

"Great Lives" Biography Book Group Brookfield Public Library 2014-15

Books are available at the Circulation Desk about a month before the meeting.

Monday, August 25, 2014

1:00pm

Harnischfeger Room

***The Story of Charlotte's Web* by Michael Sims**

As he was composing what was to become his most enduring and popular book, E. B. White was obeying that oft repeated maxim: "Write what you know." Helpless pigs, silly geese, clever spiders, greedy rats, White knew all of these characters in the barns and stables where he spent his favorite hours. Painfully shy his entire life, "this boy," White once wrote of himself, "felt for animals a kinship he never felt for people." It is all the more impressive, therefore, how many people have felt a kinship with E. B. White. In this book the author shows how White solved what critic Clifton Fadiman once called "the standing problem of the juvenile fantasy writer: how to find, not another Alice, but another rabbit hole" by mining the raw ore of his childhood friendship with animals in Mount Vernon, New York, translating his own passions and contradictions, delights and fears, into an all-time classic. Blending White's correspondence with the likes of Ursula Nordstrom, James Thurber, and Harold Ross, the E. B. White papers at Cornell, and the archives of HarperCollins and the New Yorker into his own narrative, the author brings to life the shy boy whose animal stories, real and imaginary, made him famous around the world. (Polaris summary)

Monday, September 22, 2014

1:00pm

Harnischfeger Room

***George Washington's Secret Six* by Brian Kilmeade**

When General George Washington beat a hasty retreat from New York City in August 1776, many thought the American Revolution might soon be over. Instead, Washington rallied—thanks in large part to a little-known, top-secret group called the Culper Spy Ring. Washington realized that he couldn't beat the British with military might, so he recruited a sophisticated and deeply secretive intelligence network to infiltrate New York. So carefully guarded were the members' identities that one spy's name was not uncovered until the twentieth century, and one remains unknown today. But by now, historians have discovered enough information about the ring's activities to piece together evidence that these six individuals turned the tide of the war. Drawing on extensive research, Brian Kilmeade and Don Yaeger have painted compelling portraits of George Washington's secret six. (Polaris summary)

Monday, October 27, 2014

1:00pm

Harnischfeger Room

***Lives Like Loaded Guns: Emily Dickinson and Her Family's Feuds* by Lyndall Gordon**

In 1882, Emily Dickinson's brother Austin began a passionate love affair with Mabel Todd, a young Amherst faculty wife, setting in motion a series of events that would forever change the lives of the Dickinson family. The feud that erupted as a result has continued for over a century. Lyndall Gordon, an award-winning biographer, tells the riveting story of the Dickinsons, and reveals Emily as a very different woman from the pale, lovelorn recluse that exists in the popular imagination. Thanks to unprecedented use of letters, diaries, and legal documents, Gordon digs deep into the life and work of Emily Dickinson, to reveal the secret behind the poet's insistent seclusion, and presents a woman beyond her time who found love, spiritual sustenance, and immortality all on her own terms. An enthralling story of creative genius, filled with illicit passion and betrayal, *Lives Like Loaded Guns* is sure to cause a stir among Dickinson's many devoted readers and scholars. (Amazon)

Monday, November 24, 2014

1:00pm

Harnischfeger Room

***The Hidden Life of Otto Frank* by Carol Ann Lee**

In this definitive new biography, Carol Ann Lee provides the answer to one of the most heartbreaking questions of modern times: Who betrayed Anne Frank and her family to the Nazis? Probing this startling act of treachery, Lee brings to light never before documented information about Otto Frank and the individual who would claim responsibility -- revealing a terrifying relationship that lasted until the day Frank died. Based upon impeccable research into rare archives and filled with excerpts from the secret journal that Frank kept from the day of his liberation until his return to the Secret Annex in 1945, this landmark biography at last brings into focus the life of a little-understood man -- whose story illuminates some of the most harrowing and memorable events of the last century. (Amazon)

December NO MEETING

Monday, January 26, 2015

1:00pm

Harnischfeger Room

***Alexander Hamilton: American* by Richard Brookhiser**

Alexander Hamilton is one of the least understood, most important, and most impassioned and inspiring of the founding fathers. In these pages, Alexander Hamilton sheds his skewed image as the "bastard brat of a Scotch peddler," sex scandal survivor, and notoriously doomed dueling partner of Aaron Burr. Examined up close, throughout his meteoric and ever-fascinating (if tragically brief) life, Hamilton can at last be seen as one of the most crucial of the founders. (Amazon)

Monday, February 23, 2015

1:00pm

Harnischfeger Room

***The Receptionist* by Janet Groth**

In 1957, when a young Midwestern woman landed a job at The New Yorker, she didn't expect to stay long at the reception desk. But stay she did, and for twenty-one years she had the best seat in the house. In addition to taking messages, she ran interference for jealous wives checking on adulterous husbands, drank with famous writers at famous watering holes throughout bohemian Greenwich Village, and was seduced, two-timed, and proposed to by a few of the magazine's eccentric luminaries. This memoir of a particular time and place is an enchanting tale of a woman in search of herself. (Amazon)

Monday, March 23, 2015

1:00pm

Harnischfeger Room

***Signing their Rights Away* by Denise Kurnan**

Signing Their Rights Away chronicles a moment in American history when our elected officials knew how to compromise—and put aside personal gain for the greater good of the nation. These men were just as quirky and flawed as the elected officials we have today: Hugh Williamson believed in aliens, Robert Morris went to prison, Jonathan Dayton stole \$18,000 from Congress, and Thomas Mifflin was ruined by alcohol. Yet somehow these imperfect men managed to craft the world's most perfect Constitution. With 39 mini-biographies and a reversible dust jacket that unfolds into a poster of the original document, *Signing Their Rights Away* offers an entertaining and enlightening narrative for history buffs of all ages (Amazon)

Monday, April 27, 2015

1:00pm

Harnischfeger Room

***A First Rate Madness* by Nassir Ghaemi**

An investigation into the surprisingly deep correlation between mental illness and successful leadership, as seen through some of history's greatest politicians, generals, and businesspeople. (Polaris summary)

Monday, June 1, 2015* (date change-Memorial Day)

1:00pm

Harnischfeger Room

***Coolidge* by Amity Shlaes**

In this riveting biography, Shlaes traces Coolidge's improbable rise from a tiny town in New England to a youth so unpopular he was shut out of college fraternities at Amherst College up through Massachusetts politics. After a divisive period of government excess and corruption, Coolidge restored national trust in Washington and achieved what few other peacetime presidents have: He left office with a federal budget smaller than the one he inherited. A man of calm discipline, he lived by example, renting half of a two-family house for his entire political career rather than compromise his political work by taking on debt. Renowned as a throwback, Coolidge was in fact strikingly modern—an advocate of women's suffrage and a radio pioneer. At once a revision of man and economics, Coolidge gestures to the country we once were and reminds us of qualities we had forgotten and can use today. (Polaris summary)

Monday, June 22, 2015

1:00pm

Harnischfeger Room

Selection Meeting for the 2015-2016 season. Cast your votes!

Monday, July 27, 2015

1:00pm

Harnischfeger Room

***The Most Dangerous Man in America* by Mark Perry**

Imperious, headstrong, and vain, MacArthur matched an undeniable military genius with a massive ego and a rebellious streak that often seemed to destine him for the dustbin of history. Yet despite his flaws, MacArthur is remembered as a brilliant commander whose combined-arms operation in the Pacific—the first in the history of warfare—secured America's triumph in World War II and changed the course of history. A gripping, authoritative biography of the Pacific Theater's most celebrated and misunderstood commander, *The Most Dangerous Man in America* reveals the secrets of Douglas MacArthur's success—and the incredible efforts of the men who made it possible. (Polaris summary)

The "Great Lives" Biography Book Group welcomes everyone interested in reading and discussing biographies. For more information, please contact the Adult Reference Desk at 262-782-4140, option 1.