The Institute for Historical Study Newsletter

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As I announced in an earlier *Newsletter*, the Institute has established an endowment fund whose annual interest will be used to offer grants-in-aid to members. We have already received a number of donations to the endowment fund and we welcome additional donations and suggestions for other funding sources. A committee is now preparing recommendations for guidelines and an application procedure so that we can offer the first grants before the end of this year. Details will be announced in the fall issue of the *Newsletter*.

In addition to this exciting new service to our members, we have recently provided a public service to two local non-profit organizations, surveying their archives and making suggestions for their preservation and use. The purpose of this program—the brain-child of Board member Bill Strobridge—is two-fold: to acquaint Institute members with the procedures involved in an archives assessment survey, and to encourage the agencies surveyed to make more effective use of their institutional history.

Our first two "customers" were the League of Women Voters, San Francisco, and the Japanese American Library, also in San Francisco. Our first report was well received, and if the response continues to be good, the Institute can consider various options, including applying for grants to support a more ambitious program and pay the participants. So far, six Institute members have volunteered three to six hours of their time to the project. If you want to know more about it, or would like to participate, please let me know.

The Institute never takes a summer vacation. Meetings of various kinds are scheduled throughout the next few months, culminating in the annual membership potluck, which will be held on September the eighteenth. Many Institute members are also involved in the PCB/AHA meeting, August 10–13, at San Francisco State University. I look forward to seeing you at these events.

—Joanne Lafler

LECTURE

Jewish-Polish Relations in America

Both as a scholar and an activist, Institute member George Lersky has been deeply concerned about the history of Jewish-Polish relations. As a representative of the Polish government in exile, on a secret mission in occupied Poland, he was present in Warsaw on the day of the Ghetto uprising. On such missions he was responsible for saving the lives of many Polish Jews, for which he was honored by the Israeli government at Yad Vashim. More recently he has worked actively for a rapprochement between Jews and Poles "in their diaspora," and has published scholarly works on Jewish-Polish relations. On June 1, in a lecture co-sponsored by the Institute and the Jewish Community Relations Council of San Francisco, he discussed "Jewish-Polish Relations in America: Past Confrontations—Future Prospects."

Lersky prefaced his remarks with a statement by the Polish scholar Jan Kott: "Polish anti-Semitism will end when Jews *stop* talking about it and Poles *start* talking about it." He traced the history of this vexed relationship to the wave of pogroms and anti-Semitic laws in Poland in the 1880s, following the assassination of Alexander II by a Polish anarchist who, although not Jewish, had a Jewish woman friend. Relations between Poles and Jews in America, which had not been bad before the 1880s, suffered as a result. They were to become worse after the "Dmowski incident" in 1918.

As the head of the Polish National Committee, founded in 1917 to campaign for an independent Poland, Roman Dmowski travelled to America in 1918 to seek support from the Polish-American community, many of whom were Jews. A notorious anti-Semite, who in the period before World War I had blamed Jews for his failure to be elected to the Duma and had called for a boycott of Jewish businesses in Poland, Dmowski was perhaps not the best emissary to Polish-American Jewry. But according to material that Lersky has examined, it was the hope of Ignacy Paderewski that Dmowski could make amends and strenghten important ties. To the contrary, at a fateful meeting Dmowski succeded in alienating members of the American Jewish Committee, which had supported an independent Poland. Although neither

Dmowski nor any of his followers came to power in the government of the new Polish republic, the incident was not easily forgotten.

Lersky acknowledged that the major source of Jewish antipathy toward Poles has been the indifference of most Poles to Nazi horrors. Without discounting the importance of this, he noted that an equal number of Polish gentiles and Polish Jews—6,000,000 altogether—were victims of the Nazis. (The term "genocide" referred originally to the extermination of Polish leadership as well as Jews.) Poles actively resisted their German occupiers from the very outset, and Poles figure prominently among gentiles honored in Israel. The shared history of resistance and suffering has, unfortunately, not served to draw together the two Polish communities in America. Lersky enumerated the failures to establish an ongoing dialogue. His lecture, warmly received by an audience that included many Holocaust survivors, illuminated this troubled history and provided an opportunity to keep the lines of communication open.

—Joanne Lafler

WORK-IN-PROGRESS

May

"Stalin as Body-Snatcher" is not a horror story of the conventional kind, but, as Richard Raack tells it, the revelation of a history of "disinformation." At a meeting at the home of Joanne Lafler he read and discussed his article about the identification and disposal of Hitler's body by the Soviets in the spring of 1945 and the gradual "oozing out" of the details.

That it should matter at all exactly how Hitler died and what happened to his body is in itself fascinating. There have been many fanciful stories: that Hitler escaped from the fiery bunker and was hidden for decades by loyal followers in South America; that he shot himself, or ordered his manservant to shoot him, joining his companions in a latter-day Götterdämmerung. If not for an inescapable human appetite for the Gothic, and the Soviet propensity for secrecy, there need not have been a mystery.

Richard Raack is not interested in the details, which have been known for some time now, but in the tortuous fashion in which they reached the West. A badly-charred body, recovered from the bunker, was identified as Hitler's by examining dental charts. (The autopsy also revealed that death was caused by cyanide poisoning, not by a gunshot which merely grazed the forehead.) But the results of the autopsy, and the burial of the body somewhere in Soviet-occupied Germany, were not revealed by the Soviets at the time, a situation which suggests to Raack a deliberate policy of disinformation.

After Stalin's death the story began to be told in the Soviet Union, in a convoluted fashion. A Soviet woman who had served as an interpreter for the German doctors during the autopsy published an eye-witness account, sandwiched between short stories in a collection of fiction. This story then found its way to the West at the hands of another Soviet writer, becoming the belated and presumably "official" version.

Raack's investigation of the unravelling of the story provides insight into the "political culture" of the Soviet Union—before glasnost, at any rate. Possession of the body of a fallen enemy leader might once have conferred power. In a culture of secrecy, it is the possession of knowledge that confers power.

June

Maresi Nerad presented the findings of her research for her doctoral dissertation on the history of the Home Economics Department at the University of California, Berkeley, at a work-in-progress meeting at the home of Lorrie O'Dell. The title of her work, "The Vicious Cycle of Gender and Status at the University of California, Berkeley, 1918–1962," revealed the thrust of her research as she analyzed the life of a typical "women's department" in a coeducational institution. She focused especially on the formal and informal reaction of the university to such a department.

Home Economics was introduced at the University of California, Berkeley between 1905 and 1916 as an administrative strategy to isolate the many women students enrolling in the College of Letters and Science and thereby to minimize their competition with men. Administrators established the department in order to train women for their ultimate vocation as wives and mothers. But women, inside and outside the university, promoted home economics as a way to broaden women's employment opportunities.

Nerad traced in particular the career and contribution of Agnes Fay Morgan, the extraordinary woman who chaired this department for thirty-six years. Professor Morgan fought tirelessly in behalf of her department, but in the end she achieved a measure of recognition only for herself, and not for the department she was trying to build.

Under the leadership of Professor Morgan several strategies were developed to achieve acceptance and recognition for the department. One strategy was to link itself to other "more respectable" departments, such as Biochemistry and Physiology. As chair, Morgan developed ties to agriculture and food industry groups in California and lobbied them for financial support during the days of limited resource allocation by the university. The department also tried several times to change its name to Human Nutrition, to reflect more properly the work it did. It also wanted to rid itself of the image of vocational work of low academic quality and with being just a women's department which prepared women "with rule-

of-thumb recipes for gracious living." Clearly, Dr. Morgan tried every strategy to raise the status of her department.

The fact that Agnes Fay Morgan was elected Faculty Research Lecturer and was awarded an honorary degree on her own campus was solely due to her extraordinary capabilities both in research and in administrative matters. Home Economics itself was never allowed to develop much status. Any prestige gained by individuals within the department attached only to them and not to the department. It remained a women's field of study, and as such just did not fit into the established hierarchy of academic status, prestige, and power. The department was removed from the Berkeley campus in 1960, following Agnes Fay Morgan's retirement.

June

New member Lenni Brenner gave a work-in-progress at the home of Frances Richardson Keller. His presentation, "Who pays the piper calls the tune—The funding of the Democratic Party," was based on his forthcoming book, *The Lesser Evil: The Democratic Party*.

He discussed the different groups that regularly contribute to the Democratic Party. The poorest third of the voters are most loyal to the party but contribute virtually nothing as individuals. Major donors are unions and even more so political action committees and wealthy individuals. Brenner contended that labor never gets its money's worth because of the minimalist politics of its leaders, and he noted that about half of the AFL/CIO leaders are longtime collaborators with the CIA, and the other half are passive opponents. In practice, he said, they usually end up supporting the same candidates who have learned that they don't have to do anything for labor except mouth pieties about Social Security.

Brenner presented a picture of a party that is avowedly capitalist but commands the support of only a minority of the rich. Most southern white rich are now Republicans, as are the overwhelming majority of northern Protestant wealthy. According to Brenner, the hard core of party financing comes from about half of the Jewish rich, who remain Democrats for traditional reasons. Pro-Israeli sources contributed almost half of Mondale's funds. Catholics are important financially to the party only in Boston. Additionally, congressional Democrats now are receiving about sixty percent of business political action committee money even though most PAC members are Republicans. In short, according to Brenner, the Democratic party is dominated by the rich, with union bureaucrats little better than team waterboys.

Brenner's data were gathered in part by studying five daily newspapers and magazines on a regular basis, and through interviews. Everyone present at his talk agreed that it was a very provocative and lively presentation and there was a spirited discussion following it.

NEW MEMBER

We are pleased to welcome **Victor Walsh** who is an Assistant Professor in the History Department at St. Mary's College in Moraga where he teaches American history. He received his BA from the University of San Francisco in 1971, his MA in American History from San Francisco State University in 1973, and his PhD from the University of Pittsburgh in 1983. He has published numerous articles—dealing with Irish immigration and ethnicity—in various university press publications.

At present he is working on a photographic essay on historic attitudes towards the Rocky Mountain West and the Great Plains.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Eleanor Alexander has been invited to attend a conference on "German Speaking Refugee Historians in the United States, 1933–1970s." The conference will be held in Washington, DC from December 1 to 3, and will examine the significance of the refugees for American and German historiography. The conference is sponsored by the newly established German Historical Institute in Washington D.C.

Peter Browning's two new publications on Western history, *John Muir: In His Own Words, A Book of Quotations* and *Yosemite Place Names* are now available in bookstores and through Great West Books, P.O. Box 1028-E, Lafayette, CA 94549. The cost of the former is $9.95 and of the latter $12.95, plus sales tax and $1.50 for shipping.

Kathleen Casey has decided that enough is enough with British antiques and is closing her antique store because, according to her, Maggie Thatcher ruined the antique business as a result of Britain's wildfire prosperity. After catching her breath this summer on a trip to France, she will explore French antique markets for a while before returning home.

Thanks to **Martha Davidson**, Mexican and Latin American specialists who use pictures for their research now have an essential resource in *Picture Collections: Mexico*, published last April by Scarecrow Press, Metuchen, New Jersey. The idea for this directory, the first of its kind, originated with Martha who also directed the research with support from the NEH, the L. J. Skaggs and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation, and other sources. The directory covers over 500 public and private collections of pictorial documents in Mexico. Included in the new guide are photographs, paintings, drawings, prints, posters, illustrated manuscripts, maps, architectural plans, cartoons, postcards, and ephemera that should prove useful to both historians and media professionals.

at an institution of higher learning, but no tenure track or full-time faculty are eligible.
3. A manuscript may be in the process of review for publication when it is submitted. If it is accepted for publication thereafter, that will not disqualify it.
4. One manuscript per person.
5. Fiction is eligible only if it has a scholarly basis.

BOOK REVIEW

Glenna Matthews, *"Just a Housewife:" The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America*, Oxford University Press, 1987.

Feminist historians tend to describe the domestic sphere as a kind of purdah within the patriarchal power structure. Glenna Matthews' provocative re-evaluation of the cult of domesticity sheds a much more positive light on an ideology that historically provided women with a sense of empowerment. Matthews assesses four significant functions of the home: politics, religion, emotional sustenance, and the home as an "arena for the display of female prowess." Matthews comes to the conclusion that by the 1920s all but the emotional support function had been devalued. The provocative saying in her title "Just a Housewife," expresses the current attitude toward that once most meaningful figure of home life.

The first five chapters of the book describe the rise of the cult of domesticity from its "golden age" to its decline at the end of the nineteenth century. Matthews analyzes male domestic ideology as expressed by clergymen and architects who preached the gospel of the ideal home. She also examines the attitudes of such influential writers as Emerson and Hawthorne in order to assess the importance of the housewife for men and women. The allegiance between women and clergymen has been discussed at length by Ann Douglas in her seminal work *The Feminization of American Culture* (1977). The importance of domesticity in nineteenth-century fiction as a means of establishing esteem for the housewife's role has been illustrated in Mary Kelley's *Private Woman, Public Stage* (1984). What Matthews adds to these contributions is her awareness of the intellectual framework of the period. For that reason I particularly enjoyed the chapter on Darwinism and domesticity. Matthews contends that Darwin's theory devalued women because it emphasized male activity over female passivity in the evolutionary process and also because Darwin's theories undermined the religious role of the home by furthering the secularization of American society. This offers the best answer to the question of what caused the deterioration of the domestic value system.

The book also explains the negative impact of consumerism, which took away women's pride in domestic crafts. In other words, the results of Darwinism and consumerism eroded the interest of American intellectuals, including women, in domesticity. To quote Matthews, "I understand now, why literary critics and historians have payed so little attention to this topic, although the home is still the stage for novels and plays and housework is still 'never done.'"

I wished that the author's special craft of weaving the abstract theories of major philosophers with the yarn of domestic novelists into a coherent background would be more visible in the final chapters to make us understand the reasons for the current confusion about domesticity.

The metamorphosis from Sinclair Lewis's "great American bitch" and similar descriptions of manipulative motherhood to "just a housewife" in the post-World War II era is not explained in the context of the larger culture, except as a result of consumerism. Little is said about the tremendous amount of energy that middle-class mothers devoted to childrearing and volunteer work in schools and youth organizations.

On the other hand, I recognize only too well how much time and effort Matthews has spent on her analysis of a vast literature ranging from cookbooks and household advice books to novels and theoretical treatises from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Her specific references to the changing ingredients of American cookery reflect the given attitudes that resulted from the changing political economy. Although her stated emphasis is on the abstract idea of the home—hence the term "domestic ideology"—Matthews does not ignore the disparities between ideal and real when she discusses the home life of the ideologists themselves. She frankly admits that she cannot answer the question of how much impact the formulation of the cult of domesticity has had on women's self-validation. Even after reading through diaries and letters, as Matthews suggests, I could only identify those individuals who mentioned having read such literature or who had attended home economics classes. But there was no indication in these diaries that their experiences had contributed to their sense of self worth.

Matthews examines the ideology of domestic culture and not the life experiences of the housewife. She could, therefore, limit herself to a concept that applies only to the middle class. It is the middle-class housewife whose self-worth was threatened by professionalism, for only the middle-class housewife was able to confine the scope of her female prowess to her very own home.

Having researched much this same territory myself, but with different eyes, reading Matthews' book reminded me of hiking a familiar mountain with a geologist. Where my own research had focused on personal experiences, attitudes, and motivations, Matthews uncovered theoretical foundations and formulations. Not that I agree completely with her theories. I doubt, for instance, that the middle-class housewife can be seen apart from the working-class conglomerate in a shifting society such as ours. I am convinced that the subject of domestic culture has much room for further exploration. As a scholarly assessment of the intellectual currents between home and culture, *"Just a*

Housewife" is an important step to further our understanding of a complex subject.

—Annegret Ogden

ONGOING ACTIVITIES

Several study groups continue to meet more or less regularly. The **Playreading Group** has just finished reading and discussing Georg Büchner's *Danton's Death.* Contact Lorrie O'Dell for the next meeting. Lorrie is also the contact person for the **Nineteenth Century Study Group.** Ethel Herr is in charge of the **Historical Fiction Writing Group,** which meets the fourth Saturday of each month in different members' homes on the Peninsula. We encourage all interested members to get in touch with these groups by calling the persons named above.

EDITOR'S NOTE

The deadline for submitting material for the fall issue of the Newsletter is September 15. Please foward all membership news to Kathleen Casey.

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Direct membership inquiries to Agnes F. Peterson, Membership Chair, 362 Yerba Buena Ave., Los Altos, CA 94022.

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