

# Mblem

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### Words From Nick RVC Column Nick Sanford

This article will be a debriefing of the finance committee meeting. I will start with a high level overview of what was created and end with some words on a few specific items.

The bottom line is that we are projecting a \$100,000 loss for the next fiscal year. At first glance this sounds pretty bad, but you must realize the strategy of how the dues rate is calculated. The basic idea is to set the dues rate so that the budget creates a surplus for a few years, then creates a deficit for a year or two, and then the rate gets reset. This deficit hit earlier than expected, but there were a couple of unexpected expenses that exacerbated the situation.

Coinciding with this budget is a motion to increase the dues rate to \$59. This is a \$7 increase which is quite large. However, it will allow a greater time until the next bump and it will actually increase our membership! How you ask? Every time there is a dues increase many people quickly snatch up multi year memberships at the previous rate.

Those people are guaranteed to not be lost for several years. This affect seems to outweigh the loss of members due to the higher price and hence actually increases our membership.

Back to the budget discussion. Because the dollar has weakened against the Euro, goods purchased from Europe are more expensive now than last year to include paper. This is the primary driver for the increase in printing expenses. At the same time, it was decided to increase the number of pages in the bulletin. I am convinced this is a good idea since so much is currently being left out and since Interloc, a publication for the officers, will now be incorporated in it. Also along the printing lines, postage is expected to increase next year.

Next up for unexpected major expenses is

\$35,000 budgeted for a consultant to evaluate the structure of the AMC. I was opposed to this motion when it was passed and now I have more ammo to continue arguing against it. However, since the AMC passed the motion it had to be incorporated into the budget. On a related note, since the Birmingham AG happened in the 2007-2008 fiscal year it does not play a part in this budget.

Expenses for marketing have climbed quite a bit as well. We will be advertising more in specialized markets to include trade shows.

The next AMC meeting is the last weekend in March. There is a motion to have the national office take over the income and supervisory registration processes for all future AGs. This goes against everything that I stand for in Mensa. The AMC is in for a heated argument from me, and you can expect an interesting write up with my next article.

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### MENC Election Results – March 2008 Nancy Lee

Congratulations to the new ExComm, who will soon decide amongst themselves which office to assume. (Twenty of you, out of a total membership of 573, sent in ballots...)

The vote:

- 16 - Fran Greenstein
- 18 - Ann Lewis
- 17 - Kim Oliver
- 19 - Dan Singer
- 18 - David Skaar
- 19 - Shiangtai Tuan
- 19 - Ed Williams
- 1 - Evie Hornak (write-in)
- 1 - Nina Ward (write-in)

Respectfully submitted,  
Nancy Lee, Election Proctor

#### SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- *New ExComm*
- *Culture Quest Page 2*
- *Eighty-Sixed Page 6*
- *Look for Page 10 in this ten page publication*

## The Return of Culture Quest

David Skaar

This is one of my favorite times of year, not because it's nearly spring, and not because I'm almost done raking leaves from last fall. This is because we are in the final run-up to Culture Quest. I know I've written about Culture Quest before, but I really don't think that it's possible to over hype CQ (as those of us in the loop call it). I once described Culture Quest as playing Jeopardy and chess simultaneously, while receiving electric shocks, being sprayed with a fire hose, and juggling flaming torches.

The only thing better than anticipating CQ and playing CQ, is griping about it afterwards. There are always questions that I knew the answer to, but didn't give an answer for. There are questions that my wife can look at and immediately give the correct answer (that we didn't get). Then of course, are the ambiguously worded questions that we parse to death. The usual problem is that we don't believe that the question could really be as simple as it appears, but it is.

I know that writing good questions is difficult, and that it's very easy to be ambiguous, unclear, and confusing. As much practice as the Jeopardy writers have, I still see, quite often, corrections that have to be made when a player gives a technically correct response that wasn't what the writers have in mind. I learned that when I was trying to write test questions for a genetics class – I fell in love with one particular answer, and didn't realize that there were plenty of other valid interpretations.

But that's the post-CQ aggravation. It's the anticipation that makes it all worthwhile, and the anticipation usually starts the day after the test, when I vow to spend the next year preparing, so I can do better next time. The fun is that I enjoy accumulating all the sorts of odd facts that appear in the Culture Quest test. It's particularly satisfying when I correctly anticipate what's going to be on the test. For example, I was ready when the question came up about the man who was MVP of the NBA under two different names. (Ferdinand Lewis Alcindor Jr., later to be Kareem Abdul-Jabbaar). On a similar theme, in one of my first Mblem columns, I had a series of questions about pen names, aliases, and other such pseudonyms. Many of those pseudonyms appeared on Culture Quest one year, and by that point I had forgotten El Greco's real name; fortunately, other team members remembered Domenicos Theotokopoulos, which I've remembered ever since, but I still have to look up the spelling.

Mainly, I just like accumulating marginally interesting facts, because there's usually some cultural or historical significance, and learning one usually leads to another. As someone (I forget who, so if it's a question, I'm in trouble) once said, their definition of a boring person is someone who goes to the encyclopedia to look up precisely what they need to know, and then puts it back on the shelf (this was when encyclopedias were printed in book form). It's much more fun to read the cross-referenced articles, preceding and following articles, and anything else that looks interesting on the

way. I would frequently get distracted before even getting to the reference I wanted, and have trouble remembering what it was I wanted in the first place.

As an example of how the chain of events goes, I go to look up Joe Friday's badge number, because that strikes me as a good possible question, and find that it's 714. This figure is familiar, because it is also Babe Ruth's lifetime homerun total (Jack Webb chose badge 714 in tribute). Babe Ruth also had the single season homerun record, 60 in 1927, until Roger Maris hit 61 in 1961. However, Maris' record is debatable because he hit his 61 in a longer season than Ruth had (162 games, rather than 154). Maris' record has since been topped three times, by Sammy Sosa (66 in 1998), Mark McGwire (70 in 1998), and Barry Bonds (73 in 2001). Sosa doesn't get as much publicity, since McGwire beat him the same season, and both McGwire and Bonds have been viewed with some suspicion, regarding performance enhancing drugs.

Getting back to Babe Ruth, he actually started his career as a pitcher, and set several World Series pitching records when playing for the Boston Red Sox. He was on seven World Series championship teams, with both the Red Sox and the Yankees, and after the Red Sox won their last world series with Ruth (in 1918), they didn't win again until 2004. This is the well known "Curse of the Bambino", which afflicted Boston because they traded Ruth away. Myth says that Ruth was sold to the Yankees so that the Red Sox owner could finance the musical "No, No Nanette", but that's not really true. Ruth got into a fight over money (he wanted a lot more), refused to play for a while, and the Red Sox owner just wanted to get rid of him. Speaking of unfair performance enhancement, Ruth did have an edge over other players of the time. He made so much money playing ball that he didn't need a regular job in the off season, allowing him to train and stay in shape during his last few seasons playing. Not many other players had this option, so this wasn't exactly fair.

Going back to Ruth's 714 career home runs, this record was beaten in 1974 by Hank Aaron (who needed 2500 more at bats to do it), and Aaron finished his major league career with 755 home runs, a record beaten by, again, Barry Bonds, in 2007. Incidentally, Hank Aaron is Barry Bonds' godfather.

Through watching Jeopardy, reading trivia books, and participating in Culture Quest, I notice that there are several topics that seem to show up over and over. The most notable to me is Oliver Cromwell. Knowing who he was, that he was Lord Protector, and that his body was dug up after his death and beheaded will be good for a few answers in Jeopardy. It is also useful to know that Charles I was the king of England, Scotland, and Ireland who was executed in 1649 after the English Civil War when the short lived Commonwealth was established. His son, Charles II, became king in 1660 with the restoration of the monarchy, and some question about Cromwell, Charles I, or Charles II will show up just about every week on Jeopardy.

(Conti. To P. 3 CQ)

(Conti. From P. 2, CQ)

Speaking of King Charles, it has been a very common name for European kings, with there being Charleses in England, Spain, Portugal, Hungary, Sicily, Romania, France, Sweden (my favorites), and the Holy Roman Empire (Charlemagne was Charles XXI). England has had two kings named Charles, and if the current Prince of Wales hangs in there, he will be Charles III (although it has been suggested that he will choose to go by George VII, since there seems to be bad luck associated with English kings named Charles).

Just in looking up the Charleses to list their countries took me quite a while, since I had to go off and read about many of them, historical events they were involved in, and how Charles V and VI of the Holy Roman Empire managed to rule 800 years after Charles XXI of the Holy Roman Empire (I'm still not sure). The ruling houses of Europe are such a wonderful mess to read about, and loaded with odd facts that are easier remembered than understood. For example, George V of England (the first Windsor monarch), Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany (the last German monarch), and Czar (or Tsar) Nicholas II of Russia (also a last monarch) were all cousins, as well as the major players in World War I. I have read the family trees that explain how they were related, but I sure don't remember them, since it involves the intermarriage of just about every royal family ever in Europe.

Through reading of whatever strikes my fancy, and following the trail wherever it may go, I work at learning everything I hope I need to know for Culture Quest. My readings reminded me of a family I'd read about before, so I went and found the names of Clara and Lazslo Polgar, who wanted to prove the point that genius are made not born. Therefore, they home schooled their three daughters, mainly teaching them chess. All three became chess champions, seemingly proving their parents' argument (although the parents seem like pretty smart people to start with, so I don't think it was exactly a fair test of nature vs. nurture). I don't particularly like chess, so I have proposed raising my children to be Culture Quest experts. The breadth and depth of study required should be a suitable education for them, and the meandering tracks of knowledge that are followed tend to produce remarkable syzygy – unity or alignment. Syzygy also just happens to be the first word spelled in the musical "The 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee", so if that shows up on the test, I'll be ready for that too.

And now, a couple quick, odd questions:

- 1) In the comic strip Garfield, what is the name of Jon's friend and roommate who mysteriously disappeared, leaving his dog Odie behind?
- 2) In the comic strip Garfield, what is Jon's last name?
- 3) What was the cranially related name for the republican faction that Oliver Cromwell was affiliated with?
- 4) What was the cranially related name for Charles XII of Sweden?
- 5) What location in the United States was named by Charles II (of England) in honor of his father?
- 6) What major U.S. city was named for George III's queen consort?

(See answers on P 6, CQ)

## JURY REFORM

### Ed Williams

All too frequently we read about some ridiculous jury verdict that turns some criminal loose to prey on the public again, or perhaps a verdict that convicts him/her of a lesser crime, carrying a light sentence. Remember the OJ Simpson trial, and those old, blue-haired white women who swooned over the great athlete and acquitted him for crimes he had obviously committed (and he has come very close to admitting it). The Eve Carson murder brought to my mind the 1993 Kristin Lodge-Miller case, in which a young black man (also a Simpson, so help me) grabbed this white girl jogging down Estes Drive in Chapel Hill (woods on both sides) threw her down and tried to rape her. She resisted, and maced him. He then pulled out a gun, stood over her and fired 5 shots into her. At his trial for 1st degree murder, a couple of black women jurors coerced the rest of the jury with "second degree or he goes free." So all he got was a conviction for 2nd degree murder. He is now eligible for parole, but, fortunately, so far the shysters have not found a judge who is willing to bring on himself the disgrace of turning that beast loose. Another example I recall is a case in Chatham County about 20 years ago. A man was on trial for a particularly vicious 1st degree murder. All the jurors, in the process of selection, were asked whether they would be willing to inflict the death penalty if the law and the facts so indicated. All said they would. Then, while the jury was deliberating, one woman told the other jurors that under no circumstances would she ever consent to capital punishment. She had obviously lied her way onto the jury in order to advance her political ideology (and we all know what that would be).

There needs to be some serious jury reform. First, it should be established by law, at both state and federal levels, that a jury does not have to consist of 12 people, and that verdicts do not have to be unanimous. A few states already have one or both of these reforms. To the extent that these old traditions are considered to be enshrined in Common Law going back to the 13th Century, they can always be changed or replaced by statute. Verdicts by, say, 10 of 12 jurors (or perhaps 8 of 10) would, I think, go a long way towards eliminating jury corruption, and manipulation by "criminal" lawyers. And there should be punishment for misconduct by jurors. Now, they seem to get away with it (like the above case) without consequences.

There should be serious consequences for lawyers for bringing frivolous cases, or making frivolous pleas and appeals. We hear a lot of moaning about "how expensive to the taxpayer capital cases are". It is the "criminal" lawyers who make them expensive. It seems to be their practise, after a capital conviction, to think up all the possible grounds for appeal, both genuine and

Conti. To P. 4 (next page), Jury

## Treasurer's Semi-sporadic Report

### Dan Singer

Hello. Below is the semi-annual report for the first half of our fiscal year. You may expect to see another fiscal report in the next newsletter. Why's that, you ask? Well, we've received notice from American Mensa that they would like our financial reporting to correlate with their fiscal year. MENC's has historically been 9/1 - 8/31. No, I have no idea why. AM's runs 4/1 - 3/31. So, we'll be shifting our fiscal year, and

you may expect an annual report next month covering that time period.

By the way, are you an accountant or CPA? The MENC treasury is in dire need of an informal financial review. If you wouldn't mind working with me for a couple of hours to accomplish that, please do let me know!

As usual, if you have any questions, comments, and/or suggestions, please call, write and/or email me - my vital stats are at the back of this issue of Mblem (at least they were when I checked).

MENC Financial Report, (MENC business, not for public viewing. Editor)



## Mensa Scholarships

Jim Crowley, our MENC scholarship chair, tells us that he received only 24 scholarship applications/essays for this scholarship year. This is the smallest number received over the past several years, despite Jim's distributing the information widely. Judges were Jim himself, David Skaar and Sarah Catherine Nelson. Eleven essays were sent forward to Regional and National. We will learn in May or June whether any of our applicants has won a regional or national scholarship. We should also know by then whether our ExComm will continue to award a local MENC scholarship. The question is often asked:- must applicants be Mensa members, or children of members, to be eligible for scholarships? The answer is NO, although there is a special national scholarship set aside for Mensans or their children.

## Election news

As notified by our Elections Proctor, Nancy Lee, that (in alphabetical order) Fran Greenstein, Ann Lewis, Kim Oliver, Dan Singer, David Skaar, Shiangtai Tuan, and Ed Williams are voted in as new members of Executive Committee for 2008 - 2009. They are going to meet on April 13 at the MENC Durham Brunch as their first ExComm meeting. Members are welcome to attend — both the brunch and the ExComm meeting. In general, members are welcome to any ExComm meetings to observe, to offer opinions, and/or sugges-

## The Great Pacific Explorer - Captain Cocinero A Puzzle Ed Williams

The "Try Hard", famous ship of the great explorer, Captain Cocinero, was approaching an island in the South Seas which was known to be inhabited by two tribes. They looked exactly alike physically; but one tribe - the Reds - were cannibals, and loved fresh European meat. The other tribe - the Greens - were very friendly to outsiders. The other major difference between the two tribes was that the Reds always lied every time they spoke, whereas the Greens invariably told the truth.

A boat from the "Try Hard" with several sailors approached the shore to scout out a landing site (the ship's water needed replenishing). The sailors saw two natives, at opposite ends of the small crescent beach. The Chief Petty Officer shouted at one of them:- "Are you a Red or a Green?" The native's answer was carried away by the wind, so the CPO shouted to the other: "What did he say?" The answer was:- "He said he's a Green. He is a Green, and I'm a Green too." Should the sailors go ashore or not?

(See answer to Captain Cocinero, P. 6)

Conti, from P. 3, Jury

frivolous, and then go at them one at a time, in order to prolong the case for years, meanwhile supporting the whining ideological campaigners who say "capital punishment is too expensive". One appeal is dismissed, and along comes another one. Unfortunately, Bar Associations appear to be the pet poodles of the Trial Lawyers Associations. They need to be beefed up so that lawyers could be fined or occasionally disbarred for bringing frivolous/fraudulent suits or making frivolous/fraudulent pleas. It's about time for the good lawyers who aren't into that game to stand up and make some serious changes.

## Silk Road Shiangtai Tuan

Last year, in August, I went on a trip to the so called Silk Road in the west part of China. I am afraid I have to say a few word about the history before I can describe the significance of Silk Road.

No one knows when the trade started between the East and the West. However, we all know it was difficult. Marco Polo made the trade route famous. (Marco's father Nicolo and uncle Maffeo went to Beijing in 1266. Marco, at age if 17, went with them in 1274 and stayed for the next 17 years.) That was thirteenth century already. We know trades existed in Han dynasty (second century BC) or earlier. Though it was called Silk Road, silk is not the only thing traded. (The name Silk Road is given by the German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen in 1877.) Though Marco Polo traveled the entire distance, it was not necessary to do that to be a Silk Road trader. In fact, most of the traders only moved merchandise a small portion of the total distance of well over five thousand miles.

Today, if a person in Rome wanted Chinese Silk, he can have it shipped by air, by sea, or even by rail. Thousands of years ago, it was not that easy. What made it so hard? It was not just the distance. It was the land and the human factors.

First of all, there was the Gobi desert. It was like a ocean only it is dry. To cross it, you would also need a ship, the ship-of-the-desert, that is, a camel. Before air travel was available and before there were dune buggies, there would be no way to cross the desert if there had been no camels. Even with dune buggies or most kinds of land vehicle, there would be no way to carry enough food and fuel.

The human factor is even more severe. "Silkworm culture" started about 7000 years ago (China, An Art History by Bradley Smith) but was used only in the civilization that started there. When China was at its height in their bronze period of Shan Dynasty, about 4000 years ago, a central kingdom was in

shape. Of course it was agricultural. It was vulnerable to robbery by nomadic tribes. So, city states started to build "walls" which were eventually connected by the "First Emperor" (221-210 BC) of Chin (Qin, in Pin Yin) to the "Great Wall". Han Dynasty followed, after 80 peaceful years internally they finally gained prosperity and enough strength to deal with the constant invasion from north and west. An all out diplomatic and military campaign lasted from 138 to about 119 BC pretty much secured the border of that time, with the western end of the Great Wall as it stands now. Han Dynasty lasted from 206 BC to 220 AD. At its highest the force reached Caspian Sea, making possible a relatively safe and secure caravan and merchantile traffic across Central Asia. (Last line quoted from Wikipedia on Han Dynasty.) That was probably how Silk Road was formalized. However, to pass through that many Central Asia "Kingdoms" and tribal realms was not easy. Those who were about to leave China to go West, in addition to their merchandise, had to store enough food, water, and courage. They would pray to Buddha to give them protection and good luck. Those who came from the West and finally reached China would give thanks. They built temples and left a vast amount of sculptures, stone carvings, and wall paintings. Back then, it must have been booming towns. Lucky for us, many temples they built were carved into to the side of the mountains so they are quite preserved and called caves. Don't let the name fool you. The "cave paintings" are not like the prehistorical paintings found in Europe. The cave temples can be as large as a basket ball field and there could be altars, statues in the middle and full color paintings on the walls. The subject of the paintings may be life of Buddha, stories from the Buddhist scripts, or depictions of scenes from the scripts.

To see those historical treasures was the main purpose I went on this Silk Road trip. Additionally, the scenery was simply fantastic.

Part of our touring group met in LA, then flew to Shanghai to meet the rest of

the group. It was the fifth time I went to that city, each time with a different situation. When I have a chance, I might tell you more about that.

In any case, we flew to Urumqi the second day. From there, one of the places we went to see was indeed the westernmost gate of the Great Wall called Yang Guan. One of my most favorite Tang Poems has these lines: "Have another drink. After you get out of Yang Guan, you would not expect to see any of us old friends any more." Well, after thousands of years of change, there is no more "gate" that can be recognized. Everything has been buried under sand dunes over sand dunes. The only verifiable site is where part of a "smoke/fire platform" used to be. (See photo on P. 4.) Such platforms were in history records as far back as in Shang Dynasty, about four or five thousand years ago. They were used to report border emergencies. It was to send a short message, not like American Indian Smoke Signals that may send a complicated message. However, it was fast. It went at the speed of light, that is, taking practically no time, to reach the next station as far as one can see -- about 20 to 30 miles away. It would take the time of making 100 fires one after another, less than one day for the message to be sent to the emperor two thousand miles away. He could even use another predetermined smoke color sending signals out to move troops around. What is left there is a small clay-brick and rock structure protected by a modern fence. A modern memorial stands near by. There is also a reconstructed gate like structure to mark the position. All around is a vast extent of sand stretching as far as one can see. If not for the modern road built to reach such archeological sites, anybody left there will die of thirst and hunger in no time no matter which direction he tries to go. Standing in the middle of the huge ocean of sand, one realizes the power of nature and the greatness of human beings thousands of years ago who crossed such enormous desolated distances with only camels and courage.

## Eighty-sixed in Hillsborough Suzie Bolotin

I was recently called to report for jury duty for the third time in my life. I started to write that up and realized that

- it's going to take a while to finish it, and
- I should tell about the second time first anyway.

You may be wondering (or not), "What about the first time?" Well, that's another story and a long one, and definitely not something to get into now.

The following, however, is an account of my experience the second time I was summoned to report for jury duty.

I had been called for jury duty once before and had actually served on a jury then. This time, exactly two years after that, I received another summons. I suspected the county might not realize that I was the same person, because in the interim I'd gotten divorced and had gone back to using my maiden name.

However, I was eligible to serve again, since it had been two years. So I made the drive up NC 86 (I-40 had not yet been extended to Chapel Hill and Hillsborough) and found myself once again in the courthouse in Hillsborough, where I joined the rest of the prospective jurors.

They swore everyone in as a group. Bibles and God figured into this somehow, but I don't remember if the person administering the oath was the only one with a Bible, or if Bibles were passed out to jurors. I do know that we were instructed to raise our right hands and respond to the "Do you solemnly swear" question. At any rate, I didn't put one hand on a Bible, I didn't raise my other hand, and I didn't answer the question. And since I was surrounded by people solemnly swearing, no one noticed that I wasn't.

I was waiting for the secular option of affirming

rather than swearing. The court officials didn't mention it and were ready to move on, assuming we were all sworn in. Not knowing the consequences of opting out of the sworn oath without substituting a legally equivalent action, I decided I'd better pipe up and ask about it. (It's not my favorite way to call attention to myself: "Yoo-hoo! None of that Bible/God stuff for me! Give me the Godless alternative!") At that point I was allowed to affirm, and I believe I was the only one who chose that option.

Getting down to the jury-selection business, I was in a group that they called up for voir dire, and after a bit, it was my turn to get questioned. The attorney began by saying something like, "Now, Mrs. Bolotin—did I say that correctly?"

I answered, "You pronounced my name correctly, but it's not 'Mrs.'"

The attorney rolled his eyes and said, with exasperated and exaggerated emphasis, "All right then, **MIZZ** Bolotin: What does your husband do?"

I said, "That's what I'm trying to tell you: I don't have a husband." I could hear snorts and snickers from all over the courtroom. The attorney looked both annoyed and sheepish.

The rest of the questions pertained to the case being tried, which was a civil case involving a collision in a parking lot. I was asked if I'd ever been in an automobile accident. I said I had: I'd backed my car into another car in a parking lot. I was asked if the case was resolved to my satisfaction. I said that it was resolved the only way it was going to be resolved, but I wasn't particularly satisfied with it. I also said that I'd been rear-ended twice (and my car was hit, too! \*\*\*\* rim shot \*\*\*\*).

Given my extensive personal experience with car accidents and parking-lot mishaps, the lawyer asked that I be excused, and that was the end of my second jury-duty experience.

(Answer to Captain Cocinero, P. 4)

ANSWER: They went ashore and were warmly welcomed. The first native MUST have said he was a Green, because he was either a Green telling the truth or a Red who was lying. The second native had to be telling the truth, because he said the first one had said he was a Green, and that is what the first one had to have said. So when the second one said the first one was a Green, and he was a Green too, he had to be telling the truth.

(Editor's Note: Ed told me that this puzzle was printed some ten years ago but it was not proofread and the key line was missing. Here it is in its entirety, I hope.)

(Answers to CQ on P. 3)

- 1) Lyman
- 2) Arbuckle
- 3) Roundheads
- 4) Ironhead
- 5) Carolina
- 6) Charlotte