

The MONTEBELLO Voice

an independent gazette

spring forward

March 10, 2021



100 years before Rosa

By Leslee Levy

I heard the courageous story of Elizabeth Jennings Graham in a podcast. Why did I not learn about her when I was a child attending public school in New York City? Here's her inspirational story as we celebrated Black History Month in February and now Women's History Month in March.

On a hot Sunday morning in July 1854, Elizabeth Jennings, a 24-year-old Black schoolteacher on her way to church, boarded a Third Avenue Railroad Company horse car at Pearl and Chatham Streets in lower Manhattan. Soon after boarding, Jennings was or-

ed to walk; public transportation was rarely available.

Jennings ignored the conductor's orders and resisted his attempts to remove her physically. Finally, with the aid of a policeman, he succeeded in forcing her off.

The Black community was enraged, and the day after the incident they held a rally at Jennings' church. Just as Rosa Parks would a century later, Jennings took her case to court. She sued the driver, the conductor, and the Third Avenue Railway.

Remarkably, Jennings was represented by a 24-year-old lawyer, Chester A. Arthur. Then just a junior partner at Culver, Parker, and Arthur, he later became the 21st President of the United States.

In 1855 Judge Rockwell of the Brooklyn Circuit Court ruled: "Colored persons if sober, well behaved and free from disease, had the same rights as others and could neither be excluded by the rules of the company, nor by force or violence." Jennings won her suit and was awarded damages.

Jennings's victory served as a powerful catalyst in the fight

for equality on New York's public transit vehicles, but it didn't end segregation once and for all. It would take nearly 20 years before all New York City street-cars were desegregated.

Within a month of Jennings's victory, a Black man named Peter Porter was refused a ride on an Eighth Avenue Railroad Company car along with his wife and four other women. He sued,

too, but settled out of court, and the company agreed to let Black people ride in the same cars as whites.

In 1873, the New York State legislature passed the Civil Rights Act, which explicitly outlawed discrimination on public transportation in the city. Thus, more than 30 years before the New York City subway opened, all transit lines in New York City were integrated by law. 📖



dered to get off the horse car and told to wait for a car that served African American passengers.

At the time, all public transportation in New York City was privately owned. Some omnibuses and horse cars displayed signs announcing Colored Persons Allowed, but these segregated vehicles were few and far between. New York City's Black residents were expect-

Cover photo by Azita Mashayekhi

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Editor & Designer
Mikhailina Karina

Contributors
Sue Allen, Joe de Angelis, Linda Brownlee, Turo Dexter, Elizabeth F. Penny Jones, Leslee Levy, Azita Mashayekhi, Dian McDonald, Bob Shea

Historic Huntley

By Elizabeth F. Penny Jones

Plan a visit this spring

to Historic Huntley just a few miles from Montebello. Historic Huntley is a brick Federal-style villa that was built c. 1825 by Thomson Francis Mason (1785-1838), grandson of George Mason of Gunston Hall. The setting on a hillside, looking south near Huntley Meadows Park, was probably chosen to catch the summer breezes, as it was not Mason's main house, but used as a summer retreat. A tenant house was built in c. 1827. Also on the site are other original structures such as an ice well, and a necessary with privy chambers. The name Huntley possibly came from



an ancestral home on George Mason's mother's side in Scotland.

Thomson's principal residence was in Old Town Alexandria where he was a lawyer, served as mayor, justice of the peace, and president of the Middle Turnpike And Alexandria Canal companies. He graduated from Princeton University and is buried at Christ Church Cemetery.

Thomson married Elizabeth "Betsey" Clapham Price of Leesburg in 1817 and began building Huntley on the land he had inherited from his father. The house was left to Mason's sons in 1859. During the Civil War, the 3rd Michigan Volunteer Infantry Regiment camped at Huntley. The site was

owned by a number of individuals during the second half of the nineteenth century and the twentieth century until the Fairfax County Park Authority acquired it in 1989. It had been listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972.

In 2010, restoration of the house began with funding from Fairfax County bonds, the National Park Service Save America's Treasures program, and the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. Many photos of the restoration process can be found on the website at historic-huntley.org. It was restored to the early nineteenth-century period and has an H-shaped floor plan. It is built in common bond, with recessed windows, fanlights, a raised basement, and an inset porch. The house is unfurnished but does have interesting mantels, woodwork and doors. It has a recently installed innovative geothermal heating and cooling system.



Tours and other events are available at minimum cost by accessing the Fairfax County Park Authority web site or calling 703-768-2525. Also volunteer opportunities are available. The site is at 6918 Harrison Lane, Alexandria, Virginia, 22306.

To become a member of Friends of Historic Huntley go to <http://historichuntley.org/membership.pdf>. The author serves on the board of Friends of Historic Huntley. 🏠



Vaccine tourists

By Sue Allen

After searching far and wide

for a COVID-19 vaccine, we finally bit the bullet and went to Dublin. Not Ireland, but Dublin, Virginia. It's a town of 2,500 nestled in the Shenandoah Valley less than 20 miles from better-known Blacksburg. It's 285 miles from Montebello, nearly the farthest point from Alexandria you could find in the state

We had signed up with Fairfax County, Kaiser Permanente, and every drugstore offering the vaccine. We were even preparing to drive 800 miles to northern Michigan where we own a home and the county had plenty of Moderna. The night before launching the Michigan plan, my spouse, Don, was doing a midnight vaccine search when I heard him say, "Bingo!" (Okay, that's not quite what he said but it sounds better). I ran to the computer where a CVS web site said "Availability" next to Dublin and a town named Abington. We raced through the questions and within minutes were signed up for vaccines two days later, Don's at 3 p.m., and mine at 3:15.

And drat, wouldn't you know it, the weather prediction was rain all day. We left Montebello at 8:05 a.m. and headed into the drizzle. It lasted about 250 miles, but as we drew nearer and the Blue Ridge Mountains graced our view, the sun burst through and the temperature warmed. Surely a good sign.

Rolling into the parking lot of the CVS – the newest looking structure in a town that appeared to be on the downswing – we were 45 minutes early. We decided to hike around the neighborhood and knocked off 40 minutes. Since Don was first, he checked in while I waited in the car. The parking lot was filling fast. Then it was my turn.

I stood in a very short line in the shampoo aisle, and a woman in front of me turned around from her spot six

feet ahead and said, "I came all the way from Roanoke." That's about an hour's drive.

"We drove from Alexandria." Her eyes widened and they called her name. I was next.

"Susan?" A woman pointed me toward a small curtained partition where



a man in a white coat stood. He looked about 30ish with a name tag that said Abraham. He asked me a few questions and rubbed my arm with alcohol.

"When I was a kid, I used to bite my doctor when I got a shot," I told him.

"Do you still bite?" he asked.

"No worries," I said. "You've saving my life."

I must admit they have ultra-sharp needles in today's injections. It slipped in like nothing.

After waiting 15 minutes to see if I had any reaction, I was free. Freer than I'd been in a year. One down and one to go.

Don and I fist-bumped and took

turns snapping pictures in front of the store, then walked through the parking lot toward our car. We were stopped by a man with a sizeable white beard tethered at the base by a ponytail holder. "Did you get a vaccine?" he asked

We nodded.

"How'd you got the appointment? I live a few miles down the road but I'm not sure what to do."

We took out our phones and went through each step. He had a lot of questions and we were able to answer most of them.

"I don't have a cell. I'll go home and do it on my computer. Thanks," he said.

Just like that, we'd become vaccination experts.

We drove around trying to spend money on food in Dublin. The town had been kind to us and it looked like it had seen better days. A website says the median income per household is \$27,831 and 16.5 percent of families are below the poverty rate. All we could find was a Hardees and a pizza delivery place. Then we turned the corner and happened upon an Italian restaurant, takeout, where Don bought a chicken wrap.

Then we took a victory lap hiking around Radford University, a picturesque campus atop the hills of nearby Radford. That night we stayed at a hotel in Blacksburg where we slept peacefully despite slightly sore left arms.

Two days later, back home, I opened an e-mail from the Fairfax County Health Department. It read: *You are now eligible to receive your first dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine at the Inova COVID-19 Vaccination Center.*

Six hour later, Don received the same notice.

On March 28 we'll take our second 570-mile round trip to Dublin with many stops along the way. I can't think of a better excuse to experience spring in the Blue Ridge Mountains. 🍷

Most serene Republic of Venice

By Joe de Angelis

After the fall of the Roman Empire, several powerful city-states emerged in Italy, one of which was the Serenissima Repubblica di Venezia (Most Serene Republic of Venice). The Serenissima Repubblica di Venezia was a Sovereign Italian state and maritime republic in northern Italy that was centered in the city of Venice. The Republic's history of diplomacy, wealth, mercantilism, justice and prosperity, has indeed made it worthy of its title. The Republic of Venice was the longest lasting republic in history lasting from AD 697 to AD 1797: 1,100 years. Radiating from the city of Venice, the Republic incorporated numerous overseas possessions in what is now modern Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Greece, Albania and Cyprus. It also incorporated the city of Padua with its university, which was established in 1222. The University of Padua is Italy's second oldest university after Bologna. It was originally founded as a school of law by scholars and students from Bologna, who were in pursuit of greater academic freedom. The Republic offered such freedom and the University of Padua eventually evolved

into the birthplace of modern medicine.

Integrated into an extraordinary natural landscape, Venice developed a unique history, government and artistic heritage uncommon to urban dwelling the world over. The ruler of the Republic of Venice was called a Doge and was elected for life by the city-state's aristocracy. However, the Consiglio dei Dieci (Council of Ten) was the major governing body of the Republic from 1310 to 1797. It is often stated that the Doges were dictators, their power was restrained by the Maggior Consiglio (Great Council) of Venice. Although the Doge was the head of the Council, he could not act unilaterally and had to have the consent of the other members which were his six advisors, plus three additional members from the citizenry.

The Republic never had a standing army, but it dominated trade throughout the Mediterranean Sea, which was the nexus of commerce between Europe, North Africa and Asia. The Venetians used their impressive naval power to intimidate any and all vessels sailing



through the Adriatic Sea and other Mediterranean waters. Without going into the entire history of the Republic of Venice, I would like to simply address what I consider to be a few salient historical facts about Venice that I find very interesting.

First, a few words about the city of Venice itself. Venice is located in the Venetian Lagoon, which today, consists of 117 islands among 177 canals that are connected by 409 bridges. The Venetian Republic also served as a cultural and economic bridge between the Eastern and Western Christian worlds. That cultural exchange is clearly evident today in the city's art and architecture that encompasses a combination of Islamic, Byzantine and Venetian Gothic influences.

This beautiful city of Venice that we know today began to emerge sometime during the mid-14th century. The magnificent buildings that make up the city of Venice actually were built on logs that were driven approximately 55 feet into the solid earth beneath the water. The logs were not ordinary logs, but rather they were from the Adler tree, which can grow anywhere from 40 to 80 feet in height. A unique property of Adler trees is that they are highly water-resistant, and not only that, Adler logs, when submerged underwater, eventually petrify and are as solid and sturdy as poured concrete. Millions of these logs



eternal city

had to be imported from Slovenia and Croatia as they were not indigenous to the Veneto area. Once the logs were in the ground, cross beams were then placed on top of them to provide a level building surface for the proposed buildings.

One of the first things that comes to mind when thinking of Venice is usually the gondola. The history of the gondola, however, is somewhat of an enigma, with its initial appearance in the canals of Venice lost in the fog of history. Some scholars say they originated circa AD 697, while others contend that the gondola did not appear until the year AD 1094. The same confusion applies to the name itself, with Greece, Malta, and Turkey all claiming that they provided the name “gondola” for the unique Venetian vessel, but perhaps it was actually the Venetians. Be that as it may, the gondola is a world-famous icon.

Over the centuries the gondola has changed and adapted to the city’s growth and conditions stipulated by water traffic. Today’s banana-shaped, modern gondola was not developed until the 19th century, when in 1884 Domenico Tramontin, a boatbuilder, designed and built the gondola that we recognize and know so well. Prior to 1884, gondolas were symmetrical, that is evenly balanced, and required two gondoliers to row the boat, one on either side. Tramontin’s ingenious design put the gondola out of balance to one side, however, a single gondolier could then row on the opposite side, thereby balancing the boat, keeping it level and able to travel in a straight line. The construction of the gondola continued to evolve until the mid-20th century, when the city government prohibited any further modifications. Today there only about 400 gondoliers in Venice compared to around 10,000 or so in the 16th century. But a gondolier today can earn

as much \$150,000 annually. However, gondoliers are now required to have a license, the test for which includes the history of the city, the Republic and its architecture. Currently, there are only about three or four new gondolier licenses are granted each year.

The ubiquitous gondolas of Venice were originally richly decorated and



came in many colors and sizes, that is until 1562 when, during a wave of austerity, it was decreed by the city government, that all gondolas should be painted one color: black. The Sumptuary Laws of 1562 decreed that all gondolas must be painted black to prevent any ostentatious displays of wealth, thereby giving a commercial advan-

tage to the wealthy. Sumptuary Laws are laws limiting private expenditure on such things as food and personal extravagances. Additionally, when city bridges were built over the Venetian canals, they were designed so as to allow a standing gondolier to pass under their arch. This, in effect limited the height of the “felzi” (cabins) that many gondolas had, and which accommodated many adventure lovers, such as Casanovas, as they travel incognito through the canals of Venice.

The Ponte dei Sospiri or the Bridge of Sighs, is the only covered limestone bridge in Venice. It was constructed in 1602 and spans the Rio di Palazzo, connecting the New Prison to the interrogation rooms in the Doge’s Palace. Legend states that when prisoners crossed the bridge on their way to prison they sighed in despair at the loss of their freedom and the city of Venice. The bridge’s English nomenclature stems from the poem “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage” by Lord Byron, published circa 1815: “I stood in Venice on the Bridge of Sighs, a palace and prison on each hand.”

One of Venice’s most infamous sons, Giacomo Casanova, also crossed the Bridge of Sighs. Refusing to change his ways, Casanova was convicted, in 1755 of depravity and blasphemy, and sentenced to five years of solitary confinement in the Piombi (The Leads), which was located on the top floor of the Doge’s Palace under a lead-lined roof. The lead-lined roof made conditions unbearable for the inmates when the weather reached extremes of either hot or cold. After crossing the Bridge of Sighs, Casanova was locked in a cell knowing full well that no one had ever escaped from the Piombi. However, after 15 months, Casanova was able to escape by prying open the lead roof of his cell and making his way across the Venetian rooftops to freedom. In his autobiography, *Histoire de ma vie* (The

eternal city



History of My life), published in 1787, Casanova recounts his daring escape from the Piombi. His autobiography is also considered one of the most authentic sources of information on the customs, mores and life in 18th century Europe, and Venice in particular.

The Palazzo Ducale (Doge's Palace) housed not only the Piombi, but also the Doge's personal apartments, the seat of the government, and the city's courtrooms. The Palazzo Ducale is also a beautiful hybrid of Byzantine, Islamic, and Gothic architecture all of which are melded into the Venetian Renaissance architectural motif. If you've been to Venice, you may or may not have noticed that there are two columns on the Palazzo Ducale's loggiato (exterior gallery) that are not white like the rest of the columns: they are in fact pink in color, made from red marble from Verona. They are centrally located along the loggiato, facing the Piazzetta, for a specific purpose. The Doge always made his public appearances on the loggiato, from between the two pink columns, whenever there were public events, or festivals such as Carnevale, or other official ceremonies in St. Mark's Square. But there's a far more sinister side to these columns.

Death sentences were also announced to the public from between these columns. If the convicted individual happened to be an aristocrat, he had the privilege of being hanged from between those two columns and having

his body left there for a few days as a warning to the aristocracy. Symbolically, pink represented the unspilled blood of the people sentenced to death and hung there. It is also said that the condemned had one last chance to be saved. The fourth column from the corner of the loggiato is out of alignment with the other columns, and if

the condemned person could manage to walk around it, without falling off, he would be freed. However, this appears to be more of an urban legend than fact.

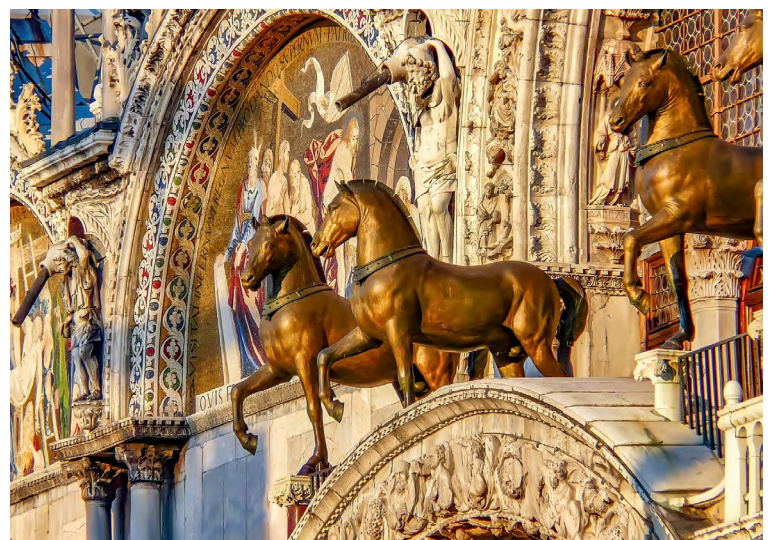
Another unique feature of the Republic's government was the use of postboxes for anonymous denunciations. These boxes, known as Bocchi di Leone (Lion's Mouth) were placed strategically throughout the city, including at the Palazzo Ducale, allowing citizens to anonymously denounce individuals whom they thought were corrupt or doing harm to the welfare of the Republic. Venice's complaint boxes, as opposed to those in other European cities, were, by law, only allowed for anonymous denunciations against public officials and not private citizens. These boxes were intricately carved to resemble the face of a lion, the winged lion of St. Mark, or a human face, with an open slot at the mouth into which letters could be inserted. This quasi-legal system is sometimes referred to as inquisitorial because upon the

receipt of a simple secret accusation with no witnesses or proof, an investigation would be launched often to the detriment of the individual accused. These Bocchi di Leone can still be seen throughout the city of Venice today.

As we know, the symbol of Venice is the winged Lion of St. Mark the Evangelist who was the patron saint of the Serenissima Repubblica di Venezia and of the city of Venice today. Venice's grand Basilica is not only named after St. Mark, but it is also the repository for his body. According to legend, in AD 828, Venetian merchants stole the body of St. Mark (one of the four evangelists: Mathew, Mark, Luke and John) from its burial site in Alexandria, Egypt. They were able to sneak it past Muslim guards by hiding the body in a large box containing hundreds of pounds of pork.

Before it became a basilica, St. Mark's was the chapel of the Doge. The original structure was destroyed by fire in 976. The current structure was not built until the 11th century. The inside the basilica contains more than 85,000 square feet of golden wall mosaics and some 500 plus columns and capitals, most of which are Byzantine dating from the 6th and 11th centuries.

One of the most striking features of St. Mark's Basilica are the Four Bronze Horses of the Hippodrome. They are situated above the entrance portal on the balcony of the Basilica. Like the



eternal city

body of St. Mark, these statues were brought to Venice from elsewhere: Constantinople. They were part of the spoils of war after the Christian Crusaders sacked Constantinople in AD 1204 during the fourth Crusade and were placed on the cathedral in AD 1254. In order to accommodate ship transport from Constantinople to Venice, the heads of all four horses had to be removed. However, collars were soon added to the necks of the horses in order to cover the weld joints where the heads were replaced.

In 1797 Napoleon conquered the Republic and had the horses removed from the basilica and sent off to Paris,

where he had them installed on the Arc de Triomphe. However, after Napoleon's defeat in 1815 the horses were returned to Venice.

The Four Bronze Horses of the Hippodrome remained in place over St Mark's until the early 1980s. Then, because of the continuous damage caused by air pollution, the original statues were replaced with exact copies and the originals were moved inside the basilica where they remain on display today.

There is much controversy about the origin of the horses. Recent analysis of the metal revealed that the horses were made of 96.67% copper, thereby dispelling the theory that they were from

the fourth century BC Hellenistic period, since the Greeks did not possess the ability to make copper sculptures. The use of copper and the technique required to create sculptures suggests a Roman origin for the horses. Given this analysis, it is now generally accepted that the horses were made somewhere between the second or third century AD.

Although the Serenissima Repubblica di Venezia has not existed for almost 225 years, the grandeur and magnificence of the Republic is readily evident in the city of Venice. St. Mark's Square with its many shops and imposing bell tower, the Grand Canal lined with architectural marvels, the Ponte di Rialto, and the magnificent Basilica di Santa Maria della Salute, all attest to the grandeur of a bygone, but fascinating era in the history of the Western world. Because of its art and architecture, as well as its history, Venice is considered one of the most beautiful and fascinating cities the world today. In 1987 Venice and its Lagoon were designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is open to the world and should be seen and enjoyed by all. 🏰



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Russian war reenactor relives history

By Randall Cook

This is the backstory I created for my Public Display Living History presentations. This was more of a guideline than a word-for-word recitation.



NIKITA MIKHAILOVICH GALIK: I was born on March 30, 1902 in Odessa, at a turbulent time for the Russian Empire.

I had a marginal education, settling for work in a lucrative job driving a horse-drawn cart carrying Army foodstuff and vodka rations for the front line troops in the Great War. Tempted by adventure, I joined the Army on January 2, 1917. The February Revolution changed my path, and in the midst of the deteriorating situation at the front, I saw opportunity in the Soldiers' Soviet. Exploiting my old supply line connections, through charm or coercion, I saw that my Regiment never wanted for food or even ammunition in the dark winter and spring of 1917.

I finally saw serious conflict as my "loyal" regiment was sent to the front to participate in the Kerenskiy Offensive, which of course, ultimately foundered and lost momentum. When the Petrograd Government of Kerenskiy was overthrown by the Bolsheviks, I made my way back to the chaos of Odessa. My parents had emigrated

to France by the time I reached my hometown, and without an immediate fall back, having alienated several important people, I had a lean winter of 1918.

I was personally appalled at the defeatist and traitorous attitudes of the upstart Bolsheviks, so, in the spring of 1918 I joined an infantry regiment of the new White Army. Over the next two years I attained Yefreitor rank status, but the writing was on

the wall for the Whites as my unit ended up in the cul de sac of the Crimean Peninsula. As Vrangeli's forces left Russia, I got back to Odessa and fell in with the lucrative but cutthroat world of Odessa's black market.

In the lean post-Civil War years, this was a means to staying afloat, and even profiting. But the increasingly ruthless CheKa caught up with me, and I was

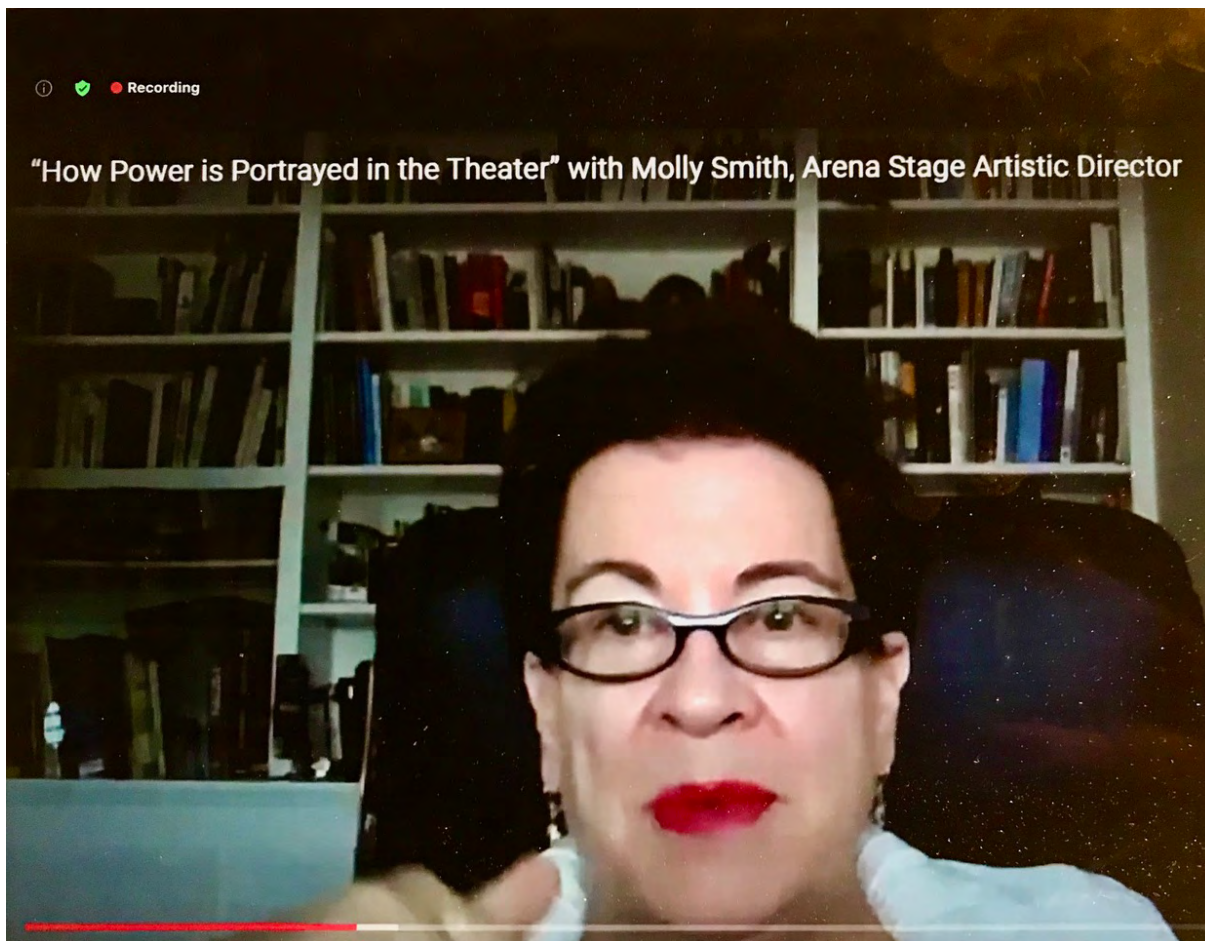


arrested and served five years in a CheKa prison.

Upon my release, I thought about emigrating, but frankly did not have the means or the channels to exploit in such an endeavor. So I joined the Red Army on April 1, 1930, and served dutifully if unremarkably, occasionally gaining rank but losing it due to infractions either real or invented by my hardcore, unrepentant Civil War veteran Leytenant.

I was disappointed that my regiment did not take part in the liberation of western Ukraine and Byelarus from the Poles in 1939, but was lucky enough not to participate in the disastrous and bloody war with Finland shortly thereafter. I was surprised, but not overly so, by the German attack and invasion of June 22, 1941. I did hope that personal advantage would smile upon me, however, in the coming maelstrom. 🍷

zoom event



Robert of Arabia, part IV

Adapting and anecdotes

By Robert Shea

“A mind that is stretched by new experience can never go back to its old dimensions.” – Oliver Wendell Holmes

As an advisor and the senior American in 1971 in the southern one-third of Saudi Arabia, in the small market town of Khamis Mushait, I represented the United States of America. I was only a major at that time, but I nevertheless had to become immersed in the local culture and festivities.

Despite local customs, our Army headquarters in Riyadh provided a “booze” ration to each of our service members at the remote locations. We could order two bottles a month, with a case of beer being the equivalent of the two bottles. It arrived on the contractor aircraft wrapped in plain brown paper. Since the contractor personnel did not get such a ration, a cold beer at the end of the day offered to select contractor supervisors was a positive way to reward extra effort or to lobby for some special project. It worked. “Miller time in the Asir Province” or “This Bud’s for you, but we have to talk.”

In our area, the Saudi Army Operations Officer was a Colonel Barak Judi. He had attended both the US Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia and the Command and Gener-

al Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He spoke perfect English and looked like Omar Sharif. Somehow he learned that we had a booze ration, and I knew that he knew that we had it. About once a month, Colonel Judi would appear at my BOQ door at the end of the day and say, “Bob, I am really, really thirsty.” I would smile and offer a cold Pepsi, a 7-Up, or an orange soda which he would accept. I would have loved to offer him a beer or a bourbon and water, but I feared that he would share his good fortune with another Saudi officer who might also become “really thirsty.” This would continue until I said no to someone who might be offended and then could report me to the local authorities for having alcohol. I risked being told to be out of the

country within 48 hours, not something I wanted to have to tell my assignment officer back in the Pentagon. Colonel Judi and I played that game for twelve months.

We had commercial air service to Riyadh via Saudair DC-9s when jet service finally arrived at our small airport. I recall, while waiting to board a flight, seeing the flight crew at the nose wheel, facing Mecca, saying prayers. I wondered if that was a form of Saudi flight insurance, but how can one argue with prayers? An equal number of planned take-offs and landings was essential and very healthy.

Many times on Friday, we would go to the local suq where fixed prices did not exist. Haggling over the price was the norm and became somewhat of a game. A small colorful prayer rug was a great gift for children back in the States. The asking price was always about 15 rials, with a rial worth about 25 cents. We would haggle the price down to 6 or 7 rials. Then, wanting another, we would ask the price of an identical item. The answer 15 rials, and the process would start all over again. Both seller and buyer enjoyed the game as we wrote Arabic numbers on our palms with a Sharpie.

When the US Ambassador and his wife visited, she asked me to take her to the suq to look for Beduin jewelry. The merchants were amazed to have a Western woman who spoke flawless Arabic haggling over their wares. She was a no-nonsense woman who enjoyed retail therapy.



personal history

When my boss or staff members from headquarters wanted to visit my site and escape the oven-like temperatures of Riyadh, they had to give me four-day's warning. They could never make an unannounced visit, for I had to obtain clearance for the Army Beechcraft to land at the local airport. Normally they wanted an update, a briefing, and a picnic in the picturesque cool mountains – not necessarily in that order.

When dealing with local commanders I used my interpreter. Diplomacy and tact were mandatory as all outranked me, and I was trying to implement change that was often resisted. I had to counsel my interpreter early on to just translate my words as spoken as he had a habit, as I learned, to amplify what I had said in less than diplomatic terms. Telling it bluntly, like it was, was not his prerogative even if it might have been appropriate and certainly a lot more truthful.

I attended two local weddings as a guest of honor, but I never saw the bride. The women gathered in one building while the men celebrated someplace else. When I learned that my counterpart's wife was seriously ill, I could not ask, "How is your wife feeling?" Discussion of female family members was unacceptable, but I could ask, "How are things at home?" He understood, appreciated my concern, and would update me. One adapted.

When one visited a local military unit, there was a social protocol that transpired as we discussed the problem of the day. First, cardamom coffee was served in small porcelain cups, almost like large thimbles. It was served with great flourish from a brass teapot with a long snout. Then scalding hot sweet tea was served in clear glass cups with handles. The last course was a warm soft drink such as Pepsi or 7-Up. For some reason the coffee and tea were always consumed in odd numbers of servings, one never had just two of something. One shook the container when finished, and the server would immediate-

ly take it and refill it for the next person in seniority. Western sanitation was not a high priority. Fortunately I was usually in the first round of servings.

During twelve months I attended probably 40 feasts in tents in some lush outdoor spot in a wadi in the area, men only. Thick hand-woven rugs were spread out with large brass trays of rice and boiled goat meat arrayed. One knelt at the rug, being careful to tuck your left hand behind your knee as only the right hand could be used when eating. Knowing that I had been invited, the host would always have a plate, a knife, and fork available. I quickly learned to eat with my hand as soon as I was at the rug. If I hesitated, the plate would be filled for me with an unstated obligation to "clean my plate." Ripping off a piece of goat meat was easy, but managing to eat greasy rice by hand is a learned skill. You burrowed into the pyramid of rice to find the warmest inner rice, where the flies had not yet left foot prints, and then made a ball of rice with your hand that you then popped into your mouth. The trick was to look busy, but not eat a lot. There were always bananas and flat bread available. Since there were normally more attendees than places at the carpet, when you were finished, you simply nodded to your host and backed away with your place being taken by the next senior person who had not yet eaten. Rose water and incense were provided to offset greasy fingers and smelly clothing.

I never went to such an event feeling hungry. I always went to our site kitchen to eat something, even a peanut butter sandwich, to avoid the temptation to eat a lot. Quite frankly, goat and greasy rice were not my favorite menu items. The after-taste reminded me of what gargling with 40-weight oil might be like. Attending and eating went with my position, and I managed to do it without any international incidents.

When we had the grand opening of the King Faisal Military Cantonment Area, I attended such a feast with King

Faisal. It was more grand with pomp and circumstance, music, clouds of incense, guards, falcons, and golden swords, but the menu was the same. I was seated two places to the King's left at the carpet. Even with royalty as the host, when I was finished, I nodded to the King and backed away from the carpet, leaving my place for the next diner. He nodded back, and I went home to brush my teeth and rinse with Listerine.

Looking back at twelve months at Khamis Mushait, I have fond memories. Terrorism, violence against Westerners, and many of the things we may associate today with the Middle East were years in the future. Being there in 1971 was like being in a time machine that had been dialed back scores of years. I was at the right place at the right time to be immersed in a totally new culture, to accomplish my modified goals, to be independent, to learn, and to adapt both personally and professionally.

Robert of Arabia returned to the United States a very new and very different guy. 🍷

*The Montebello Voice
wants to hear from
you: musings, travels,
announcements,
photos, book reviews,
commentary, memoirs,
essays, analysis,
poems, suggestions,
club news, recipes, and
free ads*

*A twice-monthly publication
for the residents, by the residents
uncut, uncensored,
unofficial*

taking flight



Red-shouldered hawk at Montebello on March 6

Photo by Linda Brownlee

Do you have large trash to get rid of? Furniture, mattress, appliance, stuff that can't go in the regular trash pickup. I am planning to rent a truck to take another mattress to the county dump on Saturday, March 20 around 1 p.m. Seeking additional trash anyone would like hauled away, plus one or two strong people to assist with loading on this end, plus one person to ride along to the dump to help unload. Dump fee and cost of rental truck to be split equitably among everyone sending items.

Turo Dexter

turo@dexterworks.com



Progreso Center for Literacy & Citizenship
Spring 2021 Services

Classes are conducted using computers at Progreso or using computers or phones at the students' home

ESL Classes -- Mon. & Wed mornings (10:00-11:30 am)
Beginner (Classes are full)
Intermediate Level
Advanced Level

Both

By computer (on-line) from Progreso
Or by computer from home

English Conversation - Thurs. evenings (7:00-8:30 pm)
Intermediate and Advanced Levels
By computer from home (no charge)

Citizenship Classes - Tues. morning (in-person with openings)
For students actively preparing for test

Immigration Assistance Services (by appointment)



For class registration, call 703-799-8830 or email
Cristina.Schoendorf@unitedcommunity.org

For immigration assistance (by appointment),
Contact Cristina Schoendorf for link

For all other inquiries, contact
Director Cristina Schoendorf:
cristina.schoendorf@unitedcommunity.org



4100 Mohawk Lane
Alexandria, VA 22309
703.799.8830

The Montebello Grounds Committee Presents:

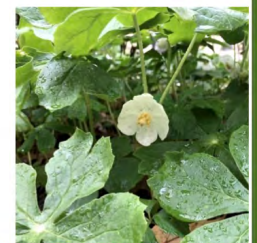
The Wildflowers of Montebello



Our presenter, **Laura Beaty**, is Horticulture Chair of the Virginia Native Plant Society. She also represents her district on the Fairfax County Tree Commission. Previously, Laura worked for the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources and for the National Parks Conservation Assn.



Spring wildflowers are coming! Learn to recognize more of them.



Thursday, March 25, 7:30 pm

Live video webinar - check email for how to join

final glance



Photo by Dian McDonald