

ARF NOTES

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California State University, Northridge



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: TIM FOX

We are nearing the end of my year as **ARF** President; it certainly was not the kind of year any of us expected, but we are tentatively emerging from this pandemic-hampered period. John Clendenning, selected last year as President-Elect for the 2021-22 academic year, will assume the position on July 1, 2021, and trust me, **ARF** will be in good hands. By fall, herd immunity is expected, enabling us to return to face-to-face gatherings and social interaction, one of the true benefits of **ARF** membership. The only question remaining is where will we gather? The campus is expected to reopen, but our home at the Orange Grove Bistro is no longer.

In the last issue, I noted that our annual meeting - the early June picnic - might be a possibility. As of this writing, that now appears to be highly unlikely, as the campus is basically closed, and the Governor has declared a June 15 reopening for reasonably sized gatherings.

In the absence of our traditional face-to-face annual meeting where the proposed slate of candidates for **ARF** Board positions (on page 2 of this newsletter) is up for membership voting, we will again vote for Board membership by email. Pamela Bourgeois, our Immediate Past President, will coordinate the email voting process for the slate of candidates approved at the April **ARF** Executive Board meeting. Watch for her communications and please participate and vote.

Unfortunately, the annual May **ARF** Memorial Awards Brunch, where we would hear presentations from the Awardees, is also a casualty of the pandemic. The Awardees will be featured in a July special edition of **ARF** Notes; each will provide a personal background and an extended abstract of their works. We received a number of outstanding applications, which challenged the selection committee and led to extensive discussions. One of the challenges faced by this

committee is the lack of background for topics that are out of our areas of expertise; when you see the July *ARF Notes* issue, you will get a feel for the challenges faced by the selection committee.

ARF membership numbers have stabilized after experiencing a slow downward drift over the past several years. I learned at the statewide ERFSA Spring Meeting that all CSU retirement organization membership numbers have been slowly declining over that same period, and it is not just a problem in California, but is a national trend, as a result of several issues. The primary one is the identification of faculty retirements. Here is where our **ARF** membership can help; if you become aware of retiring faculty from your department or college, please share that information with our membership chair. We do have tools to help track down retired potential members.

At the ERFSA meeting, CSU Chancellor Castro responded that he understands the challenge faced by CSU retirement groups like **ARF** and agreed there is significant value in keeping retired faculty involved with the University. No clear solution was identified, but a number of viable options are on the table. He indicated that he would bring this issue to his (next day) meeting with the CSU campus Presidents.

In closing, stay safe, give serious thought to vaccination, and look forward to a return to in-person meetings again next year!



PROPOSED SLATE OF ARF EXECUTIVE BOARD OFFICERS, 2021-2022

The nominating committee (Tim Fox, John Clendenning, Pamela Bourgeois), is pleased to present to the members this slate of officers for the 2021-22 ARF board. We extend our thanks to all those who accepted the call to serve. We will be voting on the slate the first week in June via email. Please watch your inbox the fourth week in May and the first week of June for information regarding the election. The first email will ask if there are any further nominations. If there are none, the second email will ask you to vote on the proposed slate by 5:00 P.M. June 5.

President – John Clendenning (elected)

Vice-President/President-Elect – Ronald McIntyre (Nominate)

Immediate Past President – Timothy Fox (elected)

Secretary – Cheryl Spector (Nominate)

Treasurer – Dan Blake (Nominate)

Program Chair – Sharon Klein (Nominate)

ARF Notes Editor – Ann Perkins (Nominate)

Membership Chair – Phyllis Russell (Nominate)

Historian – Virginia Lussier (Nominate)

Webmaster – Eugene Turner (Nominate)

Member-at-Large 1 Year – Catherine Jeppson (Elected)

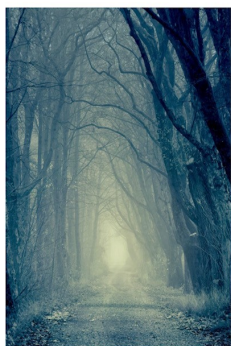
Member-at-Large 1 Year – Joel Zeitlin (Elected)

Member-at-Large 1 Year – Robert Kiddoo (Elected)

Member-at-Large 2 Year – Patrick Nichelson (Nominate)

Member-at-Large 2 Year – Cynthia Desrochers (Nominate)

Member-at-Large 2 Year – Pamela Bourgeois (Nominate)



PROGRAM COMMITTEE REPORT: We're headed toward the light -

As the vaccine criteria become ever more inclusive, more family members become eligible for hugging and more friends emerge in 3-D. We're getting there...

And the Program Committee continues to collaborate with the ARF Board to negotiate the uncertain territory between the mix of possibilities afforded by the vaccine, and the mindful caution that CSUN—and the CSU—also continues to exercise. So we're not yet sure about how our speaker program will unfold—in person or with Zoom. Our ultimate goal is to make the most of what each offers, continuing selectively with both.

But for the moment, it is likely that both our inaugural talk for the 2021-2022 season, featuring Dr. Kristen Walker from the David Nazarian College of Business and Economics department of Marketing, and our October session featuring President Erica Beck will bring us together on Zoom. Stay tuned...

Plans for other speakers in the succeeding months proceed, and members' suggestions continue to be a crucial part of the mix, so please don't stop offering them.

The benefits of Zoom, by the way, were brilliantly apparent throughout our April 14th program. How else could we have traveled—with our own guide—from both within and beyond the borders of California to parts of Mexico in pursuit of a rich understanding of California's, and thus our, relationship with water!?

Our guide, Chris Whitesides from Outdoor Adventures (where he and colleague Tim Szczepanski work a range of miracles and provide a wealth of resources), has given us multiple links, complementing and amplifying what we saw and learned on that trek. Included is a distillate of our experience, as ours allowed both some meandering and some time for conversation with climate scientist Jordi Vasquez from the California Department of Water Resources.

A YouTube “distillation” of our trek

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3iDiBPUD7_w

Google Earth Tour (A set of the views. Chris advises us that it works best with the Google Chrome browser)

<https://earth.google.com/earth/d/1OU1Nsf3dl12VaxqoW4qV0517MrusYTTT?usp=sharing>

CA State Water Project - DWR
<https://water.ca.gov/Programs/State-Water-Project>

Jordi Vasquez

jordi.vasquez@water.ca.gov

This year's “brunch,” celebrating the selected recipients of the 2021 Memorial Graduate Student Project Awards, will be held exclusively in the pages of a special July edition of *ARF Notes*, thanks to editor Ann Perkins. It is in those pages where, through their biographies, we will meet the awardees, and have a glimpse of their projects through the descriptions they have composed for us. The ARF Awards Committee is currently preparing for the selection process, an effort of Herculean proportion. They, along with the awardees, will merit a toast from each of us as we read.

And the June picnic, where we would ordinarily lunch in the beautiful setting of CSUN's Arbor Grill as we greet and hug and catch up with one another, and elect ARF's officers, is still likely to be held....on Zoom. But still for any different news about the picnic, please stay tuned.

About the picnic, the settings for next year's speakers and, of course, January's annual banquet, ARF board member Bob Kiddoo, working on our behalf, has been talking with the campus folks who are crafting policy and

planning for the reopening of the campus and its facilities, including the new “Orchard Conference Center and Catering” (OCC&C), which will succeed the Faculty Center/Orange Grove Bistro for certain of our functions. The Program Committee is is very grateful for Bob’s efforts and his insights. More information on this will appear in the July issue of the newsletter. *Sharon Klein*

EMERITI NEWS

Lorence Collins (Geology) has recently written a book entitled *A Christian Geologist Explains Why the Earth Cannot Be 6,000 Years Old: Let's Heal the Divide in the Church*. Dorrance Publishing Company, 2021. From the publisher’s note: “This book is about the geology of the Earth. Written by a fully committed Christian, it asserts that accepting the knowledge provided by studies in science is in no way in conflict with following the teachings of Jesus. If a Christian understands how God has done his creation, then he/she can be a better steward in taking care of the Earth and its life.” Dr. Collins retired from CSUN as a professor of geology at California State University, Northridge. In addition to geology, he taught mineralogy, petrology, and photogeology for 33 years.

Joyce Linden (Deaf Studies). I am supervising one student teacher and one intern teaching Deaf students on American Samoa. This is funded by a US Dept of Educ. grant in collaboration with the Univ. of Hawaii and the College of the Marshall Islands. There are 12 student teachers/interns on 7 islands: American Samoa, Guam, Pohnpai, Palau, Eebye, Yap and Majuro, and 4 of us instructors who are supervising via Zoom.

I received certification as an Independent Facilitator and am working with a vendor hired by Regional Center to serve a Deaf adult who has other challenges. I visit monthly and submit reports.

Benjamin Saltman (1927-1999) was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, educated at the University of Pittsburgh, San Francisco State, and Claremont Graduate School. He joined the CSUN English Department in 1967, where he taught verse writing and contemporary American literature for twenty-five years, and published ten books of poetry.

After retiring in 1992, he moved to Kensington (near Berkeley) where he continued to write and publish poetry and where he wrote the following autobiography: *A Termite Memoir, An Autobiographical Journey by One of America’s Great Poets* (Phoenix Press, 2018). One of Ben’s former students edited the manuscript and supervised its publication.

His was a hard life. He coped repeatedly with life-threatening illnesses. After high school he joined the US Navy, but was struck down by tuberculosis and spent two years (with several surgeries) in a veterans hospital. A rebellious and rootless youth, he roamed the country always searching for meaning. He hobnobbed with the Beats in San Francisco, taught at the experimental Emerson College, married a Catholic, divorced her, became a Vedantist, finally settled down, got a PhD at Claremont

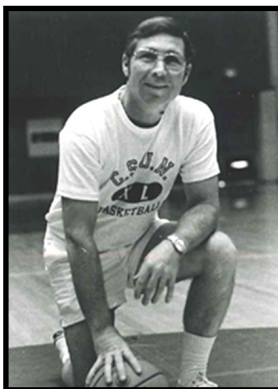
and a job at CSUN, married Helen Feigelman (yes, that’s our Helen Saltman) and raised three beautiful daughters.

ARF members’ interest will probably pique at p. 281 when Ben comes to Northridge. Readers may chuckle at (or resent) his rather dismissive assessment of the Valley and life at the University, for he generally viewed conventionality with Nietzschean contempt. On the other hand, these pages are full of wise observations with occasional wisecracks. In 1989 Ben was diagnosed with myelofibrosis and in 1995 with leukemia. One takes away from this memoir a self-portrait of one who lives courageously under the shadow of death. He once told me that all art, all beauty arises from a sense of mortality. So instead of cursing fate or wallowing in self-pity Ben Saltman transformed the darkness into light. The book is highly recommended. *John Clendenning*



IN MEMORIAM

Obtaining information about CSUN colleagues who have passed away is often difficult, so the ARF Board has formed a committee to facilitate finding out this information and writing the Remembrance articles. The Policy that this committee has developed will be printed in the July ARF Notes. If you know of one of your colleagues who has passed recently, we would appreciate it if you would notify Pam Bourgeois, who as Past President will be chairing the committee this year.



Pete Cassidy (Athletics Department), the longest-tenured coach in CSUN’s athletic history and the winningest with 335 basketball victories, passed away on December 18, 2020, at the age of 86. He began his CSUN career as a basketball and baseball player at San Fernando Valley State College, playing on the first two basketball and baseball teams from 1958 – 1960, and served as team captain on both squads. Cassidy was named Valley State Athlete of the Year in 1960.

After graduating from San Fernando Valley State College in 1960, he taught history and coached basketball and baseball at local high schools for six years. He then returned to his alma mater in 1966, where he served first in assistant coach positions and then, in 1971, as head of the basketball program, leading the Matadors for the next 25 seasons.

His unforgettable run as head coach included four California Collegiate Athletic Association (CCAA) championships and three NCAA Division II Tournament berths. Cassidy coached CSUN to his first CCAA title in 1978 and the program’s first NCAA Division II Tournament berth that season. CSUN reached the postseason again in 1979 and 1985. In addition, Cassidy won two CCAA Coach of the Year Awards and two NCAA West Coach

of the Year honors. During his tenure as head coach, Pete Cassidy produced nine All-Americans, 45 All-Conference honorees, and six CCAA Player of the Year winners.

In addition to being a legendary basketball coach, Cassidy also taught courses in the Kinesiology program. His Basketball 101 class was a must for students who wanted to learn the fundamental aspects of the game. He helped inspire countless graduates to enter teaching and coaching. His colleagues considered him “an outstanding coach and an outstanding man.”

After his retirement from CSUN in 1997, Cassidy remained active in community organizations. He served as President of the Kiwanis Club in Northridge, served on the Boards of several community organizations, and was an active member of CSUN’s Association of Retired Faculty. He also sponsored a scholarship for scholar-athletes in association with the San Fernando Valley chapter of the National Football Foundation and College Hall of Fame. He was inducted into CSUN’s Athletic Hall of Fame in 2004.

Cassidy is survived by his wife Sandy, his three children, Kevin, Michael, and Erin, and his seven grandchildren. *Ginny Lussier*



George Frederick Fisler, Nov. 29, 1931 – March 11, 2021. (Biology). For 30 years George was a key and highly valued member of CSUN’s Biology Department. A superb teacher, his lectures always meaty and polished, he was at his best in the field. Every trip into the natural world was an adventure and he always had his students’ rapt attention! I, a frequent tag-along, was inevitably in awe of

George’s ability to weave a miscellany of observations into a meaningful fabric. CSUN recognized his teaching prowess by granting him its 1989 Distinguished Teaching Award.

But at his core, George was a scholar who regularly published his own research; among his best known publications were a treatise on San Francisco Bay harvest mice, a study of macaque behavior, and a key to the world’s mammalian orders and families. His office (shared with the late Professor Andrew Starrett) was the gathering place for innumerable students who came to discuss their most recent biological or academic concerns. In these give-and-takes George never failed to gently encourage students to become involved in academic research. And he succeeded!

One of George’s former students, Joel Berger, had this to say: *“I fondly recall the investment, faith, and encouragement George offered when I was a 21-year-old trying to figure out life. He (and Andy Starrett) encouraged me to drop by their office anytime to talk about science, life, future plans or past travails. George took a strong interest in my incipient field studies and never failed to support my proposals. Commonly, he’d encourage me with a “Why not?” or “be creative,” or admonish me to “think*

about adaptive value, about evolution.” The “adaptive value” idea didn’t immediately sink in, but eventually it truly altered my thinking! Whatever success I’ve had, I directly link to GFF—a person I’ve loved and greatly admired. He so profoundly influenced me that I now share the same attitudes with my own graduate students.”

As noted, when he first connected with George, Joel was a student struggling for direction. George, recognizing his native talent and interest in animal behavior, took him under his wing. The end result? Joel earned his MS under George’s tutelage, went on for a PhD, and now occupies an endowed Chair of Wildlife Conservation at Colorado State University. Impressive as Joel’s success is, it’s critical to remember that he is just one of myriad students whose lives George affected, many in classes or as graduate students, but *literally hundreds in his impromptu office confabs!* If we could see the nexus of accomplishments of all the students George nurtured, I have no doubt it would be mightily impressive! *Jim Dole*



Paul A. C. Koistinen (History) died on January 25, 2020, at the age of 86. He taught US history, specializing in the political economy of American warfare, at California State University, Northridge, from 1963 to 2002, retiring as professor emeritus.

Koistinen was born into a large, working-class Finnish American family in the San Francisco Bay Area in 1933. He resolved at an early age to escape the confines of his family’s fundamentalist Apostolic Lutheran sect of the Finnish Lutheran church, the rigidity of which gave him a lifelong suspicion of the power of all institutions.

Koistinen began his undergraduate studies at Contra Costa Junior College, later transferring to the University of California, Berkeley. Drafted into the army in the 1950s, he came to regard war as utterly perverse. This antipathy, together with his suspicion of institutions and elites, shaped his professional career. In 1963, he completed a PhD in history at Berkeley, where he was chiefly influenced by Richard Drinnon. Koistinen then published a series of articles and two books, *Hammer and the Sword* (Ayer Co Pub, 1979) and *The Military-Industrial Complex: A Historical Perspective* (Praeger, 1980).

At that point, he launched what was surely among the most ambitious scholarly projects undertaken by any American historian of his generation—a multi-volume history of the political economy of American warfare. The series began with *Beating Plowshares into Swords*, which carried the story from 1606 through the Civil War. There followed *Mobilizing for Modern War* (1865–1919); *Planning War, Pursuing Peace* (1920–39); *Arsenal of World War II* (1940–45); and finally, *State of War* (1945–2011). Published between 1996 and 2012 by the University Press of Kansas, the five volumes interpreted war mobilization across American history, taking into account the maturity of the economy, the capacity of the federal government,

the condition of the military services themselves, and the state of war technology. A year in residence at the Charles Warren Center at Harvard University significantly advanced Koistinen's magisterial project.

As dedicated as he was to scholarship, Koistinen likewise demonstrated a powerful commitment to teaching, for which he received the Distinguished Professor award from Cal State Northridge in 1982. He had a commanding classroom presence and very high standards. Koistinen particularly welcomed students who had academic potential but faced obstacles in life, and in talking about them he could become quite sentimental. For decades, he battled for academic freedom, faculty governance, and collegial fairness in the university setting. He could be justly passionate, even fierce, in defending all three. To a rare degree, he embodied principle, compassion, and kindness. He is survived by his wife of 58 years, two children and two grandchildren. *John Brosamle*



Helen Chanda Lodge (Secondary Education) was born in 1919 in Michigan. Despite a life of poverty during the Great Depression, she excelled in school and early on realized education would be her ticket to a better and more meaningful life. She graduated from Hillsdale College with a degree in English in 1939, and earned a Masters degree from the University of

Michigan. She next taught at Los Alamos High School in New Mexico, where she met and married Bill Lodge. Helen and Bill then both earned graduate degrees in 1953 at UC Berkeley, hers the Ed.D. in English, Language, and Literature. By this time they had two young daughters, and Helen took a position at CSU Los Angeles in 1954, transferring to the Department of Secondary Education at San Fernando Valley State College when it opened.

Perhaps Helen's greatest legacy is the hundreds of English teachers she worked with who were hired in LAUSD and surrounding districts. She loved teaching English Methods classes and working with student teachers and teachers in the field. She did not suffer foolishness from students (or her colleagues) and would scold and cajole those who didn't have the work ethic needed to live up to her expectations, but she was equally glad to support and give extra time to those who were dedicated but struggling. With Dick Lid and Bill Walsh from the English department, Helen led the CSUN Writing Project during the 1970's and 80's, offering workshops for teacher groups all over the state.

Helen was active in English Education professional groups, presenting regularly at local, state, and national conventions and holding a range of leadership positions. She treasured the Distinguished Service Award from the California Association of Teachers of English she received in 1984. Among her many publications were *New Ways in English* (1968) and *Literature-Based Composition*, co-authored with Dick Lid (1988). She also co-

edited *Voices in English Classrooms: Honoring Diversity and Change*, 1995.

Helen retired in 1989 and was widely admired for her combination of kindness and toughness, her intellect and her deep and wide knowledge of English curriculum, teachers, and students. She also had an ever-changing repertoire of off-color jokes that she took delight in telling. Not known for her palate, a favorite lunch was a hot dog with hot cocoa. In retirement she continued to read widely, greatly enjoyed the ARF book and movie groups, and served as ARF president in 2001-2002. She passed away at 101 years of age on October 3, 2020. She achieved that meaningful life, and will be missed. *Bonnie Erickson*



Jennifer A. Matos (Biology)

Our colleague and my wonderful friend, professor of biology Jennifer Matos, passed away on Dec. 1, 2020. She died of natural causes (not COVID-related) at a memory care facility in

Ventura. She is survived by her husband, Dr. Craig Rudolph of Santa Paula.

Jennifer earned her BS (1976) and MS (1979) at Texas Tech and her PhD at Washington University (1992). She did a post-doc at the USDA in Logan, Utah. She interviewed for the position of Assistant Professor of Biology just months after the Northridge Earthquake. I chaired the search committee for her hire. Upon her arrival on campus in Fall 1994, we became fast friends.

Jennifer was a dedicated teacher. Conveying enthusiasm for plants and biodiversity was her special skill. Lectures in her Biological Principles (BIOL 106), Plant Biology (BIOL 316, 316L) and Flowering Plant Systematics (BIOL 407/407L/492K) courses were illustrated with color photographs, many of which she shot herself. Jennifer played a central role in creating our department's Tropical Biology Semester. In Springs 2003 and 2005, she taught for this program in Costa Rica.

Jennifer served the University with genuine distinction. She chaired the General Education Task Force that formulated the plan that reduced the GE requirement to 48 units, greatly improving CSUN's undergraduate experience. She was elected Faculty President in 2006 and re-elected in 2008. As faculty leader, she presided at meetings of the Faculty Senate and sat on the Senate Executive Committee, PP&R, University Planning and Budget Committee, and many other committees. In addition, she was a University Corporation Board member, and on its Executive Committee.

Jennifer became Professor Emerita in 2016. I have mentioned only a few career highlights. For me, Jennifer was a close and trusted friend who was smart, fun, and interesting. I am happy to have many memories of our time spent botanizing and enjoying life. To remember her, do what Jennifer would have done: open a good bottle of wine and toast her life. *Paula Schiffman*



The **Monday Film Group** met on April 12 via Zoom. The Club discussed the five-episode media series *Lupin* and the film *One Night in Miami*.

Lupin stars Omar Sy as the character Assane Diop. Sy plays an expert thief who was orphaned as a child after his father was framed for a crime he did not commit and then dies in prison. Sy's character models his behavior on the fictional character *Arsène Lupin* created, early in the last century, by French writer Maurice Leblanc. Decades after his father's death, Diop decides to use his skills to seek revenge on the wealthy man who caused his father's death. Although the group enjoyed the first two episodes of this series, they generally felt that, by the third episode, the episodes became quite confusing and hard to follow. In general, it was also felt that the reactions of the characters to each other were not very well portrayed and that some were extraneous to the main line of the story. The overall rating by the club members for *Lupin* was 6.6 out of 10.

One Night in Miami depicts a fictional account of the gathering of the four Black icons, Muhammad Ali (Cassius Clay), Malcolm X, Sam Cooke, and Jim Brown on the night after Ali wins a title bout in Miami. The film centers on a discussion of the roles of all of these individuals in the cultural changes of the 1960's. Although the acting of all four main characters was well done, Eli Goree's portrayal as Muhammad Ali was exceptionally enjoyable. The film was based on an original play by Kemp Powers and, as is often true, it did not transfer from stage to screen as well as might be hoped. Even with this caveat, the group enjoyed the film and felt that it did a very good job of depicting the reality that these four significant American figures faced as successful Black men during this tumultuous period. The overall rating by the club members for *One Night in Miami* was 8.3/10, with scores ranging from 8.0 to 9.0.

For the month of May, the club plans to discuss the two films *Oliver Sacks: His Own Life* (2019) (available on Amazon Prime rental for \$4.99) and *A Promising Young Woman* (available on Amazon Prime rental for \$5.99). Submitted by David Schwartz

ARF BOOK GROUPS



Heidemarie Lundblad, leader and reviewer for the Science Book Group.

On March 17th, the Science Book Group met to discuss *The Big Burn: Teddy Roosevelt and the Fire that Saved America*, by Timothy Egan, 2010. Welcome to new members Pamela Perez and Peter Gabrovsky, and we hope to see you again and again!

We all expressed our pleasure of reading this account of

The Big Burn, a devastating fire that ravaged areas of Montana and Idaho in 1910. However, the book also presents a very interesting discussion of how the passions of Gifford Pinchot and Teddy Roosevelt led to the creation of the US Forest Service. While Pinchot and Roosevelt initially established the Forest Service, it was the Big Burn that led to its continued existence over the determined opposition of speculators and others who saw no need for anything like that. We also appreciated the discussion of the role played by the Buffalo Soldiers, an African-American troop who originally had been viewed with disdain by the settlers, but who proved themselves when they essentially saved many of the residents of the towns in the path of the fire. All in all, an enjoyable read. **Note:** If you subscribe to PBS passport you can watch a 2015 episode of *American Experience: The Big Burn*. Based on Ann Perkins' suggestion, I watched it and, if you did not have time to read the book, it tells the story well.

On April 21, the **Science Book Group** met to discuss *This Is the Voice*, by John Colapinto. There was general agreement that Colapinto wrote a very interesting and readable book about what causes humans to be the only creatures who are capable of intelligent speech. While parrots can say words, their mimicry does not constitute intelligent speech. The book covers a wide range of topics related to speech from the physiological and evolutionary changes that distinguish humans from other vertebrates and make speech possible, to the cultural, social, and political aspects of language. Particularly interesting was the chapter on how the prosody of the voice encodes subtle emotions. Our discussion was interesting and covered a wide range of related topics.

For the May 19th meeting we have selected *The Journeys of Trees: A Story about Forests, People, and the Future*, by Zach St. George, 2020. **A few recent suggestions for future meetings are** listed below; if anyone has additional ideas or suggestions, please let me know:

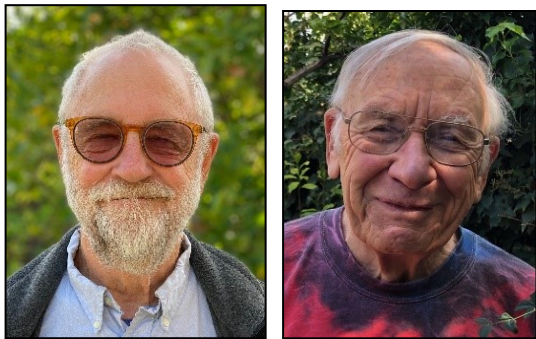
Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water, by Marc Reisner. Revised Edition, 1993.

Under a White Sky: The Nature of the Future, by Elizabeth Kolbert. Hardcover, 2021.

How to Avoid a Climate Disaster: The Solutions We Have and the Breakthroughs We Need, by Bill Gates. 2021

This Is How They Tell Me the World Ends: The Cyberweapons Arms Race, by Nicole Perlroth. 2021.

All meetings will be on Zoom until we can safely gather again. Remaining meeting dates for the academic year 2020/21: 5/19; 6/16; 7/21; 8/18, on Wednesdays from 1:30 to 3. I will send the link the day before the meeting. *Heidemarie Lundblad*



Joel Zeitlin and James Allen, leaders and reviewers for the Wednesday Book Group

The **Wednesday Book Group** met in February to discuss *Two Years Before the Mast* by Richard Henry Dana. Dana was a student at Harvard who took time off in 1834 to become a sailor on the *Pilgrim*, a square-rigged ship, which was to sail from Boston around the tip of South America (Cape Horn) to California. There had been other written accounts of sailing, but this was the first from “before the mast”, which is to say as a working sailor rather than an officer or passenger. The book was published in 1840 and became a widely read best seller.

Dana spent the first few days seasick, but then lived the hard life of a sailor—tremendously hard work, long hours, danger, constantly interrupted sleep, and everyone’s disdain for complaint or illness. Shipboard food was mostly dried salted beef. Any change in wind or conditions necessitated all hands on deck to adjust the sails, and in difficult passages like the winter trip around the Horn there would be very cold, wet, and windy days and nights on end. In calmer times the captain and mates believed that the men must be kept busy. For example, the men were set to polish, repair the ship, tighten all sails and lines, and gather oakum (untangled string wisps) to be used for caulking. Finally, the captain’s word was the only law, and his punishment of two men by flogging is vividly described.

A lot of space in the book is devoted to details of sailing the ship, but we all sailed smoothly past the unfamiliar vocabulary (unfurl the royals, shake the reef out of the top-sails, square in the head yards, set the larboard studding sails).

Once in California the business of the ship was to gather, cure, and store cattle hides, involving much extended work on land, sometimes for more than a month at a time. The missions had been established, but settlements like San Diego, San Pedro, and Santa Barbara had few people and no good harbors so that the sailors had to row small boats more than a mile between their anchorage, through the surf, and the shore to get supplies and pick up the heavy hides. At what was later named Dana Point, the men took advantage of the high cliff and sailed the hides off the edge for others to pick up down below. When sailing, strong winds and rain often made trips between ports extremely slow and arduous. But finally, their ship had forty thousand cow hides packed

in tightly for their trip back to Boston, most to be made into shoes.

Dana’s style appealed to us. He is efficient and willing to tell his opinion. The author has sympathy for other people and is curious about his fellows and his surroundings. In all the places visited, including Monterey and San Francisco, he got to know men in other ships’ crews and people living along the coast, some of whom were connected with local Mexican haciendas. Twenty-four years later, on a steamship pleasure trip along the coast Dana enjoyed seeing what had changed after the Gold Rush and U.S. takeover of California. On that trip he became reacquainted with many of the people in his book, some of whom had heard of or read his book.

All of us considered *Two Years Before the Mast* as one of our favorite books that the group has read and heartily recommend it.

For our March discussion our group read a novel published this year, *Hamnet*, imagined out of what little is known about William Shakespeare’s life. What you might have thought a typo is not. As the author Maggie O’Farrell tells us, back in the late 1500s the person’s name could be written with either an “l” or an “n”, and Shakespeare’s son was actually -old boy, Hamnet, finds his sick twin sister Judith delirious. With no adult at home except his irascible and dangerous grandfather, Hamnet runs to get the physician. Then, in a fifteen-year flashback, we meet a young man in Stratford whose father forces him to earn some money teaching Latin to children of a local farm family. He notices a young woman, walking purposefully through the farmyard with a hooded falcon perched on her fist. Who is she? The tutor walks outside and runs into her, and in that first meeting finds her intriguing. She has occasional mystical insights and believes in the power of plants to heal people, in contrast to the practices of medicine in those days. The young woman is our protagonist, Agnes, who marries the tutor, William Shakespeare.

From this tiny beginning, the plot is developed mostly around members of two families. With great attention to details of nature and the slight gestures, facial expressions, and words of people who typically don’t say a lot, O’Farrell develops the story. The main characters are drawn with consistent and memorable personalities so that the reader can easily imagine them doing what they do as the story advances. The plot builds slowly and the book becomes emotionally more intense. Although the frequent shifts of time period require some getting used to, this novel is beautifully written and captivating. The last sections and pages are especially moving, a superb climax to a very rewarding story. *Joel Zeitlin and Jim Allen*

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