



The WSFA Journal

September/October 2025

Edited by Samuel Lubell, Secretary



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Bylaw Amendments for Online Business

The 7/4/25 Fourth of July Meeting was held at the Pomerantz/Overton Fabulous Bungalow at 2:30. As far as I could tell attendance included: Bob, Bill, Elaine, Carolyn, Cathy, Lee Strong, Rodger Sam L, Judy N, Kim, and Chris. There was no online meeting.

Minute were waived, treasurer’s report waived. Bob said we have money. Not hurting for cash. Sam for Capclave said invites to the program went out. We need a programming meeting. Cathy for publicity arranged or the sharing of Capclave stuff for conventions. Email Cathy about distribution of fliers. Bill said he arranged for the Capclave gifts. Sam will send Bill the email about shirts. Need to check with Shirin about programming. Cathy volunteered to be Point of Contact for dealing with her. Arrangements were made for a Capclave meeting. Rodger for Capclave Future said will send out GoH invites. Committee reports: Sam L. gave the schedule for the committee to talk about SF. Cathy gave her list of rewards for voting on the WSFA Small Press Award. August 3 deadline. Entertivities mentioned Folklife Festival.



Old business: 1st Friday in August will be at Elizabeth’s condo. Third Friday in August will be online only. 3rd Friday in September at Capclave. New business: Two amendments to bylaws to do online business at meetings. This was needed due to the Covid years. These changes will allow WSFA to make further changes in consultation with member committee. Bill asked that amendments be emailed to members. Sam L will send them around. We had the necessary number of signatures. Bill reminded the club that by policy, these changes need to be reviewed in both a Virginia and a Maryland meeting. Bob said that this counts for the VA meeting. Bob took vote. The changes were approved. Meeting adjourned unanimously (and loudly in person) at 2:55.

PROPOSED BYLAW AMENDMENTS

ARTICLE III: BOARD OF DIRECTORS, SECTION E: Removal of Officers

This proposal is an adjustment to subsection a. This subsection currently reads “A petition for the removal of a member of the Board may be presented to the Board in writing at any time.” This proposal is to add the phrase “physical or electronic” between “in” and “writing” so that the subsection would become “A petition for the removal of a member of the Board may be presented to the Board in physical or electronic writing at any time.”

This was signed by the required 15 members.

ARTICLE VI: MEETINGS

Establish a new Section A which if approved would read as follows:

WSFA meetings may be in-person, virtual (via an application such as Zoom), or hybrid (including both in-person and virtual participation). All regular WSFA business may be conducted in any of these formats.

If this change is made, the former Section A will become Section B, the former Section B will become Section C, and the former Section C will become Section D.

This was signed by the required 15 members.



Reading for Fun Drops 40%

By Sam Lubell (originally in Samizdat... (N3F) #33)

A new study based on time-use research found a drastic drop of 40 percent in the percentage who read for pleasure over the last 20 years. Researchers from University College London and the University of Florida evaluated the American Time Use Survey and found a consistent 3% annual drop in reading for fun among adults between 2003 and 2023. The drop is higher for men than women, Blacks more than whites, rural more than urban, and those with lower income or education level. Highly educated people had over twice the percentage of readers as the least educated, and the reading rate for high-income Americans was 1.5 times that of low-income Americans.

The percent of Americans who read for pleasure on a typical day fell from 28% in 2004 to 16% in 2023. Black Americans went from 20% to 9%, while white Americans went from 29% to 18% in the same time period. However, those who did read increased their reading time from 1 hour 23 minutes per day in 2003 to 1 hour 37 minutes per day in 2023.

The study counted e-books (as of 2011) and audiobooks (as of 2021) as reading. It also included reading nonfiction, newspapers, magazines, and some electronic reading (although some respondents might not have counted this).

Why the drop? While the research did not go into this, researchers speculated this could be due to more time on social media, more non-reading electronic options, economic needs, less leisure time, and uneven availability of books.

The report cited earlier National Endowment for the Arts research that found that the percent of American adults who say they read any book for pleasure in the last 12 months fell from 61% in 1992 to 49% in 2022. This means that half of Americans did not read (or even partially read) any book at all in a year. The National Assessment of Educational Progress in 2023 found that just 14 percent of American students read for fun every day.

Articles on the drop cited the benefits of reading benefits people including effects on further education, mental and physical health, career growth, civic involvement, emotional intelligence, reasoning and comprehension skills, imagination, and empathy. The report claims, "Reading may also promote health, reducing stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms, supporting better sleep and slowing cognitive decline in older adults, as well as increasing longevity." [https://www.cell.com/iscience/fulltext/S2589-0042\(25\)01549-4](https://www.cell.com/iscience/fulltext/S2589-0042(25)01549-4) [ISCI113288](#) [grabs 1..1](#)

An industry facing a continual drop of 3% a year has only a few options. They can increase the cost of the product (and risk further drops due to higher prices), they can limit the supply of the product (but the large number of small presses and the explosion of self-published books make this very difficult), or they can try to reverse the drop (through advertising and other book promotions). What publishers seem to be doing is phasing out the cheaper mass market paperbacks and expanding their use of the more expensive trade paperbacks (which are not returnable by bookstores). Trade paperbacks usually have bigger print than the smaller mass market paperbacks (perhaps recognizing their aging customer base). Increasingly, price-sensitive buyers are turning to ebooks as a replacement for the mass market paperback.



We Will All Be Too Busy

The 7/18/25 Third Friday meeting was hybrid online at the Roth Residence. In person were Mob, Mark, Ellen, Cathy Sam L. Via Zoom were Zenlizard, Rodger, Judy K, Aaron, Sam S, Michael I, Carolyn, Judy N, Jim Thomas, Ginny, Frances, Madeleine, and Greg.

Secretary Sam L. did not have notes from the July 4th meeting. At that meeting we discussed and approved the 2 bylaw amendments that Sam L was supposed to send

around for this meeting but forgot. So the bylaws approval was postponed to the next Maryland meeting (actually the one after the next since the next MD meeting is at Capclave).

Capclave Present: Sam L said that Perrienne had to step down as Program Chair due to illness. Sam L took over programming and had a meeting. He needs to talk to Paul about getting Program Participants into Zambia. Things are moving. The next stage will be to finalize programming and then get the program participants to pick what they want to do.

Capclave Future. At this point Capclave Future has a contract. It is a two-year contract.

Cathy said we are doing a table swap with Ritsucon, October 4th at the Montgomery Fairgrounds. Need someone to table for Capclave 2026, since it will be after 2025.

Committee to Discuss SF announced its schedule of upcoming discussions. We will meet after this meeting to discuss the finalists for the WSFA Small Press Award. First Friday in August will be the May/June Asimov's, Third Friday in August for those not at the Worldcon we will discuss the Clarkesworld, and first Friday in September will be July/August of Asimov's. And Third Friday in September will be Capclave and we will all be too busy.



Treasurer's report. Zen reported \$\$\$ in the various accounts. We have a couple of CDs that we are not rolling over. We have new members. We are XX on memberships compared to this time last year. But it is what it is. Madeleine said that we should not invest in cryptocurrency.

Intertivities. Kim said that the Emmies are, for the first time, heavy into sci-fi and fantasy. Apparently the Emmy nomination board has realized that sci-fi has gone mainstream, especially with Andor. It is not just the makeup and special effects category that you'd expect but the best actor, best actress, and best drama categories.

Cathy said that Hugo voting closes Wednesday the 23rd. Business meeting for Worldcon tomorrow. Small Press award deadline is August 3rd Sunday. So yes, people should be reading the stories. If 70% of WSFAns vote. I make fudge. 80%, I make chocolate cheesecake. 90%, I make both. 100%, not only do I make the cheesecake, but everybody gets fudge.

Old business: Bob said, As far as meetings are concerned, the 1st Fridays in both August and September will be in Elizabeth's. Third Friday will be virtual only due to the Worldcon. Mark said he is going by train. Third Friday in September will be at Capclave. Book club, Sam L said the book club will have a special date due to Worldcon. It will be August 24th and we will discuss Capclave GOH Naomi Kritzer's Liberty's Daughter. September we will do the High Crusade by Poul Anderson. There was a discussion about it being "ancient" to which others protested, "It's not that ancient" with a couple people saying it was written after they were born.

New business. We need to postpone the vote on the bylaws amendment. There was a discussion about putting it on the schedule for Capclave. Ginny asked, "Have we collectively decided what to do about AI usage in our meetings? I mentioned this because I notice in the Zoom Meeting that the AI companion is available." Zoom has a tendency to sneak in AI features. Bob said that we already record the meetings as a convenience for the secretary <Thank you!>. We are an open meeting and records of our meetings are supposed to be available to the public on request. Yes, our secretary is behind.... Sam L. said that the missing journals will go up on our website. They have been sent to Paul.

Ginny asked about the breakout rooms. Only the meeting is recorded so the breakout rooms are not. Ginny said she is not asking about the recording but Zoom's AI Companion. Rodger said, "As the regular zoom host for WSFA. I am aware of AI companion tools. I have not taken any action to turn anything on Ginny. If you believe that Zoom is enabling certain AI features that will be detrimental to the privacy of WSFA meetings, and you wish to offer advice or on expertise, on maximizing our privacy and limiting unexpected, unwelcome AI

intrusion into WSFA business. Please contact me offline via email.” Ginny said that the AI features are automatic and do not have to be turned on. Rodger said that Zoom has not been sending any AI meeting summaries to us. “The only transcript we get is the one that goes with the recording, which is different.” If Zoom is using AI for anything, that’s out of our control, short of choosing not to use Zoom. Sam L said that “And Ginny based on the captions, they’re not doing a wonderful job at the various science fiction and fannish terms that we use anyway.” Kim pointed out that our meetings are public. Ginny said she only brought this up because it might be a deterrent from people attending our meetings. Mark asked about using AI in stories for the small press award. Carolyn said AI is addressed in the questionnaire that nominators have to address. One of the things they need to check off is that no AI other than spell check and grammar check was used in the creation of the story.

For announcements, Sam S. recapped that he is now living just outside of Charlottesville, north of the airport. Aaron said that as a U of VA graduate, he’s required to say that that Charlottesville is the best place on earth. Sam L. said he was probably officially let go from his government job on Tuesday. “It is hard to tell because the emails went to our government email addresses, to which we no longer have access. So if anyone knows of a job for a writer/policy person please let me know. “



First Science Fiction Conventions

By Samuel Lubell (originally in Origins (N3F) #72)

For purposes of this article, I am defining a science fiction convention as a group of fans who have an organized gathering with planned events. So, a club meeting, even one with multiple speakers, is not a convention.

There is some debate over the first science fiction convention. Americans generally credit the First Eastern Science Fiction Convention (later called the first Philcon) of October 22, 1936 as the first SF convention. This involved a trip by the New York Branch of the International Scientific Association to visit fans in Philadelphia’s Science Fiction League (which later evolved into the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society). The exact number of fans is debated (Milton Rothman says 11 met in his father’s house). Prominent fans in attendance included David Kyle, Bob Madle, Fred Pohl, Milt Rothman, and Don Wollheim.

Some say that was just a visit of NY fans to fans in Philadelphia and it lacked activities and organization. (But, they called it a convention (admittedly, not before the fact), elected a chair, had activities (a tour of Philadelphia), and conducted business (voted to have a second convention in NYC)). These fans point to a January 3rd, 1937 meeting of 20 fans in Theosophical Hall in Leeds, UK as the first convention. Notables in attendance included Arthur C. Clarke, Eric Frank Russell, and editor Walter Gillings. The convention formed the Science Fiction Association.



By 1939, conventions were popular enough that the first World Science Fiction Convention in New York City over July 4th weekend had approximately 200 people (still less than a Capclave). The convention was chaired by Sam Moskowitz and the Guest of Honor was illustrator Frank R. Paul. Prominent members included Forrest J Ackerman, Isaac Asimov, Otto Binder, Ray Bradbury, John W. Campbell Jr., L. Sprague de Camp, Harry Harrison, David Kyle, Robert A. Madle, Milton A. Rothman, Julius Schwartz, Manly Wade Wellman, and Mort Weisinger. This convention had the first fan feud as Sam Moskowitz’s supporters ousted the New York Futurians (led by Donald A Wolfheim with Fred Pohl).

There was an earlier event that a few people point out has some resemblances to a science fiction convention – the Vril-Ya Bazaar and Fete held in London's

Royal Albert Hall in March 1891. This was more of a festival or fair than a convention, but was based on a work that could be called science fiction, the novel *Vril, the Power of the Coming Race* by Edward Bulwer-Lytton (about a race of underground superhumans). People dressed in costumes based on the book, watched performances, and shopped at booths. In many ways it was more similar to ComiCons than the more academic sf conventions of the early 20th century. But the fete lost money and the organization that ran it went bankrupt. It also wasn't the product of an organized fandom and did not directly lead to anything.

Banana Peels Count As Packaging

The August First Friday meeting (8/2/25) was held online on August 2, 2025. Attendance included Sam L. Aaron, Jim Toth, Gary, Judy N, ZenLizard, Bob, Elizabeth, Sam S, Mark R, Kim, Paul H, Frances, Bill L, Ginny S., Michael I, Carolyn, and Courtni.

There have been 15 people at all Capclaves going back 19 years for which we have records. That's too few to order ribbons for.

Secretary Sam L. read the minutes. Mark asked if the 2-year contract was at the same hotel. Yes. Treasurer ZenLizard said we had approximately the same amount in our various accounts as last meeting. 2 CDs matured and we're flipping money around on that. Some stuff is in transit. We do have some hefty reimbursements for Colette coming up. He doesn't have the receipts for those yet. Bob deposited some new vendor checks that are not yet included in the bank numbers. He does not have the new Capclave registration numbers

There was discussion about the Capclave con suite Mark said, "I just got the injection for the left hip, and but the last month or so my right leg, presumably because of the left hip, has been having giving me real serious grief. So I'm not, and I've got all the walking for world, Con, so I don't let I don't know. I can't say." Zen said he has a budget for the con suite but can play around with it. Elizabeth said she thought the con suite budget would need around \$\$\$\$. Sam L. pointed out that would be more than X 2023's \$\$\$ budget. People blamed Trump's tariffs. Carolyn pointed out that the \$\$\$ did not include soda which Elizabeth said has gone up significantly. We settled on \$\$\$\$. Sam L. asked for the overall budget. Gary and Elizabeth volunteered to buy stuff for the con suite. Gary will try to buy stuff in NJ. Sam reminded people that everything has to be prepacked due to county laws, but natural packaging like a banana peel counts.



Sam L. said he is in contact with the program participants. We have about 55. "We put together various program items. What I'm going to do this weekend is, put all those program items into Zambia and send out the 1st round of requests for people to fill out. "Courtnei said she has a copy of the old instructions for how to use Zambia. Paul will look for a recent copy. Courtnei volunteered to edit the program items. Carolyn said she is two-thirds done with the restaurant guide. Joe's House of Noodles is closed. They went back to Taiwan. Wegman's is open. "What everybody needs to know is that the Safeway is closed. There's supposed to be an Asian grocery store going in, but that hasn't even started yet. The Safeway is still in the process of closing down. But what it does mean is that if anybody wants coffee after the Starbucks in the hotel closes at 10 o'clock in the

morning on Saturday that the Wegmans only has a coffee machine, not real coffee. So if somebody wanted to actually have real coffee, you have to send them down to Duncan which is probably the closest place that has real coffee." We can't have a coffee machine in the con suite but we can in the green room. Carolyn has her 55th high school reunion so won't be at Capclave. Ginny offered to help with programming. There was a check on emails. Sam L. said he would schedule a Capclave meeting for after Worldcon. Sam L. reminded people to buy their membership and hotel. Program participants can buy additional memberships at half off. Kim needs emails for GoH.

Capclave Future not present. Far Future had nothing to report. Dates for Future Capclaves. Capclave 26 will be October 2nd-4th, Capclave 27 will be Sept 24- 26.

Sam L gave the report on the Committee to Talk SF. Tonight May/June Asimov's if I can figure out how to start the breakout rooms. Third Friday those of us who are not at Worldcon will discuss Clarkesworld. In September 1st Friday, we will discuss the July/August, Asimov's, and 3rd Friday in September will be Capclave, so we won't be having a magazine discussion. Also the Book club we'll be meeting in August 24th, we will discuss Liberty's Daughter by Naomi Kritzer. And then in September we're going to be doing The High Crusade by Paul Anderson, and that would be our regular time September 12th.

Intertivities – The Kennedy Center is doing an improv Dungeons and Dragons adventure called The 20 Sided Tavern. It's very interactive. You have your phone out and they have various questions. Sometimes it's what should they do? A or B? Sometimes it's a little press of these buttons as fast as you can. And they literally roll the dice to see what happens.

Old Business – Next meeting online only. Elizabeth will be hosting First Friday in September and October. We will cover the bylaw amendments at 3rd Friday. Kim pointed out that the 3rd Friday meeting will be online only. So we'll need to do it at the Capclave meeting.

New Business – Someone had brought up that Sean Wallace mentioned having old WSFA Press books. Sam S. got a response from Sean saying what he had were mostly publisher's copies and overruns. Most are not signed. Kim offered to take them. Paul said we have no need of them if they are not limited edition numbered and signed. The unnumbered copies are not worth anything. There was a discussion of tax issues when tabling. There was a discussion about inviting Sean to Capclave separately since he was not a dealer. Bob said he is cutting back on Prime Books. Carolyn wrote up a job description of the Small Press Award. She will send to the Journal. Courtni has the WSFA Small Press Archive.

Announcements. Mark will have a BBQ over Labor Day weekend. Sam S said he is mostly unpacked with the art on walls. There was a discussion about ribbons for Capclave. Perrienne talked about the PSFS choices for the Hugos. Paul Haggerty said that his third novel, The International Criminal Conspiracy, will be debuting at Capclave. Kim reminded people to vote for the Small Press Award as the deadline is Sunday. Judy Newton said the Air and Space Museum opened up 5 new galleries. They are adding more from SF media like R2D2. Meeting adjourned at 9:10.

Review of *The Martians* by David Baron

Reviewed by Samuel Lubell (originally in *Origins* #72)



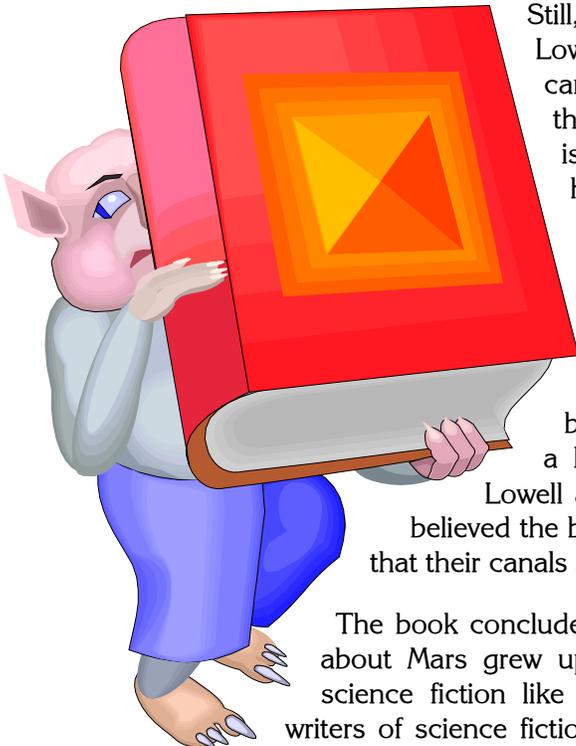
In this book, scientists discover evidence of aliens on Mars. This is covered by major newspapers leading to articles on what life on Mars is like and what they think about Earthlings. This even leads to the Martians getting a Broadway show, a dance craze, and a vaudeville act featuring Mrs. Tom Thumb. However, this book is not a work of science fiction, but actual history. *The Martians* covers earlier views on inhabited planets. Benjamin Franklin wrote "It is the opinion of all the modern philosophers and mathematicians, that the planets are habitable worlds." In 1891 a French widow, Anne-Emilie-Clara Gouget Guzman, left 100,000 francs to any astronomer who can communicate with any planet." French astronomer Camille Flammarion insisted that this was possible. So, it was not unbelievable when astronomers began claiming to see evidence of intelligent life on Mars, starting in 1892.

Much of *The Martians* focuses on Percival Lowell, a rich dilettante from a prominent New England family (his brother was president of Harvard University) who reinvented himself as an astronomer who claimed to see canals on Mars that were evidence of intelligent life there. While the original claim of canals on Mars



was due to a mistranslation when Italian astronomer Giovanni Schiaparelli wrote of “canali” Italian for channels, Lowell claimed to see actual canals carrying water from the polar ice caps (as part of an irrigation system). He built the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona, wrote articles and books, and gave lectures promoting his ideas.

By 1909, respected scientists and businessmen believed in life on Mars. Alexander Graham Bell stated that the evidence showed “Mars is inhabited by a highly civilized and intelligent race of beings.” J. P. Morgan financed an interplanetary radio transmitter to learn the Martians’ wisdom. Even Tesla got involved, saying he had invented devices that could send electronic signals to Mars and receive signals from that planet.



Still, as more evidence accumulated that the canals were not there, Lowell developed increasingly elaborate explanations, saying that the canals were invisible sometimes because they carried water from the polar ice caps that only melt under certain conditions. So, this is evidence of a superior culture, more advanced than Earth humans. The newspapers picked up this vision of a superior race with artists making their own depictions of Martians.

H.G. Wells’ *War of the Worlds*, originally appearing in 1897 took advantage of this Mars mania in describing an invasion of Martians who are more advanced than us Earthlings. The book briefly mentions the public response to the 1938 radio adaption by Orson Welles. Listeners’ belief that the broadcast is real makes a lot more sense in light of earlier news coverage of claims by Lowell and others. David Baron even quotes one listener who said she believed the broadcast, since science had proven that there is life on Mars and that their canals show they might be more advanced than us.

The book concludes with a discussion on how children who absorbed these ideas about Mars grew up to become scientists like Robert Goddard and inventors of science fiction like Hugo Gernsback. The author writes, “Many twentieth-century writers of science fiction also traced their inspiration to childhood fervor about Mars.” The book especially cites Edmond Hamilton “a pioneer of the subgenre known as space opera, the spark came at age four when he stumbled on H.G. Wells’s winged, angelic Martians in *Cosmopolitan Magazine*.” H.P. Lovecraft even attended one of Lowell’s lectures.

Help the Almighty Algorithm

The August Third Friday meeting (8/15/25) was online only. Attendance included Sam L., Aaron, Judy N, Kim, ZenLizard, Jim T, Madeleine, Bill, Frances, Judy K, Greg, Michael I, and Courtni. Many other members including the President were at Worldcon.

VP Kim Hargan opened the meeting at 8:15. Sec Sam L. read the minutes. We decided to deal with the Bylaws amendments at Capclave, the next live MD meeting.

Zen the treasurer said he paid out expenses including \$\$\$ for Collette for reimbursement of hotel expense and reimbursing Naomi Kritzer for travel expenses. Treasury is \$\$\$ up ## Capclave memberships since early August. Capclave membership are below last year with ## total, ## short of last year. Kim pointed out that everything is down.

Capclave Present. Sam L. said he sent out the questionnaire to program participants. The deadline is today so he’ll send out reminders as necessary. There were some Zambia issues. He’s sending out individual passwords. Everyone needs to talk up Capclave to their friends. He will work with Elizabeth to send emails to people who

have attended past Capclaves. A Capclave meeting is scheduled for Sunday the 24th at 2 pm. Capclave Future was not present. Courtni for Far Future was present but had nothing to report.

There was a question as to who were the current trustees. Courtni and Aaron were present but had nothing to report.

The Small Press Award votes have been tallied and the winner has been determined. Committee to Discuss SF will meet in a breakout room to discuss the current month's *Clarkesworld*. September First Friday will be the July/August issue of *Asimov's*. Third Friday will be Capclave so everyone will be busy. First Friday in October will be *F & SF* if they produce an issue <as of typing this in late November, they still hadn't> or else *Analog*.

For Social Media, Sarah posted about the Small Press Award finalists in the usual places. A lot of people congratulated the finalists. Everyone should like our posts on social media and say nice things, because that helps the almighty algorithm show it to other people. Like, share, you know, the old adage, everyone's in sales.

Intertivities. The Library of Congress Book Festival is a week before Capclave so it would be helpful if people would go to that and distribute bookmarks and talk up Capclave.

No Old Business. Sam L said he sent the Bylaws to the email list and will send a reminder before Capclave. Kim said, "That will be the second reading. We had the first reading at the meeting at the bungalow on July 4th. This will be the required second reading and discussion before we can vote on them and make them permanent." Sam L. told people to talk up Capclave. Greg had his 50th high school reunion. Meeting adjourned 8:31.

