

THE INSTITUTE FOR HISTORICAL STUDY

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NEWSLETTER

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THE INSTITUTE is affiliated with the National Coalition of Independent Scholars (NCIS), the American Historical Association (AHA), and the National Coalition for History (NCH).

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

One of the most "fun" events in previous years for Institute members has been the Pot Luck gathering which usually occurs some time after Labor Day and marks both the end of the summer hiatus and the beginning of the Fall/Winter activities of the Institute. It is social, it provides members with the opportunity to connect with other members they don't usually see, and it means lots of good food, which, next to history, is a key reason for the organization's existence.

This year's Pot Luck was held at the beautiful home of the Institute's Vice President, **Patricia Swensen**, located on a hill overlooking a lovely valley and some of the coastal range which acts as a boundary for the Ross Valley in central Marin County. It was not as well attended as some in the past, and those of us who were there were not exactly certain why this was. It was a beautiful day, the views were breath-taking, and the food, as usual, was well worth the trip. Those who were there were able to talk with people interested in different aspects of history, which doesn't usually happen, and everyone who was there---spouses and partners, as well as members--- had the opportunity to visit about what they were working on and how it was going. This is part of the collegiality that makes the Institute so special, and I urge as many of you as possible to make a point of attending next year's Pot Luck, particularly the new members of the Institute, who will be struck by the variety of interests and activities of the people they will meet who have been members for awhile.

The Institute's other social event this year was our Annual Dinner, held on Saturday, November 17, at the home of **Georgia Wright**. As always, there was delicious food (catered on this occasion), collegial conversation as well as a program. A description of the program can be found on page five in the report from the History-Play Readers Group.

Jules Becker

MUSEUM TOUR

THE JUDAH L. MAGNES MUSEUM

A small group of Institute members took advantage of a special visit to the Judah L. Magnes Museum in Berkeley on Sunday, September 16. The first part of the visit was guided by a well-informed docent, Yaira Urban, who showed us the two exhibits on display. "Revisions: Shahrokh Yadegari: Through Music" features a musical composition commissioned from Shahrokh Yadegari for the event. The text is the ancient Priestly Benediction and the music is heard as visitors view three artifacts: a Judeo-Persian miniature of Joseph interpreting Pharaoh's dream; a brass basin from Russia used in the blessing service, and a photo. The exhibition will remain until July 6, 2008. The second, larger exhibition, is "They Called Me Mayer July: Painted Memories of a Jewish Childhood in Poland before the Holocaust." A remarkable series of drawings and paintings by Mayer Kirshenblatt documents the artist's memories of his youth in Opatow, Poland, between 1916 and 1934, when he emigrated to Canada. The artist only began painting when he was over 70 years old, but his visual memory of childhood scenes is evident. This exhibition will be at the Magnes until January 13, 2008. Most of our time was spent in the Western Jewish History Center, an archive and library. This valuable research resource includes materials related to prominent western Jewish families, records of self-help societies such as the Jewish Welfare Federation, and records of social service organizations such as the Jewish Community Center of San Francisco. There are also marriage and burial registers, especially of interest to genealogical researchers. The materials in the Western Jewish History Center are particularly interesting to historians of the Jewish experience, but they are also important for scholars of the social history of the Bay Area. The numerous organizations created by the Jewish community, ranging from hospitals to charitable groups to social groups, reflect the response of the Jewish community to the needs of its members. The Institute visitors found the visit very worth while.

Ellen Huppert

WORK-IN-PROGRESS

SAN ANSELMO HISTORICAL DIORAMA

Standing at the intersection of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard and Red Hill Road, the casual visitor sees no obvious evidence that San Anselmo was once a railroad town. But at the work-in-progress meeting at the home of **Patricia Swensen** on October 21, we learned that this was the junction of two railroad lines that carried passengers and freight from Sausalito and San Rafael to Cazadero, in Sonoma County, until the early 1940s. Patricia is known to us for her scholarly work in modern British history. However, she is now a San Anselmo Historical Museum commissioner and involved in an exciting new project—the creation of a diorama of the business center of San Anselmo as it would have looked circa 1915 (Patricia is very particular about the "circa"). Her partner in this project is her husband Chuck, an experienced creator of detailed railroad models. At the moment, the diorama, which measures 6 x 3 feet, "lives" at the Swensens' home. When it is completed, it will stand in the center of the gallery of the San Anselmo Historical Museum. The diorama demonstrates the importance of the railroad to the development of San Anselmo. After the 1906 earthquake the town grew rapidly. Its name was changed from Junction to San Anselmo in 1907, but the railroad remained the main reason for its existence. By 1915, the downtown area had begun to look somewhat like it does today; a number of buildings from that period are still recognizable, including the Library, the Town Hall and the Cheda Building. The sources used for reconstructing the buildings that no longer exist were Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for San Anselmo for 1909 and 1919 and a Northwestern Pacific Railroad construction drawing from 1916. The museum's photographic collection provided clues to exterior details, as did old issues of the *San Anselmo Herald*. Once they had the footprints for the buildings, Patricia and Chuck used sophisticated computer software, to meet the challenge of producing three-dimensional scale models. To learn more, consult www.sananselmohistory.org.

Joanne Lafler

"MYSTERIES AS HISTORIES"

Three writers of historical mysteries, Rhys Bowen, Ann Parker, and Steven Saylor, faced questions asked by Moderator **Lyn Reese** at the "Mysteries as Histories" program presented by the Institute and the San Francisco Public Library at the library's Koret Auditorium on the evening of November 8. Lyn introduced the program by noting that many readers appreciate the ways that historical fiction helps to bring the past to life. She quoted from Steven's latest work, *Roma*: "All history contains an element of fiction." Good authors, she said, like the three on the panel who create engaging historical mysteries, often are either trained historians or become very credible experts in the period they write about. Commenting that these writers were in fact historians, Lyn then posed a series of questions that were designed to reflect that aspect of their work.

Rhy Bowen has written six books about Molly Murphy, who begins as an illegal immigrant at Ellis Island early in the 20th century, works to become the first female private investigator in New York City, and later returns to Ireland to work in the freedom movement. Rhys' latest work sets her new heroine, Lady Georgina, trying to "make a go of it" in London during the Depression of the 1930s. Ann Parker is a new author with two books in her series set in the Rocky Mountain town of Leadville, Colorado in the 1880s. This is a lawless wild-west town, and her main character, Inez Stannert, is a saloon keeper whose husband has disappeared and whose business partner is an African-American man. Steven Saylor has written ten books featuring his character Gordianus the Finder, set in the tumultuous last years of the Roman Republic.

When asked "what led you to select the historical period you write about?" the answers varied. Saylor said that he had always been fascinated by ancient Rome ever since he was a child. In college, he majored in history and continued afterward to read books on the topic. A trip to Rome, which "blew his mind," added new depth to his writings. Parker answered by reading a description from a guide-book which inspired her while on a visit to Leadville. She also found an ancestral connection to the area. Bowen credits a tour of Ellis Island as her

inspiration for Molly Murphy, as well as walking the streets of New York and visiting local historical museums .

Next, Lyn asked: "Where did you get ideas for your main characters, and how difficult was it to create characters who would appeal to the modern reader but would not be out of place in the world in which they inhabited?" Saylor replied that there is such a wealth of material on Ancient Rome that finding characters was really quite easy. All powerful leaders had servants who could be used for various missions, slavery was an integral part of the society, and Roman power was spread all over the Mediterranean. He tries to place his characters in situations that readers would find familiar even though the time and place are different. Parker said that her characters were based on facts she uncovered while researching the history of Leadville. Discovering that the two main streets in town were filled with saloons and bawdy houses allowed her to design a character who was faithful to the time, and yet a woman alone and having to make her own way. Bowen said that focusing on an illegal immigrant gave her the opportunity to have her character act independently and to bring a contemporary theme to her work.

The trio were then asked what their most fruitful sources were. Saylor stressed all the "stuff" he has to work with, but mentioned the orations of Cicero, since as a lawyer, Cicero's speeches were given in the law courts. Parker drew upon the newspapers from the time, but she said the most fruitful source was a diary kept by an employee of the railroad, given to her by a man she was interviewing in order to learn how silver was assayed. Bowen also credited newspapers, but talked about a visit to the Tenement Museum in New York City, which gave her insights into the daily life of the people Molly would be meeting and living among.

Approximately fifty people attended the program and the applause at the end showed their appreciation for both an enjoyable and informative evening.

Lorrie O'Dell

CALIFORNIA HISTORY ROUNDTABLE

At the home of **Ellen Huppert** on November 10, **Ann Harlow** read a draft of the article, "Albert Bender, Artists' Patron/Saint," which she is submitting for publication in *The Argonaut*. It begins most engagingly: "Saint Albert of San Francisco; Prince Albert; Mickey Bender; AMB; Albert 'Medici' Bender; Carrissimo Albertino; Bachelor of Arts; Patron saint of artists; The most popular man in San Francisco; The last envoy of *fin de siècle* San Francisco; Chevalier of the Legion of Honor of France; Cavaliere of the Crown of Italy; Honorary Doctor of Laws; Chancellor of Shedonia."

Who would not want to know more about this man of many nicknames—a man, moreover, so intimately connected with the cultural life of the San Francisco Bay Area in the first half of the twentieth century? In the first part of the article Ann enumerates some of his famous connections: Mills College, of which he was a trustee; arts organizations such as the San Francisco Symphony and Opera; museums and art schools; the Book Club of California, of which he was a co-founder; college and university libraries, several of which have rooms that bear his name.

His generosity was out of proportion to the income from his insurance business, on which "he lived comfortably but not ostentatiously." It was said that he gave away ninety percent of what he earned. Never a member of San Francisco's Jewish social elite, he nevertheless did business with wealthy Jewish families and was welcome in their homes. His reputation for probity and his connections—especially with prominent Jewish women who were engaged in charitable work—enabled him to promote favorite projects and charities.

It also helped that he was a colorful figure, diminutive in size but large in personality. The nickname "Mickey" reflected his pride in being Dublin-born. He emphasized his Irish heritage by celebrating his birthday each year on St. Patrick's Day instead of in June; his funeral casket at Temple Emanu-El was draped in green.

Bender came to San Francisco in 1881 at the age of fifteen from England, where his Rabbi father had moved the family. Some of his mother's family—the Bremers—had already settled in San Francisco. His relationship with his first cousin, the artist Anne Bremer, became especially significant. They were deeply attached, but the taboo against first cousin marriage prevented them from marrying. Instead, until Anne's untimely death from leukemia in 1923, they inhabited adjoining apartments in the building that she had converted into studio and living space.

Anne Bremer introduced Bender to the world of modern art, which he began collecting. His donations of these works became the nucleus of the modern art holdings of the San Francisco Museum of Art (later renamed the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art). He also began collecting Asian art. "Besides their inherent beauty," Ann writes, "Bender hoped that Asian art objects would help inspire a greater understanding and tolerance of California's Pacific neighbors." Ann has the task of dealing frankly and fairly with the controversy that arose over the authenticity of some of the pieces that Bender donated to local museums. Alfred Salmony, a distinguished historian of Asian art at Mills College, declared them "unworthy of museum collections, saying Bender had been duped by the importers he had dealt with and that most, if not all, of the items were fakes." Ann plans to look into the accuracy of Salmony's claims.

After Anne Bremer's death, Bender became a friend and patron of the photographer Ansel Adams, raising money for the publication of a portfolio of Adams's work. Adams took him to New Mexico, where he met artists and writers who had settled in Taos. Traveling with them was Bertha Pope, who became a romantic interest or "at least a very close friend"—his "Queen of Shedonia."

Bender died in 1941, leaving behind thousands of bereft friends and an unequalled legacy of patronage.

Joanne Lafler

HISTORY-PLAY READERS

The play readers, under the leadership and direction of **Joanne Lafler**, performed at the Institute's Annual Dinner at the home of **Georgia Wright** on November 17. Having been given about three months notice before the event, preparation involved time spent discussing which of the many plays the group has read through the years should be selected for reading. Then there was one final rehearsal, assigning roles and determining the 'staging.' The final selected scenes were from four plays—Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, John Osborne's *Luther* and Tom Stoppard's *Travesties*. The group performed for about an hour. The players were **Monica Clyde, Ellen Huppert, Peter Huppert, Joanne Lafler, Lorrie O'Dell and Edith Piness**.

George Bernard Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* is set in Egypt at the time of the Roman invasion in 48 BCE. Shaw paints Caesar as an experienced old warrior. Cleopatra was sixteen when Caesar came to Egypt, and she is shown as an impetuous teenager. The scene performed by the players is the famous arrival of Cleopatra wrapped in a carpet to surprise Caesar, and after the Egyptian fleet attacks and isolates Caesar, Cleopatra departs, against her will, into the sea with Caesar and his men.

Shakespeare's Cleopatra, as portrayed in *Antony and Cleopatra*, is very different—mature, formal, regal. After Caesar's death, Cleopatra joined forces with Marc Antony and they became lovers and allies against Antony's rival Octavian. The lovers fled to Alexandria, and, faced with defeat, committed suicide. The play readers performed the powerful scene when Cleopatra bids farewell to the dying Antony. (This scene required a little fanciful staging, since Shakespeare had the dying Antony carried aloft to the second level common to the Elizabethan stage.)

John Osborne's *Luther* is a profound look at Martin Luther's struggles with his faith as well as his historic leadership of the Protestant Reformation in

the 16th century. The scene performed by the play-readers is powerful; a very pained Luther is preparing to celebrate his first Mass, and his dialogue with Brother Weinand dramatizes Luther's struggle over what he later referred to as his alienation from God. It is the crucial scene in the play for understanding Luther and his personal struggles. The rest of the play deals with the public Luther, including Luther's dramatic appearance at the Diet of Worms and his defiant stand against both the church and the Emperor. The scene that was read puts Luther's internal trials before the audience in a way that helps the understanding of what occurs later.

The final play, Tom Stoppard's *Travesties*, represented a sharp change of place and mood. The play concerns the fictional meeting in Zurich, in 1917, of three major, early twentieth century revolutionary figures: The Communist leader Lenin, the Dadaist poet Tristan Tzara, and the author James Joyce. Stoppard includes an unimportant but real historical figure, Henry Carr, who had appeared in Zurich in a performance of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, at which time he came into contact with Joyce. Stoppard borrows two ladies from the play, Cicely and Gwendolyn, to assist Lenin and Joyce in their work at the Zurich library. The players did a delightful, somewhat manic (to quote from the stage directions) scene, replete with sharp exchanges between the absurd Carr and the two artists, Tzara and Joyce.

A lively discussion followed the readings. Members of the audience commented on the different interpretations of Cleopatra, and asked for a little better explanation of 'what was going on' in the scene from *Travesties*. A lot of the comments focused on Luther's struggle, many from those who had little specific knowledge of the Reformation. The performance was clearly enjoyed by the audience and players alike. The group invites anyone interested to join them at a play-reading session after the first of the year.

Lorrie O'Dell and Edith Piness

BIOGRAPHY WRITERS GROUP

Autumn Stanley, immersed in final revisions of her biography of Charlotte Smith, *Raising More Hell and Fewer Dahlias*, for Lehigh University Press says "I consider the Biographer Writers Group a major source of support and encouragement for the last tough slog to the finish line for a December 15th D-Day, and am grateful that it exists." **Joanne Lafler** wrote: "Sharing my work with the other biography writers has been helpful in important ways over the last several months. There are times when I worry that something I've just written is overly-detailed or just plain dull. I was pleased to find that my fellow biographers were quite interested (they're historians, of course!) and didn't think that I should cut any of it. On the other hand, sometimes I'm so close to my subject that I'm not as clear as I need to be. My fellow biographers were merciless (in a nice way) about a confusing statement in my most recent pages, and they helped me to figure out a better way get the point across."

Ellen Huppert: "I found the group to be most helpful in pointing out where explanatory material needs to be added to selections from the journals of Lizzie Gurney Taylor. My colleagues and faithful readers often ask for more information about places and persons mentioned, while those same readers are often able to answer my questions. The group constantly affirms the value of my project and keeps me going when my own energy flags."

Bonda Lewis: "The biography group has been an immeasurably precious gift. At first I was grateful that they let me participate at all; their people had actually lived, mine are mostly invented. But they accepted that historical truth is not always limited to what physically happened, and that fiction can be truth too. They hold me constantly to historical accuracy: 'How were the contracts worded?' 'How many children did that actually happen to?' I learn the most wonderful things from the group and am grateful for their belief in my work, their observations, and their endless questions. They've gone with me through the new insanity of 'finishing' the first volume, and holding my hand through starting the second. They're sterling."

Ellen Huppert

WELCOMING NEW MEMBERS

Larry Prud'homme currently resides in Petaluma. He has a Ph.D. from the University of California at Davis in Modern French History. His most recent position was at Mendocino College where he was a Professor of History and Political Science. His current interests include the histories of World Wars I and II as well as California history and civil liberties in wartime. Also, he serves as a docent at Sonoma historical sites. He looks forward to camaraderie as a member of the Institute and hopes to pursue primary and secondary sources on California during the Gold Rush.

New member **Harry Meserve** learned about the Institute in a copy of the NEWSLETTER he saw. He has studied African history as well as U.S. History at the University of California, Los Angeles, and he received his Masters in Library Science from San Jose State University. He hopes his membership will help in "finding others to share history projects and research with."

IN MEMORIAM

Members of the Institute were saddened to hear of the death of former member Ruth-Inge Heinze in July of this year. Dr. Heinze was born in Berlin, Germany, in 1919, where she pursued a successful acting career. However, conditions in East Germany led to her immigration to the United States in 1955. She studied at the University of California, Berkeley, receiving a Masters degree in 1971 and a Ph.D in 1974, specializing in Shamanism and Southeast Asia. Her first book was entitled *Shamans of Southeast Asia*, followed by *Shamans of the Twentieth Century* and *The Nature and Function of Rituals*. In 1974, she founded the Independent Scholars of Asia and began teaching courses in the psychology of shamanism and other Eastern psychologies. She taught at Mills College and at the California Institute of Integral studies.

(The report from the Readers of Medieval History will appear in the next issue of the NEWSLETTER.)

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Margaretta Mitchell sent greetings from her *The Face of Poetry* tour which has traveled east from the University of Southern California to Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, where it is housed on the walls in the Neilson Library. The exhibition is the centerpiece of the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Smith Poetry Center and will be there all semester. On Wednesday, October 3, Gretta gave a talk in the browsing room in the library and was pleased with the audience and the Q & A. Next spring the show travels to *Open Book* in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Ethel Herr says that her Dr. Oma book has been translated into Dutch and she has seen a copy of the cover online, but so far she doesn't have the book in hand. She sends thanks to the Institute for the encouragement she has been given and for the joy of its friendship.

Dave Rosen reports that he has written a monograph on "The Coast Guard in Alaska and the Arctic." Written as an internal Coast Guard publication, it is related to the Coast Guard establishing a base for the Arctic at Point Barrow. Dave was also on CBS TV's "Eye on the Bay" on November 5, explaining the History of Coast Guard Island. "They cut the 30 minute exposition to 30 seconds."

Jeanne Farr McDonnell is now on the board of the Palo Alto Historical Association and the editor of the organization's newsletter. The subject of her forthcoming biography, Juana Briones, lived during the 19th century on land which is now part of Palo Alto, so Jeanne has had the pleasure of extending the reach of the Association to earlier residents of this land, Indians and Hispanics. She also had the honor of being the featured speaker at the dedication of the state historic marker for Juana Briones in Esther Clark Park in Palo Alto.

Steven Levi sends word from Alaska: "In addition to being a land of clean air and water, Alaska, as the saying goes has 'miles and miles of nothing but miles and miles.' Alaska is the most sparsely populated state but Alaskans pay dearly for the pristine environment: it is very expensive to travel.

A round-trip ticket from Anchorage to Seattle costs about \$700 and then, as Alaskans say 'you're only in Seattle.' I would like to thank the Institute's mini-grant Committee for the \$500 I received last year. I was able to combine that money with a ticket I had already purchased for a conference in Washington D. C. Thus I was privileged to spend three days looking at original Alaskan documentation in the National Archives. My primary focus was anti-war activity in the Territory of Alaska during the First World War, but I was also able to examine documents from the Alaska Gold Rush. The results of that grant have borne fruit. My composite history of the Alaska Gold Rush came out in November from Greenwood Publishers. This will be the first history of the Alaska Gold Rush in 40 years and includes documents not seen by Alaskans in more than a century. The anti-war documents were part of my scholarly treatise "Holding Opinions Your Neighbors do Not Share," which is currently under consideration by Kent State University. For those of us who do not live in the Lower 48, grant money, no matter how small, is welcome. The grant of \$500 made it possible for me to spend two days doing research I could never had done without it.

On October 10, **Dick Herr** gave a public lecture at the Spanish Royal Academy of History in Madrid, of which he is a corresponding member. It was part of a series called "Spain and France, a Common History," presented to mark the bicentenary of Napoleon's invasion of Spain. His subject was Royal Absolutism in Spain and France. "I relied on the notes for my lectures at UC given thirty years ago, relieved that I had decided not to throw them away. The packed audience seemed impressed, but now the Academy wants footnotes, something that never occurred to my students."

Jody Offer reports that her October-November production of *A Shirtwaist Tale* was a big success, with positive reviews in the *Berkeley Daily Planet* and the *Express*, and a full hall. Pictures, songs, and other details are to be www.ashirtwaisttale.com.

CALENDAR

January 27 Work-in-Progress -- Ellen Huppert
February 9 California History Roundtable
February 23 Annual Membership Meeting

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 lorrie@galleyslaves.com or to the Institute's postal address given below. Also, we welcome the opportunity to review members' newly published books. Contact **Autumn Stanley** at autumn2_dave@compuserve.com. The deadline for the next NEWSLETTER is **February 29, 2008**.

The NEWSLETTER is the official publication of the Institute for Historical Study, a scholarly organization designed to promote the research, writing, and public discussion of history. Membership in the Institute is open to independent and academically affiliated scholars who are in agreement with its aims and who have a commitment to historical study. Membership inquiries should be sent to the Institute address.

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