqueline Hillier

Ms. Jeanne Kempthorne and Mr. Doug

Cannon

Ms. Jordan Max

Ms. Mary Maxwell

Ms. Lois Nicholson

Ms. Anne Rumpf

Ms. Catherine Toth and Mr. Kent Glenzer

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