

# BOOK CLUB 2017-18 RECOMMENDATIONS

(Books selected for 2017-18 season are highlighted)

Lou Woodburycatcott's Recommendations:

**BENEATH A SCARLET SKY** by Mark Sullivan ... Based on the true story of a forgotten hero, this book is the triumphant, epic tale of one young man's incredible courage and resilience during one of history's darkest hours. Based in the final two years of World War II, Pino Lella, an Italian teenager, wants nothing to do with the war or the Nazis. He joins an underground railroad helping Jews escape over the Alps, and falls for Anna, a beautiful widow six years his senior. In an attempt to protect him, Pino's parents force him to enlist as a German soldier—a move they think will keep him out of combat. But after Pino is injured, he is recruited at the tender age of eighteen to become the personal driver for Adolf Hitler's left hand in Italy, General Hans Leyers, one of the Third Reich's most mysterious and powerful commanders. He becomes a spy for the Allies, endures the horrors of the war and has the love affair of his life. Soon to be a movie.

**A CUP FULL: Sir Thomas Lipton's Extraordinary Life and His Quest for the America's Cup** by Michael D'Antonio ... An in-depth biography of Sir Thomas Lipton, the founder of Lipton Tea, a portrait of a remarkable self-made man and intrepid sailor. Today Lipton means tea. However, in his time Sir Thomas Lipton was known for much more. Raised in desperate poverty, he became rich beyond his wildest dreams. He built a global empire of markets, factories, plantations, and stockyards. And his colorful pursuit of the America's Cup trophy made him a beloved figure on both sides of the Atlantic. With shameless self-promotion, he became one of the world's most eligible bachelors, a patron of the poor, and ultimately reached legendary heights when he revived the competition for the America's Cup. With one losing attempt after another, the gallant Lipton, who didn't even know how to sail his own yacht, became ever more popular. D'Antonio's biography brings to vivid life this remarkable figure.

Dick Sheehan's Recommendations ...

**COMMONWEALTH** by Ann Patchett ... This novel tells the enthralling story of how an unexpected romantic encounter irrevocably changes two families' lives. One Sunday afternoon in Southern California, Bert Cousins shows up at Franny Keating's christening party uninvited. Before evening falls, he has kissed Franny's mother, Beverly—thus setting in motion the dissolution of their marriages and the joining of two families. Spanning five decades, *Commonwealth* explores how this chance encounter reverberates through the lives of the four parents and six children involved. Spending summers together in Virginia, the Keating and Cousins children forge a lasting bond that is based on a shared disillusionment with their parents and the strange and genuine affection that grows up between them.

**EMPEROR OF ALL MALADIES: A Biography of Cancer** by Siddhartha Mukherjee ... This book is a magnificent, profoundly humane "biography" of cancer—from its first documented appearances thousands of years ago through the epic battles in the twentieth century to cure, control, and conquer it, to a radical new understanding of its essence. The story of cancer is a story of human ingenuity, resilience, and perseverance, but also of hubris, paternalism, and misperception. This book is now a documentary from Ken Burns on PBS.

**INVISIBLE MAN** by Ralph Ellison ... *Invisible Man* is a milestone in American literature, a book that has continued to engage readers since its appearance in 1952. The nameless narrator of this novel describes growing up in a black community in the South, attending a Negro college from which he is expelled, moving to New York and becoming the chief spokesman of the Harlem branch of "the Brotherhood", and retreating amid violence and confusion to the basement lair of the Invisible Man he imagines himself to be. The book is a passionate and witty tour de force of style

Ron Schwartz's Recommendations ...

### **Sue Grafton Detective Novels**

### **Jacqueline Winspear Detective Novels**

**ELEVENTH MONTH, ELEVENTH DAY, ELEVENTH HOUR: Armistice Day, 1918 World War I and Its Violent Climax** by Joseph E. Persico ... November 11, 1918. The final hours pulsate with tension as every man in the trenches hopes to escape the melancholy distinction of being the last to die in World War I. The Allied generals knew the fighting would end precisely at 11:00 A.M, yet in the final hours they flung men against an already beaten Germany. The result? Eleven thousand casualties suffered—more than during the D-Day invasion of Normandy. Why? Allied commanders wanted to punish the enemy to the very last moment and career officers saw a fast-fading chance for glory and promotion. The reader is put in the trenches with the forgotten and the famous—among the latter, Corporal Adolf Hitler, Captain Harry Truman, and Colonels Douglas MacArthur and George Patton. Mainly, he follows ordinary soldiers' lives, illuminating their fate as the end approaches. Persico sets the last day of the war in historic context with a gripping reprise of all that led up to it, from the 1914 assassination of the Austrian archduke, Franz Ferdinand, which ignited the war, to the raw racism black doughboys endured except when ordered to advance and die in the war's last hour.

**ALEXANDER HAMILTON** by Ron Chernow ... This book is a landmark biography of Alexander Hamilton, the founding father who galvanized, inspired, scandalized, and shaped the newborn nation. Chernow here recounts Hamilton's turbulent life: an illegitimate, largely self-taught orphan from the Caribbean, who came out of nowhere to take America by storm, rising to become George Washington's aide-de-camp in the Continental Army, coauthoring *The Federalist Papers*, founding the Bank of New York, leading the Federalist Party, and becoming the first Treasury Secretary of the United States. Historians have long told the story of America's birth as the triumph of Jefferson's democratic ideals over the aristocratic intentions of Hamilton. Chernow presents an entirely different man, whose legendary ambitions were motivated not merely by self-interest but by passionate patriotism and a stubborn will to build the foundations of American prosperity and power.

**\*\*Selected to read/discuss in October 2018\*\* (next session)**

Roxanne Kohlin's Recommendations ...

**UNBELIEVABLE: My Front-Row Seat to the Craziest Campaign in American History** by Katy Tur ... This is a true story told by Katy Tur, a journalist and Trump correspondent for NBC News and MSNBC, about her journey through the Trump campaign, which was the most unlikely, exciting, ugly, trying, and all-around bizarre campaign in American history.

**IN THE GARDEN OF BEASTS: Love, Terror, and an American Family in Hitler's Berlin** by Eric Larson ... The time is 1933, the place, Berlin, when William E. Dodd becomes America's first ambassador to Hitler's Nazi Germany in a year that proved to be a turning point in history. A mild-mannered professor from Chicago, Dodd brings along his wife, son, and flamboyant daughter, Martha. At first Martha is entranced by the parties and pomp, and the handsome young men of the Third Reich with their infectious enthusiasm for restoring Germany to a position of world prominence. Enamored of the "New Germany," she has one affair after another, including with the surprisingly honorable first chief of the Gestapo, Rudolf Diels. But as evidence of Jewish persecution mounts, confirmed by chilling first-person testimony, her father telegraphs his concerns to a largely indifferent State Department back home. This addictively readable work speaks volumes about why the world did not recognize the grave threat posed by Hitler until Berlin, and Europe, were awash in blood and terror.

**ISAAC'S STORM: A man, a Time and the Deadliest Hurricane in History** by Eric Larson ... At the dawn of the twentieth century, a great confidence suffused America. Isaac Cline was one of the era's new men, a scientist who believed he knew all there was to know about the motion of clouds and the behavior of storms. The idea that a hurricane could damage the city of Galveston, Texas, where he was based, was to him preposterous, "an absurd delusion." It was 1900, a year when America felt bigger and stronger than ever before. Nothing in nature could hobble the gleaming city of Galveston, then a magical place that seemed destined to become the New York of the Gulf. Ultimately, however, this is the story of what can happen when human arrogance meets nature's last great uncontrollable force. As such, *Isaac's Storm* carries a warning for our time.

**THE PRACTICE HOUSE** by Laura McNeal ... This is the story of a young lady who leaves her home in Scotland in 1929 and moves to New York. She answers a newspaper ad and becomes a school teacher in drought-stricken Kansas. She arrives in Kansas as farms are beginning to fail and schools are going bankrupt. The novel tells of timeless love and leaving (and finding) home.

**WISHFUL DRINKING** by Carrie Fisher ... Intimate, hilarious, and sobering, Carrie Fisher looks at her life as she best remembers it (what do you expect after electroshock therapy?). It's an incredible tale: the child of Hollywood royalty—Debbie Reynolds and Eddie Fisher—home wrecked by Elizabeth Taylor, marrying (then divorcing, then dating) Paul Simon, having her likeness merchandized on everything from Princess Leia shampoo to PEZ dispensers, learning the father of her daughter forgot to tell her he was gay, and ultimately waking up one morning and finding a friend dead beside her in bed. Carrie tells her true and outrageous story of her bizarre reality with her inimitable wit, unabashed self-deprecation, and buoyant, infectious humor.

Ellen Droke's Recommendations ...

**THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD** by Colson Whitehead ... This novel is a magnificent tour de force chronicling a young slave's adventures as she makes a desperate bid for freedom in the antebellum South. This book is one of Oprah Winfrey's Book Club choices.

**BEING MORTAL: Medicine and What Matters in the End** by Atul Gawande ... This book tackles the hardest challenge of his profession: how medicine can not only improve life but also improve the process of its ending. Too often, doctors and the medical community are committed to extending life, and in doing so, continue to carry out devastating procedures that in

the end extend suffering. Gawande, a practicing surgeon, addresses his profession's ultimate limitation, arguing that quality of life is the desired goal for patients and families. This book asserts that medicine can comfort and enhance our experience even to the end, providing not only a good life but also a good end.

Susan Sargent's Recommendations ...

**PASSION AND PRINCIPLE: John and Jessie Fremont, the Couple Whose Power, Politics, and Love Shaped Nineteenth-Century America** by Sally Denton ... Written with an investigative journalist's eye for detail and a novelist's flair, this biography, set in the 1800s, of explorer, politician, and gold-mine owner John C. Frémont and his intellectual wife, Jessie Benton Frémont, also casts light on the tumultuous period that forms the backdrop for their lives, from the abolition of slavery to the building of the railroad.

**ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT** by Erich Maria Remarque ... Considered by many the greatest war novel of all time, *All Quiet on the Western Front* is a masterpiece of the German experience during World War I. The protagonist Paul Bäumer enlists with his classmates in the German army during World War I. They become soldiers with youthful enthusiasm, but the world of duty, culture, and progress they had been taught breaks in pieces under the first bombardment in the trenches. Through years of vivid horror, Paul holds fast to a single vow: to fight against the principle of hate that meaninglessly pits young men of the same generation but different uniforms against one another . . . if only he can come out of the war alive.

Jane LaPierre's Recommendation ...

**HALLELUJAH ANYWAY: Rediscovering Mercy** by Ann Lamott ... The author writes that mercy is radical kindness. It's the permission you give others—and yourself—to forgive a debt, to absolve the unabsolvable, and to let go of the judgment and pain that make life so difficult. This book is full of Lamott's trademark honesty, humor and forthrightness, and is profound, caring, funny and wise—a hopeful book of hands-on spirituality.

Margaret Foster's Recommendations ...

**EMPIRE OF THE SUMMER MOON: Quanah Parker and the Rise and Fall of the Comanches, the Most Powerful Indian Tribe in American History** by S.C. Gwynne ... *Empire of the Summer Moon* is a stunningly vivid historical account of the forty-year battle between Comanche Indians and white settlers for control of the American West, centering on Quanah, the greatest Comanche chief of them all and spans two astonishing stories. The first story traces the rise and fall of the Comanches, the most powerful Indian tribe in American history. The second entails one of the most remarkable narratives ever to come out of the Old West: the epic saga of the pioneer woman Cynthia Ann Parker and her mixed-blood son Quanah, who became the last and greatest chief of the Comanches.

**THE NINE TAILORS** by Dorothy Sayers ... This murder mystery novel is the eleventh in the Lord Peter Wimsey Mystery series. Lord Peter Wimsey and his manservant Bunter are halfway across the wild flatlands of East Anglia when they make a wrong turn, straight into a ditch. They scramble over the rough country to the nearest church, where they find hospitality, dinner, and an invitation to go bell-ringing. This ancient art is steeped in mathematical complexities, and

tonight the rector and his friends plan to embark on a 9-hour marathon session to welcome the New Year. During their stay in this unfamiliar countryside, Lord Peter and Bunter encounter murder, a mutilated corpse, and a decades-old jewel theft for which locals continue to die. In this land where bells toll for the dead, the ancient chimes never seem to stop.

**THE MINIATURIST** by Jessie Burton ... This novel is set in seventeenth century Amsterdam. On a brisk autumn day in 1686, eighteen-year-old Nella Oortman arrives in Amsterdam to begin a new life as the wife of illustrious merchant trader Johannes Brandt. Her new home, while splendid, is not welcoming. Johannes is kind yet distant, always locked in his study or at his warehouse office, leaving Nella alone with his sister, the sharp-tongued and forbidding Marin. Nella's world changes when Johannes presents her with an extraordinary wedding gift: a cabinet-sized replica of their home. To furnish her gift, Nella engages the services of a miniaturist—an elusive and enigmatic artist whose tiny creations mirror their real-life counterparts in eerie and unexpected ways. Johannes' gift helps Nella to pierce the closed world of the Brandt household, but as she uncovers its unusual secrets, she begins to understand, and fear, the escalating dangers that await them all. In this repressively pious society where gold is worshipped second only to God, to be different is a threat to the moral fabric of society, and not even a man as rich as Johannes is safe. Only one person seems to see the fate that awaits them. Is the miniaturist the key to their salvation or the architect of their destruction?

Dave Sargent's Recommendations ...

**NOTHING LIKE IT IN THE WORLD: The Men Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad 1863-1869** by Stephen Ambrose ... This book gives the account of an unprecedented feat of engineering, vision, and courage. It is the story of the men who built the transcontinental railroad—the investors who risked their businesses and money; the enlightened politicians who understood its importance; the engineers and surveyors who risked, and sometimes lost, their lives; and the Irish and Chinese immigrants, the defeated Confederate soldiers, and the other laborers who did the backbreaking and dangerous work on the tracks.

**DEVIL'S BARGAIN: Steve Bannon, Donald Trump, and the Storming of the Presidency** by Joshua Green ... From the reporter who was there at the very beginning comes the revealing inside story of the partnership between Steve Bannon and Donald Trump—the key to understanding the rise of the alt-right, the fall of Hillary Clinton, and the hidden forces that drove the greatest upset in American political history. Based on dozens of interviews conducted over six years, Green spins the master narrative of the 2016 campaign from its origins in the far fringes of right-wing politics and reality television to its culmination inside Trump's penthouse on election night. To understand Trump's extraordinary rise and Clinton's fall, you have to weave Trump's story together with Bannon's, or else it doesn't make sense.