

Good Books about History, 2011-12

Reviews by members of the OLLI-GMU History Club

Compiled by Tom Hady

Compiler's Note: With our decision a couple of years ago to include historical fiction, the question of what to call "history" has become more difficult. I view my role as limited. I compile the reviews and I edit for readability and format. I will occasionally ask a contributor whether this belongs in a history compilation, but I accept their conclusion-TFH.

Davod Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (2011), reviewed by Tom Hady

This is a history of the Mediterranean basin from before antiquity to the present in one (albeit thick) book. A good one, too. Abulafia is Professor of Mediterranean History at Cambridge and knows the subject. If you are like me, you will want to read fairly rapidly for a while, and then you'll suddenly find clues to things you had wondered about, and you'll savor the details. I wish I'd read this book before some of our travels in the area--but then again, I read it now with greater understanding because I had travelled there.

Roy Adkins and Lesley Adkins, *The War for All the Oceans* (2006), reviewed by Don Ferrett.

This year marks the bicentennial of the War of 1812. Those of us who got most of their American history education in the public schools learned that that was the war against the British, who wouldn't leave our commercial shipping alone and impressed our sailors. It was also the war when the White House was burned and Andrew Jackson became a hero at the Battle of New Orleans. The Adkins' book, which covers the British Navy through the Napoleonic Wars through primarily first-hand sources, puts our war in an entirely different light. Yes, the above-mentioned events occurred, but we were just a side-show in a global battle that kept the British focused elsewhere.

The War for All the Oceans is an easy read and includes much interesting information on the culture of England and France at the time. There are maps for each major battle, and a number of illustrations. There is even extensive coverage of the prisons that housed captured sailors on both sides. The book relies heavily on

diaries, letters, and reminiscences written at the time or by the participants at a later date. To get a new perspective of the War of 1812, read this book!

Stephen Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West* (1996), reviewed by Don Ferrett.

I meant to read this book during the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark expedition, but never got around to it. Then, last year my wife and I stumbled onto the site along the Natchez Trace where Lewis committed suicide (Grinder's Inn), and I knew I had to get back to the book. After reading Ambrose's well-written tale I realized that I had known essentially nothing about this startlingly difficult adventure, which took place when the United States was in its infancy. Lewis, William Clark, and a small company of adventurers, were tasked by our third President, Thomas Jefferson, to explore the northern part of the recently-acquired Louisiana Purchase, and then push on to the Pacific in search of the ever elusive Northwest Passage. The story of their trek, as told by Ambrose, through lands previously unseen by white men, across thousands of miles of untamed rivers with the constant presence of potentially hostile Native Americans, makes for an enjoyable read.

Alan Axelrod, *Generals South Generals North* (2011), reviewed by Bob Persell

This little gem of a book is not particularly brilliant or profound but it is stimulating and fun. The author provides short biographies of twelve Confederate and twelve Union generals. What makes this book a bit different is that each general is given a rating of from one to four stars, one is a "losing commander" and four is a "standout commander."

Each chapter is devoted to a general and contains relevant illustrations and "big picture" maps. By "big picture" I mean that maps convey the major aspects of the battle without so much detail that you lose track of what's going on. There is a place for both kinds of maps, but for people who aren't very serious students of the battle these maps are very helpful.

The ratings contain few surprises. Grant is rated a four and McClellan is rated a one. But on the Confederate side Jackson is rated a four and Lee a three and a half. That's a surprise to me because Jackson's quirky habit of keeping his plans a secret from his subordinates and tendency to want to court-martial them make me think Lee should have had the superior rating. No argument at all with Bragg at a one.

John Bakeless, *America As Seen By Its First Explorers: The Eyes of Discovery*, (1961), reviewed by Don Ferrett.

If you ever wondered what the territory now known as the United States looked like when the first Europeans saw it, this volume is a good introduction. Using original records of the first explorers, making use of direct quotes where available, Bakeless describes the flora, fauna, and indigenous populations of the New World. Grapes everywhere east of the Mississippi, seemingly never ending forests (then plains, then mountains), tremendous flocks of passenger pigeons, and bison as far east as Virginia are some of the topics covered. He follows the exploits of men such as De Soto, Coronado, Cartier, Drake, Champlain, and La Salle, as well as some less well known explorers. There are many helpful illustrations of locations, animals, plants, and natives throughout the book, though I was disappointed by the lack of good maps. All in all, an interesting read.

John M. Barry, *The Great Influenza: The Epic Story of the Deadliest Plague in History* (2004), reviewed by Don Ferrett

I first took note of this book several years ago when it was presented during a History Club meeting. It finally made it to the top of my stack this summer, and I'm glad it did. Prior to the presentation I knew practically nothing about this influenza outbreak except that it was a bad one. Even the presentation had not conveyed to me the full scope of the devastation it caused and the impact it had had on societies across the globe.

Barry addresses every aspect of the pandemic. He starts with the nature of the practice of medicine at the time (1918), and the individuals who were then in the process of converting medicine into a true science. He goes into great detail concerning the various symptoms of the disease, the similarities of those symptoms to other epidemics, and details of autopsies performed at all stages of the outbreak. Barry also considers the societal control mechanisms that did and (mostly) did not work to stop the spread of the disease. Finally, he discusses the lingering effects on the victims and their families and those who survived the illness, the psychological impact the epidemic had on the population as a whole, and the possibilities for a future outbreak of this magnitude (or larger). Although I had a few problems with his presentation style, I thought the book was very enlightening--and scary!

David Block, *Baseball Before We Knew It* (2006), reviewed by Irene Osterman

This is a well written and researched history of the origins of baseball. It has a terrific bibliography and very interesting appendices.

Nigel Cawthorne, *Robin Hood: the True History Behind the Legend* (2010), reviewed by Tom Hady

Was there a real Robin Hood? Cawthorne doesn't answer that question, but he provides several candidates. He does make clear the fact that the tales go back many centuries in British folklore. There is a mention of "Robin Hood rhymes" in Piers Plowman, 1377, and Chaucer speaks of Robyn in Troilus & Criseyde. Robin Hood plays were a staple of local May Day celebrations throughout the Middle Ages. By 1422, "Robin Hood's Stone" is mentioned in a property deed, marking a boundary. Cawthorne summarizes many more.

Agnes Morley Cleaveland, *No Life for a Lady* (1941, reprinted 1977), reviewed by Tom Hady

Cleaveland grew up in the latter part of the 19th century on a cattle ranch in southwestern New Mexico, at that time a very remote country. Her descriptions of events from her life add a human dimension to the history of the west. In the early times, kid on a horse was the frontier substitute for the telephone when a message needed to be delivered--and a grizzly with two cubs could not stand in the way. Later, a Resettlement Administration representative arrived in 1937 to tell the impoverished small ranchers how the government would help them move to better farms--and had to be protected by the sheriff from being tarred and feathered.

Thomas Crump, *The Age of Steam: The Power that Drove the Industrial Revolution* (2007, reviewed by Tom Hady

From the first applications to pumping out coal mines to modern electric generators (even those where the steam is generated by atomic fission), steam has fundamentally changed our society. Here is the history of that change. Engineers looking for details of the technology should look elsewhere, but the rest of us can learn a great deal about the interaction of technology and economics that shaped our development in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Virginius Dabney, *Richmond: The Story of a City* (1976 & 1990), reviewed by Tom Hady

Richmond from colonial times to the 1990's. Dabney was editor of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* for 33 years, so to some degree this is history written by an insider. It is interesting history, too; many of the events that shaped our nation had their effects on Richmond, and reading about them in Richmond adds a dimension to our understanding. If the book has a shortcoming for a non-Richmonder, it is the exhaustive coverage of seemingly every individual who had any impact on Richmond in the centuries of its existence. If you are willing to skim those sections, though, this is a rewarding book.

Kathleen Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt: A Strenuous Life* (2002), reviewed by Don Ferrett

I decided to do some additional reading to go along with a Spring, 2012 OLLI-GMU course on Theodore Roosevelt presented by the National Park Service. I chose this particular biography because I already owned it and because it is "By far the best one-volume biography of TR," according to *The New York Review of Books*. My preconceptions of TR were obtained from my standard high school history courses and a recent reading of *River of Doubt*. These left me with impressions of a character who was pro-war, who was very energetic (Bully!), and was prone to rash action.

I learned a lot from this book. TR was not really the radical Republican I anticipated. In fact, he was far more progressive (liberal) than the Democrat Woodrow Wilson. He was years ahead of other white males on many social issues: women suffrage, child labor, anti-lynching laws, social security, worker's rights, universal health, and, especially, racial equality. This book details TR's fights with political bosses and Big Business to work for the rights of the common man. He certainly didn't succeed in all of his causes, but he did help to set the stage for others like his cousins Franklin and Eleanor. I highly recommend this book.

Julia P. Gelardi, *In Triumph's Wake: Royal Mothers, Tragic Daughters, and the Price They Paid for Glory* (2008), reviewed by Almuth Payne

This book deals with three powerful reigning female monarchs and their less successful daughters: Queen Isabella of Castile (Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain) and daughter, Queen of England Catherine of Aragon, the unfortunate first wife of Henry VIII; Empress Maria Theresa of Austria and her youngest daughter Queen Marie Antoinette of France, who lost her head in the French revolution; and Queen

Victoria of England and her oldest daughter Vicky, the unpopular Empress Frederick of Germany. The book could use some judicious editing because the author repeats herself and strains to draw parallels between these women. She also takes an unbiased, even admiring view of her subjects, especially in the case of Vicky whose goal was to bring culture and civilization to the crude Prussians and who managed to alienate not only her subjects but her in-laws and most of all her son, Kaiser Wilhelm II (who was not really nice either). With all its faults, I enjoyed the book because the characters are of great interest to me.

Randall Hansen, *Fire and Fury The Allied bombing of Germany, 1942-1945* (2009), reviewed by Almuth Payne

Germany was bombed heavily during WW II by the US and British air forces, with more than half a million Germans killed along with about 80,000 aircrew, plus the destruction of some 60 cities, including many medieval sites. This controversial book maintains that while the Americans almost exclusively used precision or strategic bombing to the best of the technical capabilities of the times, the British not only used area or carpet bombing but also targeted many cities and towns against the express demands of Allied leadership.

Walter Havighurst, *The Long Ships Passing: The Story of the Great Lakes* (1942), reviewed by Tom Hady

From the *voyageurs*, who learned the ways of the Lakes while trading for furs with the Indians, to the shipping trade; from canoes to sailing ships to huge ore boats, Havighurst tells the story of the lakes. As one should expect from a Professor of English, he writes an interesting story, as well. This book is a bit dated--a lot has happened to the Great Lakes in the last seventy years (the Edmund Fitzgerald was built, carried ore for nearly 20 years and sank with all hands since the book was written). Nevertheless, Havighurst did his research and tells the story of the first 300 years or so very well. Highly recommended.

Christopher Hibbert, *The Borgias and Their Enemies, 1431-1519* (2008), reviewed by Tom Hady

Rodrigo (Pope Alexander VI), Cesare, Lucrezia and their friends and enemies. An interesting account of a time when the distinction between Cardinals and secular lords was small, both were avaricious and had few scruples, and it was not

unthinkable to say that the Pope had ordered a hit squad to take out one of his enemies.

Laura Hillenbrand, *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption* (2010), reviewed by Ben Gold

Unbroken is a biography of World War II hero Louis Zamperini, an Olympic runner during the 1930s. He flew B-24s during WWII and was taken prisoner by the Japanese. Zamperini, a disciplined champion racer who ran in the Berlin Olympics, was a wit, a prankster, and a reformed juvenile delinquent who put his thieving skills to good use in the POW camps. He endured captivity harsh even by Japanese standards and was a physical and mental wreck at the end of the war. Still alive at 93, Zamperini now works with those Japanese individuals and groups who accept responsibility for Japanese mistreatment of POWs and wish to see Japan and the U.S. reconciled. He submitted to 75 interviews with the author as well as contributing a large mass of personal records. Hillenbrand also is the author of the best-selling book *Seabiscuit: An American Legend*.

Dara Horn, *All Other Nights* (2010), reviewed by Irene Osterman

A Civil War spy page-turner meets an exploration of race and religion in 19th-century America in Horn's enthralling latest. Jacob Rappaport, the 19-year-old scion of a wealthy Jewish import-export family, flees home and enlists in the Union army to avoid an arranged marriage. When his superiors discover his unique connections, he is sent on espionage missions that reveal an American Jewish population divided by the Mason-Dixon line, but united by business, religious and family ties. After being sent to assassinate his uncle in New Orleans on Passover, Jacob's next assignment proves even more daunting: marry the feisty Confederate spy Eugenia Levy. What starts out as a dangerous game for both Jacob and Eugenia ends up being a genuine romance, fraught with the potential for peril, betrayal, tragedy and redemption. Horn propels the love story at a thriller's pace; the mix of love and loyalty played out in a divided America is sublime.

Tony Horwitz, *A Voyage Long and Strange: On the Trail of Vikings, Conquistadors, Lost Colonists, and other Adventures in Early America* (2008), reviewed by Almuth Payne

The subtitle sums things up – the author writes about what went on in North America in the years between the visits of the Vikings and the arrival of the Pilgrims, interspersing the history with his visits to whatever sites, re-creations, or memorials that are there today. Entertaining, sometimes funny, sometimes tragic – an enjoyable book.

W David Howarth, *We Die Alone: A WWII Epic of Escape and Endurance* (1955, 1999), reviewed by Ben Gold

In 1943, Jan Baalsrud, a Norwegian who had escaped to England, was working as an instrument maker. He was asked to sneak back into Norway to help the anti-Nazi resistance. In March 1943, with a team of expatriate Norwegian commandos he sailed from northern England for Nazi-occupied arctic Norway to organize and supply the Norwegian resistance. But they were betrayed and the Nazis ambushed them. Only Jan Baalsrud survived. This is the incredible and gripping story of his escape. Frostbitten and snow-blind, pursued by the Nazis, he dragged himself on until he reached a small arctic village. He was near death, delirious, and a virtual cripple. But the villagers, at mortal risk to themselves, were determined to save him, and - through impossible feats - they did. *We Die Alone* is an astonishing true story of heroism and endurance.

The author, David Howarth served as a naval officer during World War Two, running the Norwegian-manned spy ring whose name later became the title of his first best-selling book, *The Shetland Bus*. He died in 1991.

Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) reviewed by Bob Bohall

Zora Neale Hurston is considered one of the pre-eminent writers of twentieth-century African-American literature. This novel is considered her best known work. The novel narrates main character Janie Crawford's "ripening from a vibrant, but voiceless, teenage girl into a woman with her finger on the trigger of her own destiny." Set in central and southern Florida in the early twentieth century, the novel was initially poorly received for its rejection of racial uplift literary prescriptions. Today, it has come to be regarded as a seminal work in both African-American literature and women's literature. *Time* included the novel in its *TIME's 100 Best English-language Novels from 1923 to 2005*.

Hurston rejected the Racial Uplift efforts to present African Americans in a way that would accommodate the cultural standards of the White majority. Instead, Hurston celebrated the rural, southern African-American communities as she found them. The book is fiction but really is history of blacks in the 1920's and 1930's. The setting is the Deep South but could have been anywhere, the dialogue often is the phonetics of the poor and under-educated, but the values and philosophy are superb. Life is portrayed from a woman's perspective but provides considerable insight on the role of African-American men. The novel is an enjoyable and useful history of a time and culture unknown to most readers regardless of gender. Definitely worthwhile.

Frederick Kempe, *Berlin 1961 Kennedy, Krushchev, and the Most Dangerous Place on Earth* (2011), reviewed by Almuth Payne

This book was recommended by Vera Wentworth who taught a 3 session course on the Berlin Wall this past spring. It's very detailed and portrays Kennedy as an inexperienced leader who is no match for the wily Krushchev, and it is also highly critical of his handling of the events of August 1961 when the Wall went up.

I found it pretty interesting, especially since I was in Berlin about two weeks earlier and the tension was intense. The author's writing style has an annoying quirk (which seems to be popular with other writers these days); instead of past tense, he uses "would" way too often. Example: instead of "He enjoyed a distinguished career, wrote several books, and died at the age of 86 in Ohio," he writes, "He would enjoy....would write... would die....". On two facing pages I counted 16 and 17 "would's". This would (and did!) annoy this reviewer no end.

Justine Kerfoot, *Woman of the Boundary Waters: Canoeing, Guiding, Mushing and Surviving* (1986) reviewed by Tom Hady

Kerfoot owned and operated the Gunflint Lodge in the Boundary Waters of Minnesota from the late 1920's through the late 1970's. While the book is technically an autobiography, it is also a history of the development of the region and the way life was lived in one of the least developed, most rural parts of Minnesota--arguably its last frontier. It is very readable, and I found it hard to put down.

Charles P. Kindleberger , *Manias, Panics, and Crashes: A History of Financial Crises*, (Basic Books, 1978) Reviewed by Don Ferrett.

Kindleberger wrote this book during a turbulent time in U.S. economic history, a time of OPEC-driven stagflation. His motive was apparently to review the global history of such crises over a long term (250 years) to look for answers to several questions: What caused them? What role did malfeasance play in them? How did industry and governments respond? How did the timing of such responses affect the outcome? Given the subsequent Reagan Recession, the crisis of October 1987, the recession of 1991, the run on the Thai bhat in 1997, the tech bubble collapse, Enron, Bernie Madoff, and the housing bubble and following Great Recession, it is clear that the answers to his questions have not been answered definitively (or

have been ignored). This relatively brief overview of 250 years of financial crises assumes that the reader is familiar with the jargon of economics.

[Compiler's note --Kindleberger was named a Distinguished Fellow of the American Economic Assn. in 1980.--TFH]

Henry Kraus, *Gold was the Mortar: The Economics of Cathedral Building* (1979), reviewed by Tom Hady

Kraus discusses in depth the way eight medieval cathedrals, those of Paris, Amiens, Toulouse, Lyon, Strasbourg, York, Poitiers and Rouen, were financed. The story differs for each, and it tells a great deal about the relationships between the church and its officers, and the townspeople in each of the cities.

Jack Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life: 1790-1840* (1988), reviewed by Tom Hady

Change is a constant in American life, but from the viewpoint of one who lived through the last 80 years of it, the early 1800's seem like another world, and it is interesting to see the start of changes from subsistence to commercial agriculture, from a barter economy to a money economy, and from a rural economy to a somewhat more citified one that Larkin outlines. Larkin is a historian at Old Sturbridge Village.

David Fielding Lewis, *God's Crucible: Islam and the Making of Europe, 570-1215*, (2008), reviewed by Tom Hady

Lewis gives us a very readable history of a time and an area that gets short shrift in American history classes. Beginning with the rise of Islam, he carries through its spread through the Maghreb and into Spain. Charles Martel and his grandson, Charlemagne rate detailed coverage, together with the rise (and subsequent fall) of the Umayyads in Al Andulus, and their comparatively enlightened attitude toward non-Islamic religions and very enlightened view of learning. Lewis is a professor at New York University, and the book is well documented.

Neil MacGregor, *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (2011), reviewed by Tom Hady

MacGregor, Director of the British Museum, uses 100 objects from their collection as icons to tell the history of the world. As MacGregor points out in his preface, that project is "in many respects impossible," but he carries it off remarkably well. Regardless of your knowledge of world history, you will find some interesting tidbits in here, and probably will come away with a new-found appreciation of the flow of our history through the millennia.

Karen Maitland, *Company of Liars* (2009), reviewed by Almuth Payne

This novel is set in medieval England and depicts a group of diverse people thrown together by chance and trying to escape the plague. Each of them has a dark secret that must be protected at all cost. Besides telling a good mystery, the author does an excellent job of depicting the generally grim conditions of the era - the filth, cruelty, poverty, and ignorance, and the overwhelming fear of the plague sweeping across the land are well described.

William Manchester, *American Caesar: Douglas McArthur 1880-1964* (1978), reviewed by Don Ferrett

This tome is a major piece of work by a significant historian. The subject is followed from before birth to his grave in small steps. The reader may, as I did, get the impression that Manchester has padded the book with excessive detail, but not be able to decide what should have been left out. I had a negative view of McArthur and debated putting the effort into reading this extensive biography, but I'm glad I did. McArthur grew up in a difficult environment with a famous father and a very domineering mother. (She went so far as to get an apartment within view of her son's room when he went to West Point.) His heroic exploits in WWI, his shabby treatment of the Bonus Army in Washington, D.C., the initial failure in the Philippines and his subsequent brilliant tactical leadership in WWII, his role in the rebuilding of Japan, and his successes, failures, and final dismissal in Korea are all detailed in this volume. I began to admire McArthur, even before I read that he had strongly recommended to both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson that they not get involved in a land war in Asia.

Bill Mauldin, *Back Home* (1947), reviewed by Don Ferrett.

During his five years in the Army, Bill Mauldin grew from a wet-behind-the-ears 18-year-old recruit to a Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist. He arrived back home with an eye for the contradictions of the then current civilian society. His observations on everything from racial prejudice (white vs. black and Japanese) to car salesmen and politicians show insight rare in someone his age. I found much of the book as relevant today as it was when he wrote it over 60 years ago. Mauldin's writing style is very easy to read, and the 200 cartoons make it a very enjoyable book.

Bill Mauldin, *The Brass Ring* (1971), reviewed by Don Ferrett.

In this autobiographical work, Bill Mauldin describes his strange, and very interesting, path to a Pulitzer Prize at the age of 23. Born to a dysfunctional household of dirt poor farmers in the southwest, Mauldin makes his way through High School (almost!), borrows enough money to get half trained as an artist/cartoonist in a school in Chicago, and joins the Arizona National Guard just before the U.S. gets involved in WWII. By sheer dumb luck, he gets an opening as a cartoonist with the 45th Infantry Division newspaper after his Guard unit was "federalized." And the rest, as they say, is history. Very entertaining. I especially like Mauldin's description of his meeting with General George S. Patton.

Candice Millard, *The River of Doubt: Theodore Roosevelt's Darkest Journey* (2005), reviewed by Don Ferrett.

Crushed by his humiliating defeat in the 1912 election, Theodore Roosevelt decided to embark on a speaking tour of South America, followed by a trek through the Amazon basin down a river never before seen by white men: the River of Doubt. This book gives the reader a peek into the thoughts and character of Roosevelt and those who accompanied him on that journey. There is also much digression into the history of the Roosevelt family, as well as on the natural history of the Amazon rain forest and the natives who live in it. Preparations for the trip were poorly directed, and the entire party paid the price. Several lives were lost and it was sheer good fortune that the ex-President and his second son (Kermit) were not among them. As a result of his fortitude and treatment of the others on the expedition, the Brazilian government renamed the river the Rio Roosevelt. This book is very readable and gives quite an insight into the culture of a time when the most remote places on earth were finally being explored.

Robert K. Massie, *Catherine the Great, Portrait of a Woman* (2011), reviewed by Gerald P. Holmes

I found this a wonderful read, a biography but written more like a novel. It was thoroughly researched, with copious notes. Catherine not only oversaw the expansion of her empire, but also was the greatest art collector of her era, and found time to take a dozen lovers. The book is a reminder of how intertwined the histories of Germany and Russia are. The Czarist court had many Germans who converted to the orthodox religion, adopted Russian names, but still had ties to Frederick the Great and/or other German principalities. Catherine was a great reader and was in touch with the leading French intellectuals of her time. You learn a lot about a slice of European history from the Russian perspective.

Alistair Moffat, *Before Scotland: The Story of Scotland Before History* (2005), reviewed by Tom Hady

Moffat describes the history of Scotland from the retreat of the glaciers to the coming of the Vikings. As with most histories of the period before there are written records, in places the story rests on rather thin foundations. On the whole, Moffat is careful about not overreaching. The cover quotes *The Scotsman*, "Enthralling." I'm not sure I was left in thrall, but Moffat is a very good writer, and the book certainly enlightened my spare moments for a couple of weeks.

Sylvia Nasar, *Grand Pursuit: The Story of Economic Genius* (2011), reviewed by Tom Hady

Marx, Marshall, Schumpeter, Hayek, Fisher, Keynes, Samuelson, Friedman, Sen and their contemporaries. This is not the book to help you pass the history of economic thought prelim for your PhD, but it will contribute to understanding the social and economic *milieu* that gave rise to the contributions of each of those economists (and others) over the past 200 years. Furthermore, you don't need to wake up in the morning reciting "marginal revenue equals marginal cost" to understand it! It is accessible to non-economists.

Having once passed that history of thought prelim, I still found in this book many new insights into why those particular theories were worked out at those particular times. Nasar is a journalism professor at Columbia, with the educational background (a Master's degree in economics) and experience to write about this subject with understanding. She was perhaps uniquely qualified to place developments in economic thought in their historical perspective.

Jeffrey Ostler, *The Lakotas and the Black Hills: the Struggle for Sacred Ground* (2010), reviewed by Tom Hady

The sad tale of our dealings with the Native Americans has been told before, but Ostler makes it more specific in this book about the Lakotas. A professor of history at the University of Oregon, his work is well documented and, despite his apparent sympathy for the Indian plight, well balanced. Of interest to me was his conclusion that it was not really the army that defeated the Indians so much as the civilian buffalo hunters who killed the herds and left the Indians with no choice but to submit to the government directives as a condition of receiving rations--or starve.

James T. Patterson, *Relentless Giant: The United States from Watergate to Bush V. Gore* (2005), reviewed by Bob Bohall

Thanks to Jim Hubbard's leadership (OLLI Fall 2011) we had the pleasure of reading and discussing this 11th volume in the *Oxford History of the United States*. The back cover PR squib indicates "Patterson provides a crisp, concise assessment of the twenty-seven years between the resignation of Richard Nixon and the election of George W. Bush, in a sweeping narrative form that seamlessly weaves together social, cultural, political, economic, and international developments." We meet the era's many memorable figures and explore the "culture wars" between liberals and conservatives that appeared to split the country in two.

It was far from easy to direct the outcome of global events while dealing with domestic racial tensions, high divorce rates, alarm over crime, and urban decay that led many in media to portray the era as one of decline. Patterson offers a more positive perspective indicating considerable progress during the mid-70s through the hotly contested election of 2000. It was a fascinating book, very readable, and a very enjoyable history. You can always find areas that could have been covered in more depth but Patterson in 444 pages does a great job.

Betty Rogers, *Will Rogers* (1941, 1979), reviewed by Don Ferrett.

Of course I had heard of Will Rogers before. My folks had spoken of him and I had heard several of his famous quotes. Unfortunately, I always seemed to miss seeing James Whitmore's portrayals of him on stage or television. This book, first published in 1941, was written by his wife shortly after he died in a plane crash in Alaska in 1935. Given the source, it's understandable that Will was made out to be a nearly flawless man-among-men. In truth, he was. He grew up in Indian Territory (Oklahoma), dropping out of several schools along the way, and became a cowboy. From there, he moved on to being a rodeo performer, having a one man vaudeville act, performing in a Wild West show in South Africa and a circus in Australia and New Zealand, being in the Ziegfeld Follies, and acting in both silent films and

talkies. Along the way he wrote newspaper columns, lectured extensively, had a radio program, and wrote books. He never lost his down-home charm, and was the friend of paupers and kings. This is a very interesting book, containing, besides the details of Roger's life, much about U.S. culture in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Donald P. Ryan, *Beneath the Sands of Egypt: Adventures of an Unconventional Archaeologist* (2010), reviewed by Tom Hady

Ryan has dug in the Valley of Kings and elsewhere in Egypt, and for several years served as right-hand man to Thor Heyerdahl. The book is more about his activities than about ancient Egyptian history, but there is a good sprinkling of the latter in the mix.

P. H. Sawyer, *Kings and Vikings: Scandinavia and Europe AD 700-1100* (1982), reviewed by Tom Hady

There are many books on the Vikings. One thing that makes this book different is that Sawyer explains the evidence and the reasoning behind conclusions about Viking activity. The origins of coins in a coin hoard, for example, permit reasonable inductions about the directions of trade (or plunder) in that region at the time the hoard was buried. He also relates activity across Europe, suggesting how changes in the strength of rulers and the amount of plunder left attracted raiders or encouraged them to go elsewhere.

Rosalyn Schanzer, *Witches: The Absolutely True Tale of Disaster in Salem* (2011), reviewed by Bob Bohall

Award-winning author Schanzer tells the true story of the victims, accused witches, scheming officials and mass hysteria that turned a mysterious illness affecting two children into a witch hunt that took more than 20 people's lives and ruined the lives of hundreds more.

With a powerful narrative, chilling primary sources and a striking period design this book is a winner. I would recommend it highly for teens and an informative read for adults. Schanzer lectured on *Witches* at OLLI Fall 2011. The writing is easy, the style is great and the historical content is National Geographic superb. Very nice gift anytime.

Amity Shlaes, *The Forgotten Man: A New History of the Great Depression* (2008) reviewed by Don Ferrett.

The Forgotten Man, first out in hardcover in 2007, was a New York Times #1 Business Bestseller, and with good reason. After recovering strongly from the tech bubble bursting, the U.S. economy was beginning to collapse again from a real estate bubble. Who was at fault? What should the government do? As we slid into the Great Recession, lessons from the Great Depression could give government leaders guidance in avoiding earlier mistakes. Shlaes' timely tome describes specific actions taken by Hoover and Roosevelt to mitigate the economic collapse, and the impacts of those actions on the economy and the common man. Besides the alphabet soup of programs, she goes into considerable detail on the personalities involved. Prominent among these are Lilienthal at the TVA vs. Wendell Wilkie at Commonwealth and Southern, and F.D.R. vs. the Supreme Court. Although the philosophical slant is clearly to the right of center (there are quotes of praise from Steve Forbes and Newt Gingrich), the book is very informative to one who didn't live through these times and it makes very good reading.

Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (1992), reviewed by Bob Persell

In this short book (128 pages), Pulitzer Prize winning author Schlesinger comes to the defense of the concept of the "melting pot." Schlesinger, a distinguished liberal historian, argues that the celebration of ethnicity brings its own dangers. Schlesinger points out that the United States has always been a country made up of diverse ethnicities but these ethnicities merged into a fairly unified concept of the "American." That concept has been under attack as group rights have been in ascendancy while individual rights have been receding. The American ideal of assimilation has been discarded by many and this is leading to the fragmentation of American life.

Schlesinger warns: "If we now repudiate the quite marvelous inheritance that history bestows on us, we invite the fragmentation of the national community into a quarrelsome spatter of enclaves, ghettos, tribes."

The basic message seems to be "don't give up on the melting pot as an ideal to strive for."

Admiral James G. Stavridis, *Destroyer Captain: Lessons of a First Command* (2008), reviewed by Bob Persell

This memoir was kept while Stavridis, now a four star admiral, commanded his first ship. The USS Barry was a highly capable destroyer equipped with the

sophisticated Aegis class weapons system; Captain Stavridis commanded her from 1993-1995. During this period Barry was deployed to the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf.

Stavridis recounts many of the challenges every commanding officer at sea faces and gives insights as to why he handled situations the way he did. One observation he made was that one should not make the mistake of confusing one's life with his career. He believes that luck plays a role in the success or failure of a career and cited the fact that several of his highly talented Naval Academy classmates left the Navy early because of various mishaps but still had extremely successful civilian careers.

Another episode in the book that I found of personal interest was his description of a particularly challenging ship handling incident. Barry was engaged in refueling at sea under hazardous sea conditions. Collision with the oiler was a real possibility but was averted. (I can remember a very similar situation during my own career.)

Barry, under Stavridis's command, was selected as the Atlantic Fleet's top ship. Stavridis himself went on to a most distinguished career reaching the Navy's highest rank. A book of primary interest to former naval officers, *Destroyer Captain* may also be of interest to those who'd like to know more about those who go down to the sea in ships. It is a short, highly readable account of a highly successful commanding officer.

James Tobin, *Ernie Pyle's War: America's Eyewitness to World War II*, (1997), reviewed by Don Ferrett.

Although the title stresses Pyle's work during WWII, this biography begins with his childhood on a farm in Indiana, and goes into some detail on his early education and work as a correspondent. His first independent beat was covering the emerging aviation industry, followed by a multi-year "on the road" stint (an early Charles Kuralt) with his troubled wife Jerry.

Pyle's approach to the war was to describe the life of the infantryman from first-hand experience with him in the foxhole. Tobin follows Pyle's life through Africa, Italy, and France, and finally to Ie Shima where he lost his life to a Japanese Nambu machine gun bullet. Because of his intimate connection with America's sons, his death, coming only six days after that of FDR, was mourned almost as much as that of the President's.

This book held special significance for me. The copy that I read belonged to my father, who was on Okinawa when Pyle was killed. My father-in-law was on a ship

waiting to disembark on Ie Shima at the time, and he recorded Pyle's death in his diary. Both men held Pyle in the highest regard.

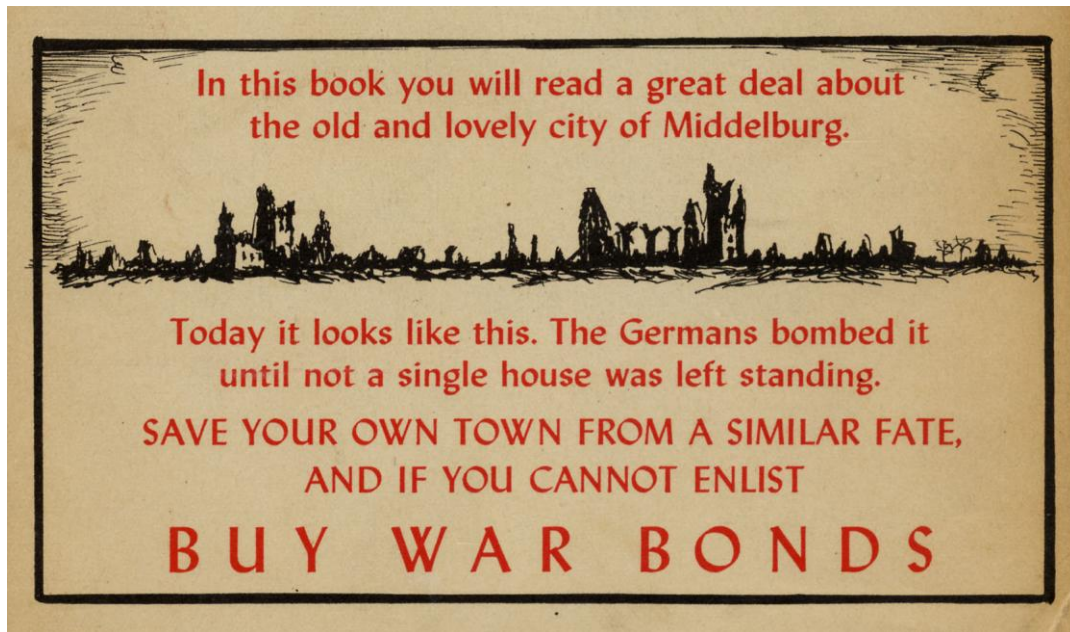
Barbara W. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century* (1978),
reviewed by Almuth Payne

Some books reward the reader when read again and this is certainly one of them (despite its daunting length of 600 pp.!!). It is a classic of medieval scholarship, covering not only all the personalities and events of these terrible 100 years with constant war, Black Death, schism in the church, famine, social and religious hysteria.....the list is endless – but the author also describes how people lived, dressed, ate, raised children, practiced medicine, entertained themselves, and so on, for a rich panorama of the Middle Ages in Europe.

Hendrik Willem Van Loon, *Van Loon's Lives* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1942) reviewed by Tom Hady

The subtitle of this book, which I thought too long to include above, describes it well: *being a true and faithful account of a number of highly interesting meetings with certain historical personages, from Confucius and Plato to Voltaire and Thomas Jefferson, about whom we had always felt a great deal of curiosity and who came to us as our dinner guests in a bygone year.* In an engaging mix of history, biography and fiction, van Loon describes a series of fanciful dinners he and a friend have with 44 figures from history, ranging from Hans Christian Andersen to Leonardo Da Vinci to William the Silent. Their first guest, Erasmus, stays with them throughout the series, but all the rest of their guests are there only for the evening, and disappear when the candles begin to flicker precisely at midnight. The evenings vary from enjoyable conversation to fisticuffs--the latter between two theologians from the 4th century. Jefferson plays the violin with van Loon.

I found this book in a library book sale, with its 70-year-old dust jacket still attached. The dust jacket, for one interested in history, was the lagniappe. On the back was the following box, which brought back vivid memories of the spirit of the times during World War II.



Nigel Warburton, *A Little History of Philosophy* (2011), reviewed by Bob Bohall

This was an impulse new book recently at the Fairfax Library. It was a fun read. I did about a chapter or so per day over a few weeks. 40 chapters plus. Unfortunately, I turned the book in without doing my review so have borrowed a bit from internet reviewers.

Nigel Warburton's elementary guide to philosophers strikes the right balance for older youth and adults alike. Warburton runs from Socrates to Peter Singer, with most philosophers getting a chapter to themselves, a few sharing the berth and Kant getting the solitary accolade of two to himself. It works for the same reason that Warburton's books and podcasts always work: philosophy is tremendously interesting but it is a difficult subject, often needlessly made even more so by the way in which it is written. It would be wrong to say Warburton makes it look easy, but he does make making it clear look easy, which clearly it is not. My summary is a simplistic read and an interesting cross section of great philosophers over the centuries

Steven E. Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies: America's Westward Expansion and the Road to the Civil War* (2010), reviewed by Bob Persell

Historian Woodworth has written a masterpiece covering the history of the United States in the 1840's. The term "manifest destiny" was first coined by a New York

newspaperman, John L. O'Sullivan, who said that it was America's "manifest destiny to overspread the country." This widespread feeling, that Heaven sanctioned the ultimate domination of the continent by the United States, was given an early impetus by Jefferson's acquisition of the Louisiana territory. By the 1840's the idea became widely accepted. In chapters describing such events as the Oregon trail, the annexation of Texas, the attraction of California's seaports, the war with Mexico and the California Gold Rush, Woodworth portrays the vibrancy of the era. The title of the book, *Manifest Destinies*, is well chosen, because, according to Woodworth, when the US followed the call of western expansion, it also made clear that another destiny awaited the young nation – the Civil War.

If you're interested in this era, I would characterize this book as a must read.