

WHITE BEAR LAKE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
BOOK CLUB SELECTIONS for 2017-2018

September 25, 2017

Discussion leader: Bob

Danzig: A Novel of Political Intrigue William Walker. 2015. 508p.

Inspired by actual events, *Danzig* is a story of diplomatic conflict and political intrigue in Central Europe during the 1930's. Richly atmospheric, it is gripping historical fiction in the grand tradition. The Free City of Danzig was established by the Treaty of Versailles as a mandate to be protected by the League of Nations and its High Commissioner. In 1933, the Nazi party took control of Danzig and pursued a hostile and violent agenda aimed at overthrowing the League's High Commissioner and subverting its constitutional protections. Sean Lester, an Irish diplomat, was the League's High Commissioner and Paul Muller, a young man fresh from university, was his secretary during this tense period. The story portrays the roles played by Lester and Muller as repeated crises engulfed Danzig and high stakes confrontations led to diplomatic clashes and, finally, political betrayal.

October 23, 2017

Discussion leader: Karen

The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf : Mohja Kahf. 2005. 448p.

Syrian immigrant Khadra Shamy is growing up in a devout, tightly knit Muslim family in 1970s Indiana, at the crossroads of bad polyester and Islamic dress codes. Along with her brother Eyad and her African-American friends, Hakim and Hanifa, she bikes the Indianapolis streets exploring the fault-lines between "Muslim" and "American." When her picture-perfect marriage goes sour, Khadra flees to Syria and learns how to pray again. On returning to America she works in an eastern state — taking care to stay away from Indiana, where the murder of her friend Tayiba's sister by Klan violence years before still haunts her. But when her job sends her to cover a national Islamic conference in Indianapolis, she's back on familiar ground: Attending a concert by her brother's interfaith band The Clash of Civilizations, dodging questions from the "aunties" and "uncles," and running into the recently divorced Hakim everywhere.

November 27, 2017

Discussion leader: Gerry

Double Selection

Hidden Figures : Margot Lee Shetterly. 2015. 368p.

Before John Glenn orbited the earth, or Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, a group of dedicated female mathematicians known as “human computers” used pencils, slide rules and adding machines to calculate the numbers that would launch rockets, and astronauts, into space. Among these problem-solvers were a group of exceptionally talented African American women, some of the brightest minds of their generation. Originally relegated to teaching math in the South’s segregated public schools, they were called into service during the labor shortages of World War II, when America’s aeronautics industry was in dire need of anyone who had the right stuff. Suddenly, these overlooked math whizzes had a shot at jobs worthy of their skills, and they answered Uncle Sam’s call, moving to Hampton, Virginia and the fascinating, high-energy world of the Langley Memorial Aeronautical Laboratory.

Hidden Human Computers : Sue Bradford Edwards & Duchess Harris. 2016. 112p.

“*Hidden Human Computers* goes beyond the three black women focused on in the forthcoming movie “Hidden Figures” and offers in-depth biographical information about a range of women who worked at NASA at its inception, offering context for their own interest in science and mathematics beyond their function at NASA. Throughout the text the authors make sure that the context of “double jeopardy” or institutional racism and sexism that shaped every aspect of these women’s lives is in full view for the students. Not only do they detail the exclusion of photos of black women from photographs of women workers at NASA and the segregated eating facilities, segregated working conditions and racist and sexist pay disparities at NASA itself (*did I mention the campus was literally a plantation before NASA bought it?*), they also detail the complexity facing black women mathematicians and scientists and their conditions of possibility.” —Alexis Pauline Gumbs [via African American Intellectual History Society].

December 18, 2017

Discussion leader: Carolyn

The Other Einstein : A Novel. Marie Benedict. 2016. 304p.

Mitza Maric has always been a little different from other girls. Most twenty-year-olds are wives by now, not studying physics at an elite Zurich university with only male students trying to outdo her clever calculations. But Mitza is smart enough to know that, for her, math is an easier path than marriage. And then fellow student Albert Einstein takes an interest in her, and the world turns sideways. Theirs becomes a partnership of the mind and of the heart, but there might not be room for more than one genius in a marriage.

January 22, 2018

Discussion Leader : Rick

Dead Wake : The Last Crossing of the Lusitania Eric Larson. 2015. 430p.

On May 1, 1915, with WWI entering its tenth month, a luxury ocean liner as richly appointed as an English country house sailed out of New York, bound for Liverpool, carrying a record number of children and infants. The passengers were surprisingly at ease, even though Germany had declared the seas around Britain to be a war zone. But the *Lusitania* was one of the era's great transatlantic "Greyhounds"—the fastest liner then in service—and her captain, William Thomas Turner, placed tremendous faith in the gentlemanly strictures of warfare that for a century had kept civilian ships safe from attack. Germany, however, was determined to change the rules of the game, and Walther Schwieger, the captain of *Unterseeboot-20*, was happy to oblige. As U-20 and the *Lusitania* made their way toward Liverpool, an array of forces both grand and achingly small—hubris, a chance fog, a closely guarded secret, and more—all converged to produce one of the great disasters of history.

February 26, 2018

Discussion leader: Lori

Fiction on a Stick: New Stories by Minnesota Writers : Daniel Slager (Ed.). 2008. 334p.

Widely regarded as one of the most progressive and educated states in the nation, Minnesota boasts a rich literary tradition. Writers from Sinclair Lewis and F. Scott Fitzgerald to Louise Edrich and Garrison Keillor have called it home. Like the rest of America, Minnesota has seen enormous changes over the century and a half since its founding. Population has skyrocketed, particularly into the suburbs ringing the city. Family farms have yielded to agribusiness, and waves of immigrants have given it a new, more diverse identity. Selected for both literary merit and to reflect the state's increasing changes, this anthology presents a literary mosaic of Minnesota at the outset of a new century. With writings by and about an extraordinarily wide range of voices and characters, including powerful work by Sarah Stonich and Éireann Lorsung, *Fiction on a Stick* is an essential collection for fans of the North Star State, regional fiction, and serious literature.

March 26, 2018

Discussion Leader : Eva

Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong : James Loewen. 2007. 464p.

Americans have lost touch with their history, and in *Lies My Teacher Told Me* Professor James Loewen shows why. After surveying eighteen leading high school American history texts, he has concluded that not one does a decent job of making history interesting or memorable. Marred by an embarrassing combination of blind patriotism, mindless optimism, sheer misinformation, and outright lies, these books omit almost all the ambiguity, passion, conflict, and drama from our past. In this revised edition, packed with updated material, Loewen explores how historical myths continue to be perpetuated in today's climate and adds an eye-opening chapter on the lies surrounding 9/11 and the Iraq War. From the truth about Columbus's historic voyages to an honest evaluation of our national leaders, Loewen revives our history, restoring the vitality and relevance it truly possesses.

April 28, 2018

Discussion leader: Bonnie

Lamb :The Gospel According to Biff, Christ's Childhood Pal : Christopher Moore. 2003. 444p.

The birth of Jesus has been well chronicled, as have his glorious teachings, acts, and divine sacrifice after his thirtieth birthday. But no one knows about the early life of the Son of God, the missing years -- except Biff, the Messiah's best bud, who has been resurrected to tell the story in the divinely hilarious yet heartfelt work "reminiscent of Vonnegut and Douglas Adams". Verily, the story Biff has to tell is a miraculous one, filled with remarkable journeys, magic, healings, kung fu, corpse reanimations, demons, and hot babes. Even the considerable wiles and devotion of the Savior's pal may not be enough to divert Joshua from his tragic destiny. But there's no one who loves Josh more - - except maybe "Maggie," Mary of Magdala -- and Biff isn't about to let his extraordinary pal suffer and ascend without a fight.

May 21, 2018

Discussion leader: Marcia

A \$500 House in Detroit : Drew Philp. 2017. 304p.

Drew Philp, an idealistic college student from a working-class Michigan family, decides to live where he can make a difference. He sets his sights on Detroit, the failed metropolis of abandoned buildings, widespread poverty, and rampant crime. Arriving with no job, no friends, and no money, Philp buys a ramshackle house for five hundred dollars in the east side neighborhood known as Poletown. The roomy Queen Anne he now owns is little more than a clapboard shell on a crumbling brick foundation, missing windows, heat, water, electricity, and a functional roof. *A \$500 House in Detroit* is Philp's raw and earnest account of rebuilding everything but the frame of his house, nail by nail and room by room.