

# AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

November 2009

## Special Points of Interest

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America's Free Speech  
Martyr, by Ken Nahigian  
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November General Meet-  
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## Sunday, November 8, 1:30-4:00 p.m. November AOF Meeting Welcomes El Porvenir Founder Carole Helper

AOF is honored to present our November speaker: Carole Harper, founder of El Porvenir. For 20 years this organization that has made a true difference for remote, impoverished Nicaraguan villages, supporting community-initiated water, sanitation and reforestation projects. Carole recently returned to the United States after a years-long residency in Nicaragua; she now lives in Davis. Her talk will focus at the long-term positive and negative consequences of the 1979 Nicaraguan revolution within the context of Crane Brinton's "Anatomy of Revolution." Brinton's book models revolutions on social cycles where a post-revolutionary nation moves away from the Old Order to the installation of a moderate regime, then to a radical one. In this context, Carole will profile four revolutions, including the French and American. From



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## Cesar Chavez Park

## Freethought Day 2009 Recap

By Bev Church, President, AOF; Chairperson, Freethought Day Committee

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Freethought Day 2009 was great fun and a remarkable success! In spite of a last minute change of venue to Cesar Chavez Plaza and an obstinate mayor/council, we persevered. As it turns out, most folks liked the new venue much better than Waterfront Park. Sixteen groups (including AOF) and many individual donors supported our effort. We even had college groups tabling this year!

It is difficult to select "the" highlight of the day. There were many. Our featured speaker, Herb Silverman,



Herb Silverman, president of Secular Coalition for America, speaks at Freethought Day 2009

# Freethought Day Photos

Submitted by Ruth Rezos



## AOF Board (2009)

**President:** Beverly Church

**Board Chair:** Don Knutson

**Vice President:** Mynga Futrell

**Secretary:** Jillian Stanley

**Treasurer:** Ken Nahigian

**Directors at large:**

Steve Campbell, Debora Smith, Jillian Stanley

## AOF Standing Committees

All AOF members are urged to volunteer in the organization. There are openings in every committee listed here. Please contact the chair or coordinator of any area of interest to you to learn details of getting involved. We would love to have your participation! Phone AOF 916-447-3589 or e-mail [aofboard@aofonline.org](mailto:aofboard@aofonline.org) for direct contact to relevant personnel.

### Programs and Events Committee

Program Planning (Team Coordinator, Debora Smith)

Meeting Matters / Logistics (Team Coordinator, Open)

Social Activities (Team Coordinator, Open)

### Membership Committee

Members Tracking (Team Coordinator, Ken Nahigian)

"Freethought Friends" (Team Coordinator, Jillian Stanley)

Outreach / Recruiting (Team Coordinator, Steve Campbell)

### Communications Committee

Beverly Church, Chair

AOF News Team (newsletter editor, events editor, public editor, postmaster, webmaster)

### Education, Activism and Service Committee

Service Projects Coordinator: Don Knutson

Education/Action Coordinator: Mynga Futrell

### Freethought Day 2010: Date to be announced

Beverly Church, Chair. (Save the date! – It's a celebration of reason and church/state separation)

### Darwin Day 2010: Sunday, February 7

Mynga Futrell and Bronda Silva, Co-Chairs

(Save the date! – It's a celebration of science and humanity)

## AOF Voluntariat

### Affiliation Liaisons

Mynga Futrell (AAI)

Kevin Schultz (AA)

Beverly Church (AHA/HAGSA)

Hank Kocol (CSH)

### AOF News Team

Newsletter Editor: Kevin Schultz

Postmaster: Jerry Sloan

Webpeoples: Pat Kelley, Robert Poeschel, Kevin Schultz  
(Openings for Events Editor and Public Editor)

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## Cesar Chavez Park Freethought Day Photos, Cont.



### AOF Program Continuation

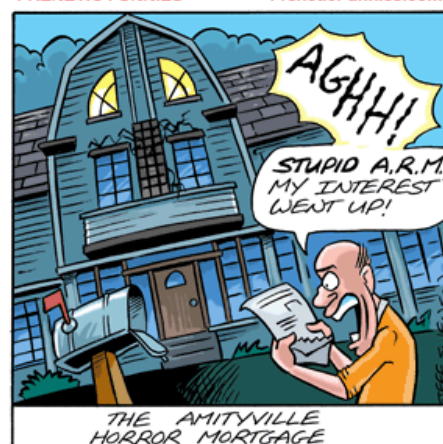
(Continued from page 1)

her involvement in Nicaragua over the years, she will offer perspectives and political insights into the continuing influences from the 1979 revolution.

In Spanish, "El Porvenir" means "the future." This is the second time that AOF has hosted a speaker from this visionary organization (the first was almost ten years ago). Come to our November meeting to hear the exciting story of what has unfolded in that decade. Then visit the El Porvenir website, <http://www.elporvenir.org>.

FRENETIC FUNNIES

FreneticFunnies.com



### 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 maintains 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 of atheism and the acceptance of atheists in our community. Through educational programs, projects, and publications, AOF will extend secular perspectives, including the separation of religion and government and the right to think and speak freely on these perspectives.*

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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.

## Historical Figures Series

# America's Free Speech Martyr

By Ken Nahigian

### *America's Free Speech Martyr*

*We honestly believe Christianity to be false, to be the greatest sham in the world, without truth in its history, without loveliness in its doctrines, without benefit to the human race.*  
- D.M. Bennett

In America the Golden Age of Free-thought had one face before the others. It was DeRobigne Mortimer Bennett. For the name alone, he deserved points.

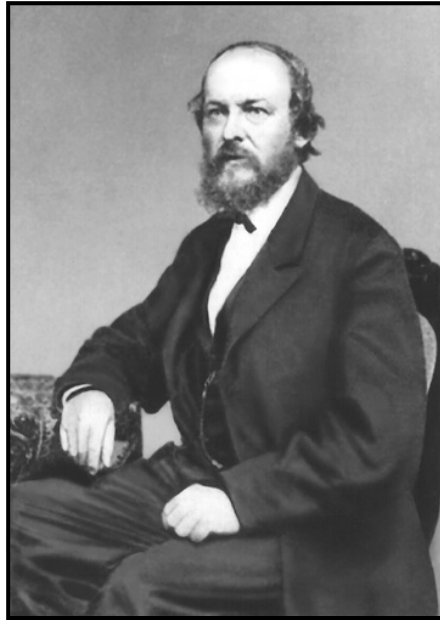
Born December 23, 1818, in Springfield, New York, he was 15 when he joined the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing—the Shakers, so called for their trembling, ecstatic dances. For 13 years he served the sect as herbalist, physician and scribe. Part of his duty was to record "divine and inspired" messages received in the so-called Era of Manifestations.

The Shakers were, in fact, just one facet of the Second Great Awakening, a revival sweeping the English world then (the First was in the 1730s-1740s), which had caught up the callow Bennett. Near mid-century, as the revival lost steam, the Shakers began to lose younger members, likely due to their rule of strict celibacy. Bennett was one. He eloped with a Shaker schoolteacher, Mary Wicks, in 1846. Friends were shocked, but perhaps not too shocked.

Ex-revivalists tend to settle into a kind of easy-going, ambient faith, wide but not too deep. Not Bennett; he had a restless mind and followed it doggedly. He soon found the writings of Voltaire, Thomas Paine and other "infidels." For the next 27 years, as the couple moved from town to town in pursuit of their pharmaceutical business, Bennett read and studied, crystallized doubts, and grew into an ardent skeptic. In 1873, while in Paris, Illinois, he argued with local ministers about the practical efficacy of prayer. When local newspapers refused to print some of his "infidel" letters, Bennett responded characteristically. He began his own journal. It was *The Truth Seeker*.

Later that year Bennett moved to New York City. From there he parlayed his magazine into America's best-known,

most controversial voice of reform. At the peak, readership approached 50,000, and included Mark Twain, Clarence Darrow and Col. Robert G. Ingersoll. "We embrace," declared Bennett, "... Liberals, Free Religionists, Rationalists, Spiritual-



*D.M. Bennett circa 1873, the year he founded *The Truth Seeker*.*

ists, Unitarians, Friends, Infidels, Free-thinkers and in short all who care to think and judge for themselves." The National Liberal League (founded in 1876) adopted *The Truth Seeker* as its official weekly journal.

No surprise, Bennett soon drew the ire of Anthony Comstock, the moral crusader, who was also in New York. Comstock vilified Bennett; Bennett ridiculed Comstock and his supporters. In 1877, Bennett went too far. An angry Comstock, acting in his capacity as a "special Post Office agent," arrested Bennett for mailing an "obscene" pamphlet on marsupial reproduction and a tract entitled "An Open Letter to Jesus Christ." Robert Ingersoll interceded; charges were dropped. But the next year Comstock had Bennett arrested again for selling a fairly pedestrian free love essay titled *Cupid's Yokes*. (Note, "free love" did not mean casual sex, simply the idea of marriage based on personal commitment rather

than legal constraint. In the day, it was a shocking idea.)

A four-day obscenity trial followed. Hyped by the *New York Sun* as "one of the most important of the day," it was in fact a sham. The judge took a standard of evidence that let the prosecution pull isolated passages out of context. Convicting the elderly Bennett, the court fined him \$300 and sentenced him to 13 months hard labor at the Albany Penitentiary. According to a *Washington Capitol* reporter, the ruling "surpassed anything of the sort since Pontius Pilate, and would make it dangerous to mail a bible or a copy of Shakespeare to anyone."

Among freethinkers and liberals it was a *cause célèbre*. Bennett drew strong defenders, including Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Ingersoll. Even the Shakers called him "an illustrious martyr, suffering from acts of the most devilish bigotry of our day." (Despite his apostasy, Bennett had kept an affection for the Shakers, and they for him.) President Hayes received a petition for pardon with over 200,000 signatures. Alas, Comstock's supporters were stronger, louder, and politically better heeled. Hayes demurred. Bennett went to prison.

Next year, a sick and broken Bennett emerged to find a hero's welcome. His last adventure was a world tour and a set of articles called *An Infidel Abroad and A Truth Seeker Around The World*. But he never recovered. Soon after coming home, on December 6, 1882, he died. Friends raised a monument with the motto, "When The Innocent Is Convicted, The Court Is Condemned."

*The Truth Seeker* carried on. Despite a strange history and some very curious ups and downs, not all of them pretty, it survives today at <http://www.truthseeker.com/>, the "oldest free-thought publication in America." Bennett might not recognize it. The last print edition was in 2004. But deep in the page or behind the sparkling pixels you will hear his voice, irreverent, bellicose and wild, doubting and debating, demanding independence, not just for nations or for states, but for women and men, for each mind and each heart.



## Cesar Chavez Park

# Freethought Day Writeup

**By Bev Church, President, AOF; Chairperson, Freethought Day Committee**

*(Continued from page 1)*

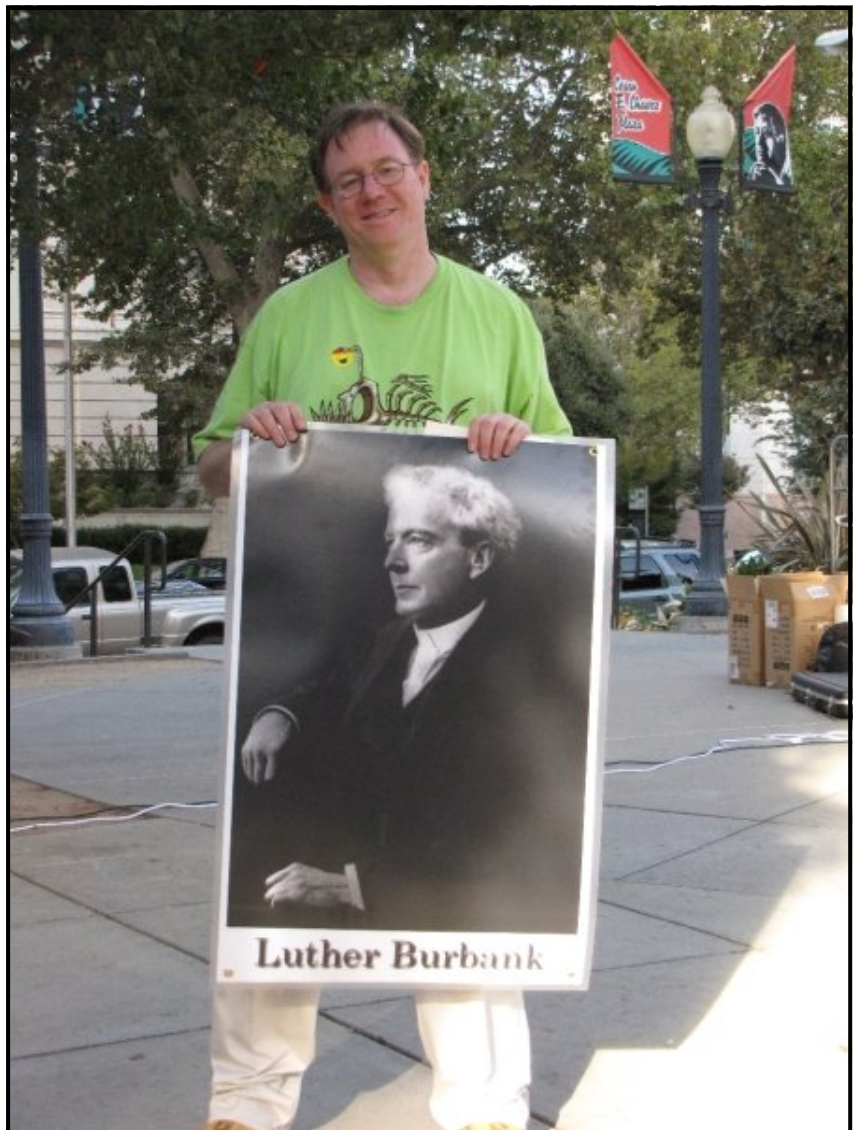
PhD, president of the Secular Coalition for America (SCA) [www.secular.org](http://www.secular.org), delivered an inspiring speech. So much so, that former AOF president, Paul Storey, presented Herb with a \$1000 donation for SCA on behalf of Freethought Day. While inducting Luther Burbank into our Freethought Gallery, Brian Jones revealed some surprising facts about Burbank – not the least of which is that in response to the Scopes Trial, in 1926 he made a public declaration that he is “an infidel” and that, in California, Arbor Day is celebrated on Luther Burbank’s birthday. The music kept the day lively and the comedian and Cleo Kocol had many of us in stitches. And, Mike Newdow led the committee in one of his original songs (I like to call it an anthem), Liberty and Justice for All.

And, we had a setback. For the past five years, we have requested and received from the mayor of Sacramento, Heather Fargo, a Freethought Day Proclamation. The current mayor, Kevin Johnson, however, was not so accommodating and our request was denied. In an effort to make lemonade out of lemons, I issued a press release and Sacramento News and Review reporter, Cosmo Garvin, did a nice job of reporting the story. Please check it out and let Mr. Garvin and his editor know how much you appreciate his having reported this. <http://www.newsreview.com/sacramento/content?oid=1299380#>

The dedicated Freethought Day Committee puts in much time and energy while remaining cheerful, creative, and flexible. I cannot thank them enough. But, I can name them here (in alpha order): Mynga Futrell, Lynne Greenwood, Tom Ikelman, Brian Jones, Ken Nahigian, Robert Poeschel, Ruth Rezos, and Debora Smith, and our photographer, Mario Sandri. Thank you all so much. Because of you, this event was a success and we met our . . .

### Education Goals

- Promote accurate understanding of the heritage of liberty of conscience
- Raise public consciousness regarding secular governance (legal neutrality)
- Educate the public regarding the contributions of freethought and freethinkers in advancing human rights and in establishing and preserving a religion/government separation in the United States



*Brian Jones inducts Luther Burbank into the Freethought Gallery*

*(Continued on page 7)*

# AOF Subscription / Membership Form

**Mail to: AOF, PO Box 15182, Sacramento CA 95851-0182 (Attn: Membership)**

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. # \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP + 4 \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address (please print!) \_\_\_\_\_

## Membership Level (please circle one):

Patron (\$50)      Family (\$30)      Individual (\$20)      Low-income (\$10)

**Note: Membership does not include a newsletter subscription**

## Newsletter subscription:

\_\_\_ Send my printed newsletter by postal mail (\$12 extra)

\_\_\_ Send my newsletter by email (*Free!*) – my email address is above

**Additional Donation:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Total enclosed:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*AOF is a 501(c)(3) Educational Association – Dues & Donations are tax-deductible as*

*permitted by law. Non-members may receive the AOF Newsletter (same rate - \$12 printed, free via email).*

☐ Please check here if you do NOT want your name on lists occasionally provided to groups similar to AOF.

☐ Please check here if you DO want to be an AOF Activist (e-mail address required).

## AOF Bylaws Amendment Proposal

## November General Meeting Announcement

There will be a vote for AOF members at the November meeting regarding a proposed change to the AOF bylaws related to term limits. Last year AOF members voted to strike the sentence pertaining to director term limits which was added when the bylaws were amended in 2005. The AOF board has approved the following new wording for term limits:

Directors having served three consecutive years shall then be ineligible to serve for a period of one year. No more than two directors may be deemed ineligible in a given year. If more than two members have served three or more consecutive years, the member(s) remaining eligible to hold office will be subject to approval by the board of directors.

The new wording will allow for a transition to the term limit requirement without undue disruption of the board's function.

*Quick  
Quote*

*If there is no struggle, there is no progress.*

— *Frederick Douglass*

”

(Continued from page 5)  
and our:

### Community Goals

- Foster participation of organizations with mutual understanding of and support of the mission
- Present a positive image to the public
- Provide enjoyment for those in attendance
- Publicize freethought organizations

So, stay tuned for details about Freethought Day 2010, scheduled for October 10, 2010. Meanwhile, remember to **Stay Curious!**



*Michael Newdow presents an original tune about the Lodi City Council debacle*

### Newsletter Submissions

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

**[newsletter@aofonline.org](mailto:newsletter@aofonline.org)**

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

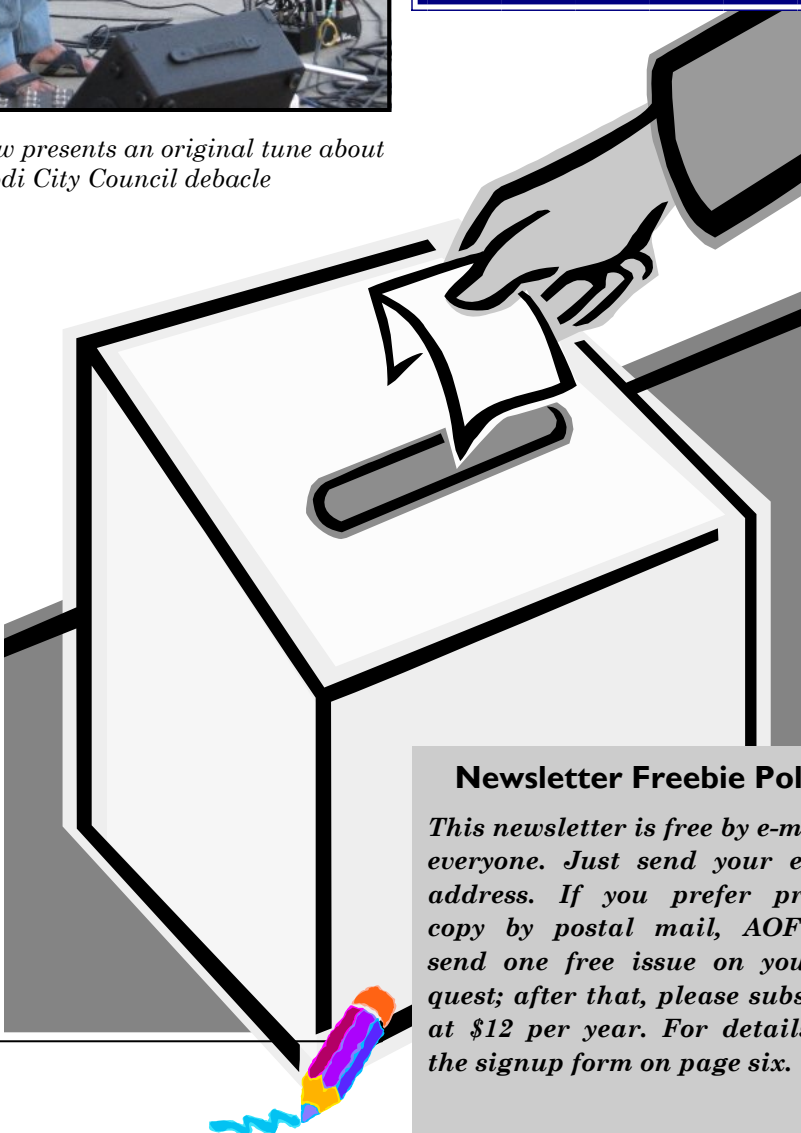
Preference is given to material in a PC-compatible word processing format such as Word, Wordpad, or Notepad. (To submit, attach your file to the e-mail and send.)

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.

## AOF 2010 Elections

*Consider Running to  
Support Freethought in  
the Greater Sacramento  
Community*

*Contact  
[board@aofonline.org](mailto:board@aofonline.org)  
For more info!*



### Newsletter Freebie Policy

*This newsletter is free by e-mail to everyone. Just send your e-mail address. If you prefer printed copy by postal mail, AOF will send one free issue on your request; after that, please subscribe at \$12 per year. For details, see the signup form on page six.*

**Want to send a letter to the Editor?**  
E-mail [newsletter@aofonline.org](mailto:newsletter@aofonline.org)!



P.O. Box 15182  
Sacramento, CA 95851-0182

*We're on the Web!*  
**aofonline.org**

## November/December Calendar of Events

AOF Dinner Social @ Kathmandu, 1728 Broadway.  
Contact: 419-2105 or shastaseer@sbcglobal.net

Thursday, November 5, 6:30 p.m.

**AOF November General Meeting**

**Sunday, November 8, 1:30-4:00 p.m.**

AOF Adopt-A-Highway Cleanup Event

Saturday, November 14, 8:00-10:00 a.m.

**AOF December General Meeting**

**Sunday, December 13, 1:30-4:00 p.m.**

Joint AOF/HAGSA HumanLight / Solstice Party

**Sunday, December 20, 1:00-5:00 p.m.**

AOF Davis Community Meals Event

**Tuesday, December 29, 4:00-7:00 p.m.**

*AOF meetings are open to the public and are generally held on the second Sunday of the month, from 1:30 - 4 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 fair in October - "Sacramento's Freethought Day" (Oct 2010), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (2010-02-07). 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.

