

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

March 2012

Special Points of Interest

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Tuesday, March 13,
7:00-9:30 p.m.

Margaret Downey: Everybody Has a Story

AOF is proud to present Margaret Downey, internationally known atheist and freethought leader, for the March general meeting.

A leader in the freethought movement for more than two decades, Margaret has an impressive list of accomplishments. She has served on the boards of many national organizations and has represented the interests of the non-theist community at United Nations conferences from New York to Madrid. She was president of Atheist Alliance International for two years, organizing two annual conventions and the creation of the annual Richard Dawkins Award. She founded the Anti-Discrimination Support Network, the Freethought Society in Philadelphia, and the Thomas Paine Memorial Committee. She has also contested a number of religious intrusions into government via demonstrations, protests, and contributions to lawsuits.

Margaret is no slacker. In her presentation at this AOF-sponsored event, she will
(Continued on page 3)



Coming up in April: Flying Spaghetti Monster Party! Sunday, April 8, 1:30 p.m., Roseville



It will be the 5th Annual Sacramento Flying Spaghetti Monster Party. What is a Flying Spaghetti Monster Party? Basically it's an excuse for a spaghetti feed.

But the "FSM" party also pokes gentle fun at Intelligent Design Creationists who insist a cosmic Intelligence simply had to have created this well-designed world. "Pastifarians" say it was the Flying Spaghetti Monster in his noodly omniscience. Open your heart to the FSM, and It will fill you with rich red sauce and garlic bread. Open to all local free-thinkers and anyone with a sense of humor. A miniscule door fee (\$5, chump change, look in your sock drawer) will cover costs, food & supplies. You will want to bring your own beverage. There will be singing, contests, meat spaghetti, vegan spaghetti, and cake. Cake! Come celebrate the Grand Designer with 'sketti. Optional: wear pirate garb if you can, or something piraty. Pirates are sacred to the FSM. Why? It is a mystery. (Oooo-WEEE-ooo) For location and contact, see page two....

(Continued on page 2)

AOF Line

By President Vincent Wales

For the past three decades, whenever I've been asked my religious beliefs by someone, I've almost always replied with either "I'm not religious" or, more likely, "I'm an atheist." And while both of these statements are true, neither is really an answer to the question. "Atheist" simply isn't much of a descriptor. It just indicates what you don't believe, but says nothing about what you do believe.

A frequent accusation by theists against us is, "Atheists don't believe in anything!" I think we'd all agree that this statement is inaccurate. But how to reply to it? Personally, I don't like the idea of defining myself by what I'm not. So what exactly do I believe?

That's a harder question to answer, and I don't have just one label I can slap on myself to explain my world view to people. I certainly have no need for "religion" in my life. I have no inner urge to feel reverence for something greater than myself. (Or reverence for myself, since we're also often accused of thinking we ourselves the be-all and end-all of everything.)

On the other hand, my unflinching reliance on skeptical thinking and the concept that humans can find the answers to their own problems plants me pretty firmly in the Secular Humanist camp. I certainly have no problems calling myself that, though I've never formally associated myself with a specifically humanist group.

My very real awe of nature and the cosmos gives me pagan and maybe even scientific pantheist leanings. In fact, I sometimes refer to myself as a "secular pagan." At least twice a year, you can find me at pagan events selling my books. The local pagan community has welcomed this non-believer as one of their own, while knowing I don't share their beliefs. In my experience, that's a rare thing in the religious universe.

When it comes right down to it, I'm a mutt, a mongrel mix of all of these, lying underneath the blanket label of atheism. It's a shame that "atheist" is a term that offends so many. I suspect many who are offended would be less so if they had an idea of what we did believe in. Maybe we should start telling them.

(Continued from page 1)

Location : The home of **Roberto Leibman, 108 Lost Oak Ct, Roseville, 916-786-9860**. This is a gated community; seek ye 'Leibman' in the gate's directory and the FSM will open the way for you. The house is at the foot of a steep driveway. The driveway will be open and a car available to taxi any who may need it.

Contact : Rachael at 916-548-4617 or David at 209-610-0651

AOF Board (2012)

President: Vincent Wales

Vice President: Mynga Futrell

Secretary: Jillian Stanley

Treasurer: Ken Nahigian

2012 AOF Board of Directors : Kristi Craven, David Flanders, Mynga Futrell, Ken Nahigian, Mario Sandri, Jerry Sloan, Vincent Wales

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.

Building / Reason House Committee

Vacant, Chair

Paul Geisert, Mynga Futrell, Mario Sandri

Freethought Day 2012: October 13 and 14

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

Darwin Day 2013: February, date TBD

Mynga Futrell and Bronda Silva, Co-Chairs

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

*The purpose of the organization,
AOF, is to promote the civic
understanding and acceptance of
atheists in our community.*

AOF Voluntariat

Affiliation Liaisons

Mynga Futrell, Atheist Alliance of America (AAA),

<http://atheistallianceamerica.org>

Jerry Sloan: American Atheists (AA), <http://atheists.org>; American Humanist Association (AHA), <http://americanhumanist.org>; Council for Secular Humanism (CSH), <http://secularhumanism.org>; and the Sacramento Coalition of Reason (Sac COR), <http://sacramento.unitedcor.org>

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ISSN: 1936-4229

AOF BloodSource ID#: 4857

AOF Federal Tax ID#: 68-0325762

AOF Voice Mail: 916-447-3589

Reason Rally in Washington D.C. March 24 event will celebrate secular values

Full details, including discount hotel reservations, speakers, and more:
<http://reasonrally.org>

What is the Reason Rally? The

Reason Rally is a movement-wide event sponsored by the country's major secular organizations. The intent is to unify, energize, and embolden secular people nationwide, while dispelling the negative opinions held by so much of American society... and having a damn good time doing it! It will be the largest secular event in world history. There will be music, comedy, great speakers, and lots of fun... and it's free!



The Reason Rally is being produced and run by the Reason Rally Coalition, a 501(c)(3) (pending) organization whose board consist of all the sponsoring organizations. There are two levels of sponsorship, the higher of which (8 organizations) will share equally in any profits generated by the event. In other words, your support benefits the movement on the whole, as well as the organizations that contributed the most to this free event.

When will the Rally be held? On March 24, 2012, from 10:00–4:00 p.m. at the National Mall, nontheists from all corners of the nation will descend on Washington, D.C. en masse to deliver the good news: “We’re huge, we’re everywhere, and we’re growing.”

Why are we doing this? Across America, in every city, every town, and every school, secularism is on the rise. Whether people call themselves atheists, agnostics, secular Humanists, or any of the other terms used to describe their god-free lifestyle, secularism is coming out of the closet. According to the 2008 American Religious Identification Survey (PDF), the percentage of people with no religious affiliation grew in all fifty states.

The purpose of this particular rally will be to advance secularism (in the broadest sense of the word) in society.

(Continued from page 1)

highlight her journey from being baptized Catholic to becoming an outspoken and proud leader in the nontheist community. Margaret notes how the human and emotional connection to freedom of thought has been ignored too long, so hopes her story of becoming an atheist activist will inspire and motivate others to tell their own journey stories so others can also recognize and make those important connections.

All who wish to make a difference for atheists and freethinkers will want to attend. Whether a freethinker or a friend & supporter of civic equality and justice for freethinkers, Margaret Downey will inspire you with her brand of activism!

Margaret's websites:

margaretdowney.com

friggatriskaidekaphobia.com

SecularCelebrations.com

Admission free as ever. Note, a raffle of restaurant gift cards (Hoppy Brewing Company, 6300 Folsom Blvd) will help cover hall and speaker expenses, so please bring just a few dollars for a good cause.

Atheists and Other Freethinkers



AOF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization. It is one of 50 member societies of the **Atheist Alliance of America** (“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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Print subscription \$12 per year, e-mail subscription free to all on request.

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.

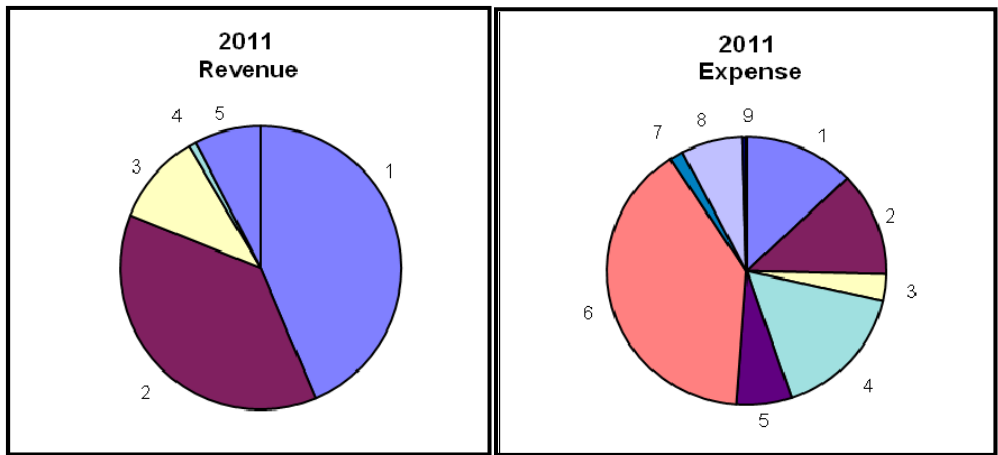
Historical "Figures" Series

AOF Financial Report, 2011

By Ken Nahigian

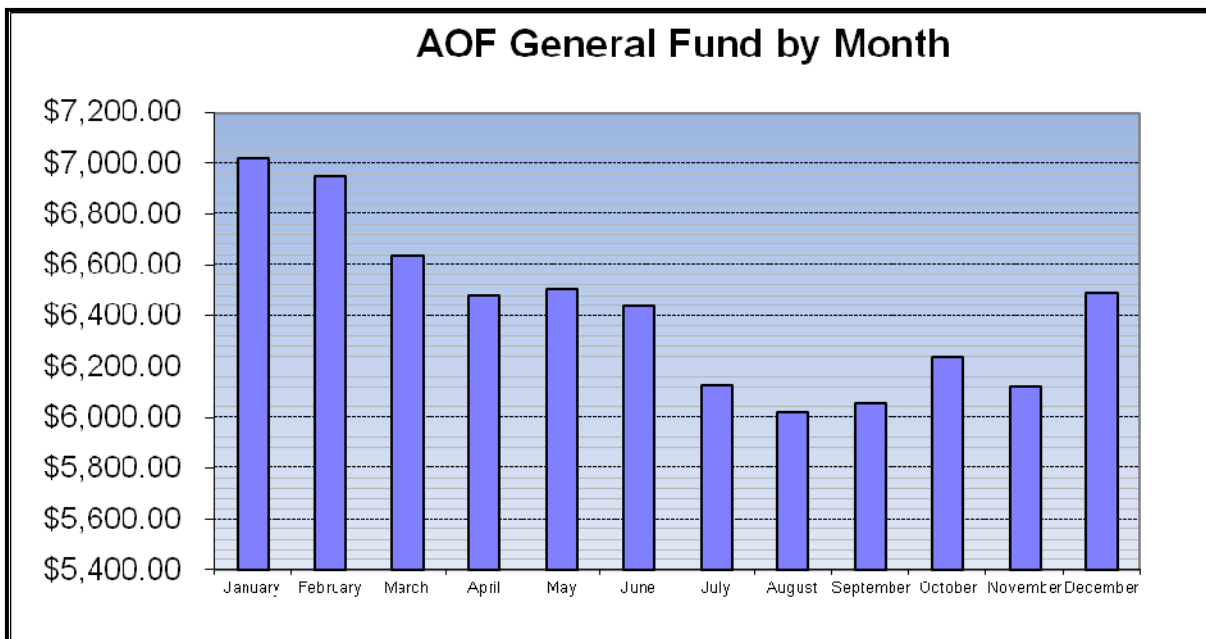
For loyal members, supporters and all readers of this newsletter, we present the AOF financial report for calendar year 2011.

In accordance with our policy of transparency to members and friends, AOF presents its 2011 financial report. Despite a slight decline in the general fund, financial footing remains sound. The "Reason House" Fund is secure, and recent months have seen a rise in income and membership, which we expect to see continue in 2012.



Revenue sources: (1) Dues & subscriptions; (2) Donations; (3) Sales; (4) Website; (5) Raffle

Expense sources: (1) Newsletter; (2) Voice-mail; (3) Speakers; (4) Merchandise purchase; (5) Outreach; (6) Room rent; (7) P.O. Box; (8) Administrative; (9) Taxes & fees



Find the full 2011 financial report on the AOF web site:
<http://www.aofonline.org/legal-documents/financial-reports.html>

Historical Figures Series

A Forgotten Freethinker: Charles Erskine Scott Wood

By Ken Nahigian

You may not know of him—if you do, you are the better. He sits in a 1931 Ansel Adams camera study, eyes gazing from a tornado of white hair and white beard, from skin-folds deep as moon-chasms or sea trenches, and they pierce you, they burrow, they sparkle, alive as this very moment. He is Charles Erskine Scott Wood, Oregon's freethinker and its sharpest pen.

Wood was wild, he was civilized, he was self-refuting—a paradox. In his complex life he was a soldier and pacifist, a reformer and cynic, a bon vivant and anarchist, a poet and bibliophile. He was all his own man. He had three distinct careers at least. Many loved him and some hated him, and on both sides that was fair enough. His circle of friends took in Clarence Darrow, Mark Twain, Margaret Sanger, Emma Goldman, Charlie Chaplain and John Steinbeck, to name just a few.

Born in Erie, Pennsylvania on February 20, 1852, the second of seven children, Wood's early years were nondescript. He attended the West Point Academy, where he sank into a kind of reptilian misery. He served in the Oregon Indian wars with little distinction. Then deep in the desert, amid the escarpments of cut glass and alkali flats like liquid pewter, something entered him and lit a fire. It was a "lean and stricken land," he said. His personal writings grew fraught, vivid, lyrical, almost Whitmanic. He attended Columbia University. By 1883 he had a Ph.D., a wife, a child, and a law degree. He was ready to quit the army.

In Portland, Oregon he started a law practice. Soon C.E.S. Wood ("too many initials," mused a local judge) was a local cultural maven. He founded the Portland library and art museum, helped establish its Rose Festival, and was a font of essays and poetry. Even in that land of individualists he stood out like a lightning flash, eccentric, polished, blunt, defiant and wildly graceful. "I come from the West," he said in 1902, "where ... we believe that the saloon and the theater has as good a right to be open on Sunday as the church and the school. I come from where we think that it is the right of every American to go to hell and be damned if he wants to. That is not humor—it is the truth."

In 1912, stormily, he resigned from the Oregon Bar when it refused to admit a black man. Then Wood began to write in

earnest. His first poetry collection was *The Poet in the Desert* (1915).

The elder gods are dead --
But still there shall be gods.

Dogwood delicately uplifts a sacrament;
Purple and yellow violets embroider a shrine.

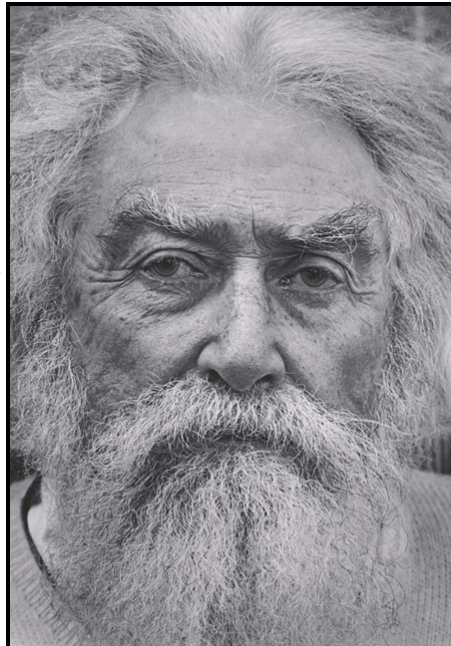
Even now a wren is praying,
Unseen and at a hidden altar.

Soon he drew fame and infamy, in particular for his books *Heavenly Discourse* (1927), *Too Much Government* (1931) and *Earthly Discourse* (1937). The *Discourse* books consisted of satirical, many thought anti-religious, dialogs. The humor was subdued and sardonic, but under the fragile skin was a kind of boiling anger which often felt like bathing in a flamethrower.

In 1939 he remarried under a fog of some scandal (actually, Clarence Darrow had introduced him to poet Sara Bard Field, who left her husband for him). Wood took his new family to California, to a retreat in Los Gatos, which they called "The Cats." After surviving an investigation by the HUAC (House Un-American Activities Committee), he died in Los Gatos, California on January 22, 1944, age almost 92.

By nature Charles Wood resisted categories—today we might call him a liberal libertarian, and he would probably snort at the lame, label-pasting term. But in fact, his reading of Jefferson, Thoreau and classical liberals had led him to oppose most limits to personal freedom. He favored "Right and Beneficial Use": the idea that land is for those who use it well, not for grantees, and not for their heirs. Government grants and privileges rankled his sense of justice. He raged against Prohibition and against the war machine that pushed the U.S. into the Philippines. He sometimes called himself a philosophical anarchist.

Sadly, time has swallowed Charles Wood, swallowed him like dark water, though his best work stood up with Mark Twain or Robert Ingersoll. He has a Facebook page—but doesn't everything?—and in Oregon he is still a kind of patron saint of the free spirit. His writings, far out of print, difficult to find even on the Internet, are out there if you look. A search is worth the while.



Charles Erskine Scott Wood
(1852-1944)

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).

(Continued from page 3)

Are we just going to use this opportunity to trash religion?

No. This will be a positive experience, focusing on all non-theists have achieved in the past several years (and beyond) and motivating those in attendance to become more active. While speakers have the right to say what they wish, the event is indeed a celebration of secular values.

What do you hope to achieve from this Rally?

We have three main goals:

1. To encourage attendees (and those who can't make it) to come out of the closet as secular Americans, or supporters of secular equality.
2. To dispel stereotypes – there is no one “True Atheist”. We will have non-theists from all political persuasions, ethnicities, genders, and backgrounds. We will show that there are secular Americans in every American demographic.
3. Legislative equality. Secular Americans can run for office and adequately represent theists, just as theists in office can represent their secular constituents proudly and openly. We deserve a seat at the table just like theists, and we hope this rally can put our values in the radar of American voters.

Who has sponsored the Rally?

American Atheists, American Humanist Association, The Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science, the United Coalition for Reason, the Center for Inquiry, the Stiefel Freethought Foundation, the Secular Student Alliance, the Freedom From Religion Foundation, the Foundation Beyond Belief, the Freethought Society, the National Atheist Party, The Brights, the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers, the Washington Area Secular Humanists, the Atheist Nexus.

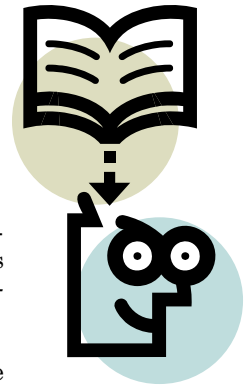
Who else from AOF plans to attend?

Contact AOF on page two of this publication to find out more details for coordinating with other like-minded local members

As a member society of several organizations sponsoring this event, the AOF board encourages members to attend and/or support this event.

Save the date! AU Sacramento to host author Katherine Stewart

By Ken Nahigian



Watch this space for an exciting event coming to your local Community of Reason. AU-Sacramento, the city chapter of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, hopes to host a talk by Katherine Stewart, author of *The Good News Club: The Christian Right's Assault on America's Children*.

The book is a fascinating and hair-raising account of efforts to convert children between the ages of 4 and 14 to a particular form of Christianity. No one is spared from their attentions, including Christians who do not share this particular religious ideology. Most chillingly, the Good News Clubs are established in public schools and their sophisticated stealth tactics bamboozle the children (and parents) into believing they operate with the blessing of the administration when, in fact, their ultimate goal is to shut down the public school system.

- From the AU Sacramento announcement

Tentatively slated for a weekend or weeknight from mid-May to mid-June, possibly with joint sponsorship from AOF and other local groups. If you would like to assist with this, please contact Carol Velarde of AU-Sacramento, <Cavelarde@aol.com>, ph. 916-684-4730.

Darwin Day 2012 recap

By Bill Potts

In spite of a late start caused by some setup glitches, this year's event was a resounding success. The speaker, **Dr. Peter M. J. Hess**, put on a very interesting, very informative, and often humorous presentation.



Question time was informal. Here, Dr. Peter M. J. Hess answers a question.



Something over two hundred people filled La Sierra Community Center's John Smith Hall. These are just some of them.

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.

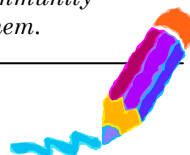
Preference is given to material in a word processing format. (To submit, attach your file to the e-mail and send.)

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.

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





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

We're on the Web!
aofonline.org

March/April Calendar of Events

Freethought Dinner Social: **Kamon Japanese Restaurant**, 2010 16th St.
Contact: info@aofonline.org . More info: <http://j.mp/Ao8uc7>

Thu, Mar 1, 6:30 p.m.

AOF March General Meeting: MARGARET DOWNEY

Tue, Mar 13, 7:00-9:30 p.m.

Board of Directors Meeting: open to all interested members. Location:
Hoppy Brewing Company, 6300 Folsom Boulevard. More info:
<http://j.mp/w0CVLL>

Mon, Mar 19, 6:30-8:00 p.m.

AOF Adopt-A-Highway Clean-up More info: <http://j.mp/wjtN1F>

Sat, Mar 24, 9:00-11:00 a.m.

Flying Spaghetti Monster Party: home of Roberto Leibman, Roseville.
More info: <http://j.mp/z1JHXb>

Sun, Apr 8, 1:30 p.m.

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.

