

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

For this column, there are a number of items I want to mention. First of all, next year is the thirtieth anniversary of the Institute. It's not too early to start thinking of a suitable way to celebrate three decades of scholarship by independent scholars in the Bay Area and beyond. The Board welcomes your ideas about a suitable venue and possible programs and speakers. Let's make this a gala occasion!

Even as we reach thirty years, the Institute clearly needs to continue to work to attract new members. Over the years we have steadily gone down in numbers, not in steep declines, but a member or two a year. I would guess that since I joined the Institute, about twenty years ago, we have declined in membership at least twenty per cent. At this year's annual meeting, it was suggested that we create a committee of interested members to begin outreach efforts aimed at recruiting additional member-ship. It may be time to consider not only continuing the out-reach we have done before, but also to investigate whether there are additional places and additional ways to alert independent scholars to our existence. Certainly we should make sure we are taking full advantage of the possibilities of our computerized, networked world to reach as many potential members as possible.

Finally, at the annual meeting, I talked a little about the increasing use of Web 2.0 features to make information about archives available on the web. One of those features is the creation of "next generation find aids" which allow viewers to add comments to the finding aid. Just this week, I received a message from the Online Archive of California (www.oac.cdlib.org) indicating they are seriously considering adding such a feature to the archive. So, possibly, in a few months, you will be able to comment on finding aids and add tags to photographs maintained in the Online Archive by California archives and special collections. I think this has significant potential for aiding research in any of the archival collections held in California.

Michael Griffith

PRESENTATION – Edith Piness

Rereading *Burmese Days* in the Early Twenty-First Century

by
Edith Piness

On Sunday, January 18, at the home of **Ellen Huppert** in San Francisco, **Edith Piness** presented a shortened version of the paper she gave last fall at the International Burma Studies Conference at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb. First published in 1934, *Burmese Days* draws on Orwell's 1920s experiences as a policeman in Burma. Never out of print, translated into ten languages, almost seventy-five years later it still evokes intense interest. Having initially read *Burmese Days* in the 1960s and earned her doctorate in the mid-1970s with a dissertation on nineteenth century British-Burmese relations, Edith's current perception, knowledge, and sensitivity are more schooled and experienced. Following the example of Bernard Crick, she reread *Burmese Days* "...carefully, without hindsight."

George Orwell, Eric Arthur Blair's pseudonym, was born on June 25, 1903, in Motihari, Bengal, where his father worked for the Opium Department of the British Civil Service. His mother's side, the Limouzins, had Burmese connections dating back to the British 1826 annexation of Moulmein and Martaban. He returned with his mother to England as a small child. Following preparatory school, he attended Eton on a scholarship. From 1922-1927, he served with the Imperial Police in Burma. He trained in Mandalay and was posted first to the Irrawaddy Delta, then Syriam, Insein and Moulmein. His final posting in Katha, in the luxuriant jungle of Upper Burma, served as the setting for *Burmese Days*. He resigned his post in 1927 and returned to England. Before his death in 1950 at age 46, he had also written *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), *Animal Farm* (1945), *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), as well several works of non-fiction, and numerous essays.

Burmese Days is the tragic story of John Flory, a timber merchant in Kyauktada, Upper Burma, a town patterned after Katha. Flory is appalled by the

petty Anglo-Indian society in which he is condemned to live. He befriends a Hindu doctor, Dr. Veraswami, a great admirer of the British—the Englishman bitterly anti-English and the Indian fanatically loyal. This relationship brings Flory calumny and disdain from his fellow "Brits," as well as making him the victim of the clever, conniving Burmese magistrate, U Po Kyin. *Burmese Days* ends with Flory taking his own life, after first shooting his dog Flo. Flory articulates Orwell's frustration and disgust with his countrymen: "Your whole life is a life of lies. Year after year you sit in Kipling-haunted little Clubs. The time comes when you burn with hatred of your own countrymen, when you long for a native rising to drown their Empire in blood. You are a creature of the despotism, a pukka sahib."

Orwell later wrote: "I gave it up...partly because the climate had ruined my health, partly because I had vague ideas of writing books, but mainly because I could no longer go on serving an imperialism which I had come to regard as very largely a racket." His scathing observations and indictments pre-dated post-colonial writers by decades.

Rereading Orwell's *Burmese Days* forty years later, as well as various writers who have written about Orwell and discussed his books, raised questions about the literature of youth, the place of Orwell in education, writing, publishing, and the reception of *Burmese Days*. As Edith said, "We progress from books read to us, visiting libraries and bookshops, books owned, read, disposed of and dispersed."

Two English publishers rejected the manuscript as politically incorrect and potentially actionable in court. Orwell and his agent turned to Harpers in America. On October 7, 1934 the *New York Times* in a republication announcement attributed the American publication of *Burmese Days* to the difficulties of the prophet being "unsung in his own country." Orwell never received any literary prizes but he has the acclaim of posterity.

Lorrie O'Dell

*Family After All: Alaska's Jesse Lee Home,
Volume II—Seward, 1925-1965*

Jacquelin B. Pels (Hardscratch Press, 2008)

The sixty-one children from the Jessie Lee Home in Unalaska and the twenty-two from the Methodist Mission in Nome were brought together in 1925 at a new site in Seward on the Kenai Peninsula. This second volume in Hardscratch Press's series is filled with entertaining first person accounts of life after the arrival in Seward. Like the first volume, this one shows the results of many hours of historical research. The wonderful photographs are a moving accompaniment.

One of the former children, Bob Berntsen, said, "I don't have much that's good to say about Jessie Lee ... I don't have much to say about it that's bad, either. It just wasn't *home*." Berntsen's experience after the death of his mother was similar to many at Jessie Lee. His fisherman father could not cope with three children and sent them from Unlaska to the Home in Seward. Bob, age 10, was very close to his younger sister and brother; they were further traumatized by being placed in separate dormitories in the Jessie Lee compound. The landscape did not help prevent homesickness either. Although set on Resurrection Bay near snowy Mt. Benson and Mt. Marathon, the Home site was backed by foothills with deep forests of trees, an unfamiliar sight to these children of the open arctic tundra. Yet, many residents did have warm memories of their stay at the Home. Billy Blackjack Johnson, in the prologue to his autobiography, *Shelter from the Storm*, wrote, "My eyes are brimming with tears. I loved my time in the Jessie Lee Home."

The story of Jessie Lee is not only about a loving community, but also of hard work shared by the Methodist staff members and the children. When she joined the staff in 1928, Rosabelle Groth taught twelve public school music classes, thirty private piano students, and advanced algebra. She also led the glee club and choir and helped to mend clothes. Male members of the staff, even the superintendent, served as men of all work—plumbers, electricians, gardeners, welders, pilots, loggers, fishermen, and

canners. By September 1929, the women were performing their Herculean tasks for 143 people, including a staff of sixteen. Fred Lange remembered duties as a child: clearing the land, milking cows, slopping hogs, hauling rocks, ploughing, harvesting potatoes and hay, and much more. Eva Olaowsine wrote in the student newspaper, the Kueuit, of picking berries and canning 1,100 quarts of jelly in one summer. But, of course, there was also fun—picnics, 4H activities, holidays, sledding and singing. Singing was an integral part of Home life from its very beginning.

At first there were two three-story buildings—one for girls and one for boys. In 1938, a third building was erected between them, connected with arcades to the first two. In 1927 the Bay View Elementary School was built nearby by the government, and soon Jessie Lee students were attending Bay View and Seward High School.

After the Pearl Harbor attack, the army's Fort Raymond took over property adjoining Jessie Lee and sent men to paint the Home in camouflage—its red roofs were painted over and fir trees painted on the sides of the buildings. The Home was forced to close its doors in June 1942; it reopened in late 1946, but all the furnishings had disappeared and had to be replaced.

Tuberculosis was a leading cause of death for the native Alaskans in these years before antibiotics. Many of the children who arrived at the Home had lost parents because of TB. The Home maintained an isolation ward for children with TB on the third floor of the boys' building. After the war the old Fort Raymond Hospital became the Seward Sanatorium for adults, and often their children came to Jessie Lee.

On 27 March 1964 an earthquake and tidal wave struck the Seward area. Only the boys' building was deemed safe for occupancy, and the Jessie Lee Home had to close. The only remnant of this once thriving and vital community in Seward is a sadly deteriorated boys' building.

Anne Homan

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

On February 28, at 10:30 am, at the home of **Georgia Wright** in Berkeley, President **Michael Griffith** called the Twenty-ninth Annual Membership Meeting to order after a short social time. Approximately twenty-five 25 members were present.

The first report of the meeting was given by **Joanne Lafler**, Treasurer. She noted that, despite the decrease in the value of the Institute's investments, the finances of the Institute were in good shape. The total assets of the Institute as of December 31, 2008, were \$20,023.37, with an additional \$1,405.00 received up to February 25, 2009. More dues are expected, since dues notices for 2009 were recently sent out, as well as additional contributions that may be received.

Peter Mellini, Membership Chair, reported that membership had been generally static, with only one new member this year—**Meg Honey**. It was reported that the Institute has approximately 100 members.

Lorrie O'Dell reported on the various programs that the Institute sponsored in the past year: **Tom Snyder** led a tour of Mare Island Ship Yard; Work-in-Progress presentations were given by **Georgia Wright**, **Karen Offen**, **Susan Cohn**, and **Edith Piness**; the "small but loyal" Medieval Study Group had ten sessions on topics ranging from Marco Polo, medieval music, the Canary Islands, and the conversion to Christianity of the barbarians; the History-Play Reading Group read six plays last year, one of which was a trilogy by Tom Stoppard entitled *Coast of Utopia*. As the editor, Lorrie then talked about the Institute's quarterly *Newsletter*. She encouraged members to make submissions, and to submit their recently published books to be reviewed.

Reporting for the Biography Writers Group, **Ellen Huppert** was pleased to detail the various books that have either gone to print, are being printed, or are being given final revisions by their authors. Ellen said that the value of having critiques of one's work by colleagues has been invaluable.

Georgia Wright then proposed that the Institute, along with three other independent scholar organizations, help plan and participate in an Independent Scholar Conference to be held in 2010. After discussion, it was agreed that Georgia would contact the other organizations and the final decision would be made by the Board.

Jules Becker announced that the California Round Table was being revived, and that he would be contacting all members who have expressed an interest in the history of California and the West.

After some miscellaneous announcements, elections for the Board of Directors and for the next Nominating Committee were held. **Jules Becker**, **Richard Herr**, and **Patricia Swensen** were elected as Directors for second terms; **Ann Harlow** and **Cornelia Levine** are the new Directors. The Nominating Committee will consist of **Ellen Huppert**, **Joanne Lafler**, **John Rusk**, **Nancy Zinn** and **Lorrie O'Dell** as Chair.

After lunch, **Michael Griffith** presented "What's New with What's Old: Archives in the Digital Age." For researchers who rely on archives for original research, little can be more important than learning what approach archivists are currently taking to acquire, organize and disseminate information about records and manuscripts in their keeping.

Currently archivist for the Santa Clara County Archives, Mike's earlier experience includes a number of years as historian/archivist of the U.S. District Court in San Francisco, and as processing archivist at the Labor History and Archives center at San Francisco State University. His talk explored current trends in the profession: new processing philosophies; new means of records dissemination and information about them, including Web 2.0 (and others); and digitization and what this means for users.

Mike started by addressing the major problem — the rapid growth of record accumulation (not new but increasing), the post-1950 or 1960 curve rising almost vertically, resulting in rising backlogs. A 1998 survey found that one-third of holdings in the

average archive were unprocessed. In order to deal with this ever-growing situation, there is agreement among most archivists that the only solution is less processing; more records can be made available for research if each collection receives less processing or "more product, less processing," a tenet being adopted by the National Historic Public Records Commission (NHPRC). Future requests for financial support for records processing will require this philosophy as a fundamental criteria for success. Records will no longer be transferred to new containers or new folders (unless the old ones are patently unsuitable) and staples will not be removed, all of these traditional methodologies once taken for granted. There will be less arrangement or rearrangement of folders, such as separation of correspondence from other types of materials. Finding aids will be more general and less detailed. And the "result for researchers—more collections available but more work to use them."

A brighter spot on the horizon, however, is the relatively new (to the profession) availability of various means of access to information about collections anywhere. Web 2.0, is essentially the increasingly sophisticated use of the Web for information gathering and dissemination, changing the way people think about the process. It goes beyond the traditional webpage, and is interactive, collaborative (for example, Wikipedia), accessible, and opens up new paths for traditional research. "Archivists are using Facebook, Twitter, and blogs, with over 100 blogs focusing on archives and manuscript collections, from around the world. Now, many archivists are talking to archivists. For researchers, the most useful are those that are institutional, where there is talk about processing or requests for help."

Photo-sharing sites (such as Flickr) allow for easy sharing of images, permitting viewers to add content. For example, the Library of Congress recently put up a ship picture, asking if anyone could identify it, and received a number of replies, one of which provided highly specific information. The obvious benefit for researchers is more information about the locations and content of images. The downside, of course is the problem of

reliability and the veracity of Web commentary. A pioneer example of the next generation finding aids is the Polar Bear Expedition records at University of Michigan. As in the Library of Congress example, it allows users to add comments and create "soft" links to pages other viewers have found useful, and even links to other relevant collections. The same caveats about reliability apply.

Digitization: ten years ago, this seemed to be a fantasy due to the high costs involved. But things have changed dramatically. For example, the Library of Congress has 26 million books; each book is estimated to comprise about 1 megabyte, so the collection total is 26 tetrabytes. The costs and size of computer to hold all this information is \$60,000. The cost of scanning (for Internet Archive) is about ten cents per page. If the average book is 300 pages, the cost of digitizing 1 million books is 30 million dollars. The UC system, to date, has scanned 1.8 million books. It is possible that within a decade or so the Library of Congress holdings (or at least those parts not under copyright) could be available at every library and computer.

However, for manuscript and archives collections the picture is slightly less rosy. These materials are harder to scan than books—they're not uniform in size or material and frequently include items difficult to interpret electronically. Mike suggested that digitization of collections would start with microfilm, as uniform, stable items, and progress to original materials as experience with the process is developed. The real benefit to researchers will be availability of a vast range of sources and universal access to these. The downside may be the possible fate of originals, so the trade-off will be debated.

Nancy Zinn

HISTORY-PLAY READERS

Since the publication of the last newsletter the History-Play Readers finished reading *Salvage*, the final play in Tom Stoppard's trilogy, *The Coast of Utopia*, having read *Voyage* and *Shipwreck* earlier. The trilogy dealt with political and philosophical debate in Russia in the mid-nineteenth century. *Salvage*, set in 1853-1868, focused on the émigré population in London and their hopes of keeping resistance alive in their homeland.

The Play Readers remained in the nineteenth century for their next reading, *Childe Byron* by Romulus Linney, the author of several novels and numerous plays. Written in 1977, it has often been performed since. The author sets up a hypothetical meeting between George Gordon, Lord Byron, and his daughter Augusta Ada, the Countess of Lovelace, the child from his marriage to Anna Isabella (Annabella) Milbanke in 1815. Father and daughter had never met, as she had been declared a ward of the court when only four months old and her father was forbidden to see her. In the play she is age 36, the same age at which Byron died in Greece. She too is dying, from cancer. The play opens with her drawing up her last will and testament while hallucinating from massive doses of the painkiller laudanum. Ada had a sharp mathematical mind and, unlike her romantic, profligate father, thinks of the world in terms of numbers. When we meet her, she is in her room with her model of the "Analytical Engine," considered a precursor of the computer. In her delirium, she brings her heretofore unknown father to life and sharp exchanges between the two ensue. The dialogue includes references to his wild youth, his shame about his club foot, his incestuous relationship with his half-sister, Augusta Leigh, his reputed homosexual relationships as well as graphic references to his conduct with her mother. In the second act, Ada plays her own mother, Annabella. The action of the play is moved forward by a six person chorus.

At its next meeting in March, the group will begin reading Alexander Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*.

Edith Piness

MEDIEVAL STUDY GROUP

The Medieval Study Group has only one session to report since the last edition of the *Newsletter*. Between the holiday season and member's travels, we had a hard time setting meeting times.

On Saturday, February 17, **Nancy Zinn** gave a presentation at her home on the Avignon Papacy in the fourteenth century. In his continuing struggle with the French King, Philip IV, in 1301 Pope Boniface VIII retracted all privileges granted to Philip by previous popes. Philip's response (in 1303) was to attack Boniface and arrest him; Boniface died a few weeks later. After the two-year pontificate of Benedict XI, Clement V became the next pope. Owing his election to French clerics, he established his court at Avignon in southern France. Clement V championed the suppression of heretics, and, despite personal doubts, pushed for proceedings against the Templars.

Besides Clement V (1305-1314), there were six more popes who ruled from Avignon: John XXII (1316-1334); Benedict XII (1334-1342); Clement VI (1342-1352); Innocent VI (1352-1362); and Urban V (1362-1378). Under these popes, actions against the Cathars, the Waldensians and the Hussites were continued; the Curia (the church administrative offices) were moved to Avignon; the conflict with Louis IV, the Holy Roman Emperor, was continued; fortunes were spent on expensive wardrobes and banquets; and two leading papal critics, Marsilius of Padua and William Ockham, were excommunicated.

In 1378, the papacy was moved back to Rome. However, a disputing party continued to honor the bishop in Avignon as the Pope. From 1378 to 1414, there were two "Popes" (for a time even three). Called the Papal Schism or the "time of the antipopes," it was a period of disorganization for the church. Finally in 1414, the Council of Constance was called and, by 1417, the last vestiges of the Avignon Papacy were dismantled.

Lorrie O'Dell

Autumn Stanley has come up with the idea of dealing with the material in her grandfather's orchard journals by organizing it according to themes. At this meeting, the theme was "weather," and SE Ohio illustrates precisely why T.S. Eliot called April "the cruelest month." **Joanne Lafler** continues to tweak her completed manuscript—a process that she hopes will not continue for many more years. She has not presented any new pages at recent meetings. That has not prevented her from expressing opinions on new work by other members of the group. **Ellen Huppert** has filled in some new material in her draft of "Lizzie's Story" and begun the necessary revisions, aided by the excellent comments from members of the group. She has found a research assistant to look into the archives in Michigan in hopes of filling in more details about some of the mysterious events that Lizzie mentioned. **Bonda Lewis** has found a source for early twentieth-century American road maps at Wichita State University. "This a treasure!" The maps are helping her find roads between the small town in southern Nebraska, where "Jenny at Home," the second volume of *Thursday's Children* is set, to Marysville, Kansas, where a group of Nebraska women will meet with Sara Bard Field on her historic cross-country trip in 1915. **Elizabeth Thacker-Estrada** has polished the Introduction to her book on First Lady Abigail Powers Fillmore. To create a smoother narrative, she is reorganizing chapters covering Abigail's years in Buffalo, New York and Washington, D.C. during the 1830s and 1840s when Millard Fillmore served in the United States Congress. **Ann Harlow**, working on a dual biography of Albert Bender and Anne Bremer, has been exploring the art-historical context of Bremer's art study in New York and Paris in 1910-11, including the influential collection of Gertrude and Leo Stein. Informative and amusing quotations are enriching her manuscript. Her article on Bender was published in the *Argonaut* (San Francisco Museum and Historical Society) in December. **Ethel Herr** has not been able to participate in the past two months due to health issues. We wish her well.

Ellen Huppert

Tom Snyder recently gave a talk on the history of the Naval Hospital at Mare Island to the Retired Physicians' Association of the Kaiser Permanente Medical Group. Also, he has had a paper on the Mare Island hospital accepted for presentation at the annual meeting of the North American Society of Oceanic History. The meeting this year is at the Maritime Academy in Vallejo, May 13 to 17. Another of Tom's current projects is looking at the relationship between the great physician Sir William Osler and his medical alma mater, Albany Medical College. In particular, Tom is looking at Dr. Osler's welcome of the Albany Hospital-Medical School's Base Hospital Unit to the United Kingdom for service during World War I. The unit served with distinction, no doubt in part due to Dr Osler's inspiring welcome."

Karen Offen co-authored an article, with Elizabeth L. Colton, "The International Museum of Women," in UNESCO's *Museum International*, (Dec. 2007); it appeared in a special issue "Gender Perspectives on Cultural Heritage and Museums." Also, she has published a long review, "Dancing with the Patriarchs," of Judith Bennett's *History Matters*, in the *Women's Review of Books*, (July/Aug 2007); a long review of Judith Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen* on the internet site H-France Forum (May 2007); and has a review in *MS. Magazine's* fall issue of Marilyn French's epic, *From Eve to Dawn: A History of Women in the World* (Feminist Press, 2008). In her women's history blog "Clio Talks Back," Karen provides ongoing women's history content to accompany the International Museum of Women's on-line exhibit, "Women, Power, & Politics." www.omow.org/community/blog.

Anne Richardson reports the good news that she has a piece that will be published in the June 2009 issue of MOREANA, defending William Tyndale from the charge of fundamentalism brought by a Harvard professor in an otherwise invincible book. "Tyndale's reputation in our times is, I guess, an obsession with me."

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Amy Essington published "Baseball on the Pacific Coast: The Integration of the Pacific Coast League, 1948-1952" in the *Journal of the West* (Fall 2008). She also wrote biographies of players Charles Follis, Effa Manley, Frank Robinson, and Fleetwood Walker for blackpast.org.

Bill Issel is spending the academic year as the László Orzágh Chair in American Studies (a Fulbright Distinguished Lecturing award) at the University of Pécs in Hungary. He is teaching three United States history courses each semester and also lecturing at universities in Budapest and other Hungarian cities. Bill has also given presentations at the American Politics Group conference at St. Anne's College at Oxford University and at American Studies conferences in Szeged and Pecs in Hungary. Bill recently had three articles published based on his work on Catholics and Politics and San Francisco city planning history in the *Journal of Church and State*, *American Catholic Studies*, and *The Argonaut*.

Two-person Hardscratch Press—editor/author **Jackie Pels** and designer David Johnson—received the Alaska Historical Society's 2008 "Contributions to Alaska History" award in October, with special mention of the newly released two-volume *Family After All: Alaska's Jesse Lee Home*. In November's issue of *Editor & Publisher* magazine, Hardscratch Press is one of several publishers honored by the Pacific Northwest chapter of the American Society of Indexers, "in recognition and appreciation of publishers who value good indexes and the professional indexers who create them." Volume II of *Family After All* has also been nominated for the Alaska Library Association's 2009 Alaskana Award. In the Bay Area in January, Hardscratch Press released *The Life Story of Henry Ramsey Jr.: An Autobiography*, an eloquent account of the journey from a Jim Crow childhood to a life of activism, public service, and high achievement.

More than 100 students and their teachers from the Berryessa School District in San Jose will come to Mountain View on April 7 to see The Lively Foundation's presentation of *The Gold Rush*, an entertaining and painlessly educational historical program. Their field trip is almost a reenactment of the overland travels of those working their way to the nineteenth-century mining fields. **Leslie Friedman** will also present *The Gold Rush* in San Jose on March 31 for another 450 students and teachers. Also, Leslie will present her paper, "Sewing and Social Status," this spring at the conference of the Western Association of Woman Historians at Santa Clara University.

M. Luciana Lombardi wrote *An Introduction to the Life and Wwork of Lucilia Guimarães Villalobos (1886-1966)*, and added audio tracks of rare live concert recordings of the Brazilian composer's music to the Online Edition of *Cantar é Viver / To Sing Is To Live*: musicandwords.net/lucilia.pdf.

Harvey Schwartz's latest book, *Solidarity Stories: An Oral History of the ILWU*, has been published by the University of Washington Press as part of their Spring/Summer 2009 New Titles. The book is a collection of firsthand narratives of union leaders, as well as the rank and file workers from the docks of the Pacific Coast to the fields of Hawaii. *Solidarity Stories* testifies to the union's impact on the lives of its members as well as its role in larger political events. Harvey is the curator of the Oral History Collection of the ILWU.

A Poetry Reading at the Library of Congress

I sent samples of my poetry six or eight months ago to the Library of Congress Poetry Librarian, Patricia Gray, who coordinates the "Poetry at Noon" Series. I rarely send to anything like that, but because it was the Library of Congress, I was intrigued. She called me and invited me herself. The date was February 10th, and we read love poetry for an "Early Valentine" theme.

The room where we read was one of the auditoriums in the original Library of Congress building, now called "The Jefferson Building" because there are three different buildings used by the Library, all adjacent to each other. The furnishings of the room were donated by a Mrs. Woodall who wanted a special place for chamber music concerts. It's done in the federal period style, simple but very elegant, so I felt completely complimented by being able to read there. The acoustics were so good that we didn't need a microphone even though the room probably held 200 people and had a deep carpet.

It was quite a fun day. I was there early, to get a copy of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, because I wanted to include one in my reading. I got to see the beautiful office in the "attic" where the Poetry Librarian works—a lot fancier than my house! Right across the hall is the school room where the Congressional Pages take their classes. And I was escorted through the tunnels below (where the LOC employees travel) to coffee in the employee cafeteria.

The first reader, who was a forty-something PhD and college teacher from Florida, was a disappointment. She had some good concepts, but she read way TOO fast and, after two poems, I gave up trying to understand the details. I imagine many others did, too. She had a large claue of supporters including her husband, who was video-taping her.

I read second. I started with Ms. Browning's poem to "explain" a reference in the first one of mine that

I read. All of my seven poems were about my husband Stuart and our marriage. I'm an excellent reader and I got lots of the right reactions—and knew how to stop for them.

The third reader was an elderly (stooped, hard of hearing) man named Ed Zimmerman, who is also a mergers and acquisitions lawyer for a big firm. Neither his hearing problem nor his CV seemed promising for writing poetry, and I started to wonder if we were the "also-rans," but he was really terrific. He took the theme of "love" in a broader sense, had a lot of wry commentary and beautiful vocabulary in shorter, carefully constructed pieces. He also read beautifully, so all could enjoy it.

I got a number of seemingly heartfelt compliments from people I had never met, including one poetry magazine editor who asked me to send him something (he bought two of my books, and wanted me to sign them, which is odd for a magazine editor). Only Poet Laureates get to sell their books at the Library of Congress Bookstore, so I doubt this will make any permanent dent in my low profile. We had at least one Congressman in the audience with his wife, since it was the "Valentine Reading."

My sister Mary had come from New Jersey to hear me and we clomped around Capitol Hill together afterward, having lunch and exploring my old haunts. We did the Renwick and the Phillips Collection and a LOT of walking, talking, and eating. The place I stayed, the Pen Center, is the headquarters of the National League of Pen Women; it's a 1890s brick place that Robert Todd Lincoln lived in for a while, in the Dupont Circle area. I lived two blocks away when I first lived in DC. Now it's more like Georgetown, and it was very entertaining to go around and compare 1964 to 2009. I always did love the buildings, though, especially since they're all loaded with history. For me it was a toe dipped into the water of American Poets, so I majored in Enjoyment the whole time.

Jody Offer

CALENDAR

March 15 Work-in-Progress -- Celeste MacLeod
June 21 Work-in-Progress -- Anne Homan

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 30, 2009**.

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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