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THE ATHEIST

January 21, 2001 CE

Vol. 5 #1

Newsletter of the Atheist Community of Austin

--- a Non-prophet Organization

P.O. Box 3798, Austin, TX 78764

512-371-2911

www.atheist-community.org

Member of the Atheist Alliance

--- a democratic confederation of non-theistic groups

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ACA CALENDAR

* ACA meets every Sunday. 1st Sunday Speaker's meeting, 11:15am, Furr's Cafeteria Longhorn Room, North Cross Mall, N. Burnet Rd. & W. Anderson Ln. Other Sundays 10:30am, Hot Jumbo Bagels, 307 W. 5th st..

* 2nd Sunday ACA Board Meetings. 12 noon at Hot Jumbo Bagels. Send agenda items to Susan Brown. or 512-443-0689.

* Godless Gamers every monday at Vic Farrow's. Contact Jeff Dee, unigames@io.com, 512-346-0366.

* Jan. 24th - Stephen Jay Gould in Austin. See article in December issue.

* Jan. 29th - Thomas Paine's birthday.

* Feb. 4th - First Sunday Speaker - Don Lawrence. Topic to be announced later.

* Feb. 12th - Charles Darwin's birthday.

* Feb. 19th - Lucilio Vanini killed by Inquisition 1619.

* Mar. 1st - ACA membership renewals due.

* Apr. 1st - ACA candidate nominations meeting.

* May. 6th - ACA officer elections meeting.

* Apr 13th - 15th - Atheist Alliance convention in Atlanta, www.atheistalliance.com.

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FREETHINKER ROCK REMOVED FROM COMFORT PARK

On Thursday December 21 a large crane and flatbed truck removed the Freethinker Rock from the Comfort town park. The removal attracted a small crowd who watched and took pictures, including Jolene Bourland, who liked the rock enough to get married by it.

Julie Fisher of the Texas Hill Country Freethinkers found the Rock dumped on private land about two miles from Comfort. Despite scare stories about the rock breaking and falling on people, Freethinker Rock almost toppled the 100 ton rated crane when it broke free. It shows no damage after its rough handling.

Freethinker Rock was to have been part of the Freethinker Cenotaph project to honor the freethinking Germans (Freidenkers) who founded Comfort and settled in the Texas hill country. The project became controversial when Comfort fundamentalists learned that atheists supported the project and that the town's founders were quite irreligious. Opponents launched a petition against a "monument to atheism" and wanted "satan's rock" removed from the Comfort park.

It is thought that Freethinker Rock's removal was approved by the Comfort

Chamber of Commerce, which operates the park under lease from Kendall County. Chamber board member Gary Lindner directed and raised funds for the removal.

The campaign to suppress and distort memories of Texas' German Freethinkers has a long history. ACA Board Member Arval Bohn says the Comfort Historical district boundary takes a jog to avoid including Bolshevik Hall. Freidenkers were not only irreligious, but interested in communist ideas -- well before Soviet police-state tyranny it should be noted.

In news reports, Lindner said he thought the rock had no owners. He ignores a number of letters project donors sent to the Chamber of Commerce describing their ownership interest.

Project donors Howard Thompson, Julie Fisher, Catherine Fahringer and Sally Chizek met with San Antonio attorneys last week to determine legal options available to donors.

ATHEIST ALLIANCE CONVENTION

The 2001 Atheist Alliance Convention will be at the Crowne Plaza Atlanta Airport Hotel April 13-15. This three day event already has a number of speakers and program events, including a Dan Barker debate. The cost for the complete program is \$170 before April 1. Cost for separate activities \$5-\$50. Contact 770-619-2345, 770-339-8394, 770-236-5624, steveyoth@aol.com, or www.atheistalliance.org.

ATHEISTS AIN'T KEGGERS

The ACA Winter Solstice party at Michelle Gadush's house was a big success. Everyone had a good time.

We did learn one thing about Austin atheists, however. Thirty atheist party animals can only drink half a keg. The Board will have to advise the Membership Committee to begin an outreach campaign to recruit better beer drinking atheists.

Don Lawrence volunteers to head up the Atheist Pub Ministry.

LIVE TV SHOW COMING - WHEN ?

Vic Farrow reports that the Atheist Experience will return as a live TV show in the Sunday 10:00-11:00am slot. This may be as early as January 21, but is dependent on Austin Cable's responsiveness, which varies. Vic also reports that his appeal of Austin Cable's suspension of his producer status was successful and that he can again produce shows.

CHRISTIANS ARE RUDEST RESTAURANT PATRONS

Dan Lewandowski of Wichita Falls reports that Wichita Falls Times-Record-News [1/14/2001]columnist Ted Buss did a story on the rudest restaurant patrons. The unanimous choice of restaurant managers was the after Sunday church crowd. Skeptics can only guess that church makes believers cheaper and meaner than usual.

TV SHOW TO HOST HOUSTON CHURCH OF FREETHOUGHT CO-FOUNDER

Atheist Experience host Jeff Dee has invited Houston Church of Freethought

(HCOF) co-founder Rudy Holz to be a guest on the Atheist Experience TV show at a date to be announced.

The HCOF celebrated its first secular wedding ceremony for Houston freethinkers Daniel Strain and Julie Ahrens on January 14th. HCOF celebrates its first anniversary in March.

GODLESS GAMERS STILL MEETING

One of ACA's most successful activities is the weekly meeting of the Godless Gamers. They play a variety of board, role-playing and card games -- whatever hits their fancy at each meeting. GG meets at Vic Farrow's place every Monday. Contact Jeff Dee, unigames@io.com, 512-346-0366.

'MANDA HAS ATHEIST CALENDARS

'Manda is handing out a little 2001 Atheist Calendar she designed. It's a handy one-pager you can put on your refrigerator or carry around.

FREETHINKER DANCE & PLAY IN SAN ANTONIO FEB 9-25

The Jump Start Performance Company of San Antonio presents two freethought shows February 9-25. The dance Southern Discomfort and play Comfort will be at the Blue Star Arts Complex, Building B, corner of South Alamo and Probandt. Tickets are \$12, \$9 for students and seniors, and \$7 for groups of ten or more. Call 210-227-5867 for info.

Southern Discomfort is a solo dance piece by S. T. Shimi. The dance portrays "a freewheeling tale of freethinking cowboys and an Indian who takes on the Lone Star state." Southern Discomfort plays Fridays and Sundays at 8:00pm.

Comfort, by Dianne Monroe, is "set in South Texas during the Civil War. This new play is the story of a young woman's quest to bury her slain brother. It is also the tale of the Freethinkers, who dared to challenge the existence of both American Slavery and God." Comfort plays Saturdays 8:00pm and Sundays at 3:00pm.

Comfort is based on a real family's recovery of remains of family members from the Nueces battlefield. These events are described in a book by Anne Stewart on sale at the Inguehutt General Store in Comfort.

Confederate Rangers had threatened people who wanted to remove the dead from the battlefield, in part because the remains might reveal that some who surrendered were executed.

The remains of freethinkers and other Germans killed at the Battle of Nueces were recovered after the war and buried at the Truere der Union Monument in Comfort, Texas. This monument is one of only six U.S. monuments allowed to always fly its flag at half mast.

BRITISH PUBS BEAT OUT CHURCHES

A recent National Public Radio item reported the results of a British survey about the center of town social life. Pubs were number one, beating out churches at number three. Civic centers were second.

Maybe atheists are going about things all wrong in our attempts to free American minds from superstition. Perhaps we'd make faster progress by

helping bars become more fun, congenial neighborhood meeting places. A first step would be for an atheist party to learn how to drink more than half a keg.

CHRISTIAN MUSIC SALES DOWN

The Dallas Morning News Religion section (1/14/2001) reports that Christian music sales were down 6% in 2000. Sales were down almost double that among Christian retailers as sales shifted to mainstream stores. Skeptics might wonder at Christians having less to sing about during the millennial year when Jesus was supposed to return.

DARWIN DAY PROGRAM & WEBSITE

Charles Darwin's birthday on February 12 is an important celebration day for atheists. A new group is encouraging a global Darwin Day Celebration with the development of a Darwin Day Program of information at www.darwin.ws/day.

ACA BUILDING & PERMANENT FUNDS

ACA maintains two special purpose funds as a financial commitment to ACA's future growth and activities. Donations made to those funds will be used for the fund's purpose.

The Permanent Fund is never spent. It exists to generate perpetual interest and dividend income to sustain future ACA operations. The Building Fund is for renting or purchasing an ACA building. As of January 14, the Building fund had \$7,025.58 and the Permanent fund had \$6,190.79.

WHO'S WHO IN HELL

Some bible thumpers have put out a book called Who's Who in Hell. ACA member Howard Thompson and Catherine Fahringer of San Antonio are among this good company.

LUCILIO VANINI DEATH ANNIVERSARY

Atheists should remember what religionists do to atheists when they rule government. The following is from A Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers of All Ages and Nations, by J. M. Wheeler, 1889. Note Vanini's death quote.

Vanini (Lucilio, afterwards JULIUS CAESAR), Italian philosopher and martyr, b. Taurisano (Otranto), 1585. He was accused of instilling Atheism into his scholars, tried and condemned to have his tongue cut out, his body burned and his ashes scattered to the four winds. This was done 19 Feb. 1619.

President Gramond, author of History of France under Louis XIII., writes "I saw him in the tumbril as they led him to execution, mocking the Cordelier who had been sent to exhort him to repentance, and insulting our Savior by these impious words. 'He sweated with fear and weakness, and I die undaunted.'"

ACA MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS MARCH 1ST

ACA dues for the year beginning March 1st are due on that date. See the new dues schedule under ACA Board Actions.

ACLU & BARRY LYNN HONOR SANTA FE DOES

[From Janet Swisher] The ACLU of Texas will be holding their John Henry Faulk Civil Libertarian of the Year Annual Awards on February 10, 2001 at the Thompson Conference Center. The theme is Separation of Church and State. The honorees are the Doe family of Santa Fe, Texas, and Prof. Douglas Laycock, who wrote the brief for their case. The keynote speaker is Barry Lynn, Executive Director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

Some members of the Freethinkers Association of Central Texas are planning to drive to Austin for this event. Contact ACLU at 512-441-0077 or <http://www.aclutx.org>.

ACA BOARD ACTIONS

January 14 meeting. Don Rhodes reports about \$15,051 total assets, mostly in the Building and Permanent Funds. Michelle Gadush reports a \$308.69 balance from sale of products.

The board approved Don Rhodes' new membership structure.

- Individual \$24/year, prorated to \$2/month
- Family \$36/year, prorated to \$3/month
- Student/Retired \$12/year, prorated to \$1/month
- Sustaining: Contribution of \$5 or more per month.
- Lifetime: \$1,000
- Newsletter \$12/year

Don Rhodes & Howard Thompson presented a proposal a Nominating Committee. The proposal was withdrawn.

A member complaint about receiving political e-mail from the ACA Secretary Howard Thompson was discussed. The issue for ACA is how to make member mailing lists available to members and what constraints to put on the usage of such lists. Free speech issues are involved. Any constraints would have ACA telling members what they could say to each other if they use the list to communicate with other members.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- * Newsletter: The Atheist newsletter published the third Sunday each month. Send items .
- * Products: Atheist paraphernalia for sale at meetings. Contact Michelle Gadush .
- * ACA Library: Our library is in our cabinet at the bagelry. You may donate or check out books from this growing repository of valuable information.
- * Randalls Donations: Randalls grocery will donate a percentage of your purchases to ACA. You'll need receipts and the ACA code #5158. Contact the Randall's customer service dept. to increase donations to ACA.