Good Books about History, 2013-14

Reviews by members of the OLLI-GMU History Club

Compiled by Tom Hady

Compiler's Note: With our decision a few years ago to include historical fiction, the question of what to call "history" has become more difficult. I view my role as limited. I will occasionally ask a contributor whether this belongs in a history compilation, but I generally accept their conclusion. Other than that, I compile the reviews, put them in a common format, and do a very limited amount of editing.--TFH.

Catherine Allgor, *A Perfect Union: Dolley Madison and the Creation of the American Nation* (2010), reviewed by Jim Crumley

This book focuses on the impact Dolley Madison, arguably our most famous and influential "First Lady," had on the early government and social life of our nation. Born a Quaker and a widow by the time she met the "Great Little Madison," (her description of our Fourth President), she exploded on the American scene. "Mrs. Madison's Wednesday Nights" were an outlet for political foes to get together in a social setting that allowed less strident discussion. Thomas Jefferson, who shrank from confrontation of any kind, very seldom invited political foes to White House meetings. In fact, he seldom talked to any Federalists during his Presidency. Madison was not a "social person" and these events provided an opportunity to meet the opposition in a convivial circumstance. Dolley Madison is probably best known for saving George Washington's portrait when the British burned the White House, but she was much more. She knew each of our first 12 Presidents. She was the first person to send a "private" telegram. She presided over the setting of the cornerstone to the Washington monument, and, was given her own, evidently ceremonial, seat in the House of Representatives. When she died, essentially penniless, the government shut down to allow a huge crowd to attend the largest funeral to that time in Washington history.

Stephen E. Ambrose, *Band of Brothers* (1992), reviewed by Don Ferrett.

I'm glad I finally got around to reading this best seller about a group of U.S. paratroopers in the European Theater of Operations in WWII. (Specifically, they were members of Easy Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne Division.) Ambrose used official documents and many hours of interviews with the principals to weave together the story of a group of kids who volunteered for extremely hazardous duty after the outbreak of WWII. Ambrose first describes their extended period of training in the States under a strange Company Commander before entering combat. Most of the book is devoted to detailed descriptions of their main battles: Normandy, Market Garden, and Bastogne. Also included are the time spent waiting for D-Day in England, and the end of the war where they were the first to enter Hitler's mountain retreat at Berchtesgaden.

The book includes several maps, a few photographs, and a decent index. However, there is no bibliography, and the personal recollections of these men are all that remain to substantiate many of the details presented here. I liked the book, but felt that it was not one of Ambrose's strongest (see for example: *Undaunted Courage* or *Nothing Like It In The World)*.

Stephen E. Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage: Meriweather Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West* (1996), reviewed by Jim Crumley

While Stephen Ambrose's reputation has suffered from the plagiarism controveries surrounding several of his books, he still wrote a good story. In this one, he tracked Meriweather Lewis from his youth as a neighbor to Thomas Jefferson in Virginia, through his military career, to his time as aide to President Jefferson, and to his selection (by Jefferson) to lead an expedition to the Northwest Territories and the Pacific. While the early parts of the book are of some interest, the expedition is the key.

When Lewis, joined by his friend William Clark, began their adventure, the Blue Ridge Mountains were believed to be the highest in North America and people thought that mammoths and other prehistoric mammals might roam the Great Plains. Jefferson was most interested in finding a water connection to the Pacific.

Throughout the trip, Lewis sent back notes on what he saw and examples of animals, minerals, and plant life that he recovered. At one point, he added Sacagawea, a Shoshone squaw, to his team. She served as a guide and interpreter for the expedition, and became famous over the next 200 years for her efforts. Most interestingly, she spoke various Indian dialects and a little French (her husband-- who either bought her or won her in a poker game--was a Quebec trapper). At least initially, she apparently spoke no English. So, when coming across Native Americans, she would translate their language into French for her husband, who would then pass the information to a bilingual (French and English) member of the expedition. He, in turn, would translate the information to English for Lewis and/or Clark's use. One can only imagine how many errors inserted themselves into this effort.

Some of the key points of the story include Lewis' first view from the other side of the Rockies and Clark's famous statement, "Ocean in View," when he first glimpses the Pacific Ocean.

The book concludes with Lewis' controversial term as Governor of the Louisiana territory and his death by multiple gunshots. Ambrose presents the death as a suicide, but equally responsible historians believe he was murdered. The author rejects those conclusions. Regardless, we'll probably never know the truth.

Another interesting sidelight was the continuing "feud" between the Adams family and Thomas Jefferson. John Quincy Adams and his grandson, the historian, Henry Adams, completely dismissed the Lewis and Clark Expedition as little more than a trip across the country. For most other historians, it was more than that.

David Howard Bain, *Empire Express: Building the First Transcontinental Railroad* (1999), reviewed by Jim Crumley

This is the third book I've read on the building of the transcontinental railroad. It is clearly the most comprehensive, but may be overly detailed for some (maybe most) people. The dreamers, the engineers, and the politicians, along with the controversial designs, inter-regional conflict, backroom deals, and out-and-out bribery are all here. The Indian threat, the Rocky Mountains, the Great Plains and major weather phenomena are all overcome. The silver find in Nevada, the gold find in California, and the desire to connect east coast and west coast as a link between European and Asian commerce all drive "the greatest engineering challenge in history." Thomas Durant, who is presented in a fictionalized portrayal on the AMC series, "Hell on Wheels, appears even more devious in "real life."

Durant's Union Pacific races to lay track going west and Leland Stanford's Central Pacific railroad rushes to meet up to connect the nation's rails at Promontory Point, Utah. It's really an exciting story as they overcome one problem after another to change commerce in our nation like no previous episode in our nation's history could have.

Robert D. Bass, *The Swamp Fox: the Life and Campaigns of General Francis Marion* (1959), reviewed by Jim Crumley

This is a short (245 pages) book about the life and times of Francis Marion, the "Swamp Fox." The author notes Marion's very hard-working, Christian upbringing in South Carolina and his exploits fighting Cherokees during the French and Indian War, but, within about ten pages, he gets to the whole point of the exercise—Marion's time as a partisan guerrilla during the American Revolution. His "cat and mouse" game throughout the eastern half of South Carolina with Britain's infamous Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton provides highlights to the narrative. In fact, it was Tarleton who gave him the nickname, "Swamp Fox."

Marion was apparently only semi-literate and could be moody and introspective, but he had an intuitive strategic and tactical genius that served him well. Starting as a Private, he led the British on a "merry chase" through much of the war and eventually was promoted to Brigadier General under Nathanael Greene. While the British (particularly Tarleton) were accused of terrorist tactics (burning of homes and killing women and children), Marion was known for, and frequently criticized for, his humane treatment of the enemy.

Pierre Berton, *The Klondike Fever: The Life and Death of the Last Great Gold Rush* (1958), reviewed by Tom Hady

Here are the stories of the flood of humans who descended on the Klondike after gold was discovered in 1896. Most of them were looking for gold, but many just saw a good business opportunity selling needed supplies to the gold-seekers—and they got rich doing it. Some went over Chilkoot Pass, the location of the iconic pictures of men laboring up the steep, snow-covered trail. Others went through Skagway to White Pass, and found themselves on "Dead Horse Trail." Still others tried other routes. Most got to the Klondike too late, if they made it at all.

One point not always clear in other accounts is that while Soapy Smith and his henchmen ruled Skagway, the Mounties enforced law and order on the Canadian side. It was said that you could leave a bag of gold dust on the trail for a week and come back to find it intact. Miscreants in Dawson were given one of two sentences by the Mounties (their commander apparently also ran the court): leave town, or work for a term of months on the government wood pile—which amounted to an astounding 1320 cords of wood for a winter's supply. Fifty prisoners were usually at work, year round.

Mounties to the contrary, petty crime was rampant on both sides of transactions: *Most men used the so-called "commercial dust," heavily laced with black sand, to pay their bills. As the bank valued this commercial dust at only eleven dollars an ounce, a customer using it to buy groceries or whisky could reckon that he was saving five dollars an ounce, since the normal price of clean Klondike gold ran around sixteen dollars. . .On the other hand, the bartenders and commercial businessmen weighed the dust carelessly, so that a poke worth one hundred dollars was usually empty after seventy dollars' worth of purchases were made.*

Like the boom towns before it, Dawson had a short life. By midsummer of '99, gold had been found on sands of Nome, and the next stampede began.

Walter R. Borneman, *Polk: The Man who Transformed the Presidency and America* (2008), reviewed by Jim Crumley

This is the second and the better of the biographies I've read on James K. Polk. It follows his life from his early days to his relationship with his long-time mentor, Andrew Jackson, to his time in Congress, his term as Governor of Tennessee, his two defeats for that same governorship, his Presidency, and his death less than four months after leaving the oval office. Although greatly appreciated by those who have studied our various presidents, Polk is probably the least recognizable to the average American of the best of that group.

When Polk ran for President, he promised to be a "one term President" and stated four very large goals for his presidency:

1. Cut taxes by lowering the "Tariffs of Abominations" to defuse intersectional hostility that threatened secession.
2. Establish an independent treasury instead of the National Bank of Philadelphia (the precursor to today's Federal Reserve) which had caused tremendous controversy.
3. Solve the problem of British occupancy of the Oregon territory (today's Oregon, Washington, and parts of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming)
4. Acquire the California province from Mexico.

He accomplished all of these, prosecuted and won the Mexican War, expanded the United States from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and, true to his promise, did not run for a second term. Some, like Henry Clay in the Senate and former President John Quincy Adams in the House, fought him every step of the way on each of these issues. But, whether one approves of his actions or not, that is a pretty impressive set of accomplishments for a President who was a "lame duck" from day one. IMO, a really good book!

Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (2009), reviewed by Jim Crumley

This book was originally written in 1970 and has been widely praised ever since for being a history of the American West from the perspective of the American Indian. Therefore, it is clearly not intended to be a "balanced" report. In fact, I could describe the central theme of the book very simply: "white man bad; red man good." But, since virtually every other book of the period prior to this one essentially described the Indians as drunken, lazy savages, I think it was probably about time for "the rest of the story," and well worth anyone's time.

While the primary period covered is that from roughly 1860 to 1890, culminating in the Wounded Knee massacre, the author covers virtually the entire time from 1492 to 1860 also, but in less detail. King Phillip, Pontiac, Black Hoof, Tecumseh, and others are talked of briefly. Clearly, from an Indian perspective (and probably any unbiased one), American colonists and eventually the U.S. government made agreements with various Indian tribes that were neither enforced nor honored. Dozens of tribes were wiped off the face of the earth and many others were confined (as they are today) to relatively small reservations. It is not a "proud era" of American history.

Bill Bryson, *At Home: A Short History of Private Life* (2012), reviewed by Don Ferrett.

This book was a Christmas present from my mother-in-law, who tries to give something a little out of the ordinary. As a work of Bryson's, it is also a little out of the ordinary. He lives in a Victorian parsonage in England, and decided to write a book about it--not just the house, but everything in it. This leads to a wide range of topics, from chimneys to hair styles. The book is literally stuffed with odd historical items concerning how our homes are organized today and just how that came about, including brief biographies of inventors along the way. In fact, there were so many interesting and diverse facts that I was somewhat overwhelmed. Bryson was not as focused here as in earlier works of his that I have read. Unfortunately, I never really quite got into this one.

Andrew Burstein and Nancy Isenberg, *Madison and Jefferson* (2010), reviewed by Jim Crumley.

This is an extensive dual biography of two of our greatest "founding fathers." It is neither a short, nor easy read, but a long (650 pages) and detailed look at the relationship between the two Virginians. Most histories tend to give Jefferson the "starring" role in this relationship, but this book intentionally places "Madison" first in the title. It also goes to great lengths to show Madison's predominance in many of the thoughts and philosophies both men expounded and points out how Madison may well have influenced Jefferson's thinking to a greater extent than the reverse. I thought it a very interesting addition to anyone's knowledge of our founders.

David Cannadine, *Mellon: an American Life* (2006), reviewed by Jim Crumley

This is a lengthy and very thorough treatment of the life of Andrew Mellon, powerful financier, Secretary of the Treasury, renowned art collector, and philanthropist. Raised by a domineering father who introduced him to the business world, Andrew was uncommonly successful, coming to own several large American companies such as Gulf Oil, Carborundum, and Alcoa, along with his extensive bank holdings. But Mellon was cold, forbidding, and completely focused on business to the detriment of his relations with his wife, children, partners, and others.

Following his spectacular business career, he served as the Secretary of the Treasury through three administrations. Mellon was hailed as the "greatest Secretary since Alexander Hamilton" through the Harding and Coolidge years and then reviled by FDR and the "New Dealers" during the Hoover administration.

He was accused of income tax evasion but was largely exonerated; he was accused of continuing to operate his businesses while a government employee, which was largely true; and he was accused of being selfish and miserly, which was totally wrong. He never seems to have been interested in money per se, but interested in succeeding at whatever task he chose. In the end he spent much of his time collecting art and establishing the National Gallery of Art.

Norman F. Cantor, *Antiquity: From the Birth of Sumerian Civilization to the Fall of the Roman Empire* (2003), reviewed by Tom Hady

Cantor writes a concise, readable account of ancient times. He provides a measured description of what he regards as the successes and failures of ancient men and civilizations.

Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton* (2004), reviewed by Jim Crumley

This may be the most complete biography of Alexander Hamilton ever written. It is full of details from original sources and provides insights to many of the controversies and complexities of our nation's founding. Unfortunately, Mr. Chernow has chosen to exalt all the good things Hamilton did and downplay or forgive his failures. Somehow, he is given credit for activities in which he was a minor player: He and George Washington won the revolutionary war as a team, without either of which, it could not have happened. During Washington's Presidency, Hamilton was more like a "Prime Minister" than a cabinet member; overstated, but some truth there. He was the one who talked George Washington into attending the Constitutional Convention and allowing his name to be brought forward for President. This is counter to every history of the time I have read.
He was "the main architect of the new American government," the "foremost interpreter" of the constitution, and possessor of "superhuman stamina." His opponents are labeled "vile sycophants," engaged in "grotesque fantasies," "scandalous hyperbole," "malicious gossip," and "demonizing." And, when Hamilton was found improperly using appropriated funds, Crenshaw excuses it as a "technical violation of the law," noting (accurately) that it was not for personal use. He simply used it for purposes that he thought were of higher priority than the President or Congress. Huh?

Hamilton, no doubt a great man, and important founder (generally consider one of the "big six") is portrayed as an all-seeing, altruistic genius who is opposed by jealous, short-sighted, pedestrian minds. Sorry. It's hard to put Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Burr, et al. in that category. Chernow gives him great credit for his inputs to the constitution despite noting that most of these inputs were "far out" monarchical plans for a President for life, and no state governments whatsoever.

That said, he was the primary author (along with James Madison, and, to a lesser degree, John Jay) of the Federalist Papers. While they may not have been a significant factor in the actual ratification of the Constitution, these writings have been used for the past 200 years to gain insight into the intent of the founders.

Certainly, Hamilton's design of our financial system was a great achievement, but it was not and is not without faults. But, not according to Chernow. While he was clearly a favorite of George Washington, there was a reason he was despised by Adams, Jefferson, and Madison despite early, cordial relations with all of them. In the end, they simply didn't trust him.
All in all, however, this is a worthwhile, though lengthy read, but it requires some knowledge of the time and other players to put into context the slant provided by Mr. Chernow.

Ron Chernow, *Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller* (2007), reviewed by Jim Crumley
This is an exhaustive (and to some, exhausting) look at the life of John D. Rockefeller. One of the most polarizing figures in American history (Was he good? Was he evil?), Rockefeller rose from relative poverty to become the richest man of all time (adjusting for inflation). He had an overriding Baptist faith (tithing from his earliest days), went to church consistently, never drank or smoke, and, through the Rockefeller Foundation and other devices, gave away approximately $550 million to a wide variety of causes. Yet, he was ruthless in business, willing to cut corners to get his way, and used his monopolies to drive others out of business. An ardent abolitionist, Rockefeller was probably one of very few people who actually voted for Abraham Lincoln and against FDR.

Rockefeller made most of his money early on in the oil business to provide kerosene for lamps. The automobile was still years away. But the Standard Oil Company that he formed, and was broken up in 1911, leaves a legacy that involves much of that entire industry as it stands today.

In his later life (he lived to be 97) he gave away almost all of his wealth. He was particularly drawn to improving education and he founded Spelman College in Atlanta for African American women and named it after an abolitionist ancestor. He gave $80M to turn a small Baptist college, the University of Chicago, into one of the great institutions in the country if not the world. He also provided support to such schools as Yale, Harvard, Columbia, Brown, Bryn Mawr, Welesley, and Vassar, among many others. To say the least, he was a complex man whose biography makes for a fascinating read.

Diane Coyle, *GDP: A Brief but Affectionate History* (2014), reviewed by Tom Hady

Every economist learns about GDP (Gross Domestic Product) in graduate school and most use it in some way in their careers. But its history is not widely taught. Asked about it, I would probably have begun with Simon Kuznets in the years before WWII; Coyle begins with William Petty in 1665. One of the major issues of national income accounting, what's productive enterprise, began early, too. Adam Smith would have counted only the production of physical goods.

When she moves to recent decades, Coyle's history becomes more a very useful history of development of macroeconomic theory. Probably it would be more accurate to call the whole book a partial history of economic theory, since GDP is really a reflection of that body of thought.

Roger Crowley, *City of Fortune: How Venice Ruled the Seas* (2011), reviewed by Tom Hady

Visiting almost anywhere in the eastern Mediterranean, you find old fortifications attributed to the Venetians, but the scope and power of their empire never seems to come out. For centuries, Venice ruled trade in the area. Since this was at the western end of the routes we know collectively as "the Silk Road," it was an immensely profitable trade. Crowley chronicles Venetian era, from its beginnings around 1000 to its close around 1500 when the "Turks" arose as a new power and the Portuguese figured out how to do an "end run" around the Venetian monopolies. A recurring theme is that the Venetians were not, like most rulers of the day, interested in territorial aggrandizement. Territory was useful mainly to facilitate their trade. They were primarily businessmen, and hard-headed ones. Crowley writes well, and this is an interesting book.

Steven J. Diner. *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era* (1998), reviewed by Tom Hady

The late 1800's and early 1900's were an interesting time of transition from the small-firm, craftsman-led, independent industry to the huge corporations and assembly lines We are so familiar with. We all learned its outlines in a survey course or two in American history, but there are lessons in the details. The Walmart controversies of our time are echoes of the controversies over department stores and mail order operations of that era. Henry Ford is widely credited with paying his workers well above the prevailing wage; less often does one

hear that he had to do so to keep men from quitting in sheer boredom at drilling the same sized hole in the same place for months on end. To maintain a 13000 man workforce for 12 months in 1912-13, he had to hire 54000 different individuals. Workers of all levels in many industries found ways to adjust. One young woman is quoted as saying that she was careful not to produce too much, because then the bosses would just cut the piece rate. This is a good place to find some of the antecedents of our current trends and problems.

Joseph J. Ellis, *Founding Brothers: the Revolutionary Generation* (2003), reviewed by Jim Crumley

This is a Pulitzer Prize winning history written by a somewhat disgraced author (he lied about his military service, anti-war credentials, and civil rights participation among other things), who was suspended from his position at Mount Holyoke for a year. Nonetheless, it's a good read, relatively short (305 pages), and broad enough in its scope to give you a feel for seven of the "founding brothers"- Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Hamilton, Franklin, and Burr.
Ellis gets right to the point, anointing our founders as our "greatest generation," with due respect to Tom Brokaw. He dismisses recent criticism of the founders' failure to address slavery in the constitution as the only way to keep the country together, rather than having an immediate break between north and south. His reasoning appears sound and, considering the times, may well have been the only possible solution. Rather than a biographical sketch of each founder or a chronological narrative popular in most histories, Ellis divides his book into six chapters, each dissecting specific relationships or events.

His portrayal of the Hamilton-Burr duel and its causes is probably the best I've read. Simply put, Hamilton disparaged Burr's character in strong terms; Burr didn't like it and demanded an apology. And Hamilton, convinced he'd only spoken the truth, believed it would be dishonorable to deny or retract his previous statements.

Ellis then discusses the famous Jefferson-Hamilton-Madison dinner that formed the basis, or final act (depending on your view) of the great compromise that resulted in our capital being moved to the Potomac River (now Washington, DC).

He then returns to the issue of slavery and "the silence" regarding its discussion both during the Constitutional Convention and during later congressional deliberations, including some very contentious ones in 1790.
Washington's farewell and the "break" between the Washington/Hamilton/Adams faction and the Jefferson/Madison faction is also well done.

In "The Collaborators" he discusses two famous collaborations—the one between Jefferson and Madison and the one between John and Abigail Adams. When President Adams retained all of Washington's cabinet, he found that, as a group, they were more loyal to Alexander Hamilton than to him, the President. The only advisor he truly trusted was his wife—sometimes to his advantage and sometimes not.

Finally, in "The Friendship," Ellis gets into the long friendship, then the period of enmity, and finally the later period of correspondence, mutual admiration, and cautious trust between Thomas Jefferson and John Adams.
Good book!

Joseph J. Ellis, *American Creation: Triumphs and Tragedies at the Founding of the Republic* (2007), reviewed by Jim Crumley

This is another book regarding the founding of our country by Joseph Ellis. In it he describes the founding as an "evolutionary revolution" that lasted, for purposes of his book, from 1775 (beginning of the War) to 1803 (the Louisiana Purchase). Like his previous book, *Founding Brothers*, Ellis uses an episodic motif to discuss the subject, saying the key characters were chosen using a "Casablanca Principle," that is to say, he "rounded up the usual suspects," with starring roles performed by George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison.

Ellis covers events leading up to the Declaration of Independence and the interplay of Adams and Jefferson. He then covers the War, with particular emphasis on Valley Forge and Washington's ability to avoid major decisive conflict for three years while he prepared his Army. In a Chapter called, "The Argument," he discusses the evolution of our Constitution and the ratification process, highlighting the views of Madison and the arch-opponent of the Constitution, Patrick Henry.

Ellis then turns to the "Native American problem," in which George Washington and his Secretary of Defense, John Knox (with an assist from Secretary of State, Jefferson) tried to give the American Indians their own lands east of the Mississippi. Much of the Chapter focuses on the Creek Chief, Alexander McGillvrey, whose father was Scotch and whose mother was half Creek and half French. McGilvrey was a master politician, spoke English, Spanish, and Creek and had the full support of the Creek nation as well as the Cherokees, Choctaws, and others. In the end, McGilvrey and a number of his chiefs spent a month in the U.S. Capitol (New York, at the time) negotiating directly with Washington and Knox before signing the Treaty of New York, which gave the Indians title to all of their lands east of the Mississippi and, coincidentally, made McGilvrey a Brigadier General in the U.S. Army. Sadly, settlers refused to honor the treaty, overran the Indians, and McGilvery turned to Spain to negotiate a better deal. He died a year or so later and the displacement of Native Americans to the West became almost a foregone conclusion.

Finally, Ellis wraps up with two chapters discussing, first, the rift between the faction headed by Jefferson and Madison (Republicans), and the one headed by Hamilton (with Washington and Adams as subordinate players)(Federalists). This came to become our two-party system. And then Ellis discusses the Louisiana Purchase which opened up the west and left the Pacific Ocean as the next boundary for our nation. Ellis does a good job of describing the roles of all the major players in the purchase, including Jefferson, Madison, Livingston, Monroe, and, of course, Napoleon.
Much of this book is a retelling, in a readable fashion of what most casual students of the founding know. I think the sections on the Native Americans and Louisiana Purchase, however, would be worth anyone's time.

Joseph J. Ellis, *First Family: Abigail and John Adams* (2010), reviewed by Jim Crumley

This is an interesting look at the lives together of John and Abigail Adams sourced, with a few exceptions, from their own letters to each other. The letters probably give one a more positive impression of Abigail than that of her husband. She comes across as very smart, very loyal, very loving, VERY understanding, politically astute, and often, very funny. On numerous occasions, she chides John about the "secondary status" of women, but he just "puts her off." John, on the other hand, comes off as loving, but very driven, self-centered, arrogant, and a man frequently capable of deep feelings of persecution. A true "founding

father," he believed that he was, in fact, THE founding father and was envious of anyone who got credit for almost anything. Those who disagreed with him tended to become life-long enemies. And, for the most part, his relationships with Hamilton, Franklin, Madison, Burr, and, at times, even Washington, were adversarial. His relationship with Jefferson, of course, ranged from warm to frigid and back. Fortunately for him, Abigail was frequently able to calm his inner rages and set him back on the "right track." As a couple they were well matched and exceptionally important to our nation's early years.

Joseph J. Ellis, *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson* (1998), reviewed by Jim Crumley

This is not a "standard" biography of Thomas Jefferson, but more a discussion of his inconsistent character and seemingly contradictory writings. The author points out the factors that allow modern day "left-wingers" and "right wingers" each to point to Jefferson as the source of their various different views. That is interesting in itself. However, I think this book is more a complement to one's reading on Jefferson rather than an initial effort.

Anthony Everitt, *Augustus: the Life of Rome's First Emperor* (2007), reviewed by Jim Crumley

This book chronicles the life of Caeser Augustus from his childhood as Octavian through the murder of his great uncle, Julius Caeser, who, in death, adopted the young Octavian as his "son." It continues through the various civil wars, his name change to Augustus, his rule as the first Roman Emperor, and his efforts to name his successor, Tiberius, his stepson. At his own death, Augustus adopted his wife, Livia, as his daughter to bring her into the "Julian family," to allow her to retain certain rights.

The introduction to the book begins with the death of Augustus, which the author depicts as a suicide assisted by Livia. This is not the most common view of the Emperor's controversial death, and, in my view, not adequately supported by the author.

Beyond the obvious storyline, the author presents many interesting facts. For example, Roman soldiers carried 65 pounds on their backs and looked more like pack mules than how they are commonly depicted in Hollywood movies. I also found the etymology of the word "decimation (decimate)" to be interesting. And, while depicted as a great and relatively humane ruler, Augustus was wildly inconsistent. He installed numerous laws, for example, to support marriage, encourage having children, and to punish adulterers, although he, himself, was married 3 times (divorcing the first two for political gain), had only one child, and reportedly had numerous extra-marital affairs. He may have been the first person quoted as saying, "Do as I say, not as I do." Certainly an interesting man.

Ronald Florence, *Lawrence and Aaronsohn: T.E. Lawrence, Aaron Aaronsohn, and the Seeds of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (2007), reviewed by Almuth Paine

Most of us have heard of Lawrence of Arabia and seen the impossibly handsome Peter O'Toole in the 1962 movie. Who, on the other hand, was Aaronsohn? The author says "they were dreamers, with the passion and self-assurance of youth and the conviction and single-mindedness of men on the outside." Lawrence, a British officer in WWI, supported the "Arab Revolt" and hoped for an Arab nation despite the fact that the Arabs were mostly

feuding tribes and nomad Bedouins who were unable to agree on a leader for a guerilla raid, let alone a nation. Aaronsohn was a Zionist settler in Palestine who used the agricultural research station and the field work he and friends did as cover for spying for the British against the Ottoman Empire, in the hopes of gaining a Jewish homeland. The subsequent conflict over who was supposed to be where is with us to this day.

Daniel Frankforter, *The Medieval Millennium: an Introduction* (1999), reviewed by Tom Hady

Frankforter was a professor at Penn. State Erie, and this is a text for a summary class. If his lectures are as good as his book, it's a class I would like to take. He does an excellent job of relating events, especially the development of political institutions, to the progress of medieval society.

David Goldfield, *America Aflame: How the Civil War Created a Nation* (2011), reviewed by Jim Crumley

This is a single volume review of the years preceding, during, and roughly 30 years after the Civil War. There is not much new here regarding the war itself or the specific battles, though there are some "nuggets" I had not known. For example, Hooker's 20,000 men were moved from the Eastern Theater to the Chattanooga area in seven days, when Lincoln commandeered the railroads. Longstreet, by contrast, had to travel over 19 railroads and six weeks to traverse the same distance in the Confederacy.

Another area of interest was the horrible conditions in prisons. 29% of Union prisoners at Andersonville died. Not much better, 24% of Confederate prisoners at Elmyra, New York, met the same fate. Strangely, the mortality rate was higher, 15% to 12%, in Union prisons than in Confederate prisons. That's not the impression one might receive from the "popular press."

But the unique, and controversial, part of the book is the time leading up to the war. Goldfield asserts that only in America did it take a war to end slavery. Only in America, when slavery was ended, did former slave holders (even in the Northern slave-holding states) not receive any compensation for their loss. The author points to the 2nd Great Religious Awakening and the fundamentalist, but opposing, views in the North and the South as the reason war could not be averted. Northern fundamentalists, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's father, preached against slavery, Catholics, Mormons, and alcohol—considering each pretty much equally horrible. Catholic churches and monasteries were burned down; Mormons were "run out of town," and Southerners (even those who did not own slaves) became "devils." Southern religious leaders believed slavery was sanctioned in the bible and was, in fact, the salvation of the blacks, who were "saved" from a primitive life to advance in an agricultural economy. These strongly held religious beliefs, which strayed into the political realm (the Republican Party was supported primarily by abolitionist based solely in the Northeast.), made it impossible for compromise on hardly any issue.

Even after Lincoln's election, when seven Southern states had "seceded," numerous efforts at compromise put forward from various quarters were turned down. Everyone had an "all or nothing" view of virtually every issue. This, according to Goldfield, made war inevitable. After the war, and with the assassination of Lincoln, Republicans, in general, wanted to "punish" the South. They did a pretty good job since "net worth" in the South did not

regain 1860 levels for over 60 years. More interesting, legislation mandated male Negro suffrage in the south at a time when only eight of 22 northern states allowed such suffrage. Recalcitrant southerners fought back and violence against blacks in the South was put down by federal troops.

In addition to the Civil War and Reconstruction, the book covers the Plains Indian Wars, building of the transcontinental railroad, the political corruption of Tammany Hall and the Grant Administration, the excesses of Jay Gould and other "robber barons," and, finally, the major innovations and inventions that drove American progress.

In the end, I don't think Mr. Goldfield's book delivers on the assertion of his title, "how the Civil War Created a Nation." At best, he sidles up to a "new nation" with a discussion of the industrial revolution and new technologies. An interesting read, but, if you're looking for a "Civil War" book, this isn't it.

Michael Grant, *Julius Caesar* (1992), reviewed by Jim Crumley

This is a short (187 pages) book on the life of Julius Caesar. There is nothing "new" here but it provides an underpinning for someone who knows little of the life and times of one of the greatest men, and prolific authors, of all time. The book covers the many wars, affairs, arranged marriages, treacheries, and assassinations of the time. Caesar's ambition is highlighted and all the main players in his life are included. As a general, his early brutality towards fallen enemies and his later magnanimity towards them were both efforts on his part to get them "on his side." The latter seemed to have worked better and helped him later in his civil wars, when he received significant support from "non-Romans." Eventually, of course, Senatorial conspirators assassinated him, which, in turn led to more civil war. Unfortunately, this book simply ends with Caesar being carried out of the Forum following his assassination and does not deal with his legacy or the Rome he left behind.

Stephen Greenblatt. *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (2011), reviewed by Tom Hady

In 1417, Poggio Bracciolini, a "humanist" who had until recently been apostolic secretary to the pope, discovered an ancient manuscript in a remote monastery in southern Germany. Lucretius' *De rerum natura (On the Nature of Things)*, written in the first century before Christ, had been lost for centuries. *De Rerum* contained a view of nature that anticipated modern science (all things are made up of atoms, for example) and was very different from the teachings of the 15th C. church. "The Swerve," Lucretius thought, was a slight deflection of these individual particles, which happened at unpredictable times and gave rise to an endless chain of collisions that brings about the "rivers to replenish…the family of animals to rise up and replenish," etc. These ideas found minds willing to accept them in the 15th C., and much of the book is a discussion of philosophers of that period and how they dealt with Lucretius' ideas—as well as the efforts of the Roman Catholic authorities to stamp them out. It is fascinating reading.

Sandra Grimes and Jeanne Vertefeuille, *Circle of Treason: A CIA Account of the Traitor Aldrich Ames and the Men He Betrayed* (2012), reviewed by Jim Crumley

For those who attended Sandy Grimes' talk on the Hunt for Aldrich Ames at an OLLI course, this is the book she and her co-author wrote about that case and much more. If you attended the talk, you'd probably enjoy reading it. If you did not, I'd highly recommend it. It's only 192 pages long and an easy read, though the unfamiliar Russian names require some effort to keep straight. While the work is clearly a view taken from a CIA perspective, as noted by the authors, it appears to tell the story from a relatively balanced perspective, including some of the "warts."

Winson Groom, *Kearney's March: The Epic Creation of the American West, 1846-1847* (2011), reviewed by Jim Crumley

This book, by the author of "Forrest Gump" and numerous histories covering the early 19th century through the Civil War, essentially depicts the "winning of the west." While it generally follows the path of General Stephen Kearny's travels through virtually every "new territory" annexed to the Union, it covers much more. President Polk, John C. ("The Pathfinder") Fremont, Kit Carson ("a steely-eyed killer"), Zachary Taylor, Winfield Scott, Alexander Doniphan, the Donner Party, and the Mormon Militia all have their moments.

Roger Hall, *You're Stepping on My Cloak and Dagger* (1957), reviewed by Don Ferrett.

If you want to know what it was really like to be an operative for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS--precursor to the CIA) during World War II, this is the book for you. The author gives his first-hand account of the trials and tribulations of a volunteer from the Army as he is trained, allowed to Hurry-up-and-wait (repeatedly), and finally sent on a mission. All does not go as planned on pretty much any part of the hero's career as an agent provocateur. The book is an easy read, both from its brevity (219 pages) and from the author's easy, light-hearted style. Ian Fleming did not use the OSS as his MI6, or agent Hall as his James Bond!

Robert Harris, *An Officer and a Spy* (2014), reviewed by Ben Gold

An amazing account of the Dreyfus Affair of 1895. While this is a work of fiction, every character was an actual participant in the Dreyfus affair. Every event portrayed actually occurred as described. The only fictional part of this book is the description of the thoughts of the main character, Colonel Georges Picquart, and the various conversations that take place. Colonel Picquart exposed the conspiracy to frame Dreyfus and was punished by the France General staff for doing so. This is absolutely a fabulous read and not to be missed.

Kristine Hughes, *The Writer's Guide to Everyday Life in Regency and Victorian England: From 1811-1901* (1998), reviewed by Tom Hady

Want to know when gas lights replaced oil, or what a rush light is? How to make syllabub? What inter-city travel was like in 1840, or the origin of the penny post? Questions like those and many more are answered in this book. As is usual with books of this type, though, the emphasis tends to be on the lives and manners of the "better sorts." The country workman gets little coverage.

Nancy Isenberg, *Fallen Founder: The Life of Aaron Burr* (2008), reviewed by Jim Crumley.

Aaron Burr is, of course, most known for killing Alexander Hamilton in a duel. He's also known for resigning from the army during the war in a pique over not being promoted as quickly as he thought his due. In the confusing "tie" vote between himself and Thomas Jefferson in the 1800 Presidential election, his refusal to recognize that his votes were for Vice President, not President, won him few fans and caused an early constitutional crisis. And his trial for treason (he was acquitted) in his later years left him, at the time, possibly second only to Benedict Arnold in the nation's pantheon of "villains." But, in her book, Nancy Isenberg excuses each of these occurrences as either a rational extension of Burr's "sense of honor" or the product of jealousy and malevolence foisted upon the population by people such as George Washington, John Adams, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe, all of whom, according to the author, were incompetent individuals lacking in ethics and honor. To be clear, Aaron Burr was certainly one of the most important Americans of the revolutionary period and the early days of our republic. He was a leading thinker, scholar, lawyer, war hero, Senator, and Vice President. He was clearly brilliant and the author suggests he had very "enlightened" views on women and slavery. But this biography suffers from undue fawning and, in several instances, not very convincing excuse-making. Reading it was a waste of my time.

Simon Jenkins, *A Short History of England: The Glorious Story of a Rowdy Nation* (2013), reviewed by Jim Crumley

Most educated Americans have a passing knowledge of Alfred the Great, the Norman Conquest, the Magna Carta, Agincourt, Henry VIII and his wives, Queen Elizabeth, the Spanish Armada, Cromwell, Gladstone, Disraeli, The Great War, Winston Churchill, and the Battle of Britain—maybe more. But in a little over 300 pages, Jenkins covers the history of England from the Dark Ages to the present in an easily readable, informative style that will encourage many readers to look deeper into some of the events and people that have dotted the historic landscape of this country from which many of us sprang. Unless you are already very familiar with English history, this is a good place to start.

Dan Jones, *The Plantagenets: The Warrior Kings and Queens Who Made England* (2012), reviewed by Almuth Paine

The Plantagenets ruled England for more than two centuries. They spent much of that time trying to expand or hold on to their French lands (the 100 Years War was during this time), but ended with what we consider England today. There were glamorous figures like Richard the Lionhearted, famous rulers like Henry II and Edward III, and terrible tyrants like King John (12th c.) or the last of the line Richard II, another greedy paranoid disaster of a ruler who was stripped of his crown. A great read.

Kenny Kemp, *Flying With the Flak-Pak: A Pacific War Scrapbook* (2013), reviewed by Don Ferrett

It has been a long time since I read a book that I found as interesting, informative, and personal as this one. The author opened his father's foot locker from WWII and found a treasure trove of photos, letters, military orders, training manuals, and other documents. He then proceeded to investigate the circumstances of each item and organize the whole

into a comprehensive, highly readable book about the coming of age of a B-24 pilot in the Pacific Theater (Seventh Air Force). Included are newspaper articles, photos, numerous maps, and transcriptions from audio tape of his father's story. This is as good, and intimate, a history of the war as I ever expect to find!

Alex Kershaw, *The Bedford Boys: One American Town's Ultimate D-Day Sacrifice* (2003), reviewed by Almuth Paine

On D-Day 70 years ago today (6/6), the small town of Bedford, VA lost 22 of its young men, more in one day than any other town in America. This book tells the story of these "boys" and how their families, friends and neighbors were forever affected by the grim and historic events of that day. Bedford became the site of the United States D-Day Memorial which is well worth a visit. (I learned about it in an OLLI class!!).

Ian Kershaw, *The End: The Defiance and Destruction of Hitler's Germany, 1944-45* (2011), reviewed by Almuth Paine

The author grapples with the question of why Germany was able and willing to fight on until the country was in ruins and almost completely occupied when it was clear that the war was lost. The main reason was Hitler's grim determination, no matter what, to avoid the "shameful and disgraceful" capitulation of 1918, but he had support from the military and civilians, whether willing or based on fear, to carry out orders and keep things more or less continuing.

Denise Kiernan and Joseph D'Agnese, *Signing Their Lives Away: The Fame and Misfortune of the Men Who signed the Declaration of Independence* (2009), reviewed by Jim Crumley

This little book provides short, 3-5 page, "biographies" on each of the 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence. Less a history than a series of anecdotal stories regarding the signers, the book is still of interest. Each section is headed with descriptors such as "the signer who dared to acknowledge an illegitimate child," or "who taught himself how to read and write," or "who was orphaned, impoverished, abused, shot, and imprisoned." Virtually nothing is "sourced" but a number of interesting "facts" and rumors are presented. As a minimum, the book might encourage the reader to investigate certain signers in more detail.

Peter Maas*, The Terrible Hours: The Greatest Submarine Rescue in History* (2001), reviewed by Almuth Paine

On May 23, 1939, a brand new submarine, named Squalus, took its final test run out of Portsmouth, NH, and inexplicably flooded and sank minutes after diving. The rescue of most of its crew and the eventual raising of the sub from the ocean floor were due mainly to the extraordinary leadership and inventions of naval officer Charles "Swede" Momsen, a courageous hero and visionary.

James Madison*, Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787*(1987 Edition), reviewed by Jim Crumley

This is the ultimate source for the discussions that took place in Philadelphia at what we now call "The Constitutional Convention." If you're interested in the intent of the founding fathers, this is an important resource. The meetings were held in secret and James Madison, on his own, took notes on the proceedings. Due to the agreement between those present, his notes were not made public until after his death almost 50 years later.

Let there be no doubt, this can be tough reading. The language from that time, the abbreviations that are not familiar in today's world, and the references to earlier discussions at the convention are sometimes very difficult to follow. But the debates about how to set up our government, who should be responsible for what, how officials should be elected and how long they should serve were all discussed in detail. How slaves should be represented (the famous 3/5ths rule) and whether importation of slaves should be abolished (they put it off for 20 years) involved significant discussion. How each state voted on these issues and others are all there. Some of the votes might surprise many otherwise learned readers.

Pauline Maier, *Ratification: The People Debate the Constitution, 1787-1788* (2010), reviewed by Jim Crumley

If you've studied the constitution and read (and probably reread) *The Federalist Pape*rs, this is one of two books (Madison's notes on the Constitutional Convention being the other) that you might want to read. This book provides an overview of the Constitutional Convention, but is probably the best publicly available source for the state conventions that later ratified the document. Ratification was not a foregone conclusion by any means and several states barely had the necessary majority votes, such as Massachusetts (187-168), New Hampshire (57-47), Virginia (89-79), New York (30-27) and Rhode Island (34-32).
The debates in New York, Pennsylvania, and, especially, Virginia were at time nasty, frequently loud, but almost always thought provoking as our founders discussed virtually every paragraph of our constitution in detail. The discussions on the right of the federal government to tax, on the appropriate term lengths for various offices, and dozens of other details are chronicled in an easy to read style that should not intimidate anyone, but should be illuminating to all.

Leo Marks, *Between Silk and Cyanide: A Codemaker's War, 1941-1945* (2000, updated in 2013), reviewed by Don Ferrett.

The author of this book worked at the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) in an office on Baker Street, London. He was just out of college when he started, as in very young, but ended up performing amazingly well as a code maker/breaker. His expertise was not in enemy codes, which were handled by Bletchley Park, but those used by SOE field operatives. Many messages were unreadable to coding errors by the agents, but some were a result of bad atmospherics. In either case, for the safety of the agents, the SOE went to great pains to try to decode the messages before the agent's next radio time to keep them from having to resend, and thus be on the air longer and susceptible to Radio Direction Finding (RDF) by the Germans.

This is a first-hand tale of what those back home were doing to try to keep their intelligence agents alive, and includes many other aspects of the spy trade besides coding. The book is told in a breezy manner and is filled with humor--clearly a necessity at the time for the

author to keep from going mad! At over 600 pages, the there is a lot of material covered here, but it is well worth the time. An extraordinary book.

Charles McCain, *An Honorable German: A Novel of World War II* (2009), reviewed by Almuth Paine

This novel is about a young naval officer who eventually becomes the commander of a U-Boot, and watches his beloved country face total ruin.

David McCulloch, *1776* (2005), reviewed by Tom Hady

From fortifying Dorchester Heights at Boston in one night to crossing the Delaware to surprise the Hessians at Trenton, with an overnight retreat from Long Island and other surprises in between, McCulloch follows Washington and his under-equipped, untrained army through the first year of the war and a string of British successes. Well-written, well-researched; vintage McCulloch. I had, however, hoped when I picked up the book that I would hear about the events of 1776 in the Continental Congress and the state governments. I even (though not with much hope) thought it possible that I might see coverage of life in the colonies away from the immediate battles. Those hopes were not fulfilled; this is a military history.

Christopher McIntosh, *Ludwig II of Bavaria: The Swan King* (1982), reviewed by Tom Hady

If you have visited Neuschwanstein Castle and wondered about the king who built it, here's a book for you. Ludwig was King of Bavaria during the period when Bavaria was subsumed into the newly united Germany and ceased to be an independent state. He was a patron of Wagner and passionately interested in Wagnerian scenes and stories. Was he "mad?" McIntosh paints him as increasingly eccentric in his later years, but it is not clear whether the charge was primarily an excuse to depose him. He died mysteriously, by drowning.

Marc Morris, *The Norman Conquest: the Battle of Hastings and the Fall of Anglo-Saxon England* (2013), reviewed by Tom Hady

This is an excellent and detailed review of the history of England from the times leading up to the Norman invasion through the death of William in 1087. It would be tempting to summarize it by saying "Be glad you were not English in the 11th century," but that is too restrictive. William had little peace during his reign, either in England or in Normandy, and the same was true of his Norman followers.

Linda King Newell and Vivian Linford Talbot, *A History of Garfield County [Utah]* (1998), reviewed by Tom Hady

I read this and parts of a couple of companion volumes for other counties in order to put together a talk for an OLLI class. I include it here primarily as a way of calling attention to

the fact that there are county histories for all of the counties in Utah; they are on line and they can be read or downloaded (chapter by chapter) at http://content.lib.utah.edu/cdm/search/collection/USHSArchPub. They are complete, but they emphasize the time since white settlers arrived, and like most histories of the type, they are of the most interest if you had ancestors in the area. However, they were written by trained historians and one can expect a bit more regard for evidence than is often found in local histories.

Paul B. Newman, *Growing Up in the Middle Ages* (2007), reviewed by Tom Hady

A moderately interesting account of childhood in the Middle Ages, from birth to adulthood and from the experiences of a serf child to those of a noble child. Among the more interesting chapters are those dealing with apprenticeship, which was one of the few ways that a boy, especially, might improve his standing in a very structured society.

Lynne Olson, *Those Angry Days: Roosevelt, Lindbergh, and America's Fight Over World War II, 1939-41* (2013), reviewed by Tom Hady

Olson tells the story of the fateful three years when Hitler was attacking Europe, Britain hung in the balance, and the US gradually moved toward war. She provides some fascinating details: *Most junior naval officers and crew did not share the isolationism and Anglophobia of their high-ranking superiors. When the fifty overage destroyers were handed to the Royal Navy…British seamen, to their delight, found that their American counterparts had stocked the ships with luxuries unheard of in their service, including cigarettes, blankets, sheets, steaks, and bacon.* For this reviewer, a boy in the early grades at the time, she awakens memories long forgotten. Whether she is correct in her some of her conclusions, such as her characterization of President Roosevelt as a reluctant leader who had to be almost dragged each step toward war by his staff, is beyond my ability to judge.

Sharon Kay Penman, *A King's Ransom* (2014), reviewed by Almuth Paine

This is the last in a series of novels about the Plantagenets in medieval England, and it tells the story of the last years of King Richard the Lionhearted. As he returns from a crusade to the Holy Land, Richard is captured by his enemies after suffering a shipwreck. He is imprisoned and his friends and allies, led by his "lady mother" Eleanor of Aquitaine, must raise the exorbitant ransom demanded by Holy Roman Emperor Heinrich, so that Richard can be freed and rule over his threatened lands.

Nathaniel Philbrick, *The Last Stand: Custer, Sitting Bull, and the Battle of the Little Bighorn* (2010), reviewed by Jim Crumley

This is an interesting account of the activities leading up to, and including, "The Last Stand." Philbrick includes a little history on many of the primary characters and a great deal of detail on several of the battles leading up to the eventual massacre. Some of the very descriptive accounts of the savagery of both sides (soldiers and Indians) could be a little much for the squeamish, but gives a good feel for the attitudes of the participants. Several

specific situations put the reader into the minds of those involved. For example, at one point, several soldiers are hiding in a shallow hole with two of their horse, all lying down, with Indians roaming within yards of them, killing and scalping the down and wounded. When the horses start to whinny, one soldier stuffs their mouths with brush and ties them closed with long grass. Their terror is palpable.

Over 20 Medals of Honor were awarded for the Battle of Little Bighorn, mostly to survivors of the 7th Cavalry who were not with Custer, but, nonetheless pinned down by overwhelming numbers of Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho warriors. Most were given for risking their own lives to go to a nearby creek to bring water back to their comrades.

Some of the author's claims are based on conjecture and much on Trooper Peter Thompson's recollections, who was with Custer up until the actual attack. Much of Thompson's remembrances, however, have been discredited by the accounts of Indian participants. Nonetheless, this is a good read.

Nathaniel Philbrick, *Bunker Hill: a City, a Siege, a Revolution* (2013), reviewed by Jim Crumley

This is the latest effort from a prolific historian, Nathaniel Philbrick. It covers New England activities during the period from the late 1860's through the Battle of Bunker Hill and beyond. As such, it provides excellent insight into the thoughts of the British and colonists particularly in New England leading up to the Revolution. One focus is on Samuel Adams and the "Boston Committee of Correspondence," which included John Adams, John Hancock, and others who wrote very stirring diatribes against the British and planned strategic avenues for the colonies to follow. Some of the less "charming" acts of our forefathers are also covered, such as the horrible tarring and feathering of loyalists, like John Malcolm.

One of the tragic heroes of the book is Dr. Joseph Warren. A true patriot and a well known physician, he was named a Major General by the Provincial Government. Upon arrival at Bunker Hill, he refused command based on the greater experience possessed by other men. Instead, he fought as a private in the heaviest fighting, only to die on Breeds Hill when he kept battling, out of ammunition, to allow the bulk of his troops to escape. Upon his death and recognized by the British Captain Walter Laurie, his body was mutilated by English soldiers and stuffed into a hole. Overall, I thought this was an excellent book.

Daniel Philbrick, *Mayflower: a Story of Courage, Community, and War* (2007), reviewed by Jim Crumley

While the title of the book is somewhat misleading, Philbrick does cover the Mayflower crossing—a frightening passage full of bad weather, food rationing, and death. He spends much more time, however, on the next 50-60 years after the Plymouth landing. Most of the focus is on the relationship between the Pilgrims and the Native Americans. And, in Philbrick's account, the colonists don't come off too well. Myles Standish was the military commander of the Plymouth Colony and a more brutal murderer was nowhere to be found. Beyond the physical bad treatment of the Indians (who are described as "simply wanting to be left alone"), the European intruders cheated them unmercifully. In the early years, the Indians were able to trade fur pelts for many of their needs and desires from the colonists. But, due to overhunting, fur pelts became less available and the Indians only had their land to trade. Unfortunately, they were only allowed to trade with the colonial government

which kept prices down. The government would then sell to the settlers, frequently at five times the price they had paid the Indians.

Wars, massacres, treaties, broken treaties, enslavement, ritual murders, public executions, and truly awful torturing continue through King Phillip's (English name for the Native American leader, Metacomet) War in the late 1670's. Comparing losses during 14 months of that war to other wars in our history is illuminating. According to Philbrick, during WWII we lost almost 1% of our adult male population. During the Civil War, it was about in the 4-5% range. During King Phillip's War, the English lost roughly 8% of the male population in Southern New England. But the Indians…the Native Americans…had horrific losses. Counting the dead, enslaved, and displaced, they lost roughly 60-80% of their 20,000 people (men, women, and children). As for Metacomet: the colonists killed him, sold his wife and children into slavery, drew and quartered his body, and placed his head on a pike in Plymouth, where it remained on public display for over twenty years.

William R. Polk, *The Birth of America: from before Columbus to the Revolution* (2006), reviewed by Tom Hady

Polk has the interesting idea that American history didn't occur in a vacuum! The British interacted with the Indians, for example, the way they had learned to handle the Irish. Spain, he says, was the western superpower in the 16th century; England was the equivalent of a "rogue state" in current terminology. Spain's dominant problem was to protect the flow of gold from the Americas from pirates. It concluded that it would not work to find and destroy the "pirate base" at Roanoke. *Phillip decided that he must attack the sponsor of the pirates, England, itself. Thus the first English landing at Roanoke was one of the actions that led Phillip II to launch an "invincible Armada" of 132 ships. . .to "shock and awe" England in 1588.*

Polk's discussion of the pathological state of representative democracy in the British Parliament and its relation to the American drift toward independence before our Revolution is interesting, as is his discussion of the growth of manufacturing and trade in "the colonies" during the latter years. We had some 30,000 workers in 80 or so iron furnaces, he says, producing about one-seventh of world iron production.

Robert V. Remini, *At the Edge of the Precipice: Henry Clay and the Compromise that Saved the Union* (2010), reviewed by Jim Crumley.

In this book, Remini puts forth the thesis that the legislative compromises during 1820-1850 saved the Union. With such statesmen as Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and John C. Calhoun ruling the U.S. Senate, a variety of compromises were adopted that avoided what could have been the secession of the south and splitting of the nation. These culminated in the Compromise of 1850, conceived of by Clay but eventually passed in the Senate by Steven Douglas. In the author's opinion, this set of compromises saved the union, because, had the south seceded in 1850, it is likely they would have succeeded in breaking away. The north did not gain the industrial power until about 1860 that allowed it to "win" the Civil War. Moreover, none of the three Presidents preceding Lincoln (Millard Fillmore, Franklin Pierce, and James Buchanan) were capable of providing the leadership necessary to preserve the union. I think he makes his points very persuasively.

Robert V. Remini, *Joseph Smith* (2002), reviewed by Jim Crumley.

I read this book after taking the OLLI course on "The Utah War." It focuses on the life of Joseph Smith, founder of the Mormon Church, his visions, his beliefs, his writings, and the degree of persecution he suffered in his early life. After establishing the "Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," he and his followers were driven from one place to another by the local citizenry. In Kirtland Ohio, at one point, a group of Methodists, Baptists and Apostate Mormons actually dragged him from his home to "tar and feather" him. He was evidently a convincing speaker, possessing of a "winning" personality. As he grew his church, however, he attracted many critics, disbelievers, and outright enemies. Eventually, he was charged with inciting a riot and jailed in Carthage, Illinois awaiting trial. Unfortunately, an angry mob stormed the jail, shot him numerous times, and he died instantly. Five men were tried for the murder and all were acquitted.

Robert V. Remini, *The House: The History of the House of Representatives* (2006), reviewed by Jim Crumley.

This is an interesting book written by the House Historian with great assistance from the Library of Congress and the support of a number of congressmen and staffers. The most interesting area from my perspective was the very first Congress that established the initial rules for the House, set up our government's executive and judicial branches, provided the nation a funding mechanism, and passed the Bill of Rights. The pre-Civil War Congresses and the Reconstruction era are also of interest. The 40 years of Democratic reign (1955-1995) show what a dominant political party can accomplish (for good or bad) with essentially no opposition. The next ten years of divided government show that "true consensus" is necessary to pass legislation if one party cannot simply "steamroll" another. The author concludes his work by opining that neither divided government nor "one-party rule" is all good or bad. The former makes the passing of legislation very difficult. The latter tends to lead to "an arrogance of power" and diminish the possibility of compromise, without real checks and balances.

Graham Robb, *The Discovery of France: A Historical Geography (*2007zz0 reviewed by Tom Hady

France, since it was known from Roman times, held few mysteries and its geography was well-known even in medieval times, right? Wrong! According to Robb, France was a balkanized territory where local dialects were so numerous that residents of neighboring villages might have trouble understanding each other. Paris knew very little about the geography of France. The Grand Canyon of the Verdon, for example, was known *only to a few woodcutters and carvers who saw no reason to share their knowledge of the local inconvenience with the outside world.* It was first navigated by boat in 1905, 37 years after Powell's trip down the Colorado.

Starting with a portrait of the unknown France, Robb traces the exploration and map making beginning in about the 18th C., through the railroads and highways and the Tour de France. An interesting book.

Stacy Schiff, *Cleopatra: A Life* (2010), reviewed by Jim Crumley.

Through Shakespeare's plays and Elizabeth Taylor's portrayal, most people have a general knowledge of Cleopatra. This book, well written and readable, fills in a great deal more. The last Queen (Pharoah) of Egypt ruled jointly with her brother (and husband) Ptolemy 13, then another brother (and also husband), Ptolemy 14, and finally, with her son, presumably by Julius Caesar, Ptolemy 15 (Caesarean), for over twenty years. She was apparently a good administrator and very popular with her subjects. She was evidently not the "great beauty" of legend but a compelling woman who seduced world leaders more with her intelligence than her sexuality. She flaunted her wealth (possibly the richest individual in history) to the advantage of her empire and her riches, in many ways, funded the Roman Empire of Augustus for a century or more.

Stacy Schiff, *Cleopatra: a Life* (2010), reviewed by Tom Hady

Cleopatra, every school child knows, took her life with the bite of an asp. Was she a wanton seductress? Not, at least, as Schiff paints her. She was in Schiff's view, a tough, smart ruler who did what she had to in order to preserve her rule and her country on the shore of the Mediterranean, when it was a Roman lake. She was successful for many years, but fell victim to the battle between Marc Antony and Octavian for supremacy in Rome. When captured, she famously committed suicide, but in Schiff's view it is unlikely that she used an asp, an Egyptian cobra, for the job. *A woman known for her crisp decisions and meticulous planning would surely have hesitated to entrust her fate to a wild animal. She had plenty of quicker, less painful options.* Further, the poison was apparently smuggled to her in a basket of figs, and *An Egyptian cobra, bristling and hissing and puffing itself up to its six-foot splendor, could hardly have hidden in a fig basket or remained hidden in one for long.* This is an interesting book, though the prose is a bit long-winded for my tastes.

T.J. Skyles, *The First Tycoon: The Epic Life of Cornelius Vanderbilt* (2010), reviewed by Jim Crumley.

Cornelius Vanderbilt was born during the Presidential administration of George Washington. He dropped out of school at age eleven and with borrowed money started a small ferry business when he was 16. He eventually built a fortune that in some terms may have been the largest ever. When he died, the author points out, had his assets been liquefied, they would have made up over 10% of the nation's entire wealth then in circulation.

For much of his career, Vanderbilt was the "people's hero," fighting against monopolies and providing low cost and exceedingly fast steamboat transportation to the masses. Slowly, he defeated the "monopoly" opposition so completely that he had his own monopolies, first in steamboats and eventually in railroads.

He was known even among his many competitors as a man of great integrity, whose word could be trusted, but who should never be crossed. In this book, the author does a good job of expanding on the "popular conception" of a greedy, self-involved, "robber baron."

Les Standiford, *Desperate Sons: Samuel Adams, Patrick Henry, John Hancock and the Secret Band of Radicals who led the Colonies* (2012), reviewed by Jim Crumley

This book focuses on the various "Sons of Liberty" groups founded in colonies from Massachusetts to South Carolina. Samuel Adams receives the most focus as "the Father of the Revolution," but there are many more players than the title would suggest. Activities in Massachusetts, Virginia, and New York receive the most attention, but several other colonies (eventually states) are also included.

In an interesting aside, the author dug up an account from an "unbiased" observer of Patrick Henry's "If this be treason…" speech, in which it is claimed that no such statement was made. In fact, the claim runs that when it was asserted that some of Mr. Henry's comments bordered on treason, his response was one of backing off and saying that it was not his intent—roughly 180 degrees from the popular version—which I like better. Regardless, Mr. Standiford does a good job of describing what a relatively small band of true believers can accomplish.

Benn Steil, *The Battle of Bretton Woods: John Maynard Keynes, Harry Dexter White, and the Making of a New World Order* (2013), reviewed by Tom Hady

Steil, who is director of international economics at the Council on Foreign Relations, gives us an extensively-researched account of the pull and push of the US and British governments to form the post-WWII world economic order: The US, becoming the world's creditor, was pushing for hegemony and (at least in Cordell Hull's State Department) free trade; the British, finding themselves deeply in debt for war materiel, were trying to hold on to remnants of their old place in the global order. While it is hard to accept some of Steil's conclusions (Harry Dexter White's role in Pearl Harbor comes to mind), he provides an exhaustive coverage of the events before during and after the Bretton Woods conference, and provides some interesting sidelights. Why does the U S traditionally choose the World Bank president, and the IMF head is foreign? Because by the time the first heads of the two institutions were to be named, Harry Dexter White, who was a "natural" for the IMF job, was strongly suspected of being a Soviet agent. It would have been difficult to pass him over for the IMF position without explaining why. How big should the staff of the IMF be? Keynes thought 30 technicians; the Americans thought 300. The current staff is about 2400, according to the IMF web site.

For one who started his career as an economist when the post-Breton-Woods environment was simply "the way things are," this book is interesting reading.

Robert Taft, *Photography and the American Scene: A Social History, 1839-1889* (1935, reprinted 1964), reviewed by Tom Hady

Daguerreotypes, Talbotypes, Ambrotypes, wet plate photographs, albumin prints, dry plates and finally flexible film: these and all their variants can be found in this book. More than describing the technology, though, Taft tells of their role in our society. The early photographer accompanying an expedition to explore the American West was not popular with the packers; if he wanted to take a picture five mules might have to be unpacked. The "plate" (we'd call it the glass negative) had to be coated on the spot, in the dark, and then exposed before it dried. When the "dry plate"—still a "glass negative" came along about 1880, that process was much easier, and it provided the basis for a bright bank clerk by the

name of George Eastman to make his fortune. While the title implies a cutoff of 1889, the final chapters have a (rather sketchy) description of events into the early 1900's.

Evan Thomas, *John Paul Jones: Sailor, Hero, Father of the American Navy* (2010), reviewed by Jim Crumley

This is the story of one of the most fabled Naval Officers in U.S. history. Born "John Paul" (he added the "Jones" later in life) as the son of a Scottish farmer, he rose to fame in the U.S. Navy during the Revolutionary War. Ambitious, independent, thin-skinned, somewhat paranoid, prone to sulking, withdrawn, and intense, Jones made enemies by the gross. His single-minded drive caused him numerous difficulties with his own sailors, and his self-promotion was less than enviable.

Nonetheless, he took the war to the enemy, operating mostly in British waters, where he terrorized the coastline, attacked British shipping in the harbors, and generally made a pest of himself to the English, who classed him "a pirate." His battle with the HMS Serapis is covered in detail, though the author dismisses the famed quote, "I have not yet begun to fight," as probably fiction.

Jones was frequently in trouble for his dalliances with various women and he had long-running feuds with other Captains throughout his life. But, he was honored by the King of France with the title, "Chevalier," and had a medal struck in his honor by the U.S. Congress for "valor and brilliant service." As the war was drawing to a close in 1782, Jones was left without a ship and eventually migrated to Russia in 1787 to serve in the Russian Navy of Catherine the Great. He performed well in the Black Sea against the Ottoman Turks, but Court intrigue and jealousy of other officers caused him to be recalled to Moscow. He left Russia to live in Paris where he died a lonely, embittered man. The U.S. government refused to bury him and the French government saved him from a pauper's grave to give him an honored burial. The American Ambassador, Gouverneur Morris, did not attend; he had a "dinner engagement." Jones' body was finally returned to the U.S. in 1906 and he was reburied at the Naval Academy Chapel in Annapolis, Maryland.

Arthur Bernon Tourtellot, *William Diamond's Drum: The Beginning of the War of the American Revolution* *(1959), reviewed by Tom Hady*

Library book sales can be good hunting grounds. When I found this slim (270 pages, plus notes) volume, I thought it was historical fiction, and might be good relaxation. In fact it is a detailed account of Lexington and Concord, and the early steps to form an American union and army in the weeks afterward at the Second Continental Congress.

Richard Toye, *Churchill's Empire: The World That Made Him and the World He Made* (2010), reviewed by Jim Crumley

Toye's book provides an examination of Winston Churchill's view of British Imperialism. A man of his time and class (Victorian elite), Churchill viewed Africans, Indians, and Asians as somehow beneath Englishmen. He saw England (and to a lesser extent, America) as the future of mankind. And, in his view, the British Empire was a good thing for the subjugated colonies and dominions. At the same time, he was very concerned about the welfare of the people in these foreign lands. He did not believe that India, as an example,

could or should rule themselves as long as the "caste system" was in place. He proclaimed on several occasions that as long as Britain did what was "right" for the people of these countries, there was nothing wrong in using British power to do so.

During his long career, some of his statements and writings seem to contradict each other, not surprising for a man who changed political parties on several occasions. In fact, many of his contemporaries had very different views of Churchill's support for "the Empire." Nonetheless, Toye depicts a complicated man who truly believed in his country and its place in the world. Certainly, he was one of the greatest leaders of the 20th century if not of all time.

Harlow Giles Unger, *The Last Founding Father: James Monroe and a Nation's Call to Greatness* (2009), reviewed by Jim Crumley

This is another biography from the prolific Harlow Giles Unger. It is the story of James Monroe, from young man, to war hero, to a determined opponent of the Constitution, to Congressman, Senator, Governor, Secretary of State and War (at the same time), and finally to President. Mr. Unger tends to give his subjects more credit than less biased observers, and sometimes denigrates others to make his point. For example, he suggests that Monroe essentially ran the Madison administration and that James Madison was effectively incompetent. This is clearly not the view of most historians.
But, certainly, Monroe was involved in great events and the book covers them well without getting too bogged down. His unsuccessful campaign against his good friend, Madison, for a congressional seat following ratification of the constitution may have been the most important such contest in our history (two future Presidents running against each other for a House seat), though Unger doesn't cover it in much detail.

He does cover the Louisiana Purchase in some detail, however. In that case, Secretary of State Madison sent Monroe to France to negotiate with Napoleon Bonaparte for the purchase of New Orleans. According to Unger, Bonaparte essentially said, "take the whole of Louisiana; I have no use for it." Despite the terms being more expensive than he was budgeted, Monroe jumped on the offer, which almost doubled the size of the United States at the time. Other historians reporting the event would suggest that Monroe actually arrived after the "deal was done" by his predecessor, Robert Livingston. For the past 200+ years, various parties have claimed responsibility for Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, and Livingston for the "purchase." In truth, it was probably Napoleon alone who made it happen and all others were merely "secondary players." Nonetheless, Napoleon apparently knew and respected Monroe. And, when the "First Consul" started to have "second thoughts," Monroe was instrumental in getting the U.S. Congress to approve "the treaty," pay the agreed-to price, and close out any possibility of Napoleon "welching" on the deal.

Monroe's Presidency was known as the "Era of Good Feelings" and, probably thanks to the "Monroe Doctrine," he is generally considered one of the better presidents, certainly top-third, in our history.

Harlow Giles Unger, *Lafayette* (2007), reviewed by Jim Crumley

This is a recent biography of the heroic Frenchman. While I think the author tends to overstate Lafayette's military contributions (comparing him to Alexander the Great (among others), and calling him the "conqueror of Cornwallis" for his part (significant) in the Battle of Yorktown), this is an excellent read. Sneaking out of France against the King's orders at

age 19 to fight for American independence, he certainly was brave and became a good friend of many of our founding fathers. In fact, he was treated as "a son" by George Washington. His success in gaining French support of the American Revolution cannot be overstated. And his belief in the freedom and liberty promised by our revolution led him to be a leader in the later French Revolution, and resulted in his imprisonment for several years. Insights into the activities of his wife, who was equally heroic in her efforts, are also interesting. Lefayette remains a beloved figure in France and America. His grave in Paris is covered with dirt from Bunker Hill and still flies an American flag, changed every July 4th.

Gore Vidal, *Inventing a Nation* (2008), reviewed by Jim Crumley

This book provides a short (205 pages) look at the origins of our country. Or, at least, that is what one would expect from the title. Certainly, Vidal discusses the early days of the nation and some of the original founders, focusing on George Washington, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson. But his efforts at "cute" commentary and incessant efforts to denigrate modern politicians with whom he disagrees (G.W. Bush among the foremost) takes away from the value of the "history." While historians cannot avoid bringing their personal prejudices and experience into their work, Vidal puts those views in the forefront of his prose. While it would be valuable to examine George Washington's generalship, for example, Vidal dismisses one defeat as "no one but Washington could have lost" the battle. Too many of these kinds of "potshots," without sufficient evidence or source documents detract from the effort. Methinks Vidal has written so many novels he failed to recognize that history is expected to be based on fact, not opinion dressed up as fact. I read the whole thing but couldn't recommend it for someone interested in learning something about our founding.

Douglas Waller, *Wild Bill Donovan: The Spymaster Who Created the OSS and Modern American Espionage* (2011), reviewed by Don Ferrett

Egotistical, hard-working, moral, serial philanderer: that's the conflicting view I got of Donovan from reading this biography. Clearly, he was a complex individual, whose character was shaped by growing up an Irish Catholic in Buffalo. This book is a thoroughly researched work that covers Donovan's life from cradle to grave. It does the same for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). There is a lot of material included here detailing real field operations of the OSS during World War II. The relationship of the OSS with foreign intelligence services is also described in some detail. There is also significant insight into the political infighting going on in the executive branch (including the military services) of the government during FDR's presidency. The early secret (OSS) lives of people who would later become influential in the CIA are also covered, where they intersected with the boss. Some were not so favorably viewed by him, even though they would go on to become CIA Directors.

Waller has apparently had access to files not previously open to the public, and those who have an interest in the early days of intelligence gathering for the US will likely find new information here. There are a number of source notes and an extensive bibliography, as well as a good collection of photographs. My only real criticism is the lack of mention of the intelligence failures on the German rocket program and the build-up to the Battle of the Bulge.

Alison Weir, *Elizabeth of York: A Tudor Queen and Her World* (2013), reviewed by Tom Hady

What was it like to "live like a queen" around the turn of the 16th century? Here, in nearly 500 pages of detail, is the answer: multiple-page descriptions of ceremonies, details about dress, lists of retainers and much speculation about Elizabeth's feelings when various events happened. Indeed, there is so much detail about Elizabeth's spending (several years of her accounts, each page initialed by her, survive) that the subtitle might well be "A Tudor Queen and her Purse." Nevertheless, the book held my interest to the end.

Alison Weir, *The Children of Henry VIII* (1996), reviewed by Tom Hady

The eleven years between Henry VIII's death in 1547 and Elizabeth I's accession in 1558 were a parlous time for England. Edward's youth opened the door for ambitious nobles to follow their own agendas—including the briefly successful plan to put Jane Grey on the throne on Edward's death. Jane was supplanted by Mary (not until the 17th century was she called "Bloody Mary") within a few days, brought to the throne with a wave of popular acclaim. On Mary's death, Elizabeth inherited an England that was torn by strife and plots, broke and dispirited. Weir tells the story well, including such tidbits as *Back in 1539, the beautiful and spirited Duchess of Lorraine had, at the age of sixteen, been suggested as a bride for Henry VIII, but had refused to consider the idea, declaring that, if she had two heads, one would be at His Grace's disposal.*

John Hoyt Williams, *Sam Houston: a biography of the Father of Texas* (1993), reviewed by Jim Crumley

Sam Houston was a very interesting character. Born in Virginia, he moved to Tennessee and became a follower of Andrew Jackson to the point that Jackson and his wife, Rachel, treated Houston as "their own son." When he married, Rachel gave him her "prized sterling silver flatware" as a wedding present. When Rachel died, Houston was the lead pallbearer. Partly due to this relationship, Houston was elected U.S. Senator and then Governor of Tennessee before his drinking and scandal resulted in divorce and his resigning from the governorship. Houston then moved west, renounced his U.S. citizenship, and was elected a citizen of the Cherokee nation. His primary intent was to avoid licensing fees and taxes on trading with the Indians. As "one of them," he thought he could get around this expense. The Supreme Court ruled differently.

Eventually, of course, Houston moved to Texas, won the battle of San Jacinto, became President of the Republic of Texas, Governor and Senator of the State of Texas, and tried mightily (even resigning as Governor) to stop Texas from seceding from the Union with the rest of the South. An interesting man, this book provides a revealing look at his life.

Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* (1962), reviewed by Don Ferrett.

For anyone who wonders why we were surprised by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, this is a must read. The author has done a tremendous job of digging through documented evidence from the time period, as well as records of hearings held later to place blame. The amount of evidence is remarkable for what is and isn't there. Yes,

the U.S. could decrypt many Japanese diplomatic messages. But not all, and not instantly. And the translations of those messages were not always what the Japanese meant to say. Also, no one person or group had access to all of the data. The sheer volume of information being sent to Washington for several months preceding the attack, and the number of groups receiving the different types of information, coupled with rigidly divided lanes of authority, resulted in an insurmountable signal to noise problem. Read this book and say goodbye to theories of ineptitude or conspiracy!

Kirsten Wolf, *Viking Age: Everyday Life During the Extraordinary Era of the Norsemen* (2004), reviewed by Tom Hady

Wolf sets out to convey to a nonspecialist readership the facts and flavor of everyday life in Scandinavia during the Viking age, and she succeeds well. This is a good place to find a summary of what's known about Viking home life, the economy of the time, religion, and especially literature. If you want a history of the era, look elsewhere; Wolf says in the preface that she has made no effort to give a formal history of Scandinavia during the Viking age. Wolf is a professor (and department chair) of Scandinavian studies at the University of Wisconsin.

Mitchell Zuckoff, *Ponzi's Scheme: The True Story of a Financial Legend* (2005), reviewed by Jim Crumley

The story of Charles Ponzi is an interesting look into the life of the man who preceded Bernie Madoff by 80 years. Starting in 1920 Ponzi offered "investors" the opportunity to triple their money in a few months, only to use money from new investors to pay off earlier ones. While some, in fact, made a great deal from their "investments," most ended up with nothing. Ponzi was in and out of jails for much of his life and while he was certainly not the first to "rob Peter to pay Paul," his name lives on as the creator of the "Ponzi Scheme," with which we are all familiar.