



Noesis

**The Journal of the Mega Society
Issue #196, June 2014**

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About the Mega Society

The Mega Society was founded by Dr. Ronald K. Hoeflin in 1982. The 606 Society (6 in 10⁶), founded by Christopher Harding, was incorporated into the new society and those with IQ scores on the Langdon Adult Intelligence Test (LAIT) of 173 or more were also invited to join. (The LAIT qualifying score was subsequently raised to 175; official scoring of the LAIT terminated at the end of 1993, after the test was compromised). A number of different tests were accepted by 606 and during the first few years of Mega's existence. Later, the LAIT and Dr. Hoeflin's Mega Test became the sole official entrance tests, by vote of the membership. Later, Dr. Hoeflin's Titan Test was added. (The Mega was also compromised, so scores after 1994 are currently not accepted; the Mega and Titan cutoff is now 43—but either the LAIT cutoff or the cutoff on Dr. Hoeflin's tests will need to be changed, as they are not equivalent.) Mega publishes this irregularly-timed journal. The society also has a (low-traffic) members-only e-mail list. Mega members, please contact the Editor to be added to the list. For more background on Mega, please refer to Darryl Miyaguchi's "A Short (and Bloody) History of the High-IQ Societies"—

<http://archive.today/K32e>

—the Editor's High-IQ Societies page—

<http://www.polymath-systems.com/intel/hiqsocs/index.html>

—and the official Mega Society page,

<http://www.megasociety.org/>

Noesis is the journal of the Mega Society, an organization whose members are selected by means of high-range intelligence tests. Jeff Ward, 13155 Wimberly Square #284, San Diego, CA 92128, is Administrator of the Mega Society. Inquiries regarding membership should be directed to him at the address above or:

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Editorial

Kevin Langdon

Here is another (relatively small) issue of *Noesis*.

This issue begins with an article by May-Tzu (Richard May) on an ancestor he learned about through persistent genealogical research.

Then there is an obituary for my friend Howard Schwartz, some of whose writings have appeared here, by his long-time romantic partner Darien De Lu, with links to some videos of Howard's playing music and singing.

Here's an excerpt from a message that I wrote to Howard's family and friends:

Howard was a wonderful friend. Smart, funny, kind, sensitive. I greatly appreciated him and I have fond memories of the times we spent together, primarily through our membership in Channing Club, where Howard had many friends.

Howard is survived by sisters Hope Seldin and Ellen Ratner and many loving family and friends.

And finally there is an essay by Miriam Berg raising a number of questions about the purported entity "God."

See many other interesting writings on Miriam's website:

<http://www.folksongoclllector.com>

We need material for *Noesis*, from Mega members and others, in order to publish issues containing more pages, perhaps even more frequently.

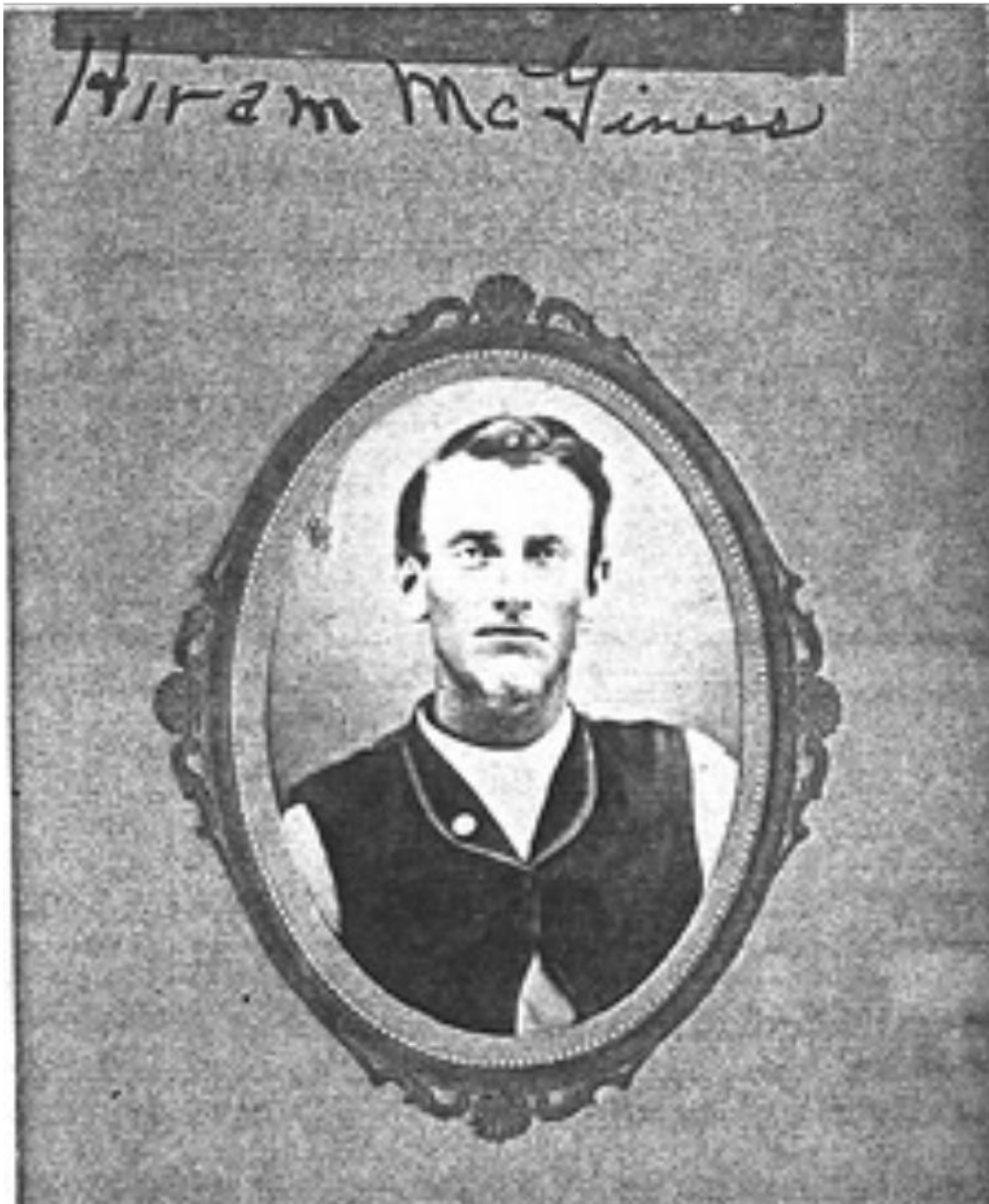
The tentative deadline for the next issue is October 15. If there's enough material I'll publish an October issue. And if any Mega member is interested in running for Editor, Internet Officer, or Administrator please announce your intention to run in the election at the end of this year.

Cover: The globular cluster M80 (NASA). See the description at:

<http://www.dvidshub.net/image/692947/hubble-images-swarm-ancient-stars#.U7JOimdOVfw>

Photo of Howard Schwartz, page 8: Hope Seldin.

Photo of Howard Schwartz, page 9: Darien De Lu.



Hi

May-Tzu

I never knew I had a grandfather on my mother's side, although I suspected that I might have had one. Grandfather was born ninety-five years before I was. His great grandfather fought in the Revolutionary War. At fifty years old he, Hiram McGinnis, married his adopted daughter, who was then only seventeen, shades of Woody Allen and Soon-Yi. So my grandfather is in effect my great grandfather.

When I found him in a 19th. century Federal census or actually several, it indicated that he was a farmer. All the McGinnises were farmers it seems (except for the "old Mrs. M'Ginnis" a notorious fortuneteller warned by the Congregationalist church in the 1790s), who moved down from Shoreham, VT to Crown Point, NY a little after 1800. Farming, probably organic farming actually, though they didn't know it, was a noble occupation before giant agribusiness, but it seemed uninteresting.

Birth records of his children also confirmed that he was a farmer. And one said he was a carpenter. An old newspaper article I managed to obtain from a relative referred to Hiram as "a well-known character around Port Henry." What did that mean, I wondered. A drunken Irishman?

Eventually I obtained a copy of his last will and testament and probate letters. In a deposition taken because of a dispute regarding the probating of his estate, his sister-in-law called Hiram, "Hi." He was apparently considered to be a schemer by some of those who knew him.

To my surprise I discovered that many nineteenth century and early twentieth century Northern New York newspapers had been digitalized, including: the *Ticonderoga Sentinel*, the *Essex County Republican* and the *Elizabethtown Post*. None of these, however, specifically referenced Crown Point. But OCD is a terrible thing to waste, so I began to search these archived newspapers sedulously, not expecting to find anything about my dull McGinnis family of farmers.

Complicating the searches was the fact that McGinnis was a common name in that area and was spelled many different ways. There are very many ways to search with quotation marks for Hiram Porter McGinnis, if you include all possible spellings of McGinnis in the forms: H. P. McGinnis, H. McGinnis, Hiram McGinnis and Hiram Porter McGinnis. All these variations occurred in print. Factoids were randomly uncovered by the searches, however, and dopamine hits occurred.

Glimpses emerged of times past. Hi was listed in a tax record as a "mechanic." Another article revealed he was a Republican and was elected as one of the local constables. In another Hi was said to be building a piazza for some local lady.

Fortuitously, because these were weekly or monthly newspapers in a very rural area, many quite mundane events and doings by the local citizens were considered newsworthy.

I learned long before that Hiram had lived in Cold Spring Park. I thought it was only the name of an area of Crown Point. But from the newspaper articles I learned that Cold Spring Park was an actual park with a splendid view of Lake Champlain and various surrounding mountains, one of the most prized vistas in the region, according to the newspaper accounts. And to my astonishment I learned that this was not a public park but private property and a major tourist attraction in the summer, owned by grandfather.

Newspaper reports mentioned the names and points of origin of many of the tourists. Some were from out of state and a few even from foreign countries. At one point Hi had constructed a fifty foot observation tower for the benefit of tourists and the locals. In the winter large tents were erected for meetings of religious camps, as they were called. Prominent ministers spoke. Some events allegedly could accommodate up to a thousand people.

Several local Fourth of July celebrations were held at Cold Spring Park in the 1890s, during which Hi presented colorful lectures on his version of the local history and touted the alleged curative powers and health benefits of the waters of his cold spring. (Did the spring water lack lithium and Hi perhaps have a touch of hypomania, which facilitated his self-promotion?) There were both string bands and brass bands present for the festivities, according to his advertisements placed in local newspapers. Food and refreshments were available and, of course, there was the traditional fireworks display in the evening. Cold Spring Park was actually a business, founded on land described as not very arable, and Hi was the proprietor.

One article from the 1890s mockingly referred to Hiram as the "astrologer, Hiram P. McGinnis," because he publicly asserted that there was a relationship between the unusually cold winter and spring that year and the occurrence of a higher than normal number of sunspots on the surface of the sun at the time. An interesting theory to be proposed by a man of the 1890s who could read but not write, according to the 1900 census.

Another article referred to Hiram as "a giant towering above men in the physical sense." Yet another, discovered later, said that Hi, a man born in 1849, stood six foot seven inches tall and was nearly the tallest man in Essex County, N.Y.! So Hi was high, I guess.

From various allusions found in these nineteenth century regional newspapers I learned from multiple sources that Hiram was considered "odd," an eccentric, affable and entertaining, a raconteur and local historian of the area. Perhaps Hi was a high-I.Q. type, having little formal education.

Two independent newspaper sources related that the local Port Henry congressman, Wallace T. Foote, Jr., a lawyer, brought the then visiting Speaker of the House of Representatives, Thomas B. Reed, to Cold Spring Park to meet Hiram Porter McGinnis, because Hi was considered to be a Crown Point 'historian' of high entertainment value, not to mention a character. Hi was said in one account to be thoroughly unimpressed with Speaker Reed and was said to have "stuffed him," which apparently meant to "put him on" with a less-than-accurate embellished version of the history of the area.

With the assistance of a museum I was even able to obtain a JPEG of a photograph—probably from the 1880s—of the to-me-unheard-of McGinnis Family Band. Hiram, smoking a cigar, and his bearded older brother, James, smoking a pipe, are playing fiddles, as is their brother-in-law, Henry Betts. Rustic children sit in the foreground, staring at the unseen photographer. The scene looks more than a bit like Duck Dynasty.



References:

Northern New York Historical Newspapers <<http://news.nynl.net/titles.html>>

History of the town of Shoreham, Vermont: from the date of its charter, October 8th, 1761, to the present time (1861), by Goodhue, Josiah F., pages 144 - 146



Howard Bert Schwartz (May 6, 1943- Feb. 26, 2014)

Darien De Lu

Howard passed away in his long-time Oakland apartment while a friend read him mystic poetry, ending a long confrontation with liver cancer, heart disease, and chronic digestive problems. He was a long-time member of the San Francisco Folk Music Club who frequently attended the Friday night sessions at Faith Petric's. He was well known for his ability to play accompaniment in the singing room, regardless of song or key. He also attended various other folk gatherings in the Bay Area, and he played for numerous Sufi dance events.

Most of the local folkies are unaware of Howard's many other accomplishments. Howard was a professor of sociology for many years, beginning with a position at Harvard and moving on to other positions that seemed right to him. He was uninterested in prestige or a high salary, preferring work that spoke to his sense of authenticity. He described his specialty area, ethnomethodology, as the study of everyday and common-sense thinking. Recently a journal in England republished Howard's scholarly papers because they liked his work and felt it reflected the early foundation of that branch of sociology. With a friend Howard co-authored a sociology text book, a text notable for the sprinklings of humor Howard insisted upon. It continues in use and has been translated into multiple languages.

Subsequently he successfully transitioned into computer programming jobs. Long after he retired from that work, he continued to help friends with his techie skills.

Howard had many other sides to himself. His playful side delighted in entertaining people with his stock of magic tricks. With children he could interact at their level, without pretense and with mutual enjoyment. In earlier years he was an avid folk dancer and skilled tap dancer—the latter dating back to his days as a child actor. (He had significant parts in an episode of the TV series *Dragnet* and in the film *Marjorie Morningstar*.) For many years he was active in the community of followers of the spiritual leader Meher Baba, and he traveled to India several times to go to the Meher Baba center.

Encouragement of loving attitudes and community feeling motivated Howard throughout his life. Many of his friends were glad to share these qualities at a "Living Farewell" recognition event for Howard in April 2013 and to remember them at a memorial gathering for Howard in May 2014.



A video of Howard's memorial can be downloaded at:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/xj7k7ekszyoaa7q/RememberLong.mov>

And here are several links to Howard's musical performances and other content:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INFI271yhYY>

http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCOU_9RheYyygg1CtV3Eq5Aw

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gb1LIIKsZ4g>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8cq6tN6ffTI>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EOwvgu6qcZQ>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MzvaLYIxsvo>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LBKbnsv85PU>

HOW OLD IS GOD?

Miriam Berg
September, 2013

How old is God?

A strange question! but it's certainly English. In order to answer it, and answer it meaningfully, we must understand who or what God is, and when, if at all, it or she or he came into existence. All very mind-boggling questions, but if we are to use the word God at all, we owe it to ourselves and to philosophical certainty or uncertainty to find some answers.

WHAT IS GOD?

Who or what is God? Some of us believe in God as a being overseeing the universe, or at least the earth, and probably with it the solar system. But some of us believe that there is no such being, for many reasons: there is no evidence of such a being; it's impossible for there to be such a being over the whole universe or even the solar system, to say nothing of the Earth; and that everything that has happened in the fifteen billion years that the Universe as we know it has existed was either the natural result of physical laws or was a random occurrence, but still consistent with those same physical laws.

So again, what is God? or what do we believe it to be? We might agree that if there is such a thing, it must have consciousness whatever that is; and it must have some limits in space and time since otherwise if there are no such limits then we would seem to be simply talking about the universe as a whole, the totality of all the matter and energy we can observe and describe. It seems impossible that there exists something invisible and eternal that no one has ever found any evidence for.

But then, what is consciousness? We are (or seem to be) conscious beings, by which we mean we have some inner picture of the world outside ourselves, even if we have only minute control over the reality behind that inner picture. By itself, "consciousness" does not imply control over what we are conscious of; we cannot control weather, or the sun rising and setting, or the behavior of people who are not in our presence, or who ARE in our presence but have their own consciousness and tendency or need or desire to exert their own control over THEIR inner picture, including us.

WHERE IS GOD?

Can we assert that the solar system occupying such a vast expanse of space as it does (billions and billions of cubic miles) can or must have a consciousness, of itself if

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nothing else? Or can we assert that to be true even of our own planet, with its billions of square miles, or billions and billions of cubic miles contained within itself? Ho, ho, it is to laugh!

Other life forms must have some form of consciousness in order to interact successfully with their environment, even if that awareness and interaction is far less extensive than our own. We could even assert that humanity as a whole, with its books and communication systems and increasing commonality of experience is therefore "conscious" of itself. But is this God, or is it what we mean by God?

It seems clear from the scientific discoveries of the last several centuries, which have never turned up the slightest evidence of any being or consciousness larger than ourselves, force us to abandon the notion of a Superbeing over all of humanity, or even over all of earth, which seems to obey clear and continuous natural laws, both physical and biological. We conjecture that those same laws would apply on any other planet as well, so that most people today probably admit the existence of life forms on those other planets, though how different from us we cannot tell. But that remains a conjecture, until such time as we actually discover such life forms.

Modern philosophers and theologians, in their desire to find something that they can attach the word "God" to, have decided or seem to have decided that "God" must be everything, or all life or the energies that configure atoms and matter, or something all-embracing. Can energy have consciousness? can all life together have a single consciousness? Can you have consciousness without personality? Does God have personality? These questions seem to get more and more far-reaching and unanswerable, or instead, perhaps, less meaningful.

IS GOD MORAL?

Now let's ask, is God moral? or perhaps, is God morality? This is another poorly defined concept, but our best understanding is that it is or would be for each being to treat each other being fairly and considerately, at least members of its own species. But if we are to believe the Old Testament, the God therein depicted named Jehovah was certainly intolerant of other gods or worship of any other thing whatever. Is that moral or ethical? Maybe divine ethics and morality are different from human or animal ethics and morality. But we do not even know what "divine" means, if we don't know what God is, or where it is, or how it came into existence, or how long it's been around. And if we don't know anything about a thing, how big it is, what it is made of, what it does or what's its function, then we don't even know where to look for it. Maybe it doesn't exist anymore, as the Mill family insisted.

WHERE DID GOD COME FROM?

But this raises yet another question, how did God come into existence, and by what process? My grandson, when he was told that the universe was made by God, asked at once, Well, who made HIM? and if you find the thing that made God, who made

THAT thing? That's a youthful reprise of the argument between George Bernard Shaw and a Jesuit priest, who said blandly, "The universe exists; somebody must have made it." Shaw answered, "If that somebody exists somebody must have made him." The Jesuit priest granted that there was a maker of God, and a maker of the maker of God, and so on; but it had to come to an end sometime. Shaw countered, "It's as easy for me to believe that the universe made itself, as it is to believe that some maker made it. And even if we insist that the thing we call God is like an aura or invisible, an impalpable mist or field around the so-called universe, who can point to any evidence for the existence of such an aura or spirit?"

The simplest and most probable explanation for the origin of the notion of God or a god is as follows. Our remotest ancestors, already human or at least humanoid, learning to recognize things and put names on things, occasionally saw something unusual happen, with no visible agency causing it: thunder, lightning, wind, earthquake, birth, death. They saw these things happened, in the same way that they had made a pot, or killed an animal, or built a fire; and they assumed, and the species came to believe that all these things were caused by some Being or Superbeing more powerful than themselves, that they couldn't see because it was invisible, but everyone else could see those same events because it was everywhere. This must have been the origin of the myth of God.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT?

Finally, let us ask, What does God want of us? The immediate question is, How do we KNOW that God "wants" anything of anything? Wanting, desiring, seeking, seem to be a characteristic of living creatures, or life, as far as we can tell. And it sounds like mere anthropomorphic projection for us to say that this thing which we don't know what it is has any characteristics at all. It comforts us as conscious beings to tell ourselves and others, I did that thing because God wanted me to; and they accepted that (or didn't accept it) because they all believed in the same God. But that assertion by itself doesn't prove anything.

But we have not answered our first question, How old is God? If the answer is some number less than fifteen billion years, the age of the known universe, how much less? Did God come into existence at the time of the formation of the solar system, or of Earth specifically? And how did it come into existence? Was it around when the only living creatures were protozoa or something even simpler? But in the face of our not knowing WHAT God is, or WHERE it is, or anything else about God, we might as well admit that we don't know how old God, whatever it is, is. To paraphrase Aristotle: You tell me that there is a God, because God is; but I say, there is not a God, because God is not. That that is, is; that that is not, is not; that that is is not that that is not, and that that is not is not that that is. Is not that that?

However, if you want to believe in a God, believe in one; but I'm not like Pascal, who said it was better to believe that God exists than not to believe, because then when you die, if you're right, all will be well, and if you're wrong, you haven't lost anything.