

Books in the Mill – Spring 2012

A Nation at War: 1861 – 1865

The UNH-Manchester Library is partnering with the Manchester Historic Association to present “*Books in the Mill.*” These book discussions are held in the mezzanine meeting room at the University of New Hampshire Library, 400 Commercial Street, Manchester, NH. Everyone is invited to participate. For more information, call (603) 641-4173 - <http://manchester.unh.edu/>

Thursday, February 16, 2012 – 6:30 p.m.-8:00 p.m.

March by Geraldine Brooks (novel)

Brooks imagines the Civil War experiences of Mr. March, the absent father in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. An idealistic Concord cleric, March becomes a Union chaplain and later finds himself assigned to be teacher on a cotton plantation that employs freed slaves, or "contraband." His narrative begins with cheerful letters home, but March gradually reveals to the reader what he does not to his family: the cruelty and racism of Northern and Southern soldiers, the violence and suffering he is powerless to prevent and his reunion with Grace, a beautiful, educated slave whom he met years earlier as a Connecticut peddler to the plantations. In between, we learn of March's earlier life: his whirlwind courtship of quick-tempered Marmee, his friendship with Emerson and Thoreau and the surprising cause of his family's genteel poverty. When a Confederate attack on the contraband farm lands March in a Washington hospital, sick with fever and guilt, the first-person narrative switches to Marmee, who describes a different version of the years past and an agonized reaction to the truth she uncovers about her husband's life.

Thursday, March 22, 2012 – 6:30 p.m.-8:00 p.m.

Walking to Gatlinburg: a novel by Howard Frank Mosher

Mosher's Civil War odyssey centers on a Vermont teenager's harrowing journey south to find his missing-in-action brother. Seventeen-year-old Morgan Kinneson goes in search of his older brother, Pilgrim, a Union soldier reported MIA at Gettysburg. But first, Morgan accidentally causes the death of a runaway slave he was leading to safety in Canada. In the course of tracking down his missing brother, Morgan is pursued by slave catchers, accompanies an elephant on an Erie Canal showboat, visits the battlefield at Gettysburg, meets an escaped slave who turns out to be the dead slave's granddaughter, and gets wounded during a mountain feud before learning of Pilgrim's fate. Complicating matters is a rune stone the dead slave left to Morgan, which could compromise the security of the Underground Railroad if the slave catchers get their hands on it. The story of Morgan's rite-of-passage through an American arcadia despoiled by war and slavery is an engrossing tale.

Thursday, April 19, 2012 – 6:30 p.m.-8:00 p.m.

This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War by Drew Gilpin Faust (non-fiction)

Battle is the dramatic centerpiece of Civil War history; this penetrating study looks instead at the somber aftermath. Historian Faust notes that the Civil War introduced America to death on an unprecedented scale and of an unnatural kind—grisly, random and often ending in an unmarked grave far from home. She surveys the many ways the Civil War generation coped with the trauma: the concept of the Good Death—conscious, composed and at peace with God; the rise of the embalming industry; the sad attempts of the bereaved to get confirmation of a soldier's death, sometimes years after war's end; the swelling national movement to recover soldiers' remains and give them decent burials; the intellectual quest to find meaning—or its absence—in the war's carnage. In the process, she contends, the nation invented the modern culture of reverence for military death and used the fallen to elaborate its new concern for individual rights. Faust exhumes a wealth of material—condolence letters, funeral sermons, ads for mourning dresses, poems and stories from Civil War-era writers—to flesh out her lucid account. The result is an insightful, often moving portrait of a people torn by grief.