

Great Plains Popular Culture Association Conference

Ken Woosley

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Scholars, writers, teachers from 20 states and several papers dealing with recent news making events in Montana, including the Freeman and the alleged Unabomber, are all slated for the Great Plains Popular Culture Association conference to be held at Montana State University-Billings, October 3–5. The conference is open to the general public free of charge. “We definitely want this to be a community-wide event, not just a campus program,” said Dr. Gary Acton, chairperson of the MSU-Billings Department of English and Philosophy and conference coordinator. “We’ve also planned teaching workshops for Saturday to make it possible for Billings and area teachers to attend.” Featured speakers include Dr. Marty Knepper of Morningside College, Sioux City, Iowa, a past president of the national Popular Culture Association and a founding member of the Great Plains Popular Culture Association. He will deliver the keynote address at a noon luncheon on Thursday, October 3 entitled “Why Study Popular Culture?” Local mystery writers Sandra West Prowell and Lise McClendon will give presentations Thursday afternoon. Prowell, author of *By Evil Means*, *The Killing of Monday Brown*, and *When Wallflowers Die*, will talk on “Montana as Fruitful Setting in Contemporary Popular Fiction.” McClendon, whose two novels, *The Bluejay Shaman* and *Painted Truth*, as well as feature art dealer/detective Alix Thorssen, will discuss “Developing the Female Detective.”

One of the sessions immediately following McClendon’s talk will focus on detective and crime fiction. There will also be a discussion of Montana contemporary issues. Humorist Paul Somerville will entertain conference attendees at a Friday luncheon. His presentation will be followed by an afternoon of programs that should be of particular interest to Montanans, Acton said. Warren E. “Sandy” Barnard, associate professor of journalism at Indiana State University, will present his findings concerning the question “So What Happened to General Thomas Francis Meagher, the Erstwhile Governor of Montana Territory?” Barnard will present his findings based on accounts of a frontiersman clerking at Fort Berthold at the time Meagher disappeared from the deck of a steamship. The question of whether Meagher fell, jumped in, or was pushed remains one of the great mysteries of Montana history, according to Acton. Barnard is author of two recent books on the Battle of the Little Big Horn—*Custer’s First Sergeant John Ryan* and *I Go With Custer, the Life and Death of Reporter Mark Kellog*. Other presentations will include a panel discussion Friday afternoon on the ethics of dissatisfaction (“Spikes and Sprites: From Earth First to Tiananmen Square, on Protest and Dissent in Popular Culture”), several papers on the Freeman and the alleged Unabomber, and a poetry reading beginning at 5:15 Friday evening. Two workshops for teachers are scheduled for Saturday morning. From 8:15 to 9:30, Judy Sneller, Department of Humanities at South Dakota School of Mines and Technology, will present “Long Live Dilbert — or — How to Teach Humor at an Engineering University or Any Other Serious Institution.” From 10 to 11, Djana Trofimoff, Kansas State University, will discuss “Pet Peeve Essay. A Cultural Studies Approach.” For more information concerning the conference, contact Acton at (406) 657-2348.

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