AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California September 2005

Sunday, September 11 Book Banning Pressures Today

Special Points of Interest

- AOF to Consider a Change of Meeting Place (page1)
- Why Not Invite Some of Your Nonreligious Friends to the Freethought Day? (page 2)
- Governor Prays: A Children's Story (page 4)
- Movie Night to Screen Some Really Hot Items (page 5)
- Volunteering Opportunities for Freethought Day (page 5)
- The Changing Church-State Wall (page 7)

Come to the September AOF monthly meeting on the 11th at 2:30PM and hear Sacramento Public Library System representative Carolyn Rokke discuss, "America's Would-be Censors: Who They Are, What They Do, and How Libraries Respond." Ms. Rokke will describe the efforts to ban books both during her tenure at the Sacramento Library and historically throughout the nation. Members of the audience will receive a list of the American Library Association's, "The 100 Most Frequently Challenged Books of 1990-2000." You may feel shocked to learn that the list includes some of our nation's most beloved books. Ms. Rokke will also share several books which people have attempted to ban.

The topic of banning books speaks to the freedom to express ourselves in a society which often fears challenges to the status quo. Challenging authority and convention often results in reactionary attempts to silence critics through the removal of their works from public discourse.

(Continued on page 7)

Standard Fare

Next Meeting	1
Looking Ahead	3
Highway Cleanup	5
Membership Form	6
Board Meeting Summary	6
President's Thoughts	7

Where Will AOF Be Meeting? Location, Location, Location



The AOF Board of Directors is requesting feedback from AOF members regarding two proposed alternate meeting locations for monthly AOF general meetings seen as helpful to accommodate a growing organization.

- Coloma Community Center auditorium (4623 T Street, Sacramento), or the
- Florin Station community room (Sacramento County Sheriff 's Dept. Central Station, 7000 65th Street, Sacramento).

This is your chance to provide input regarding the two available alternate locations. Read all about it in the AOF Line on page 2.

Advise Board Regarding Available Meeting Locations AOF Line

By Kevin Schultz

The AOF Board of Directors is asking for your feedback on the issue of where we hold monthly AOF general meetings. To assist members in providing input, the Board has prepared the following overview of the available alternative meeting locations. We encourage interested members to visit the locations during normal business hours.

Coloma Community Center Auditorium 4623 T Street, Sacramento (916-808-6060)

Pros: two blocks from light rail, on bus route #37, close to mid-town and CSUS, handicap-accessible, seats 160, polished hardwood floors, climate controlled, on- and off-street parking, chandelier lighting and large windows, built-in PA system, internet, piano, storage for meetings, time-slots open all day Sunday.

Cons: possibly too large, \$35/hr plus ~\$100 yearly insurance (we pay \$35/hr for Sierra 2 room 10)

Florin Station Community Room [Sacramento County Sheriff's Dept. Central Station] 7000 65th Street, Sacramento (916-876-8300)

Pros: free, near multiple bus routes, two blocks from Hwy 99

Florin exit, handicap-accessible, seats ~75-150, newly remodeled, climate controlled, carpeted floor, acoustic ceiling tiles, large parking lot, fluorescent lighting, microwave, television, time-slots open all day Sunday

Cons: no windows, no storage, possible discomfort with meeting at a police station, possibly too far south

For comparison:

Sierra 2 Community Center Room 10

(2971 24th Street, Sacramento)

Pros: on bus routes #63/64, close to midtown, handicap-accessible, seats 68, climate controlled, carpeted floor, acoustic ceiling tiles, on- and off-street parking, fluorescent lighting, piano, storage

Cons: room too small, poor Sunday time-slot (able to move to 13:00 [1PM] but no earlier), \$35/hr

While the board welcomes all feedback, we would like to request that members answer these specific questions:

 If you do regularly attend meetings now, would you continue to attend meetings at either of the alternate locations?

(Continued on page 3)

The purpose of the organization,

AOF, is to promote the civic

understanding and acceptance of

atheism in our community.

Please attend and support Freethought Day 2005! This outdoor event is AOF's best opportunity all year to bring our key concepts to the attention of the public. Have fun while helping to shed light on (1) how freethinking has contributed to human progress and (2) the importance of secular government.

AOF Board (2005-6)

President: Don Knutson Vice President: Mynga Futrell Secretary: Kevin Schultz Treasurer: Ken Nahigian Directors at large:

> Carla Corbett, Beverly Church Dave Flanders, Phil Lazier Vincent Wales

AOF Committees

Newsletter: Mynga Futrell (Editor) Kay Dickey (Submissions Editor) Jerry Sloan (Mailing)

Freethought Day, Oct. 9, 2005: Beverly Church, Mynga Futrell, Carla Corbett, Kay Dickey, Jerry Sloan, Tom Ikelman, Kevin Schultz, Brian Krofchok Darwin Day, Feb. 12, 2006: Bronda Silva, Mynga Futrell, Dave Henderson, Ed McConnell, Kay Dickey, Ken Nahigian,

Ad Hoc Committees:

Web Portal (Kevin Schultz, Richard Langley); Alternate Meeting Place/ Time (Jerry Sloan, Ken Nahigian, Kevin Schultz); Youth Outreach (Jerry Sloan, Tina Burgess, Mynga Futrell); Connections (Kevin Schultz, Betty Simonsma); Growing AOF Membership (Jerry Sloan, Kevin Schultz)

Archive: Jody Craig, Kay Dickey, Mynga Futrell, Ken Nahigian, Betty Simonsma

AOF's Voluntariat

Affiliation Liaisons:

Mynga Futrell, Kay Dickey (AAI), Hank Kocol (CSH), Ed McConnell (AA), Beverly Church (AHA/HAGSA)

Community Service Projects:
Don Knutson

Internet Website: Pat Kelley

Meetings: Dave Flanders, Ken Nahigian Jerry Sloan, Betty Simonsma

Membership Database: Ken Nahigian

We welcome additional involvement from AOF members. Right now we need volunteers to perform very small tasks at our meetings. Just phone the voice mail at 447-3589 if you can help us out. Or, send an e-mail to us at aofboard@aofonline.org

Members Have Their Say at August "Sizzler" Meeting Recap By Dave Flanders

Various members shared sundry thoughts at AOF's August meeting.

Ken Nahigian spoke on a letter to the editor on separation of church and state. He provided a history of the horrors of previous theocracies that didn't work. Then he spoke of America—the first secular government—a representative democracy that is still going strong.

Cleo Kocal spoke on the absurdity of the phrase "may God bless."

Ben Cornforth spoke of a poem he searched for—a poem that recalled a man having a dream

Betty Simonsma talked of the importance of using critical thinking when analyzing so called holy books.

Don Knutson recounted his recent visit to Israel. He showed various photos from his trip, including the walls that separate the Palestinians from the Israelis. He favors equality and justice for all who reside there.



Dave Flanders said the brain is a memory system that stores experiences in a way that reflects the true structure of the world, remembering sequences of events and their nested relationships and making predictions based on those memories. It is this memory-prediction system that forms the basis of intelligence, perception, creativity, and even consciousness.

Kay Dickey read two poems by Cynthia Bryant "Shock and Awe" and "God is Dead".

Paul Storey talked of his ongoing debates he has with certain theistic coworkers at his job.

Jerry Bachman spoke on holy relics Jerry clearly seems to be a master at captivating the audience and also making them laugh.

Freethinkers sharing their ideas freely—it is good to be in "the land of the free."

(Continued from page 2)

- If you do not regularly attend meetings, would you attend meetings at either of the alternate locations?
- What time on Sunday works best for you? AOF currently meets from 14:30-17:00 (2:30-5PM).

Feedback may be submitted via AOF voice-mail (916-447-3589); e-mail (aofboard@aofonline.org); postal mail (AOF, Attn: Location Feedback, PO BOX 15182, SAC-RAMENTO, CA 95851-0182); or to me (Kevin) in person at the upcoming meeting.

Please submit your feedback by Friday, September 16.

Web sites:

http://www.cityofsacramento.org/ parksandrecreation/recreation/ c_coloma.htm

http://www.sacsheriff.com/ organization/field_services/ florin_station/index.cfm

Maps:

http://maps.google.com/maps? q=4623+T+Street,+Sacramento,+ca&s pn=0.028534,0.053571&hl=en

http://maps.google.com/maps? q=7000+65th+Street,++Sacramento, +ca&spn=0.228450,0.428570&hl=en

Atheists and Other Freethinkers



AOF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization. It is one of 50 member societies of the Atheist Alliance International ("a positive voice for atheism"). AOF also main-

tains affiliations with the Council for Secular Humanism, American Atheists, and the American Humanist Association.

AOF's Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the association, Atheists and Other Freethinkers, is to promote the civic understanding and acceptance of atheism in our community. To accomplish this purpose, AOF will, through educational programs, projects, and publications, extend atheistic perspectives concerning the separation of church and state and the right to think and speak freely on these perspectives.

AOF News & Views: Copyright © 2005 by Atheists and Other Freethinkers, PO Box 15182, Sacramento, CA 95851-0182. The contents of News & Views are informational and educational. Views expressed via the articles in this publication are not necessarily those of Atheists and Other Freethinkers.

Subscription \$12 per year (free to members).

Reprinting of original material in this newsletter is granted to atheist, freethought, rationalist, skeptical, and secular humanist groups as long as acknowledgment is given. Exchange of newsletters with aforementioned organizations is solicited.

Freethought Day - So What? By Mynga Futrell

Below is a casual item written originally for a publication that focuses on the general public, not freethinkers. I'm thinking it may offer a bit of ammunition (and perhaps nerve?) to any AOFers who are pondering whether or not to invite their non-freethinking friends and relatives to come on down to Freethought Day 2005. -- Editor

Because he was concerned about some of the directions our nation was headed in his time, the gifted comedian and entertainer Steve Allen frequently weighed in on the importance of enlightening *every*-one, religious or not, to the role that the freethinkers in human history have played in the advancement of overall progress.

Note: Maybe you don't recall Steve Allen (probably you don't, if you are under 30), so perhaps I should say a word or two about him. Steve became a genuine American celebrity back in the 1950s, and he was someone especially well known to audiences in TV's early years, staying quite active on through the 80s. I might add that he was also a serious intellectual and something of a philosopher. It was in the latter capacities that he frequently

lauded the actions of freethinking folks.

Steve was particularly keen on touting those human mortals who struggled to increase liberty, including the freedom to think creatively and critically. In 1996, when he was preparing a press blurb for a book called *Freethought Across the Centuries*, Steve wrote the following:

"The average American has almost no conception of the debt owed to freethinkers of the past 200 years of American history, not to mention those Europeans who distinguished themselves for their courage and clarity of thought. We can, with the gift of hindsight, perceive the importance of those thinkers who moved bravely against the current of their time. In those times, sad to say, they often paid dearly for taking advantage of that freedom of thought and expression that are so honored by the rest of us, at least as abstractions."

As we face the currents of our own times, when such commodities as political "courage" and "clarity of

thought" are pretty much in absentia, I'm thinking that it's really too bad Steve isn't around now to inspire and enlighten us. Fortunately, there's another way to douse ourselves in some refreshing historical examples of both these hard-to-findnowadays attributes. Sacramento is coming up on its fourth annual Freethought Day event (October 9, in Waterfront Park of Old Sac), and it's a good time to take note of the types of people that Steve held in high esteem and look to how they addressed the burning issues of their day.

Freethinkers are people who make up their own minds about matters regarding religion and who, in doing so, depart quite a bit from tradition and authority. They also tend to find themselves frowned upon by others. Some of the most strident movers and shakers in the women's suffrage/ rights movements of the 19th century were freethinkers, people like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Frances Wright, Ernestine Rose,

(Continued on page 6)

For Children Only: The Story of the Governor Who Prayed



Dear Californians, Please do provide me with a really good after school program

Some Rather Late News (Sacramento) — The following was obtained from "The Buzz" column of The Sacramento Bee. It was entitled "Governor admits he's knee-deep in religion."

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger doesn't talk about religion much, and he has said it doesn't influence his political decisions. But, at the annual California Prayer Breakfast in Sacramento in June, he made an exception.

He told the crowd about kneel-

ing on the floor of a City Hall office in Fresno to pray with Mayor Alan Autry in 2002, when Schwarzenegger was pushing his initiative for after-school programs.

"He says, 'let's kneel down and let's ask the Lord to help us,'" Schwarzenegger recalled. "So, I slowly kneeled down, and now he started praying, started praying for afterschool programs, started praying

Don't let them see me here for our children.

"I started praying, "I hope no one comes through this door right now. Please, God, don't make someone come through this door right now and see us two kneeling here on the floor, on this hardwood floor."

After telling that story to the breakfast crowd, Schwarzenegger then asked Autry to say a prayer for the state budget and Schwarzenegger's agenda in the upcoming special election.



A Small Crew, But...

By Don Knutson

Just four AOF members answered the call to clean up our Adopt-A-Highway segment of Highway 99 north of Elkhorn Boulevard on August 28. The stretch was particularly dirty perhaps in part to the crew which had repaved the area earlier in the month.

Dave Flanders, Don Knutson, Tom Nicolette and Kevin Schultz took on the task. But it was frustrating being surrounded by trash and carrying an already full bag. Lesser men would have used their deity's name in vain and walked away, but we carried forth and collected 20 bags of trash with Kevin starring with six.

The net "take" was a \$10 bill and a \$5 bill, which will be donated to AOF, and two pornographic magazines which will not.

Special recognition goes to Tom for bringing an ice chest full of fruit and vegetable drinks which hit the spot on such a parched day.

Our October clean-up will mark the 10th anniversary of AOF's continuous care. Please join in the festivities on Sunday, October 16 @ 8 AM.

Get in on the Action!



Movie Night, September 16, 7 PM A Double Feature

"OutFoxed"
Running Time: 77 minutes
"Fahrenheit 911"
Running Time: 122 minutes

Outfoxed is a documentary that examines how media empires, led by Rupert Murdoch's Fox News, have been running a "race to the bottom" in television news. This film provides an in-depth look at Fox News and the dangers of ever-enlarging corporations taking control of the public's right to know. It explores Murdoch's burgeoning kingdom and the impact on society when a broad swath of media is controlled by one person. Media experts, including Jeff Cohen (FAIR) Bob McChesney (Free Press), Chellie Pingree (Common Cause), Jeff Chester (Center for Digital Democracy) and David Brock (Media Matters) provide context and guidance for the story of Fox News and its effect on society.

Fahrenheit 9/11 is Academy Award-winning filmmaker Michael Moore's searing examination of the Bush administration's actions in the wake of the tragic events of 9/11. One of the most controversial and provocative films of the past year, it takes us inside that war to tell the stories we haven't heard, illustrating the awful human cost to U.S. soldiers and their families. With his characteristic humor and dogged commitment to uncovering the facts, Moore considers the presidency of George W. Bush and where it has led us. He looks at how - and why - Bush and his inner circle avoided pursuing the Saudi connection to 9/11, and at the atmosphere of confusion, suspicion and dread in which the Bush Administration makes its headlong rush towards war in Iraq.

Volunteers Needed For Expo On Freethought Day

The Freethought Day planning committee is seeking persons to take charge of a <u>single</u> display in the exposition. This involves a bit more responsibility than just minding a table for a shift. The volunteer "table chairperson" brings materials to the event, arranges their display there, acquires a volunteer assistant or two just for that table, and boxes up/returns the items. You can handle the task as you see fit. Taking on the assignment is a superb contribution to Freethought Day, as it frees the Committee (although we do arrange for key aspects for you).

We already have a volunteer who has offered to "chair" the Banned Books display. (Thank you, Joy! - we will arrange for books for you.) Now we are looking for persons to take on comparable responsibilities: A Freethinker's Bookshelf display, a Youth Education display, the Silent Auction, Voting and Activism, Children's Activities, and Freethought Day Merchandise. Call the AOF voicemail at 447-3589 to indicate your interest and to learn of the specific tasks associated with each role.



We are depending on our members to enable AOF to coproduce a marvelous outdoor event. We gladly accept donations in any amount. Please give what you can. Thank you!

Directions to Movie Night: The films will be shown at the home of Beverly Church, 24 Adkinson Court (Take the Del Paso Road exit east off I-5). Her phone number is 359-5423. Note: Bev can better plan for the number to be hosted if each person who plans to go will phone a couple of days ahead of time. (If you decide at the last minute, though, feel free to com ahead; bring your favorite microwave popcorn and beverage.)

AOF Subscription / Membership Form

Mail to: AOF, P O Box 15182, Sacrai	mento CA 95851-0182 (Attn: Mem	bership)
Name(s)	Phone ()
Street		Apt. #
City	State	Zip
E-mail address (print legibly!)		
Check your preference:		
Newsletter Subscriber Only (\$12)Low-income Member (\$10)Single Membership (\$20)		O Please check here if you do NOT want your name on lists occasionally provided to organizations similar to AOF.
Please check your preference. We can deliver your please check your e-mail address above.	•	O Please check here if you DO want to be on our AOF activist list.

(Continued from page 4)

and Susan B. Anthony. These women were on the receiving end of lots of frowns, and worse, but they surely moved society forward for women.

American history..."

Freethinkers hold no quarter for hypocrisy and are quick to criticize the failure of ac-

tions in the name of

religion to live up to flowery words. They are sometimes, though not always, considered irreverent and blasphemous. Such commentary tends to be swept under the rug of history, so that the eloquence of Robert Green Ingersoll is faded (only historians of the late 19th century know him now), and the snide remarks of Mark Twain about religion are not those chosen for entry into youngsters' books.

At Sacramento's outdoor Freethought Day celebration, people have an opportunity to be entertained, have lots of fun, and get to know a few folks from history while they're at it. Besides all those mentioned above, there are others represented in AOF's "Gallery of Free and Independent Thought," including our two gallery additions for 2005.

Frederick Douglass (a Christian critical of how religion was used by those in power to oppress) and Mary Wollstonecraft (a freethink-

ing Deist and child of the "The average American has almost Enlightenno conception of the debt owed to ment). In a freethinkers of the past 200 years of new biography about her just

—Steve Allen out this summer, the au-

thor drew parallels between the public scorn of Mary Wollstonecraft (who was disparaged as "a hyena in petticoats" in her day) and that suffered more recently by Hillary Clinton. I'm not sure about that; I cannot comment on the comparison, not having read the book. What I can say about Mary herself is that I find her particularly inspiring. She wrote strongly about rights of both men and women and movingly about the value of human reason.

The Freethought Day event itself is a salutation both to human reason and to church state separation. There's a connection there that could surely use some strengthening. Who is to do it? As a bumper sticker I purchased last year states: Freedom Depends on Freethinkers.

Perhaps we could all benefit from a day of fun and education that involved exposure to human examples of characteristics that can reinforce our own backbones and brainpower. Dousing ourselves in some stories about courageous and clear-thinking men and women could reinvigorate us. If there's any time in the history of the United States that a "reason revival" is called for, it is now.

AOF Board Meeting Summary

August 21, 2005 Common House Community Room

Directors present: Don Knutson (president), Ken Nahigian (treasurer), Kevin Schultz (secretary), Beverly Church, David Flanders. Directors absent: Carla Corbett, Mynga Futrell (vice-president), Phil LaZier, Vincent Wales.

Secretary minutes approved with corrections by consensus for month of July

Treasury report approved with corrections by consensus

Bylaws discussion postponed until September. Membership vote tentatively scheduled for November

Thank you note received from Children's Receiving Home of Sacramento for AOF's \$400 donation (proceeds from silent auction)

Next board meeting Sun, Sept. 18, at 09:30 at the home of Ken Nahigian.

The Church/State Wall Then and Now

The following comments by Franklin Foer (senior editor at *The New Republic*) come from his review published in the *New York Times*, Sunday, July 24 of the book *Divided by God: America's Church-State Problem and What We Should Do About It* authored by Noah Feldman.

It's surprising to read about the sturdiness of the wall separating the state from religion in the Republic's early years, especially during the Second Great Awakening in the early 19th century. Congress, for instance, insisted on seven-day mail delivery. When Sabbatarians objected in 1828, it responded that the federal government couldn't properly worry about religious considerations. (Sunday delivery continued until 1912.) ...

Every time the secularists seem victorious, Feldman says, their opponents bounce back, in part, because of deft rhetorical thievery. They have embraced key secular phrases, fashioning a doctrine he calls "nonsectarianism." It holds that America should never promote a specific religion, but maintains that if the country shuns religiosity entirely, especially in education, it will crumble...

When Feldman tallies up the results of recent battles between the evangelicals and the secularists, he declares the contest an ugly draw...

At present the line between church and state is as jagged and unstable as the Russian-Polish border. What's more, the current arrangement seems calculated to offend everyone.

Newsletter Submissions

Submit your newsletter items to the *N&V* submissions editor, Kay Dickey, at this e-mail address:

frethnkr@mindspring.com or mail item to the AOF mailbox: PO Box 15182, Sacramento, CA 95851-0182.

Preference is given to material submitted online in a PC-compatible word processing format such as Word, Wordpad, or Notepad. (To submit, attach your file to the e-mail and send.)

AOF also welcomes succinct and substantive letters to the editor. Note: All letters are prioritized by AOF 's publishing criteria deriving from the organization's Statement of Purpose.

On Peace and Violence President's Thoughts By Don Knutson

I attended the "Cindy Doesn't Speak For Me" caravan stop at the KFBK studios to counter-demonstrate against the pro-war zealots who were on their way to harass Cindy Sheehan in Crawford, Texas. Join-

ing us were George and Dee Ann Heath, the pacifist couple who, according to a story in *The Bee*, experienced their three sons enlisting in the Army with two of them currently serving in Iraq.

As a non-parent, I have no basis to pass judgment upon their success as parents, but I do want to comment on pacifism.

In my early teen years, I was what you could call a punk, constantly getting into fights. I accepted it as my culture. I found violence to be exciting but never fun. The process

of maturation and my acceptance of rational logic and reason as my exclusive guides in life allowed me to develop what is now a strong repellant stand against violence.

Earlier this year within two weeks

of one another, a middleaged man in Sacramento and a teenager in Oakland were killed by a single punch to the face. This made me think of what level of violence can be acceptable when something so common

can be so lethal. After all, we've all been socialized by the old western movies' barroom brawls where most everyone survives numerous punches to the face.

So the question for non-pacifists is: On the linear spectrum between complete non-violence and a punch to the face, what level of violence is tolerable to you?

Censorship Today

(Continued from page 1)

As a contemporary example of how people can work to censor books, when I went to pick up banned books for Freethought Day 2004's banned books table, the woman at the front desk expressed gratitude at what we were doing. During the subsequent discussion, she remarked that individuals frequently check out controversial books and fail to return them. By doing so, they may keep the book off library shelves for months.

AOF general meetings offer free food and beverages, literature, merchandise for sale, camaraderie, and a postmeeting dinner for those interested. We look forward to seeing you there!

—Submitted by Kevin Schultz

Newsletter Freebie Policy

We'll be pleased to send one free newsletter to any person upon request, but after that time, please subscribe to AOF's newsletter for only \$12 per year. Or, better yet, why not become a member? That way, you'll get our newsletter FREE as part of your membership!



Freethought Day Sunday, October 9

We're on the Web! www.rthoughtsrfree.org/aof.htm

September Calendar of Events

AOF General Meeting Sunday September 11, 2:30 PM

Freethought Day 2005 Planning Committee Saturday, September 10, 10:30 AM

Movie Social Friday, September 16, 7 PM

AOF Board meeting Sunday, September 18, 9:30 AM

Freethought Day Sunday, October 9, 2:30 PM

AOF meetings are open to the public and are generally held on the second Sunday of the month, from 2:30 - 5 PM at the Sierra 2 Community Center, Room 10. Note: The months of February and October are exceptions, since AOF co-produces two public education events: (1) an outdoor faire in October - "Sacramento's Freethought Day" (10/9/05), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (2/12/06]. Watch the newsletter for details.

Directions to AOF's General Meetings

The Sierra 2 Center is located at 2791 24th Street in Sacramento, just south of Broadway and the Department of Motor Vehicles. Visitors are welcome. Parking is available on the street or in the rear, off 4th Avenue. AOF Board meetings are held at alternating sites, so please inquire about the location. For AOF's 24-hour recorder, call 447-3589. Leave your name and a number (repeat for clarity) and someone will phone back to answer your questions about AOF.

