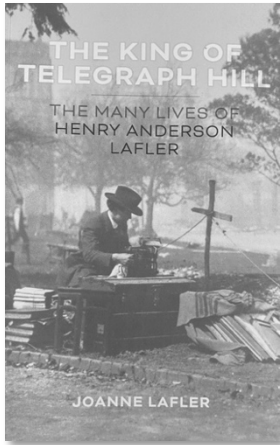


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## A Biography with Hidden Acknowledgments

By Oliver B. Pollak

The Acknowledgments section of a book expresses authorial gratitude. Joanne Lafler's *The King of Telegraph Hill: The Many Lives of Henry Anderson Lafler* (2024) biography of her father-in-law, published after she died on March 18, 2023, lacked the usual Acknowledgments. The following intimate intellectual tapestry, drawing from the IHS *Newsletter*, Work in Progress (WIP) and Writers' Group reports, and Lafler's 535 endnotes, sheds light on this omission. Joanne had always been diligent in recognizing the help of others.



At the second-ever WIP meeting in February 1981, Joanne Lafler and Roberta Wollons “discussed the different problems they have faced as biographers.” Joanne had “been frustrated by lack of material” about the famed English actress Anne Oldfield. In 1986, at Ethel Dunn’s home, Joanne presented “Where there’s a will, is there a way?” about the will and nine codicils of Anne Oldfield’s daughter-in-law, Katherine Maynwaring. Joanne’s article, “The Will of Katherine Maynwaring: An Autobiographical Reading,” appeared in *Biography* (1997) and included the author’s note about Marian Ury, who taught at the University of California, Davis, where Joanne was a visiting lecturer from 1990 to 1994: “I would like to dedicate this essay to the memory of my dear friend Marian Ury [1932–1995], whose encouragement and comments were helpful beyond estimation.”

Ann Marie Koller reviewed Joanne’s *The Celebrated Mrs. Oldfield: The Life and Art of an Augustan Actress* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989) in the Winter 1992 *Newsletter*. Lafler’s Preface thanked no less than thirty-seven scholars, librarians, friends, family, and institutions. She wrote, “I am grateful to Marian Ury and Georgia Wright, who read the manuscript and made many thoughtful suggestions, and to my colleagues in the Institute for Historical Study, a haven for independent scholars in the San Francisco Bay Area.” In 2013 she recalled that “Institute members had been wonderfully helpful” in the completion of *The Celebrated Mrs. Oldfield*, her first book.

At a 2000 WIP meeting, Joanne announced the beginning of her career as a California Historian; she intended to write the biography of Henry “Harry” Anderson Lafler (1878–1935), her husband John’s father. Historian Anne M. Homan reported, “Those of us who have attempted research in county records wish her good luck!” Joanne had already published essays about the Bohemian Club, to which her father-in-law had belonged: “From Ritual to Drama: San Francisco’s Bohemian Theater, 1880–1923” (1985) and “Seeded in the Grove Itself: Theatrical Evolution at the Bohemian Club Encampment,” (1990).<sup>i</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Respectively, *Encore: The Archives for the Performing Arts Quarterly*, 1985, 2–15; *Theatre West: Image and Impact*, ed. Dunbar H. Ogden (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), 19–42.

Continued on outside back cover...

## A Note from the Editor...

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In reading through this newsletter, you'll appreciate how active our organization has been in the past few months. Our two new study groups, the Jewish History Study Group and the Women's History Study Group, are thriving. You can get a bird's-eye view of what they've been discussing in the recaps found on pages 9–11. The Writers' Group has also had a steady stream of members' writing projects to review in the past few months (see page 11), and plans are underway to revive the California and the West Study Group. If you have yet to reply to President Liz Thacker-Estrada's October 1st email questionnaire about getting this group rolling again, she'd love to hear from you. You'll also notice that this Fall issue of the newsletter has something new: images! To show them off at their best, we've switched to a white paper stock for this issue. Speaking of issues, if you have any about this change in paper stock, please let me know!

—Rose Marie Cleese

### **Upcoming Monthly Programs, 10 AM Saturday, 11/15/25**

– Liz Schott,  
“Dorothy Liebes and the Golden Gate  
International Exposition, 1939–1940”

### **Note: No monthly program in December Saturday, 1/17/26**

– Ted Atlas,  
“Getting NPS Approval for the Willows-  
Glen County Airport”

**Saturday, 2/21/26** – Dan Kohanski,  
“What Triggered World War I—and  
Are We at a Similar Moment”

**Saturday, 3/21/26** – David Mostardi,  
“A Western Publisher: Paul Elder &  
Company, 1898–1968”

### NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Rose Marie Cleese

### COPY EDITOR

Ann Harlow

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## PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

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November is Native American Heritage Month, a time to celebrate the history, culture, and traditions of American Indian and Alaskan Native peoples. This past quarter, Institute members viewed, presented, and discussed the contributions of America’s indigenous communities.

In August, during a Ruby Princess cruise of Alaska’s Inside Passage, Rose Marie Cleese and I visited Totem Bight State Historical Park in Ketchikan, where restored totem poles and a traditional Clan House showcase the rich heritage of the Tlingit and Haida peoples. In Juneau, ascending halfway up Mount Roberts on the Goldbelt Tram, we enjoyed a Tlingit history and culture presentation by a tribesman playing a drum, wearing an intricately designed cape, and standing between totem poles of the Raven and the Eagle, moieties that form the foundation of the tribes’ social structures. Following his talk, we watched an award-winning, Native-produced documentary, *Seeing Daylight*. In Sitka National Historical Park, we hiked past Tlingit and Haida totem poles that line the park’s scenic coastal trail and stood in a clearing where the historic Tlingit fort was destroyed by Russian forces in 1804.



During the Monthly Program in August, Patricia Southard discussed the influence of Haudenosaunee women on 19th-century women’s rights activists (page 5), and at the August meeting of the Women’s History Study Group, Katya Miller presented her three decades of experiences with Native American culture (page 9).

As well as exploring Native culture, Rose Marie and I visited several sites of Russian America (1732–1867) in Alaska, including the Russian Bishop’s House (1841–1843) in Sitka, one of only four remaining Russian colonial buildings in the US. At the September Monthly Program, Maria Sakovich discussed the chapel at Fort Ross (page 7) and the genesis and significance of the annual Russian Orthodox Fourth of July celebrations there. Rose Marie and I visited two Russian Orthodox churches in Alaska: in Juneau, the diminutive St. Nicholas Orthodox Church (1893), founded at the request of the local Tlingits, and in Sitka, St. Michael the Archangel Cathedral (1844–1848), the first Russian Orthodox cathedral built in America.



The Annual Membership Potluck was held on Saturday, October 11th, at the home of Jim Gasperini in Berkeley, where guests enjoyed his sunny patio and lush garden, a bountiful variety of dishes, and the companionship and conversation of fellow members and their spouses. Besides Jim and me, those attending in person were Rose Marie Cleese, Monica Clyde, David Goldberg and Pam Peirce, Ann Harlow and Phil Zimmerman, Dan Kohanski, Katya Miller and John Freedom, Jody Offer, Oliver and Karen Pollak, Lyn Reese, Liz Schott, and Michael Several. Peter Stansky attended the event on Zoom.

—Elizabeth Thacker-Estrada

## MONTHLY PROGRAMS

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### **“Secularism and the Problem of the Sacred in the History of Technology”**

**presented by Enrico Beltramini**

**July 19, 2025**

In a return to the original function of the monthly presentations, Enrico Beltramini described a work very much in progress and asked for input to help him develop his idea. Enrico’s thesis is that historians of religion and technology have tended to approach their topic from a purely secular perspective, and that this is inappropriate. He maintains that these historians need to appreciate that medieval technology was religious in origin and evolution. Further, in medieval times there was no concept of a division between religious and secular; the medieval European world was entirely religious, and theology dominated. This is difficult for historians to appreciate, as history is a secular discipline that does not accept the idea that actions and events can have a supernatural cause—whereas religion, particularly Christianity, is founded and focused on the reality of the supernatural. Enrico calls this approach “retroactive secularization.”

He proposes that historians of the period should adopt a “post-secular” approach to the history of technology. This will allow historical analysis to accept the transcendent part of religion as other historians have already argued. To secularize the past, as many historians do, is to distort it.

The lively discussion that followed included questions about the methods historians should use to try to resist applying the modern division of religious and secular to a time when this division did not exist. What these historians have to grasp is that the medieval world was, in Enrico’s words, “saturated in theology.”

Complicating the matter, as Enrico described it, is the way that historiography changed as Europe became a superpower in the early modern era. As a result, contemporary history is not merely the history of the contemporary age; it presents itself as a superior form of history, one that claims the authority to judge all previous histories as less advanced, incomplete, or obsolete. This ignores the reality that the non-European world doesn’t think the European way, and therefore applying modern European standards to it will not yield a valid analysis. The European (Western) idea of history that we today are at the pinnacle of progress leads us to misunderstand and misinterpret prior eras. This “universal methodology” that is taught to historians today, Enrico argues, is now in crisis.

Another one of his concerns is that religion is making a comeback in the modern secular world and this revival and its influence cannot—should not—be ignored or dismissed. Secularization doesn’t work, Enrico claims, for the simple reason that religion is still here, and that the ideas that medieval Christendom espoused are still with us, even if in a more secular form. Thus, the culture of technology is based on the secularization of theological categories, and therefore historians can analyze technology in a theological way.

Enrico shared that he is in contract to write a book on this topic, currently titled *Rethinking the Christian—Technology Nexus*, which will be part of the book series “Technology and Change in History.” He expressed his appreciation for the many comments and ideas offered during the presentation, and that the feedback will be very useful as he moves forward.

**—Daniel Kohanski**

**“First Ladies and Women’s Rights  
from the Jacksonian Era to the Civil War,  
1829–1861”**

**presented by Patricia Southard and  
Elizabeth Thacker-Estrada**

**August 16, 2025**

This era, from the start of Andrew Jackson’s time as president up to the start of the Civil War, was a formative and uncertain time of transformative economic and social changes for the new nation. Against this backdrop, Patricia Southard and Elizabeth Thacker-Estrada told the intertwined stories of the formation of the Women’s Movement, individual first ladies, and the Office of First Lady.

Patricia began her segment by asking why we have only one story of the women’s movement when the women of this country came from several ethnic, racial, and economic groups with extremely different experiences that shaped their many-times-great-granddaughters.

The first group was the familiar Northern upper- and middle-class women, who gave us the model of womanhood so influential up to the present day. The second group, only recently discussed, was the Southern slave-owning woman, who had economic and legal freedom “only dreamed of by her Northern sister.”

Patricia continued with farming women, who created a cooperative, pragmatic version of the Two Sphere Model, which decreed that women and men inhabited two divinely determined spheres—the public (male) and the domestic (female). Two other overlooked groups were enslaved women and free African American women, whose passion and skills gave so much to the Women’s Movement, a movement that would later marginalize them—likewise, the women of the Iroquois Confederacy (Haudenosaunee) who provided activists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton with a model of women who wielded political power in their society.

Lastly, were the pioneer women, who out of necessity created new role models for women and even did a bit of gender-bending.

Patricia continued with a discussion of the beliefs, innovations, and movements that led to the creation of the women’s movement. These included the Second Great Awakening, a grassroots religious movement that gave rise to social reforms and opened paths for women outside of the domestic sphere. Two other movements, Manifest Destiny and the Westward Expansion, encouraged the spread of “superior American values” while inadvertently opening new opportunities for women. While the Industrial Revolution provided new types of paid work for women, the Market Revolution, a product of the Industrial Revolution, transformed the nation from a subsistence economy into a cash economy and widened the gap between the haves and have nots. The dominant belief of the era was the Two Sphere ideal. In reality, the model applied to a fraction of women. Another influence, media, especially newspapers, provided platforms for the Abolition and Women’s Movements. The Abolition Movement had the most intimate relationship to the Women’s Movement, as it provided resources, leadership, platforms, and networks to the fledgling movement. Patricia turned next to the Seneca Falls Convention, its proceedings and legacy, and the “myth of Seneca Falls,” which erased the contributions of several important leaders, and national conferences that launched legislation and strategies for women’s rights from 1850 to 1860.

She ended with a snapshot of how women and the Movement mobilized for the Civil War by providing services to the military and to support of war efforts on both sides of the conflict.

Elizabeth Thacker-Estrada then spoke about the presidential wives and White House hostesses from the administration of Andrew Jackson (1829–1837) to the presidency of James

Buchanan (1857–1861) and their relationship to women’s rights and the office of first lady. All were upper- to middle-class white women, and most abided by the social conventions of the era, including that of the Cult of Domesticity or Cult of True Womanhood, with its principles of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity.

Yet some first ladies and their women relatives and acquaintances endured scandal due to marital problems. Rachel Donelson Jackson (1767–1828) married Andrew Jackson (1767–1845) in 1791 only to learn that the divorce from her first husband had not been finalized until 1793, making Rachel an adulteress and bigamist. The Jacksons remarried in 1794, but she was subjected to character assassination during his 1828 presidential campaign, despite being a religious woman. She died of a heart attack before her husband became president in March of 1829.

Emily Tennessee Donelson (1807–1836), Rachel Jackson’s niece, served as White House hostess for her widowed uncle. During the “Petticoat Affair,” Emily sided with the women of Washington who viewed themselves as the guardians of morality and virtue in ostracizing Margaret Eaton, the wife of Secretary of War and Jackson friend John Eaton. Margaret was rumored to have had an affair during her first marriage and had married her second husband less than a year after her first husband’s death. As a “true woman,” Emily obeyed her uncle by inviting Margaret to the White House but defied him by refusing to help her gain acceptance in Washington society.

Angelica Singleton Van Buren (1816–1877), the daughter-in-law of the widowed President Martin Van Buren (1782–1862), had served as his White House hostess. In 1853, she confronted the lack of women’s marital rights when she gave her sister, Marion, refuge from her abusive second husband, to whom, by law, Marion had been forced to transfer her

ownership of her first husband’s property and assets. When Marion unsuccessfully attempted to regain them through the courts, Angelica intervened, but her political acquaintances refused to help, illustrating the difference between influence and actual power.

In 1840, as a young, unmarried woman in New York City, future first lady Julia Gardiner Tyler (1820–1889), the second wife of President John Tyler (1790–1862), was caricatured in a lithographic broadside poster that sought to confine her to her proper sphere. Julia was depicted holding a placard stating that she would make purchases at a certain store because “Their Goods Are Beautiful and Astonishingly Cheap,” meaning that although she was beautiful, her behavior—being overdressed and flouncing down the street on the arm of a dandy (actually her father)—made her cheap. Julia skirted scandal when another person the publisher had caricatured had the publisher indicted for libel and convicted.

Several presidential wives and White House hostesses were well-educated and supported women’s education. Emily Donelson stated that a solid course of study for women “ought to be prized above everything.” Anna Symmes Harrison (1775–1864), the wife of President William Henry Harrison (1773–1841), has the distinction of being the first president’s wife to obtain a formal education, which took place at the New York City school of a feminist educator. Sarah Childress Polk (1803–1891), who became the wife of James K. Polk (1795–1849), rode hundreds of miles to attend the Moravian Female Academy in Salem, North Carolina, the best girls’ school in the South. Abigail Powers Fillmore (1798–1853), who founded the White House Library with her husband, Millard Fillmore (1800–1874), became a schoolteacher in central New York in her teens and was the first president’s wife to work before and after marriage.

These ladies also expanded the office of first lady. Priscilla Cooper Tyler (1816–1889) was the first woman acting as first lady to travel with the President as an official member of the presidential party, accompanying her father-in-law, John Tyler, to Boston for the June 1843 dedication of the Bunker Hill Monument. Sarah Polk rejected domesticity, stating during the 1844 presidential campaign, “I will neither keep house nor make butter.” She functioned as her husband’s unofficial political advisor, yet, with her ladylike manners, managed to stay respectably in her sphere. Because the term “president’s lady” referred to the wife of a president, a new term—“first lady”—was devised for Harriet Lane (1830–1903), the first woman to preside at the White House for a bachelor president, her uncle James Buchanan (1791–1868). A published pen drawing of her and her uncle is the first known instance of a first lady being portrayed in a public activity during her incumbency.

The White House wives and hostesses of the antebellum era lived remarkable lives despite the social constraints placed upon them.

—Patricia Southard and  
Elizabeth Thacker-Estrada

**“The Making of a Pilgrimage:  
Fort Ross, 1925–2025”  
presented by Maria Sakovich  
September 20, 2025**

Maria’s talk intertwined histories of the Russian-American Company’s southernmost foray into California, which created Fortress Ross; the Russian Orthodox Church in San Francisco; and the role Holy Trinity Cathedral played in establishing what became the annual Fourth of July pilgrimages to the former Russian colony in Sonoma County. Maria is the granddaughter of Archpriest Vladimir Sakovitch, who served as the cathedral’s rector from 1918 to 1931 and was

largely responsible for inaugurating the annual pilgrimages, which began in 1925.

In January 1918, Father Vladimir Sakovitch and his family arrived at Holy Trinity Cathedral, where he would begin his tenure, leading a multi-ethnic, Serbian majority congregation. The family had come from Montreal, Canada, where Fr. Vladimir had ministered the previous four years, mostly to Ukrainians, who had fled their rural areas in the Austro-Hungarian Empire to seek better opportunities in North America.

Maria shared some background on the Russian Orthodox Church in San Francisco after the Russian Revolution and the arrival of refugees during and after the Russian Civil War. At his new assignment, Fr. Vladimir faced unusual problems. The cathedral, on the northwest corner of Green Street and Van Ness Avenue (where it stands to this day), was no longer receiving funding from the church in Russia; there was no salary for the priest. Taxes and mortgage payments had been neglected by the previous pastor. Periodic threats from the Bolshevik government and little direction from the North American church administration added to the challenges.

With the influx of refugees, beginning in 1920, the parish would be transformed. These mostly educated, middle- and upper-class Orthodox Christians had endured a 4,100-mile trek across Siberia to China, then a voyage across the Pacific Ocean to seek refuge in San Francisco. They arrived with many needs. Fr. Vladimir responded by offering services beyond the religious services; the church now included a school, a library, and a post office.

On June 18, 1925, a member of the Sonoma chapter of the Native Sons invited the church to serve at the Fort Ross chapel, and the rector noted in the Pastoral Journal: “It would be good to hold a service in the first Russian church in the United States on the American civic holiday

of the Fourth of July.” Maria opined that her grandfather likely “felt that this was an opportunity to acknowledge the past and link it to the future he saw for his compatriots in their new home.” Fr. Vladimir was not totally unfamiliar with Fort Ross. In 1922, when the mayor of Santa Rosa informed him that the “Native Sons had painted the exterior of the chapel,” Fr. Vladimir proposed holding a service there on Thanksgiving Day. Although that never happened, in 1923, he attended the Native Sons’ annual July 4th celebration at Fort Ross, and wrote, “If only the roads were safer, it would be possible to celebrate Divine services there, after fixing the church’s interior to a proper state.”

Maria gave the group a short yet vivid glimpse into the history of the former Russian settlement (1812–1841) as it pertained to the Russian Orthodox church. She shared facts about the fort’s fluctuating population and pointed out that Fort Ross never had a resident priest. In the decade before the RAC left, three clerics from the Church of the Holy Archangel Michael in Sitka, Alaska, visited the colony. After the Company’s departure, the site and surrounding lands became thriving enterprises; for over a century (1873–1974), the Call family operated a dairy ranch, as well as a hotel and saloon.

In the late 1890s, many Californians became interested in preserving the state’s history, and the new attention paid to forgotten Fort Ross impelled several Russian Orthodox clergy to visit the former settlement and offer prayers there. In 1903, the property was sold to the California Historical Landmarks League, with the help of William Randolph Hearst’s citizens’ fund-raising campaign. In 1906, a state agency was formed to administer all the recently acquired historic sites.

Back to 1925: plans were made to hold the first service in the Russian chapel since 1841, in conjunction with the Native Sons’ Fourth of July celebration. But from the start, things did not go

well. Two weeks before the event, on a trip to Fort Ross to get the chapel ready, one car of the two-vehicle convoy was hit by a train near Guerneville and a passenger died of her injuries two days later. On July 4th, six taxis and a truck left Holy Trinity at 8 a.m. but didn’t arrive at Fort Ross until 5 p.m. The drive had proven to be arduous, due to the roads’ sharp turns and steep inclines. Once they had all arrived, Fr. Vladimir recounted, “We forthwith began the procession around the church. . . followed by the sprinkling of Holy Water and a thanksgiving service. . .” The choir sang against a background of Shasta daisies provided by Luther Burbank. The next morning, after a night on the beach with his parishioners, Fr. Vladimir served a Divine Liturgy. The next year, the Native Sons once again invited Holy Trinity Cathedral to share the Fourth of July celebration.

Before his death in 1931, Fr. Vladimir wrote about that year’s pilgrimage: “Not many worshipers (Russians 10), Americans[,] listeners and visitors. Publicity Necessary [to have] more written in newspapers about Fort Ross. . .” The next year, however, saw a robust turnout with “thongs” at the chapel. What had become an annual pilgrimage continued in partnership with the Native Sons through 1933, after which Holy Trinity continued to hold Fourth of July services throughout the Depression and World War II.

The new wave of Russian refugees, displaced by the war in Europe and China, where they had resettled during and after the 1917 revolution, swelled the numbers of Fourth of July pilgrims. By 1954, the local Russian Orthodox Church Abroad selected Memorial Day for its own pilgrimage to Fort Ross—the combination of an historic Russian site and the first Orthodox church in “the lower 48” still commanded celebration. July 4, 2025, marked the centennial of the Fourth of July pilgrimages, begun by Maria’s forward-thinking grandfather.

—Rose Marie Cleese



## SPECIAL GROUP REPORTS

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### Women's History Study Group

At each meeting of the Women's History Study Group (WHSG) this past quarter, a different member presented and led the group in a discussion of a topic in her area of interest.

At the July meeting, Karen Offen discussed the history of women's history based on two papers that were sent to WHSG members to read: the entry "History of Women" that she wrote for *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History*, and the article "Women's History at the Cutting Edge: A Joint Paper in Two Voices," cowritten with Chen Yan for an international conference of historians in 2015 in Xian, China, and published in *Women's History Review* the following year.

Karen stated that early women's history focused on noted individual women, such as famous queens, or women who influenced men, such as Sacajawea. She noted that schools today often change "Women's Studies" to "gender studies" due to male historians complaining about preferential treatment for women, and that studies have generally moved from a national to an international focus the past 30 to 40 years. A 1974 study of women scholars at Stanford, which documented their actual experiences and conditions there, was influential in the field.

Karen pointed out that valuable archives of women's history exist in many universities and are not used as much as they could be. She noted particularly the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, which has many valuable historical documents on Southern women's history. Karen works with the International Federation for Research in Women's History.

At the August meeting, Katya Miller spoke about her 30-year journey into Native American culture, including her research on the Statue of

Freedom atop the US Capitol dome. Katya described how her jewelry-making in San Francisco led her to Santa Fe and its national gatherings of Native Americans. Over time, Katya met a number of influential Natives, including Alice Papineau, aka Onondaga Clan Mother; singer Joanne Shenandoah, Iroquois, who wrote *The Peacemaker's Journey* and has worked hard against human trafficking; Oren Lyons, Onondaga Faithkeeper and national spokesperson; and Joy Harjo, Muscogee, Poet Laureate of the United States (2019–2022).

Through these contacts, Miller became aware of the Capitol statue, whose iconography is half Native American and half Euro-American, and she began to research the statue. Through her attendance at Native gatherings, Katya learned of the importance of the Six Nations governance and philosophy, which influenced the wording of the US Constitution. Her research led to her book *Lady Freedom: Heart of a Nation*, now at the publisher. In 2023, Katya was included in a gathering in New York called, "Mother of Nations." Twenty Mohawk and 20 western women were invited, including actress Marisa Tomei, philanthropist Lorraine Powell Jobs, and feminist leader Gloria Steinem.

At the September meeting, Anne MacLachlan's presentation was based on her paper "The History of Doctoral Women in the United States," focusing on women students at the University of California from 1870 to 1950. Women are rarely mentioned in general histories of UC, and the first (1930) contained a page-and-a-half of totally incorrect information that unfortunately was later cited in other histories.

Although women were admitted to UC "on equal terms as men," late-19th-century women were isolated on campus and excluded from student government. Female students created

their own parallel student government, specific sororities, and many types of clubs, of which their patron, Phoebe Hearst, the first woman Regent, approved. Academic honors were denied to women despite, per the first President's Report, their attaining the highest academic achievement of their classes.

The presence of undergraduate women on campus ultimately led to support for graduate women students. In the late 19th century, many women master's students trained to become teachers. A standardized high school curriculum prepared students for higher-level work at universities, with undergraduate studies leading to master's and doctoral work.

Factors that affected women in doctoral education included the undervaluation of women's work, the belief that women were insufficiently intellectual, the absence of women's suffrage (until 1911 in California and 1920 nationally), and the impact of marriage on women's educational and employment opportunities, which Berkeley's first female PhD, Milicent Shinn, studied.

—Jody Offer & Elizabeth Thacker-Estrada

### **Jewish History Study Group**

This group, formed just last spring, showed its range and depth over the summer.

In July, Peter Stansky discussed the Sassoon family and its place in British society. The merchant family claimed descent from Jewish princes in the Babylonian exile from the Kingdom of Judah in the 6th century BCE. Moving from Baghdad to London, the family found business opportunities and antisemitism expressed more in tasteless jokes than violence.

Textile and opium trading brought the family riches in the 19th century, and they ensconced themselves in British high society. Albert was

a baronet, Sir Edward a member of Parliament, Siegfried a fine poet, and Philip a renowned host, art specialist, and politician. Sybil, who married into the aristocracy, restored the home of Sir Robert Walpole, considered Britain's first (de facto) prime minister.

August brought an invitation, suggested by Oliver Pollak, for participants to share recommendations of works of Jewish history. Peter Stansky offered *Coningsby*, an 1844 novel and “a wonderful read” by Benjamin Disraeli, featuring the Jewish character Sidonia. Peter Crane suggested Ted Morgan's *An Uncertain Hour: The French, the Germans, the Jews, the Klaus Barbie Trial, and the City of Lyon, 1940–1945*; chronicles of Varian Fry and the International Rescue Committee, including *Crossroads Marseilles, 1940* by Mary Jayne Gold; and *I Will Bear Witness*, Victor Klemperer's diary of the Nazi years “to get into the bloodstream of what it was like to be a Jew in Germany—highly personal.”

Louis Trager recommended the 1958 essay “The Non-Jewish Jew,” by Isaac Deutscher, which finds a thread in the genius of Spinoza, Freud, Marx, Trotsky, Heine, and others as double outsiders by virtue of their heretical Judaism. Oliver himself discussed a collection of 40 books that his mother and aunt brought when they hastily fled Germany in 1939, and which he has written up for the Book Club of California newsletter. He highlighted *The Oppermanns*, a 1933 novel by Lion Feuchtwanger about how the world of a German family collapses and they escape the country.

In September, the group held a wide-ranging conversation centering on the tradition of Bay Area Jews' assimilation and ambivalence about their ethnic-religious identity. Those who arrived in Northern California during the Gold Rush held equal status with other whites. They were strongly inclined to assimilate, to the point of

holding services on Sunday and having choirs in their temples. Jews in the region became known for being anti-Zionist and “not very Jewish,” Peter Stansky said.

Arriving later, immigrants fleeing Eastern European pogroms were far more devout, and they were shunned by the largely German elite that had established itself. Some elites became ambivalent about publicly embracing Judaism and its culture. Dan Kohanski recalled his parents’ involvement in the Zionist movement in San Francisco in the 1950s. In charge of Jewish education in the city, Dan’s father ultimately moved the family out of the city when he was told not to teach Hebrew in Hebrew school.

All are welcome to the Zoom meetings, held on the second Sunday of the month at 9 a.m. Pacific Time. Special thanks to Liz Thacker-Estrada for kicking off the September discussion, to Ted Atlas and Dan Kohanski for guest hosting, and to Liz for her forbearance and undying support.

—Louis Trager, Leslie Friedman & Liz Schott

### Writers’ Group Report

In July, our group read and discussed portions of a fascinating work of creative non-fiction presented by Marilyn Geary: *Taking the Waters: Finding Renewal in Tuscany’s Hot Springs*. Neither an academic nor scholarly piece, it is both a memoir and a travelogue but, more importantly, it is a reflection on aging and the search for psychic renewal. Marilyn provided us with two relatively brief chapters recounting visits to hot springs in San Filippo and Pienza. The group was extremely impressed with the quality of Marilyn’s writing and her ability to skillfully blend her accounts of the visual and physical aspects of her journey with her personal meditations. This is a work of great promise, and the group looks forward to further emersions.

In August, Pam Peirce presented the final chapters of her biography of Katharine Gibson. These pages found Gibson at the peak of her writing career, publishing a variety of works for children and adults as well. Her range extended to books on art for young people, historical fiction, and fairy tales. Pam also followed developments in Katharine’s family life: the death of her husband, Frank Wicks; her continued relationship with Sybil Cox; and her own death in 1960. The biography ended on a note of quiet triumph—Katharine had recovered from the traumas of her youth, the misery of her mental illness and incarceration; became the mistress of her fate; and emerged as a creative force. The group had numerous suggestions for Pam, specifically urging her to provide more direct quotations from some of Katharine’s works and perhaps to reduce some of the material on her family life. Most importantly, the group hoped that Pam’s book, like its subject, would find a “happy ending.”

In September, Ann Harlow gave us another chapter of her book *Kissing Cousins: The Artistic Lives of San Francisco’s Albert Bender and Anne Bremer*. This segment focuses on Anne and covers the period, 1910–1912. It is a study in influences. The years before the First World War were a time of enormous cultural and artistic ferment marked by an exhilarating sense of liberation from conventions—and the discovery of new possibilities of expression. In art, post-impressionism was having a profound influence and Anne came under its spell. She met the Steins, Gertrude and Leo, and Alice B. Toklas; she may have met Mabel Dodge Lujan. She studied at a number of Paris schools as she began to develop her own styles and techniques. The Writers Group felt that Harlow had presented this material clearly in a well-written narrative that shows great promise for the larger work she’ll present at future sessions.

—Rob Robbins

## MEMBER NEWS

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### Our Newest Member

New member **David Mostardi**, a graduate of UC Berkeley, is the historian at the Berkeley Hillside Club, a community-based membership organization founded in 1898 and dedicated to supporting arts and culture and preserving landmark buildings. Since 1997, David has been researching bookseller-publisher Paul Elder (1872–1948) and his early business partner, Morgan Shepard (1865–1948); he also writes the Paul Elder & Company website, [pauelder.org](http://pauelder.org). For 70 years, Paul Elder's was the leading bookstore in downtown San Francisco, and between 1898 and 1917, Elder published over 400 books. Shepard, who left the partnership in 1903, would later publish the children's magazine, *John Martin's Book*. David's forthcoming book, *A Western Publisher: Paul Elder & Company (1898–1968)*, is scheduled for publication in 2026 by the Book Club of California. David also leads field trips for the Golden Gate Bird Alliance and plays accordion for Scottish Country Dancing. He lives in Berkeley with his wife, Arlene Baxter.

### What our members were up to this summer . . .

On August 21st, **Jody Offer** led a read-it-yourself of her five-act play, *Scenes from the Life of Julia Morgan*, at the Emeryville Senior Center. Jody noted that the group seemed to be having a very good time, staying for a long Q&A and then asking her to “come back with another play.” Jody reported, “They had a lot of questions about Julia; I think it's safe to say they knew very little about her when they walked in. If any Institute members know of groups who might be interested in having this experience, forward me a contact and I will check it out.”

**Maria Sakovich** gave the keynote talk at the recent one-day conference, “The Story of Orthodoxy at Fort Ross—Then and Now,” held at St. Seraphim of Sarov Cathedral in Santa Rosa on Friday, October 3rd. Her presentation, “The Beginnings of the Annual Pilgrimage to Fort Ross,” recalled the collaboration between San Francisco's Holy Trinity Cathedral and the Sonoma County Native Sons of the Golden West, the difficulties of traveling to the former settlement of the Russian-American Company (RAC) on the coast, and the significance of this piece of old Russia to recently arrived refugees from the Bolshevik revolution and civil war in the 1920s. Maria's grandfather, Archpriest Vladimir Sakovich, was the first to perform services in the old chapel in 1925, 84 years after the RAC abandoned the settlement. This past Fourth of July celebrated the 100th anniversary of the pilgrimage to Fort Ross.

**John Graham** is busy working on the follow-up to his El Fornio Story Cycle. His working title is *The Moorish Box (La Caja Morisca)* and has the same characters as his first book about the fictitious mission town, El Fornio, California, founded in 1776 north of Santa Barbara. This new narrative concerns the Spanish horsemen who came to the New World and California who were actually Arabs—expelled Christianized Moors with a talent for horsemanship and their contemporary descendants. The story takes place at El Fornio and Tejon Ranch, where the “Cross and Crescent” is the ranch's livestock brand and is the oldest brand still in use in the country.

John shares his book's teaser here: “Taken for Native American or Mexican all her life, Dolores Huerta had been told by her family that they were Moors from Spain, the progeny of Spanish horsemen who came to the New World after 1492. When her favorite uncle, Carlito

Zaragoza, passes and leaves a mysterious box and letter, 'Lo' and her partner Hank Peabody, Jr., director of the El Fornio Historical Society, set off to locate a second box that might bring all the secrets together. This follow-up to *The Reeducation Of A Turd Peddler* finds the same crew chasing another California fairy tale. They found Junipero Serra's heart in a jar, but can they find the second box?"

**Katya Miller** was a panel participant during the 118th annual meeting of the Pacific Coast branch of the American Historical Association. The three-day meeting, which began on July 30th, was held at Santa Clara University and was entitled "High-Stakes History: Studying the Past in a Perilous Present." Katya was placed on a panel called "Memorable Women Remembered" with two other speakers and presented "The Nearly Forgotten Female Icon Atop the Capitol Dome" as an independent scholar. She drew upon her decades of researching the history of the Statue of Freedom for her presentation. The other panelists presented *Girls Get Rough: Women's Self-Defense in the United States During World War II* by Wendy Rouse, San Jose State University, and *Miss Monroe and the Lost Women's Art Colony of Manifest Destiny* by Nicholas Fischer, an independent scholar.

Katya found the rest of the conference quite educational and rewarding. She attended the panel "Indigenous Sovereignty and Autonomy: Indigenous History and the West" and heard talks on Spanish-Hawaiian immigrants in California, the role of the historian, and doing history differently. At the Western Association of Women Historians luncheon, she learned that next year's conference in Sacramento will focus on where history, research, and networking meet. She strongly encourages our members to check out next year's gathering.

**Oliver Pollak** gives a fascinating account of the book collection of his aunt and mother, all three of which made it safely out of Germany during World War II, in the latest issue of The Book Club of California's *Quarterly News-Letter* (Summer 2025, Volume XC, Number 3). Club executive director and newsletter managing editor Kevin Kosik notes on his editor's page, "Oliver B. Pollak shares the story of his family and the books they took with them when they fled Germany in 1939. As family history and book history converge during war times, this text is a powerful exploration of what we collect and why."

Oliver's essay, entitled "Two Sisters – My Aunt and Mother – Rescue Books from Germany in 1939" is part of the Club's "Collector Chronicles," a "series of essays from members about unique, unusual, or significant items in their collections." Oliver would be pleased to send a scanned copy of the piece to any member who requests one. His email address is [obpomni@gmail.com](mailto:obpomni@gmail.com).

Your editor, **Rose Marie Cleese**, has been wearing her editor's cap pretty nonstop the past few months. In addition to helping member Katya Miller get her manuscript about the Statue of Freedom at the US Capitol across the finish line, she was also contracted by Kevin Kosik at the Book Club of California to do the final edit of new member David Mostardi's book about publisher Paul Elder. She also was hired to write the intriguing life story of the mother of Merle Easton; the family lived in Alaska during and after World War II. With that project done, Rose Marie is now starting on ghostwriting a longer memoir of Merle's life; Merle is a retired architect and well-known San Francisco Victorian building preservationist. Rose Marie will also be helping another client write a book about the vintage restaurants of San Francisco from 1849 to the 1990s. Whew!

**...continued from outside front cover**

Impressively, Harry Lafler rode his bike from Pocatello, Idaho, to Portland, Oregon, in 1900; Joanne and John drove the approximately 661 miles by car in 2003. She hoped to interest the Oregon Historical Society in the story. By the mid-teens Ellen Huppert reported, “The group’s consensus was that the biography was ready for publication, and we encouraged Joanne to proceed to send a proposal to a possible publisher now.”

In 2019, Joanne emailed the Writers’ Group a chapter and Table of Contents, as well as her Author’s Note, Prologue, a synopsis of fourteen chapters, and Epilogue for review. Joanne’s last *Newsletter* contribution, “What’s in a Name? Jack London and Racism,” appeared in the Winter 2023 issue. Her father-in-law and London were friends.

Although *The King of Telegraph Hill* has no acknowledgment page, it is not lacking in nods. Many can be found in the book’s 58 pages of endnotes. Between the covers, Joanne cited Institute members Malcolm E. Barker, Jules Becker, Gray Brechin, and Masha Zakheim, and twice wrote, “I am grateful to Pamela Herr,” biographer of Jessie Benton Frémont. She was “grateful” for “records supplied by the Wellesley College Alumni Office;” Randal Brandt, the Bancroft Library librarian; Sara Chetney, Claremont Libraries’ special collections curator; “the late Jeff Norman, historian of Big Sur,” and “indebted” to Professor Richard A. Walker for insight into Oakland politics; as well as appreciative of the research of Lafler family members. After Joanne’s untimely passing, her nearly finished manuscript, the product of three decades of research, was rescued by her family and Georgia Wright’s daughter, Beth, director of Wright for Writers.

The author has his own acknowledgments regarding this article. Thanks to Lana Costantini of the San Francisco Historical Society, Rose Marie Cleese, Ann Harlow, Richard G. Robbins Jr., Carol Sicherman, Beth Wright, and Karen Pollak.

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