

Tracing the Truth, Part III: - Planning Your Visit to an Archive or Library by Taryn Edwards

Do your homework:

Before you go to a library or archive be sure to start on step 1 of your research plan by reading several books and articles on your topic so you have a good idea of the kinds of resources you want to find before you talk to a librarian or archivist. The role of these professionals is to connect you with their institution's resources but not actually do the research for you or teach you about the topic. They have many other duties besides customer service, so help them help you by being prepared and focused. You will get the best service.

Look at the archive's web site and familiarize yourself with it and its catalog. Make sure to read any descriptions of their collections or relevant finding aids they have published on their website. You don't want to visit an archive that has nothing for you! Take note of the archive's hours and any rules or restrictions about using the collection. Some archives may not allow photography or photocopying. Or if part of the collection is offsite, such as at the Bancroft Library, you may need to order these items well before your visit.

Consider writing to the archivist about your project so that she can plan for your visit or refer you to a colleague with more knowledge in your subject area. Be as flexible as possible when stating when you want to visit, particularly if it is a small archive. Give the staff time to muster their forces – in other words, don't say you are coming tomorrow, if you can help it.

Talking to Librarians/Archivists:

Be as specific as possible when asking an archivist or librarian for material. Do not ask for everything they might have on your topic for example on the 1906 Earthquake. Instead ask a more specific question such as whether they have information on a specific person who lived through the quake. Most libraries and archives do not have the staff or money to describe their collections in detail so be prepared to do your own searching through many boxes of material that *might* be related to your topic. Being specific is especially important if you want the library staff to make a copy of the material to send to you. If you are not specific about what you're looking for, or what collection of material it might be in, they will be unable to assist you. *Bottom line: they will not search through boxes of manuscripts looking for your evidence.*

Don't be afraid to articulate your research problems (but keep them brief and specific). The archivist may offer a different perspective on your issue, or have an idea of where to look. Don't forget to mention any prior research you've done or where you've looked already.

What to Bring on Your Research Visit:

Each archive is different but these guidelines generally apply:

Bring pencils – no pens.

Bring a simple notebook or pad of paper without pockets. I like to use a steno-pad. Be prepared to offer this up for inspection when you arrive and when you leave.

Bring cash and plenty of change if you think you might need to make photocopies or print out copies of microfilm.

– continued on back page

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As we enter the 2020s, we have also entered the fifth decade of the Institute for Historical Study. We will celebrate the 40th anniversary of our incorporation this year.

It feels more and more like a new era following the deaths of two of our most stalwart long-term members, Ellen Huppert in November 2018 and Georgia Wright in December 2019. Those of us who have been members a long time (17 years in my case) miss them greatly and will want to honor their accomplishments as we reflect on the past four decades. We will also be thanking others who have played various leadership roles over the years, including Joanne Lafler and Nancy Zinn. Nancy is stepping down after coordinating our monthly programs for two and a half years. Thank you for your service, Nancy!

The leadership torch has gradually been passed from the founding members to a younger age group, and that cohort is aging, too—so please do what you can to bring in younger members! And if you have any interest at all in playing a leadership role of some kind, please contact me or another member of the board. It's the responsibility of all members who value the Institute to keep it thriving for decades into the future. Fresh ideas and energy are welcome!

I feel like we've lost the momentum that led Georgia, Ellen, Joanne and others to create conferences, short courses, film series and more. However, our organization is alive and well, unlike some other independent scholars' groups that started around the same time. We continue to provide intellectual, social and sometimes financial support for our members, and we produce at least one or two public programs a year. We could perhaps do better at advocating publicly for the importance of history. I'm so pleased that Oliver Pollak has been delving into our newsletters and other archives and believes the Institute is worthy of a book describing its history and members.

I hope to see many of you at our annual meeting on Saturday, February 29th, 10 AM to 2:30 PM (location to be announced). It's a great chance to meet your fellow members face-to-face, learn about what the organization has been up to over the past year, contribute your own ideas, and hear short talks by some of our new members.

Another date to put on your calendar: Saturday, May 16, for a luncheon to celebrate the Institute's 40th anniversary. You'll hear more about that in the spring newsletter.

– *Ann Harlow*

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WORK IN PROGRESS

“The Impact of Religion on Sex from the Hittites to Augustine”

On Sunday, October 20 **Dan Kohanski** gave a presentation in the lovely Mill Valley home of Edee Piness, based on a chapter from his book in progress, “After God.” Dan began with examples, from the limited surviving records, of what can be understood about the sexual morés of the peoples of the ancient Middle East. They seem to have been quite broad-minded, tolerating practices that in more recent times became taboo. For glimpses of attitudes about sex, scholars often need to read between the lines of laws and lawsuits that do not directly reference sexual conduct. For example, though same-sex relations are rarely mentioned in the annals of the influential Hittite Empire of the second millennium BCE, one law prohibits a man from having relations with his mother, his daughter—or his son. This law obviously focuses on censuring incest; that incest with a son is equated with incest with women suggests that sex between males was not subject to a more general prohibition.

Even bestiality seems to have been tolerated, up to a point. Someone who had sex with a cow could not “come into the presence of the King,” but someone who had sex with a horse or mule was under no such restriction. The Hittite preoccupation with “purity” included many rules about bathing after sex, especially for priests, so that they would not “go before God in an unclean state.” The point was not that sex was sinful, but rather that sexual behavior temporarily rendered one unfit for devotional activity. This obsession with purity had a strong influence on later cultures.

Dan next focused on what can be learned about ancient sexual practice from the Bible. Beyond the well-known eroticism of the *Song of Songs*, the egalitarianism of its sensuousness warrants attention: both the man and woman claim equal entitlement to sexual engagement and delight.

He reviewed how complex rules about purity in the Bible may have derived from the Hittites and explained that some Bible stories were later taken out of context to condemn certain types of sexual behavior. The sin of Onan, for example (from which the term “onanism” derives), was not that he masturbated (“Onan cast his seed upon the ground.”) No, God smote Onan because he refused to impregnate his brother’s widow, thereby ignoring his “levirate duty” according to the custom of the time. In another example, the city of Sodom earned the wrath of God not because it was particularly licentious or given to same-sex practices, but because it violated essential customs of hospitality.

So how did sex come into such ill repute in later centuries? Dan traced the change to the Essenes, a Jewish ascetic sect with whom John the Baptist spent some years, and the influence of the Apostle Paul, a Hellenistic Jew who grew up familiar with another ascetic tradition, that of the Greek Stoics. There was a bias in the early Jesus Movement toward celibacy, the thought being to discourage anything that distracted from the contemplation of God in the few days or years that remained before the second coming of the Christ. As time went on and it became apparent that the end of the world might not be imminent, church leaders were confronted with many questions about how to reconcile their teachings with observed reality. A major turning point came, centuries later, with (Saint) Augustine, Bishop of Hippo. A mistranslation of a single line that the Apostle Paul had written in Greek and Aristotle’s erroneous idea of how children are created resulted in Augustine’s momentous declaration that we are all guilty of “original sin,” and that the original sin was sex. From these early decisions can be traced the bias against contraception in the Catholic Church.

After briefly discussing the thinking of Martin Luther and later developments within the Protestant traditions, Dan moved into stories

about the history of contraception in the 20th century. He ended with “some concepts about how to think about sex now,” in the light of this history. A brief review cannot do justice to his complex, well-considered analysis. We can look forward to the full text when his book is published. In the meantime, see his recent article in *The Humanist*, “Why the Catholic Church Is So Conflicted about Sex.”*

Dan wears his erudition lightly, and enlivened this complex story with many engaging and illuminating anecdotes. Discussion afterward ranged from the influence of the Egyptians to Henry VIII and the history of polygamy to the question of why the Hittites thought that sex renders one “unclean.” Dan’s modest answer to that one: “I don’t know.” I suspect he means: no-one really knows, though our culture still struggles with the influence of their practices, millennia ago.

* <https://thehumanist.com/magazine/january-february-2019/features/why-the-catholic-church-is-so-conflicted-about-sex>

– *Jim Gasperini*

Writers Group

Our October and November sessions were devoted to catching up with the work of members who have books nearing publication and who had not presented for some time. In October we met at the home of Joanne Lafler to discuss portions of **Marilyn Geary’s** book on Italian-Swiss immigrants to California and Australia that some members of the group had not seen before. We also discussed the concluding chapter. Some members felt that there was a little too much speculation as to what Luigi, the father of several of the main characters, was thinking and feeling in his final hours. Others were less disturbed, noting that imaginative reconstructions of this sort are not

problematic, provided that the speculative nature of these segments is clear.

In November we met at the home of Rose Marie Cleese to discuss the penultimate chapter of **Joanne Lafler’s** biography of Harry Lafler, a father-in-law she never knew. Lafler was an important and colorful personality in the history of 20th-century California as a writer, a leading figure in the artistic bohemia, a businessman and real estate developer. His love life was equally colorful. There was general agreement that this work is “ready for prime time,” and we urged Joanne to press ahead. There was a strong feeling that Joanne might do some things in the chapter reviewed to heighten the drama of Harry’s fatal crash which brings his story to a close. The group also urged Joanne to make a very strong case for Lafler’s importance for the history of California in the first half of the 20th century in the concluding chapter of the book.

For our third session, scheduled for December 8 to discuss a chapter of Cathy Robbins’ work on Calabria, the holidays caught up with us. Turn-out was going to be very small, so we postponed this session until January.

– *Richard Robbins*

In Memoriam: Georgia Wright

Georgia Wright joined the Institute for Historical Study in the fall of 1980. She immediately embraced the Institute, for that was her nature. Before the end of the year she became chair of the program committee. In January 1981 her home in Berkeley was the site of our first “work-in-progress” meeting. Countless meetings and events followed at 105 Vicente Road, and after she lost her home in the 1991 Oakland hills fire she designed the new house specifically as a venue for Institute gatherings. On August 17, 2019, she hosted our last major event of the year—the annual potluck.

Georgia was our most frequent contributor of works in progress. When she was reminded recently that she had presented her work twelve times over the years she responded, with characteristic wit: “Good heavens! Did I really bore the Institute twelve times?” But her presentations were hardly boring. They took us from her study of church architecture in medieval France and England to her involvement in the Limestone Provenance Project, in which nuclear science has been used to identify sources of limestone used in religious sculpture that have traveled far from their original sites. Georgia introduced us to the complexities of producing two videos of medieval churches. In 1989 she collected documents from the Bancroft Library for a display in the foyer of the UC Berkeley Library that celebrated the bicentennial of the French Revolution. In the course of that work she came across the diary of a cleric who recorded his daily life and royalist sympathies while managing to keep his head in tumultuous times—a discovery that became the subject of work-in-progress presentations and a book in progress.

Georgia’s death in Berkeley on December 20 leaves a great hole in the life of the Institute, as did the death of Ellen Huppert in November 2019. I will have more to say about Georgia’s many contributions in the April issue of the newsletter. I welcome all readers who knew Georgia to contribute memories of her for publication in that issue. You may send them to me (jwlafler@ gmail.com). I share your loss.

– *Joanne Lafler*

Richard Robbins and **Maria Sakovich** participated in the 51st annual convention of the Association of Slavic, Eastern European, and Eurasian Studies in November in San Francisco, both at roundtable discussions. Rob presented at “*Citizen Countess: Sofia Panina and the Fate of Revolutionary Russia* by Adele Lindenmeyr,”

and Maria at “Little Known California Resources for Russian Studies.”

Dan Kohanski will give a presentation on developments in the intertestamental period (the half millennium between Ezra and the birth of Jesus) that influenced later Judaism and early Christianity, at the Commonwealth Club on March 23rd at 6:00 PM. The title of the talk is “Between Ezra and Jesus There Is Daniel.” See the Commonwealth Club website for more details and tickets.

Joe C. Miller will give a talk, “Wild Women Suffragists, and Their Reputation as Free Lovers,” at the San Francisco Main Library, Thursday, April 2, at 6:30 PM. “The talk,” Joe writes, “is rated PG-13.”

Historical Treasures of Sacramento Revealed

The highlight of our ambitious two-day crawl of Sacramento’s historical resources on September 28-29 was, without a doubt, the high caliber and unbridled enthusiasm of our guides at each of the venues we visited. We learned so much more on these guided tours than we would have on our own.

At the **California State Archives**, where 99% of the archives consist of government records, archivist Jeff Crawford gave us a 90-minute tour, during which we had a chance to look at documents he had pulled per our earlier requests (e.g., material on California suffragettes and member rolls of various militia groups operating in Volcano in the 1860s). At the Archives’ Preservation Lab, we saw items in various conditions and learned from head preservation technician Juan Ramos some of the techniques used to preserve pristine documents and to restore damaged ones. He also gave us advice on what materials to use when preserving historic papers.

At the **State Capitol Building**, State Parks guide Rob Reif shared his repository of endless,

SPECIAL EVENT

fascinating anecdotes with us on our hour-long tour of the Capitol. We had the opportunity to walk through several historic rooms that are roped off to the general public, including the State Treasury Room with its enormous original vault. We also viewed large oil portraits of former governors that line the hallways, including the controversial modern-art portrait of Jerry Brown done during his first term of office (1975 -1983). In the Assembly chambers, Rob informed us that the Speaker sits on a stool on the dais, with two high back chairs on either side that remain unused and represent the kings and queens of the Old World.

After lunch, we explored the Stanley Mosk Library and Courts Building, part of the **California State Library**. Communications officer Deborah Lynch led us on an excellent 90-minute highlights tour: the stunning vestibule with its 16 towering granite columns and murals depicting *War through the Ages*, painted by San Francisco-based artist Frank Van Sloun; the Circulation Room with its no-longer-used carved card catalog cabinets recessed into the walls; and spacious Gillis Hall, where Assistant Chief of State Library Services Jessica Knox-Jensen provided background on the reading room's sprawling 69-foot-long Maynard Dixon mural, *A Pageant of Traditions*. In the stacks, we looked at a cross section of items from the Library's collections of maps, newspapers, government records, books, and ephemera.

On day two, our first stop was the **California State Indian Museum**. Adjacent to Sutter's Fort, the small museum is rich in artifacts: baskets, a huge redwood dugout canoe, ceremonial regalia, beadwork, and hunting and fishing tools. Plans are in the works to rename it the California Indian Heritage Center and move it to a site near the confluence of the American and Sacramento Rivers. Our docent, Al Striplin, whose 50% Indian roots are split between his mother's Aztec heritage and his father's California Central Coast Indian family group,

shared with us his spiritual journey from Catholicism in his youth to his Indian beliefs today.

At **Sutter's Fort**, we had just enough time to explore the only structure remaining of the original fort, the small three-story building in the center. The fort was built in the 1840s by Swiss immigrant John Sutter, who arrived in California in 1839 seeking to become a Mexican citizen in order to acquire land. His sawmill on the American River in Coloma was famously the site of the discovery of gold in January 1848 by a worker of his, James Marshall. In one of the building's small rooms, a storyteller in period clothing regaled us with little-known tales of the colorful and controversial Sutter.

Our final destination was the *Chiura Obata: An American Modern* exhibition at the **Crocker Art Museum** that included Obata's sketches of the aftermath of San Francisco's 1906 earthquake; his paintings of Yosemite and the Monterey coastline; drawings of students on the UC Berkeley campus where he was an art professor; and poignant sketches of his journey to and internment at the Topaz Relocation Center in Utah in 1942. In the historic part of the museum, the circa-1860s mansion of Judge Edwin B. Crocker, brother of the Big Four's Charles Crocker, we had a chance to view Charles Christian Nahl's *Sunday Morning in the Mines*, one of the most famous paintings of the California Gold Rush.

Our two-day visit to Sacramento gave us just a taste of the vast repositories of historical documents, artifacts, and works of art that are preserved, housed, and displayed throughout our capital—and all accessible to researchers. Said new Institute member Kevin Knauss afterwards, "Even though I have visited each of Friday's venues before and even done research at the locations, I learned something new on each tour. My mind was swirling with new subjects to dive into and research at each of the places."

Continuing Our 40th Anniversary Celebration

From the *Newsletter*, Vol. II, No. 1 (February 15, 1981)

Member Profile: Georgia Wright

“The Institute’s active and enthusiastic program committee chair has this to say about her background, work, and interests:

I received my PhD in the History of Art from Columbia in 1966 and since then have taught at the Universities of Minnesota and California (Berkeley and Davis campuses) and at Mill College. I have published articles on French Gothic sculpture, particularly tombs, with an excursion into the work of Caravaggio (his Entombment), but most recently indulged in a non-funereal study of [architect Bernard] Maybeck’s campus plans, inspired by some materials I came upon at Mills.

Last June I completed the MBA at Berkeley, and took a part-time job doing research for a consulting firm specializing in coal. The complete lack of connection between my former career and my present one is delightful. The focus of concern, the team activity, and the expectations are all so different that I feel I am starting a new life with the advantage of remembering a former incarnation. Evenings or weekends, released from the mines, I can plunge into my tombs. My husband teaches Art History at Berkeley, so that I am not without support in my “avocation.”

“Off to a Successful Start”

“The newest Institute undertaking—a monthly series of informal meetings at which members discuss their works in progress—was off to a successful start in January, with a meeting at the home of Georgia Wright in Berkeley. The first of two featured speakers, Sylvia Myers, a scholar and teacher of English literature, has been interested in the 18th-century English blue-stocking movement as a prototype of the friendship networks established by women who have adopted an independent stance. . . . The second participant, Ruth Friedlander, has turned from her doctoral work on the history of medicine to Biblical history—and the task of translating that history into drama: a trilogy of the life of King Saul. . . .

“Response to the first meeting was enthusiastic. For the speakers it offered an opportunity to try out ideas and generate a lively discussion. For all those present it was an occasion to become better acquainted as scholars in an informal setting. The program committee is scheduling at least one such meeting each month in different Bay Area locations and at different times. Non-members as well as members are cordially invited to attend, but it is felt that the opportunity to make presentations should be limited to members. Georgia Wright welcomes suggestions on speakers and topics, which may also include discussions of important new literature. . . .”

Historians, History, and Historical Resources in the State Capital of California: A Sacramento Meeting

“A meeting designed to acquaint our members and friends with the vast, but little-known, ‘lode’ of historical material in our state is scheduled for Saturday, March 14 at 1:30 p.m. . . . in Old Sacramento. . . . Our speakers represent . . . the California Department of Parks and Recreation, which houses over two million artifacts in its West Sacramento facility and oversees historic reconstruction of Old Sacramento; the State Archives; the Sacramento Museum and History Commission; the Office of Historical Preservation; the Bureau of Land Management; the State Lands Commission; and the Special Collections of the Shields Library at UC Davis. Each participant is preparing a brief outline of archival holdings, which will be available as a brochure at the meeting.”

The next issue of the newsletter reported that “more than 80 people attended the afternoon meeting.”

Bring your digital camera and an extra battery and memory card. I have had both fail on me! If you plan to use your phone to take pictures, bring your charging cable and its power adapter. Bring your laptop if you prefer to take notes that way, and its power supply. Be prepared to potentially leave all your stuff in a locker, except for your pencil and paper. Each library is different. Bring a sweater. Libraries and archives tend to be in old buildings and often have finicky heating systems. I find also that when I am sitting still, reading and note taking, I get cold. Bring a cup for water – you may not be allowed to bring in a bottle but a tiny cup will fit in your jacket pocket and sure beats slurping out of drinking fountains. Bring your lunch. You will burn a lot of calories thinking and you don't want to waste your precious research time looking for a cafe. And don't forget to bring a magnifying glass.

Take Good Notes:

Lastly, don't forget to keep copious notes of where you found what. Write at the top of each page of written or typed notes the source you are using with the complete title and the call number. – Don't forget to save often and above all, keep a copy of your notes saved separately from your first drafts. You don't want to accidentally delete something during the writing process. If you can, take pictures of the resource's title page, container record, or paging slip. If you're not sure what to photograph, make sure you at least get the call number and the barcode assigned to that resource. Some archives require you to also put an identification tag in every photo you take. It seems like overkill, but you definitely don't want to have any mystery pictures that make you wonder, where did I find this? You also want to be able to find the resource again or refer to it to a colleague or librarian; and of course the source must be footnoted.

Thank everyone profusely:

Lastly, be sure to thank the library staff members who have given you great service. A quick email after your visit is polite and also will provide the librarian with your contact information in case she thinks of something that will help you later. It is my practice as a librarian to keep these thank-you emails, just in case I need to contact the researcher again. One time I contacted a researcher a year after we met because I *finally* found what he was looking for.

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Save the date: Saturday, May 16, 2020 —40th anniversary lunch!