

# THE INSTITUTE FOR HISTORICAL STUDY

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## NEWSLETTER

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### **“The ‘Here Lived’ Project: A Digital Testament to the Unjust Incarceration of Berkeley’s Japanese American Residents During World War II” • by Michael Several**

After moving to Berkeley in 2020 and purchasing a house on Stuart Street, I read *Berkeley: A City in History* by Chuck Wollenberg. On page 83, he wrote that Dwight Uchida, the father of children’s book author Yoshiko Uchida, rented a house on Stuart Street. I was hoping that that was the house we had purchased. I looked in the 1940 census and discovered the Uchida family did not live in our house but lived right across the street. I then purchased Yoshiko Uchida’s memoir, *Desert Exile*, in which she describes her life on Stuart Street and her and her family’s imprisonment at Topaz in Utah during World War II. The book includes photos of their house on Stuart Street, and I saw how little it had changed. I began wondering who else in Berkeley was imprisoned during the war because of their Japanese ancestry. I also wondered if there was a way of remembering the racially motivated injustice by identifying the people and locating the homes where they lived in Berkeley.

In 2011, nine years before moving to Berkeley, I discovered the Stolpersteine (“stumbling stones”) on a trip to Berlin. Beginning in 1992, Gunter Demnig placed small brass plaques, Stolpersteine, in sidewalks next to places where Jews had lived or worked. Demnig’s project has now resulted in over 100,000 plaques installed throughout Europe and has been expanded to places where all victims of the Nazis are remembered. Though each plaque has limited information, it is enough to preserve the memory and restore the presence of people who are now gone. After “*Hier wohnte*” (“Here lived”), most Stolpersteine plaques have the person’s name, year of birth, deportation date, and the date and place where they were murdered.

Knowing that installing similar plaques in front of houses in Berkeley where people of Japanese ancestry had lived was beyond my capability, I decided to create digital Stolpersteine, providing in a list format information comparable to what is on the brass plaques. In my digital Stolpersteine, each panel has the street address followed by the words “Here lived,” the names of all the people who lived at that address, their year of birth, their place of birth, their occupation, the month and year their imprisonment began, the camp or camps where they were imprisoned, and the release date and their destination when they were released.

Starting this project over two years ago, initially, I spent a lot of time trying to locate and figure out what documents I could use. I went through numerous folders the Bancroft Library has posted online. Most of the folders dealt with farm property, diaries, reports, drafts of reports and were of no use for my project. However, the Bancroft posted the “Evacuee Roster” for the Topaz Relocation Center, which was the main camp where Berkeley residents were incarcerated. This roster has the names and addresses of each person at the camp. With that information I was able to frame the additional information I collected. The National Archives has online data extracted from form WRA-26 of each incarcerated person, which I used to get the year of birth, place of birth and the occupation of the person. The National Archives also has the *Final Accountability Roster* of each camp. I used the ones for Topaz, Tule Lake, Gila River, and Granada to get the person’s date of release and their destination. The Japanese American National Museum hosts *Ireizo*, a website monument to the more than 125,000 who were imprisoned during World War II, which I used to check the spelling of a person’s name, verify the year of their birth, and identify all the places where they were imprisoned.

—continued on outside back cover

# ANNUAL MEETING

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The Annual Meeting of the Institute for Historical Study will be held on Saturday, February 22, 2025, at the Miller Avenue Baptist Church at 285 Miller Avenue in Mill Valley. The meeting will also be accessible on Zoom. For members attending in person, set-up, socializing, and lunch will begin at 11:30 a.m., Pacific Standard Time. The business portion of the meeting will start at 12:30 p.m. Lunch will be available for purchase or members can bring their own packed lunches. The program of speakers, which will include a history of the institute's annual meetings as well as new member introductions, will begin at approximately 1:45 p.m. and conclude around 3 p.m. Further details and a Zoom link will be sent to members via email.

Several Institute members live in the North Bay, and this will be the first annual meeting held in that area. If possible, please plan on attending the meeting in person. Members who are able to provide a ride or who need a ride from the Peninsula or the East Bay may contact me to arrange carpooling.

Looking forward to seeing members at the annual meeting in person or via Zoom.

—**Elizabeth Thacker-Estrada**

## **Upcoming Monthly Presentations**

Sun., 2/16/25, 2 p.m. – Bill Doggett

on Black Swan Records and the  
Harlem Renaissance

Sat., 3/15/25, 10 a.m. – Christopher Webber

on James McCune Smith

Sat., 4/19/25, 10 a.m. – Enrico Beltramini

on the theology behind Lynn White's  
historical theology

## NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Rose Marie Cleese

## COPY EDITOR

Ann Harlow

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 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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THE INSTITUTE is affiliated with the National Coalition of Independent Scholars (NCIS) and the American Historical Association (AHA).

## FROM THE PRESIDENT AND THE EDITOR

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### President's Message

The Institute's Annual Meeting will take place on Saturday, February 22nd, at the Miller Avenue Baptist Church in Mill Valley. This will be our second hybrid annual meeting with members able to attend in person or via Zoom. A new handheld microphone will facilitate communication between those members physically at the meeting and those attending virtually. (See page 2 for more annual meeting details.) Please attend this once-a-year event!

Also in February, we will mark Black History Month on Sunday, the 16th, at 2:00 p.m. with a presentation by Bill Doggett: "Black Swan Records and the Harlem Renaissance: The Story of the First Black-Owned Record Company, 1921–1923." Beginning in March, the Monthly Programs will be held on the third Saturday of the month at 10:00 a.m. to encourage greater attendance on Zoom. In support of the "more than a month" concept that African American history deserves to be studied throughout the year, Christopher Webber will present a program on Saturday, March 15th: "Black Doctor: A Biography of James McCune Smith." (See page 9.)

In 2024, Mini-Grant Committee members Richard Robbins, Dan Kohanski, and Louis Trager reviewed grant proposals and made recommendations to the Board of Directors, which funded all five proposals. Mini-grants have been awarded to Institute members Marilyn Geary, Steve Levi, Peter Meyerhof, Maria Sakovich, and me. Member dues and donations make it possible for the Institute to award these grants.

On Tuesday, January 28th, the California Historical Society officially announced that its museum on Mission Street in San Francisco is permanently closed and that its archives and vast collection of some 600,000 books, letters, photographs, postcards, and ephemera documenting the history of California and the West will be moved to Stanford University. There it will be known as the California Historical Society Collection, under the stewardship of Stanford University Libraries in partnership with the Bill Lane Center for the American West. The collection will be accessible to both the public and academicians. See <https://californiahistoricalsociety.org/> for details. The Society was a great resource for many of our members, and its closing is a terrible loss. It is my hope that, in the near future, the Institute can put together a panel open to the public to discuss the important role historical associations play in preserving the lessons of the past.

Thank you to Rose Marie Cleese for serving as the newsletter editor for this winter edition of the IHS newsletter. —**Elizabeth Thacker-Estrada**

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### Editor's Message

It is my pleasure to serve as editor for this issue of the IHS quarterly newsletter. It was heartening to see the number of contributions sent in from members, ranging from news items to book reviews and feature articles. Whether it is myself or another member who continues on as editor, I invite all of you to email me with any suggestions you have for the newsletter going forward. I have a couple of my own: having a resources section that provides useful research links and a list of upcoming events that have relevance to members, and adding visuals to feature articles. You can send your suggestions to [rleese@earthlink.net](mailto:rleese@earthlink.net). I hope you enjoy this issue of the newsletter. —**Rose Marie Cleese**

## MONTHLY PROGRAMS

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**“Democracy Under Attack:  
*The Creole Incident: The Beginning of the  
End of Slavery*”  
presented by John Hyde Barnard  
October 20, 2024**

John Hyde Barnard, author of the book, *The Creole Incident: The Beginning of the End of Slavery*, presented the fascinating story of the most successful slave revolt in United States history. The November 1841 takeover of the U.S. brig *Creole* by enslaved Americans, its precursors, and its aftermath occurred during an often-neglected time in American history, 1836 to 1842, between the end of the presidency of Andrew Jackson (1829–1837) and the beginning of the Mexican American War (1846–1848). Along with the slaves who courageously rebelled, certain members of the U.S. House of Representatives and a handful of radical abolitionists played crucial roles in the preparation for and the outcome of the revolt. This rebellion played a pivotal part in saving the U.S. Constitution and the Union from a threat to democracy 20 years before the Civil War and even predisposed the outcome of that conflict.

In 1836, 130,000 petitions flooded Congress demanding the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, a federal territory. These petitions upset southern representatives, who, because the District had been formed from portions of two slave states—Virginia and Maryland—insisted that slavery should exist in the District. They set up a committee in the House of Representatives headed by Henry Laurens Pinckney of South Carolina. On May 18, 1836, a resolution from the Pinckney Committee proclaimed that petitions on slavery would henceforth be tabled, a resolution that became known as the “gag rule.” Because the First Amendment to the United States Constitution guarantees the right “to petition the government for a redress of grievances,” the gag rule violated

the Constitution, and the right of petition ceased to exist when it pertained to anything about slavery. By 1840, the gag rule had become a standing rule. In the U.S. Senate, southerners led by John C. Calhoun of South Carolina unsuccessfully attempted to impose a gag rule. Yet, the subject of slavery was no longer debated in either house of Congress.

In the U.S. Constitution, slavery was protected under Fifth Amendment property rights and the Tenth Amendment that decreed that all powers not given to the federal government were regulated by the states. States controlled slavery through state and municipal codes. In the view of southerners, the federal government had no right to interfere with slavery. Calhoun wanted to reform the Constitution—in which the word “slave” was not even used—so that slavery was part of federal jurisprudence and would have the protection of the federal government. If southerners could not achieve this, then they wanted enough votes to amend the Constitution and secede from the U.S. legally and form their own country, which would allow them to make treaties with other nations.

In 1836, along with the implementation of the gag rule, the Republic of Texas was formed after the territory broke away from Mexico following the Texas Revolution. By 1840, Texans were making treaties with European countries, and many in the United States feared a foreign country would get a foothold on the North American continent. Southerners wanted Texas to join the Union because, if divided into multiple states, most would be slave states. Under the gag rule, U.S. representatives could not even debate whether a state would enter the Union as slave or free.

John Quincy Adams, who was elected to the House from Massachusetts following his presidency (1825–1829), and a few fellow House members realized the overwhelming threat to the United

States should the expansive Texas territory join the Union as perhaps as many as seven to 12 new states. With the gag rule in effect, it was likely that most of these new states would be slave states and would thus increase the representation of pro-slavery forces in Congress. For years, Adams led the effort in the House to break the gag rule.

The congressmen who fought the gag rule joined forces with abolitionists. Joshua Leavitt, a lawyer, a preacher, an abolitionist, and a member of the American Seamen's Friend Society (ASFS), studied the intercoastal slave trade in which slaves from the upper South, including Virginia, were transported by ships to the deep South, including Louisiana, to work on the sugar plantations, often to death. Leavitt recruited Adams to represent the Africans, who had seized the Spanish ship *La Amistad*, in the 1841 Supreme Court case *United States v. The Amistad Africans*. Adams, assisted by Leavitt, successfully argued that the Africans were free men who had been kidnapped and illegally transported as slaves.

Leavitt became familiar with the 1824 court case *Forbes v. Cochrane*, part of English common law, which could be applied to the problem of the intercoastal slave trade and help to break the gag rule. Once a slave left Virginia and was on a ship on the high seas, he was to be treated as a person under federal constitutional law. The person would be under federal not state jurisdiction because of the Supremacy Clause of the Constitution in which federal law trumped state law. One of the federal laws that trumped state law was interstate commerce. Leavitt realized that by creating a situation on one of the slave ships, for instance a mutiny of the slaves, and then sailing that ship to a port where slavery was not recognized under British law, slaves would be considered passengers. If the slaves entered the port unarmed and returned the ship to its proper owner, they could not be accused of piracy.

Leavitt recruited another abolitionist, his associate George Bourne, to go south to Virginia, where he was familiar with the auction houses, to recruit slaves for a slave revolt. One of those he recruited

was Madison Washington, who had escaped a Virginia plantation owned by Judge Johnston in 1839 and had successfully traveled the Underground Railroad to Canada. He worked there for wages but was unable to save enough money to purchase the freedom of his wife, Susan, a slave and a daughter of Johnston. In 1841, Washington decided to return to Virginia via the Underground Railroad to free his wife. In Canada and in the northern states, Washington became known to abolitionists, including Robert Purvis in Pennsylvania, who discussed the legalities of a revolt with Washington and who displayed in his home a portrait of Cinque, the leader of the *La Amistad* revolt, which fascinated Washington.

Back in Virginia, Washington was captured, sold to speculators, and taken to Richmond, where he was instructed by Bourne, sold to slave trader Thomas McCargo, and placed upon the brig *Creole* with 134 other slaves to be shipped to the slave market in New Orleans. On November 7, 1841, Washington forced his way on deck and led 18 other slaves in a revolt. They took control of the ship and commanded the crew to sail to the port of Nassau in the Bahamas, a British colony where slavery had been abolished in 1834. They either burned or threw overboard all the weapons before entering the port of Nassau, and they returned the ship to the owners.

Madison and his 18 compatriots were charged and jailed, but the remaining slaves on the *Creole* were freed that fall. A handful of slaves remained on the ship and chose to return to the United States and slavery. After the *Creole* sailed into New Orleans, a newspaper article stated that the slaves had been instructed by George Bourne. No extradition treaty existed between the United States and the United Kingdom, and the men who led the revolt on the *Creole* were freed in April 1842.

When word of the successful revolt reached Joshua Leavitt in early 1842, he commissioned Theodore Weld, a top legal mind in the abolitionist movement, to put together a series of resolutions to be presented on the House floor during the 27th Congress. On March 21, 1842, Joshua Giddings,

a congressman from Ohio, presented the Creole Resolutions that resolved that each state surrendered to the federal government all jurisdiction over the subjects of commerce and navigation upon the high seas, that slavery is confined to the territorial jurisdiction of the power creating it, that when a ship belonging to the citizens of any state of the Union leaves the waters and territory of such a state and enters upon the high seas the persons on board cease to be subject to the slave laws of such states and thenceforth are governed by the laws of the United States, that when the brig *Creole* left the territorial jurisdiction of Virginia the slave laws of that state ceased to have jurisdiction over the persons on board and such persons became amendable only to the laws of the United States, and that the persons on board the said ship who resumed their natural rights of personal liberty violated no law of the United States, incurred no legal penalty, and were justly liable to no punishment.

The slave revolt on the high seas came under federal jurisdiction, and under the federal law of interstate commerce, the gag rule was circumvented based upon the Creole resolutions. The next day, southerners in the House of Representatives censured Giddings, whereupon he left Congress and returned to his district in Ohio.

The Creole incident illustrates the brutality of slavery in that the most successful slave revolt in the 240 years of slavery in the American colonies and the U.S. freed only 128 people. The results of the Creole Incident would give President Abraham Lincoln the right to put down the rebellion of southern states in 1861 because the states had seceded illegally. The South never obtained enough votes to legally secede from the Union.

Illustrated with PowerPoint slides of contemporary paintings of Washington, D.C., and the House of Representatives and daguerreotypes of John Quincy Adams, John C. Calhoun, Joshua Leavitt, and George Bourne, this informative and thought-provoking presentation can be viewed on the IHS YouTube channel.

*The Creole Incident* is available at Book Passage, 51 Tamal Vista Blvd., Corte Madera, CA, and Sausalito Books by the Bay, 100 Bay Street, Sausalito, CA, and online at Walmart, Barnes & Noble, Amazon, and Morgan Hill Book Store.

To learn whether Madison Washington was ever reunited with his wife Susan and whether Joshua Giddings was returned to Congress, Barnard said to read his book, assuring those who attended the presentation that the book has a happy ending.

—Elizabeth Thacker-Estrada

### **“Fire Rituals — Theory and Practice”**

**presented by Jim Gasperini**

**November 17, 2024**

Jim Gasperini began his presentation with a fire ritual, reading a hymn of the *Rig Veda* addressed to Agni while lighting a candle to “mark our entry into a space of shared contemplation.” Noting that many cultures celebrate with fire during the months preceding and following the winter solstice, he showed some familiar examples (the Hanukkah menorah, Christmas tree candles, Yule log) and others less well-known, including the *Oniyo* “devil fire” of Japan, *Ndocciata*, an Italian festival that goes back to the pre-Roman Samnite tribe, the *Quema del Diablo* of Guatemala, and *Up Helly Aa* celebrations in the Shetland Isles, which culminate in the burning of a replica Viking ship.

Fire rituals go back to the days when small bands of predecessor hominin species needed to keep the precious flame alive as they wandered the African savannah. Though the words can be used interchangeably, a useful distinction can be made between *ceremonies*, which may simply celebrate something or mark it as significant, and *rituals*, which are intended to make something happen or control the world in some way. For example, adding candles to a cake creates a familiar ceremony that celebrates somebody’s birthday. When the birthday boy or girl makes a wish and blows out the candles, they perform a lighthearted ritual, hoping that their wish will come true.

Jim next showed examples of the many purposes for fire rituals. Rituals of appeal include the lighting of votive candles and joss sticks. Rituals for protection include the burning of effigy witches on Witches Night in eastern Europe and leaping over bonfires on Ivan Kupula night. Animals were long driven through or around bonfires in rituals of purification; a similar impulse lies behind the burning of demonic *Ogoh-ogoh* figures in Bali. Rituals of obliteration, intimidation, and subduing adversaries include book burning, popularly associated with the Nazis but going back at least to the Middle Ages. In recent years fundamentalists in Tennessee have publicly burned such demonic works as the Harry Potter stories. Fire rituals can also be used for acts of protest, blessing, strengthening, declaring possession, expressing triumph, healing, celebration, and commemoration.

Fire rituals frequently mark “rites of passage” at every stage of the human experience, from birth through marriage to funerary customs. Anthropologist Victor Turner popularized this term. Leveraging his study of initiation rites among the Ndembu of Zambia, he developed a highly influential three-stage model of ritual, applying it to aspects of his own culture including theater, pilgrimage, and festivals. Examples of the use of fire to set aside a sacred time and space include the lighting of a chalice during Unitarian Universalist services and the Chinese folk custom of burning paper money to honor ancestors.

Why is fire central to so many rituals? Adding fire to any ordinary activity transforms it into something more significant. Fire concentrates the life force—Jim examined the complicated relationship between life and fire, characterizing fire as “a non-living relation and intermediary.” Once we managed some control over this mysterious force, we attempted to leverage its mystery into understanding of or communication with the deeper mysteries of the universe.

Fire often symbolizes transformation, as beautifully represented by *Shiva Nataraja*, the Lord of the Dance, but can also symbolize

continuity. The superhuman longevity of fire—a flame can be kept “alive” far longer than any human lifetime—inspired the many and varied traditions of “eternal flames.” The practice of keeping perpetual flames often overlaps with “new fire” rituals. The Vestal Virgins kept an eternal flame symbolizing Rome for a thousand years, but once a year extinguished it and relit the fire from a “pure source.” Natives of southeastern North America and the Incas of Peru followed similar practices. The Zoroastrians, for whom earthly fire is a living, energetic manifestation of the presence of the supreme creator, place great store in the actual physical continuity of their temple fires. Carefully tended fire in one temple in Iran has burned for at least 1,500 years.

New fire rituals can inaugurate the reign of a new monarch, represent commitment to independent adult responsibilities, serve as an instrument of political subservience, or assure the renewal of the world in grand calendric cycles. Every 52 years the Aztecs extinguished all fires throughout their empire and lit a new one on the breast of a sacrificial victim in a grand ritual atop a mountain. They believed this ritual necessary to prevent the extinguishing of the sun.

Though fire rituals have declined in frequency and importance in recent times, we keep inventing new ones. These include the *Flama del Canigó*, patriotic symbol of Catalan unity; modern reconstructions of ancient pagan practices such as the worship of Hekate, a Roman mystery goddess; a special “unity” candle used in many wedding ceremonies; the fire and water ceremony of Shinnyo-en, honoring the departed; and spectacular events at such festivals as the Woodford Folk Festival in Queensland, Australia, and the Burning Man Festival in northern Nevada. Whenever we wish to invest a ritual or ceremony with significance, humankind’s ancient fiery partner makes it bright and clear that *now we take actions with serious intent*.

—Prometheus

## WRITERS' GROUP REPORT

The last three sessions for this year have been devoted to members' biographical efforts. In October Liz Thacker-Estrada presented the first chapter of her biography of First Lady Abigail Fillmore. The chapter covered Abigail's early years concentrating on her education and her emergence as a working woman and an educator in a life that eventually led from backwoods hardship to the highest circles of power. The group found Liz's chapter to be solidly researched and well-written. Some felt that it could have been strengthened by a broader treatment of education in the early years of the American Republic, but all felt that this was a promising beginning to a work that could illuminate the neglected presidency of her husband Millard, but more importantly, show how a woman restrained by the concepts of womanhood of the time could overcome them and emerge as an important cultural influence and role model.

In November and December, Ann Harlow presented chapters 3 and 4 of her dual biography of Albert Bender and Anne Bremer. The two chapters focused on Anne and gave us an account of her early development in the period before her trip to Europe in 1910. Harlow had to work around the many gaps in the record of Anne's life. She concentrates on the San Francisco cultural and artistic scene and on the artistic currents, national and international, that flowed around and influenced her subject. Given the paucity of written material on Anne's early years and the fact that many of her first paintings have been lost, the group was impressed by what Harlow has been able to pull together. Some readers suggested that Ann might augment her picture of the San Francisco art scene by comparisons with other artistic centers in the U.S. It also might be valuable to point ahead to the ways that the international currents Bremer encountered before her trip to Europe would be reflected in her later work.

In January and February, we look forward to reading work by Michael Several and Liz Schott.

## IN MEMORIAM

The Writers Group is always eager to hear new voices. If you are working on a project and would like some friendly feedback, please join us!

—**Rob Robbins**

### In Memoriam

**Paula Levy Gillett**, the first president of the Institute for Historical Study (1980 to 1982), passed away on September 24, 2024. She was born on July 15, 1934, in New York City to Ira and Sophie (Silvershein) Levy. She earned her Bachelor of Arts from Brooklyn College in 1955 and her Master of Arts from Yale University in 1956. She married Eric Gillett on June 23, 1956, and they had three children: Walter, Nadia, and Noel. Paula obtained her PhD in modern British and French social and intellectual history from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1979. Her dissertation was a study of the social world of English painting in the Victorian era. A lecturer at UC Santa Cruz from 1979 to 1980, she taught a seminar on authors, artists, actors, and musicians in the London of Samuel Johnson. From 1984 to 1989, Paula served as project director in the Graduate School of Education at UC Berkeley and directed the New Faces of Liberty Project. For many years, she was a professor of Liberal Studies in the Department of Humanities at San Jose State University. She served as the co-chair of the Committee on History in the Classroom from 1992 to 1996 and was a visiting scholar at the Institute for Research on Women and Gender at Stanford University from 1996 to 1997. Her book, *Worlds of Art: Painters in Victorian Society*, was published by Rutgers University Press in 1990, and St. Martin's Press published *Musical Women in England, 1870–1914: Encroaching on All Man's Privileges* in 2000. Her other memberships included the American Historical Association and Phi Beta Kappa. In recent years, she lived in Walnut Creek, California.

—**Elizabeth Thacker-Estrada**



## MEMBER NEWS

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### Two New Members

**Enrico Beltramini** holds doctoral degrees in theology, history, and business, with training in theology, history, and social theory. He taught theology and the history of Christianity for 25 years at UC Berkeley, Santa Clara University, and Notre Dame de Namur University, where he is now a senior researcher. Author of five monographs and over 70 articles, his work centers on Christianity in South Asia, the history and theology of digital technology, and modern historiography of medieval Christianity, combining interdisciplinary perspectives to explore the intersections of faith, culture, and intellectual history.

**Liz Schott**, who lives in Sebastopol, retired in 2020 after a 30-year career in education, including 10 as a district superintendent. Having always loved beautiful garments, she committed to learning how to sew properly, and to becoming more knowledgeable about fashion and textiles. A podcast alerted her to the subject of her biography-in-progress, Dorothy Wright Liebes, a native of northern California and influential designer who dominated the interiors landscape in the first half of the 20th century in San Francisco, Chicago, New York, and Hollywood. Liebes' Sonoma County roots and early employment as a teacher resonated with Schott, who is a year into her research. She has joined the IHS Writers' Group.

**Carol Sicherman** has created a blog about the foreign-born in Mountain View Cemetery (<https://carolsicherman.wpcomstaging.com/2024/12/16/lives-of-the-foreign-born-in-mountain-view-cemetery/>). Posting it on the website Oakland History produced many responses—some offering assistance, others asking that ancestors be included. A Mien woman here for 45 years volunteered to help with the Mien community. A relative of one couple—husband born in China, wife in Brazil—gave information about his Uncle

Thet and Auntie Nadir. The daughter of an Istanbul-born Armenian shared information. If you'd like to join Carol's mailing list for future posts, contact her directly.

**Bert Gordon** was the commentator on the panel "Jews in Vichy France" at the 50th annual meeting of the Western Society for French History in San Francisco this past November. The three highly informative presentations were: "Occupation, Exile, Return: Sculpting a Life, 1940-46" by Paula Birnbaum of the University of San Francisco; "The Shoah's Youngest Victims: Hidden in France, 1939–1945," by Rosamond Hooper-Hamersley, Independent Scholar; and "On the Road: French Jewish Artists in Vichy France," by Richard Sonn of the University of Arkansas. All three papers addressed the issues confronting Jews during the German occupation of France during the Second World War.

### Book News

**Chris Webber's** latest book, *Black Doctor*, is the first full biography of James McCune Smith, who was born in slavery in New York City in 1805. Raised by a self-emancipated single mother in one of the worst neighborhoods in the city, he still managed to get an excellent elementary education in a school established by the Quakers for Black children. He wanted to be a doctor but no American college or medical school would accept him. His pastor, Peter Williams, the second Black priest in the Episcopal Church and Rector of St. Philip's Church, Manhattan, therefore raised money to send Smith to the University of Glasgow in Scotland, where in five years he earned an AB, MA, and MD with honors and returned to New York City better qualified than most white doctors. He established a medical practice in New York City and contributed case studies to medical journals. Working closely with Frederick Douglass, Smith was a leading voice in the pre-

Civil War abolition movement contributing regularly to “Frederick Douglass’ Paper” and editing it occasionally when Douglass wanted to travel. He died in 1865, but lived to see the end of slavery. John Stauffer of Harvard had written about Smith and published some of his writings but Webber is the first biographer of this important figure in American history. He will be speaking about Smith at the IHS monthly meeting via Zoom on March 15th. His book is now available from standard book sources and from the author.

**Bonnie Portnoy** recently published her lavishly illustrated biography of artist Tilden Daken: *The Man Beneath the Paint: California Impressionist Tilden Daken*. IHS member Rose Marie Cleese performed the final edit. The book, filled with Daken’s paintings and numerous historic family photographs, is the culmination of two decades of research on the grandfather she never knew. Daken was described by historians as one of the most adventurous and prolific landscape painters of the American West in the early 1900s.

Over the past year, she has given presentations to public and private venues throughout Northern California. She invites you to attend her upcoming talk and book signing at the Book Club of California, 47 Kearny Street, Suite 400, San Francisco, on February 24th (reception at 5:30 p.m.; talk and Q&A from 6:00 to 7:15 p.m.), offered both in person and virtually. Membership is not required to attend but both the in-person and Zoom choices of attendance require registration: [www.bccbooks.org/event/the-man-beneath-the-paint-california-impressionist-tilden-daken/](http://www.bccbooks.org/event/the-man-beneath-the-paint-california-impressionist-tilden-daken/).

Famous in his day and a close friend of writer Jack London, Tilden Daken (1876–1935) painted as many as 4,000 works in oil, from every California state park and national park in the West, to the redwood forests and High Sierra—and beneath the Pacific Ocean in a diving bell. To learn more about the artist, visit [www.TildenDaken.com](http://www.TildenDaken.com). The book is also available to order online through the Nevada Museum of Art (link is on book page of Tilden Daken website).

### **Review of Joanne Lafler’s Long-Awaited Book**

The main title of **Joanne Lafler’s** engaging book, *The King of Telegraph Hill: The Many Lives of Henry Anderson Lafler*, conveys the tone of the book—beckoning the reader inside while raising amused questions (king?)—while the subtitle promises information and interpretation. A worthy subject for a scholar who specialized in drama, Henry Anderson Lafler, known as Harry, played a one-man show in which he took many parts—journalist, poet, editor, essayist, bohemian (and Bohemian), advertising man, Oakland booster, builder of bungalows, developer of residential and industrial real estate, and accomplished womanizer. Tall and almost ridiculously handsome, he was the central character of many dramas during his life (1878–1935). Even his premature death, in a car crash, was theatrical.

Joanne Lafler was among the founders of the Institute and an active member thereafter. This posthumous biography of her father-in-law allows readers to admire her achievement while mourning her sudden death. She had finished the book when she died, culminating years of research into the historical and cultural context in which Harry Lafler operated. She had unique access to a large archive of letters, documents, and photographs in the possession of her husband, John, who was only four when Harry died. The resulting social and literary history makes judicious use of Harry’s own distinctive and often exhilarating words. Joanne’s evident pleasure in writing creates a corresponding warmth in the reader.

Harry Lafler secured his place in history by setting up his typewriter amid the ruins of the April 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire. Published in a popular national magazine only three months after the catastrophe, his vivid, detailed, eyewitness account shot him to fame. As he was writing, a photographer captured Harry’s moment in history in the photo that graces the cover of this book.

By that time, his Byronic looks and behavior had endeared him to the young Bay Area intelligentsia in whose ranks he was central. Already separated

from wife #1, he was also busy with one of his main private endeavors—love affairs. He would shortly entice the great love of his life, a poet named Nora May French. No marriage took place because, suffering from bipolar disorder, she took her own life. An appendix, “Harry’s List,” annotates his own record of affairs, 32 in number.

During the ten years after the earthquake, Harry directed his energies to business, mainly real estate, with a finger in many pies. When Werner Hegemann, a renowned German authority on urban planning, was invited to the Bay Area, Harry became his mentee, absorbing Hegemann’s exceptional skills. He put these skills to use in his own property, creating the Lafler Compound on Telegraph Hill, where his famous Sunday open houses drew bibulous crowds. His friends included Jack London and a host of others. In 1913 he quickly exited from marriage #2, with a good deal of attendant gossip; two years later, he married wife #3, a dancer who studied with Ruth St. Denis.

One fascinating thread in the book is Harry’s evolution in the 1920s into an “industrial engineer and statistician.” A central figure in Oakland’s development, he relentlessly promoted the city while eliding its labor unrest and pervasive racism. From 1923, he devoted himself to large development projects in Los Angeles County, where he lived for extended periods until the Depression returned him to the Bay Area.

Harry’s devotion to Northern California remained strong throughout his time in the south. He acquired land in Big Sur and built Stone House, his long-dreamed-of dwelling in Big Sur. He also entered into a fourth marriage that yielded John, his sole known progeny. Even as the Depression caused his fortunes to crumble, he continued to take responsibility for his first wife, and his third and fourth wives participated in the scattering of his ashes after the Stone House burned down.

The crisp narrative of this deeply researched book interlards facts and stories with dry humor. It deserves to be known further afield. Journals that publish book reviews—such as *California History*,

*Pacific Historical Review*, *The Public Historian*, and *Southern California Quarterly*—should receive copies, though perhaps after the problems listed in the paragraph below are remedied. Reviews attract acquisition librarians working in public and university libraries.

There are four unrelated questions that concern me. First: what is the future of the John Lafler Family Papers—will they join the Lafler material in the Huntington and Bancroft libraries? Second, why is there no index of the many personal names and topics that enrich the book? Third, why does the verso of the title page fail to print the ISBN number, which exists? Fourth, why does the book omit a place of publication and a publisher?

Perhaps a reprint could remedy these omissions and encourage librarians to order it. The Oakland Public Library rejected my request to order it, possibly because I could not fill out the place of publication and publisher (I found the ISBN number on Amazon). WorldCat listed 55 libraries around the world that hold another book of local history, *Brooklyn’s Barren Island*. Why does the San Francisco Public Library have Miriam Sicherman’s book and not Joanne Lafler’s?

—Carol Sicherman

### Serendipitous Connections

I joined the Institute about 20 years ago because I had started working on a dual biography of Albert Bender and Anne Bremer of San Francisco and I saw that there was a biography writers’ group. My husband and I attended the annual picnic, a potluck. There I met Joanne Lafler, one of the Institute founders, and learned that the biography she was working on was of a contemporary of Albert and Anne’s who traveled in many of the same San Francisco literary and artistic circles. We were delighted to find each other. It was through another Institute connection that Joanne found an editor and self-publishing coach to finally bring the book to completion—Georgia Wright’s daughter Beth Wright ([wrightforwriters.com](http://wrightforwriters.com)).

—Ann Harlow

**—continued from outside front cover**

I largely completed my research in May 2024, when the Berkeley Historical Society and Museum was beginning to plan an exhibit on Berkeley's Japanese American community. When the curators of the exhibit learned of my work, they enthusiastically incorporated it in the exhibit. Nancy Ukai suggested naming the database I created "Here Lived," two powerful words commemorating memory as well as loss that are in both the Stolpersteine and my database. During the summer and early fall of this year, I went through a final collection of documents that was compiled in San Francisco dealing with problems people had in storing or selling their personal property.

The information in the database became the basis of two major components of the Berkeley Historical Society and Museum's exhibit. George Petty created a display that presents the information in tight, clear, and concise entries. These entries are mounted on boards that show the magnitude of the imprisonment. An alphabetized, numbered index of each name enables viewers to locate individuals in the display. Elina Juvonen tapped into the database to create an interactive digital map that enables a visitor to click a specific map point and see who lived at the address, the information about the person that is in the database, the text of any oral histories that were taken, and family photographs.

The data I collected and the exhibit components are now a *guide* to the approximately 260 locations in Berkeley where residents of Japanese ancestry were living when they were unjustly imprisoned during World War II. The database and exhibit components are also a *memorial* to the more than 1,188 people who were unjustly imprisoned, a *record* of each individual's unjust imprisonment, and a *model* for other communities creating exhibits and memorials to the racial injustice experienced by residents of Japanese ancestry during World War II.

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