

# MMXX in Review

## The Bird's Nest West

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We should have known that 2020 would be an odd year by the way it began for us. Normally we would have welcomed in the year at home in Monmouth with a traditional drive on New Year's morning over to the Mississippi River to look for eagles. But this year, the Society for Classical Studies and the Archaeological Institute of America decided, in their great wisdom, to begin their annual meeting in Washington, D.C. on January 1<sup>st</sup>. Since Tom is currently a Society Trustee for AIA he had no choice but to be there. So we modified our holiday habits, reluctantly took down our Christmas tree in late December (instead of leaving it up, as per custom, until after Epiphany) and headed East to spend New Year's Eve in Salem, Virginia, with Julia, Victor and their daughter Dorothy. Then, since Victor is also an AIA member, all five of us headed up to D.C. early on New Year's Day. On the way Tom and Anne had lunch with Tom's sister MaryBeth and her daughter Tracy at Tracy's apartment in northern Virginia. Once in DC, Anne enjoyed quality grandmother time with Dorothy while the rest of us acted professional. (Anne had the better deal!)

After the meetings, we drove back to Salem to celebrate Epiphany. The Three Kings (with the help of grandparents) caused great excitement by leaving Dorothy a brand new bicycle. It snowed enough for Dorothy and Victor to build several snowpeople, but the snow melted quickly and Dorothy spent many happy hours during our visit learning how to ride her bike.

In mid-February Julia had a professional meeting in Chicago so Tom and Anne drove up from Monmouth to grandparent while Julia was otherwise engaged. We spent one afternoon chasing dinosaurs at the Field Museum and another afternoon at the Shedd Aquarium where the lung fish was a special hit. On Feb. 14 Marie and her daughters drove into Chicago and the three cousins had a wild time making valentines and cavorting together in the hotel pool.

Later in February, Tom had a meeting in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and persuaded Anne to fly out with him. While in Albuquerque they took the Roadrunner train up to Santa Fe for the day. Another afternoon they took the Sandia Peak Tramway up into the Cibola National Forest where they enjoyed splendid mountain views and an excellent lunch. And, yes, Tom eventually did give his paper entitled "Penelope in the 21st Century: Atwood's *Penelopiad* and Malerba's *Ithaca Forever*."

In early March we drove up to St. Paul to help Jessica celebrate her birthday, but little did we realize at the time that COVID was soon to change life in so many unexpected ways.....

For many months, Tom had been busy planning the annual meeting of the Classical Assn of the Middle West and South (CAMWS), scheduled for the end of March in Birmingham, Alabama, but, by the time, he and Anne got home from St. Paul, it was very clear that the physical meeting would have to be cancelled. Fortunately, the contract Tom had signed with the hotel actually had a pandemic clause so no CAMWS in Birmingham! (Unfortunate for the hotel, but lucky for CAMWS).

Cancelling the meeting in Birmingham meant that Tom had to spend several weeks transforming the meeting into a virtual one in May via Zoom. That was quite a challenge and confirmed Tom's view that he was very fortunate to have retired from the classroom before COVID created so many pedagogical challenges.



(He doesn't think he could have coped with teaching courses via Zoom.) The virtual meeting, at least was a success, attended by more than 600 people instead of the 500 expected in Birmingham.

Just before COVID closed the world, Julia and Dorothy flew to Italy to spend spring break with Victor, who was teaching in Italy this year. They had a few glorious days in Italy before they realized that they had to leave as soon as possible. No easy task as all the borders started to close, but, with the help of the US Consulate in Rome they eventually managed to fly home. After quarantining in Salem for two weeks, they all headed west to spend COVIDtime in Illinois. (Since their classes were now virtual, they could teach them from anywhere and Victor's family needed him in Rockford.)

So, although we were kept from celebrating Easter in church this year, we did have a five-year-old to liven things up with an Easter egg hunt. Dorothy also spent a lot of time helping Tom plant his garden. She seems to be a born gardener and actually enjoys not only planting but hoeing and weeding. (She is a terror with dandelions.)

Another unfortunate result of COVID was the cancellation of a May trip to Italy. We were supposed to accompany Julia and fifteen Roanoke College students on a Grand Tour of Rome and Florence. Tom would have served as a chaperone and Anne was going to grandparent Dorothy. After Italy we were also planning a visit to our friends Viv and Chris in Britain, but, obviously, all that was not to be. COVID has also ended our daily breakfast chats with our friends Bill and Jackie Urban.

We did manage some socially-careful visits with Marie and her daughters in COVIDtime. In April Marie brought the girls to Monmouth to celebrate Tom's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday with homegrown strawberry icing on his cake, and, in summer, we met twice at the Klehm Arboretum and Botanical Garden in Rockford (about halfway between Monmouth and Marie's home in Mundelein), where we celebrated first Phoebe's birthday and later Marie's. In between these two visits, Sylvia had her first stayover with us in Monmouth. She and Dorothy had a high old time.

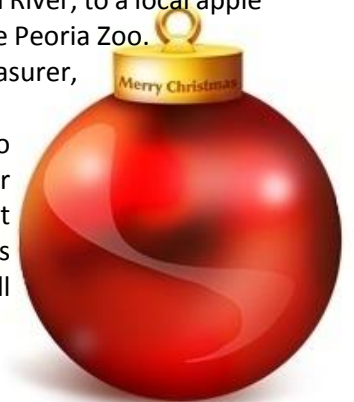
In July Julia and Dorothy drove out with us to spend several weeks in Maine. We had tested negative for COVID before we left but staying at our camp in Jefferson, even in good times, is pretty isolated anyway. We spent hours swimming in the lake and teaching Dorothy how to swim. By the end of our stay she was finally a full-fledged swimmer. Luckily we saw a lot of Anne's family while otherwise keeping a low profile.

In mid-August we returned to Illinois while Julia and Dorothy went back to Virginia with Victor. By the time we got home, our garden was flourishing. We had had bumper crops of strawberries, cherries, and cucumbers before we went to Maine and returned in late summer to incredible crops of leeks, beans, and tomatoes. Even the brussels sprouts produced profusely. Tom and Dorothy harvested them together at Thanksgiving.

This fall we have mostly stayed close to home, where Tom has been swimming at the local Y in socially distanced circumstances and canning 100 qts of tomato sauce. Anne has been concentrating on processing garden bounty while writing weekly letters to "the kids." She can also claim testing some new recipes (using tomatoes, leeks and green beans) and producing several "twiddling" projects. We have made a few afternoon excursions around western Illinois, to the Mississippi River, to a local apple orchard, to the Wolf Covered Bridge on Spoon River Drive in Knox Co. and to the Peoria Zoo.

On September 30 Tom fulfilled his last obligations as CAMWS Secretary-Treasurer, and is now officially in full retirement, thank goodness.

Just before Thanksgiving Julia, Victor and Dorothy came from Virginia to Illinois and will stay until sometime in early January. So we were not alone for Thanksgiving and the same will hopefully be true for Christmas. So we can't complain. COVID has so far been not more than an inconvenience for us. Others have had much more trouble. We know many acquaintances who were very ill with the disease and others who have fared far worse.



**Best Wishes for a Happier (COVID-free) 2021  
from Anne and Tom Sienkewicz**