

THE INSTITUTE FOR HISTORICAL STUDY

VOLUME 33, No. 1, SUMMER 2013

NEWSLETTER

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ellen Huppert President
Richard Robbins Secretary
Georgia Wright Treasurer
Ann Harlow
Kathleen O'Connor
Judith Offer
Margaretta Mitchell

The position of Vice-president is currently vacant.

NEWSLETTER EDITOR Maria Sakovich
COPY EDITOR Ann Harlow
BOOK REVIEW EDITOR Autumn Stanley

MAILING ADDRESS:
P. O. Box 5743
Berkeley, CA 94705

www.tihs.org

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 nonmembers who wish to remain on its mailing list.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Task Force which has been working on redesigning the web site has selected a consultant. The Board will be given a choice of designs in June; and the new website should be on line before the end of the summer. Many thanks to Bonnie Portnoy, Ann Harlow, Elizabeth Nakahara, and Joanne Lafler for their time and effort.

In July, the Institute is cosponsoring an author appearance at the San Francisco Public Library. C.W. Gortner, author of the historical novels *The Last Queen* and *Confessions of Catherine de Medici*, will read and discuss his new book *The Queen's Vow*. This novel centers on Isabella of Castile, best known as the sponsor of Christopher Columbus's voyages to the new world. During her reign, Spain became a united kingdom and a world power. The presentation will be on Wednesday, July 10, at 6:30 p.m. in the Latino/Hispanic Rooms A and B. The Institute is cosponsoring this presentation as part of our on-going commitment to bring historical understanding to the widest possible public. In the past, we have sponsored many events, including film series and lectures. In October, we will be presenting a panel of local archivists, also at the San Francisco Public Library.

On another front, September 7 has been selected as the date for the traditional potluck, at the Berkeley home of Gretta Mitchell. Put it on your calendars; detailed information closer to the event. We will probably not have an annual dinner this year. It has become increasingly difficult to find the right place to hold it and to create a good program. We will instead concentrate on informal events such as the potluck.

– *Ellen Huppert*

WORKS-IN-PROGRESS

Compared to What? is **Judith Offer's** eighteenth play to make it to the stage. At her March 17 presentation at Georgia Wright's home, Judith described the challenges and creative process that informed the writing, production, and direction of this history play about the early days of organizing the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, a topic with both local and national significance.

Judith was immediately attracted to the subject because the porters, all African American men, "represented hardworking people who achieved something." "I'm not interested in criminals, who feature very prominently in today's films, and I'm not interested in the rich and famous." Moreover, the history of Pullman porters is an important aspect of the history of Oakland, once the terminus of three national railroads. One of West Oakland's main streets was Railroad Avenue (today's Seventh Street).

Despite the working conditions—217 rules regulated porters' conduct—and small salary, the job was among the better ones available to Black men in a society where racial discrimination limited choice. Many porters were college-educated and owned their own homes—57 percent in Chicago, a high rate for any group at the time. In 1926, in order to combat the Pullman Company's harsh treatment of its porters, newspaper publisher A. Phillip Randolph was invited to help organize a union, a feat which took eleven years to accomplish. Because the porters were on the road so much, African American club women also played an important role.

In addition to research, a task familiar to all historians, the creation of a play requires a great deal of collaboration with others, not just in the later stage of production, but in the development of characters and action. Periodic readings help shape a play. The role of Archibald Snoddy (based on a real name), for example,

representing the worst of Pullman bosses, grew over time, eventually transforming through fourteen incarnations. In an early version of the play, there was no romance between Irish immigrant Mary Heaney, who ran a local boarding house, and porter Seamus Gibson, but discussions with Black actors convinced Judith of the plausibility of such a relationship.

In general, it is difficult to get history plays produced, and many groups won't produce from "new" authors or material. Community theater is almost entirely a volunteer effort. Judith described some of the problems in the first production of *Compared to What?* in Vallejo two years ago: frequent changes in boards of directors, illness and accidents among the cast, double-booking of the space. The production in Oakland faced a new challenge: lack of theater companies. Except for the Woodminster Amphitheater, which produces summer musicals, there are no small theaters for live theater (except in schools). It took almost a year to find the physical space to perform and a willingness to produce the play herself (with help from a Kickstarter campaign).

"By the last weekend of the run in Vallejo," Judith reported, "audiences were half Black and half White, and I didn't get any resentment from people that a White woman was taking on a perceived Black subject. After all, not many people can take on the research for a history play; not many can write a play; not many can direct a play." Another satisfaction of this particular topic was the opportunity it afforded to create the role of Hetty Tooker, a strong Black woman dealing with tremendous odds. "I really like to write about the different kinds of women out there."

– *Maria Sakovich*

Cathy Robbins presented her book “Nobody Travels South of Rome: Finding Calabria” at the home of Ellen Huppert on April 21. Quoting Eudora Welty—“One place understood helps us understand all places better”—she made a case for a book about Calabria, the region at the toe of Italy where her ancestors had lived for a thousand years until they, along with millions of other southern Italians, left about a hundred years ago for greener pastures, many of them coming to the United States.

Calabria, like much of southern Italy, has been scorned by northern Italians and until recently mostly overlooked by tourists. Cathy sees her book as building on Norman Douglas’ classic work *Old Calabria*, from which she took her ironic title. She hopes that a traveler equipped with three books—Douglas’, hers, and the *Blue Guide to Southern Italy*—would find a deeper understanding of the region.

As part of her overview, Cathy outlined the peoples of Calabria, beginning with the first settlers, the Pelagians—part of a group of Italic peoples who came to be known as Lucanians or Bruttians—and continuing with the Greeks, who were succeeded by the Romans. One of her main themes was the resistance to conquest that features repeatedly in Calabrian history: resistance against the Greeks, the Romans, and after the Roman Empire collapsed, against later outside powers. She emphasized the lasting influence of Greek and Byzantine civilizations, as evidenced in archaeological sites maintained by the government. In the nineteenth century, brigands, who might be seen as the ancestors of today’s organized crime, took positions of power, resisting the unification of Italy championed by the north.

Concluding with some comments about Calabria today, Cathy suggested some of the reasons why a region rich in ancient history had declined so markedly that its population has been leaving

for over a century. Among the reasons are the destructive effects of Spanish efforts to control the seas between the Mediterranean and the Adriatic, a feudal social structure promoting poverty, and disease (malaria) and other natural disasters.

Considerable discussion followed, as members of the Institute with experience in the region asked questions and contributed their own observations. One question regarded control of resources such as wind farms: was the Mafia involved? At present, Italian authorities are vigorously prosecuting the Mafia, but this did not preclude their influence in such industries. Cathy mentioned the ‘Ndrangheta, a crime organization that exploits West African agricultural workers and traffics in drugs and people. She also referred to the problem of Balkan boat people, Albanian refugees who come to Calabria although not in such great numbers as further up the Adriatic coast. In the remaining time, Institute members had a chance to leaf through various specialized guides that Cathy had brought, an indication the modern tourism that has developed in Calabria.

– *Carol Sicherman*

Writers Group

In our most recent meetings, we read and discussed chapters from three biographies, each quite different, but with some common issues. We addressed such questions as lack of sources, how much explanatory material should be included with the narrative, and how to structure a biography if a strictly chronological order is not followed.

At our March meeting we discussed **Rob Robbins’** Chapter XI of his biography of Vladimir Fyodorovich Dzhunkovsky. As usual,

GROUP REPORTS

we found Rob's writing clear and compelling as he detailed the dramatic events during the early years after the Bolshevik Revolution. As a faithful servant of the tsarist regime, Dzhunkovsky came under suspicion and was jailed and tried. But ironically, he regained his freedom due to the determined efforts of his sister and to the spontaneous support of peasants and workers who appreciated the even-handed way he had governed.

Elizabeth Thacker-Estrada's revision of her biography of Abigail Powers Fillmore raised the issue of how much to rely on incomplete sources when there is no corroborating evidence. The consensus of the group is that there is no problem using a reliable single source. Liz asked for comments on what she called a "Prologue," but the group discussed whether it should be called "Introduction" or "Preface" instead.

Ellen Huppert is struggling with how to reshape her group biography "In Their Own Words" to better draw in the reader. Beginning in the middle of the historical narrative, she offered the section of Lizzie Gurney's journal where she expressed the great struggle she was experiencing when Barton Taylor came courting. The majority of the group found her pages to be compelling, although they could use more explanatory material. As for Barton's own account of his early years, his prose was found to be less interesting than Lizzie's and therefore better paraphrased than directly quoted.

– *Ellen Huppert*

California Roundtable: An Excursion to Vallejo

Twelve Institute members enjoyed a history-filled day in Vallejo on April 13, organized by **Ann Harlow and Tom Snyder**, with private viewings at the Vallejo Naval and Historical

Museum and the McCune Collection at the Vallejo Public Library. Before regular open hours executive director Jim Kern gave us a tour of artifacts from Mare Island (the first U.S. naval base on the West Coast), including a Russian canon from Sitka, Alaska, a gift to a naval physician who treated Russian sailors here in 1863, and from various ships, including the *USS San Francisco*, which participated in the battle of Guadalcanal. We looked through a working submarine periscope and viewed current exhibits: paintings—"War of 1812: Ships from the Age of Sail,"—and the contributions of women throughout Vallejo's history.

Following lunch in Old Town and a walk past numerous historic buildings, we arrived at the McCune Room and browsed around the collection of rare books and printing-related objects, assembled by local physician Donovan McCune and donated to the city of Vallejo in the 1960s. Judith Hilburg, president of the McCune Committee, introduced the collection and showed us some of their finest incunables (books printed before 1500) and other treasures.

Institute member **Peter Meyerhof** gave an illustrated talk about José de la Rosa and California's first printing press. The Ramage press arrived in Monterey (spelled Monterrey in those days) in 1834 and was used by a series of governing authorities, including Mariano Vallejo, to issue proclamations and other printed information (and misinformation, in the case of an already obsolete Spanish book of home remedies). Although the name Agustín Zamorano is usually associated with the press, Peter's research has revealed that de la Rosa was its main user, both in Monterey and in Sonoma, where he worked for General Vallejo in a number of capacities. In another talk, we learned about a Victorian-era home entertainment called toy theater or paper theater and a project the McCune Collection is developing to further explore printing history. Michael and

GROUP REPORTS

are using a form of puppetry to develop a performance based on William Morris's illustrations of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in the "masterpiece of publishing" known as the Kelmscott Chaucer. We also had the opportunity to peruse a display of other recent examples of toy theater, often based on illustrated children's books but not exclusively aimed at children.

—*Ann Harlow*

History Play Readers

The group recently read *Famine* by well-known Irish playwright Tom Murphy. The play, written in 1968, produced in 1977, is usually performed as part of a trilogy that includes *The Patriot Game* and *The Blue Macushla*. As its title suggests, *Famine* deals with the "Great Famine"—the disastrous Irish potato famine of 1846-47.

The play is set in County Mayo in the west of Ireland, in the fictitious city of Glanaconnor. The residents here face the prospect of starvation as the second crop of potatoes fails. The protagonist, John Connor, is the elder of the village to whom, in their distress, the community turns for guidance and strength. Initially he encourages them to keep trying to dig the potatoes in hopes that they may save at least a few. As the tragedy compounds and conditions become even more dire, John still attempts to maintain some order. He discourages his friends from attacking the police and stealing a grain cart, the contents of which were destined to be exported to England. Ireland is governed by England, which handles the tragedy very badly, barely providing any food or other desperately needed aid. Local landlords and the

agents of absentee landlords look out only for their own interests. A public works plan is too late and too weak and ineffective to handle the massive needs of the destitute population.

John's authority begins to erode as the people become more panicked and begin to resent his approach. He and others are unable to procure work as they do not have the proper permits. Unable to pay his rent, he is evicted from his home. Many, encouraged and coerced by the British, emigrate to Canada. Those that remain sink into total despair. John's wife decides that he must murder her and their children. He kills his wife and son, but his daughter escapes. He is reduced to a shell of man, whose family, friends and identity is gone. *Famine* is a powerful, gut-wrenching play depicting ruin and degradation on an intense scale, offering insight into a historical situation in which there is little or no hope.

The play readers will meet again on June 28 to read a play about architect Julia Morgan by Institute member **Judith Offer**. Please contact Joanne Lafler for additional information.

—*Edith L. Piness*

MEMBER NEWS

Welcome to new member **Sue Bessmer**, recommended to the Institute by member Leslie Friedman. With M.A. and Ph.D. in Political Science from Stanford University, Sue is retired from San Francisco State University, where she taught interdisciplinary social science, with an emphasis on the many and varied ways in which politics, economics and geography shaped the course of human history. That experience inspired and guided her in writing her latest book, *How the World Worked: From the Pharaohs to Christopher Columbus*.

On June 20th, **Peter Meyerhof** will present “New Information on the Origin of the Blue Wing Adobe and its Earliest Residents.” At the lecture for the Sonoma League for Historic Preservation, Peter will reveal the new evidence he has found that a portion of the historic Blue Wing Inn originated as an integral portion of the Sonoma Mission and that it housed the first Mexican family to reside in Sonoma. Find out who these individuals were and what they were doing during the mission period and during the exceedingly turbulent transition from mission to pueblo in early Sonoma: 6:30 p.m. at Sonoma Barracks building on the Plaza in Sonoma.

On July 1, under the auspices of the Dramatists’ Guild, **Judith Offer** is having a reading of her one-act play “Cat in a Cell” about the meeting of an Oakland A’s center fielder and an Oakland Tech High School English teacher. The event is free, 7 p.m. at the Tides Theater, 533 Sutter Street, San Francisco. In May her play about the early organizing days of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, *Compared to What?*, ran for three weekends in Oakland.

Dot Brovarney is completing a 3-part interview with Alan Chadwick-apprentice Fred Marshall, who worked closely with the French intensive and Biodynamic master gardener at the Round Valley Garden Project in rural Covelo during the 1970s. She’s also editing text for the new

Native American exhibition at the Mendocino County Museum in Willits. The exhibit is being curated by her colleague, longtime local anthropologist and Native American Studies instructor Dr. Victoria Patterson. Following up her 2011-12 exhibit on horticulturalist Carl Purdy (1861-1945), Dot is again collaborating with ethnobotanist Dr. Kat Anderson, this time on an article examining how California’s botanical record and land management patterns might inform restoration of its wildflower populations.

The recent discovery of handwritten music dedicated to her grandfather inspired **Maria Sakovich** to begin an article exploring how necessity and love of music motivated the priest (who was known for his wonderful baritone voice) to introduce San Francisco audiences to the music of the Russian Orthodox church. One of the local treasures she found in the course of research were the scrapbooks of musical programs kept by the San Francisco Public Library (in the Art, Music, and Recreation Division), dating from 1885!

Leslie Friedman gave a lecture, May 23, for the European Soiree. Her talk, “Backstage Stories from Behind the Velvet Curtain,” focused on some of her performance tours, especially where art and politics met. Leslie, a dancer/choreographer in addition to being an historian, was the first American dancer or artist of any kind to be presented with joint U.S. and host country sponsorship in Russia, China, Egypt, Poland, and many other countries. She included films, brief dance excerpts, and costume changes in her presentation. Ambassador Charles T. Magee, who was the U.S. Consul General in Leningrad when Leslie danced there, traveled to San Francisco from Washington, D.C. to be at Leslie’s presentation. He introduced her, noting that he had hosted many great artists such as Vladimir Horowitz who

MEMBER NEWS

came to Russia the year after Leslie and that she was the equal or better of the finest.

The Lively Foundation, of which Leslie Friedman is artistic director, performed its educational and entertaining program, The Gold Rush! for nearly 1500 students this spring in San Jose, Santa Clara, San Mateo, and San Rafael. The program uses narration taken from letters written in the mining fields, projections of archival pictures, music that was popular in the era, period costumes and dances to bring that time to life.

On the last day (1 June) of a retrospective exhibit of her fine art photography at Photo Gallery in Oakland, **Margaretta Mitchell** gave a short talk followed by audience questions. Among the many subjects discussed was the transformation of photography in the past ten or so years by the “digital revolution.” A new exhibit with four other photographers opened June 8 in San Francisco: Robert Tat Gallery, 49 Geary Street, Suite 410.

In the course of her work for one of her clients, Hoover Institution Press, **Rose Marie Cleese** prepared marketing materials (sales sheets, catalog copy, back cover and the jacket copy) for two books just out: *The Illusion of Net Neutrality: Political Alarmism, Regulatory Creep, and the Real Threat to Internet Freedom*, by Robert Zelnick and Evan Zelnick and *Women of the Gulag*, by Paul R. Gregory. The latter has a publication date of July 15, 2013. “Both are definitely worth a read,” she reports. “And you can read my copy in the book’s Amazon listing under ‘Book Description’ and ‘From the Inside Flap.’” (Rosemary notes she is experienced at writing marketing materials for and editing nonfiction books and has worked with many authors who have self-published.)

Cathy Robbins’ book, *All Indians Do Not Live in Teepees (or Casinos)* is in its second printing from Bison Books/University of Nebraska Press.

In Paris earlier this year, **Karen Offen** lectured (in French) in the conference cycle of the Institut Emile du Châtelet, “Forty years of feminist studies.” The video can be seen on line.* Karen also lectured at Sciences Po – Paris (formerly known as the Institut français des sciences politiques) on her new book, *Les Féminismes en Europe, 1700-1950* (the French translation, revised and updated, of her book *European Feminisms*), published by the Presses Universitaires du Rennes in late 2012. She reports that the translation by Geneviève Knibiehler is superb. A book-signing followed. *www.institutemilieduchatelet.org/Conferences/conference-Offen.html

Tom Snyder writes that he has stepped down as executive director of the Society for the History of Navy Medicine. He founded the Society in 2006 at the behest of navy medical historians to serve as a scholarly home for people interested in research, study, and publication in all aspects of the history of navy/maritime medical history. During his tenure, the Society grew to 175 people from around the world. It has sponsored academic panels at such organizations as the American Association for the History of Medicine, the Association of Military Surgeons of the United States, and the Naval Academy’s McMullen History Symposium. Tom also established a nonprofit foundation for support of the Society’s work. Utilizing gifts and dues payments, the Foundation funds graduate student travel grants to give papers at its panels and a graduate research grant. Tom continues a program of regular talks on the history of the Navy’s first hospital on the west coast, at Mare Island, California (closed in 1957).

CALENDAR

July 10: Historical novelist C.W. Gortner at the San Francisco Public Library

July 13: Board meeting

August 15: California Roundtable excursion: Green Gulch Farm Zen Center in West Marin

Sept 7: Potluck dinner

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 **August 31, 2013**.

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.

The Institute for Historical Study

P. O. Box 5743

Berkeley, CA 94705

www.tihs.org