

Library Newsletter

March 2020

Sponsored by The
Friends of the
Weathersfield
Proctor Library

FROM THE LIBRARIAN

MARK P. RICHARDSON

What could be better than a window? Writing this, I'm sitting at my home desk on a second-floor landing right next to a window filled with bright light. Skies are blue, the white snow glitters in the nooks and hollows of the land around the house, and a solitary woodpecker scratches along a bare tree trunk oblivious to the full feeder hanging from a nearby branch. The road we live on is a dirt one, and it is furrowed from the cycles of freezing and melting that have defined this winter. Deep grooves mark where meltwater has washed away soil and these small canyons have been frozen in place as temperatures have plummeted. Driving is done slowly, and I am reminded of Vermont's history of corduroy roads, roads that were surfaced by logs laid perpendicular to the course of the road.

Last night at the library we held our second annual Fondue Night. The library was full of food and conversation. Warm cheese, bread, and even pasta was followed by slices of fruit drowned in melted chocolate or caramel. As I nervously watched the carpet, adults and children drifted from conversation to conversation, balancing paper plates full of food and cups of cider. I didn't know everyone here. Most, of course, I have known for years. But there were new faces. Some were folks who had just moved to the community, and others were longtime residents who were rediscovering their library. Recipes were exchanged, stories told, and finally we all drifted off to our cars and home.

CONTINUE ON PAGE 6



5181 ROUTE 5
ASCUTNEY, VT 05030
802.674.2863
weathersfieldproctorlibrary.org

UPCOMING EVENTS

Town Challenge
March 14, 2020

Art Exhibit at the Li-
brary April 4-10, 2020
Artist Becky Woodbury
Tucker and Kathy
Maynard Giurtino

Egg Hunt April 11,
2020

Guest Author Howard
Mansfield April 23,
2020

Library Book, Bake
and Yard Sale June 20,
2020

Summer Reading Be-
gins June 2020

Summer Evening July
18, 2020

TOWN CHALLENGE

BY COOKIE SHAND



2019 Winners Susan Hindinger, Sean Whalen, and Kristen Brusco

The Weathersfield Proctor Library's 9th *Annual Town Trivia Challenge* will take place on Saturday, March 14th at 7:00 PM at the Weathersfield School on Schoolhouse Road in Ascutney, VT. This fun event will feature nine Town teams representing boards, committees, school staff and students. Each team will answer questions in random order in seven trivia categories: Spelling, Town History, Current Events/Sports, "Name That Tune," Geography, and Literature. In addition to bragging rights for first place, there are also prizes for the team that displays the most team spirit and for the team that raises the most funds.

So, which team will be our 9th Challenge winner? The public is invited to attend at no cost, but a donation would be appreciated. There will be an opportunity to sponsor a favorite team the evening of the event. Refreshments will be served and door prizes given out. Call the Library at 802-674-6863 or 802-674-5021 for further information. (Storm date will be March 15th.)

MARCH ANNIVERSARIES

BY STEVE DONOGHUE

There's scarcely a New Englander anywhere who won't reflexively smile when reminded that March 26 is the birthday of Robert Frost, who attended Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, wrote immortal poetry in Derry, New Hampshire, and was a former poet laureate of Vermont (true, he was born in California, but nobody's perfect).

But Frost is by no means the only literary figure to have a March birthday. March 2, for instance, is not only the birthday of Ted Geissel, whose beloved "Dr. Seuss" books have brought joy to millions, but also the date of the National Education Association's "Read Across America" initiative designed to honor Geissel's legacy. Surely that makes the 2nd an ideal day to acquaint your favorite young person with "Hop on Pop" or "Yertle the Turtle" or "If I Ran the Circus"? Or skip the young person and re-acquaint yourself with those and other Dr. Seuss classics?

Another March birthday belongs to a man who was entertaining children long before Dr. Seuss was born: on the 8th it's Kenneth Grahame, author of "The Wind in the Willows." And the 12th belongs to the great Lois Lowry (University of Southern Maine alumnus and long-time Boston resident), also no stranger to the assigned lists and personal favorites of millions of young people.

CONTINUE ON PAGE 6



LIBRARIES NOT TAKEN

BY STEVE DONOGHUE

Occasionally my bossy Miniature Schnauzer and I get an invitation to leave Boston, come to Vermont, and stay the weekend with old friends. We always accept, not only because it can be refreshing to get away for a few days (even from what is objectively, scientifically the greatest city in the world), but because, like so many unprepossessing old farm houses off little roads in Vermont, my hosts' house is crammed to the rafters with good books.

It's a weird, almost prurient dissonance all inveterate book-lovers have felt: the strange allure of another book-lover's personal library. As you prowls the shelves, you're suddenly confronted with all the bookish choices you've ever made.

Part of it is intensely familiar. You look at all the books, you pull some of them down and turn their pages, you get drawn into their million separate worlds, Book-lovers can rely upon having such feelings whenever they so much as casually browse the shelves of a bookstore or public library. We have our homes and our always-changing routines, but books are our common terrain, the one Garden of Eden that never has an "Exit" sign.

But that familiar feeling takes on an extra and challenging flavor when you're looking at another person's personal library. Suddenly, the ethos behind the collection isn't in the least bit public-minded. There's no spectrum of different reading-tastes being served on these shelves - you have abruptly entered a demographic of precisely one. You have left a republic and entered a kingdom ruled by a benevolent but entirely unapologetic dictator.

And it's immediately recognizable, because we are all that dictator. We shape our personal libraries to conform solely to the private topography of our interests, and as those interests slowly, tectonically shift over the years, so do our libraries shift. "When you stand inside somebody's library," writes Lev Grossman, "you get a powerful sense of who they are, and not just who they are now but who they've been ..."

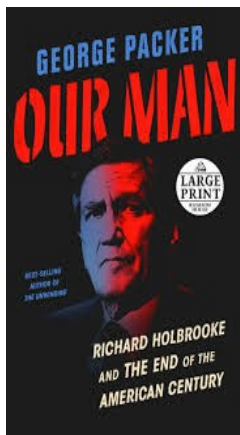
Walking around this vast personal library that's not my own, I see all the roads not taken, so many volumes that spoke to my host in clear voices, saying, "Me? You must have me always to hand" - when so many of those same volumes were stubbornly silent around me.

There were, of course, commonalities. There are dozens and dozens of books that likewise sit on my shelves back at home: "I, Claudius," "The Once and Future King," the great essays of Montaigne and Borges, CS Forester's mighty Horatio Hornblower saga, the big, indispensable Riverside Shakespeare.

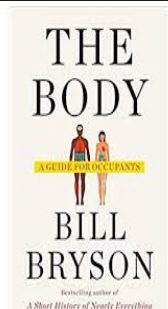
And there are those far rarer and far sweeter overlaps of niggling specificity, little things you encounter with a quick intake, that prompt a delighted "Oh! You have this too?" Whether it's that one particular edition of "The Three Musketeers" or those odd little paperbacks of Elric of Melnibone or that battered old biography of an obscure mariner from the American Revolution, you smile a bit extra at these bits of shared DNA: here, in a sense, is the written demonstration of why a friendship started in the first place.

CONTINUE ON PAGE 7

MARCH NEW BOOKS TO THE LIBRARY



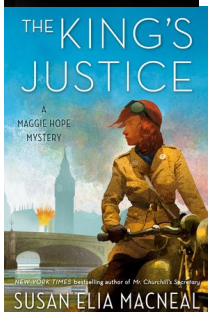
One of the most-discussed and most-reviewed of our new arrivals is “Our Man,” George Packer’s big, generous 2019 biography of former US diplomat and Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke, whose main claim to a place in the history books is the vital part he played in hammering out the Dayton Peace Accords that brought desperately-needed peace to Bosnia in 1995. Holbrooke was forceful, enormously smart, and relentlessly egotistical. A description once used for the Marquis de Lafayette - “a statue in search of a pedestal” - would have applied equally to him, and one of the many amazing qualities of Packer’s book is its ability to be completely frank about the man’s shortcomings while also maintaining an affectionate, even sometimes admiring tone. Holbrooke himself would have considered this treatment of his life and times borderline insubordinate, but it’s far and away the best book that’s ever likely to be written about him.



“The Body” by Bill Bryson - Readers familiar with Bryson’s uproarious literary tours of the American Midwest or the Appalachian Trail will be delighted by this newest book, which provides a guided tour of territory much closer to home: all the gross and icky and frankly disgusting inner details of your own body.



“Me” by Elton John - Most celebrity memoirs are either too cautious or too pious, mainly because they’re largely written by anonymous hacks while their glitzy subjects are busy buying private islands, but this memoir of the world-famous entertainer reads like a long and disarmingly comfortable chat.



“The King’s Justice” by Susan Elia MacNeal - The latest Maggie Hope novel finds our heroine in WWII London and suffering a kind of PTSD due to her traumatic ordeal in the previous book, but newcomers won’t feel excluded: once Maggie encounters a series of mysterious deaths around the city, she’s back to her old self.



“The Testaments” by Margaret Atwood - Canada’s greatest living novelist here returns to the world and the characters from her beloved modern classic, “The Handmaid’s Tale,” and whether you love or hate that earlier book, this new one will have you reconsidering some of its most fundamental underpinnings.



FROM THE YOUTH LIBRARIAN

GLENNA COLEMAN

Summer is not a fairytale, although some days this winter it has seemed that way! This year's Summer Reading theme, "Imagine Your Story," focuses on fairytales, folktales, and fantasy. Begin looking in April for a list of activities and times for library events around these themes. From guest speakers to story time to crafts to movies, there will be something for everyone.

Egg Hunt Call for candy! The 3rd annual Weathersfield Egg Hunt has been scheduled for Saturday, April 11, rain or shine. Help us fill 5000 eggs! Candy contributions or non-gender-specific prize baskets can be dropped off at the Weathersfield Proctor library any time before Wednesday, April 8. Help us make this event another success.

Other ways to contribute: Help fill eggs from noon to 3:00 on Wednesday, April 8th at the Library, or, you could volunteer to be the bunny!

GUEST SPEAKER ON APRIL 23, 2020

HOWARD MANSFIELD



Howard Mansfield sifts through the commonplace and the forgotten to discover stories that tell us about ourselves and our place in the world. He writes about history, architecture, and preservation. He is the author of ten books, including *In the Memory House*, *The Bones of the Earth*, *The Same Ax, Twice*, and *Dwelling in Possibility: Searching for the Soul of Shelter* which *The Boston Globe* called "a wholly original meditation ... that's part observation of the contemporary built environment, part cultural history, part philosophical account, and at times something like a Whitmanian poetic survey." His latest book is *The Habit of Turning the World Upside Down*, which includes a story about Romaine Tenney that first appeared in *Yankee*.

FROM THE LIBRARIAN

CONTINUE PAGE 1

The library has many of these annual events. The Town Challenge and the Summer Evening with Friends and Neighbors have been around for about a decade. The annual Trunk or Treat at Hoisington Field has been held half that long. The Spring Egg Hunt and Winter Fondue Night are relative newcomers. No one seems to know how long Santa has been visiting the library, but every year parents tell me about when they first saw Santa in the very rooms he shows up in now. I even have a trustee who is nostalgic about a table and attendant chairs that were part of the children's area when she was a little girl.

Of course, there is the day to day life at the library. Events punctuate the year, but the typical day is spent doing what librarians have been doing in Weathersfield for nearly a century and a quarter. Reference questions are researched and answered. Books are found, ordered and borrowed. Children are read stories and, yes, the bills are paid, and the sidewalks shoveled. These days are just as important as the special events. Old and new friends step into the building and an event of sorts is created. Libraries are places where memories matter. The past is in the books on the shelves, some recorded thousands of years ago. The past is in memories of a visit from Santa or a set of children's furniture. And now that Fondue Night is the past, a fond memory of good times with good neighbors. But our library is also about the future. It is about answering the next question, discussing the newest book, or an old classic newly discovered. It is about receiving that first library card or learning how to send an email.

MARCH ANNIVERSARIES

CONTINUE FROM PAGE 2

And despite how famous all of these writers eventually became, none of them started that way. They wrote and scrambled and published when and where they could, which makes it all the more worth remembering that March is also National Small Press Month - so maybe investigate that lesser-loved part of the literary world and find one of tomorrow's superstars?

But there are also many, many branching paths, shelf after shelf of books I might have once considered owning, might once have owned, might once even have loved but now no longer keep. Jonathan Littel's long and twisted novel "The Kindly Ones"? A collection of letters by the late, unlamented John Fowles? The old four-volume Harcourt, Brace box set of the essays of George Orwell? That old familiar "Shakespeare of London" by Marchette Chute? The complete set of Bernard Cornwell's ebullient "Sharpe" novels?

Encountering these things in a well-stocked public library is a common enough feeling, and in such a setting it barely causes a ripple of interest. "Oh, they have all of the 'Aunt Dimity' novels, well that's good," you think, in passing, without the slightest hint of temptation or regret. It's easy to dismiss a decision you can imagine being made by committee.

But encountering the same things on the shelves of a big personal library that's been as carefully and lovingly assembled and curated as my own? Suddenly, the complacency vanishes. Suddenly, these road-not-taken books become accusations. "You've always dismissed me," you hear these volumes say (poutingly, and maybe angrily). "But HERE is a reader who appreciates what I have to offer." If "I want that" is the cruellest thing you can think in a bookstore, surely "Do I want that?" is the cruellest thing you can think when roaming another person's book collection.

I confess, more than once I got what my Aunt Muriel used to call itchy fingers. Down on some low shelf I'd come across a likely book and think, "Amidst all these, surely this one won't be missed if I simply nick it?"

So far, I've controlled myself (mainly out of sympathy for how much Vermonters love their books, but also, admittedly, out of awareness for how much Vermonters love their guns). My bags contain only the books I brought with me, and the ones I've found while I've been here. But the visit isn't over yet.

Steve Donoghue is a book reviewer and editor living in Boston (with his inquisitive little Schnauzer Frieda). His work has appeared in the Boston Globe, the Wall Street Journal, the Washington Post, and Kirkus Reviews, and he writes regularly for the Christian Science Monitor, the National, and the Martha's Vineyard Gazette. He is a proud Weathersfield Proctor Library patron.



Weathersfield Proctor Library

Newsletter March 2020

Weathersfield Proctor Library
PO Bos 519
5181 Route 5
Ascutney, VT 05030