

## June 1998

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### **E.Haldeman-Julius and His Remarkable 'American Freeman' Newsletter.'**

The June 14 AOF meeting will feature Hal Verb, President of the Atheists of the San Francisco Region. The title of the talk is, "E.Haldeman-Julius and His Remarkable 'American Freeman' Newsletter."

The Newsletter began in 1895 by a pioneer socialist leader, J.A.Wayland. Mr. Verb, concentrating on the era of 1917 through 1951 when it ceased publication, considers the American Freeman the greatest freethought newspaper ever published. He will explain his position on this point at the June meeting.

### **But...The Words "Separation of Church and State" Aren't in the Constitution!**

Have you ever wondered what to say when someone argues that the words "separation of church and state" don't appear in the Constitution? Here are a couple of responses:

"The next time believers tell you that 'separation of church and state' does not appear in our founding document, tell them to stop using the word 'trinity.' The word 'trinity' appears nowhere in the bible. Neither does **Rapture**, or **Second Coming**, or **Original Sin**. If they are still unfazed (or unphrased) by this, then add: **Omniscience**, **Omnipresence**, **Supernatural**, **Transcendence**,

Afterlife, Deity, Divinity, Theology, Monotheism, Missionary, Immaculate Conception, Christmas, Christianity, Evangelical, Fundamentalist, Methodist, Catholic, Pope, Cardinal, Catechism, Purgatory, Penance, Transubstantiation, Excommunication, Dogma, Chastity, Unpardonable Sin, Infallibility, Inerrancy, Incarnation, Epiphany, Sermon, Eucharist, The Lord's Prayer, Good Friday, Doubting Thomas, Advent, Sunday School, Dead Sea, Golden Rule, Moral, Morality, Ethics, Patriotism, Education, Atheism, Apostasy, Conservative (Liberal is in) , Capital Punishment, Monogamy, Abortion, Pornography, Homosexual, Lesbian, Fairness, Logic, Republic, Democracy, Capitalism, Funeral, Decalogue, Bible"

Dan Barker, Losing Faith in Faith: From Preacher to Atheist (Madison, WI: FFRF, 1992), p. 109.

"It is true, of course, that the phrase 'separation of church and state' does not appear in the Constitution. But it was inevitable that some convenient term should come into existence to verbalize a principle so clearly and widely held by the American people.... [T]he right to a fair trial is generally accepted to be a constitutional principle; yet the term "fair trial" is not found in the Constitution. To bring the point even closer home, who would deny that "religious liberty" is a constitutional principle? Yet that phrase too is not in the Constitution. The universal acceptance which all these terms, including "separation of church and state," have received in America would seem to confirm rather than disparage their reality as basic American democratic principles." Leo Pfeffer, Church, State, and Freedom (Beacon Press: Boston, 1967).

## Let's Share Website References

With so many of our members now on the Internet, it's time we started providing some references to online sites of interest. Here are a few initial ones. If you have favorite Internet sites, please send them in so we can share them.

For a current collection of websites of Humanist, Freethought, Atheist, Secularist, Rationalist, Skeptics, Church/State Separation, and First Amendment Organizations:

<http://www.freethinkers.org/org/aha/websites/>

Humanist Website of Steven Schafersman: <http://humanism.net/~schafesd/>

The Celebrity Atheist List: <http://www.primenet.com/~lippard/atheistcelebs/>

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy" <http://plato.stanford.edu/contents.html>

## President's Message

by David Flanders

Thanks again for electing me president of AOF. I am very grateful for the job past presidents have done, as well as present and previous board members. I'm hoping we can continue to sail ahead on this fascinating journey called life.

I'd like to quote something from Bertrand Russell's autobiography: "Ever since puberty I have believed in the value of two things, kindness and clear thinking. At first these two remained more or less distinct; when I felt triumphant I believed most in clear thinking, and in the opposite mood I believed most in kindness. Gradually, the two have come more and more together in my feelings. I find that much unclear thought exists as an excuse for cruelty, and that much cruelty is prompted by superstitious beliefs." Also, I'd like to quote a paragraph from the book 'Higher Superstition': "Muddleheadedness has always been the sovereign force in human affairs--a force far more potent than malevolence or nobility. It lubricates our hurtful impulses and ties our best intentions in knots. It blunts our wisdom, misdirects our compassion, clouds whatever insights into the human condition we manage to acquire. It is the

chief artisan of the unintended consequences that constitute human history. To crusade against muddleheadedness, therefore may be the most futile, and hence the muddleheaded quest of all. Still, passivity in the end is more reprehensible than quixotry."

That is one of the goals I see worth pursuing in the coming year: thinking that is free of the constraints of dogmatic ideologies. Believe it or not--I was a Christian in my teenage years and I recall listening to a Catholic nun describe blissfully her relationship to god. She said it was similar to the song "Killing me softly with his love" as sung by Roberta Flack. She said god was slowly killing the intellectual curiosity within her...god was killing the 'worldly desires' within her as well...god was transforming the independent nature within here to one who is obedient to the holy father. Experiencing chaos in my teenage years, I frightened myself into 'believing in god' and regressed to childhood memory circuits within my brain and sensed a feeling of comfort. But as time progressed, the mind virus was playing havoc with the rest of me and eventually I decided enough was enough.

Perhaps many of you are familiar with the quote from George H. Smith: "We have nothing to fear and everything to gain from the honest pursuit of truth"...I'll be looking forward to seeing you at the June meeting.

## **May Program**

AOF member Don Knutson was the speaker for the May General Meeting. His talk was a discussion of present-day societal problems and some remedies in Nicaragua. Don's talk had three segments: (a) a brief history; (b) a collection of his slides showing his and other persons' involvement at the village level; and (c) some philosophical implications and remedies.

Don spoke of his political activism since the 1970s, including demonstrating and working against Apartheid and opposing the Reagan administration on the CIA-US support of the Contras in the 1980s. This led naturally to a short review (or introduction for some of us) of the history on foreign interventions in Nicaragua.

The 1850 discovery of gold in the US West brought many miners who traveled across the Nicaraguan isthmus to the Pacific as an alternative to the overland route. This profitable commercial route attracted the US government, which attempted to establish English as the official language and transform Nicaragua into a fiefdom. This led to a conflict among rival US capitalists in Nicaragua in 1855.

Even after Panama Canal was built, the US had an interest in exploiting Nicaragua. There were 14 separate Marine invasions of the country from the 1850s to the 1930s (when first hints of later Sandanista/Contra conflict appeared). Sr. Samoza Garcia was the head of the Nicaraguan National Guard in 1933, and he assassinated Sandino. There followed three generations of ruling Samozas. The Sandanistas overthrew Samoza #3 (Don suggested that he carried oppression to new levels) in 1978. Nicaragua fell apart economically soon after this overthrow, because of the "naiveté" of Sandanistas. The Contras sprang up as a counter-Sandanista movement, funded illegally by the US government.

Finally, 1990 brought in Sra. Chamorra, a breath of relatively fresh air, but the newest president is reverting back toward a Samoza-like strongperson, according to Don.

Highlights from Don's slide show include: Images of the 90%-predominant Mestizo (Spanish-Indian) race;

Don and colleagues involved with Sacramento's "sister city", San Juan De Oriente; abundant beautiful fresh water lakes formed in volcanic craters; lush vegetation; the paradox of the absence of running water, but availability of TV; supplies brought as baggage by volunteers to assist in schools, which are largely dependent on private support; clothing manufacturing with wages typically \$0.40 per hour in a 48 hour work week.

In discussing possible remedies, Don mentioned that land ownership is difficult as the government has appropriated lots of the land. Potable water is a problem throughout third world, and Nicaragua is no exception. Don is a strong advocate of micro-credit, which is the lending of money to small ventures, usually women and neighborhood cooperatives.

Data show that small loans are more successful when controlled by women, that is, not given to men. And there are side effects that tend to reinforce families and communities. For example, microcredit loans help women to have some power. The rate of default is very low; clearing houses can be found in a variety of places in US; and CDs can be purchased in this effort. The current president of Nicaragua is tending to oppose microcredit, but there is too much pressure from NGOs (non-governmental organizations) to slow the microcredit programs.

Don gave a fine talk, warmly received by the membership.

## **Elections at May Meeting**

The new board of directors elected at the May meeting are:

President: Dave Flanders  
Vice President: Don Knutson  
Secretary: Steve Knapp  
Treasurer: Kay Dickey  
Directors at large: Hank Kocol, Peggy Lucas, Marilyn Vogel, Paul Storey

## **Highway Clean-UP**

It was a cool and darkly threatening May morning as nine hardy individuals gathered to clean the two-mile AOF stretch of Highway 99. As the day progressed however we warmed to the task and left 15 bags of litter for CalTrans. Our group included Janet, Jason and Steve Borchert, Bryan Hurd, Don Knutson, Hank Kocol, Betty Simonsma and Pete Studelska. Extra acknowledgment must be accorded to Don Massey for bringing his smooth-riding station wagon to efficiently shuttle us to the four quadrants of our highway section.

## **Letters to the Editor**

**May 12, 1998** In the book Contact, by Carl Sagan, Dr. Arroway says, "... if God wanted to send us a message, and ancient writings were the only way he could think of doing it, he could have done a better job."

When I came across this thought, it occurred to me that if god wanted to rid the world immediately of atheists, agnostics, freethinkers, infidels, etc., all it would take would be a single appearance right here in 1998. Breaking in on the last episode of Seinfeld would have done it; so would a visit during halftime at the Super Bowl. And one minute after midnight in Times Square would have reached at least the sober witnesses. But revelation only to a warlike, nomadic, mostly illiterate desert tribe was surely not the way of a first rate god. This was at most an apprentice god, on his way up, or maybe a has-been god on his way down. Or of course, maybe just a fantasy.

Woody Allen had another view on what would turn nonbelievers into believers: "If only God would give me some clear sign! Like making a large deposit in my name at a Swiss bank." That would do it for me.

On a different topic, after the recent school shootings, I've been watching the various religious spokespersons (including those interviewed in the Bee's Religion and Ethics section) trying to deal with the age-old problem of evil. It's clear that they never have dealt with it, and never will. There is absolutely no way to reconcile their all-loving, all-powerful god with situations like this. Trying to pretend there is a such a reconciliation just makes them sound goofy. They talk of free will. Kids and teachers have to die so that an 11- year old and a 13-year old can exercise free will. That's good. The other tack they take is to say that it is all part of a greater plan that we can't know. Let's think about that. What greater plan would have kids and teachers killed at school by other students? Population control, maybe? I wonder if they realize how lame they sound.

**By Michael Cornwell**

**To the editor: (edited for space)**

First, let me thank you for putting out a newsletter on atheism in the Sacramento area. In doing so, we know that diversity is still alive in a culture of the right wing claiming to be religious.

I was a member of the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) church until age 53. I am a retired dentist, with also a nursing education and MPH degree, all from SDA schools. My wife received her nursing education from SDA schools and our four children went through high school at SDA schools, with three of them going to SDA colleges. We both worked for the system for several years, for we firmly believed with all our hearts in the seventh day Sabbath, the second coming, and keeping the TEN, for we knew Jesus would soon return for His Sabbath keeping believers. This is something I now regret, because of not only the time I wasted hoping for nothing, but also my loss in not learning more about the fascinating geology and paleontology of this old, old world.

I still receive SDA publications, and the church is changing. It no longer has a vision, except to be liked. They are sounding like the evils (e.g., the Catholic Church) that they fought against since they were founded in 1844. They were once in the vanguard of religious freedom, but they have moved away from that leadership role and have broken with Americans United for Separation of Church and State, which they largely founded.

Adventists believe they have a particular work to do in the last days, and that is to spread their essential picture of a Sabbath keeping Christ to all the world. One of their channels is the medical work, thus their many hospitals. Unfortunately, the Adventist health system is not working for the church as it once did. Most employ non-Adventists who have little knowledge of the church's goal or hope. And though the church does graduate many competent health professionals, the "work" suffers as most go into private practice rather than the mission field. Their statistics show not only a loss of these professionals, but also a 70% loss of their young. But Adventists, like all groups waiting for His return, is founded on time, and time will kill it. The first day of the next millennium will be especially traumatic.

The church, like so many other self-righteous groups today, would like to separate themselves from America's secular program that has actually been far better for their personal religious interest. They have become caught up in the religious right rhetoric about free exercise of religion and anti-abortion sentiment. The church never supported abortion, but always gave the impression it was a personal choice. Now some of them, especially the young, are rabidly anti-abortion.

It's sad to contemplate the frauds and deceptions that religion has been perpetrating on believers for centuries. Without going into it, if there was ever a deception pulled on the faithful at the beginning of Christendom, the trinity has to be IT. Rationality never seems to have a chance in the world of frauds, religious wars, and destruction of non-Christian cultures.

Please realize that I am not an angry person, just an enthusiastic one (ever listen to a Pentecostal preacher?) who has become as aggressive as the right wing is today. And since I once did fervently believe, I now LOVE to irritate the faithful by pushing the screw deeper into the heart

of those in the faith who might secretly wonder, as I once did, about this unholy mess while in the quietness of their soul's sanctuary.

**Bob Erickson**

## **WOMEN'S RIGHTS CONVENTION**

**By Cleo Kocol**

This is the 150th anniversary of the First Women's Rights Convention which was held in Seneca Falls, NY, in 1848. The germ of the idea first occurred to Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott in London, England, when they attended the World Anti-Slavery Convention in 1840. Although avid abolitionists, the women were not allowed to be seated on the floor of the convention and were not allowed to participate. English clergymen, holding bibles, declared the subjection of women was ordained at Eve's creation. Elizabeth's husband, Henry Stanton, and others spoke on the women's behalf, but they were in the minority. George Bradburn said, "If anyone can prove to me that the bible teaches the subjection of one-half the human race to the other, then the best thing I can do for humanity would be to bring together every bible in the universe and make a great bonfire of them."

In 1848 Elizabeth saw Lucretia Mott again at Waterloo, NY, where Lucretia was visiting her sister, Martha C. Wright. While drinking tea with the two women and their friends, Jane Hunt and Mary McClintock, Elizabeth suggested a convention and the women agreed. On July 14, 1848, they put the following announcement in the Seneca County Courier: A convention to discuss the social, civil, and religious condition and rights of women will be held in the Wesleyan Chapel at Seneca Falls, NY, on Wednesday and Thursday, the 19th and 20th of July current; commencing at 10:00 A.M. During the first day the meeting will be exclusively for women, who are earnestly invited to attend. The public generally are invited to be present on the second day, when Lucretia Mott of Philadelphia, and other ladies and gentlemen will address the convention. They had five days to plan. Stanton wrote a Declaration of Sentiments. Based on the Declaration of Independence it began, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal." The Declaration had eighteen resolutions; the one stating that women should have the vote being the most controversial. Even those who supported Stanton's other proposals balked at this resolution. Even her husband said that if she insisted upon presenting the resolution he would leave town. She was adamant; so was he. But ex-slave Frederick Douglass agreed to support her. At the convention a heated debate followed the reading of the franchise resolution, and a vote was taken. The resolution barely passed, although all the other resolutions were passed unanimously. After the two-day convention, the ladies were lambasted by the press. Editors, outraged at such unwomanly behavior, said the demands in the sentiments would "demoralize and degrade women." But the newspaper accounts, while chastising the women, brought the convention to the attention of the nation. Everyone debated the issue: were women really equal to or the same as men? The rights asked for at Seneca Falls included some we are still petitioning for today: equal rights in the professions, the trades, at the universities, in political office, and in the churches; the right to make contracts, to sue and be sued, to testify in court, to have equality in marriage, to control our own property, and to have wage equity. Two weeks after the first convention another was held and the movement grew. Eventually the main

thrust would be the vote. This was not a reality, however, until 1920. Although Susan B. Anthony was not present at that first historic convention, she and Elizabeth Cady Stanton became firm friends and workers for women's rights in the years to come.

Although the original five women at Seneca Falls had no idea how many people would heed their call and attend that first convention, three hundred arrived, an awesome amount when you remember that they had no telephone, no radio, no television, and no automobiles. What they had was a newspaper announcement printed five days before the event, horses and wagons, and a burning need recognized by all women.

This year women and men will converge on Seneca Falls to honor our foremothers, to assess how far we have come and how far we have to go. Look for me there. For the freethought feminist, it is a pilgrimage long overdue, but what better year to make it? In New York State, events will take place at Seneca Falls, Rochester, and Geneva. For information, contact: <[njoh@uhura.rochester.edu](mailto:njoh@uhura.rochester.edu)>, or the website at [www.rochester.edu/SBA/Forum98](http://www.rochester.edu/SBA/Forum98); snail mail at: Nan Johnson, Susan B. Anthony University Center, University of Rochester, Dewey Hall 4-145, Box 270435, Rochester, NY 14421; phone: 716-275-8799.

## **Calendar of Events**

Sunday, June 14<sup>th</sup> noon to 2:00 p.m. E.Haldeman-Julius and His Remarkable 'American Freeman' Newsletter

Sunday, June 21<sup>st</sup> Newsletter Committee Meeting

Wednesday, June 24<sup>th</sup> 6:30 p.m. Board Meeting