

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

I first joined the Institute some seventeen or eighteen years ago. In recent years, I spent most of my time being a parent and did not participate frequently in Institute events. Now that my daughter is older, I am happy to be able to return to being a more active member of the Institute.

Attending our annual meeting on February 23, I was pleased to see what a strong and vibrant organization the Institute continues to be. There were many familiar faces but new faces as well. The Institute continues to provide a wide variety of programs and events through which our members can present their ideas and explore common scholarly interests. We also continue to foster research through our long established grants-in-aid program. We really are unique, or nearly so, in the length of time we have furnished a home for an amazingly wide range of scholars of history.

I want to call members' attention to our forthcoming tour of Mare Island, scheduled for June 1. Organized by Tom Snyder, this tour of the historic Navy shipyard promises to be a memorable event. Among unexpected treasures, the shipyard's chapel contains the largest collection of Tiffany stained glass windows west of the Mississippi! I hope that many members will be able to participate in what should be an outstanding program.

I am looking forward to a year of lively Institute events!

Mike Griffith

WORK-IN-PROGRESS – Ellen Huppert

On Sunday afternoon, January 27, at **Ruth Willard's** elegant retirement residence, the Peninsula Regent in San Mateo, **Ellen Huppert** talked about the third section of her proposed four-part volume on the Taylor Family, *In Their Own Words*. Part I is Barton Taylor's childhood, including a memoir he wrote as an adult; Part II is the story of the performance tours of Barton and Marietta, his first wife, in the South in 1851-2; and Part III, the subject of Sunday's talk, is the life of Elizabeth G. "Lizzie" Taylor, Barton's second wife, as told in twelve volumes of her journals—some newly discovered—dating from 1854 to 1886. Part IV will deal with Lizzie's son Hartley and his wife, through their letters of 1903-4.

Barton and Elizabeth Taylor are Ellen's great-grandparents. Lizzie was born in Centreville, Michigan, in 1840. Her father, Chester Gurney, was an attorney and an abolitionist, possibly even a conductor on the Underground Railroad. In 1847 he ran (unsuccessfully) for Governor of Michigan on the Liberty Party ticket.

Lizzie's journals, with long daily entries in the early years, give a clear picture of life in the small town of Centreville in the mid-19th century—the close friends, the frequent visits with neighbors, the girls' shopping and other activities, the rather informal-sounding school schedule and, of course, the occasional excitement such as a trip to Niagara Falls or the burning of the jail. Life was generally happy until Lizzie's parents decided to separate, an event that changed and darkened everything.

After further schooling in Ypsilanti, Lizzie became a music teacher. She also joined the Baptist church, and she documents in her journals her sense of attachment to this church. Her faith was important in her life, and many passages in her journals deal with this aspect of her inner life and also her struggles. When a Methodist minister, the Reverend Barton Taylor, asked her to marry him, she agonized over the decision, especially since it would require her to leave the Baptist church. It is Lizzie's fervor, as written in the journals, that most surprised Ellen, who personally found it hard to understand Lizzie's anguish. However, in 1866,

Lizzie agreed to marry Barton, and there was much speculation among the attendees at the meeting as to why she should take this step. The only clue Ellen could give was that Lizzie said he was very charming.

With this marriage, Lizzie took on two new careers: as the wife of a Methodist minister and as the stepmother to four children from Barton's previous marriage. She and Barton also had children of their own. With these new demands on her time—complicated by the deaths of several of the children, and by the frequent moves demanded of Methodist clergymen (they lived in nine different places in eighteen years)—her journal entries became briefer.

On Thanksgiving Day 1886, at the end of her last journal, she counted her blessings. All of her stepchildren were married, she had reached a religious peace, she had found a cause to work for in the temperance movement, and had reconciled with her mother before the mother's death. "How wonderfully Providence has led us!" she says. "How he has lifted me from a life of gloom and worry and sadness to a life of light and peace and joy. Those duties which once were a burden have become a pleasure under his guiding hand! And in the three years just passed all of our children brought into the church and, we trust, into the fold."

She was to suffer further sorrows—Barton died in 1898, she lost her sight in 1899, and all of her children had died except Hartley and Ralph; yet, the journals ended on a high note.

Lizzie died in Manila in 1913, where she had gone to live with Ralph. Her remains were brought home to Albion, Michigan, where her obituary says that "she was one of the most active members of the local W.C.T.U. (Women's Christian Temperance Union), and it was largely due to her efforts that the present W.C.T.U. Building was made possible." She was mourned by her son in Manila, and by three step-children who called her "the salt of the earth."

Autumn Stanley

My Life in a Digital Age

The Institute gave me a grant for a digital projector, which I will store but which any member may use. I put it to good use during my mini-seminar “Walls, Ceilings, and the Viewer in Italian Renaissance and Baroque Painting.” On the last Sunday of the month, from June to November, Institute members (along with several spouses) gathered at my house for lessons on viewing Italian art with illustrations from Giotto to Caravaggio.

The challenge of transferring edited photos to PowerPoint was tedious—and now **Dan Wages** tells me I could just use Iphoto! Ah, well. The advantages of going digital are several. My husband did not have to haul my books to campus and shoot slides. I could shoot at home and remake the photos when I saw I had missed something. Being basically unorganized, this was wonderful.

The projector came with a 125-page manual written for advanced electrical engineers. I hauled my laptop and the projector to campus for help from the art history staff. “Just plug it in and turn it on,” they said. Which would have worked but for the need for an adapter for the Mac. Bought that. Nada. Returned it for another. Noticed I had plugged it into the wrong port on the projector in the dim light!

The mini-course was great fun, even if too many participants didn't do their homework! Making sure everyone got the full view of the Michaelangelo's Sistine Chapel brought cries of "So that's what it looks like!"

As for me, I will use the projector for talks on my Limestone Sculpture Provenance Project (in French for *Les Amis de la Culture Française* and in short form for the Berkeley Commons Club) and I'll use it for my upcoming work-in-progress “The Dean of Amiens Cathedral Interviews the Master Sculptor.” Thank you, Institute.

Georgia Wright

Since Medieval Study Group report was missing from the Winter issue of the NEWSLETTER, here is what we have been doing for the last six months.

In July, **Lyn Reese** gave a presentation on Marco Polo and the myths that have developed around his famous journey. She discussed the scholarly differences about whether he even took the journey, and whether the journey he did take was the one he documented. We were surprised to discover that there were two versions of the book and that it was one of the best sellers of the Middle Ages. In September, **Lorrie O'Dell** talked about a book by Lauro Martines entitled *April Blood*, which recounts the story of the attempted assassination of two Medici brothers in the Florence Cathedral in the 15th century. The story is told against the background of Florentine civil politics, family feuds, and papal ambitions. While Lorenzo survived the attack, Giovanni was murdered, and the following months of bloodshed and intrigue paint a picture of Florence very different from its image as the ideal Renaissance humanist city. In November, **Bob O'Dell** discussed the book *Society and Homicide in Thirteenth-Century England*, by James Buchanan Given. Using both crime and population statistics, as well as anecdotal evidence, the writer attempted to test the common assumption that the medieval period was an especially violent time. While the result didn't settle that question, and there were problems between the crime data and the population data, one learns a lot about criminal justice in 13th century England. **John Rusk** was the presenter in December, and he recounted the story of Sir John Hawkwood, a 14th century English soldier of fortune who became a *condottiere* (an Italian mercenary) and sold his services to any city that would pay him to fight (or not to fight). Eventually he became the commander-in-chief of the Florentine army and was made a Florentine citizen. A funerary monument, a fresco by Uccello, was commissioned in 1436 and can still be seen in the Duomo. It is this monument that has assured Hawkwood's place in Florentine history.

Lorrie O'Dell

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING – Morning Session

At 10:30 am, after the members who were present had acquired their coffee or tea, the Institute's Secretary, **Ellen Huppert**, called the Annual Membership Meeting to order. The meeting was held on February 23rd in the meeting room of the Dimond Branch of the Oakland Public Library on Fruitvale Avenue. Acting for absent President **Jules Becker** (recovering from surgery) and Vice-President **Patricia Sewnsen** (dealing with a family responsibility), Ellen began the meeting by calling on Treasurer **Joanne Lafler** for a financial report.

Joanne reported that the Institute's financial condition looked very good. Although the report was not a complete annual report (which comes out at the end of the fiscal year, March 31st), the figures she quoted as of January 31, 2008 show the monies in the general fund amounted to \$14,371.54 and those in the endowment fund were \$14,846.89. She noted that although the Institute's finances were in very good shape, donations to either fund are always welcome. In the absence of Membership Chair Edith Piness, Ellen reported three new members since last year and mentioned that our total membership is usually about 100.

Lorrie O'Dell reported that six Works-in-Progress were presented over the past year, with topics ranging from the history of naval medicine to baseball integration to building a diorama for a local history museum. Lorrie mentioned that attendance at these sessions seemed to be declining and, therefore, it as been agreed to try not to hold Work-in-Progress sessions during a month when another Institute activity is scheduled. She encouraged members to attend these sessions, even if the topic seemed foreign to them. "The sessions are always interesting and you might learn something." As Program Chair, **Monica Clyde** described the additional programs the Institute sponsored this past year. Besides the annual pot-luck dinner and the annual fall dinner, there was a tour of the Judah L. Magnus Museum, the "Mysteries as Histories" program held jointly with the San Francisco Public Library, and Georgia Wright's mini-course on Renaissance art. Monica then mentioned a planned tour of Mare Island, facilitated by Tom Snyder, to be held on June 1st.

Lorrie then reported on two study groups. Again representing Edith Piness, she described the four plays the History-Play Readers had read over the past year, as well as the four short scenes performed at the annual dinner in November. Since members of the Medieval History Group were to make presentations during the afternoon session, Lorrie simply described the way the group functioned and welcomed anyone interested in either group to "come and see what we are all about." **Bonda Lewis** reported for the Biography Writers Group by stressing how important it has been for participants to have the support and critiques of their writing projects from other members. Joanne spoke for the California Round Table, which usually meets quarterly, but was now on hold until Jules Becker can return to guide the group as usual.

In her capacity as the Editor of the Institute's NEWSLETTER, Lorrie pleaded for more members to make submissions, particularly things that can be of wide historical interest, such as a review of a recent book read, an interesting historical museum visited or excursion taken, a conference at which a paper was presented. As with any publication, material is needed to fill potentially blank pages. Lorrie also talked about the membership email list, and encouraged submissions for distribution. **John Rusk**, the Institute's webmaster, reported that our website had 16,551 visitors last year, and he hoped soon to make the Membership Application into a PDF file to make it easier to print. He is happy to add a link for any member who has a website.

Joanne announced that the National Coalition of Independent Scholars (NCIS) is holding its annual conference from October 24-26 at the Graduate Theological Union's Conference center in Berkeley. It is hoped that the Institute will be represented by at least one panel.

The election of new members to the Board of Directors was then held, and **Michael Griffith**, **Francesca Miller**, **Peter Mellini**, and **John Rusk** were elected for two year terms. **Anne Homan**, **Ellen Huppert**, **Edith Piness**, **Lyn Reese**, and **Georgia Wright** are on the 2009 Nominating Committee.

Afternoon Session -- ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

After the election of the new directors, the members of the Board who were present met to elect new officers: President, **Michael Griffith**; Vice President, **Richard Herr**; Secretary, **Monica Clyde**; and Treasurer, **Joanne Lafler**. After lunch, the afternoon program began. At the invitation of the Board, four members of the Medieval Study Group made short presentations on various subjects which they had discussed at their meetings.

Nancy Zinn began with her presentation on "Food in the Life of Medieval Europe." Using an extensive body of sources (a bibliography was available), Nancy stressed that the Medieval diet "is not strange to us, but different," the differences being mainly in the lack of certain foods with which we are now familiar, in differences in methods of preparation, and in presentation and consumption. The peasantry, of course, grew most of their own food and raised animals for eating. Instead of wheat, the grains raised were mainly rye, barley, spelt, and oats; vegetables were beans, lentils, chickpeas, and green peas. Meat came from sheep, pigs, and chickens, with fish often available from local ponds and streams. Herbs were grown in kitchen gardens. The upper classes had access to a wider variety of food, including imported spices. Accompanied by either beer or wine (never water), a medieval table provided a more various experience than is commonly thought. **John Rusk** commented that, while others talked about broader themes such as medieval food and climate, his chosen area was 'blood and gore.' He presented the story of *The Last Duel*, a book by Eric Jager, set in 14th century France. The story began with the claim of the young wife of a knight that she had been raped by another knight who had visited her while her husband was away at 'the wars.' When her husband heard her story, he took his case to the court of his overlord, but fearing that he would not receive a fair hearing, he didn't appear. Finally, he took the case to the king (17-year-old Charles IV) who passed it on to the Parlement of Paris. After legal arguments by lawyers for both sides, a trial by combat was ordered. On December 26th, outside of the walls of Paris, in an enclosed arena without exits, surrounded by Parisians ordered to observe strict silence under penalty of death, the trial was

held. The accuser's (very pregnant) wife was present, for if her husband was defeated and killed, she was to be instantly burned at the stake for bearing false witness. The question of guilt or innocence was now in God's hands, and the fight began. Although wounded early, the accuser ultimately was victorious, slaying his wife's rapist on the field. The deceased defendant was dragged from the field by his heels. After the wife shortly gave birth to a boy, she and her husband returned to their estates and prospered. **Lorrie O'Dell's** subject was *The Little Ice Age*, the book by Brian Fagan. She pointed out that what preceded the little ice age was the medieval warm period, a time from about 800 to about 1320 when average temperatures were two to three degrees warmer than what had preceded and what followed, evidence having been collected by studying tree rings and glacial cores in Europe and the North Atlantic. Warmer temperatures meant better harvests, and greater yields. However, in 1320, seven years of almost unceasing rain began, bringing on what is known as the "Great Famine," to be followed by colder and colder temperatures. The trough of the little ice age was 1565, and temperatures did not rise to the 1320 level until about 1850. **Lyn Reese** read a selection of letters written during Middle Ages. The first two letters were by Emma, Queen of the Franks, to her mother, Ottonian Empress Adelaide. The first letter (986) expressed her sense of power as regent for her son, but the second (987) was written after Emma had been overthrown and was imprisoned. The next letter she read was by Anselm of Bec (1072), later the Archbishop of Canterbury, to a woman who was refusing to let her husband become a monk; a wife's permission was required. Anselm was trying to convince her that it was her duty to allow her husband to serve God as he chose. In 1464, Alessandra Strozzi, of the Florentine Strozzi, wrote to her son Filippo in Naples regarding possible marriage proposals. Finally, Lyn read some 12th century letters, first from a student to his parents, and then from a father to his student son, full of language very familiar to 21st century audiences.

Lorrie O'Dell

GROUPS REPORTS

BIOGRAPHY WRITERS GROUP

At the January meeting, **Ann Harlow** reported on the completion of her articles on Albert Bender and the early history of San Francisco's art museums, both submitted to *The Argonaut* of the San Francisco Museum and Historical Society. In February she returned to her book on Albert Bender and Anne Bremer and shared part of a chapter on the aftermath of the 1906 quake and fire, including the arrival of Matisse paintings in San Francisco. At the beginning of January, **Joanne Lafler** completed the final chapter of her Harry Lafler biography and presented it to the group with the warning that much of it was very depressing—inevitably so, since the last years of Harry's life took place during the Great Depression and because he and his fourth wife, Margaret, had separated. And then there was his death in a car accident, for which members of the group were not prepared. At the February meeting, she presented the greatly reduced and rewritten first chapter, parts of which the group found confusing. As always, their suggestions were very helpful. **Elizabeth Thacker-Estrada** has, through years of research, accumulated 300 single-spaced pages concerning first lady, Abigail Powers Fillmore, and is now focused on paring the book to 170 concise double-spaced pages. Accordingly, the group's suggestions at the January meeting regarding organizing the material into fewer chapters were invaluable. Liz now has a workable blueprint for overcoming writer's block and completing the book. In January, **Ellen Huppert** turned to the earliest of Lizzie Gurney Taylor's journals, which described small town life in Michigan in the 1854. Ellen's February contribution returned to the details of the adult Lizzie's life, as she gave birth to two babies who died in infancy, while struggling to maintain good relations with her step-children. **Autumn Stanley** reported that her editor at the Lehigh University Press says that she hasn't read a manuscript she enjoyed more, but that the book still will not be published until 2009. Any Institute member who is writing on a biographical subject is most welcome to join the group.

Ellen Huppert.

HISTORY-PLAY READERS

As noted in the last NEWSLETTER, the group performed at the Institute's annual dinner in November, doing selected scenes from four plays. At that time, the group had not completed reading John Osborne's *Luther*. As dramatized in the second half of the play, Luther defied the Church hierarchy by his rejection of Papal indulgences and his belief that one is saved by faith and not by works. In 1521, at the Diet of the Holy Roman Empire at Worms, he refused to recant his beliefs, declaring that he answered only to God's word. He denounced the peasant uprising of 1524-25, but finally achieved a modicum of peace by marrying a former nun and becoming a father himself.

The group moved from the 16th century to the 20th, reading the first act of August Wilson's play, *Gem of the Ocean*. Wilson, who was born in 1945 and died last year, set himself the monumental task of illustrating the 20th century African-American experience through a cycle of ten plays, each of which was set in a different decade. Several years ago the play reading group read *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, a play set in a Chicago recording studio in 1927. About that time, we attended an American Conservatory Theater (ACT) performance of *Gem of the Ocean*, the ninth of the ten plays. *Gem of the Ocean*, although set in 1904, was the next to last play written. It is set in the Hill district of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, an African-American neighborhood. There, the first adult generation of free-born blacks mixes with their once-enslaved elders. The play's central character is Aunt Ester, who is now 285 years old, having been born the first year that slaves arrived in America. She is a symbol of the African-American past and an enabler in the present. Though old and tired, she takes her mission seriously and has the devotion of friends and others in the community. The group will finish reading the play at its next meeting on March 28. All interested persons are invited to join us.

Edith Piness

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Bill McPeak reports that **finally** his article for the *History of Earth Sciences Society Quarterly Journal* will be heading for the light of day. Bill had forwarded all correspondence in regard to the history of the submission to the previous editor, who promised (nearing the end of his tenure) that the new editor would receive it. Bill has received an email confirming that the new editor had indeed received the record on Bill's article, and that he was "disturbed" that the article had been somehow overlooked. So, but for checking some revisions to the guidelines, finding a few photos to send along, and having the article given a final look by the reviewer who was most favorable toward it—the article will be published in the September issue.

Anne Homan's recent book, *Historic Livermore, California A-Z*, has sold out from its first printing of 1,000 copies, and she has ordered a second printing that includes a few corrections.

Karen Offen has had three publications since January: Articles on the "History of Women," "Ghénia Avril de Sainte-Croix," and "Ellen Key," for the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History*, edited by Bonnie G. Smith; "Madame Ghénia Avril de Sainte-Croix, the Josephine Butler of France," in *Women's History Review* (London), 17:2 (April 2008)—a special issue on Josephine Butler and her international networks to campaign against government-regulated prostitution and the 'white slave trade,' edited by Anne Summers; and "Thinking Historically about the International Women's Movement," a special issue of *Sextant* (Brussels).

Georgia Wright spent twelve days in New York, plugging the Limestone Sculpture Provenance Project at Columbia and New York University Institute of Fine Arts and Conservation Center, and premiering her PowerPoint presentation, "The Dean of Amiens Cathedral Interviews the Master Sculptor," at Queens College for an undergraduate class on Gothic Art. She met with her co-director at the Metropolitan Museum and with the webmaster of the limestone project. She ate a lot of bagels and lox and explored the New Museum (Contemporary Art) about which she has absolutely nothing to say.

Jeanne McDonnell has recently been appointed co-editor of the Palo Alto Historical Association's monthly newsletter and has received and edited the text the University of Arizona Press will be using in their fall catalogue announcement of the biography that has been a big part of her life for so long: *Juana Briones of 19th Century California*. While working on that book, Jeanne became interested in Henry Wager Halleck, Juana's attorney in the enormous land-ownership documentation event that absorbed so much time and effort in California once statehood was achieved. Jeanne found that his fifteen years in California were crucial to the state's development. During the Civil War, he became Abraham Lincoln's Chief of Staff, and he may have expected to return to California, but he married Alexander Hamilton's granddaughter, and family and work kept him in the East. Jeanne feels that he has received far too little attention by historians, in particular, his California achievements. "I hope to remedy that with a biography that will concentrate on California."

The Society for the History of Navy Medicine, co-founded in 2006 by **Tom Snyder**, now has 90 members from around the world. He says he arrogated for himself the title of Executive Director. Made up of people interested in any/all aspects of the history of medicine of navies and the maritime environment, the membership includes civilians and military, active and retired; graduate students and other academics, medical and historical professionals; and just plain people interested in the topic. In April, the Society will mount their Second Annual Meeting and Papers Session concurrent with the annual meeting of the American Association for the History of Medicine, of which the Society is a Constituent Society. The four paper presenters this year include two nursing professors, a physician-professor and a surgeon in the fleet. An attempt is being made to create a foundation to endow the Society. Also, Tom will be participating in a panel on "Military Assistance to Civil Authority in Times of Natural and Epidemic Disaster" at this year's Society for Military History meeting, also in April. "For this panel, I am expanding on work I did on the 1918 Flu epidemic at Mare Island and Vallejo (where Navy personnel

MEMBERSHIP NEWS (Cont.)

played a huge role in managing the ill in the community) by expanding the purview to the national picture." He'll also be giving a presentation on the history of the Mare Island Navy Hospital at the March meeting of the local Navy League chapter. (Pant, pant, says Tom).

Amy Essington presented "Beyond the Baseball Diamond: Racial Integration in Professional Basketball, Football, and Hockey" at the American Historical Association's Annual Meeting in Washington DC, in January 2008.

Francesca Miller's chapter, "Women in the Social, Political and Economic Transformation of Latin America and the Caribbean," in *Capital, Power and Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean*, edited by Richard L. Harris and Jorge Nef, (Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), was just released. She also has twelve entries in the forthcoming *Oxford University Encyclopedia on the History of Women*.

Anne Richardson has an article coming out in the next issue of *The Tyndale Society Journal*, "The American Obedience: A Progress Report."

After having it sit for years on the closet shelf, **Judith Strong Albert** is busy editing *Margaret Fuller's Women*. The book will be published in the late fall at a press "appropriately called Paper Mill Press." She has contacted Carole Braverman, the playwright who wrote *The Margaret Ghost*, to see if she is willing to write a foreword for the book.

Lucia Chivola Birnbaum's news is that her *dark mother. african origins and godmothers* (New York, et al, I Universe, 2000) was published in an Italian edition as *La Madre O-Scura* (Cosenza, Italia, *Mediterranea Media*, 2004) and in a French (international) edition as *La Meré Noire* by the African press, *Menaibuc* in Paris, May 2007. This edition is presently distributed in Africa and the Caribbean. Her book in progress is *the future has an ancient heart. transformational legacy of primordial african migration paths everywhere, focusing on europeans and euro-americans*. Also, she has been asked to be the keynote speaker at the

student-sponsored multiversity conference February 26-29, 2008 at the California Institute of Integral Studies. The University of Palermo and the feminist *Progetto Amazzone* have asked her to present a paper in November 2008 on the healing aspects of primordial African migrations in Palermo.

2007 was a good year for **Steven C. Levi**. In January his nonfiction, ghosted autobiography was released by Community Press. Titled *Telling it All, My Life as a Con Man by Alabama Fats, as Told to Steven Levi*, it has been optioned by a small production company in Hollywood. (See the Review on page 9.) Steven's second work, *Boom and Bust in the Alaska Gold Fields*, research for which was partially funded by the Institute, was released by Greenwood Publishing in November and will be in their annual catalog in March. His third book to be published is an Alaska Gold Rush novel, *Cadzow*, which takes place in the Territory of Alaska and the Yukon Territory of Canada. It was published by a Canadian company. A collection of Levi's humorous Alaska Gold Rush short stories was also accepted in 2007 with a publication date of early 2009. "2009 will be the 50th Anniversary of statehood," Levi says. "I'd like to think there is going to be a lot of interest in Alaska history in Alaska and I'd also like to think that will translate into book sales."

Lyn Reese has had two recent publications: her article with lesson ideas, "Teaching Women's Rights As Human Rights: Linking Past to Present," was published in *European History Educators' Association's Annual Bulletin*, and "The Women Were There! Reviewing the Role of Women Sleuths in Historical Mysteries" was published in the *Journal of Mystery Readers International*, Winter 2007-2008.

Telling It All: My Life as a Con Man.

By Steven Levi

Tell it All: My Life as a Con Man is a fascinating story of the life of a con artist who earned his living cheating “the lame” (suckers, to the rest of us) throughout the country. As told to Institute member **Steven Levi**, it is more than an autobiography of a black man, alias Alabama Fats, who proudly claims that “When it comes to working for a living, there is no faster way to make money than cheating other people.” “I know,” he proudly states. “I did it for 60 years.” Levi’s book is also a revealing social history of life in the United States from just before World War II to the end of the century, along with a credible description of race relations in the country during that period.

David Gray was born about 1921 on a farm outside Montgomery, Alabama. David went to school as long as he could--junior high--before he had to go to work to help support the family. This was during the Depression. Later, at age 19, when he was married and his wife was pregnant, he worked in a dry-cleaning shop in Montgomery, but the chemicals were eating him alive, and he wasn't making enough to feed his family. At this point he met an established con artist called Mobile Fats, who told him there was a "better way" to make money. They jumped a train for the weekend and conned 'lames' all the way to Atlanta and back. David made more money in that weekend than he would have earned at the dry-cleaning shop in six months. So he quit the shop and started as a con man. David Gray became Alabama Fats.

Gray was called Alabama Fats not only by his associates, but by the local police. The cops, he claims, supplemented their income by relieving him of a portion, and sometimes all, of his earnings and were very much involved in the life he led for most of his adulthood, living off greedy people. He claims to be proof positive that there really is a fool born every minute. And he doesn't care if they are “old people, cripples, black or white.”

Alabama Fats and his partners, who changed depending on the time and place of the “sting,” were experts at what he calls “the three-card Molly,” but what is generally known as “three-card Monte.” The con man and his partners played as long as they could keep their victim going, or until all his money was gone. “We’d play the three-card Molly on the street, on the trains, in the train stations, in a bus station, on a blanket in a park, on a cardboard box on the sidewalk... You could play... anywhere because there are fools everywhere,” says Gray. “We didn’t have to go looking for lames. We just stood there and let the lames find us.” But Alabama Fats wanted more money from more prosperous targets and he began other cons: The Bank Agent Con and The Jewelry Con, for example. “That’s where the money was, so that’s where I went,” he explains.

The con man’s description of the relations between whites and blacks before, during, and immediately after World War II is an important part of his story. Alabama Fats reports he even “went legit” for a while, remarried and settled down in Cleveland. For that period he ran a Mexican restaurant/cafeteria, and sold some used clothes, books, records, furniture and medicine. But he found the con still too tempting, and he didn’t like all the rules and regulations involved in a legal business, so he went back on the game.

Did the con man ever go to jail? You bet. Levi provides a rap sheet almost a full page long. But when he came out, it was back to the con because, as he says over and over, there are always people eager to be taken. “Telling It All” is a quick read and an engaging one, particularly for those interested in the changes in our country before and after the Big War, when money became more readily available, airlines and airports largely replaced trains and train stations, and, according to Alabama Fats, the con got better and better. If you would like to know what life was like at that time, Alabama Fats can tell you, and Levi has done a fine job with his story.

Jules Becker

CALENDAR

April 20	Work-in-Progress -- Georgia Wright
May 18	Work-in-Progress -- Monica Clyde
June 1	Tour of Mare Island
June 22	Work-in Progress -- Karen Offen
October 19	Work-in Progress -- Susan Cohn
October 24-26	National Coalition of Independent Scholars Conference in Berkeley

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 autumn_stanley@sbcglobal.net. The deadline for the next NEWSLETTER is **May 31, 2008**.

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