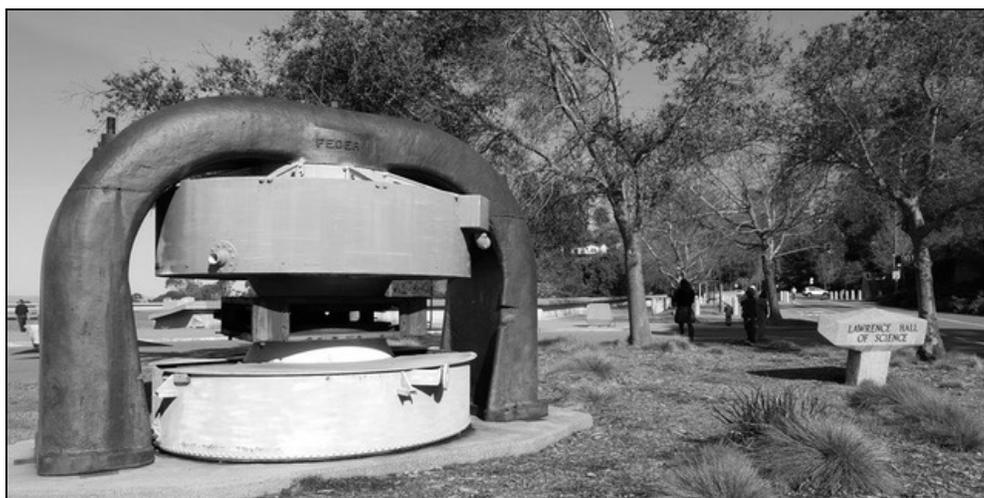

What Is That Crazy Object in Front of the Lawrence Hall of Science? A National Historic Landmark.

By Ted Atlas

Visitors to the Lawrence Hall of Science high above the UC Berkeley campus cannot miss seeing the large, bulky piece of equipment sitting near its entrance. But few would be able to tell you anything about it. It's a Federal (Telegraph Company) arc generator built in 1919 and repurposed in the 1930s; it would play a key role in the development of the atomic bomb.



The story begins in the years before World War I, when the Navy was put in charge of building a wireless radio network for the military. The Navy selected arc-generating radio transmitters built by the Federal Telegraph Company headquartered in Palo Alto to equip stations and ships with long-range transmitters. The Federal arc transmitters were superior in range to the spark transmitters then in use by Marconi. Spark generators could produce only dots and dashes (Morse code) signals, while arc generators were to be able to both operate at greater distances and transmit voice.

The Federal Telegraph Company began in 1909 when Cyril Elwell, a Stanford electrical engineering graduate, obtained the patent rights in the United States for the Poulsen Arc Generator. After Cyril left in 1913, Leonard Fuller became the chief engineer for the company.

During World War I, the Navy used Federal arc transmitters to build the most powerful radio transmitter in the world near Bordeaux, France. The Navy ordered two additional 1000-kilowatt arc generators from Federal to be deployed at a proposed transmitting station in North Carolina. The station was cancelled with the end of the war, but the castings and the coils had already been delivered to Federal in Palo Alto.

In 1921, Federal signed a contract with the Chinese government to build five wireless telegraphy stations to communicate with the Federal West Coast stations. Federal planned to use the two 1000-kw arc generators

Continued on page 13 . . .

A Note from the Editor...

What better way to keep the new year rolling along than to attend our annual meeting in February! Here are the details for this year's gathering; hope to see all of you there:

2026 Annual Membership Meeting —

When: Saturday, February 28th,
from 10 AM to 2 PM

Where: Burlingame Public Library
Lane Community Room

480 Primrose Road, Burlingame

Schedule:

10 AM – Setting up and socializing

10:30 AM – Business meeting

11:45 AM – Lunch (\$15 or bring your own)

12:30 PM – Program, including new member presentations and tribute to Peter Stansky

2:00 PM – Conclusion

Zoom option – Members who can't make it to Burlingame can attend via a Zoom link.

Car pooling – Rides will be available for members who need transportation there.

A reservation sheet is included in this mailing to reply and state your lunch preference.

Upcoming Monthly Programs,

Saturdays at 10 AM

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

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

4/18/26 – Open Forum: “How Being an Immigrant Got You Interested in History”

5/16/26 – Katya Miller, “Lady Freedom, Heart of a Nation”

6/20/26 – Jim Gasperini, “What Is Fire?”

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).

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

While the Editor's Note on the facing page gives the when and where of our Annual Membership Meeting, herewith I give you the why, what, and who. Our annual meeting provides the opportunity for you and your fellow Institute members to renew friendships with each other; meet new members and learn of their historical interests (this year's presenters include new members Ted Atlas and David Mostardi); hear up-to-date reports on our programs, study groups, committees, and quarterly newsletter; discover new ways to participate in the Institute; elect members of the Board of Directors and the Nominating Committee, and, this year, witness a presentation honoring founding member Peter Stansky, who will attend the event in person. Tributes to Peter will be given by several IHS members: Peter Crane, his student at Harvard University; Leslie Friedman, his student at Stanford University; and Bertram Gordon, a fellow longtime IHS member. Thank you to Oliver Pollak and Leslie for arranging this tribute to Peter. Thank you also to Tim Welsh for his assistance in planning the annual meeting. It's an annual meeting you won't want to miss! Please remember to fill out and return the rsvp form that's enclosed with this newsletter by the requested return date.

I also want to thank three members who will be ending their terms on the Board of Directors at the annual meeting. Jim Gasperini has been serving as vice president and as the liaison to the National Coalition of Independent Scholars, an affiliate organization of the Institute. Jim will continue as our webmaster. Louis Trager has served on the Mini-Grants and Annual Meeting committees and effectively encouraged membership renewals. For the past year he has served as the facilitator of the Jewish History Study Group and has played a crucial role in establishing the new study group. John Barnard served on the Annual Meeting Committee with me in 2024–25 and arranged the location for our 2025 annual meeting in Mill Valley, the first ever held in the North Bay.

I hope to see you—either in person or on Zoom—at our annual gathering on Saturday, February 28th. And I look forward to your active participation in the coming year in Institute meetings, committees, programs, study groups, and your articles and reports for the newsletter. Your continued collegiality and commitment to historical inquiry are the essential factors that help us maintain and strengthen the Institute and fulfill our scholarship goals this year and in the years to come.

—Elizabeth Thacker-Estrada

MONTHLY PROGRAMS

**“Listening with Intention: From Humboldt to a Statewide Storytelling”
Presented by Tammy Farmer
October 18, 2025**

As the featured speaker at our October monthly program, Tammy Farmer, a BA candidate in Leadership Studies at California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt, presented her oral history and storytelling initiative, “Listening with Intention.” Her initiative aims to create a unified platform for collecting, preserving, and sharing oral histories across California, and that could ultimately benefit the 115 community colleges, 23 California State Universities, and 10 University of California campuses. Currently, these colleges and universities lack a shared pipeline that takes an oral history interview from consent, transcript, archive, and short-captioned clip to a citable archive across university systems. The many advantages of a statewide workflow include education, community, citation and access, and preservation.

Tammy shared with us details of her pilot project, “Empowering Seniors in Humboldt County,” which is an Institutional Review Board (IRB)-approved pilot project running through the spring of 2026. In describing the project, she told us of the Oral History Van concept, similar to a bookmobile, and five one-on-one interviews she conducted with seniors over the age of 60 in the Eel River Valley to ensure the framework she built stands up for oral history collections. Tammy’s years as a 911 operator, volunteer firefighter, EMT, and community advocate trained her to listen with intention, to ask clear questions, and to take that information and coordinate a response. In this era when direct communication between people is being lost more and more—they are on their phones or

engaging with AI—Tammy wants to restore the human connection.

Tammy had to employ many different technological tools to produce one oral history. She needed a simple platform to collect the oral histories, transfer them into a clip, and then disseminate and export them. To this end, she plans to test the TheirStory platform, which she discovered while researching solutions for oral history collection. TheirStory is an end-to-end oral history and audiovisual research platform used by more than 120 universities and cultural institutions to streamline their process for recording, transcribing, indexing, editing, and making accessible the audiovisual stories of their communities. Tammy has partnered with Tracey Barnes Priestley to help her test the TheirStory platform. This test run is called Creative Aging. Tammy and Tracey ask interviewees five questions, with no limit on answer time.

The program included a demonstration by Zack Ellis, the founder of TheirStory. Transcripts of recordings are produced automatically, words in the transcript can be highlighted, and the transcript is easy to edit. All content uploaded to their system is transcribed and indexed, making it searchable. Metadata—data that defines and describes the characteristics of other data, including the who, when, and where of the data produced—is built in. A QR code links back to the full interview. Data can be exported and disseminated on social platforms. Oral histories can be downloaded directly into university archives after obtaining consent and reviewing the transcript for ethical issues. Tammy was planning to facilitate a November meeting between Cal State Humboldt and TheirStory to explore podcasting opportunities. She mentioned

upcoming developments, including transcript-based video editing and public galleries. She also highlighted successful implementations of TheirStory at such institutions as Brown University and the Los Angeles Public Library. Dr. Fiona Vernal, who implemented statewide free platform usage in Connecticut, will mentor Tammy in the statewide implementation in California.

This “Listening with Intention” initiative aligns well with the interdisciplinary studies our Institute values: history that can be shared and preserved and that can serve as a primary source through storytelling, performance, community, and writing. The project combines archives with lived experiences. As Tammy stated, this project features “technology and storytelling working together so that every community has a place in history.”

Tammy delivered her presentation to IHS to be sure she is asking all the right questions in a non-biased collection framework. Dan Kohanski observed that what she is doing precisely fulfills the original purpose of the monthly programs.

—**Elizabeth Thacker-Estrada**

**“Dorothy Liebes and the Golden Gate
International Exposition of 1939”
Presented by Elizabeth Schott
November 15, 2025**

Dorothy Wright Liebes was an influential weaver and textile designer who dominated the interiors landscape in the first half of the 20th century in San Francisco, Chicago, Hawaii, New York, and Hollywood. This monthly program focused on her involvement with San Francisco’s Golden Gate International Exposition of 1939, which took place on Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay.

A native Northern Californian, Dorothy was born in Guerneville in 1897 and raised in Santa Rosa. She was born two months premature, and it became a cliché among her neighbors to say, “Dorothy was in such a rush to start making things that she couldn’t wait to be born.” Wright graduated from Santa Rosa High School in 1916 and spent the next dozen years at San Jose Normal, UC Berkeley, and Columbia University, with teaching stints in Hayward and Piedmont in California and at Columbia’s Horace Mann School in New York City. While living in New York, she sold pram robes to Saks Fifth Avenue until 1928 when she married Leon Liebes, president of San Francisco’s H. Liebes & Co., which operated one of the city’s leading department stores. Living at the top of Nob Hill, Dorothy attempted to settle into San Francisco society as the “wife of a big retail store owner,” but did not succeed. The marriage officially lasted 18 years, but the couple lived separately for the last dozen, divorcing in 1946.

In 1938, after establishing her studio in San Francisco and securing several high profile commissions, Liebes was named director of the Decorative Arts Pavilion for the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition. Created on a mightily beefed up version of the Yerba Buena Shoals, the Golden Gate International Exposition (GGIE) celebrated the completion of the Golden Gate and Bay Bridges; its three permanent structures were intended to serve as the region’s commercial airport when the fair was done. Through no fault of her own, Dorothy Wright Liebes was behind the eight ball already when she was asked to be the director.

In her unpublished autobiography, she wrote, “The idea for a Decorative Arts exhibit came as an afterthought. The overall planning had been going forward for more than two years when three prominent San Francisco women, Mrs. George Cameron, Mrs. Nion Tucker, and Mrs. Helen Russell [born into the Crocker and

DeYoung families] called attention to the fact that no provision had been made for showing objects that beautify the home. Wouldn't the average woman and man be . . . interested in objects found in the home?" This question ultimately landed on the desk of Herbert Fleishhacker, chairman of the Fine Arts Committee of the GGIE, who likely knew Liebes when she was desperately trying to be happy as the society matron that her husband thought she would be. She revealed that "I had come to know most of the members of the Operating Committee [of the GGIE] during my 'civic virtue' era"—the years early in her first marriage when she contributed to making San Francisco a cultural center.

Once on board, and realizing the urgency of her assignment, Liebes wasted no time preparing for what one newspaper reported was her "20,000 mile trip around Europe seeking art stuff for the exhibition." Liebes relied on introductions from her colleagues in America for entrée to "salons, galleries and homes." Not content to simply spotlight the masters, Liebes sought out works that embraced modernism. She raced through nine countries in six weeks. "On an average day, I entered a dozen or more ateliers, museums, private homes, factories. I could not begin to estimate the number of conferences with artists, craftsmen and collectors." Liebes had many appointments with Marie Cuttoli, the "moving spirit" in the revival of French tapestry following the first World War. The remarkable array of artists Cuttoli commissioned to design tapestries included Braque, Derain, Dufy, Le Corbusier, Léger, Lurçat, Ray, Miró, Picasso, and Rouault.

Reflecting on her European tour, Liebes was "struck by something that seemed curious." She had been advised to "ask for more than I expected to get in every case." Instead, she found artists and craftsmen "more than eager to loan their works. Where I might ask for a few

choice pieces . . . the owners would urge me to take more. At first, I assumed it was because the artists . . . simply wanted to be well represented," she wrote. It wasn't until Mussolini sent numerous "great and famous" paintings—among them the Sistine Madonna, that it dawned on her why artists were so ready and willing to participate: it was the growing fear of war in Europe. ". . . the prudent artist or collector found in our Exposition and in the New York World's Fair of 1939 a convenient opportunity to remove his treasures to a safe haven. Some were never returned."

"By the time I returned to San Francisco," she wrote, "the buildings for the Decorative Arts exhibition were well along." Architect and artist Shepard Vogelgesang, who had a hand in the design of other fairs and expositions, had created a world all its own with a dozen model rooms, plus "ateliers," where visitors could see artisans at work. Throughout the spring and summer of 1939, Liebes presided over staff meetings, spoke at engagements across the state, taught multiple series of classes about modern decorative arts, and sold and distributed the extraordinary catalog she'd compiled and published just months earlier. She hosted VIPs and proudly showed her family around the grounds.

But, after just eight months, it was time to return the objets d'art that had not been sold to their owners. Returning the works of art—both fine and decorative—to Europe, however, turned out to be a multiyear endeavor. Liebes wrote, "War broke out in Europe in September, 1939. Immediately, many of those who had loaned us objects for the Exposition cabled asking us to sell them and deposit the receipts in American banks. A sad postscript to a glorious event."

—Elizabeth Schott

SPECIAL GROUP REPORTS

Women's History Study Group

At the October 27th meeting, Dot Brovarney discussed her research on three women for her work-in-progress, *Overland Monthly Women on California's Literary Edge*. *The Overland Monthly*, a 19th-century San Francisco journal, is generally associated with short story writer Bret Harte, who served as its first editor from 1868 to 1871. Twenty years later, the publication introduced Jack London to the world. *The Overland Monthly* also gained a reputation for printing the works of women, one of whom, Milicent Shinn, worked as its editor for 12 years beginning in 1882. Librarian Ina Coolbrith gained renown for her poetry through her frequent contributions, particularly in the earliest years when she worked closely with Harte. Freelance writer Ninetta Eames played a role in promoting London when she wrote the first biography of the writer, which *The Overland Monthly* published in 1900.

Brovarney first discussed Ina Coolbrith. Ina (1841–1928) was born Josephine Donna Smith into an early Mormon family, in Nauvoo, Illinois. In 1852, she traveled overland by wagon with her family before settling in what was then the small pueblo of Los Angeles. She had her first success with newspaper publication of her poetry there. Following a youthful marriage marred by her husband's abuse, she and her family moved to San Francisco. By then, she had changed her name to Ina Coolbrith, prompted by her choice to separate herself from her past—from both her husband and her church. After being passed over for the editorship at *The Overland Monthly*, she found work as Oakland's first librarian. It was Ina who mentored a ten-year-old library card holder with a great curiosity for books—the young Jack London. Although she would have preferred to make her way as a full-time poet, the library job

proved necessary as she became sole support for her niece and nephew whom she fostered after her sister's early death. Ina Coolbrith enjoyed great respect in literary circles and in 1915, her beloved state named her its first poet laureate.

Milicent Washburn Shinn (1858–1940) was born in rural Niles, California, to a Quaker and Congregationalist family who had made their overland journey in 1856. She lived on the farm until her parents sent her to live with an uncle in Berkeley, where she could attend high school. There, poet and English teacher Edward Rowland Sill mentored her and continued to do so in his new academic position at UC Berkeley, where she attended college. It was Sill who learned of the editorial opening at *The Overland Monthly* and encouraged her to apply. Shinn succeeded in getting the position and worked there from 1882 to 1894. During this time, she lived on the family farm with her parents, brother, and his wife and children. She became fascinated with her baby niece Ruth, observed her closely, and kept a record of the child's first three years of life. This study opened a new world to the woman who had long been devoted to education. The editor returned to her alma mater intent on using her research in pursuit of a PhD. When she learned that none of the professors had any knowledge in this area and nor did any American university educators, she created her own curriculum. In 1898, Milicent Shinn became the first woman to earn a PhD at UC Berkeley.

Ninetta ("Netta") Eames Payne Springer (1852–1944) was one of eight children born in a backwoods cabin in Wisconsin. Her mother harped on Netta's "plainness," noting that the other seven children did not suffer this defect. This harsh judgment proved to be seared into her memory. The family journeyed on the Overland

Trail to California when Netta was 13. Her sister Daisy, 15, kept a diary, recording both the beauty of the landscapes and a few of the human horrors. As an adult, Netta gravitated toward practices that defied social norms. One of these led her to marry twice under “free love” agreements. Netta’s work, mainly her travel stories about interesting places in California, ran frequently in *The Overland Monthly*. She and her first husband, who was the publication’s business manager in the 1890s, made the magazine a home away from home. They also embraced the social circle that grew around it. Netta inherited Charmian, her 6-year-old niece, after Daisy died at 30. According to Charmian, a writer herself and the second wife of Jack London, her aunt had some strict rules and could be harsh with her. At the same time, Netta supported Charmian’s education, arranged for her to attend Mills College, and helped her gain job skills that enabled her to live independently.

Brovarney pointed out some similarities in the lives of her three subjects; All had a parent with an interest in books and encouraged education. All had caregiving responsibilities for siblings’ children. Two of the three met some level of abuse from male relatives. All advocated women’s suffrage. All expressed passion for the natural environment. Brovarney then posed a few questions in thinking of her move from research to writing: Should she feature just these three women, or include some others, who had lesser or later *Overland Monthly* connections? If more, how might the information be organized? She suggested three other possible subjects: Mary Austin, who took her first two stories to *The Overland Monthly* on Ina’s advice; Josephine McCracken, who worked at the magazine with Harte and wrote the book *Overland Tales*—she became an important local literary figure in Santa Cruz; and Helen Carpenter, who published a diary of her overland journey across country to Ukiah in Northern

California and wrote about the Native Pomo peoples she encountered and befriended there. The study group assembled seemed to lean in the direction of including other female *Overland Monthly* women in some way—perhaps a chapter of “also-rans”—to make clear that there were many California women writers by the late 1800s. Several people suggested other themes that could be included: the trauma of male violence; boarding houses; the influence of the overland journey. It was also suggested that Brovarney include information about her research experience, to help other women researching California women’s history.

The November 24th meeting focused on a presentation by Lyn Reese about her experiences in developing women’s history education for the Berkeley Unified School District (BUSD) in the 1970s. The discussion covered challenges in covering women’s history and how they changed over time. In 1972, Lyn moved with her family to Berkeley. She had been active at the elementary level creating new educational approaches in nearby Richmond, but in Berkeley she became engaged in the flourishing political and social activism movements of the time, many of them focusing on women’s rights.

Also in 1972, Susan Groves, a high school teacher, recruited Lyn into the new Women’s Studies Program funded by the BUSD, the very first such project in the nation. In 1975 the program managed to get a federal Title IX Educational Equity Act grant to develop six middle school history units in order to include women’s history in the district’s required social studies, historical, political, and cultural topics. Lyn joined five ethnically diverse academics in creating these units. Motivated by the group’s enthusiasm, practical ideas, and many contacts at the University and in organizations around town, this experience launched her future work in secondary-level women’s history curriculum.

The group decided to feature a student-accessible, story-like format for the materials through stories they created of young women in the period with follow-up activities, images, and short biographies of important women. Historical backgrounds for teachers and students were also included. Lyn helped create all three units of the World History group: “Women Under Feudalism :Western Europe and China,” “Women and the Industrial Revolution in Europe and Japan,” and “Women in Change: 20th-Century South Africa, China, and Cuba, and the History of International Women’s Day.”

As Lyn began giving teacher workshops within the district and throughout the state, she started to feel pushback. Many teachers felt ill-equipped to use this new history and could not find time to learn it. Meanwhile, the California Department of Education said the materials had to conform to their social studies standards, and textbook publishers provided no space in their books.

In a startling upset, in 1979 the BUSD decided to cancel the women’s studies program near the end of its Title IX grant. But the program found ways to finish, and *In Search of Our Past: Units in Women’s History* (Suzanne Hurwitz, ed.) was published by the BUSD in 1980.

Lyn and Jean Wilkinson, a ninth-grade teacher who had also worked on the grant, decided to work together discovering the growing body of women’s history materials that was available for secondary-level students. The result was *Women in the World: Annotated History Sources for the Secondary Student* (Scarecrow Press, 1987).

Looking back on these first years researching and writing this exciting new history for the schools, Lyn expressed a very positive attitude toward them, saying they were engaging, satisfying, and even fun.

—Jody Offer, Lyn Reese, and
Elizabeth Thacker-Estrada

Jewish History Study Group

At the onset of the group’s autumn meetings, the focus was on religious history. Later, there was a sharp turn toward the impact of anti-Semitism on car purchases.

In October, Enrico Beltramini presented the theory that Christianity’s split from Judaism resulted from a political decision by Jewish religious authorities that the acceptance among rabbis of Jesus as the physical embodiment of God required declaring that position to be heresy. He based this explanation on Alan Segal’s *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism*.

The central idea, stated Beltramini, is that God—called Yahweh, a Hebrew name from the Bible—has a physical form as well as a spiritual one. The place of this concept in Judaism, he said, is shown by several passages in the Torah, which makes up the first five books of what Christians call the Old Testament.

Segal’s book was highly controversial originally. By now, though, “this idea that the ‘two powers in Heaven’ was a very well-established proposition in Judaism has been accepted,” because a mountain of scholarship supports it, Beltramini maintained “Christianity and Judaism split from each other. . .because the majority of Jews didn’t recognize him as the second [material] Yahweh.”

The theory answers the challenging question of how Jesus’ Jewish followers “were able to elaborate this very sophisticated biblical theology,” of the Trinity, soon after Christ,” he stated. “The ‘two powers in heaven’ theory explains that, because it was already in Judaism.” Even “today there is a strong, very strong line of thought in Judaism that actually believes that Jesus was Christ,” Beltramini contended. “But they are Jews, and still are Jews, and don’t become Christians.”

Dan Kohanski disputed that last assertion and countered that “very few Jews accepted” the two-powers concept before it was declared heretical. He also repeatedly challenged the historical accuracy of the Gospels, which Beltramini called “the wrong question.” The discussion became intense at times, with the two talking over each other.

At November’s meeting, I raised a recurring pattern of US Jews avoiding particular automobile makes because of the attitudes and actions of their owners against Jews. This has included boycotts of the German brands Volkswagen, BMW, and Mercedes-Benz, continuing for decades after World War II, and a much more recent backlash against Tesla over actions by its chief, Elon Musk.

Perhaps the first car-brand boycott by American Jews targeted Ford during much of the 1920s. Henry Ford backed *The Dearborn Independent*, a conspiratorial, anti-Semitic weekly newspaper distributed through Ford dealerships that published the fabricated *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and a series that blamed many of the world’s woes on “the International Jew.”

A lawsuit filed by crusading California lawyer Aaron Sapiro against the paper sparked an organized boycott of Ford Motors. This, in turn, produced an apology from Henry Ford and the shutdown of the *Independent*. But the damage to Ford had been done: Ford had gone from being America’s dominant automaker to becoming a distant also-ran to General Motors.

As for the German makes, all had intimate connections with Hitler’s Nazi regime that shaped the attitudes and buying habits of generations of Americans. They encouraged a turn toward Japanese cars, not least Subaru, whose maker had defied an Arab League boycott of Israel. The aversion of US Jews toward German makes held strong through the 1960s but had faded by the ’80s, largely because of

German Holocaust reparations and German government support for Israel. Meeting participants recounted their own and their families’ cars. Peter Stansky *kvelled* (“gushed”) over his contrarian ’60s VW bug.

No group meeting was held in December, because of “the holidays.”

—Louis Trager

Writers’ Group Report

Due to a communications snafu, our planned October meeting did not take place. We had intended to consider materials sent by Steve Barton, and he obliged us by letting the group discuss them at the November session. Steve’s book-length effort is entitled “The City’s Wealth and the City’s Limits: Progressive Housing Programs in Berkeley California 1975–2025.” This work is a detailed study of the decades-long efforts of Berkeley progressives to use the powers of their city’s government to increase social equity through changes in housing policy. In November, Steve gave us an introductory overview outlining the general scheme of the work, and then provided an opening chapter on Berkeley’s political history and radical tradition in the broader context of national politics. It shows how “progressives” gained significant influence during the 1970s and how they came to control the City Council for most of the past 40 years.

The group was greatly impressed by Steve’s clear writing, erudition, and command of his source material. They felt he might do well to strengthen those sections by putting Berkeley in a national context and perhaps to humanize his discussion by quoting more liberally from the speeches and writings of key figures.

In December, the Writers’ Group had the chance to review another installment of Marilyn Geary’s

memoir-travelogue “Taking the Waters: Finding Renewal in Central Italy’s Hot Springs.” This time Marilyn took us to Montecatini Terme and Bagno Vignoni. These two chapters were somewhat less about the hot springs she visited and more about the reflections on her own personal life that her Italian travels brought to mind, including Marilyn’s own struggles when young to gain the education she desired in spite of paternal disapproval. In the section on Bagno Vignoni, she reflected on the life of one of the most celebrated visitors to its waters, St. Catherine of Siena. Catherine’s life was marked by religious fervor and defiance. Early on, Catherine devoted herself to penitence, flagellation, sleep deprivation, and fasting. These self-imposed sufferings proved to be a source of great power and agency in an age when women had little of both. Although illiterate, she dictated more than 400 letters and even influenced Pope Gregory XII. Musing on Catherine’s life of fasting and self-torment, Marilyn somewhat comically recalled her own teenage obsession with her weight and the eating disorders that flowed from it. Her self-imposed suffering did differ from Catherine’s substantially, however. Marilyn’s consisted of allowing herself a single apple a day and dancing for hours after school to Little Richard’s *Good Golly Miss Molly* and *Tutti Frutti*.

The group was favorably impressed with Marilyn’s efforts although many felt that the comparison of her own youthful obsession with thinness with Catherine’s mortification of the flesh to be a bit over the top. Still, we were all ready for further Italian spa adventures.

—**Rob Robbins**

A warm welcome to our newest member. . .

Joining us this January was **Stephanie Quintana**, who first learned about our institute last August when she became friends with IHS members Liz Thacker-Estrada and Rose Marie Cleese while they were all cruising up Alaska’s Inside Passage. A native Californian, she is descended from emigrants who traveled the Oregon Trail, circa 1860. With a BS in biological sciences and a teaching credential from UC Davis, she taught science and the humanities at high schools from Sacramento to Utah during her 30-year career. Her current book project focuses on the history of the San Joaquin Valley as it pertains to her ancestors who were involved in the colorful world of gambling from 1890 to 1950. She is particularly excited about joining the Writers’ Group to give her direction in her research and writing efforts.

. . .and farewell to a former member.

California recently lost one its most respected and preeminent historians, **Gary Kurutz** (1948–2025). When he was in his mid-30s, he was a member of the Institute for Historical Study. At that age, he was already principal librarian in the Special Collections of the State Library in Sacramento. He had previously served as bibliographer of Western Americana at the Huntington Library in Pasadena, as well as head librarian of the Sutro Library in San Francisco and library director for the California Historical Society, also in San Francisco.

As curator of the State Library Special Collections, Kurutz expanded the depth and diversity of the library to such an extent that his name is ubiquitous in the acknowledgements sections of books on the American West, from the most obscure to notable ones by historians such as Kevin Starr.

Kurutz was the author of numerous award-winning books and articles, including definitive bibliographies on the California and Alaska Gold Rushes. He also taught a course on books of the American West for the California Rare Book School and was an active member of the Book Club of California.

He retired in 2017 as principal librarian emeritus of Special Collections of the California State Library, and a year later he retired as the executive director of the California State Library Foundation, where he had served for 20 years. He was inducted into the California Library Hall of Fame and was the recipient of the prestigious Hubert Howe Bancroft Award and the Book Club of California's Oscar Lewis Award for outstanding contributions in the field of California History.

—Peter Meyerhof

In other member (author!) news. . .

This fall, **Dot Brovarney's** book, *Mendocino Refuge*, earned three first-place awards in the International Firebird Award competition. Judges recognized it for Western non-fiction writing and for both its cover and interior designs. In December, she made a couple of appearances in Sonoma County with, hopefully, more to come: first, in person at the Sea Ranch Lodge Book Faire, and second, in print courtesy of poet and editor Terry Ehret at the Sonoma County Literary Update. Dot's December interview with *Mendocino Voice* editor Lin Due resulted in an article about her book in *Bay City News* and *SFGATE*, as well as locally. For more about *Mendocino Refuge* and how to obtain a copy, go to www.mendocinorefuge.com.

Bonnie Portnoy is urging members working on book projects to "keep the faith!" In her latest update on the 2024 publication of her lavishly illustrated book about her maternal grandfather, *The Man Beneath the Paint:*

California Impressionist Tilden Dakin, Portnoy is happy to report that sales are still going well. "After two decades of researching, writing, and finding a publisher, I've been experiencing a whirlwind of marketing, speaking engagements, and book signings. My publisher, Jack Bacon & Company, creates beautiful books under the umbrella of the Nevada Museum of Art. The publication is a hybrid; thus, I contributed to the design and printing costs. And because my publisher has no formal connection to book distributors, I've become a book schlepper! Most local indie bookstores have embraced my book, requested regular book signings, and re-order regularly. This holiday season, I had so much fun at personal appearances and met so many engaged buyers who have been fascinated by my grandfather's art and adventurous life. I reflect on and congratulate our institute members who have successfully found a pathway to publication, whether self-publishing or the traditional publisher route. It's a challenge! Alternatively, I know there currently are members immersed in writing and facing the task of finding a publisher. Persevere and it will happen!" Portnoy's book, which was recently reviewed in the Jan–June 2026 issue of the San Francisco Historical Society's *Panorama* newsletter, is available online through the Nevada Museum of Art, as well as via a direct link on Portnoy's website, www.TildenDaken.com/book/.

Speaking of the San Francisco Historical Society, our number-crunching member, **Oliver Pollak**, did some research into the society's prestigious journal, *The Argonaut*, and discovered that more than 20 former and present members have contributed some 47 articles to the journal since former IHS member, the late Charles Fracchia, began publishing it in 1990. For more detailed data (names/numbers of articles), contact Oliver.

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in China. The Japanese government was able to stop that project by claiming that Mitsui, a Japanese company, already had a contract to provide long-range communications in China, so the generator parts remained in storage in Palo Alto.

After leaving Federal, Fuller became an electrical engineering professor at UC Berkeley. Dr. Fuller often dined in the UC Faculty Club, where he met physics professor Dr. Ernest O. Lawrence. Lawrence told Fuller of his work on a “proton merry-go-round,” a circular particle accelerator, later known as a cyclotron. A cyclotron is designed to use a magnetic field to boost the energy of whirling particles and fire them, like a slingshot, toward a target at such a high speed that the nuclei break apart (split the atom) on contact with the target. Lawrence’s first cyclotron was very elementary in design and materials, utilizing a 5-inch magnet capable of producing 80,000 electronvolts (eV). His assistants were working on an 11-inch model that would produce more than 1 million eV, but Lawrence was interested in a much larger version.

In 1931, Fuller arranged for one of the unused generators, which had been in storage since 1919, to be given to Dr. Lawrence. Dr. Lawrence used the 85-ton magnet from Federal to build a 27-inch cyclotron that could produce 5 million eV. That unit was redesigned as a 37-inch cyclotron, capable of accelerating alpha particles up to 8 million eV. Lawrence used the 37-inch unit to produce Technetium, the first artificial element, and to magnetically separate Uranium-235, a key component of the Manhattan Project. These cyclotrons were housed in the Radiation Lab (RadLab) on the Cal campus. In 1937, Dr. Lawrence told *Time* magazine that getting the Federal magnet was one of the two “luckiest” breaks he had in his research project.

This was not the only Federal arc generator that contributed to the Manhattan Project. A surplus Federal arc generator from the Naval Radio Station at Annapolis, Maryland, was given to Columbia University, where it was used in 1939 by Enrico Fermi, Neils Bohr, and other scientists to conduct the first nuclear fission experiment in the United States, one of the first steps in the Manhattan Project.

The Berkeley Radiation Lab continued to expand the size of cyclotrons. The 37-inch cyclotron was replaced by a 60-inch cyclotron (used to synthesize plutonium later used in the Fat Man bomb dropped on Nagasaki), but the usefulness of the original Federal generator was not done. Dr. Lawrence used the magnet to build the first test Calutron at the Radiation Lab. This was a prototype to perfect the large-scale production of U-235 from uranium. Calutrons (named for California University Cyclotron) were used in the Oak Ridge, Tennessee, facility to produce enough U-235 for atomic bomb testing in New Mexico.

The Little Boy atomic bomb, dropped on Hiroshima in 1945, used U-235 as the fissionable material, a process made possible by the research done using a device that, 22 years earlier, the Japanese government had prevented from being shipped to China for use in a radio station. In 1948, the 37-inch magnet was moved to UCLA where it was used in a cyclotron to study the “nature of matter” and to produce radioisotopes for medical research. It was replaced in 1963, at which time it was moved back to Berkeley and reassembled in front of the Lawrence Hall of Science.

Dr. Lawrence was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1939 for the invention of the cyclotron and his subsequent research. He gathered a strong retinue of scientists to work in the RadLab. Among them was Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer, who cowrote the Oppenheimer-Phillips Process to explain an aspect of deuteron-induced nuclear reaction discovered using the 37-inch cyclotron. During a visit to the RadLab in 1942, General Leslie R. Groves met Oppenheimer, whom he later hired to run the Los Alamos, New Mexico, facility where the atomic bombs were designed and built.

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Dr. Lawrence continued to oversee the RadLab and a second facility in Livermore. He died in 1958 at the age of 57. The two labs were separated and renamed the Lawrence Berkeley National Lab and the Lawrence Livermore National Lab. Fuller continued to teach at UC Berkeley until 1943 and then taught at Stanford from 1946 to 1954. He died in 1987 at the age of 96.



A reproduction of the arc generator lurks behind Ernest Lawrence (Josh Harnett), physicist Luis Walter Alvarez (Alex Wolf) and J. Robert Oppenheimer (Cillian Murphy) in Christopher Nolan's hit film Oppenheimer.

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