

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

September 2010

Sunday, September 12, 1:30-4:00 p.m. Kel Munger on “Armageddon”

Special Points of Interest

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From the mega-best-selling “Left Behind” novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins to films like *2012* and *I am Legend*, the end of the world fascinates us. While the idea of apocalypse is ancient, conservative American Christianity has refined it to a gory, glorious epic, then exported it, with implications for the environment and international relations, not to mention the economy. What is it that leads us toward apocalypse? On September 12, Kel Munger will reprise her recent presentation for the Sacramento City Freethinkers, and offer theories, including her favorite: that Armageddon is true believers’ big chance to yell “f*ck you!” at a contemporary American culture they cannot master.



(Continued on page 2)

AOF in October

Coming in October: Sacramento’s 9th Annual Freethought Day

Do *not* go to the Sierra 2 Center for the October AOF general meeting. AOF will not be there. Instead we will join hands with other local freethought and humanist groups to bring you the **9th Annual Sacramento Freethought Day**.

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Sacramento’s Freethought Day is a local annual festival of **reason, freethought and church-state separation**, open to the public. It is an opportunity for us to celebrate values and freedoms we too-often take for granted today, but which were once seen as radical or outlandish, and to commemorate the independent thinkers who led us to a policy of governmental neutrality in matters of faith and conscience.

Sacramento’s 9th Annual Freethought Day Fair, tentatively slated for early to late afternoon of Sunday, October 10, will go forward as a joint activity of local freethought, humanist and independent-minded groups. As ever it will feature speakers, live music, entertainment, tablers and vendors, an education expo, and children’s activities.

Specifics are still in planning. More next month. If you would like to help, please

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Kel Munger is a writer and editor at the *Sacramento News & Review*. Her journalism has won awards from the California Newspaper Publishers Association. She has also won prizes and honors for her poetry and fiction, including a Pearl Hogrefe Fellowship. She is the author of *The Fragile Peace You Keep: Poems* (New Rivers Press, 1998), and her first novel is currently under consideration at Southeast Missouri State University Press. Kel Munger has been a recovering Jehovah's Witness for some time now.

As usual, we invite AOF members to bring snacks (finger foods only) for the Hospitality Table.

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contact the steering committee at freethought-day-committee@googlegroups.com.

Admission will be free as always, time: noonish to late afternoon. The site as of press date is unconfirmed.

Come join us, bring your free minds and hearts.

For additional information, please see the Freethought Day web site, at <http://freethoughtday.org>

September 18, 8:00-10:00 a.m. AOF Highway Clean-Up By Don Knutson

Just three AOF volunteers answered the call to cleanup the fabled two-mile stretch of Highway 99 north of Elkhorn Blvd. on Saturday, July 24 which AOF has been cleaning for the last 15 years. Wendy Hoffspiegel and AOF members Don Knutson and Carolyn Lignos collected some ten bags of unspeakables recklessly but reliably discarded by unknown miscreants for ultimate collection by CalTrans. We will return to the scene on Yom Kippur, Saturday, September 18 this time at 8a.m. in deference to the potential heat and to once again do the honorable deed of correcting other's mistakes for the benefit of nature.

AOF Board (2010)

President: Beverly Church

Vice President: Mynga Futrell

Secretary: Jillian Stanley

Treasurer: Ken Nahigian

Directors at large: David Flanders, Paul Geisert, Ken Nahigian, Mario Sandri

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 for direct contact to relevant personnel.

Programs and Events Committee

Program Planning (Team Coordinator, *Open*)

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

Building / Reason House Committee

Beverly Church, Chair

Paul Geisert, Mynga Futrell, Mario Sandri

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 2011: Date to be announced

Mynga Futrell and Bronda Silva, Co-Chairs

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

AOF Voluntariat

Affiliation Liaisons

Mynga Futrell, Atheists Alliance International (AAI), <http://atheistalliance.org/>

Kevin Schultz, American Atheists (AA), <http://atheists.org/>

Beverly Church, American Humanist Association (AHA), <http://americanhumanist.org/>

Hank Kocol, Council for Secular Humanism (CSH), <http://secularhumanism.org/>

AOF News Team

Newsletter Editor: Kevin Schultz

Postmaster: Jerry Sloan

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

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AOF Family News

By Ken Nahigian

1. The National Center for Science Education has published **Cleo Kocol's** book review of Philip Appleman's 2009 poetry anthology, **Darwin's Ark**. The review appears in Volume 30 of *NCSE Reports*. You can also see it at <http://bit.ly/9S5qlo>.
2. From the July 31st Sacramento Bee, featuring **Rena Davonne**:

A long-neglected building in downtown's Mansion Flats neighborhood is set to come to life next month with the opening of a coffee shop, child care center, and yoga and belly dance training studios.

"It's kind of glorious," Bay Area developer John Striklin says of the building at **14th and E** streets that he bought three years ago, gutted and then remodeled to resemble its original 1940s look.

He's named it the Shine Building, after its first occupant, cash register salesman William Shine.

The corner location will house

Shine, a coffeehouse, art gallery and music spot.

Owner Rena Davonne says the place will guarantee "a fresh cup of coffee every time."

How will she do that? "I can't tell you. It's a secret," says Davonne, who ran a business in the same building in the 1990s.

Not a secret is her plan for "grass-roots" entertainment, with local bands of all sorts performing regularly. Also providing entertainment on the stage: Shine employees.

"Every (one) has to perform on stage," Rena Davonne says.

Add this unusual wrinkle: Davonne plans karaoke nights featuring musical theater tunes.

Ideal for the folks dropping by after an evening at the nearby Music Circus.

Read more: <http://bit.ly/9QIPLG>

3. AOF member David Flanders submits the following news:

Sacramento's 2nd largest circulation newspaper the **Sacramento News and Review** in its August issue featured a front page article about the brights, "The Bright side" (link: <http://bit.ly/aHRnYC>).

For those who don't claim to have supernatural neurons in their brain (soul), and are thus free of supernatural and mystical elements, there is a name for their worldview: bright.

Originally the August meeting was going to feature a truth-seeker video, but due to an equipment problem with the projector, that did not occur. Instead **Paul and Mynga** shared an in depth analysis of the brights. On the bright website Vlad from Romania said "since the word atheist doesn't imply a naturalistic worldview, I would be happy and proud to call myself a bright."

The brights website (<http://www.the-brights.net>) is today a catalyst in promoting fellowship for nonbelievers around the world. That would seem to make for a brighter day...A happier era than the 1000 year reign of Europe by the church of the Pope and virgin Mary. Some described that time as the dark ages.

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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

The God Machine

By Ken Nahigian

John Murray Spear was not your typical clergymen, far away from it. He loved science and God in about equal measure. His restless, idiosyncratic mind was a dance of technology and spirits, whirling and meshing like gears, running together like a molten rainbow, into a vision of purest transcendence.

Born in Boston in 1804, Spear grew up in the Universalist Church of America. He was ordained at age 26 and took a congregation in Barnstable, Massachusetts. He became an outspoken social reformer, an abolitionist and advocate for temperance and women's rights. This could invite trouble—in 1844, after delivering an anti-slavery speech, a mob beat Spear senseless, invalidating him for some months. In Boston he also operated a station of the "Underground Railroad" to help escaped slaves flee to Canada. But at age 48, abruptly, he left it all for Spiritualism, the new-age movement of the day.

Spear began to channel messages from "the Association of Electrizers," a spirit fraternity. Among them were Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Emanuel Swedenborg and Benjamin Rush. They had a gift for mankind, announced Spear: a new technology for spiritual freedom and social utopia. The gift would take the form of a new machine, a marvelous mechanistic messiah. It was the New Motive Engine.

Spear gathered a technical team and set to work in High Rock, Massachusetts, then a Spiritualist hotbed. On the team were editors of two spiritualist newsletters, who chronicled the project, and a mysterious, fey-like woman, so-called the "Mary of the New Dispensation" (possibly Spear's wife).

Directed by the spirits, Spear revealed the plans piecemeal. Over nine slow months the Engine took form, a mind-boggling, anthropomorphic wonder with an iron skeleton, steel arms and spheres, a brain of zinc and copper plates, insulating membranes, antennae to pull power from the sky, grounding rods for legs, a flywheel, and a torso of wires, coils, chemicals and magnets, all machined to precision. The cost was near \$2,000, an outrageous sum for the day. Yet this was merely a prototype, a working model, as Spear told his eager crew. The true Motive Engine would be 10 times larger.

In 1854 it was complete. Donning a dramatic robe of

gemstone crystals and metal strips, Spear fell into a trance in order to establish a psychic "umbilical" link to the Engine. Meanwhile the New Mary declared herself pregnant. On June 29, in front of witnesses, she lay next to the robot child, convulsing in symbolic labor. Then, solemnly, she rose and placed her hands upon it.

It began to move.

"The Thing Moves," screamed the *New Era*, a popular spiritualist newsletter; "The time of deliverance is at hand!" Some were less sure. The motion was feeble, according to witnesses, perhaps that of a newborn infant, but the source was uncertain—was the New Mary simply shifting it around with her hands? The team decided that relocation would invest the cybernetic brain-child with new vigor. They moved it to Randolph, New York. Here the New Motive Engine would surely find life, to become a port to the Spirit World. Unfortunately the experiment went no further—reportedly, a superstitious mob, inflamed by local Baptist preachers, gathered, broke into the storage shed, and smashed it. And so we will never know. (To our deep loss, no photos or blueprints survived.)



Portrait of John Murray Spear

Crestfallen, Spear and the New Mary parted ways. Spear went on to wed Caroline Hinkley, a women's rights activist, and sired a human child with her. He remained in the news, still guided by the Association of Electrizers. With their tutelage he developed a doctrine of emancipation, universal suffrage, communal living and free love. He and his wife toured England for six years, lecturing and holding séances, but with muted success. They then moved to California to work for women's rights and socialism.

Spear continued to work and preach until 1872, when the Electrizers delivered one last message. He had done enough. It was time to retire.

John Murray Spear died in October 1887, in Philadelphia, and was buried in the Mount Moriah Cemetery. Few remember him. Yet he was at the least, surely, one of great folk-artists and showmen of his day.

In 2008 a Brooklyn-based alternative-rock band, Piñataland, produced a song about his God Machine, titled "The Dream of the New Mary". Hear it at their website, <http://www.pinataland.com/>.

Building A Better Future for Sacramento Takes All of Us!

Reason House: Considering Our Freethought Footprint

By Mynga Futrell

Last month I outlined some potential benefits of our having a “Reason House” in Sacramento to serve the freethought community. That article focused *solely* on likely advantages to AOF and its “sister” organization, HAGSA. (Both are formally organized and long-established nonprofit groups.)

Here, I’ll shift focus and begin to consider whether ownership of a building - one that could serve as a community center - might not also be a useful change within a broader context.

Let’s consider the local “freethought scene” (or “Community of Reason”). In addition to AOF and HAGSA, it includes a variety of loosely organized groups. Some have been around for quite a while. For example, a monthly discussion (Sacramento’s Organization for Rational Thinking, or SORT) has generated a loyal following.

More recent arrivals on the scene, aided by the organizing help of the Internet and Meetup.com, have created social gatherings and permitted groups to pursue informal activities. By far the largest of these assemblies is the Freethinkers, Atheists, & Nonbelievers group, with its several hundred “FANs”, but there are also meetings of skeptics and an “action group” of Brights. Campus clubs are continually coming and going under varied names (the challenge has been sustaining them). There is a “Church of True Science” modeled on religious gatherings, too.

Participants from the varied groups mostly conduct

their own affairs, with some overlapping of participants. With a few exceptions, the groups’ activities (that is, the benefits of these activities) are primarily directed toward their own memberships. Consequently, freethought in all its rainbow of varieties is essentially invisible to other citizens in the Sacramento area.

Once in a while, participants from several of the freethought groups may come together to put on an event that is mildly visible to the broader community (e.g., erecting a billboard one time, or conducting an annual Freethought Day Fair). However, for the most part, there really is no “Freethought Footprint” anywhere in the city. The public existence is on websites. All in all, too little goes on that has any notable or noticeable or memorable consequence.

Furthermore, so much of what does go on is centered on the freethinkers themselves.

Oh, occasionally a skeptics group will hold an event for the public (perhaps with an eminent speaker), but nothing much takes place that is largely viewed by other citizens or the media as a positive and sustained contribution to the broader community. (Darwin Day, though staffed primarily by freethinkers, is planned and conducted as a community event by and for “science enthusiasts”.)

When freethinkers as such do garner notice in the larger arena, it is almost always in the context of dissent to some sort of intrusion of religion into what is seen to be as a secular situation (in violation of the Constitution’s Establishment Clause).

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Family News, continued:

A lively question and answer period occurred at the meeting. Upon hearing that many non believers in theocratic countries are achieving friendships with like minded people in their hometowns thanks to the brights website, one could sense joy and gratitude for Paul and Mynga’s work in making the movement a reality.

For more details on the AOF August meeting, see page seven for Ken Nahigian’s write-up.

Paul Geisert notes: “I have a response to the SN&R article (there are a number of errors). When on the article page, look at comment 27, posted 08/07/2010 7:30PM by user Bright1. It would be nice if you could include a “heads up” that the comment is the 27th in the listing of comments. It is really hard to read since they published all comments as a single line of text, and my response is rather large. If you want, you could say anyone can email me and I will send them a clean copy (the-brights@the-brights.net). Thank you.”

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-deductable 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).

Video Cameras and Neurons

New Digital Morality At Some Churches

By David Flanders

Some churches in America are installing video cameras to stop thieves—finding them to be a more effective deterrent than posting the ten commandments. This “new morality” seems to be spreading to Burger King restaurants as well. As customers eat their family value meals, thieves fear the video camera (Big Brother) more than THE LORD. In the mind of thieves, making a living stealing stuff is much more difficult in the digital age than in the religious age of years past when Christianity ruled in Europe (when King Jesus ruled). It was so much easier to steal in the mist of an all seeing, all knowing sky-god...“It seemed like taking candy from a baby.”

Judge Moore in Alabama placed a stone version of the 10 commandments at a court house in the dead of night, also fearing video cameras witnessing his crime. Despite his prayers to his all powerful God, a video camera powered by 120 volts of electricity (less than all powerful) witnessed and reliably recorded the crime anyway.

Apparently the authorities valued the “witness of the video camera” more than Judge Moore’s Judea Christian Values. Possible they thought he was bearing false witness—violating one of the 10 commandments... If Judge Moore’s recollection of the God of the ten commandments is sustained by neurons in his brain (they require a few milliamps to store the information), than perhaps the video camera had an unfair advantage at using 120 volts. Also the camera had and an electronic video card that somehow is less able to lie.

Some churches in the future may take it a step further by installing a monitor so that the thief can see that his every move is being recorded by the video camera—providing the thief an outsiders view of himself. If Christians could view a brain scan of their brain lying to them self and see it from the perspective of an outsider, would it help them achieve less bias and more intellectual honesty? Who knows. Anyway, suppose someone decided to violate the first 4 of the 10 commandments by worshipping an imagined neuron in his brain, rather than the God of the bible. With sustained worship the believer may sense he possesses a supernatural all powerful neuron—one that his brain values more than the sky-god of the bible—a neuron more powerful and reliable than the on/off transistors of the video camera—a neuron that is never off—it is always on—it exists forever...eternal life!

Burger King would probably be happy to have him as a customer as long as he paid for his hamburger. Delegates of a Christian sky-god church corporation might be outraged that they no longer got church donations from him. Maybe they would conclude that it is not good for him to steal from God—one of the 10 commandments being—"thou shalt not steal".

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Charitable and service activity is miniscule or sporadic, or primarily an individual (rather than collective) affair. The concept of involving constructive interchanges with citizens at large in an ongoing basis just isn't on the radar. There are almost no examples of working with or serving or building bridges to those who think differently on matters of ultimate concern.

The longstanding inner-directedness and collective civic impotence of the constellation of freethinkers is, I believe, to a large extent a consequence of there not being any viable central place for idea sharing and substantive creative exchanges.

How much more might these groups do if they could have a Reason House community center?

Of course, much of the commitment and personal energy of participants that now goes to necessary logistics of locating and arranging space (sometimes free or borrowed, perhaps paid for) for gatherings and activities might be replaced by a set of logistical worries of building management and care. That is unquestionably so.

However, whereas thinking now is short-term, it could be long-term. Outer-directedness could blossom and impact could be made manifest. I firmly believe that ownership of property would increase the cohesiveness and productivity of those who see themselves as "belonging" to the freethought community.

But there, as yet, is no place of belonging. When will there be?

D.M. Bennett: The Truth Seeker

AOF August Meeting Recap

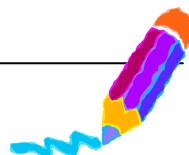
By Ken Nahigian

The August General Meeting, sadly, was a near-washout. A dozen AOF members and guests convened at the Sierra 2 Center hoping to watch *D.M. Bennett: The Truth Seeker*, the acclaimed documentary about the most famous and forgotten thinker of the Gilded Age in America. Technical difficulties (equipment failure) prevented the video showing. Fortunately Paul Geisert and Mynga Futrell then saved the day, entertaining and enlightening us with a report on The Brights (<http://www.the-brights.net/>) and the story-behind-the-story of the recent feature article in *Sacramento News and Review* ("The Bright Side," August 5, 2010, <http://www.newsreview.com/sacramento/content?oid=1468499>).

After that the meeting disbanded in favor of the post-meeting potluck at the home of Wayne and Gloria Luney, where participants all had a good and tasty time. AOF apologies to all. We may host another showing of the D.M. Bennett documentary at a later time—once we resolve the equipment failure.

For more details on the August AOF meeting, see Dave Flanders' write-up on page three, in the Family News section.

Want to send a letter to the Editor?
E-mail newsletter@aofonline.org



Newsletter Submissions

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

newsletter@aofonline.org

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

Preference is given to material in a word processing format. (To submit, attach your file to the e-mail and send.)

AOF 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.

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.



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

We're on the Web!
aofonline.org

September/October Calendar of Events

AOF Dinner Social: **Café Marika**, 2011 J Street (cash-only, no credit/debit). Contact: 419-2105 or shastaseer@sbcglobal.net

Thu, Sep 2, 6:30 p.m.

AOF September General Meeting

Sun, Sep 12, 1:30-4:00 p.m.

AOF Highway Cleanup

Sat, Sep 18, 8:00-10:00 a.m.

Freethought Day

Sun, Oct 10; Details TBA

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" (Feb 2011). 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.

