The Institute for Historical Study *Newsletter*

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Recently, Masha Zakheim delivered one of the anniversary lectures at the San Francisco Main Library. Her subject was the San Francisco paintings of Diego Rivera, and—as usual—she held the audience not only by her knowledge of the subject, but by the charm of her lecture style.

All members will soon receive the traditional end-of-the-year letter. This letter was first sent a couple of years ago as a last-ditch attempt to avoid raising the annual dues of the Institute for Historical Study. We were delighted and gratified at the generous response of our membership and we have been able to keep the dues at the old familiar rates. Last year the membership sent in $1500 in response to this appeal and we noticed that more members making small donations account for the fifty percent increase from the first year.

Thanks to the keen participation of our members at all levels of activity, we have offered a full slate of services and opportunities this year. Monthly Works-in-Progress continue to be lively, thought-provoking presentations for the scholars and their audiences. The specialized Institute groups engage many avid members in focussed readings and discussions. The Newsletter is read with great attention by many other organizations as well as our own. And then, there are the gatherings held just for the conviviality and gustatory pleasure of a particularly sophisticated cohort. I'm sure it could be said that 100% participation in IHS activities would require some neglect of pets or gardening chores, not to mention significant others—our calendar is always jam-packed with interesting and worthwhile events!

—Joan Murray

AUTUMN ARRIVES

Starting with this issue, I will join Peter Browning in editing the *Newsletter*. The timing feels good because autumn, my namesake season and the time of schools' reopening, has always been my time of new beginnings.

Also, I've been wanting to get more involved with the Institute, and this seemed a good way to do it. However, since I have not been much involved for a while, perhaps I should introduce myself.

I am an independent scholar and writer who jumped ship from English to history of technology. I worked as an in-house editor for eleven years, at the Stanford University Press and Wadsworth Publishers. I've also done free-lance editing intermittently for much of my adult life. I've published a little poetry and fiction, a couple of children's books, and an asparagus cookbook, but my main achievement is my big book on women inventors, *Mothers and Daughters of Invention* (1993; paperback, 1995).

My current projects include a biography of 19th-Century reformer and magazine editor Charlotte Smith, a biographical dictionary of 19th-Century US women inventors, and a book on British women inventors.

Besides maintaining the regular useful features of the *Newsletter*, I'd like to open the pages up to more writing by members, from letters and humorous or serious opinion pieces to reviews of local events with historical interest or implications—as space allows, of course. In short, I'm open to new ideas. I will also need lots of help, so don't hesitate to e-mail me at autumn_dave@compuserve.com.

—Autumn Stanley

WORK-IN-PROGRESS

Joanne Lafler

On 22 October, Institute members gathered at the home of Judith Albert in Berkeley to hear a Work-in-Progress by Joanne Lafler, "A Toe in the Water: Beginning My Career as a California Historian." We are familiar with Joanne's credits as a theater historian and biographer, but she has now taken on a new challenge in the field of California history. Her father-in-law was Henry (Harry) Anderson Lafler, and Joanne is planning to write his biography. According to Joanne, although Harry was not a great man, he was a prominent figure in the Northern California Bohemian movement in the early 1900s. Along with his compatriots, Lafler drank a good deal of red wine,

wrote poetry, and chased women. A list of thirty women with whom he presumably had sexual relations was discovered among the family papers. Harry and his fourth wife, Margaret Hofmann, secretly drove to Grants Pass, Oregon to marry so that their Bohemian friends would remain unaware of their legal marriage. Margaret was the mother of John Lafler, Harry's only child and Joanne's husband. Harry died when John was five years old. One of Joanne's purposes in writing this biography is to help John dispel the myths and recover the true story of his father.

Harry Lafler was born on 6 February 1878 in Gaines, New York and grew up in a conventional farming family; his two brothers became engineers. He was killed in an automobile accident near San Jose on 14 January 1932. John, who was in the car, was thrown out and does not remember the accident. One of the obituary titles called Lafler the "Czar of Telegraph Hill," and Joanne's book will be titled "The King of Telegraph Hill." Between 1908 and 1920 Lafler built several "cottages" out of scrap lumber at the corner of Greenwich and Montgomery streets, where he and friends famous for their high jinks lived in a compound. Nicknamed "Fra Lafler" because he wore his hair long, Lafler also owned property in Big Sur near Nepenthe, where he enjoyed hiking long distances. About 1925 he built a stone house there, which was described in detail by Jack London although London died before the house was built. Joanne is critical of the authors who have written about the Bohemians in San Francisco, Carmel, and Big Sur; rather than "sloppy nostalgia," she will use a more scholarly approach to the subject.

At the time of the 1906 earthquake, Lafler lived on Clay Street, and in July *McClure's Magazine* published his article "My 60 Sleepless Hours," which included his first reaction to the quake: "It was but a small fraction of a second between the moment when I became conscious of noise and motion and the moment when I stood naked, but for an undergarment, on the roof of the building, having leapt through the open window." In contrast to the Victorian phraseology of the article, he wrote succinctly to his current mistress, poet Nora May French, in Pacific Grove, "I showed my legs but saved my life!" Lafler, very critical of the army's work in the aftermath of the earthquake, self-published a pamphlet on what he termed unnecessary destruction in the city.

Joanne classifies Lafler's efforts at poetry as old-fashioned and poor: "Literature is not going to be a big part of the book." Lafler was the exchange and literary editor for the *Argonaut*. When he was unsuccessful in his bid to buy the *Argonaut*, he attempted his own publication but, partly as a result of the 1906 earthquake, failed in his effort. By 1909 he was selling real estate in Oakland and had given up his literary ambitions. For the rest of his life he earned his living by real estate promotion. He wrote promotional booklets such as "Statistical Industrial and Market Survey of Oakland and the Eastbay Communities" and "Alameda County: The Ideal place for Your California Home." Although he no longer tried to make writing his profession, Lafler did continue to write poetry, and in 1910 he edited the publication of the poems of Nora May French. In 1916 he wrote a play for the Bohemian Club's summer encampment.

In her new field of California history, Joanne has learned to use the old city directories of San Francisco and Oakland, published before telephone books existed. She will also try to access old county property records, in San Francisco and in the Big Sur area. Those of us who have attempted research in county records wish her good luck! This is certainly an interesting project, and it is enhanced by the private letters and other papers belonging to the Lafler family.

—Anne M. Homan

BOOK REVIEW

Lyn Reese, *Women in the Near East: Stories and Primary Sources from the Sumerians through the Early Israelites*. Berkeley: Women in World History, 1995. 97 pages, spiral-bound paperback, illus., biblio., $16.95.

In recent years teachers of history have had a wide choice of materials and texts. Major textbook publishers provide heavy, expensive, colorful student history books supported by a mind-boggling array of 'peripherals.' Included in a teacher's textbook resource box will be videocassettes, audio cassettes, CDs of period music, transparencies of period art, and maps, as well as the traditional workbooks, quizzes, and test banks. The nature of the textbook business today dictates that, to be profitable, a text must be 'all things to all people.' Moreover, since the state social-studies frameworks span several centuries at each grade level, to keep the textbooks to one weighty volume the coverage must be shallow.

Ideally, the frameworks and standards for each discipline would be set well in advance of a textbook change, but sometimes the *eminences grises* charged with designing these state frameworks and creating curriculum standards are unable to complete the task. When this happens, textbooks cannot be organized, written, and offered to the state for acceptance since the frameworks guide affairs in California with respect to foreign-language textbooks. While the State Department of Education procrastinates, teachers are using books that are several years old and often in sad condition. We teach from the national standards while California educrats dither and delay.

A similar bureaucratic logjam hampered the development of social science standards and curricu-

lum until recently. Therefore, there were no textbooks for the sixth and seventh grades. Teachers knew what years and events had to be covered, but had to find their own materials. The resulting demand was filled by university-based 'projects' such as the Clio Project at UC Berkeley, by enterprising teachers themselves, and by independent scholars.

Teachers had other reasons for developing or finding alternative materials. Until recently, women and minority populations were given short shrift in general textbooks. This deficit, always historically incorrect, has finally become culturally incorrect. With the growth of research in underrepresented gender or ethnic areas, teachers could tap a great deal of interesting, relevant material to create a more balanced curriculum.

Lyn Reese has produced a well-researched and -organized spiral-bound ninety-page booklet on women in the ancient Near East. It is replete with references to original sources, photographs of actual artifacts, helpful timelines, and relief maps, and contains an excellent bibliography. This unit would fit into the sixth-grade social studies framework (prehistory to Classic world) with modification. It could be taught at the tenth-grade level using the more sophisticated lesson options and discussion points. A good teacher would have no difficulty designing a hands-on project to go along with the excellent lesson suggestions offered by Reese at the close of each chapter.

The best feature of this booklet is the unwavering focus on developing independent thought and inquiry. Reese gently but consistently encourages student to see for themselves, to speculate and synthesize without violating the truth of the original sources. Students respond well to the more active mode of learning that is implicit in the language of this text.

The chapter headings show Reese's dedication to presenting a comprehensive picture of women in the ancient Near East—not just goddesses and queens, but humble potters and weavers. She has included several types of literary material in addition to the narrative text: essays, poems, and biblical accounts. There are cleverly designed work pages to check comprehension and anticipate student writing assignments. A possible improvement would be a glossary of the specialized terms found in the text. As it is, the teacher must mine these from the text and 'scaffold' them for the students.

As a teacher, I can assure you that the topics covered by *Women in the Near East* are only obliquely touched upon in the latest California state-approved textbooks for this period of history. Not only that, but in asking around I discovered that many teachers completely skip this part of the framework! They tell me that they are reluctant to do anything with the Israelites and Early Christians. It's all about the separation of Church and State and the possibility of misunderstanding. Certain parents may object, of course. Indeed, last year in my school an avowed Christian parent requested that her daughter be exempted from doing her lessons in the unit about the Growth of Islam (seventh-grade state framework). Nevertheless, Lyn Reese's unit is teacher-friendly and would add immeasurably to any student's understanding of history, historiography, and active scholarship.

—Joan Murray

A REPORT ON NAA AND THE LSPP

Georgia Wright Co-Director, LSPP

Interdisciplinary studies are all the rage. We have psycho-history, anthro-literature, psycho-economic-literary-history, socio-politico-anthropology, and Marxist-feminist-postcolonial-legal-history. But there are limits. Nuclear-scientific-medieval-art-history, for example, has not caught on after twenty-three years and a few hundred thousand dollars. The problem? The chemist produces the reports but the art historians and curators do not use them as she would like—or expect—given the extremely high investment in energy (nuclear and human,) time, and funds. Chemists, of course, are accustomed to publishing everything and fast, something not expected of most art historians. But we expect that the art historians have filed or buried the reports. Do we have a C. P. Snow problem here?

The Limestone Sculpture Provenance Project (LSPP)—many of you have heard about this and can skip this paragraph—subjects samples of limestone taken from buildings, quarries, and sculpture to bombardment in nuclear reactors in order to determine the concentrations of trace elements in the stone. Neutron activation analysis (NAA) is quarry specific. At Notre-Dame in Paris most of the sculpture has the same profile and thus came from the same quarry, so that if an art historian wants to know whether a Gothic head in a US museum may have come from Notre-Dame, we can tell that with a degree of certainty. I am skipping the process—the collecting, recording, drying, weighing, sealing in quartz, batching the samples for the medical reactor, counting the gamma rays of isotopes of certain elements as they return to a stable form, packing up the samples in lead and sending them off from Brookhaven National Laboratory to the reactor at the University of Missouri to bombard them and activate another group of elements, counting those gamma rays, registering all the data, and using the fancy statistical programs to analyze the data—in order to get right to the problem, the reports.

Lore Holmes, the chemist, prepares the reports in a standard format. Under the identification of the sculpture (museum and acquisition number and subject of the sculpture), she discusses the processes (the part you skipped but using longer words) as well as listing the twelve or so elements that are determined, those important for distinguishing among limestones. She discusses the results (the stone was compared with the database; 12 variables were used, each sample eventually designated by a point in multidimensional or Mahalanobis space defined by the concentrations of the variables; samples with similar compositions lie close together; the piece in question was compared with the database and distances calculated in multidimensional Mahalanobis space; pairs of samples were arranged in a matrix with rows sorted in decreasing order of similarity.) So what's not to understand? She adds a note on the presence of mercury, an indication that red pigment was used, or on gold, a sign that the piece was carved in a shop where gilding was done. Following the tables of figures, before the bibliography and acknowledgments of our funding sources, she would summarize the report.

We began to suspect that the recipients never got to the summary. Complaints were heard as to the difficulty of the language—and not all of these from the French curators. What was this "degree of confidence" stuff? I pushed Lore to put the conclusion at the beginning of the report, and though it hurt her to do something so unprofessional, she did. We waited for feedback, for changes in museum labels, for articles. We could get people to give talks at conferences if someone close to the Limestone Project solicited papers, and sometimes, especially if the speaker knew that Lore would be there, she or he would ask Lore to write the technical part.

Now there is nothing very super positive about connoisseurship. An art historian suggests that a piece may have come from a certain church because of this or that quality of style or even treatment of the subject. But those interested in connoisseurship may look to NAA to substantiate their guesses and they expect a great degree of certainty from science. Usually they don't understand statistics. When Lore has too few samples (less than the number of variables) because the person collecting the samples was stingy or because there are only a few pieces remaining from a destroyed church, the means and standard deviations are almost meaningless and the conclusions must be stated as probabilities. That may be one problem. Lore has discovered that at least one art historian did not want to tell her what his guess as to provenance was because he thought that might bias the conclusion. There are 2,200 samples in the database; searching the database is not done casually! With 12 variables, it is not easy to bias measurements or play fast and loose with numbers, and it is much more precise if Lore can compare a sample with a reference group from the target church. (But then there are those who ask if what we are doing dates the stone. No, the geologists do that, but the Jurassic Era is not much help if you are looking for a difference between 1200 and 1220.

I'm trying to convince Lore to boil down the report so that it would read "Congratulations! Your head/Apostle/capital came from Ste-Agathe, Poissy, all right. For more information visit our website at http://nuclearscience/arthistory/BrookhavenNationalLaboratory\report75\\." Maybe then museums would put our identifications on their labels or maybe I'll just visit them with a labelmaker in hand!

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Paula Gillett's book *Musical Women in England, 1870–1914: Encroaching on All Man's Privileges* has been published by St. Martin's Press. Macmillan released the book in England in September.

In addition, her essay "Ambivalent Friends: Music Lovers, Amateurs, and Professional Musicians in Late 19th-Century England" is being published by Oxford University Press in *Music and British Culture, 1785–1914*, edited by Christina Bashford and Lwanne Langley.

Joanne Lafler has been awarded the NCIS Eisenstein Prize for her article "The Will of Katherine Maynwaring: An Autobiographical Reading," in *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly.* The prize, given biannually, was awarded in Raleigh, NC at the fifth national conference of the National Coalition of Independent Scholars, where Joanne was moderating a panel on "Independent Scholarship and Gender."

In her news note Joanne mentioned her debt to her IHS colleagues who encouraged her to do SOMETHING "with the amazing 18th-Century will" that she had found, and who "provided valuable input during the evolution of the project, from conference paper to finished article," emphasizing that it was "truly a group effort."

Jody Offer staged her latest theatrical production, *Three Times Three*, on three Sunday afternoons in November at the LMNO Restaurant on Washington Street in Oakland. This was a set of three one-act plays, all of which were "world premieres," all set in Oakland in the modern era. Their titles are: *A Neutral Stage, Different From Her,* and *You Can Bank on Copies at Fast Print.*

Anne Richardson's review of a twenty-part conference proceedings on William Tyndale is in *Moreana*, vol. 37, no. 142 (June 2000), 1–30.

Masha Zakheim reports that, together with several other IHS California Round Table members, she

participated in the 50th Jubilee Celebration of **Sister Catherine Ann Curry's** entrance into the Order of the Convent of the Presentation. "We attended Mass in the Presentation Chapel and then partook of a very delicious dinner afterwards. Congratulations to Sister Catherine and best wishes in commemoration of this important event in her life!"

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January	**21**	Anne Richardson, Work-in-Progress. "A Humanist takes on a Pope."
February	**17**	Annual Meeting, at Preservation Park in Oakland.

EDITORS' NOTE

Peter Browning and Autumn Stanley are co-editors of the *Newsletter.* Please send all your reports, reviews, and other material to Peter. You may use any PC word-processing format—or as a PC-ASCII file if you use Macintosh. Send Membership News to Wolfgang H. Rosenberg on the form on page 5.

Deadline for the Winter 2000–2001 Newsletter is 30 January.

The *Newsletter* is sent to all members. Non-members who wish to receive it and to get regular announcements of Institute events are invited to make tax-deductible contributions to assist with the cost of printing and mailing.

Direct membership inquiries to: Edith Piness, Membership Chair, 2 Strawberry Landing, Mill Valley, CA 94941.

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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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Put down your name, address, and phone number, and tell us about your new publications, conference papers, promotions, grants, awards, new jobs, or Theories of History!

Thank you in advance.

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