

Mechanics' Institute Annual Report 2021

September 2020 - August 2021

A Year of Challenges and Innovations

At Mechanics' Institute, 2021 has been a year marked by innovation. We were able to reach broader audiences with virtual programming, welcoming writers, teachers, and change-makers such as (below, left to right) Jewelle Gomez, Annalee Newitz, William Bauer, Damon Akins, Lily Diamond and Rebecca Walker, Louise Aronson, Kathy Chin Leong and Dick Evans, and Clifford Thompson. As we reopen, Mechanics' Institute will take lessons we have learned from hosting virtual programs and services into the future.



Dear Friends:

This year has been challenging, but also offered an interesting learning opportunity for the Mechanics' Institute. While we envisioned that everything would be back to more routine operations in 2021, the pandemic continued to threaten the health and wellbeing of our local and national communities and engendered literal and social distances between all of us. The staff and trustees had to re-envision the Institute services and programs in an effort to ensure that we can offer members and guests a sense of community again. Your support and continued membership have made this possible.

By creating innovative virtual programs, opening our doors to the library and chess room, and restarting live events, the Institute has developed new ways of engaging with members and the public. This year we hosted more than 540 programs and events, including virtual author events and film saloons, in-person and online chess classes and activities, and an array of library classes, historical events, and book and writing groups. Reopening the library in the spring and restarting live events and chess tournaments in the summer – with extensive safety protocols, of course – were highlights of the year and kept so many staff, trustees, and members inspired to engage and help create more innovative ways to connect with one another. As we continue to offer more live events, we look forward to creating ways for members and the public to participate in programs both virtually and in-person.

The Institute has also begun the preliminary work to restore the exterior of the building in partnership with the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). We have achieved the majority of our fundraising match for our five-year NEH Challenge Grant and have begun the permitting process to start the restoration. The Institute anticipates that we will complete this work in 2022. In addition, we have continued to build our fundraising capacity to support programming and services during a time when earned income has declined due to impacts from the public health crisis.

Thank you for your support during this challenging year. We appreciate your continued membership and engagement, and we look forward to expanding in-person programs and services this coming year.

With warmest regards,



Lindsey Tonsager
President, Board of Directors



Kimberly Scrafano
Chief Executive Officer

The Ongoing Work of Mechanics' Institute

MI Provides Resources

Mechanics' Institute's library was initially dedicated to the intellectual needs of engineers, inventors, and creatives. Today's collection includes materials in all subject areas. We offer a broad collection of periodicals, e-magazines, the latest bestsellers, audiobooks on CD and via the web, e-books, music, an extensive film collection on DVD, blu-ray, and via streaming. Mechanics' also maintains special collections in chess, industrial expositions and world's fairs, Californiana and Western Americana, Civil War, and a collection of Arion Press Fine Print Books. We also maintain Mechanics' Institute archival materials, including chess club records, MI history, and Mechanics' Institute Industrial Exhibitions (1857-1899).

MI Builds Community

The Mechanics' Institute hosts a myriad of activities each year, including author events, writing workshops, topical panel discussions, film screenings, book groups, chess and technology classes, tours of the Institute, and chess competitions, blitzes, and tournaments for all ages. These activities develop strong communities of practice and interest within the Mechanics' Institute. Social events such as the annual Holiday Gathering and bi-annual Member Meetings provide opportunities for members across the spectrum to come together and meet one another in celebration of the Institute's ongoing mission to support members in their many endeavors of curiosity and labors of love.

MI Engages in Skill Building

Chess learning opportunities are offered for all levels of players, from beginner to Grandmaster. Activities include a comprehensive scholastic program, women's classes, beginner and intermediate classes, chess history and strategy lectures, Tuesday and Thursday Night Marathon competitions, blitz games, USCF-rated tournaments, and special chess events with renowned players from across the globe. The library offers writing workshops in partnership with the San Francisco Writers' Conference and local authors, as well as librarian-led classes on technology and using library resources.

MI Fosters Curiosity

The Mechanics' Institute hosts more than 70 cultural events each year, including topical series such as "Women's Suffrage 100" and "Tech and the City." MI partners with local organizations such as MoAD (Museum of the African Diaspora), LatinX in Publishing, Architecture + the City, and City Lights Bookstore to produce compelling author events and panel discussions. Curated by film critic and author Matthew Kennedy, the CinemaLit Film Series presents 35 films each year, featuring classic and contemporary American and international films introduced by prominent film critics, writers, and reviewers, followed by lively discussion amongst attendees. Mechanics' Institute provides access to expert-led seminars, scholarly reading groups, a series of chess lectures, and a thriving scholastic chess program. We post staff book recommendations, historical articles, and MI updates to our blog, where members can find inspiration for their next great read, or dig into the past and contemplate their place in Mechanics' Institute's long history.

MI Performs Outreach

Mechanics' Institute's Youth Outreach Program uses chess instruction as a learning tool for students, as well as a source of pride and progress within their respective schools and communities, benefiting those who would not normally be able to participate in extracurricular activities due to financial constraints. We are committed to expanding our programming in schools, focusing on diverse and less advantaged San Francisco communities to help level the playing field for children whose families may lack the resources afforded those in more privileged communities, and creating pathways for children to continue learning and developing through the Mechanics' Institute. The Library Materials Outreach Program for the Homebound allows members who are unable to leave their residences due to chronic illness to exchange library materials by mail.

Beyond the membership benefits, I believe in the Mechanics' mission as an accessible community resource. It's a unique sanctuary for people with healthy curiosities and a desire to learn and grow. The events are like those of an exceptionally humanistic public university (with a world-class chess club). Prior generations gave us all of this, supporting the Mechanics' during past eras, undeterred by major world struggles. Its longevity is inspiring. Our duty now is very clear. We must take our generation's turn to keep it going.

-Bobby, MI Member

Growing Together

Membership

Mechanics' Institute continuously builds upon the egalitarian principles of MI's early founders. They aimed to provide a library with open-access stacks; maintain a thriving chess club; offer classes and programs that teach skills and build curiosity; welcome all regardless of age, gender, or race; and to charge as little as possible for our services.

Membership in the Mechanics' Institute is open to the public, providing services of the library and chess room, along with free admittance or discounted member rates to special events, lectures, book discussion groups, tournaments, classes, and other activities. We serve over 3,000 members. Find Membership in suite 504 to meet your service needs, including renewals, visitor passes, and new member registration.

Our year-end appeal is now underway; we rely on the year-end appeal to make a significant amount of our annual income to help cover the operating costs of the Mechanics' Institute. Please donate online or by mail. Look out for additional opportunities to give to specific programs throughout the coming year.

I've come to writing later in life and the Writer's Lunch hosted by the Mechanics' Institute is a real eye opener! The virtual get together allows me here (just outside Edinburgh, Scotland) to connect with people from all over the world (but mainly the USA) to gain a bit of perspective on the art of writing a book.



-Ray,
MI Member

I am grateful for the membership embracing our virtual events thus helping to keep MI's intellectual and cultural flame alive. Their participation and interest proves that MI is more than a library, chess room and cultural event calendar; the keystone is our community and never has that been clearer to me than during the pandemic.

Taryn, MI Strategic Partnerships Librarian

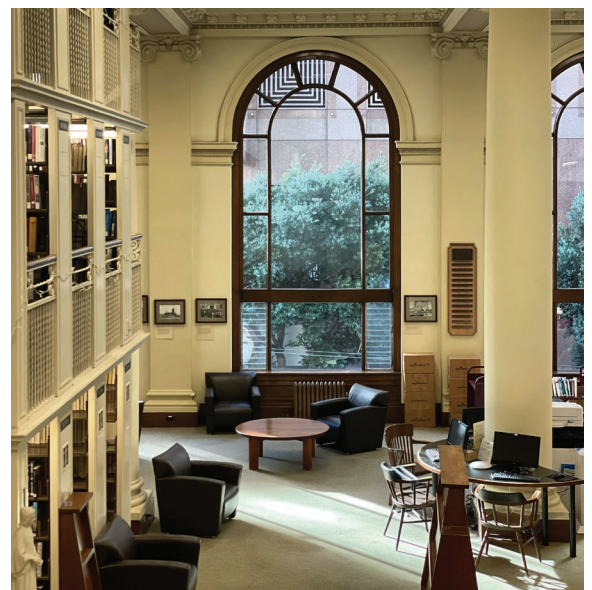
57 Post Street

Architect Albert Pissis is renowned for his stately structures of steel and stone. As the architect of the Mechanics' Institute building at 57 Post Street, he proposed a nine-story steel-frame mixed-use building, finished in reinforced sandstone on a granite base, with a symmetrical classical façade. The street floor would be rented out as retail space; the second and third floors would be a library and offices, and on the fourth floor there would be a room for the chess club; the rest of the building would be given over to offices for rent. We operate much the same today.

The Mechanics' Institute building at 57 Post Street was completed in 1910 and has been the home of the Institute and many tenants for the past 111 years of changing tastes, minor earthquakes, and periodic revolutions in architectural style — testimony to the value of classic design, hardy materials, and respectful use.

We want to thank and recognize our building tenants for their perseverance and resilience during the pandemic. Our small community of tenants has changed over the past year and we have some new additions to the building who are doing exciting and meaningful work in their industries. As tenants and also members of MI, we encourage participation with the Mechanics' Institute and hope to foster strong collaboration between members, tenants, and staff.

If you are interested in joining our tenant community, we have office and retail space available in the building. Please visit milibrary.org/rent/office for more information.



Expanding Possibilities and Future Plans

Library

2021 has been a year of great hope. On April 5, Mechanics' Institute reopened the library for three days a week and by May 17, we increased open hours to five days. We have expanded online workshops, tours, library programs, and classes in lieu of in-person programming, reaching 2,600 virtual program attendees in the last year from such far-flung locales as New York, and even the United Kingdom.

Library staff respond to some 300 calls and emails per month, with questions on open hours, instructions on accessing digital materials, book searches, and research queries. One librarian even answered a member's research question by speaking with a *USA Today* reporter to see if the newspaper has a morgue. Funding has been provided by California Humanities and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) as part of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 to fund Mechanics' Institute Archival activities, so stay tuned for exhibits, programs, and increased access to our Special Collections in the year to come.

E-resource use has tripled at MI, yet print remains popular. Librarians continue to review and order new physical and digital materials. We subscribe to Kanopy, allowing members to choose from thousands of movies and documentaries, which our members can stream for free. All of our databases, including Ancestry, are now available remotely.

We will continue to offer online programming, onsite and virtual services, and digital as well as physical collections. Stay tuned for an expansion of open hours.



The library offered remote reading groups, virtual programs, and writing workshops led by authors, including (left to right) Sheryl Bize-Boutte, Lyzette Wanzer, and Matthew Félix

The library at Mechanics' Institute is my refuge from a noisy and unpredictable world. It's books and comfortable chairs and tall windows but, most of all, the assurance of peace and quiet. Oh, how I missed you! Welcome back.

-Beth, MI Member

Chess

Throughout the pandemic, Mechanics' Institute has paved the way in offering over 200 virtual chess events, classes, and tournaments. During the first half of 2021, our scholastic chess programming continued to offer online classes, camps and tournaments for K-12 students. We provided online classes for the adult chess community with offerings for all levels of players, including our free MI member beginner class and women's class. We also offered specialty classes, including Zugzwang!, Modern Chess Openings, The Art of Attack, The Art of Defense, and Endgame Lab. Uniting our chess community via live broadcasts of events on Twitch, we interact with participants through virtual chat during broadcast of tournaments such as our flagship Tuesday Night Marathon, new Thursday Night Marathon, and monthly online blitz events.

The Mechanics' Institute led the way in the world of chess, with Chess Director Abel Talamantez receiving the 2021 U.S. Chess Federation's Organizer of the Year Award in recognition of his work organizing national online events at the highest level, such as the 2020-2021 Pan-American Intercollegiate Championship, the 2021 US Amateur Team Championship, 2021 US Junior Chess Congress, and the 2021 San Francisco Scholastic Championship.

On June 1, the chess room was cleared to reopen for live competitions and events. Onsite classes are attracting participants, and we continue to offer virtual classes for both our adult and scholastic chess communities. In the summer of 2021 we offered in person and virtual camps, coaching more than 100 students. As onsite instruction has resumed, MI is expanding the number of schools we reach — including schools in our youth outreach program, which provides free chess instruction to underserved public schools in the San Francisco area.

Many players who first experienced Mechanics' through our virtual offerings in 2020-2021 have since joined live events. As players and parents walk back through our doors and into the chess room, they bring life and engagement back to the chess club at MI. We remain committed to finding unique ways of bringing communities together through chess.

Thank you for conducting so many online scholastic tournaments since COVID-19. It is my son's participation in Tuesday and Thursday Night Marathons and scholastic events that helped him to do well in the national scholastic championship qualifier. Regardless of what happens in the Championship round, my son learned a lot about chess, playing fair, and more from the Mechanics'.

-Rama,
Parent of Scholastic Chess Player



Scholastic chess participants learn with Chess Director Abel Talamantez.

Expanding Possibilities and Future Plans



Scholastic chess tournament competitors pose with Women's Grandmaster (WGM) Carla Heredia.

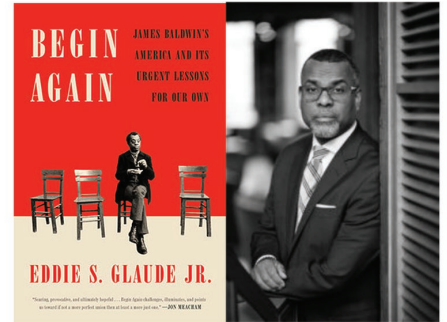
When our daughter, Kaya, began her journey with Mechanics' Institute at Westport Elementary, she was once again excited about the game, about learning new moves, and understanding the overall differences in strategies she can employ. Chess club was the highlight of her week. This year, Kaya has been able to take her game to a new level, particularly when it comes to the discipline of thinking about her next move, and the move after that, and the move after that. We can see her going through scenarios in her head as she takes her time to make a choice. This would not be possible without generous support from the Mechanics' Institute. We are so grateful for this continued positive presence in Kaya's life.

-Rob and Belle,
Parents of Scholastic Chess Player

Events

This year's programs were hosted virtually, reaching a broader audience than ever before. One of the most popular events of the year was *We are the Land: A History of Native California*, with over 230 attending the online event. This book, co-authored by William Bauer and Damon B. Akins, provides a panoramic view of our state's Native tribal history, honoring a vital community that is preserving cultural heritage and restoring dignity to sacred land.

Two stand-out events celebrated the life and work of James Baldwin. In the first, "A Juneteenth Tribute to James Baldwin," authors James Campbell, Clifford Thompson, and poet/playwright Jewelle Gomez discussed Baldwin's early life, literary legacy, and influential years in Paris. The second event unpacked America's continued racial bias in *Begin Again: James Baldwin's America and its Urgent Lessons for Our Own*. Professor Eddie S. Glaude Jr. provided a searing and insightful distillation of Baldwin's political activism during the 60s and 70s and his prophetic messages for today.



CinemaLit enjoyed a wide audience in virtual film discussions. A special CinemaLit Salon author event with *San Francisco Chronicle* film critic Mick LaSalle discussing his book *Dream State: California in the Movies*, engaged the largest viewership of the year.

Special engagements for Women's History Month and MI's "Tech and the City" series featured several dynamic programs. Co-authors Rebecca Walker and Lily Diamond presented their instructive book on writing and creating, *What's Your Story*, with a surprise appearance by poet Alice Walker. Annalee Newitz discussed her archeological delvings in *Four Lost Cities: A Secret History of the Urban Age*. Reporter Nicole Perlroth shared her investigation of cyber warfare, in conversation with Board President Lindsey Tonsager about her book, *This is How They Tell Me the World Ends: The Cyberweapons Arms Race*. And co-authors of *How Ten Global Cities Take on Homelessness: Innovations That Work*, highlighted collaborative solutions to homelessness.

In 2022, programs will be hosted onsite, online, and in a blended format. Look out for programs in our upcoming series, "Civil Rights, Artistic Diversity, Historical Reckoning: Exploring the Film, Literature, and Lives of Marginalized Communities," supported by funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The enriching events that you planned during our shared Covid isolation positively impacted my life. In so many ways it was a period of deprivation, but because of the Mechanics' Institute there were Zoom highlights along the way!

-Kimberly,
MI Member



Photo by Alonso Nichols



Guest speakers at virtual events this year included (clockwise left to right): *White Space* author Jennifer De Leon, Rene Yung on *Art Migrating Across Borders*, and Wendy Liu discussing how to liberate technology from capitalism in her book, *Abolish Silicon Valley*.



In Grateful Acknowledgement

We are grateful for the support we receive from individuals and foundations.
Thank you to everyone for your generosity, making our continued growth possible.

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Strong Foundations

As a non-profit 503c public charity, the work of the Institute is supported through rental income, member dues, fundraising, and by managing an endowment fund to cover the operating costs of staffing, services, collections, and building maintenance.

Financials

Below, you will find the results of our audited financial statement for the Mechanics' Institute Fiscal Year ending 2021.

Income

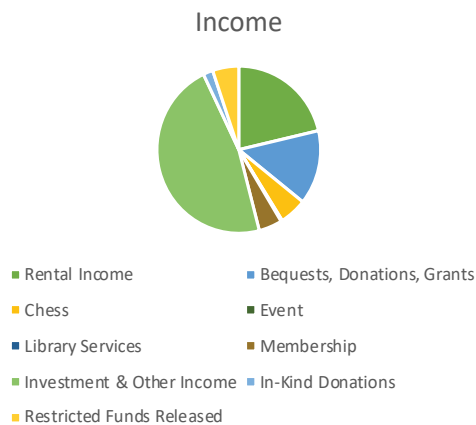
Rental Income	\$929,142
Bequests, Donations, Grants	\$626,461
Chess Room Income	\$233,824
Event Income	\$10,259
Library Services Income	\$1,809
Membership Dues	\$199,997
Investment & Other Income	\$2,043,427
In-Kind Donations*	\$84,139
Restricted Funds Released	\$225,387

Total **\$4,354,445**

Expenses

Library, Chess & Events	\$1,448,267
Building	\$853,248
Fundraising	\$63,605
Management & General	\$591,316
MI Special Projects - Professional Fees*	\$84,139
Funds Set Aside for Future Program Use	\$1,313,445

Total **\$4,354,445**



Support Mechanics' Institute

The Need

You are part of the ongoing 167-year story of Mechanics' Institute. Thank you for your support as the city, the country, and the world battles a pandemic that has taken millions of lives and threatens to become a permanent fixture in our world. Now, more than ever, connection is important; occupying ourselves with reading, writing, playing, and learning is holding us together; and taking care of one another is essential.

At Mechanics', we are here to provide you with ways to build relationships with one another, understand the world we live in a bit better, and develop a clearer set of priorities — whether those be values that include the play and intellectual engagement of chess, the joy and wonder of reading a good book, or the enlightenment in discovering another's perspective through attendance at events, classes, workshops, and film salons.

The Opportunity

We are proud to support more than 3,000 members who tell us that they love the Mechanics' and that their lives are richer for their interaction with us. This is what keeps us coming to work with a smile each day — you.

If you've ever wondered what you can do to help support the library, sustain the chess club, sponsor our roster of author, film, and topical programs, or to ensure that our beautiful building remains sound for decades to come, please know that your donation — whether \$10 or \$10,000 — makes a great difference to us. Member dues cover only a fraction of our operating costs, and every dollar you give above your membership payment enables the library to add materials to its collection, allows the chess club to offer free chess classes, and makes it possible for our events to remain low-cost or free to members. Give today at milibrary.org/give.

Fundamentals



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History

Mechanics' Institute began with a determination to improve the lives of all of San Francisco's citizens. In 1854, the city was in crisis due to a drop in gold production that led to a statewide economic depression. Out-of-work gold miners looking to settle in San Francisco had no way to gain skills and education and few opportunities for steady employment. Mechanics' Institute's founders decided to invest in the community by starting up a library and providing a venue for self-improvement which was open to all, regardless of race, sex, age, or national origin. Additionally, Mechanics' Institute hosted Industrial Fairs in the city to support small businesses, including "start-ups" such as Levi Strauss & Co., Folger's Coffee, and Ghirardelli Chocolate. Members and supporters, including Gertrude Atherton, Jack London, Ambrose Bierce, and many whose names may be lost to history but whose contributions live on in their involvement with the Mechanics' community, have always been at the center of what Mechanics' Institute is about. You are the beating heart of MI.



A woman checks out a stack of books at Mechanics' Institute, circa 1905. (*above*)

Chess players contemplate their next moves at MI's Chess Club, 2021. (*below*)



Mission

Mechanics' Institute provides space for exploration and growth by offering classes, lectures, and resources that inspire and engage our members, and by acting as a hub for communities of practice to discuss, improve, and develop their mutual interests.

Vision

Mechanics' Institute envisions a world in which folks from all walks of life join in mutual curiosity, in striving together to develop collective skills and make a better today, and in hope for the future through study of the humanities, cultural exploration, and using what they learn for the good of their community. We hope that Mechanics' Institute demonstrates this collaborative spirit, and makes your corner of the world a much better place.

Values

Mechanics' Institute began with foundational egalitarian values, supporting skill-building, education, and personal growth for its members. Those values have not changed. You — members and donors — sustain this work and are part of a long legacy of thinkers, inventors, and readers. You are our reason for being, and we are grateful that you have allowed us to accompany you on your journey of curious exploration of the world and connection with one another. Thank you for supporting the Mechanics' Institute with your gifts and your presence.