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NEWSLETTER

Urban Legend or Not: The Questionable Circumstances Surrounding the Death of a President in 1920s-era San Francisco by Monika Trobits

Part II

The official story was that President Harding died at the Palace Hotel on the night of August 2, 1923 following a heart attack. But the unofficial story that swirled around town was that he actually died across the street at the House of Shields speakeasy in the company of his cronies and a woman that wasn't his wife. As you can imagine, it was rather awkward to formally announce that the president had died in a speakeasy during federally-imposed Prohibition. Even for someone of Harding's well-known reputation as an avid drinker, gambler, and womanizer, it wouldn't sound appropriate. The story goes that after a whispered discussion at the speakeasy, it was apparently decided to quietly carry the president's body across New Montgomery Street to the Palace Hotel, sneak it up to his 8th-floor suite, and then announce that he had died there. It was also rumored that the president's body might have been carried through a tunnel that supposedly connected the speakeasy with the laundry room of the Palace Hotel. (Whether such a tunnel actually existed remains unclear.)

At the same time, there were further rumors that "the Duchess" (a nickname for Florence Harding for her imperious manner) had been poisoning her husband. He arrived in San Francisco not looking well, not feeling well, and very, very tired. According to local newspapers "The Duchess" initially blamed his death on food poisoning which she suggested was caused by food brought up from the Palace's kitchen. The Palace management vehemently denied this. The suspicious hotel manager, sensing that she had been up to something, immediately challenged the rather haughty Mrs. Harding. The manager strongly stated that no one who had eaten at the Palace in the past several days had shown any indication of a food-borne illness. (Maybe it was the fault of the Old Poodle Dog!). The manager then noticed a half-full glass near the deceased president's bed. The liquid it contained had a strangely foul odor. The manager picked up the glass, telling Mrs. Harding that its contents would be analyzed. The First Lady grabbed the glass, quickly pouring its contents down a nearby drain. She then backed off and agreed to drop the issue. She refused to allow an autopsy of Harding's body and instead directed that he be immediately embalmed. President Harding was 57 at the time of his demise.

Did Florence Harding take advantage of the president's heart condition by poisoning him as retribution for his philandering and for supposedly fathering at least one child outside their marriage? Alas, we will likely never know for sure what Mrs. Harding's intentions were. Following Harding's death, his family stated that a childhood case of the mumps had rendered Harding infertile. However, in April 2015, the *New York Times* reported that Harding's paternity of a daughter had been confirmed through genetic testing by AncestryDNA. That daughter, Elizabeth, born in 1919, used Harding's surname throughout her life. Her mother, Nan Britton, had written a book in 1927 entitled *The President's Daughter* and stated that Harding had paid \$500 monthly in child support. Elizabeth Ann Britton Harding (Blaesing) died in 2005 at 86.

Warren G. Harding, an avid golfer, would be memorialized in San Francisco through the naming of Harding Road which leads to the Harding Park Golf Course opened in 1925; both are located at

– *continued on back page*

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I am writing in the midst of a flurry of Institute events. Last Friday and Saturday I was in Sacramento with several of our members; Rose Marie Cleese did a wonderful job of putting together tours, meals, and even lodging in a Victorian mansion for some of us! Her report will be in the Winter newsletter.

Tonight I'll be at Robert Cherny's talk on the Coit Tower murals that we are cosponsoring. Our relationship with the speaker and subject go way back. Bob Cherny was a member and officer of the Institute, and another former member, Masha Zakheim, wrote a book about the murals. She was the daughter of one of the artists, Bernard Zakheim, and we are using a detail of his mural on the membership page of our website and in our member recruitment flyers. I see another former member, Bill Issel, has recently published *Coit Tower: A Novel of San Francisco*.

Then tomorrow I'll be on the outing to the San Rafael Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Civic Center complex, which I've been wanting to plan for years. It seems to have not caught the fancy of many of our members, but that's how it goes sometimes.

One of our newer members, Oliver Pollak, is doing an amazing job of delving into the forty-year history of the Institute. He's working on a book-length manuscript about us and finding it "fascinating do-it-yourself historiography." Anything you could send him about what the Institute has meant for you would be useful, especially if you are a longtime member, but even if you are not. I imagine the evolving nature of our membership will be one of many topics considered. It was a predominantly female organization in the early days, and Oliver discovered that eight of our members served as president of the Western Association of Women Historians.

Oliver is now the keeper of the Institute archives, previously held by Ellen Huppert. If you have materials relating to the Institute that you are ready to let go, don't just throw them away; contact Oliver. Eventually the archive may go to a public institution. And if Oliver sends you (individually or collectively) a request for information, I hope you will make the effort to respond.

The board will meet on October 12 and review this year's applications for mini-grants. The deadline has passed, but comes around on September 15th each year, so keep it in mind for next summer if you have a project that needs some financial support.

– *Ann Harlow*

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The NEWSLETTER is the official publication of the Institute for Historical Study, a scholarly organization designed to promote the research, writing, and public discussion of history. Membership in the Institute is open to independent and academically affiliated scholars who are in agreement with its aims and who have a commitment to historical study. Membership inquiries should be sent to the Institute address.

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“Fire in the Mind”

On Sunday, July 21 **Jim Gasperini** gave an illustrated presentation of digital tools for research with examples from his work in progress, a cultural history of fire provisionally titled “Fire in the Mind: How We Imagined Fire, from the Burning Bush to Burning Man.”

He began by explaining the origins of the project. As “worship associate” at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Berkeley, he learned that he might someday be asked to write a sermon. Considering what topics he might address, he thought of his longtime association with the Burning Man festival, and the complex relationship “burners” have with fire. Turning to Amazon to prepare by reading a book on fire and spirituality, he was astonished to find that no book seemed to exist addressing the subject in any comprehensive way. He decided that he had found a project worth tackling. He now has a sense, after three years of work, of why no one has tackled the subject; anyone with credentials for the study of any aspect of this immensely complex subject would know better than to take on a project with such ambitious scope.

Jim started his examination of digital tools with the outline in Google Docs he uses for high-level structure. He finds the ability to access Google Docs from any of his several devices (laptop, iPad, Android) particularly useful. He next demonstrated how he collects excerpts from printed books. He had brought along a copy of *Maya Cosmos* by Friedel, Schele, and Parker, with post-it notes marking passages of interest. He showed a screenshot of a page scanned from the book, using an inexpensive printer/scanner and an application, “Image Capture,” that comes free with Mac computers. Once the desired pages have been scanned into a PDF, he uses Adobe Acrobat Pro for OCR (optical character recognition). He then copies useful excerpts and pastes them into Word documents, and uses Word’s text color feature

to highlight passages of particular interest. He finds this a more efficient and accurate way to capture quotes from printed works than typing them up.

Jim next showed how he has been able to download many obscure but useful books in the public domain from the Internet Archive (archive.org). As an example of how useful this can be, he explained how he researched a story he first found in James K. Frazer’s *The Fasti of Ovid*, about a dramatic practice involving fire at the time of the inauguration of a new king of an ancient African kingdom. Having learned not to entirely trust Frazer’s interpretations of such stories, Jim decided to track down the original German source. After downloading the 1907 book cited in a Frazer footnote, applying Google Translate to the specific pages cited and searching for key terms in the book as a whole, it became clear that the citation was in error. Searching further in the Internet Archive, Jim found an 1882 edition of *Die Loango-Expedition* that must have been Frazer’s real source. Courtesy of Google Translate, he could read the story in a fuller and richer context than what appeared in Frazer’s retelling.

The last online tool Jim presented, Citefast, creates bibliographies. It can be set to capture information about books, articles, and web pages in APA, MLA or Chicago standards. He demonstrated the process of adding a book by entering the title *Homa Variations*. Citefast already had the title in its database and filled in most of the other necessary information. When Citefast is unfamiliar with a source, information can be entered manually. He demonstrated this process with an online article in *Cultural Survival*.

Jim concluded with a summary of the status of his project. He has submitted four draft chapters for review to the Institute’s Writers Group and each time found the process very useful. He is also grateful to have been the recipient of an

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Institute mini-grant, much of which has been spent purchasing research materials, mostly books. He has given up the idea that research can ever really be declared complete on a project like this, but looks forward to having a completed draft in about a year. Later in the summer he was scheduled to give, finally, the “fire sermon” at UUCB that inspired the project to begin with.

– *Jacques N. de Plume**

**Monsieur de Plume is a fiction designed to cover up the embarrassing fact of having to ask the presenter to write-up his own presentation. He did a swell job, but it has been newsletter practice for a listener to take on this task.*

August Potluck and Program

I could not attend the potluck lunch* at **Georgia Wright’s** home, but I wanted very much to see the video, “Three English Cathedrals: Norwich, Lincoln, Wells,” which Georgia, an historian of medieval art, made 25 years ago with a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. I love these amazing, complex, grand buildings constructed without modern technology. I arrived in time to be guided, by narrator Edward Markee, around the medieval cathedrals, representing 400 hundred years of stylistic change. Markee acknowledged that his interest in medieval architecture stemmed from his boredom as a child at the “endless sermons” at his local parish church; to cope, he studied the richly carved stonework surrounding him. A fine guide he proved to be, complemented by the stunning camera work which took the viewer up and up (these building were designed to impress) and into areas both accessible, if one were there, and inaccessible. Medieval English music accompanied the tour of the cathedrals. The pace of the video, deliberate, leisurely, transported me to a remarkable world.

*Oliver later wrote: “That was a lovely potluck. I look forward to more.”

With the Norman conquest came Norman bishops to replace Anglo-Saxon bishops. At Norwich Herbert de Losinga began building the cathedral in 1096. In 24 years all but the nave had been completed, showing primarily a Norman influence, for example, rounded arches and window tops. Another 35 years elapsed before the nave was finished and newer Gothic elements had been introduced. At Lincoln another Norman bishop began construction of the hilltop cathedral in 1192, seven years after an earthquake destroyed the Anglo-Norman cathedral. By 1256 the new building showed a unity of Gothic design, with the exception of the incorporation of a west facade of the original Anglo-Norman church. Much light emanated from beautiful windows made of colored glass (much of which was later destroyed by Protestant fanatics in the 16th century and during the 17th-century civil war). At Wells another Gothic style developed, heavier than at Lincoln and included much sculpture on the west facade and in the interior. Three dramatic features impressed me greatly on my visit to Wells decades ago: the very dramatic “scissor arches” reinforcing the piers under the tower, the asymmetrically worn steps (in the interior) leading to the chapter house, and the high Anglican service that Sunday. At the end of the video, as the narrator summed up the broad similarities and differences between these three cathedrals, bells pealed a glorious Sunday or feast day song.

As a coda to this celebration of medieval architecture, Georgia circulated a recent clipping from the *New York Times* “God Save the Cathedral? In England, Some Offer Mini Golf or a Giant Slide” (August 13, 2019). “This summer, visitors to some of England’s most imposing and ancient cathedrals will find carnival rides, a mini golf course, a lunar landscape and a lifelike model of the Earth dangling from the ceiling. Inside Norwich Cathedral in the east of England, a colorful,

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55-foot-tall slide—known as a helter skelter—winds past the 12th-century stone pillars. The Rev. Canon Andy Bryant, Norwich Cathedral’s canon for mission, said it offered visitors a new perspective on the ornate ceilings, and on the faith more generally. ‘This is a deliberate attempt to help people engage with our cathedral,’ he said. ‘There is this idea that the helter skelter makes it all brash and noisy, but people are going on it to see the cathedral in all of its glory.’”

– *Maria Sakovich*

“Reminiscing about a Forty-year Journey to Recover the Debates on the Woman Question in France, 1400-1920”

On Sunday, September 15th at the home of Lyn Reese, **Karen Offen** spoke to an enthusiastic audience. Karen is a Senior Scholar at the Clayman Institute for Gender Research at Stanford University as well as a long-time member of the Institute. Karen reviewed some of the events and research that led finally to publication of her two recent books: *The Woman Question in France, 1400-1870* (2017, paperback 2019) and *Debating the Woman Question in the French Third Republic, 1870-1920* (2018), both published by Cambridge University Press. Having gone through the Ph.D. program at Stanford, she realized that she had virtually never encountered any mention of women in French history. Once she received her degree in 1971, she began to ask a seemingly novel question: “Had there ever been a women’s movement in France?”

Karen’s post-1971 work focuses primarily on gendering modern European history, with expertise on women’s history, gender analysis, and comparative history, though much of her foundational research is in French history. She began documenting comparative women’s history which resulted in the landmark book,

Victorian Women: A Documentary Account of Women’s lives in Nineteenth-century England, France, and the United States, co-edited with Erna Olafson Hellerstein and Leslie Parker Hume (Stanford University Press, 1981). She then co-edited with Susan Groag Bell *Women, the Family, and Freedom: The Debate in Documents*, an intellectual and political history of women, published in two volumes (1983).

Karen published four major articles that put her scholarship on the map. These included “Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France,” published in the first special issue on women’s history of the *American Historical Review* (1984). Her fourth article, “Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach,” in *Signs: Journal of Women in Society and Culture* (Fall 1988), has been translated into five languages and continues to be cited in international scholarship. In this article, Karen delineated two different strands of argument, which she called “relational” (or familial) and “individualist.” The individualist strain of argument (which downplays sexual differences) was more commonly found in Great Britain and America, whereas the relational strand (which sought equality in difference) predominates in Europe and most other parts of the world.

Karen applied for—and received—several significant research fellowships that allowed her to pursue her investigations, NEH, Rockefeller, and the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation among them. She also won five grants from NEH for summer seminars for college teachers on the woman question debates in Europe and America and (with Marilyn Boxer) on the politics of motherhood.

In her talk Karen described a number of serendipitous discoveries of libraries and catalogued sources on the history of feminism in Europe and French feminism in particular. In the Stanford stacks, she discovered the published

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catalogue of the Gerritson Collection, a treasury of sources (in several languages) on the woman question in Europe. Originally the library of the Dutch physician Aletta Jacobs, it had been acquired by the John Crerar Library (Chicago) and subsequently sold to the University of Kansas, which microfilmed the materials in the early 1970s and more recently put them online. (UC Berkeley owns a copy of the microfilms.)

Karen's husband George discovered that one of the Paris municipal libraries was a *feminist* library, the Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, which held a spectacular collection of feminist literature. At the BMD, Karen found hundreds, even thousands of *published* sources, not only books, but also pamphlets, periodical articles, newspaper articles, etc. Women's voices appeared everywhere, often contradicting the observations of men who had dominated an earlier literature on and about women. By 1973 Karen had written a 100-page manuscript, too long to publish as an article and not long enough to constitute a book. It then sat in a drawer for some years. Meanwhile Karen edited a collection of articles by colleagues which was published as nos. 3-4 (1977) of *Third Republic/Troisième République*, a new journal published exclusively on microfiche.

When Karen completed her latest book manuscript, she offered it first to her earlier publisher, Stanford University Press, but their interests had since changed and the editor declined to take it on. Cambridge University Press accepted it, but the reviewers and editor thought it was too long (1100 pages); it would have to be severely cut. When Karen refused to cut it, the press offered to publish it in two volumes.

A lively Q and A followed Karen's presentation.

– Nancy Zinn

Writers Group

In July and again in September we read and discussed the first chapter of **Pam Peirce's** developing biography of Katherine Gibson. Gibson was a highly regarded writer of children's literature and a well known journalist and educator in the field of art. But there was also a tragic and darker side to her life. For over three years Katherine had been held in the Ohio State Hospital for the Insane. Under an assumed name she wrote a powerful account of her mental illness, incarceration, and eventual recovery, a book that is still used by mental health professionals. Pam sees Gibson, who was her adoptive grandmother, as a model of the early twentieth-century "New Woman."

Pam's first chapter begins with a retelling of Katherine's attempted suicide in the asylum and continues with a discussion of her family background in Indianapolis. In its July discussion of the chapter, held at Pam's home, the group urged her to heighten the dramatic potential in this prologue and to add more information of both Gibson's family background and the circumstances in Indiana at the time of her birth. At the September meeting, held at the house of Cathy and Rob Robbins, the group found the chapter much strengthened and urged Pam to go forward and would await her next presentation with great interest.

At our August meeting at the home of Jim Gasperini, the group considered the third chapter of **Dan Kohanski's** nearly finished book "After God: A Secular History of Religion." This chapter, entitled "A Time of Distress," treats the complex developments in the period of Jewish history between the events described in the book of Ezra and the birth of Jesus. These included the return from exile, the

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impact of Hellenism, the Maccabean revolt, the theological and historical innovations found in the book of Daniel, the growth of the Jewish sects of Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes, and the rise of messianism. The group found Dan's survey of these complexities to be excellent and his treatment marked by clarity of exposition and language. It saw little to criticize and encouraged Dan to submit further chapters for consideration.

In October the Writers Group will meet at the home of Joanne Lafler to consider materials to be presented by Marilyn Geary.

– *Richard Robbins*

Play Readers

Alan Bennett graduated from Oxford in 1957 with a first class honors degree in history and taught medieval history as a junior lecturer for two years. Fortunately, for lovers of theater, he soon realized that life as a playwright and actor was what he really wanted. Since the 1960s he has written more than twenty plays, including several based on historical characters and events. For our most recent gathering we chose *The Madness of George III*, set in 1788-89 when the king sank into madness and the nation teetered on the edge of a constitutional crisis. The subject is obviously not a laughing matter, but Bennett handled it with wit as well as compassion. After great success at the National Theatre in London in 1991 the play was made into a movie under the title *The Madness of King George*. (The title change assured that audiences accustomed to seeing sequels like *Star Wars II, III, IV*, etc., would not assume that *The Madness of George III* was the next in a series of movies about the English monarch.)

Detailed information about the king's illness is readily available, for it was studied, discussed, and recorded by those who observed him. The wisdom now is that he suffered from a

psychiatric condition, probably bipolar disorder—evidenced by accounts that he would talk endlessly and wildly for days on end. Bennett opted for the 1960s diagnosis of porphyria, a metabolic disease in which the sufferer's urine turns blue. The state of the king's urine is a central feature in his play.

What mattered in 1788-89 was not a diagnosis of the disease but its effect on the king's ability to discharge his duties as a constitutional monarch. Parliament was divided on the matter. Leader of the minority Whigs, Charles James Fox, supported the desire of the Prince of Wales to become regent during the king's illness. Tory prime minister, William Pitt the Younger, defended the king and hoped desperately for his recovery. The play proceeds by interspersing two kinds of scenes: those in which Fox and Pitt, and their respective cronies, plot their political courses, and those in which the king's doctors torture and almost manage to kill him with their useless and painful procedures. (It is believed that similar medical practices caused the death of George Washington.)

Enter a fascinating historical character—Francis Willis, a doctor from Lincolnshire whose unorthodox practices were believed to have cured patients with disorders similar to those of George III. Highly recommended by the queen's lady-in-waiting, Willis was allowed complete control of the king's treatment. In addition to painful contemporary practices such as blistering, Willis used confinement—putting the king into a straitjacket and tying him to a chair—to bring him under control. Sometimes only the threat of confinement was necessary. These scenes were painful to read and probably more painful to witness on the stage, but Bennett shows that Willis, unlike the royal doctors, was also sensitive to the king's gradual emergence from madness. Before the last scene, in which the king and queen depart for a public celebration of his recovery, Bennett tells us what the future holds: the king will have another

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brief attack in 1802 and descend into madness in 1810. The Prince of Wales will become regent in 1810 and king in 1820. As readers of Bennett's moving and engaging play, we will always be fans of George III.

At our October meeting we will watch a DVD of the movie and compare it with the stage play. We meet on the third Tuesday of the month at 1 p.m. in members' homes. New members are always invited to try us out and join the group. For more information, contact Joanne Lafler (jwlafler@gmail.com).

– *Joanne Lafler*

Welcome to new member **David Goldberg**. "I've had two careers," he writes. "After studying biology at Columbia University, I came to San Francisco to be a research associate at UCSF. Later I metamorphosed into a photographer—two kinds: horticultural photography and fine art photography. Of the former I've shot three books plus work in many others, calendars, etc. and taught the subject for 22 years at UC Berkeley. My fine art work has moved in the direction of approaching documentary subjects through the prism of contemporary visual art, combining photography, painting, and writing. My current projects are *A Family History*, concerning immigration to America from the Russian Pale, and *Truth*, an examination of the fungibility of photographic and philosophical truth in a social, political, and historical context." (See: David GoldbergImages.com)

John Graham gave a talk on August 14 at the Ignacio Valley Library in Walnut Creek: "All Mount No Diablo: Prehistory, History, Culture, and Gossip." The large, looming neighbor in Contra Costa County is not an old volcano but it has generated legends, from the original Miwok to contemporary folk, including even a Marvel Comics character by the name of Tiamut who is imprisoned beneath the mountain.

Carol Sicherman's years of research on a collection of family postcards from the first quarter of the 20th century have resulted in two articles illustrated with examples of the postcards: "Jacob Sicherman's War," in *The Galitzianer* (Vol. 25, No. 2, 2018) and "A Galician Family in Peace and War: The Sicherman/Schiff Postcard Collection, 1905 - 1921," in *East European Jewish Affairs* (Vol. 49, No. 2, 2019).

Joe Miller noted a benefit of Institute membership: "I learned a great deal about online newspaper searches from Institute member Oliver Pollak. Two weeks of searching turned up hundreds of useful articles about Free Love's connection with women's suffrage. Thanks Oliver!"

Peter Stansky with his coauthor Fred Leventhal has just published a short biography with Oxford University Press, *Leonard Woolf: Bloomsbury Socialist*. He writes: "should any member of the Institute be interested, it is available directly from Oxford at a 30% discount by going to www.oup.com/academic and using the promotion code AAFLYG6. The book will also be presented at the annual Stanford Book event, which I run, along with other books by Stanford authors. This academic year it will be on Saturday, May 2, from 1 to 5 p.m. at the Stanford Humanities Center. For the past 16 years the event has made clear the richness and variety of the books written by Stanford authors. The books are available for purchase at a 10% discount. Plan to come!"

Members can read **Robert Aquinas McNally's** latest article, "Harte for the Wiyots," on Historynet as well as in the December issue of *Wild West* magazine. Robert writes of an 1860 incident where young newspaper reporter Bret Harte expressed his outrage over a massacre of peaceful Wiyot Indians near his home on the Northern California coast. Beset by death

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threats from “friends” and neighbors for exposing the state-supported extermination of Natives in California, Harte had to face a difficult choice on what to do next. (See: <https://www.historynet.com/harte-for-the-wiyots.htm>)

Steven Levi writes that relevancy of history has always been his number one concern as a teacher and announces the availability of his book *What You Are Supposed to Learn About Real Life in Your High School United States History Class (Making History Interesting to Students)*. It can be ordered from Amazon as a book, download, or audio book.

“I’ve been diverted this summer from my usual work on various topics regarding Russian refugee emigrants in 1920s and 1930s San Francisco,” writes **Maria Sakovich**. “Instead, I’ve been researching and writing about the small, architect-designed house I’ve been living in for 37 years for my landlady’s application for landmark status. I delved into ‘Second Bay Tradition’ and the work of well-regarded Francis Joseph McCarthy.”

The Dancer’s Garden by Leslie Friedman (The Lively Foundation, 2019)

This is a wonderful quirky, perky series of ruminations on gardens, flowers, plants, trees, cats, people, indeed life. It has magnificent photographs mostly taken by the author herself but also some by her husband, the distinguished photographer and printer, Jonathan Clark, the proprietor of that fine private press, appropriately named The Artichoke Press. Leslie herself, a member of the Institute, is well-known primarily as a dancer and choreographer but is also a fine historian. Some years ago, to an extent sidelined by hip problems, she decided to turn more attention to her garden in Mountain View. In this delightful book she tells us about the various growing things, mostly flowers, that

she deals with, their characteristics, difficulties, and rewards. She and Jonathan expand their horizons, coping with so many growing things, not only flowers but pine, apple, and orange trees. They rescue abandoned cacti from the neighborhood. The author has an amazingly direct way of dealing with what she is putting into the earth, the satisfactions and beauty (so wonderfully captured in the photographs) when they flourish; the sadness when they die. She makes being a gardener such an immediate, connected, and personal matter.

In the text Leslie recounts her adventures with a wide range of growing things, most vividly oxalis, chrysanthemums, poppies, narcissus, camellias, primroses, magnolia, all beautifully illustrated. She is very insightful on how to deal with all these and other growing objects, and how they can be menaced by birds, notably crows, as well as by cats, humans, too much water and too little water. There is such a splendid sense of engagement with the ambitious enterprise of having a garden. As she writes towards the end of the text about fruit (but it may be about any of the myriad aspects of nature that she has nurtured): “When I had acquired my first new hip, my first foray into the garden was to see the apple blossoms. The apples would arrive later than the peaches. The oranges come when we run out of apples. We change partners, but it is the same dance.” Leslie Friedman has choreographed a garden and other growing things much as she has both performed and created dance. As she concludes her book: “It is a wonder.” It is an exhilarating read.

– *Peter Stansky*

SAVE THE DATE: May 16, 2020

Saturday lunch and afternoon program to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Institute for Historical Study. Details forthcoming.

40th-Anniversary Extra

*The Institute's first newsletter, dated December 10, 1979, reported on a variety of activities that had been taking place in the previous few months: creating articles of incorporation and a budget, applying for seed money, forming study groups, setting membership dues and the first general membership meeting. It seems appropriate to begin a year-long celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the Institute for Historical Study in the Fall 2019 newsletter. In this and the next three or four issues an article or excerpts from articles from our early newsletters will be featured, using the original uncolumned style. "Report on the New York Conference," from Volume I, No. 1, below, presents the historical context for the establishment of the Institute. The article was not signed. On the next page, **Oliver Pollak** reviews a 35th-anniversary book of a sister organization.*

Paula Gillett [one of the founding members] represented the Institute at the conference "Independent Research Institutions and Scholarly Life in the 1980s," which was organized by the New York-based Institute for Research in History and funded by the Ford Foundation. The programs and conversations of those two days made it clear that we are part of a national movement.

A major theme of the conference was the importance for many of us of the transition from "displaced academics" to "independent scholars," a change that is a necessary first step, leading to the development of new organizations without which "independent scholars" will very likely be isolated scholars, working without the benefit of peer-group support, intellectual stimulation, scholarly community, and professional affiliation.

Represented at the conference were independent research institutions from all over the country, including long-established ones like the Newberry Library, the Eleutherian Mills Historical Library [now the Hagley Library], and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, and new ones, like the Center for Independent Study (New Haven, Connecticut), the Organization for Asian Research Scholars (Tucson, Arizona), and the Institute for Historical Study. Also attending were representatives of the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and several state humanities and arts councils, as well as the Organization of American Historians and the American Association for the Advancement of the Humanities.

The accounts of development and future plans given by the various research institutions suggest that while the employment crisis in the academic world was without question the motivating force behind the formation of most of these new institutions, once formed the new groups established independent validity by exploring functions seldom addressed by traditional academic departments. And once established, these independent scholarly institutions must turn their attention to two critical areas of concern, one practical and the other philosophical.

Achievement of financial stability is a practical necessity. Public and private funding in the humanities is not expected to increase, so all our organizations are competing for a fixed supply of operating capital as far as grant monies are concerned. It was essential, therefore, that we explore new ways of developing ongoing sources of income. . . .

The philosophical issue is the question of self-definition; two guest speakers at the conference, Thomas Bender of New York University and Burton Bledstein of the University of Illinois, Chicago Circle Campus, addressed the topic. Both set the problem in the context of the domination of intellectual and cultural life of post-World War II America by the university. Professor Bender saw in the development of the new organizations the promise of a rebirth of the civic culture once institutionalized in literary and philosophical societies and the lyceum movement. In Professor Bledstein's view, the failure of historians to develop vocational opportunities outside the university is a symptom of the university's domination of cultural life; a historian working outside the university feels him/herself outside the mainstream. He

suggested that the success of our new organizations would very likely lead to their absorption by the universities. Professor Bender did not see this ironic form of success as a necessary development, but strongly emphasized that real independence for our organizations can be achieved only by staking out new territory in new ways; he advised that our institutions not accept without question the disciplinary divisions and norms of the university and that we consciously avoid accepting a position in the penumbra of the university. . . .

Scholars Without Walls: A History of the Minnesota Independent Scholars' Forum 1983-2018

by Lucy Brusick, Evelyn Klein, and Mike Woolsey (Minneapolis, MN: Wise Ink Creative Publishing, 2019), 292 pages, \$18.60.

Maria Sakovich knew I was working on the Institute's history for our 40th anniversary and sent me the June 2019 *Minnesota Scholar* announcing the June 22 book launch of *Scholars without Walls*. The Minnesota group was part of a nationwide trend. An expanding number of humanities doctorates that the academic market could not absorb and employ prompted the establishment of independent scholar groups, of which there were about eight in 1992. Displaced by the academic economy, surplus of over-qualified talent compared to budgets, declining student population, and already-in-place tenure track faculty, newly minted and unemployed Ph.Ds began banding together. New York's Institute for Research in History was founded in 1976, the Bay Area's Institute for Historical Study in 1979-80, and San Diego Independent Scholars and Minnesota's Independent Scholars Forum (which included both sciences and the humanities) appeared in 1982. The National Coalition of Independent Scholars was established in the late 1980s. These organizations arose in urban areas rich with state and private universities. Their leadership and membership were predominantly female except for Minnesota where men predominated.

Minnesota's forum received \$60,000 over five years for various projects. This book is funded in part by a 2017 Minnesota Historical Society grant (\$7,090) to cover what volunteers could not do. "Book design, photo enhancement, peer review, and final editing" were outsourced. Sources for the story came primarily from MISF reports in "News & Views from Minnesota Independent Scholar's Forum" inserted into *Humanities Scholars Newsletter* produced by the Minnesota Humanities Council and the Forum's own newsletters, which have gone through four titles over time.

Cosponsors for various Forum programs have included Science Museum of Minnesota, First Unitarian Society, Women Historians of the Midwest, Minnesota Historical Society, Hamline University, Macalester College, the University of Minnesota, and the League of Women Voters. Chapter 9 of twelve chapters is devoted to describing 16 grants managed by the Forum.

Remember those history essay assignments asking students to "compare and contrast," say the Mississippi to the Sacramento River? It's impossible not to compare the Institute for Historical Study with the Forum. The benefits of membership in both organizations are similar: a newsletter, library privileges, and scholarly companionship. Both the Forum and the Institute had to confront UM and UC when the universities tried to curtail lending privileges. Membership numbers have declined: Minnesota had 81 members in 1984 and around 70 today; the Institute's membership peaked in the 1980s at about 150. (We have been hovering around 90 for the past several years.) Presidential messages have echoed perpetual calls for the need for new members, misgivings and hope, and praise for dedicated members. The Institute created a Five-year plan in the early 1980s, the Forum in 1991. The Forum initially met when necessary, reflecting a loose organization. The Institute has hewed to a regular calendar of board and membership meetings, study groups, and works in progress as well as picnics and potlucks. For scholars in both organizations (as everywhere) the personal computer and internet resources revolutionized research opportunities.

We are grateful for this preservation of institutional memory.

Lake Merced. The Harding Theatre, which opened in 1926 on Divisadero Street, was also named for the 29th president and is currently the site of the Emporium Arcade Bar.

* * *

During the 1920s an estimated 1,500 speakeasies operated in the city when it had a population of about 600,000. City officials knew about most of them and chose to look the other way. San Francisco's Board of Supervisors unanimously passed a resolution in 1926 instructing the local police not to enforce Prohibition. The House of Shields continued doing business unabated.

Prohibition came under fire, especially when the Great Depression began, in part because local governments needed the tax revenue generated by sales of alcohol. In addition, the alcohol beverage industry could provide thousands of much-needed jobs. Franklin Roosevelt ran for president promising to end Prohibition if he was elected in 1932; he was and followed through. Prohibition was repealed in December of 1933 via the 21st amendment allowing for state and local control of alcohol.

When Prohibition ended, the Old Poodle Dog moved again, this time to Post Street to the ground-level of the Mechanics' Institute Building and then briefly to the Crocker Galleria during the restaurant's final days; it remained in business until the early 1980s.

The repeal of Prohibition allowed the House of Shields to reestablish itself upstairs in its original street-level location. It subsequently ended its "gentlemen's club" days in the 1970s when it officially allowed women into the bar (prior to that time the only women let in were generally prostitutes). The House of Shields is still in business at its New Montgomery Street location. It's an original tenant in the Sharon Building and one of the city's legacy bars/businesses.

The Palace Hotel, which dates to 1875, is still across the street.

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