

THE INSTITUTE FOR HISTORICAL STUDY

VOLUME 31, No. 3, WINTER 2011-12

NEWSLETTER

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

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Thinking about what I might comment on in the wider world that pertains to the study of history, I kept coming back to what a historically discouraging time we live in. There was much more optimism about the future of America in the depths of the Great Depression than there is now. In California restrictions on the state budget process have led to dismal results for the teaching of history in public schools and universities. State historic parks are closing. The rocky national economy continues to limit both private and government grant funding for museums and nonprofit publishers. This is the fourth New Year in a row in which there's been a sense of "lets hope this year is better than last." There is plenty to be concerned about.

But sitting around and complaining won't help matters. We can all find things to do to make life a little easier for people who are a lot worse off than we are and to work toward a more sustainable future. I'd like to recommend two magazines for some positive thinking to counteract all the negativity in the regular media: *Ode* (odemagazine.com) and *Yes!* (yesmagazine.org). They may inspire you to new action, or at least provide a breath of fresh air.

I want to thank Mike Griffith for serving as our webmaster for the past two years and recently finishing the project of converting the website to its new format. It doesn't yet have all the features some members would like to see; we would need one or more website volunteers to meet that challenge. So if you have a vision for a website that will help attract new members, please think about what you can do to make that happen. And please continue to think about people you could invite to join the Institute, since word of mouth continues to be our best source for new members.

I hope to see you at our Annual Meeting in Oakland on Saturday, February 25 (details on page 11) and to inspire you to new action on behalf of your Institute for Historical Study!

Ann Harlow

WORK IN PROGRESS

On the Eve of Armageddon: Hitler, Stalin, and the Coming of the Second World War

At the Work in Progress (September 18), held at the home of **Lyn Reese, Richard Raack** discussed his forthcoming book, "On the Eve of Armageddon: Hitler, Stalin, and the Coming of the Second World War."

In his analysis of the developments leading to the outbreak of hostilities, Dr. Raack argued against the more generally accepted view that Stalin acted largely from defensive motives and that he signed the pact with the Nazis as a last resort to keep the USSR out of a conflict for which it was unprepared. Raack believes that Stalin's motives were basically aggressive. For him a war in Europe was something to be desired. It would ruin the capitalist powers, and even if Germany were ultimately victorious, that country would be profoundly weakened. By standing aside, Soviet Russia would emerge the big winner from the conflict, with increased territory and the prospect of a Communist revolution greatly advanced.

In support of his argument, Dr. Raack offered two documents for consideration. The first of these was a report regarding a speech that Stalin was said to have made at a Politburo meeting, on August 19, 1939, regarding the prospect of a pact with Germany. In it, Stalin summed up the situation as follows: "... it is in your interest that a war should break out between the [sic] Germany and the Anglo-French bloc. For us it is crucial that this war last as long as possible, so that both sides emerge exhausted. For these reasons we must accept the pact proposed by Germany and do everything possible so that this war, once begun, lasts as long as possible."

The second document was a communiqué sent by the Comintern to the Communist parties in the Balkans. It stated that the Soviet Union was "wholly disinterested" in the war that might

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break out in Europe. "We have decided to bide our time. The revolutionary activity which is continuously developing under the guidance of the Communist parties in all countries will prepare a favorable ground for our future intervention."

Dr. Raack acknowledged that the genuineness of the two documents he presented has been questioned, but he felt that those doubts were unfounded.

During the discussion that followed Dr. Raack's presentation, much attention focused on the Soviet Union's contribution to the victory in the larger war that followed Hitler's attack in 1941. There was general agreement that until recently Russia's role in the defeat of Nazism was not sufficiently appreciated in the United States. Many of Dr. Raack's listeners were also grateful for his reminder of the fact that through all the twists and turns of Soviet diplomacy, Stalin never lost sight of revolutionary goals.

Rob Robbins

California Roundtable

The quarterly meeting of the California Roundtable took place at the Marin home of **Edith Piness**, with **Charles Fracchia** speaking on "Shaping the City: San Francisco and the Gold Rush." Charles, founder and president emeritus of the San Francisco Museum and Historical Society, teaches at City College of San Francisco and the University of San Francisco and has written various books, including, most recently, *When the Water Came Up to Montgomery Street: San Francisco During the Gold Rush*.

He spoke about how San Francisco has a unique character for reasons stemming from the Gold

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Rush days. The city is known for tolerance, inclusivity, and unconventionality, not surprising since the Gold Rush brought together people from all over the world at a time when most people never traveled fifty miles from home. Besides being diverse, the people who came were predominantly male, young, and adventurous. They were risk-takers, not conformists.

One rarely hears ethnic slurs in the Bay Area compared to other parts of the country, Charles said. Admittedly, racism has reared its head at times in San Francisco, but by and large people have gotten along. Jews, Italians, and Irish were able to achieve positions of prominence in the nineteenth century more easily here than elsewhere. The city is now forty percent Asian.

The early Chinese immigrants were looked upon with "bemused tolerance" at first and integrated into urban life. They participated in civic rituals like parades. But anti-Chinese sentiment grew, in part because of the growth of the labor movement. The concept of a strike was alien to Chinese cultural traditions, so employers found they could readily hire Chinese strike-breakers at lower wages than their regular workers. This bred increasing resentment among the working class, especially by the late 1870s due to an economic recession. Labor leader Denis Kearney led some big anti-Chinese demonstrations. However, according to Charles, these were milder and less violent than some riots that took place in other parts of the United States.

Another way the discovery of gold set a tone for California's next 150 years was in being a source of sudden great wealth. Just eleven years later, the huge Comstock Lode of silver was found. Wealth fostered greater appreciation of the arts. Soon agriculture became another source of riches, followed by oil, the entertainment industry, aviation and aerospace, and electronics. Charles mentioned and recommended the

following books: *Eldorado* by Bayard Taylor, *Cities in History* by Peter Hall, *The Rise of the Creative Class* by Richard Florida, and *Cosmopolitans: A Social and Cultural History of the Jews of the San Francisco Bay Area* by Fred Rosenbaum.

Ann Harlow

History Play Reading Group

The play readers recently completed reading *Tales from Hollywood* by British playwright, screen writer, and film director Christopher Hampton. The play, which premiered at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles in 1982, covers the years from 1938 to the 1950s in Hollywood. During the thirties many German Jews and intellectuals fled Nazi Germany, first to neighboring European countries and ultimately to the United States, where a German emigré community established itself in Southern California. Among those who settled were Nobel Prize winner Thomas Mann as well as his older brother Heinrich Mann. Heinrich, who, despite being respected in pre-Hitler Germany, lived with his young alcoholic wife, penniless and forgotten in Los Angeles for the decade of the 1940s. Thomas, however, who had been first welcomed at Princeton, lived comfortably with his wife among the emigrés. Bertolt Brecht also lived among them. An early enemy of National Socialism, Brecht had escaped first to Switzerland, then Scandinavia, and finally to the United States.

Hampton had translated several plays by Austrian playwright Odon von Horvath, who suffered an untimely death in Paris when a branch of a tree fell on him during a storm. Hampton makes the deceased Horvath the narrator and central character of the play and has him marry an idealistic Jewish writer, Helen Schwartz. Horvath is intrigued by the Hollywood scene and on occasion revels in it, though he is

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also conscious of the suffering he observes and displays real sympathy for the unfortunate Heinrich Mann. Hampton has Horvath drown in a swimming pool accident in 1950. The cynical Brecht, on the other hand, despairs of and despises life in the United States.

Hampton provides graphic and amusing descriptions of the clash of this diverse, enticing community with the less-than-sympathetically-described motion picture establishment. In the play there are also a few quick appearances of well-known Hollywood names, including the Marx brothers, Greta Garbo, and Johnny Weissmuller. The dénouement comes in the late 1940s and early 1950s when the former refugees from totalitarianism face another form of it with the investigations of Senator McCarthy, the House Un-American Activities Committee, and the Hollywood Blacklist.

The play reading group will meet again on January 10. Anyone interested in attending should contact Joanne Lafler.

Edith L. Piness

Biography Writers Group

At our October 22 meeting at the Oakland home of **Joanne Lafler**, we discussed published biographies we liked or disliked. Unsurprisingly, our choices reflected the kind of biographies we were writing.

Rob Robbins, whose own book deals with a Russian administrative figure, liked Jonathan Steinberg's *Bismarck: A Life*; Edmund Morris, *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*; Robert Service's *Trotsky*; and Alex Storozynski's *The Peasant Prince: Thaddeus Kosciuszko and the Age of Revolution*. Despite its fascinating topic

Rob did not like Linda Himmelstein's *The King of Vodka* (the story of Smirnov).

Bonda Lewis recommends *The Life of Monsieur de Molière* by Mikhail Bulgakov, although it may be more fiction than biography. **Joanne Lafler**, sharing Bonda's interest in theatre, likes *Mrs. Jordan's Profession: The Story of a Great Actress and a Future King* (William IV) by Claire Tomalin. By the same author, she liked *Jane Austen: A Life* and *Samuel Pepys: The Unequalled Self*. Gillian Gill's *We Two: Victoria and Albert: Rulers, Partners, Rivals* also won Joanne's approval. She would not recommend *Irrepressible: The Life and Times of Jessica Mitford* by Leslie Brody, who does not write well and has nothing new to say about her fascinating subject.

Ellen Huppert looked at family histories and found Gillian Gill's *Nightingales* an excellent example, where the famous daughter, Florence Nightingale, is placed within her family context. Best of all was *The Hare with Amber Eyes* by Edmund de Waal. He explored his own family saga from its beginnings in Odessa, through prosperity marked by great mansions in Vienna and Paris, before the Nazis interrupted all Jewish life in Europe and family members dispersed around the globe.

Elizabeth Nakahara enjoyed *W. Eugene Smith: Shadow and Substance* by Jim Hughes, which used letters to enrich the biography of the *Life* magazine photographer. Also good is Katherine Graham's autobiography, *Personal History*, by the former publisher of the *Washington Post*. Less satisfying is Diane Fujino's *Heartbeat of Struggle* about activist Yuri Kochiyama: too little personal is included, and the book is tedious rather than engaging.

Liz Thacker-Estrada liked Richard Ellmann's life of Oscar Wilde, and she found two

biographies by Patricia Brady to be helpful for her own work: *Martha Washington: An American Life*; and *A Being So Gentle: The Frontier Love Story of Rachel and Andrew Jackson*. On the other hand, Paul Finkelman's *Millard Fillmore* consistently denigrates that President's achievements, unlike Robert J. Scarry, whose biography of Fillmore reflects his years of painstaking research.

In early December, the group met at the home of **Rob Robbins** and enjoyed the splendid view of the ocean from his Sunset area home in San Francisco. The ensuing conversation was equally enlivening. Beginning with a discussion of writers' groups and organizations, we listed many useful groups. National organizations such as the Women's National Book Association have local branches which hold monthly meetings. Others, such as the Authors' Guild, offer services such as workshops and website support. The California Writers' Club (founded by Jack London!) has local chapters which hold meetings and offer workshops. Many other suggestions, including professional organizations, were made.

Next was a colloquy on how to get started, keep going, and overcome blocks in writing. Our conclusion was that while each writer has to find her own time and methods, suggestions were appreciated. One given is that it is most useful to set aside a time each day exclusively for writing, whether it is thirty minutes or three hours. The writing time must be dedicated so that even the need to research some point must be ignored until later. Other ideas included beginning by rereading a past chapter for revision before going on to new territory. Most agreed that writing without too much searching for just the right word was more productive, as everything will have to be revised later. It isn't necessary to start at the beginning as missing parts can always be composed later: "Write it large and kick it into place." Attacking a writing task piece by piece,

or in the words of Anne Lamotte, "Bird by Bird," helps.

Pages that had been circulated were discussed, with one common theme emerging: the issue of balancing necessary historical background with maintaining reader interest and focus on the subject of the biography. No easy answers there!

Ellen Huppert

Our New Website

You may have noticed that the Institute has a new website. If you haven't seen it yet, go to www.tihs.org to check out the new look. The new website was built using Google Sites, a free website building service. While the content of the new site is not substantially different from the old, using Google Sites to host the website has some practical advantages. First, Google Sites is free, meaning the Institute no longer has to pay for website hosting, a not insubstantial amount of money. Second, the website building tools at Google Sites, if sometimes rudimentary, are (and presumably always will be) up-to-date. To edit its former webpage, the Institute had been relying on Microsoft Front Page, a program so obsolete that Microsoft no longer supports it. Finally, if desired, it's possible to incorporate other nifty Google apps into the new website.

This new website would not have been possible without the Herculean efforts of John Rusk, who created, refined, and maintained the previous website for a decade for the Institute. Without John's dedication and work, the Institute would not have a website at all.

Comments on the new website may be e-mailed to the Institute at:
instituteforhistoricalstudy@gmail.com.

Mike Griffith

SPECIAL EVENTS

The Rise and Decline of the Homogeneous Society

"The Rise and Decline of the Homogeneous Society," might also be called, "From Homogeneity to Multiculturalism." In his speech at the Institute's annual dinner, U.C. Berkeley Professor Emeritus of History **Richard Herr** chronicled the worldwide evolution from enforced homogeneity to a broader concept that incorporates minority communities.

Humans, Prof. Herr explained, naturally desire a homogeneous society, that is, one in which all members share a common feature, such as language, class, or ethnicity. "The obvious way to achieve such a society is to assimilate the nonconforming groups into the majority. For example, the French Revolution on August 4, 1789 abolished nobility. Henceforth, every French person was simply a citizen."

In Western democracies, leaders promoted one national language to ensure the efficient functioning of government and industrialization. They nationalized the predominant language by mandating its use and by teaching it in elementary schools. During the 1880s, in France's Third Republic, teachers punished non-French-speaking school children by making them wear a shoe around their necks. A common language became necessary as manufacturers moved workers around to different jobs in increasingly mechanized production, thereby necessitating a common language among interchangeable laborers.

When assimilation failed to create a homogeneous society, some countries resorted to exclusion. A common German fear, that the pure-bred population might become polluted via miscegenation, resulted in policies to maintain Germanness. "Under Bismarck, Germany heeded the complaints of local German communities and

expelled many Jewish and Polish immigrants." Later, when the large Polish population resisted being Germanized, the German Empire decreed in 1913 that only persons born of a German father could become German citizens. In a similar vein, the United States excluded Chinese immigrants of a particular class and denied citizenship to those and their children already here. U.S. immigration policy, however, favored assimilating European immigrants by giving citizenship to their children born on American soil and by Americanizing those children in public schools. Prof. Herr cited another example of American exclusion policy: Jim Crow laws marginalized post-Civil War African Americans, which politicians justified as a "separate-but-equal" policy. In theory, this meant two homogeneous communities existed in the same society, but in fact, the minority community was not equal to the majority community.

"The drive for homogeneity reached its horrible climax in the Soviet elimination of the Kulaks, ostensibly to create a classless society, and in the German elimination of Jews and others seen as threats to the purity of the race." "One would have thought that these examples would have discredited the demand for homogeneity," Herr continued, "but far from it. After World War II, the number of Germans driven out of Poland and Czechoslovakia, a violence sanctioned by the Allies, was greater than the deaths in the Holocaust."

Since World War II Western nations have faced the issue of homogeneity in different ways. The United States has continued to see a homogeneous community as the ideal, ending "separate but equal" education by forced integration of schools and resisting affirmative action because only individuals, not groups, have constitutional rights. France, too, remains strongly devoted to the ideal of homogeneity. On the basis of a constitution that harks back to the

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eighteenth century revolutions, it also maintains that only individuals, not groups, have rights. It refuses to support regional efforts to preserve historic languages in the public schools.

Spain and Great Britain, which do not have such a constitutional tradition, are more flexible. The Spanish democratic monarchy has conceded local autonomy to Catalonia, the Basque provinces, and Galicia, making their languages official in their regions and giving them control over local education. In 1997 Great Britain gave Scotland its own parliament and Wales an assembly, with authority over local cultural matters.

Feminists, according to Prof. Herr, "have been divided between those who seek incorporation as equals into male-dominated 'patriarchal' society by 'breaking the glass ceiling,' and those—a minority—who seek separate-but-equal status with a community of their own." Some separatists have called the glass breakers "honorary men." But increasingly, "feminists have maintained that they do not want to become part of male society, but that both genders must be equal parts of 'humanity.'"

This trend toward relaxed homogeneity shows that the basic concept is not a tyranny of the majority but a common psychological need for community. People appear uncomfortable when a distinct group won't—or can't—fit in. To lessen this discomfort, societies should adopt a broader identity that includes minorities. "Rather than forcing minorities to assimilate into majority culture, multiculturalism seeks to unify them all into a broader culture in which all communities have equal value," says Prof. Herr. "This may be the way forward for the twenty-first century to overcome intolerance fostered by the homogeneous ideal."

Elizabeth Nakahara

MEMBER NEWS

Cathy Robbins reports that "Reviews of *All Indians Do Not Live in Teepees (or Casinos)* have been gratifying, and the publisher reports good news from the sales front with half the first printing sold already within three weeks of release." On November 10, Cathy was a guest on the radio program, "Native America Calling," a live, talk-call-in show broadcast coast-to-coast and world-wide on the internet.

"Now that the owners have demolished the Juana Briones' home in the City of Palo Alto," **Jeanne McDonnell** writes, "I'm left with my board activities for the Palo Alto Historical Association: my position as chair of the history committee of the Women's Club, which has the special duty of working toward the centennial of the clubhouse in 2016; and the project of deciding where and how to display remnants of the Briones house so that at least that will be a reminder of nineteenth-century California and the Hispanic people of that time. At the very least, among these duties, I will assure that the century-old club building will not suffer the fate of that much older structure."

Two members' articles have been published in *Feminist Writings from Ancient Times to the Modern World: A Global Sourcebook and History* (Tyffany K. Wayne, editor; ABC-CLIO, publisher, 2011). Both are in Volume 2, and each centers around a selection of each individual feminist's writing: **Karen Offen's** entry, number 119, "Feminism," (1907) is about feminist activist Ghenia Avril de Sainte-Croix. **Sondra Herman's** entry, number 156, "Nation and Family," (1941) is about the Swedish social reformer Alva Myrdal.

Maria Sakovich presented a paper, "Russians at the Angel Island Immigration Station" at the California State Park Foundation Hidden Stories Conference featuring Russian influences in California (September 22). A few weeks later

she presented her work on the 1920s and 1930s Russian footprint in San Francisco's Fillmore District for the Congress of Russian Americans.

Welcome to new member **Jim Shere**, director of the Glen Ellen Historical Society and executive committee member of the Sonoma Valley Heritage Coalition. Jim has been working with a private collection of documents and artifacts belonging to a local ranch. "The discovery of these," he believes, "suggests that there is an unexplored and rich trove of material still stored at various locations in the Valley of the Moon, all of which urgently need to be documented and eventually recorded and preserved."

Welcome back to lapsed members **Charles Fracchia**, **Ross Maxwell**, and **Thomas Snyder**.

2011 Minigrants Awarded

The IHS Board is delighted to announce this year's recipients of minigrants to support historical research. Grants are based on scholarly merit and all fields of historical study are eligible. The amounts change each year with the Institute's financial situation; this year each IHS member grantee was awarded \$500, which could cover expenses such as travel, copying, translation services, and conference registration, in pursuit of his or her subject. The four recipients are: **Ellen Huppert**, **Steven Levi**, **Sharan Newman** and **Jackie Pels**.

Ellen Huppert will work at the Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, using the nineteenth- and twentieth-century correspondence and diaries of five "ordinary, yet unusual" Michigan residents for a book, "In Their Own Words." The book will move "from Michigan's frontier days to the increasingly urban and industrial society of the twentieth century."

Steven Levi will examine the life of **Walton E. Cole**, a Unitarian minister whose papers are at the Unitarian Church in Upland (Los Angeles area) and Harvey Mudd College in Claremont. Cole was a singular voice opposing Father Charles Coughlin, whose national radio broadcasts spurred on anti-Semitism in the 1930s.

Sharan Newman is researching the Eliot family of St. Louis, Missouri, who were deeply involved in the establishment of a variety of public institutions, including soup kitchens, public schools, and orphanages, as well as significant contributions to the founding of Washington University. She will visit the archives at the University and the Missouri Historical Society.

Jackie Pels, founder of Hardscratch Press, is undertaking research for a poem she has been commissioned to write to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the founding of Fort Ross. The narrative will be "from the perspective of one of the Aleut men . . . drafted from their Alaskan villages to accompany the Russians to 'New Albion.'"

Bonda Lewis and "Performances Off the Shelf"

A few pieces of furniture, other props, and soft lighting transformed the stage of the utilitarian Koret Auditorium in the San Francisco Public Library and beckoned the November audience into the 1928 boudoir at The Cats in Saratoga, California. We are about to meet suffragist and poet **Sara Bard Field** on her forth-sixth birthday, shortly before the festivities begin. We find her reminiscing and for the next hour we share her memories and some stories from the first half of her life.

What a splendid introduction to an historical figure. **Bonda Lewis** wrote the script based on primary sources. With dramatic skill Lewis

conveyed not only events but also reactions and emotions. History might appeal to a lot more students in school if the curriculum included such insightful and vivid portraits of "ordinary" women.

Sara Bard Field is not the only figure from the past that Bonda portrays. Her *Performances Off the Shelf* offers a variety of one-woman shows on women writers and activists. Intrigued, I later interviewed Bonda.

What motivated you to bring history and theater together? For how long have you been doing it? I am by profession and training an actor. Before beginning this series of shows I had performed in theaters all over the United States and in Northern Europe. About twenty years ago, a dear friend and colleague rang me out of the blue and announced that she thought I should be doing a one-person show on Jane Austen. Period. End of conversation. I trust Judy with my life, so there was reason to listen. I began to reread Austen's novels. This after telling myself that such a project was clearly impossible—I couldn't write and had no idea how to do a one-person show. And besides, I knew nothing about the part of England where Jane Austen had lived.

But I *was* intrigued, so having finished her published writings, the surviving correspondence came next. And at some point I became aware of the fact that I'd spent the previous Christmas not four miles from her home at Steventon, and two years before, I'd been in her very street in Bath. So from all those experiences came *Tea and Sensibility*, a show on Jane Austen.

From the beginning I wanted, if possible, to use primary sources exclusively. As actors, we can learn about a character in several ways: we can observe and give presence to both what the character says about herself and what actions she takes, and what others say and do about and

toward her. To an actor developing a character those are the cards and the character must be played with that hand. So I decided from the beginning not to use secondary sources, but to rely solely upon what the character says about herself (and by extension that would include what she writes) and what others say about her, how she behaved toward others and how others behaved toward her. My desire in performance is to convey the person's thoughts and her way of putting them down on paper.

What other figures have you portrayed? After Jane Austen, the next was Louisa May Alcott. Then Isabella Bird, the most published travel writer of the nineteenth century. Queen Victoria was one of her biggest fans, as was Disraeli. She was a real adventurer. With her I began playing women most people didn't know about. Next was Amelia Jenks Bloomer, editor and publisher of the first women's rights journal, *The Lily* (1849-1853). Absolutely anyone who was working in women's rights in those years contributed articles. But who now knows who Bloomer was? And while I was working on Bloomer's show, in 1996, **Jeanne McDonnell**, founder and executive director of the Women's Heritage Museum, asked if I would do a fifteen-minute "departing-from-San Francisco" speech as a woman I'd never heard of: Sara Bard Field, feminist and poet. I'm a complete sucker for an interesting subject, so of course, I agreed! Those first fifteen minutes eventually evolved into interviewing Field's daughter and granddaughter, which with the Field papers in the Huntington Library are the basis of my one-hour performance.

I also created "The Powder Keg," a study of nurses to armies in the United States and Great Britain between 1811 and 1949. There are twenty-two characters, composites from the hundreds I researched. No one knows their stories! I did the research at the Royal Army Medical Corps Museum in Ash Vale, Surrey, the

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Florence Nightingale Museum in London (due largely to a grant from IHS), and in the United States, at the Library of Congress, the National Archives, the Army Center for Military History, the archives of Women in Military Service of America, and the Red Cross archives. I have also taken about twenty oral histories of World War II nurses who served in the British and American forces.

What I have loved about doing these shows is the discovery of new facets of well-known lives or the discovery of the amazing lives of unknown women. I enjoy the combining of first-person scholarship with writing the character into a life that can be presented on stage.

What is your goal with these portraits? To show these women to the world, and tell their amazing stories, and to impress viewers with the fact that these were ordinary women who, faced with extraordinary challenges, helped to change their world—as the viewer can, too. Though I am a BA theater major with an MA in drama lit and theater history, I understand history from the personal point of view; history isn't about super people, it is about us.

What kind of reactions do you get from audiences? They are generally amazed and delighted. In performance they can hear these women's voices and understand that they were ordinary people like us, who by doing what they *had* to do, became heroes. Only courage makes them different from us—and we possess that same courage to do what must be done.

A typical reaction is something that happened in Fresno at a history teachers' conference. After a performance as Louisa Alcott, one teacher told me that she had loved Alcott all her life and had wished with all her heart she could meet her. Then she hugged me and said, beaming, "Now I *have* met her. I am so happy!" If I reach one

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person in this way, my intention is realized. I am utterly blessed to be able to do what I love.

Maria Sakovich with Bonda Lewis

Judith Strong Albert, *Minerva's Circle: Margaret Fuller's Women* (Paper Mill Press, 2010)

Using a wealth of printed and archival letters and journals, **Judith Albert** gives a stunning portrait of a group of women who came together from 1839-1844 at the Boston bookstore of Elizabeth Peabody. The women subscribed a small amount to attend the meetings, held for several weeks each autumn, to hear talks by Margaret Fuller and to discuss issues of importance. Fuller, already known as a writer and educator, surprised the participants by using the topics to challenge them into questioning their place in the world as women. She asked them to look inside themselves, to ask what their purpose was. "What are we born to do? And how shall we do it?" she demanded.

These "conversations" reflected the growing need of women to define themselves as distinct from the standard roles of daughter, wife, and mother. Not all of those who attended were prepared to accept Fuller's call for sexual equality. Albert follows the stories of Fuller and three of her listeners who did.

Elizabeth Peabody was a strong supporter, giving the women space to meet. She tackled the situation of women's lives by devoting hers to early childhood education, introducing the concept of the kindergarten to America. Lydia Marie Child, already known for her children's stories and books of household advice, was also an ardent abolitionist who wrote pamphlets against slavery and the Northerners who refused to protect those who ran from it. She also fought

for the rights of Native Americans. For her the subjugation of women was part and parcel of these injustices.

Caroline Healey Dall began by being doubtful about the nascent women's rights movement. Over her long life her opinions changed, and she became a strong advocate for the financial freedom of women. Although her relationship with Fuller was turbulent, she later produced a biography of her early mentor.

As Albert unrolls the lives of these women in parallel chapters, we see the common threads. All of the women had a parent who was either physically or emotionally absent. All were attracted by or belonged to the Unitarian church and the Transcendentalist movement. William Ellery Channing, Bronson Alcott, and, especially, Ralph Waldo Emerson were influential in their lives, although all four women were determined enough to openly disagree with their erstwhile teachers. Each woman knew the panic of insolvency and all wrote copiously in their journals as well as in tracts, books, and articles. Through their words the poignancy of their struggle is brought to life.

The book concludes with a historiographical essay on the American fight for universal suffrage. Albert demonstrates the echoes in the movement of concepts that were part of those autumn conversations. Finally, there is a bibliographic chapter on works by and about the four women.

While the subject matter is fascinating, the organization of the book presupposes prior knowledge of Fuller and her milieu. The second chapter, an imagined typical meeting, introduces many women who are only briefly mentioned afterwards. A reader not familiar with the Boston intellectual scene of the time could easily become confused. While this episode is charming, it might be better placed toward the end.

Fuller and her circle are not as well known or lauded as the Seneca Falls women. Albert demonstrates that their contribution to the movement, still unfinished today, was as great as that of Stanton or Anthony. Their work in education and social justice began the work that came to fruition in the late twentieth century. Fuller, Peabody, Child, and Dall may have felt that they were only throwing a pebble into a very large pond. Albert's study shows how far the ripples have spread.

Sharan Newman

2012 Annual Meeting

The annual meeting will be at the Oakland Public Library Rockridge Branch, Saturday, February 25, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Following morning coffee and a business meeting, at which we will elect new board members and nominating committee members, there will be a catered lunch. The program after lunch will include several short talks by members about their research projects. If you are interested in being one of those speakers, or perhaps giving a longer presentation at a Work-in-Progress meeting, please contact program chair Georgia Wright, gwright188@earthlink.net.

CALENDAR

January 10	Play Readers meeting
January 14	Board meeting
January 15	Biography writers meeting
February 25	Annual meeting (Rockridge branch, Oakland Public Library)

Members are encouraged to let us know all their news – a paper being given at a conference; a new job or position; the awarding of a grant or fellowship. Please send all material for the NEWSLETTER either by e-mail to msakovich@juno.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, 2012**.

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