

**Parachuting into the 21st Century by Louis Trager**

Recently I had a small adventure in online publishing and promotion, and I thought that an account of my experience might provide if not insight at least entertainment.

For some time I've been going at research on the old-boy network that promoted and maintained the long mid-20th-century US political and social consensus. Scores of bipartisan, ad hoc "citizens committees" on public affairs, mainly international relations, have been documented by reputable scholars and journalists to have collaborated intimately behind the scenes with the very Executive branch whose policies and projects the committees were supposed to be lobbying for and independently endorsing. The continuity of methods, aims, and organizers, officials, and other participants, was so strong, I contend, that the citizens committees became a long-running, informal, extra-constitutional institution.

Last fall, I seized on a news event to act on my impatience to publish and my eagerness to call dibs on my conceptualization before someone else claimed it. I arranged to have published by History News Network at George Mason University a 1,300-word piece, "How the Government and Private Elites Have Teamed Up for Decades to Astroturf America" ([hnn.us/article/156791](http://hnn.us/article/156791)).

The comments proved helpful, gratifying, and surprising. One reader commented with satisfaction that the article portrayed intelligent people, suitably interested in the outcomes, to have been running the show. Another said everyone who cared already knew all the information reported. An author friend kindly pointed out that some sentences were too long and convoluted, and that my ultimate audience of general readers, particularly those born since the invention of fire, would be bewildered by the barrage of historical references in this dense piece for a quasi-academic outlet.

Responses from several experts in various disciplines that my work intersects were enthusiastic beyond expectation. Granted, I had chosen whom to notify, and had e-mailed with some of them previously, but as a group they reflected diverse perspectives on both sides of the Atlantic. One, a professor of international history at the London School of Economics, whom I'd contacted cold about the article, congratulated me on "a great article. I'm just gearing up for teaching and will recommend it to the students in my course 'Presidents, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy, from Roosevelt to Reagan.'" Staff with the Council on Foreign Relations, who figured prominently in the article, unfortunately did not, as we say in the news racket, respond to requests for comment.

In promoting the article, I got it republished on a couple of small websites and linked on [realeclearhistory.com](http://realeclearhistory.com), a page in a family of "aggregator verticals" anchored by the better-known Real Clear Politics. The piece also popped up on at least as many sites that republished on their own initiative. (I learned this later through googling.) I touted the article on a couple of mailing lists. I ran out of steam before spamming H-Net, but did at least manage to sign up for several relevant lists.

The formidable libertarian and conspiracy milieus proved even trickier than I had anticipated. It turns out that many websites offering platforms for a vaguely defined range of iconoclastic points of view are infested with neo-Confederates, Holocaust deniers, and expositors of our reptilian masters from space. I

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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There are times when I am concerned (but not despairing) about the future of our Institute. As organizations go it is getting on in years and has achieved many of the goals its founders had in mind: intellectual stimulation, camaraderie, a place to practice history and to share ideas. It has served the interests of historically-minded people who could not find or did not want a place in the regular "groves of academe." As a group we have been successful and are comfortable, if not set, in our ways. This is the news, both good and bad.

So I was delighted with the annual meeting this past February. I was excited when I listened to our new members give presentations on their interests and their work. I was enormously pleased with the display of enthusiasm for new projects, specifically plans for a mass reading of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* and planning for the commemoration of 1917, the hundredth anniversary of America's entry into the First World War and the Russian Revolution. And these should be just a beginning.

New people continue to join our ranks, men and women with wonderfully varied interests, from crime in San Francisco to English explorations in the Tudor era to the reconstruction of historic gardens and landscapes. I know that all IHS members extend to you a warm welcome. But membership in an organization like the Institute brings with it a measure of responsibility—to become active and to make the Institute your own. We have a number of established sub-groups; we urge you to join them if they suit your interests. But if they don't, start your own. Use our roster to find members with whom you might get together to create a new group that could satisfy your goals and contribute to the vitality of the Institute by devising programs that will serve both members and the broader public. Get in contact with the Institute board; we are here to serve you. Consider the prospect of volunteering your service and expertise. Best of all think about serving on the board in the coming years. Remember: when the nominating committee knocks on your door, it's not the KGB!

I'm looking forward to an exciting 2015.

– *Rob Robbins*

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## ANNUAL MEETING

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**Sue Mote** is working on a novel, “An Ordinary Viking,” the story of an adventure-seeking youth who really doesn’t like the shedding of blood. When researching the Viking age for a work of fiction, Sue found many details elusive.

The Norse had no written language beyond the runes with which they carved messages on memorial stones and personal belongings and on random walls and deck planking. For written accounts, all we have are the views of travelers, spectators, and victims, i.e., outsiders. Archaeological evidence provides a limited and shifting view. Much of the Vikings’ material culture was of wool or wood, which easily decays. The interpretation of evidence shifts because new objects keep surfacing, and technology requires adjustment of the meanings of physical evidence. For example, bone scans have turned the Oseberg ship burial’s “crippled old servant” into a woman who ate what only royalty could afford.

So what to do, asks the novelist who must transport the reader “into the scene.” One way to enrich knowledge of the everyday is to stand up, walk away from the computer, and test something out. Sue tackled one puzzle through this approach. The Norse had no sandpaper with which to smooth the spoons and trenchers with which they cooked and ate, but she discovered that the river-rounded sandstone pebbles in her backyard had the perfect texture for the task. Experimental archaeology is another technique. What did warriors sit on while rowing their ships? Two- and four-oared vessels have planks to sit on, but no evidence remains of benches in the larger ships. Some reenactors have tried a standing row in replica ships but that proved inefficient in transmitting force from oar blade to ship. The explanation now accepted (but not yet proven) is that each man sat on his (or someone’s) sea chest. With the walrus-hide rope (“line”) long disintegrated, we don’t know how these men rigged their ships. Modern students

do rig their replica sea-going ships and sail them. They try this and fiddle with that and the ship responds. Was this the Viking way? We may never know.

**Margaret Simmons**, daughter of late Institute member Ann Marie Koller, presented her mother’s scholarly life and the dilemma she faces in the publication of her mother’s biography of dancer Tilly Losch. Ann Marie was born in 1913 in the suburbs of Plentywood, Montana. Her life was devoted to scholarship. It is all she ever wanted to do, and it is what she did while teaching high school. She was a happy member of the Institute. She taught herself German to work on a biography of the Duke of Meiningen while she was getting her PhD at Stanford. That research became *The Theatre Duke*. Along the way, she wrote a piece about Ira Aldrich, a black actor who had worked with the Duke of Meiningen in the 19th century. (See the collection *Ira Aldridge: The African Roscius* for Ann Marie’s essay).

Ann Marie died, at the age of 96 in 2010, leaving a manuscript biography, “The Charming Life of Tilly Losch.” Margaret has found and contracted with a publisher, a university press, who now requests additional material. Margaret’s position is that this is her mother’s book, not hers, and she does not wish to alter the manuscript. So she came to the Institute to ask for help and suggestions as to what to do next that would honor her mother and, most importantly, her work. There were some valuable ideas, including getting an editor to write an addendum to include as an appendix and publishing the work as a memoir.

A historical and cultural geographer, **Liz Vasile** spent most of her career outside academia, in program management and evaluation. She recently returned to Cal as an academic coordinator, a job that involves navigating the institutional bureaucracy of the university on behalf of faculty and members of an

interdisciplinary research center. Part of the draw of returning to campus was to be able to focus on a little scholarship of her own. Picking up the threads of her previous research and fieldwork, on urban peripheries and enclaves, countercultural and oppositional movement, and migration in Latin America, North Africa, and the US, Liz is diving into the literature in search of a focal point for future work, and a good research question. One area of particular interest is anarchist immigrants from southern Italy and their participation in multiethnic labor movements in the US in the early to mid-20th century. Related to this on the theory side is the field of Mediterranean or Southern Thought, as an alternative framework for examining the modern migration experience, relations between people, culture, and environment, and an alternative vision of what development could look like.

Liz finds that a major challenge of independent scholarship is a lack of dialogue. “I have no regular interlocutors these days, and I’m one of those people who thinks by talking as well as writing.” Since my job at SFSU involved helping students choose, craft, and execute senior projects and master’s theses, we are teaming up to find just the right project for Liz.

– *Sue Bessmer*

**Edward Von der Porten** described the Manila Galleon Project that has engaged him for the past sixteen or so years. Drawing on a wealth of experts from his career in marine archeology and history and support from various institutions, such as the National Institute of Anthropology and History in Mexico, he has put together a research and excavation team that has explored the remains of the *San Felipe*, found on the coast of Baja California. What started as a few pieces of porcelain, believed to be Chinese, found by American tourists, is now a full-fledged project that has slowly revealed

treasures and information about the Chinese-Spanish-Philippine trade that lasted 250 years.

Archival records document that the ship left the Philippines in 1576, bound for the coast of California and Acapulco, Mexico. In a “horrible last voyage that ended with the crew starving and racked with scurvy, or some other dietary disease, so weak they could not sail the ship any longer, the *San Felipe* ran aground, everyone aboard dead or dying.” It is “one of the oldest known shipwrecks on the Pacific Coast of North America” at a site that is as remote now as it was in the sixteenth century. Fragments of the cargo have been found and analyzed: Chinese porcelain, beeswax, Chinese stoneware containers, as well as other objects: a plate of Chinese cloisonné, a compass gimbal, a sounding lead, and a bronze figure of a Fu dog. The project is described in “Treasures from the Lost Galleon” (in *Mains'l Haul*, Winter/Spring 2010), which accompanied the exhibit that Edward developed for the San Diego Maritime Museum.

– *Maria Sakovich*

#### “Who Could ‘Read’ Sculpture on French Gothic Portals?”

On November 16 **Georgia Wright** presented a fascinating paper that “has been rejected by five journals and counting.” The work in progress, at Georgia’s home, facilitated with images of medieval church sculptures, was complex, and I asked Georgia to summarize the afternoon’s meeting. (Ed.)

My article, which I tried to summarize in 70 minutes, including questions from listeners, challenges the basis of art historians’ belief that the medieval laity could “read,” that is identify scenes and their meanings. This article of belief is based upon Pope Gregory the Great’s assurance that “art is the book of the illiterate.” The dictum was repeated or lightly modified up

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to the Renaissance, sometimes accompanied by reference to the second commandment against the making of graven images, followed by exceptions in the Old Testament of the making of such images. The old iconoclastic arguments survived well into the thirteenth century.

Very few preachers, however, touched upon the works of art all around them (an exception is the Crucifix). Few were visually literate, and none would have been able to serve as a modern-day docent. Yet art historians have forgotten their own long apprenticeships and the fact that they must identify images for students, even those with Bible training, and they assume that medieval laity, addressed in Latin in sermons having little to do with the scenes on show, could somehow “read” them. They also believe, mistakenly, that high clerics spelled out the surrounding art in detail.

The faithful were taught very little. They were expected to know the Creed, “Our Father,” and “Hail Mary,” all in Latin. As for sermons in the vernacular, there were precious few, other than some on the Nativity, Magi, and Shepherds. Some lucky lay people may have seen liturgical dramas. Others might have heard certain prayers in epics and poems recited by jongleurs or actors. But associating these with figures and scenes would not have been easy. Nevertheless, even with representations of traditional subjects, with details which came from the sculptors’ repertory, like the Last Judgment, art historians propose highly sophisticated theological programs, described in highly abstract terms.

French Gothic sculpture on facades of churches and cathedrals was visible to the laity (although the sculpture on the high arches over the doors was invisible to all). I argue that sculptors, not bishops, carried the themes; they traveled between jobs and visited churches in progress during the winter, accumulating large repertories of images associated with the popular themes of Judgment and the Coronation

of the Virgin. In the latter, which became extremely popular from the 1140s on, the Virgin is enthroned on Christ’s right, while in the register below, her death and bodily assumption are depicted. If there is a lower register, that may represent Old Testament kings and prophets flanking what art historians have identified as the Ark of the Covenant. Therefore, in metaphorical terms, the Old Law is displaced by the New Law. But did the laity see the Virgin as Maria Ecclesia or rather as the Mother interceding for us with her Son?

Around 1195 the old Last Judgment, with Christ dividing the Blessed from the Damned, was modified, via the Coronation, to show Christ displaying his wounds, flanked by the Virgin and John the Evangelist interceding. On the Last Day, however, it will be too late for intercession. People were much more concerned about the First Judgment at death, when most would go to Purgatory. So the artists/sculptors catered to popular appeal. The lower registers contain the division of Blessed and Damned, a job left to St. Michael with no biblical or theological sanction. Angels are leading souls off to heaven or the bosom of Abraham (a bit confusing) and devils are leading the damned to a hell mouth or towards images from Revelation. What a mixed bag! Where were the theologians?

If most clerics paid little attention to the sculpture around them, seldom referring to its subjects in their sermons, and had little intellectually invested in the “reading” of sculpture on their churches, why did they spend so much on it? Based on Abbot Suger’s list of clergy and royalty invited to every consecration of a new part of his abbey of St.-Denis in the 1140s, I argue that the motive was competition between these noble bishops and abbots. Gregory the Great’s dictum, so often cited, might be interpreted then as a rationale or magical thinking: “we have our texts while art is the book of the illiterate.”

## WORKS IN PROGRESS

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### “Writing African History as an Outsider Invited Inside”

Carol Sicherman, who gave her talk at the home of Monica Clyde on January 18, came to African studies by way of a 1985 NIH summer seminar on Commonwealth literature. She got interested in Ngugi wa Thiong’o (b. 1938), the preeminent Kenyan writer of his generation. His mixing of historical and fictional characters enticed Carol to explore the background of his stories.

Ngugi initially wrote in English, the language of his secondary and tertiary education. When he helped write a play for residents of his village who were learning to read and write Gikuyu, he realized the power of the mother tongue. All members of the audience could understand what they heard, and they could recognize their own oppression. There were consequences to such knowledge. The repressive governments of Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel arap Moi perceived Ngugi as championing ordinary Kenyans against the inequalities and injustices in Kenyan society. The play was shut down and Ngugi was imprisoned for a year, though never charged. He resolved that from that time forward, he would write his fiction and poetry in Gikuyu. After his first Gikuyu-language novel was published, he was again threatened and forced into exile, first in Britain and then in the US. Ngugi’s second novel, *Matigari*, written in London, was thought by the authorities to be a person for whom they issued an arrest warrant; when they learned that the suspected culprit was a book, they confiscated every copy they could find.

Finding the historical figures in Ngugi’s fiction proved challenging, and sorting myth from fact was not easy, even with sometimes plentiful “sources” at hand—sources that were difficult to evaluate. Carol cited the case of Waiyaki, a resistance leader in the 1890s who was captured by a British punitive expedition and reportedly died en route to the coast. Radically different

stories of his death differentiated the colonial narrative from that of the Gikuyu people. According to Gikuyu oral history, Waiyaki was buried alive and face-down, an account that had repercussions during the resistance war in the 1950s, when members of the Land and Freedom Army seized a member of the Leakey family and, in revenge for Waiyaki’s murder, buried him alive and face-down. The “facts” about Waiyaki’s death were impossible to confirm.

In Kenya, even under dictatorship and despite Ngugi’s being *persona non grata*, Carol found people willing to talk to her, with only one exception, during her first and second visits (1987, 1991). Ngugi’s home village, however, was not accessible to her, nor were the files of the Literature Department at Nairobi University, of which Ngugi was the first African member. Here he spearheaded a revolution in the literature curriculum, throwing out the colonial syllabus in favor of a syllabus centered on Africa and including the rest of the world. In an ironic twist, Carol had access to the story of this revolution through a Scotsman who had taught in the Literature Department and taken his papers when he left. He deposited them in the Scottish National Library.

Carol went to Uganda in 1991 to examine Ngugi’s intellectual formation at Makerere University in Kampala, of which he was a graduate. Makerere had enjoyed a lively intellectual life in the 1960s, with many student publications; Ngugi’s first stories were published in the English Department magazine. In 1971 Idi Amin put a stop to all that, and during the 1970s and 1980s the ravages of tyranny and civil war caused written documentation to dry up; even paper and pens disappeared. The vice-chancellor of Makerere University was abducted and murdered, and many faculty members fled. Because of the turmoil of war, the library at Makerere University was barely functioning when Carol got there, though all the university staff were

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accommodating and generous. Carol resorted to extensive interviews, which were hard to arrange for lack of reliable telephone service. So she ambushed people in their offices, finding them willing to stop what they were doing and help. Her welcome at Makerere was so warm that she later decided to write a book about the university (*Becoming an African University: Makerere, 1922-2000*).

Carol's research and travel were supported by the CUNY Research Foundation and small federal travel grants. She had access to libraries and archives in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Africa. Africans themselves are less fortunate in securing funding, resulting in an imbalance in cultural research emanating from Africa.

Carol enhanced her presentation with photographs she had taken in Kenya and Uganda. As an adjunct effect of her interest in Africa, as well as her guilt in being so well supported in her research, Carol became a sponsor of a children's home in Kampala, and we saw a photo of her and her husband with some children housed there.

– *Cornelia Levine*

### **N.B. Next works in progress:**

**Paul Drexler:** "Murder and Mayhem in San Francisco," Sunday, **April 19** and

**Karen Offen:** "How the International Women's Organizations and their Allied Affiliates 'Entered' the War, 1914-1915," Sunday, **May 31**

### **California and the West Study Group**

San Francisco City Archivist Susan Goldstein led an exclusive tour of the Main Library on Saturday, January 31. In her position (since 1995), Susan works with all city departments to preserve and make accessible their historical records. She also manages a robust program and

exhibition schedule and is currently engaged in a number of digitization projects. At the moment, she is busy preparing for the 100th anniversary celebration of the San Francisco City Hall, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and the American Library Association Conference.

The "new" library, designed by James Ingo Freed of Pei Cobb Freed & Partners (New York) and Cathy Simon of Simon Martin-Vegue Winkelstein & Moris (San Francisco), opened its doors in 1996. Our tour included all six floors. It is immediately apparent that the new library has become a vital part of the city's fabric—dynamic and responsive to the community's needs. Under construction is a state-of-the-art digital media center for teens. Already in place is a computer training center, an extensive adult literacy program, and an outreach program for the homeless. A wide array of rotating exhibits ensures that a visit to the library is always fresh and interesting. Among the dedicated collections are special centers, including African American, Filipino American, and Gay and Lesbian. Dig a bit deeper and you'll find the library holds an improbable number of other unique collections. To cite just a sampling: calligraphy, wit and humor, and the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition. The library also holds the photo morgue of the *News-Call Bulletin* and over 40,000 digitized photos as part of the San Francisco Historical Photograph Collection, much accessible via the internet. The Art, Music, and Recreation Center boasts an extensive clippings file, music scrapbooks of programs, and an etchings and engravings collection, which date back to the 19th century. Music scores can be checked out.

Some may be surprised to find that the library has been a federal depository since 1889. The library's Government and Information Center is your one-stop shop for almost anything related to city, state, and federal government. Particu-

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larly impressive are city police records dating back to the 1860s and mayoral records to the Mexican period. The periodical and newspaper collection rivals or surpasses that of any Bay Area university.

Our tour culminated with a visit to the San Francisco History Center and the Book Arts Room on the 6th floor. Whether you are working on city or county history, architecture, labor, landmarks, education, or vital statistics, you're bound to find something of value in its 30,000-plus volumes and audio collection. The center still makes good use of its subject and biography card catalog and ephemera guides.

From a historian's perspective, there are two points worth emphasizing. (1) A conversation with the library staff is worth its weight in gold. There is a treasure trove of primary materials tucked away in the stacks, some of it uncataloged within layers of larger collections, that the library staff knows intimately well. (2) The library is growing its digital holdings in leaps and bounds, and much of it is accessible *from home*, if you hold a library card. For example, Proquest's historical copies of the Francisco Chronicle available now from 1869 through 1922, will be added to (1923 to the present) later this year.

Goldstein would love to grow the library's collections, but storage is a practical limitation. Even if items are digitized, the originals are generally retained. There is a downside to items that are "born digitized," says Goldstein, because author notes, which are key to a full understanding of the developmental process, are generally absent. Migrating to new formats is no less challenging.

– *Neil Dukas*

### Historic Sonoma

**Peter Meyerhof** will lead the tour on **Saturday, May 16** that will include the Sonoma Mission, Barracks, Blue Wing adobe, among others. Institute members and friends will gather at the Maysonnave House, about one block from Sonoma Plaza, for a brief introduction on the historic importance of Sonoma. Lunch afterwards at a nearby restaurant. Details later via e-mail to the membership.

### Play Readers

In February and in April we read "New Jerusalem: The Interrogation of Baruch de Spinoza at Talmud Torah Congregation: Amsterdam, July 27, 1656," by David Ives. Spinoza's family, along with many other Sephardic Jews, had fled Portugal (and Spain) to Holland to escape the Inquisition. Amsterdam was their "new Jerusalem." The young Spinoza was a star pupil under the rabbi and was widely expected to ascend to that position. However, Spinoza, a youthful free thinker, rejected divine authority and instead believed in reason. His bold ideas strained tolerance and led to a confrontation between political forces and his own community. He was summoned to the synagogue to defend himself. No written record survives as to what was actually said at Temple Talmud Torah on July 27, 1656. In the play's performance, the audience becomes the historic Amsterdam congregation listening to Spinoza's views of god, nature, and free will, views radical then which continue to be controversial until this day.

We invite interested members to join us for future readings. Please contact Joanne Lafler (jwlafler@gmail.com).

– *Edith Piness*

## MEMBER NEWS

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Welcome to our newest members:

**Patricia Cullinan** is the president of the Sonoma Valley Historical Society. She has had a lifelong interest in the history of California, due, she says, to “having lived in a town that still maintained the cultural landscape of early California.” She is also active in the promotion of the horticultural history of early California.

**Paul Drexler** operates Crooks Tour of San Francisco and has written articles on crime history for numerous publications, including *California Living* and *Focus Magazine*, and he writes a monthly column for *The Westside Observer*. He is working on a book about historic crimes in San Francisco neighborhoods. Crooks Tour was selected for the 2014 San Francisco Award in the Tourist Information Center category by the San Francisco Award Program.

**Charles Sullivan** studied history, psychology and English literature at Swarthmore College. Later he earned a Ph.D. in organizational psychology from New York University, and held various teaching and administrative posts at Georgetown University and other institutions. In recent years he has resumed the study of history, using primary sources at Oxford and elsewhere, to develop a deeper understanding of the Elizabethan age of discovery. He is writing a book about Francis Drake, Walter Raleigh, and a group of lesser-known figures.

On the activities front **Jackie Pels** reports the publication of two books from her Hardscratch Press. She writes: “*There’s a Freedom Here: My 100 Years in Alaska* is the memoir of centenarian Patricia Ray Williams, and a lively history of the town of Seward, on Resurrection Bay, founded in 1903 as a transportation hub in what was not yet a US territory. Pat’s mother arrived at the future townsite in 1901, by miscalculation on the part of a ship’s captain. Her father established his law practice in the

fledgling community in 1906, and the couple brought their infant daughter home to Seward in 1910. (I was born in Seward a few decades later, so it was a particular pleasure for me to introduce the book during the Alaska Historical Society’s annual conference, held for the first time in Seward last October.) *Mendota: Life and Times of an Emerging Latino Community, 1891-2012* is being introduced this month. Author Manuel G. Gonzales, Ph.D., born into a farmworker family in the San Joaquin Valley, augmented years of research with 140 interviews for a book that’s both scholarly and personal—and timely.”

**Patricia Bracewell** gave a reading of her new book, *The Price of Blood*, on February 9, at Diesel Bookstore in Oakland. This is the second volume of her trilogy about Queen Emma of Normandy.

Two Institute members made appearances in February in two television documentaries: **Charles R. Ortloff** in the NOVA program on the ancient World Heritage site of Petra (in Jordan) explained the hydraulic engineering aspects of the multiple pipeline systems that brought water from distant springs to the city center. **Rose Marie Cleese**, granddaughter of San Francisco’s first Italian American mayor, contributed to the “The Italian Americans.”

On March 28 at Fort Ross State Historic Park, **Maria Sakovich** inaugurated the series “Presentations on the Reconstruction of the Fort Compound” with a talk about the 150-year history of initiation, rehabilitation, and reconstruction of the Russian-built chapel.

In July **Charles Sullivan** will present “New Light on Raleigh, the Gilberts, and Other Elizabethans: ‘Colleagues of the Fellowship for the Discovery of the Northwest Passage’” at the London meeting of the Society for the History of Discoveries.

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blew up one publishing opportunity, with the unorthodox but respectable-looking ForeignPolicyJournal.com when I questioned the operator about a home-page article identifying the theology of Passover as the source of Israeli aggression.

I posted to the 12 most relevant-sounding communities on Reddit, a large operation where users vote the items and links that they like into prominent display. My offerings didn't go viral, or even bacterial. The iotas of interest I stirred up appeared on the "libertarian," "conspiracy," and "conspiratard" (debunker) pages, rather than more solemn ones. Only later did I learn of Reddit's growing reputation as a breeding ground for racists and assorted other creeps and cretins.

I learned much more promptly that you can't simply sign up with Twitter and tweet your way on to the message feeds, or timelines, of celebrities or anyone else, especially if you won't condescend to follow them. And I was extremely impressed with the efficiency of Wikipedia's volunteer editors in expurgating the paragraphs that, citing my article, I had inserted into four relevant entries. I was equally impressed with the array of grounds cited. I lost track after conflict of interest, use of an op-ed as a source, and violation of a strict taboo on original research (amusing, since my article was a synthesis based entirely on secondary sources).

The web, and social media in particular, are renowned for encouraging get-rich-quick schemes, but I didn't have much luck parachuting in from the 20th century, in anticipation of becoming an overnight sensation with a striking innovation in historical interpretation. I don't gainsay the benefits of online marketing. But I will be seeking professional assistance the next time I try it.

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