

THE INSTITUTE FOR HISTORICAL STUDY

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NEWSLETTER

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The NEWSLETTER is sent to all Institute members, as well as college and university libraries and other interested scholars. The Institute appreciates all tax deductible contributions made by non-members who wish to remain on its mailing list.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I hope to see many of you very soon, at our panel presentation on the WPA on September 14, 6 p.m. at the San Francisco Public Library, and our annual potluck, September 25, 1-4 p.m. at Georgia Wright's home. Bring a guest who's a potential member if you can!

Besides your other work in history, I want to encourage you all to remember personal and family history. Both my parents died this year, my mother very recently. I have found it fascinating going through letters and newspaper clippings my grandmother saved, copies of the letters my mom sent to relatives for years as my brothers and I were growing up, photos of ancestors and so on. I was able to tape some of my father's reminiscences about his early life several years ago. He and my mother both made some effort to write memoirs, but didn't get very far into it before their health deteriorated. So while you're still healthy and your memory intact (or more so than it may be later), think about taking the time to write or dictate some of your own personal history. You don't have to have been someone "important" to have stories and details that will be appreciated by at least some of your descendants.

There is a growing number of professional Personal Historians who can help you—or maybe you'd like to become one! See www.personalhistorians.org. Whether you do something elaborate like an illustrated print-to-order book or just organize some files, write a paragraph at a time, and label old family photos, there's no time like the present to start.

Ann Harlow

MEETING AT CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

On June 20, the Institute presented “**Things You May Not Know About California History**,” a program hosted by the California Historical Society in the handsome meeting room of its headquarters on Mission St. in San Francisco. CHS executive director David Crosson offered a warm welcome to the gathering and turned the meeting over to the moderator Edith Piness, an active member of both organizations.

Maria Sakovich began the program with a talk titled “In the Fillmore District and Beyond: Businesses of Russian Refugee Immigrants between 1920 and World War II,” illustrated with historical photographs. Though both the Jewish and Japanese pre-World War II Fillmore District “footprints” are remembered today, the Russian presence has been forgotten. In the wake of the Bolshevik revolution and ensuing civil war, this new wave of Russian immigrants — generally well-educated—settled in the Fillmore, feeling at home in part because of its Russian-speaking Jewish residents who had arrived earlier. Maria noted that despite their education and former social status, most found any work they could. A few took up shop-keeping and other small businesses. In addition to selling a variety of goods, most frequently groceries but also books, jewelry, furniture, and operating restaurants, these new entrepreneurs were also physicians, dentists, dressmakers, and music teachers. Maria concluded with a few biographical details.

Robert Oaks brought to life “Joseph Heco and San Francisco: The Tale of a Japanese Castaway, 1851-1859.” Taken aboard an American ship after their own boat lost its mast and was foundering, Heco and his shipmates at first feared that their rescuers might slaughter and eat them. (Japan was still closed to the west, and myths about our alien world abounded.) Instead, in Gold Rush San Francisco they became instant celebrities. Heco, who was only fourteen, had a quick, open mind and adapted to his new

environment. With help from a U. S. Customs Collector, and later from California Senator William Gwin, he learned English and traveled across the country. In Washington he became the first Japanese to meet an American president. Indeed, Franklin Pierce was only the first; he later met James Buchanan and Abraham Lincoln. On his second trip to Washington, Heco became a naturalized citizen, the very first Japanese-American. When he finally returned to Japan, he became a translator at the US consulate and went into business for himself, one of only a handful of people in the world at that time who spoke both Japanese and English—a remarkable outcome for a one-time castaway.

Anne Homan and her co-author, Richard W. Finn, described “Vasco’s Livermore, 1910: Caricatures by an Itinerant Artist,” the subject of their recently published book. How a young Australian with a Portuguese surname, traveling around the world “on his pen,” came to the small East Bay town of Livermore remains a mystery. But in putting together the charming collection of forty-four caricatures signed “Vasco,” the authors solved other mysteries. All of the subjects were Livermore residents and habitués of the Hub saloon, but some were a challenge to identify. Few of the drawings included the full names of their subjects. The rest had to be identified from nicknames, contemporary photographs, or clues left by the artist. A shamrock on the lapel of a bearded, cigar-smoking, bowler-hatted gentleman with a toy lamb turned out (after much research) to be Irish-born George Johnston, an early sheep raiser in the area. The result of the authors’ labors is a capsule history of Livermore that might otherwise have been lost.

The speakers fielded questions during the discussion period and informally at the reception that followed.

Joanne Lafler

WORKS-IN-PROGRESS

“The Fault: Quakes, Slides, & the Lawrence Berkeley Lab”

The Institute’s works-in-progress usually bring members together to listen and discuss a chapter, a presentation, or other work in a formative stage. About a dozen of us, however, gathered in July in the living room of **Georgia Wright** to view her video “long finished and distributed to friends, UC Regents, the Lab, and the Secretary of the DOE, and viewed by hundreds of visitors to the Save Strawberry Canyon website.” This special viewing of “The Fault: Quakes, Slides, and the Lawrence Berkeley Lab” highlighted the many ways historians work and the various possibilities for communicating with the public. It also reenforced the value of getting together to share sources and ideas, even after a work is complete. For this “work-in-progress” report, I asked Georgia to explain how video has enhanced her history projects and how her skills as a historian helped her take on this contemporary issue.

Why make a video? As some of you know, I began making videos around 1988—two on medieval churches. It’s fun to work with others, to test ideas, to find that a Steadicam (video camera), moving, can bring to life a complex space like an ambulatory around a choir. My mentor, Charles Ragland, having introduced me to the medium, guided the editing of these. It takes eight hours of work, including voice and music editing, to produce a minute of video. When I became co-director of the Limestone Sculpture Provenance Project, which uses neutron activation analysis to try to match stone from an “orphan” piece of sculpture in a museum to its original building or region, I reached again for video to explain the process—the irradiation, the analysis, the role of the art historian—to art historians and curators. The video helped me write the brochure for the project and explain to the mystified what we were doing. So when I joined the Board of Save Strawberry Canyon, I reached for the camera once more.

What motivated you as a historian to get involved in this project and what skills as a historian helped you? I walk in Strawberry Canyon on the Jordan Fire Trail almost every day and have since 1992. I couldn’t help but notice the amazing habitat and its salubrious effect on the two-footed creatures that share it. I’m putting my research/analysis/whatever skills to work in writing responses to Environmental Impact Reports. I’m delving into the geology with the guidance of my 93-year-old guru, Garniss Curtis. Also, it certainly helps to be unafraid of writing!

Part of the discussion after viewing the video centered on suggestions for strategies for Save Strawberry Canyon. As we have all discovered over and over again, archivists and librarians are worth their weight in gold. **Kathleen O’Conner**, formerly employed at the National Archives, Pacific Region, in San Bruno, remembered that the records for the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory are part of the NARA collection there, probably “some facilities records among the administration records.” “A great breakthrough” commented **Ellen Huppert**.

Maria Sakovich/Georgia Wright

“Treasures of the Federal Writers’ Project”

In preparation for her participation at the Institute’s program at the San Francisco Public Library on September 14, **Joanne Lafler** gave an informative and spirited presentation on the Federal Writers’ Project of the 1930s. She described the origins of the FWP, meant to give work to needy writers, editors, historians, art and architecture critics, archeologists, and others. Not all of them were talented or accomplished, though some came to prominence later, for example, Richard Wright, Studs Terkel, Saul Bellow, Claude McKay, and Zora Neale Hurston. Aesthetics took second place to need in the selection of writers, and

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their pay was set lower than private sector work but above public assistance.

The program was directed from Washington, DC. Each state had its own office—California had two, one in Los Angeles and one in San Francisco—and the chief directive was to produce a state guidebook. These state guides had to conform to certain criteria and cover certain areas dictated by the national office, but were also to capture the distinctive quality of each state. They were richer and more comprehensive than any guide books before them. (Joanne discovered on a recent trip that her AA travel guide had nothing to say about Wallingford, Connecticut, a bedroom community of New Haven, but the FWP Guide contained a rich description.) Meticulously researched and carefully and often elegantly produced, they were published by commercial presses, and sold well. They were revised and went into extra printings. There were additional publications put out by the FWP covering regions or individual cities, as well as other kinds of materials.

Joanne described the FWP's encounters with political forces on both the right and the left. The San Francisco office came under suspicion of being a "hotbed of Communism," perhaps not entirely unjustified. Other critics questioned the efficacy of the project over the long time it took to produce tangible results from the research and writing.

For Joanne the FWP guidebooks offer a "time capsule" view of a very different America before WW II and define "what writers of the late 1930s valued and how they looked at their world." She cited the assessment of Victorian houses in San Francisco in the California guide—"an inferior form of architecture"—the same houses we have come to appreciate as "The Painted Ladies." For her talk she will highlight San Francisco and Northern California as described by the FWP.

Cornelia Levine

Postscript on Guide Books. Talk about

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synchronicity! On the day after my discussion of the guide books published by the Federal Writers Project, **Hyshka Stross** read an article about another guide book that was published in the 1930s. *The Negro Motorist Green Book* was designed for travelers who needed to know not only which route to take or which sights to see but where, during the years of Jim Crow, it was possible "eat, sleep, buy gas, find a tailor or beauty parlor, shop on a honeymoon to Niagara Falls, or go out at night." Victor H. Green, a Harlem postal employee, published "the Green book," as it came to be known, from 1936 until 1964. My thanks to Hyshka for sharing this important piece of American history. The article can be read in full in the *New York Times*, August 23, section C1, p. 1.

Joanne Lafler

History-Play Reading Group

The Play Readers moved forward through two millennia. As reported in the last issue of the Newsletter, the group completed reading Jean Racine's *Britannicus*, set in the year 55, and moved up to the early 20th century to read Albert Camus' *The Just Assassins (Les Justes)*.

Camus was born in 1913 in Algeria, then a French colony. He had a difficult, impoverished childhood. With the encouragement of a teacher who recognized his potential, he won a competitive grant to enter the Grand Lycee in Paris in 1924. Later, he entered the University of Algiers. There he suffered a debilitating attack of tuberculosis, whose effects remained with him for the rest of his life. Camus published his first two books in 1937. During WW II he lived in France as well as Algeria, where he worked for the Resistance. Upon the liberation of Paris he was awarded a medal for his efforts. He wrote *Les Justes* in 1949, and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957. He died in a car accident in 1960.

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The Just Assassins is set in Moscow in 1905. All but one of the characters are based on historical figures. In the play, Camus addresses the moral issues associated with terrorism and murder, questioning whether revolt against injustice can ever justify killing another person. The individual in question here is the Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich of Russia, uncle of Tsar Nicholas II. On February 15, 1905, the Duke and his family attended a concert at the Bolshoi Theatre. Ivan Kaliayev, a member of the revolutionary socialist group planning to assassinate him, held back and did not throw the bomb as he did not wish to kill the Duke's wife and children.

The action of the play includes wonderful dialogue among the group of revolutionaries as to what is tolerable, what is not, in fomenting revolution. Two days later Kaliayev carries out the plot when the Duke is alone in his carriage, literally blowing him to bits. He is arrested and imprisoned. Several days later the Grand Duke's widow insisted on visiting him in prison. An Orthodox Christian, she tried to persuade him to repent to save his soul. Kaliayev refused, convinced of the rectitude of his act, the love of his compatriots, and his need of punishment for taking a life. He was hanged on May 23, 1905. The play ends with a passionate speech by Kaliayev's lover, Dora, which shows that the conspirators, in their fanaticism, are out of touch with political reality.

At its next meeting in September (Saturday, the 20th, 1 pm at Monica Clyde's), the group will read G.B. Shaw's *Good King Charles's Golden Days*. We welcome all interested members.

Edith L. Piness

The Biography Writers' Group continues to meet, with members sharing their work for comments. We welcome new members - just let me know. *Ellen Hupper*

MEMBER NEWS

In Memoriam: Ann Marie Koller

With a personal sense of loss I learned of the death of Ann Marie Koller on June 11. As well as being a longtime member of the Institute, Ann Marie was a friend and colleague. Theater history professor Dunbar Ogden introduced us many years ago, rightly imagining that she would be an inspiration to a new PhD. While teaching high school German in the 1950s she returned to graduate school at Stanford and completed her dissertation on Georg II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen (1826-1914), popularly known as "the theatre duke." (Where most men in his position were happy merely to patronize their court theaters and leave the real work to a hired "intendant," Georg II was active in all aspects rehearsal and production, including new methods of staging that influenced the course of European theater.)

Research for her dissertation—published by Stanford University Press in 1984 as *The Theatre Duke: Georg II of Saxe-Meiningen and the German Stage*—led Ann Marie to archival materials in the East German State Library and the Meiningen Theater Museum. While completing her dissertation she also translated a life of Georg II. Her work was widely respected. Dunbar Ogden notes that "she was one of a handful of American theater historians whose internationalism embraced Continental European theater."

At ninety-six, Ann Marie's enthusiasm for life and work remained undimmed. On our last visit we talked about her biography of the dancer-actress Tilly Losch and the memoirs she was writing about her childhood in the rural northwest. I was fortunate to know, and will always remember, this inspiring woman.

Joanne Lafler

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Autumn Stanley has just learned that the *Ohio Farmer*, a journal published since the 1880s and subscribed to by her grandfather, is going to publish a much-abbreviated version of her “Orchard Wizard,” an article about her Grandfather Sanders, which she is calling “An Ohio Farmer.” It will come out this winter. Autumn also reports that her recently published *Raising Hell and Fewer Dahlias: The Public Life of Charlotte Smith* will not become an “orphan book.” Rowman & Littlefield, the company that’s taking over distribution of books has decided to purchase the whole remaining inventory of *Dahlias*. She is relieved to know that she *won’t* have all the responsibility for marketing, publicity, and distribution.

A new book this month from **Jackie Pels’** Hardscratch Press is *Homesteaders in the Headlights: One family’s Journey from a Depression-era New Jersey Farm to a New Life in Wasilla, Alaska*, by George Harbeson Jr. (The Harbeson family’s saga predates the Wasilla mayoralty of Sarah Palin, but her future father-in-law has passing mention as a high school basketball coach.)

Amy Essington presented “Crossing Borders to Play Baseball: Pacific Coast League Players in Latin American Leagues,” at the American Historical Association’s Pacific Coast Branch Conference in Santa Clara, California (August 2010). Her entry on the “Portland Beavers” for the Oregon Encyclopedia is available at <http://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/>. Her short review of *No Girls in the Clubhouse: The Exclusion of Women from Baseball* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, 2009) was published in *Women’s Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*.

Cornelia Levine reports that a paperback version of the first half of the book of letters to FDR that she did together with her husband, Lawrence W. Levine, has been issued by UC

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Press under the title *The Fireside Conversations: America Responds To FDR During The Great Depression*. This paperback covers the New Deal part of *The People and the President: America’s Conversation with FDR*, which was published by Beacon Press in 2002.

WHEN THE WATER CAME UP TO MONTGOMERY STREET: SAN FRANCISCO DURING THE GOLD RUSH

Charles Fracchia’s engaging book focuses on the dynamic growth of San Francisco in the years following the California Gold Rush. Though many distinguished books have chronicled this astonishing movement of peoples—J.S. Holliday’s *The World Rushed In* and *Rush for Riches* prominent among them—here the author concentrates on those particular aspects of the discovery of gold near Sacramento which led to the development of San Francisco, and traces characteristics of the modern city back to that heady era. The provocative title comes from Bret Harte’s *A Ward of the Golden Gate*, in which a speaker talks of living in the city seven years earlier and another comments, “When the water came up to Montgomery Street.”

In “Before There Was Gold,” the dynamic first chapter of the book, the author draws an intriguing picture of the small trading village of Yerba Buena before 1848. Its small population of Natives and Californios had already begun to grow after the U.S. takeover in 1846. Delightful illustrations and maps are nicely matched with the text. The second chapter, “The Discovery of Gold,” recounts John Marshall’s momentous discovery at Sutter’s Mill on January 24, 1848, and the subsequent spread of the news to the whole country and ultimately to the world, with comments by then-President Polk predicting great changes in California.

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The filling in of Yerba Buena Cove and the expansion of the town is vividly described in the following chapters. Several of the fine prints show us the dramatic, almost instant growth of the city, now called San Francisco, with abandoned ships on the horizon. Although Fracchia provides us with splendid illustrations of the booming—and sadly, frequently burning—city and the many vessels in the harbor, he does not go into any detail about what was carried on them, or about research on those still buried beneath the city. Nonetheless, the sweeping panorama of the rise of the city is breathtaking. My attention was captured by a photograph showing City Hall right next to the Eldorado gambling casino, the kind of juxtaposition that vividly characterized San Francisco.

While the myriad illustrations often complement the fine narrative, this is not always the case. As the book goes on, there seems to be a disconnect between illustrations and text that can become confusing, as in the sections on the Volunteer Fire Departments and the Vigilance Committees. Here the photos of events described do not appear for many pages and thus seem out of context. A small point, but a frustrating one.

It is Charles Fracchia's touching belief that much of "San Francisco's liberal, tolerant and inclusive politics" (p.9) has its roots in the diversity of the population that arrived at the same time from all parts of the U.S. and the world during the Gold Rush. He does not ignore the cultural conflicts, describing in some detail, for example, the "Hounds" who preyed upon Hispanics, and the rise of Vigilance Committees at various times in the 1850s. The author's thesis is an appealing one, and it is indeed possible to see a direct connection between today's San Francisco and the early intermingling of people from so many diverse backgrounds, people who might never have

encountered one another in a more traditional society. However, one cannot overlook the fact that violence and discrimination abounded as well—the activities of the aforementioned Hounds, the anti-Chinese brutality, the mistreatment of the natives, the appropriation of property from Californio families.

The overall effect of the book is powerful. One is transported back, almost viscerally, to the early days of San Francisco. The author describes the growth of the economy outside of gold, the rise of finance and of trade. He takes account of the egregious corruption and volatility in the brand-new city. The reader is pained at the recounting of the endless fires, cheered by the continuous rebuilding. In *When the Water Came Up to Montgomery Street* Charles Fracchia takes us on a wonderful odyssey, and fills a special niche in recording the dynamic birth of this very special city which, if not quite like Athena springing from the head of Zeus, was nearly as dramatic.

Edith L. Piness

CALENDAR

September 14	Special Program at San Francisco Public Library: The WPA
September 25	Potluck Lunch
October 23	California Round Table
November 13	Annual Dinner

Members are encouraged to let us know all their news – a paper being given at a conference; a new job or position; the awarding of a grant or fellowship. Please send all material for the NEWSLETTER either by e-mail to msakovich@juno or to the Institute's postal address given below. Also, we welcome the opportunity to review members' newly published books. Contact **Autumn Stanley** at autumn_stanley@sbcglobal.net. The deadline for the next NEWSLETTER is **December 31, 2010**.

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