

Library Director Deb Hunt Retires



I clearly remember Executive Director Jim Flack's phone call in July 2013, asking: "How would you like to be the 17th Library Director of the Mechanics' Institute?" I was speechless for a moment before I replied with an enthusiastic, "Yes!"

I have had a wonderful experience getting to know and work with members, staff, trustees, guest speakers, the public, and the wonderful folks in membership libraries groups across the globe. I have been able to learn from colleagues, participating in many areas of the MI.

One of my favorite experiences was hosting "Reinvention: Thriving in the 21st Century," a 2016 gathering of membership libraries' representatives from the UK, Australia, Canada, and the U.S. We shared insights,

strategies, and practices that make the mechanics' institutes and independent libraries thrive in their communities, with keynote speakers including Brewster Kahle, founder of the Internet Archive, and Lee Rainie, Director of Internet and Technology Research at the Pew Research Center.

I've rubbed shoulders with the Poet Laureate of the United States, hosted activist Daniel Ellsberg, and met four-time Women's World Chess Champion, Hou Yifan. While I enjoyed meeting these famous people, I also cherish memories of member interactions, programs highlighting local and regional presenters, annual holiday parties, and opportunities to learn together. Most of all, I have witnessed the dedication of staff and volunteers who are the heart of MI and, along with our members, make it the unique and wonderful place it is.

The past eight years have flown by! Yes, there have been challenges, including the pandemic, but we have been ever resilient. Staff continue to amaze me with their willingness to try new things, remain optimistic, and stay connected to our members. I know my successor will bring new ideas and energy to Mechanics', and I know that members, staff, and trustees will be as welcoming and supportive as they have been to me.

Featured Events

This Is How They Tell Me The World Ends: The Cyberweapons Arms Race

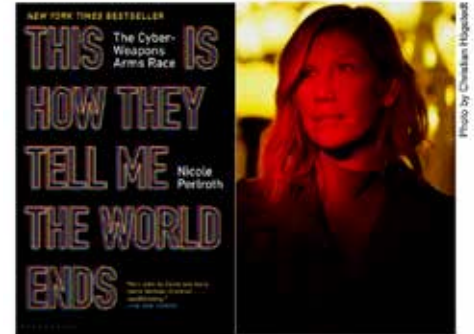
Cosponsored by Gray Area and Goethe-Institut

July 8, 5:30 pm PDT

Online; Registration required

MI and Cosponsor Members Free; Public: Sliding Scale \$5 - \$10

The New York Times reporter and author Nicole Perloth will join Mechanics' Institute's Board President and data security attorney Lindsey Tonsager to discuss the perils of cyber warfare affecting international politics, national infrastructure, and our personal devices. *This Is How They Tell Me the World Ends* is cybersecurity reporter Nicole Perloth's unraveling of an opaque, code-driven market from the outside in – where she encounters spies, hackers, arms dealers, mercenaries, and a few unsung heroes along the way. Please check the [event link](#) for additional details and to register.



Begin Again: James Baldwin's America and Its Urgent Lessons for Our Own

Cosponsored by Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD)

July 29, 5:30 pm PDT

Online; Registration required

MI and MoAD Members Free; Public: Sliding Scale \$5 - \$10

Princeton University Professor Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. will draw parallels between the civil rights movements of the 1960s and today. From the publication of *The Fire Next Time* in 1963 to *No Name in the Street* in 1972, James Baldwin transformed into a more overtly political writer, a change that came at great professional and personal cost. Baldwin emerged from this journey with a sense of renewed purpose about the necessity of pushing forward in the face of disillusionment and despair. From Baldwin's powerful writing, Glaude invites us to find hope and guidance through our own times. Please check the [event link](#) for additional details and to register.



How Ten Global Cities Take on Homelessness: Innovations that Work

August 5, 5:30 pm PDT

Online; Registration required

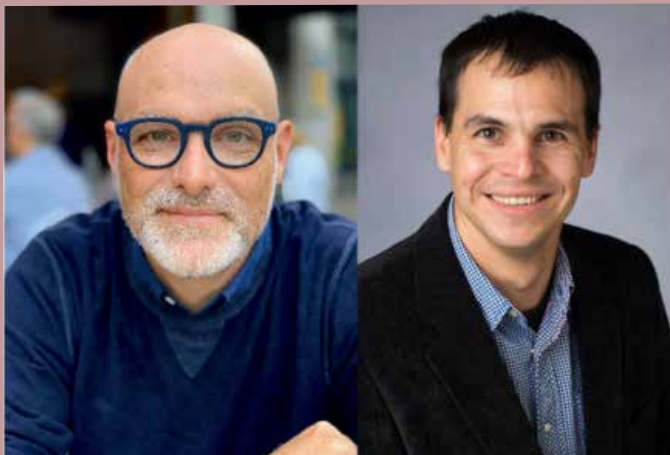
MI Members Free; Public: Sliding Scale \$5 - \$10

Linda Gibbs, Jay Bainbridge, Muzzy Rosenblatt, and Tamiru Mammo examine one of the most formidable issues facing metropolitan areas today: the large numbers of people experiencing homelessness in cities. These experts with first-hand experience profile ten cities to explore ideas, strategies, successes, and failures. Together they bring an array of government, nonprofit, and academic perspectives to offer a truly global perspective. The authors answer essential questions about the nature and causes of homelessness and analyze how cities have used innovation and local political coordination to address this pervasive problem. Please check [milibrary.org](#) for additional details and to register.



Summer Highlight On July 22 at 5:30 pm, Susan Meissner, author of *The Nature of Fragile Things*, and Ron Nyren, author of *The Book of Lost Light*, will discuss their respective novels — about love, loss, and resilience — that center around San Francisco's 1906 earthquake, fire, and aftermath. Please check the [event link](#) for additional details and to register.

We Are the Land: A History of Native California, Brings Past into the Present



Offering a panoramic view of tribal life and existence in California, author William J. Bauer, Professor of History at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas began, “We start with creation, and we try to go up to the present if possible. We were able to provide some references to how California Indian Nations responded to and shaped the COVID-19 Pandemic...We wanted to refute the notion that California Indians have disappeared from the state.”

Bauer, an enrolled citizen of the Round Valley Indian Tribes, was talking about the book he co-authored with Damon B. Atkins, *We are the Land: A History of Native California*. On Thursday, May 27, the two historians discussed their work during a well-attended virtual event co-sponsored by Mechanics Institute and California Institute for Community, Art, and Nature.

“We really wanted the book to emphasize the present,” said Akins, Associate Professor of History at Guilford College, in Greensboro, North Carolina, adding that he wanted to do something historians often fail to do, “bringing things up to the present, and showing how the legacies of what’s happened in the past are still operating today.”

Over two hundred attendees were present for the talk and readings which dealt, not only with the cruelties of the past, but with modern attempts at closure, like the Round Valley Tribes’ annual commemoration of the Nome Trail Walk, and efforts — such as the city of Eureka’s return of 40 acres of Indian Island to the Wiyot Tribe — to return stolen land to indigenous occupants. A lively and extended Q&A session followed, with attendees asking about research sources, Native American wildlife management, and the modern phenomenon of land acknowledgment.

A [recording of the event](#) can be accessed on the Mechanics’ Institute’s YouTube account.

CinemaLit: Featuring Iconic Actors



Port of Shadows, which opens our July series of films featuring iconic actor Jean Gabin, is a darkly romantic early Noir film set in the Port of Havre. The more classically Noir *Touchez pas au Grisbi* served as a 1954 comeback for Gabin. *Maigret Sets a Trap* was the first of three films that established Gabin as the face of Simenon’s iconic detective, and *Two Men in Town* captures Gabin at the end of his career, playing a compassionate social worker. We wrap the summer with our season finale, King Vidor’s sprawling and sumptuous 1956 adaptation of Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, starring Henry Fonda as Pierre and Audrey Hepburn as Natasha. In September we return at last to CinemaLit at Mechanics’ Institute, continuing where we left off with Pre-Code Barbara Stanwyck: Take 2!

Jean Gabin: The Great Face of French Cinema

July 9 *Port of Shadows* (1938) 93 min

Directed by Michael Carné; Jean Gabin, Michèle Morgan

July 16, *Touchez pas au Grisbi* (1954) 97 min

Directed by Jacques Becker; Jean Gabin, Jeanne Moreau

July 23, *Maigret Sets a Trap* (1958) 119 min

Directed by Jean Delannoy; Jean Gabin, Annie Girardot

July 30, *Two Men in Town* (1973) 99 min

Directed by José Giovanni; Jean Gabin, Alain Delon

Season Finale

August 6, *War and Peace* (1956) 208 min

Directed by King Vidor; Henry Fonda, Audrey Hepburn

Pre-Code Barbara Stanwyck: Take 2

September 10, *The Miracle Woman* (1931) 90 min

Directed by Frank Capra; Barbara Stanwyck, David Manners

September 17, *Ladies They Talk About* (1933) 69 min

Directed by Howard Bretherton; Barbara Stanwyck, Preston Foster

September 24, *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* (1934) 88 min

Directed by Frank Capra; Barbara Stanwyck, Nils Asher

Programs begin at 6:00 pm PDT;

MI Members free; Public \$10 Suggested Donation;

Registration required

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Featured Library Programs

Bird Talk and other Stories by Xu Xu: Modern Tales of a Chinese Romantic

July 9, 12:00 pm PDT

Online; Registration required

MI Members and Public: Free

In this literary roundtable, Frederik H. Green and Fiammetta Hsu will discuss the life and times of Xu Xu and sketch out his literary and intellectual trajectory. Fiammetta Hsu will further share personal memories and will discuss the cultural significance of her late father's correspondences with other Chinese intellectuals in exile. Green will then share some of the joys and pitfalls of embarking on his translation project and will read excerpts from his translations that represent some of Xu Xu's most important works. Please check the [event link](#) for additional details and to register.



Coming Out of COVID Creatively with Matthew Félix

July 20, 6:00 pm PDT

Online; Registration required

MI Members and Public: Free

Join author, podcaster, and MI member Matthew Félix for a talk about how to reconnect with your creativity in a post-pandemic world. Matthew will discuss assessing your current frame of mind, as well as the state of your project(s), whether already underway or in the works. He'll share his approach to identifying obstacles preventing progress and how to get unstuck, as well as ways to open to inspiration, get inspired again, and stay that way—including why clearing the mind and fostering an awareness of the body is essential, and how to do both. Matthew will also underscore the importance of not merely following someone else's creative process but finding and developing your own. Please check the [event link](#) for additional details and to register. This event is part of the "Mechanics of Writing" series held in collaboration with the San Francisco Writers Conference.



How to Think like Shakespeare: Lessons from a Renaissance Education

August 27, 12:00 pm PDT

Online; Registration required

MI Members and Public: Free

Join author Scott Newstok for a presentation and discussion of *How to Think like Shakespeare* – an exploration of the craft of thought. In fourteen brief chapters that draw from Shakespeare's world and works, Newstok distills enduring practices that can make learning more creative and pleasurable, showing how mental play emerges through work, creativity through imitation, autonomy through tradition, innovation through constraint, and freedom through discipline. It was these practices and a conversation with the past that nurtured a mind like Shakespeare's. And while few of us can hope to approach the genius of the Bard, we can all learn from the exercises that shaped him. Please check the [event link](#) for additional details and to register.



Donor Profile: Judith Taylor



Judith Taylor is a longtime member and donor of the Mechanics' Institute. She has written several books on horticultural history, all of which are available in the

library's collection. Prior to becoming an author focused on horticultural history, Judith was a neurologist and taught at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York. In 1994, when she and her husband retired to San Francisco, the Mediterranean climate here inspired her to plant olive and lemon trees in her new garden and subsequently to write her first book, *The Olive in California: History of an Immigrant Tree*. Judith has always been interested in the history of botany due to its parallels with the history of medicine and the fact that the majority of the treatments doctors and healers historically used were derived from the plant world. She has written several papers on historical botanists for the *New York State Journal of Medicine* and other publications while she was still in practice.

On the recommendation of a friend, Judith was drawn to the Institute when she needed research for her first book that was not available in other libraries. She cites the feeling of community that the Institute fosters as her reason for continuing her membership and donations, and greatly enjoys the many groups offered for members, in particular the Brown Bag Mystery book club. She also enjoys learning about books and authors she hadn't previously known about, and the differing perspectives from her fellow group members.

Supporting Memberships

Supporting members give a tax-deductible gift when joining, providing MI with the resources we need to continue serving members as we begin to re-open the Institute under our COVID Health and Safety Plan. The number of supporting members has doubled since March 2020 when pandemic closures began, and we are grateful for the assistance of each of our supporting members who have given in the past year, listed at right.

To support our work, [donations](#) may also be made online at milibrary.org/give, by mail, via your company's matching gifts program, or directly from your retirement or other investment account. Joining the [James Lick Legacy Society](#) signals your commitment to the Mechanics' Institute's ongoing mission.

Recent Major Gifts

We are grateful for the support we receive from the following individuals and foundations, who make our continued growth possible. Thank you! The following contributions were received between March 1 and May 31, 2021.

Anonymous
AO Dragge Foundation
Zubin Beesla
Sheila Cunningham*
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The Charles D. and Frances K. Field Fund
Estate of Louise Frankel*
Mike and Lark Hilliard
Richard Laiderman* and Jung-Wha Song
Jennifer Lindsay
Mark E. Mackler

Tribute Gifts

Charles T. Sullivan*
In Honor of Deb Hunt

* James Lick Legacy Society Member

Supporting Members

We are grateful for the assistance of each of our supporting members. The following contributions were received between May 1, 2020 and May 31, 2021

Michael Antonini	Henry Heines	Lois H. Scott
Jeremy Blatteis	Charlton Holland	Olivia Sears
Sue Breedlove	Rick Homan	Richard Segal and
Carol Brownson	Charles Henry James	Dorothy
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Chess Programming

Mechanics' Institute Tuesday Night Marathon Returns Live

The Tuesday Night Marathon (TNM), Mechanics' Institute's flagship chess event, returned live on June 1 after more than a year of online competition. In keeping with the Institute's COVID Health and Safety Plan, the event was limited to 50% capacity, but players were eager to get back to the board and use the historic chess room. We continue to broadcast the top games on [our Twitch channel](#) with live commentary by GM Nick de Firmian and FM Paul Whitehead, bringing the live action to anyone interested in following online. For more information about our TNM, which is both FIDE and USCF rated, please visit www.milibrary.org/chess. With the return of live chess, we will also continue to offer high quality online events and programs to the community. Please visit the [chess events page](#) to see a sample of our offerings, both live and online.



In-Person Scholastic Chess at Mechanics' Back in Action

Scholastic chess is back inside the Mechanics' Institute building, as we continue to promote the benefits of chess to the children in our community. Many of the participants in our in-person scholastic event on June 5 had only previously played online; for those having never before visited the Institute, this was an engaging experience. Students competed with gusto and were able to interact over the board. Both parents and players told us what an exciting day they had, and staff enjoyed seeing so many new faces. Full results from this event can be found at the [chess classes & tournaments](#) page of our site.



On June 5, TNM competitors engaged in tournament play, in person for the first time in more than a year of online-only competition.

Summer Enrichment Programs: Online and Onsite

Mechanics' chess club is offering a full slate of enrichment programming for kids throughout the summer, both live and online. Our coaching philosophy centers around developing critical thinking skills, learning from mistakes, and learning sporting conduct through chess, providing a foundation that will benefit students in many areas throughout their lives.

- In summer camps, our team of coaches is ready to engage students with a healthy mix of instruction, puzzles, tournament games, and fun. Our campers can make new friends and learn all the fine lessons chess affords. Our online camps are half day, and our live camps allow half and full day options.
- We offer online kids' classes in one hour blocks for intermediate and advanced students, as well as a tactics-specific class for scholastic tournament players.
- Weekly scholastic events are open to student players of all levels, so they may continue to develop and apply what they've learned.

From our daily free tournaments on Chesskid.com to our weekly USCF rated events, there is something for everyone.

Check MI's [scholastic chess page](#) for information regarding our offerings. Limited scholarships are available upon request. Please reach out to us if we can assist, by emailing chessroom@milibrary.org.



Students participated in the June 5 scholastic chess tournament to learn skills and win prizes.

A Classic Book and a Memorable Lesson

by Paul Whitehead, Chess Room Coordinator



Steve Brandwein (1942-2015) was my predecessor as Chess Room Coordinator at the MI from 2000 to 2012. Former Chess Room Director John Donaldson observed on Steve's retirement: "You don't replace a guy like Steve." No, there could be no replacing possibly the most well-read person on the planet, a legendary blitz (speed chess) player, a friend of Bobby Fischer's, a terrific Scrabble player — not to mention a fierce competitor at Ping-Pong and Bridge — a person with an endless curiosity

and a savage intellect... a wonderful and trusted friend of mine — and many others. I haven't replaced Steve — who could?

There was an aura around Steve, and his exploits were near legendary: a radical member of SDS in his college days, he played marathon blitz sessions with Bobby Fischer ("I only won about 1 out of 10.") and was ejected from live TV coverage of the 1972 Fischer-Spassky match when he turned to the camera and talked about getting U.S. troops out of Vietnam and "Mad-Dog Kissinger" instead of chess!

Steve was an amazing conversationalist with a real interest in people, and everything people were up to. Able to hold his own with philosophers and any kind of deep thinker, Steve nevertheless took a real pleasure in low humor, bad jokes and malicious gossip. He seemed to take particular delight in skewering simple-minded religious beliefs, and in playfully mocking those unwitting mortals who tried to gain wisdom at his feet... which leads me to the following tale from long, long ago.

Steve was well known in some parts as a chess "hustler." A hustler is someone who makes their living from chess — in whatever way they can — and one way was by having students and giving lessons.

So, once upon a time — in a chess world not too different from ours of today — Steve had a student named... well, let's call him Mister S. Everywhere that Steve went, Mr. S. was sure to follow — to the Meat Market Coffeehouse on 24th Street, where chess-players could smoke and meet non-chess players (for a radical change!), or on to Fiddlers' Green, a chess club/bookstore just up the street, and of course the venerable Mechanics' Institute, where Steve went EVERY DAY. Steve referred to his walks down to 57 Post Street (from wherever in the city he was living at the time) as his "constitutional." And right on his heels: Mr. S.

Seeking knowledge and demanding answers, trying desperately to find the deep chess truths that only Steve seemed to possess: how could Mr. S. unlock the secrets to chess mastery? It seemed that only Steve could help, only Steve could instruct, and that only Steve could provide the answers to Mr. S.'s questions — no others would do! And yes, Steve did have the answer for Mr. S. — a couple of lessons, you might say... It seems Mr. S. owned a book, a famous chess book, newly purchased and shiny: *Zurich 1953*, by World Champion contender David Bronstein.

Now, Mr. S. was always wanting to play Steve — to learn, to become a great player just like Steve. But Steve was a hustler, and hustlers do not play chess for free — not on your life. So, they ended up one day at the MI Chess Club and played blitz chess for *Zurich 1953*, as a sort of bet — and Steve naturally won the book.

But now Mr. S. wanted this fantastic chess book back, to study and learn from those important pages. Yet now it was now in Steve's possession. What to do? Mr. S. decided to dig in his wallet and find the funds to buy the book back from Steve — at full cover price! Ah, now it was his again! So now he could play Steve again... for the book... and lose it again, and buy it back... again... And again and again, and again! In a way this concluded the 1st lesson, but read on.

Our Mr. S. had not tired of drinking deeply from the fountain of wisdom, and he still had one more hurdle to overcome (as far as Steve was concerned!). One day, as Mr. S. badgered Steve yet again for a lesson (and apparently without funds to buy back *Zurich 1953* for the umpteenth time), Steve, it seems, had finally had enough of his faithful student's endless searching, his desperate quest. In a lightning-bolt moment of dazzling Zen-like clarity Steve posed this, the ultimate chess-koan: study the following position for one full hour — a chessboard, empty of pieces. That's correct, dear reader — an empty chessboard. And so Mr. S. sat there, staring at the empty board. For an entire hour.

Much time has passed since then, and while back then I thought Steve's lesson funny — if a bit harsh — now I think differently: chess is a difficult business, and who is to say what strange paths will open our eyes to its mysteries?

This author does not know if Mr. S. ever took another lesson from Steve, and Steve himself never let on, although he did get a certain gleam in his eye whenever *Zurich 1953* was discussed. And was it my imagination, or did Steve give a silent chuckle whenever the board was swept clear of pieces? The purity of the board without chessmen, the emptiness, the cosmic void... One thing I do know: Steve lent me THAT COPY of *Zurich 1953*, one of the greatest chess books ever written. And I lost it!

That book, which had changed hands so many times, a cosmic chess laugh, was lost by me and never replaced. As Steve could never be replaced. Even by his replacement.

Welcome Back!

57 Post Street Reopens



After a year and several months of the Mechanics' Institute (MI) operating at restricted capacity in accordance with city and state public health requirements, we are excited to open our doors with a carefully crafted reopening plan.

In June, we began to welcome visitors back into the historic Mechanics' Building at 57 Post Street, with restrictions in place to protect the health of members, staff, and building tenants.

MI can now allow in-person services and activities for members and guests at full capacity. We are working on gradually reopening our library and events spaces with extended hours, following library and venue best practices.

Members are welcome to [drop in to the library](#) Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays between 12 pm - 4 pm, as well as Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2 pm - 6 pm, with no advance scheduling required. The chess room hosts select events in person, and is open Monday through Thursday from 11 am - 4 pm for study, but not for casual play. Conference rooms, including the 4th floor meeting room, are not yet open for visitors, but we hope to host select events in person beginning this summer.

In the meantime, online programs and To Go library pickup will continue full swing. If you have any questions about library services, please contact us at 415-393-0101 or email circulation@milibrary.org. If you are interested in learning more about live chess activities or would like to schedule a time to visit the chess room, please contact us at chessroom@milibrary.org.

MI no longer requires masks or social distancing for vaccinated members or guests in our library. **All unvaccinated individuals must wear masks and adhere to social distancing requirements** throughout the MI building, library, chess room, and event spaces. Please be aware that certain programs and activities may require masks for both vaccinated and unvaccinated members and guests. We ask that you carefully check event details to see what protocols are in place for each program. Please find the Institute's complete [Health and Safety Plan](#) on our policies page.

If you have any questions about the building, how we've maintained the Institute during the closure, or for any other 57 Post-related concerns, please contact building@milibrary.org.

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www.milibrary.org

Library Questions?

Call:

415.393.0101

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Membership Questions?

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Library Hours

Please see our [website](#) for details.

Closures

July 4

Independence Day

July 5

Independence Day, Observed

September 6

Labor Day