

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

Earlier today, on the way back from a weekend in the Sierra, I began to ponder this column. One thing I've been thinking about recently is how history enlivens our understanding. While it may be preaching to the choir, I thought I might say more about a small example of this.

A few years ago, I became quite interested in the history of Christmas. I read Stephen Nissenbaum's *The Battle for Christmas* (1996), a work I highly recommend.

Nissenbaum's thesis is that today's Christmas celebration is an invention of the nineteenth-century and not something which originated in a murky and distant past. According to his book, the pre-nineteenth century Christmas celebration, at least in England, was a rowdy event in which the poor could invade the houses of the well-to-do and demand their finest food and ale. It was in a nineteenth-century increasingly dominated by an urban middle class that Christmas became redefined as a domestic celebration emphasizing gifts from parents to children. In the United States, celebrants adopted what they thought were age-old traditions from abroad, such as the Christmas tree, little realizing that they were of comparatively recent origin there as well.

I found this story of Christmas's recent origins quite exhilarating. It provided a much fuller sense of how we came as a society to celebrate as we do and why. It also was quite interesting to learn that within a decade or so from the start of a recognizable Christmas celebration, many were complaining of the stress of so much shopping. I suppose this is a round-about way of celebrating what the Institute provides: a forum in which we are encouraged to pursue our curiosity and to enliven our lives and those of other members through our research.

Mike Griffith

WORK-IN-PROGRESS – Susan Cohn

At the home of **Celeste MacLeod** on Sunday, October 19, **Susan Cohn** related a long forgotten story she heard from a National Park Service ranger on Alcatraz Island, the story of a small group of unusual prisoners held there during World War I when the island served as a United States Army Disciplinary Barracks. Her challenge in researching this story has been both to locate documents and articles from which she can piece together the events and motivations of participants in this little-known episode of war resistance, and to present her findings in an exhibit format that would hold the attention of at least some of the 5,000 daily visitors to the National Park Service site.

In July 1918, shortly after their court martial at (then Camp) Fort Lewis, Washington, four young Hutterite men, three of them brothers, arrived in chains at Alcatraz for refusing to take part in any way in World War I. They had been drafted from their farming community in South Dakota and had arrived at Camp Lewis a few months earlier. These young men felt that any activity related to the war effort was counter to their pacifism as taught by their church. This refusal to serve and to wear the U.S. Army uniform resulted in a twenty-year prison sentence to be served at Alcatraz Island.

Once on Alcatraz, they would not don the army prisoner uniform and refused to work, with the result that their treatment during their incarceration was extraordinarily brutal. They were kept in the dungeon cells under the main cellblock without furnishings, light, or heat at night, and were forced to stand shackled to their prison bars during the day. Shortly after the war ended on November 11, 1918, the men were transferred to the U.S. Disciplinary Barracks, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, where two of the brothers soon died. When their families were allowed to retrieve their bodies, they discovered that the men had been dressed in the uniform that they had so heroically resisted wearing.

As a result of this tragic incident the main body of the Hutterites left the United States for Canada. (Some eventually returned, years later.) The two brothers who died at Fort Leavenworth are buried

near Freeman, South Dakota. Their gravemarkers read "Martyr."

The story that Susan wants to tell is complex. She must introduce the Hutterite Christians, a German-speaking sect that moved from the Austrian Empire in the eighteenth century to Catherine the Great's Russia, and then migrated in 1874 to the United States to practice their communal farming and nonviolent principles unmolested. The United States during World War I, with its super patriotism and strongly felt anti-German sentiments and persecution, also needs to be explained

The subtleties of draft resistance and conscience are a major part of this story. These Alcatraz prisoners interpreted very strictly what they could or could not do, even though some of their co-religionists felt justified in adopting a more lenient interpretation. It will also be important to convey why the Army—or those in charge—felt it necessary to implement such drastic measures against these conscientious objectors. To present these threads in a few words, but with as many images as possible is Susan's challenge. Unfortunately, objects probably have not survived, except for the site itself.

Those of us gathered were enthralled, saddened, and convinced by Susan's carefully written presentation (soon to be shared with National Parks staff) that this almost unknown episode at Alcatraz Island needs to become part of the former prison's public history. Just where the story ends and even begins was one of the questions discussed.

Maria Sakovich

BIOGRAPHY GROUP

Autumn Stanley's biography of the nineteenth century magazine editor and reformer Charlotte Smith, *Raising More Hell and Fewer Dahlias*, is in press at Lehigh University Press, the latest completed step being her review of the "rough pages." The book will appear in 2009. Autumn has also been working on a biographical article about her grandfather, "An Orchard Wizard in SE Ohio." With good suggestions from the Institute's Biography Group, she hopes to interest *Smithsonian* magazine or an Ohio history publication in the article. **Joanne Lafler** presented a draft of her rewritten preface to her biography of Harry Lafler, with which she hopes to capture the attention of potential readers. She was sure that this was the *final* rewrite, but the group had other ideas. She came home with suggestions to ponder, including changing the name to "introduction" from "preface," providing a much-needed transition. **Ethel Herr** brought two things to show to the group: a CD created by her and her friend, Ellen, titled "Do As I Say...", a recording of a dialogue between Ethel and Ellen on the subject of struggles with hypocrisy and arrogance, and a print-out of the beginnings of a book on the history of her church which is celebrating its 50th anniversary next spring. **Elizabeth Thacker-Estrada** has been working on three projects. First, group members have helped her refine portions of chapters 1 through 3 of her book-in-progress, *Abigail Powers Fillmore: The Light of the White House*. Second, as an Editorial Board member of the *First White House Library Catalogue*, she has written "Abigail Powers Fillmore: First Lady of the Library," and assisted in editing the essays of other contributors. The manuscript has been submitted to Penn State University Press. Third, she has updated a bibliographical chapter that will appear in *Michelle Obama: The Report to the First Lady*, a book that will be published by Nova History Publications. **Ann Harlow** is grappling with the historical context of international art at the time of Anne Bremer's trip to Paris in 1910-1911. She notes that Albert Bender, her other subject, now has an entry in Wikipedia. It was probably added by the National Museum of Ireland, which recently opened the exhibition "A Dubliner's Collection of Asian Art: The Albert Bender Exhibition."

MEDIEVAL STUDY GROUP

Nancy Zinn hosted the group on Saturday, August 30. **John Rusk** discussed the entry of the Canary Islands into the European consciousness to stay during the thirteenth century. The islands were inhabited by a well-proportioned Neolithic people, many of them blond, sharing traits with the Berber people of North Africa. The Guanches, the term that is usually applied, had lost their sailing, even their boat-building, skills and had occupied the seven largest islands long enough for separate languages to develop. The Canaries, along with the other (uninhabited) Atlantic islands of Madeira and the Azores, provided a laboratory for Iberian people to develop the tools and ideology of conquest that were used in the New World and Asia. Parallels are everywhere: free-lancing conquistadors plagued the Islands as well as New Spain; imperious missionaries were to be found on both sides of the ocean; Dona Maria (*La Malinche*) of Mexico had a predecessor in Francisca de Gazmira. The unnecessarily brutal conquest of the Canaries was not completed until the 1490s, about the same time that Columbus made the Islands his jumping off point for a voyage into the unknown.

On November 9, at the home of **Lyn Reese, Bob** and **Lorrie O'Dell** discussed Richard Fletcher's book, *The Barbarian Conversion*. Tracking with impressive authority Christianity's growth from the time when Constantine gave it power and prestige in the early fourth century to the conversion of the Lithuanians in 1386, Fletcher shows an urban religion moving first into the rustic reaches of the empire, then gradually establishing itself beyond those borders. With rare exception a peaceful process, the church's influence in barbarian Europe grew largely through contact with barbarian nobility, which was seduced by the organization, wealth and literacy of Roman culture and the political advantages of Christianity within both the barbarian and Roman worlds. Such acceptance was embraced also by invaders—Ostrogoths, Visigoths and Vandals. Monasteries were usually "noblemen's clubs" and missionaries mainly were from the upper classes. Examining the missionary impulse, and the nature of pagan religions, Fletcher says that there are things that we don't know about the details of the process and things that we will never know.

HISTORY-PLAY READERS

In the last newsletter, it was reported that the History-Play Readers had begun reading *The Coast of Utopia*, a trilogy of plays by Tom Stoppard: *Voyage*, *Shipwreck*, and *Salvage*. The plays premiered at the National Theatre in London in the summer of 2002. They run for a total of nine hours. The trilogy focuses on political and philosophical debate about Russia in the mid nineteenth Century. *Voyage* is set in 1833-44 at a country estate in Russia and in Moscow. *Shipwreck* covers the years 1846-1852. The action is in Moscow, as well as in Germany and France (Paris and Nice). The first play envisioned hope for a better society, the second reflects the dissolution of those ideals after the failed revolutions of 1848 and the exile of leaders from Russia and Germany. Alexander Herzen and his family, along with his literary friend Belinsky, dominate the Moscow portion of *Voyage* as well as *Shipwreck*. Herzen, the illegitimate son of a wealthy landowner, is reputed to have been the inspiration for Stoppard to write the trilogy. Personally and politically, *Shipwreck* is a tragedy. Herzen's marriage to his wife Natalie flounders and the play concludes with the tragic drowning of his deaf son, Kolya. The last play, *Salvage*, set in 1853-1868, is focused on the émigré population in London and their attempt to keep resistance alive in their homelands. The play readers will conclude their reading of *Coast of Utopia* with Act II of *Salvage* in early December.

INSTITUTE MINI-GRANTS

The Mini-Grant Committee and the Board of Directors are pleased to announce the following awards for 2008: **Monica Clyde** received \$460 for research expenses concerning German pioneers in Gold-Rush era California and for registration fees for the NCIS conference. **Maria Sakovich** received \$870 for translation of sources encountered during research into the Russian émigré community that arrived in the Western US following the Bolshevik Revolution and for registration fees for the NCIS conference. **Steven Levi** received \$370 to partially cover transportation costs from Alaska to the Bay Area as he continues his study of Alaska Gold Rush history.

MEMBERSHIP DINNERS

ANNUAL MEMBERS' POTLUCK DINNER

The potluck was held this year on September 14 at the home of **Ellen** and Peter **Huppert**. As is always the case at this event, we came, we ate much delicious food, we drank, we chatted endlessly about matters historical— and about politics as well, since the Presidential election was certainly historical. But there was something new this year. **Nancy Zinn** took charge of the History Bee. Her new wrinkle was to organize us into teams. This proved to be a wise decision, for the questions were more than usually difficult, and they often required team consultation. As usually happens, we learned a great deal about history—European, American, world, literary, scientific—including, it must be admitted, a lot that we thought we *already* knew. Many thanks to the Hupperts for their gracious hosting of this event.

Joanne Lafler

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DINNER

Our festive Annual Dinner, held on November 8 at Grace North Church, Berkeley, attracted 36 members. Monica Clyde selected an appetizing menu and, with an artistic touch, festooned the tables with autumn leaves. Wine lubricated the conversation, although given our proclivities, that was hardly necessary. Dunbar Ogden, emeritus professor of drama at UCB, spoke about his memoir *My Father Said Yes: A White Pastor in Little Rock School Integration*. He told of his interviews with those who had participated in the integration of Central high School in 1957, and about recording his father's memories. For Institute members working on biographies, this was an opportunity to question someone who has written one so well. He writes of the personalities and dynamics, of the bravery of students who, when finally protected by the National Guard, still underwent harassment in the halls, unbeknownst to their parents, and of the one white minister who did not say no to the request to accompany the students on that first terrifying day.

Georgia Wright

NCIS CONFERENCE

The National Coalition of Independent Scholars, with which the Institute is affiliated, held its biennial conference in Berkeley on October 25 and 26, with the Institute as one of the co-sponsors.

In the first of the Saturday sessions, "Music and Art," Elliot Wise analyzed Roger Campin's *Marriage of the Virgin*, an early Flemish painting which is quite wonderfully complex. Carol Braun's talk suggested that Johann Sebastian Bach's political and religious affiliations have been misinterpreted. In the session on "Exploring Issues in Biography," Catherine La Courreye Blecki discussed the life and work of Sir Francis Bacon, emphasizing his powerful use of rhetoric, his advocacy of empiricism and his vision of a community of scholars outside of academe. Eike Reichardt talked about the career of Karl August Lingner (1860-1916), a German manufacturer who, with no formal training in biological science, made significant contributions to the fields of hygiene and public health. In the session on "Cultures and Politics," Institute member **Celeste MacLeod** presented an overview of her planned full-length work on Fanny Trollope's "infamous" book, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832), a best-seller in both Britain and America.

The Institute-sponsored panel, "Discovering California History," was well presented and well received. **Maria Sakovich** spoke on "Deaconess Katharine Maurer: 'Missionary among Immigrants' at San Francisco's Angel Island Station" **Monica Clyde** reported on "German Pioneers in Gold Rush California," and **Jeanne Farr McDonnell** summarized her book *Juana Briones of 19th Century California*.

Keynote speaker Stanley Chodorow provided a short history of scholarship from ancient times, stressing the degree to which traditional scholarship was always independent. In his comments on recent developments, he pointed out that scholars in academic departments suffer from limitations on their scholarship, different from, but sometimes as painful as, the difficulties endured by independent scholars. An academic historian and administrator, he was instrumental in helping the San Diego

Independent Scholars win access to the university library. In "Making Research a Business," Rue Ziegler told how she converted her expertise as a cultural anthropologist into a business, consulting with community, business, and government groups on land use issues in Napa County.

One session offered three views of Bay Area history. While trying to identify the huge "aggressively" shedding tree in her Oakland garden (a Bunya Bunya), Mary C. Wilson uncovered the history of the nineteenth-century vogue for importing exotic flora. Barbara Fisher focused on the career of Dr. Charlotte Blake Brown, who founded Children's Hospital in San Francisco—the only such hospital managed completely by women. The threat of venereal disease became a pretext for the control of prostitution in San Francisco as Mary Ann Irwin reported in "Making Sex Safe for the Married Man: Prostitution and the San Francisco Municipal Clinic, 1911 to 1913."

The panel "American HerStory around the World" featured Tisa M. Anders on "The Creation of Sugar Culture: Western Nebraskan Women as Example," explaining the critical role of women and children from Mexico in sugar beet cultivation. Marilyn Färdig Whiteley, in "'May God Forgive Us!': Mission and Indian Rights in the work of Isabel Crawford" outlined the career of a woman who became an important and beloved advocate for Indian rights. Kathleen Sheldon's paper "No more cookies or cake: now 'C'est la guerre': An American Nurse in Turkey, 1919 to 1920," was her search for the real story of her great aunt, who served as a nurse in Turkey after World War I.

Sunday was devoted to a workshop, actually two presentations, one on what should go into a curriculum vitae (for a fellowship) and one on grants. Participants were given a CD of the Grants Handbook (originally written by Georgia Wright with Laura Garces and Mary Emma Harris.)

Ellen Huppert, Joanne Lafler, Georgia Wright

IN MEMORIAM

Agnes F. Peterson, who served as Curator of the Central and Western European Collections of the Hoover Institution at Stanford University for 41 years, died in Los Altos on September 1, 2008. A long-time member of the Institute, Agnes served on the Board of Directors, and helped arrange meetings and programs at the Hoover Institution. For all of her strong ties with faculty at universities around the world, she had a deep appreciation of the work done by independent scholars.

Agnes Peterson was first hired by the Hoover Institution Library on April 16, 1952, after having received her undergraduate degree in history at the University of Toronto and receiving her master's degree, also in history, from Radcliffe. Softly voiced, rigorously accurate, unfailingly polite, and intellectually curious, Agnes found her forte as West European curator. She facilitated the acquisition of some of the most valuable archival collections at Hoover, and for decades she managed the Library's depository role for the publications of the emerging European Community. The list of collections established under her tutelage is long.

Many milestones marked her career. In 1980, she was awarded the Order of Leopold II by Belgium. In recognition of her research and writing, she was appointed Hoover Institution research fellow in 1986. In 1990, she received the Distinguished Service Award of the Stanford University Library Council.

Throughout her decades at the Hoover Library, Agnes Peterson consistently put the research of library patrons ahead of her own work. Generations of historians benefited from her matchless knowledge not only of the Hoover collections but of European history. She would locate new sources and consistently followed through, matching researchers with the most pertinent materials for their topics. In 1979 she secured facilities and funding at the Hoover Institution for one of the founding meetings of the German Studies Association, now the preeminent professional organization for the study of Germany in the United States. She was equally active in the American Historical Association and, significantly, the

Western European Studies section (WESS) of the Association of College and Research Libraries. She gave long-time support to the Women's History/Women Historians Reading group, a gathering of Stanford and Northern California historians whose meetings Agnes often hosted. She served on several leadership or review boards over the years, including the World War II Studies Association, the Conference Group on Central European History, the consultants' panel of the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Stanford Bookstore. In 1987 she assisted a non-academic businessman to launch the Great War Society, an organization she provided with both logistical support and access to resources in the early years. It still thrives.

In short, Agnes Peterson documented the transformation that took place in the second half of the twentieth century. In her own words: "When I started working, the second World War was just over, the cold war had begun, and now, when I have stopped working (at least officially), the cold war is over and the whole world has changed. Few people have the chance to get to do what they like to do, in such exciting times, and get paid for it." (Speech on the occasion of a Festschrift presented to her by the Great War Society, August 18, 1994.)

Despite her family's deep ties to Germany, Agnes's father, Hermann Fischer, a biochemist in Berlin, was so disturbed by the growing Nazi menace in the 1930s that he voluntarily relocated the family first to Switzerland and then to Canada in 1937. Before leaving, he took his daughter to the Louvre to see the Greek sculpture "Winged Victory," and assured her that this represented the real Europe.

Agnes Gertrud Margarete Ilse Fischer Peterson will be remembered especially for her legacy of tolerance, her devotion to history, her European charm and style, and her infinite number of kindnesses to family and friends. Agnes was, as several scholars have pointed out, "an institution within the Institution."

Courtesy of Elena Danielson, Hoover Institution.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Karen Offen has several new published articles to report: "Thinking Historically about the International Women's Movement," special issue of *Sextant* (Brussels), nos. 23-24 (2007). Also, the following publications include her work: *Historia de una conquista*; in *Women's History Review* (April 2008); *História comparada das mulheres: Novas Abordagens*, ed. Anne Cova (Lisbon: Livros Horizonte, 2008); a CD-ROM, from the Conference XI Jornadas Nacionales de Historia de la Mujeres y IV Congreso Iberoamericano de Estudios de Género (Rosario, Argentina, August 2008); and *Civil Society, Public Space, and Gender Justice*, ed. Karen Hagemann, Sonya Michel, & Gunilla Budde (New York: Berghahn, 2008). In addition, her entries in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History* (2008) include "History of Women," "Ghénia Avril de Sainte-Croix," and "Ellen Key."

Edith Piness presented a paper at the International Burma Studies Conference at the Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois, October 3-5. George Orwell's first book, published in 1934, was *Burmese Days*, written after his service in the Imperial Burma Police from 1922—1927. "I have recently learned that on his deathbed (he died at the age of 46!), he was working on a story about Burma."

Georgia Wright gave her dialogue, "The Dean of Amiens Cathedral Interviews the Master Sculptor," at Carleton College and met with students interested in video and medieval subjects. The next day she 'premiered' "Who Was the Audience for the Gothic Portal?" She'll give the Gothic Portals talk at the Medieval Association of the Pacific (MAP) in Albuquerque in March. Her 'master sculptor' dialogue is to be scheduled at Swarthmore and Columbia University, her *alma maters*.

Amy Essington published two entries in the *Encyclopedia of Jim Crow, 1880-1965* (September 2008). She also completed the entry "John Ritchey" for blackpast.org. (November 2008). Amy participated in two roundtables, one at the Fourteenth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women (June 2008) and another at the American Historical Association, Pacific Coast Branch Conference (August 2008). She also presented a

paper at the Association of the Study of African-America Life and History Convention, Birmingham, Alabama (October 2008).

Ann Harlow will have an article published in the forthcoming issue of *The Argonaut*, the Journal of the San Francisco Museum and Historical Society: "Albert Bender, Artists' Patron-'Saint.'"

Bernard Wishy has established a blog on contemporary American and world politics. The web address is www.clearerview.synthaSite.com. Comment is possible and most welcome. The first blog is *Obama and the Conservative Future*.

Jeanne Farr McDonnell spoke at a meeting of the Daughters of American Colonists. They had put a plaque on the Juana Briones house in 1954, so it was a pleasure to tell them about a first-generation daughter of American Colonists. Her book, *Juana Briones of 19th Century California*, is finally available from the University of Arizona Press, and she will be speaking at the California Historical Society on Thursday, January 8, from 6 to 8 pm, free and open to all.

Suzanne Perkins wrote a chapter titled "Is it a Chocolate Pot? Chocolate and Its Accoutrements in France from Cookbook to Collectible," in *Chocolate: History, Culture, and Heritage*, a book about the history of chocolate. The book, edited by Louis E. Grivetti and Howard-Yana Shapiro, will be published February 9, 2009 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Along with the UC Berkeley undergraduate chorales and professional soloists, the UC Alumni Chorus, with **Joanne Lafler** in the alto section, gave two performances of the oratorio "Voices of Light" by American composer Richard Einhorn. The oratorio, which uses texts from a variety of medieval sources, is performed as the live music for showings of Carl Dreyer's famous silent film, *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928). The film, which was thought to have been destroyed, has been carefully restored.

ESSAY

My husband Peter and I spent two weeks in October, 2008, doing what millions of tourists do every year, "leaf peeping" in New England. We were fortunate; it was a banner year for bright foliage, and we hit the peak of the season. As usual, I was also looking for points of historical interest. New England is filled with history, of course, with colonial, federal, Greek Revival and Victorian homes, churches, and public buildings and monuments. What I had not previously realized is that the landscape, too, is historical. Today's landscape is not what the earliest European visitors saw. By the end of the nineteenth century, most of New England was clear cut, leaving hillsides completely denuded. The original forests were evergreen, but hardwood trees moved in. The hills now are covered with deciduous trees, which provide the glorious fall colors. The desired effect is specifically cultivated by the U.S. Forest Service. At a viewpoint on Highway 112 in the White Mountain National Forest, visitors are informed that evergreen trees have been cut away to allow a fuller view of colored leaves!

Outdoor museums were among the highlights of our trip. Strawberry Bankes in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, was the first English settlement on that part of the coast. I was most excited by the exhibits of the building techniques and tools used, beginning with the seventeenth century. There were a variety of structures, many furnished appropriately, including an eighteenth century tavern and a Jewish home from about 1900. The Shelburne Museum south of Burlington, Vermont, also features buildings, some *in situ*, others moved to the site, showing life from the seventeenth century up to 1950. The Hancock Shaker Village in western Massachusetts shows the life and devotions of the Shakers. The round stone barn is especially stunning. While the austere aesthetic and fine craftsmanship of the Shakers are the best-known characteristics of their culture, they were also interested in efficiency. The machine shop, where not only wood-working machinery but also laundry facilities were run by a water turbine, showed this quality. Museum highlights in Maine include the Maine Maritime Museum in tiny Bath, which was at one time one of the most important ports in the

United States. Indoor and outdoor exhibits show off a major shipbuilding site and the important maritime history of the state. Another museum was the Cole Land Transportation Museum outside Bangor. This private collection includes every kind of transport, from very large cargo trucks, a railroad engine and cabooses, automobiles, horse-drawn carriages and sleighs, and bicycles, tricycles and sleds. The Amoskeag Mill Museum in Manchester, New Hampshire, provides an excellent explanation of the history of the technological, economic and social history of textile manufacturing and of the town of Manchester. The brick mill buildings stretched a mile along the Merrimack River. After a century of producing cotton and woolen cloth, the mill shut down Christmas Eve, 1932, bankrupted by the move of textile milling to the southern U.S. where labor costs were less.

The history of the urbanization of Boston, whereby the very small land mass where the first Puritans settled has become today's city, is fascinating. Lines in the sidewalk indicate the original shoreline, showing most graphically that one is standing on filled land, almost a quarter mile from the current waterfront. The top of Beacon Hill was cut down by real estate speculators, and land changes had to be made to correct the use of tidal lands for sewage disposal. In Boston, we visited the John F. Kennedy Museum, located in a stunning building at the water's edge. Visitors are provided with a summary of JFK's early life and presidency. The Cuban missile crisis and the confrontation in Alabama over the admission of the first black students to the state university were featured. The Bay of Pigs was never mentioned, not one of the best moments in the Kennedy's story.

I read as much as I could get my hands on before leaving. I enjoyed Kenneth A. Lockridge's *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years* (Norton, 1970); Jane Brox's book *Clearing Ground* (North Point Press, 2004); Nancy S. Seasholes' *Walking Tours of Boston's Made Land* (MIT, 2006). and *Five Thousand Days Like This One: An American Family History* (Beacon Press, 1999)

Ellen Huppert

***Boom and Bust in the Alaska Goldfields:
A Multicultural Adventure*** (Praeger, 2007)

by
Steven Levi

Gold was first discovered in Russian America in 1849, by a miner called Peter Doroshin. The site was a river in the south-central part of what would become known as the Kenai Peninsula. Fortunately for the United States, the find was not considered commercially viable, and the Russians abandoned all further exploration for gold. Had they persisted, a wealth far surpassing that gained from the fur trade would shortly have been theirs, and the land now known as Alaska would probably have remained a Russian colony. At the very least, the United States would have had to pay far more than \$7,200,000. In 1867, even this sum seemed ridiculously high, and the territory was dubbed Seward's Folly in "honor" of Secretary of State William H. Seward, who negotiated the deal. At the time, Russia was embroiled in political squabbles on its western front, and the US viewed the burgeoning North Pacific cod fishery as an incentive for expansion. Seward carried the Alaska albatross to his grave. But had he lived just a bit longer, his foresight would have been celebrated instead, as gold discoveries began in the very year he died (1872), and peaked during the great Alaska gold rush at the turn of the century. And here is where Steven Levi's fascinating tale begins.

The year is 1880, and the site is a mountainside in Southeast Alaska near the modern city of Juneau. The discovery was a "hard-rock" gold deposit that yielded during its lifetime over two billion dollars in gold, dwarfing the purchase price for all Alaska. But hard-rock mining requires skilled manpower and expensive machinery to extract and refine the metal, and thus produces no great influx of people eager to share in the bounty. That influx, however, was shortly to begin, with the discovery of placer gold in the Klondike region of Canada's Yukon Territory, followed by similar finds in far western and central Alaska. Discoveries on the beaches of what is now Nome, and in the river valleys around Fairbanks, occurred within a few years of each other and, along with rumors of other sites

throughout the territory, caused what Levi calls a stampede. Placer gold deposits commonly occur in stream-bed gravel and require only a shovel or a gold pan to gather up the pure yellow metal, and a 'poke' to carry it away. More sophisticated equipment might include a wooden rocker or a sluice box capable of working larger volumes of gravel, both readily constructed on site by the prospector or miner. Thus even novices could extract placer gold, and this seemingly easy road to fabulous riches fueled the rush to Alaska, just as it had in Northern California fifty years earlier.

But placer mining in Alaska was a far cry from similar ventures in California. Land and weather were both more daunting in the North. Wilderness Alaska at the turn of the twentieth century was largely unexplored, and lacked even the most rudimentary accommodations, sources of supply, transportation, and even law and order. Levi's prodigious research on the plight of the miners he calls Argonauts reveals a world where deprivation, lawlessness, and starvation seemed the rule, not the exception. His account is a testimonial to the avarice of the few and the almost superhuman effort of the many, reminiscent of the struggles of such early Polar explorers as Shackleton and Scott.

However, I would be remiss in reviewing this important book if I failed to point out some ways in which it could have been improved. A good proofreading would have help catch some of the typographical errors and grammatical mistakes. Also, for readers unfamiliar with both the expanse and the geography of Alaska, a few regional maps charting the journeys described in the book would have been helpful. However, for those who crave the exploits of adventurers whose lives helped shape the 20th Century, *Boom and Bust in the Alaska Gold Fields* is a must read.

Guest reviewer, Thor Lauritzen, is a native Alaskan, born in Seward of immigrant Norwegian parents in 1932, and raised in a small mining and fishing community in the Eastern Aleutians. He himself has tried prospecting.

CALENDAR

January 18 Work-in-Progress -- Edith Piness
February 28 Annual Membership Meeting
March 15 Work-in-Progress -- Celeste MacLeod

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 **February 28, 2009**.

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