



BLL Book Reviews – June 2010

Brewster Ladies Library
1822 Main Street, Brewster, MA 02631

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The Bridge: The Life and Rise of Barack Obama

by David Remick

reviewed by Jim Mills

The rapid rise of Barack Obama in the world of politics certainly qualifies as an all-American success story. Born in Hawaii in 1961 of a white Kansan mother and a black Kenyan father, Obama was raised in an unusual environment that was to create a unique individual. Shortly after Obama's birth, Barack Obama Sr. left his wife and son in Hawaii to attend East Coast colleges, never to return to his family. Obama's mother, pursuing a career in anthropology, moved to Indonesia where Obama started grade school. After the fourth grade Barack was sent to live with his maternal grandparents in Hawaii where he completed his grade and high school education. In the 50th state, Obama found an accepting multicultural society where the few black students were able to readily fit in with the student population. Upon graduation Obama decided to attend college on the US mainland starting at Occidental College in California and later transferring to NYC's Columbia University.

Instead of pursuing a lucrative business career, Obama, was oriented towards public service, accepting a position as a community organizer in Chicago's south side. In New York and in Chicago Obama got his first prolonged contact with other mainstream black Americans. It was here that he developed his understanding of the daily problems that minority and underprivileged Americans face on a daily basis. After a number of years working in Chicago, Obama decided that he could accomplish more with a legal degree. Barack was accepted at Harvard Law School and in his second year he was honored by being selected as the first black president of the Harvard Law Review. This award was testament to his ability to appeal to both liberal and conservative law students who viewed him as a fair arbiter of their differences. Upon returning to Chicago, Obama began to enter politics by being elected as an Illinois State Senator. His run for a US Congressional seat in 2000 was unsuccessful but fortune shone on him in his 2004 race for the US Senate. As Remick points out, it took quite a while for Obama to be accepted by other black leaders due to his unique life experiences, so different from that of most minorities in the US.

Most of his subsequent career is known to most Americans: his decision to run for President after only two years in the Senate, his narrow winning of the Democratic nomination and his decisive victory in the general election. As in his Senate race, Obama was fortunate in his timing with a crushing economic downturn souring Republican prospects in 2008. Throughout his career Obama has been noted for his intelligence, confidence, calm demeanor and his willingness to hear a wide variety of points of view before making a decision. These qualities, in the opinion of this reviewer, should hold him, as president, and the nation in good stead. At various points in his life these characteristics plus his quick learning ability had led numerous observers to speculate that Obama would become the nation's first black President.

David Remick, the editor of the *New Yorker*, has produced a very interesting and comprehensive account of Obama's life. Remick provides a background on Obama's family in both Kansas and Kenya. At various junctures in the book, the author includes details of life in Hawaii and Indonesia and of the history of the Civil Rights Movement and Chicago politics. *The Bridge* would be of interest to readers curious about the diverse background of our 44th President, a man whose life experiences have differed so significantly from those of his predecessors.

Trailside Treasures, Plants of Cape Cod

by Nancy Wigley and Susan W. Carr

Mudflat Mania!: Exploring the ocean when the tide pulls out!

by Irene Ledwith, Bud and Betsy Ferris

reviewed by James N. McCutcheon

Like many other “wash ashores” of my generation, I never really discovered The Cape Cod Museum of Natural History until my grandchildren began going to a succession of the museum’s excellent summer camps and started begging my wife and me to take them there whenever they visited us in between.

It wasn’t long after that when I came across some of the marvelous guidebooks, published by the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History, devoted to the endless treasures of nature available for personal enjoyment on Cape Cod. These guidebooks have some very special virtues for any resident of or visitor to Brewster and its environs. All of them were produced by professional and almost-professional naturalists and photographers who are related to, and work, as volunteers at the museum. Only flora and fauna found on the lower Cape are considered; the lively texts contain wonderful anecdotes and fascinating bits of local history dating back to the earliest settlers, the Indians, and the salt works. The photographs, all in full color and taken on the museum’s property, are works of peerless beauty in their own right.

The event that occasions this book review was the recent publication of two fine additions to the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History’s personal library.

Trailside Treasures, Plants of Cape Cod is just off the press. Nancy Wigley, Botany Specialist for the museum is responsible for the text. Susan W. Carr, recently retired Director of the Brewster Ladies’ Library and a specialist in the photography of plants and birds, supplied the wonderful color photographs. There are, according to the book, somewhere around “1,350 species of vascular plants on Cape Cod.” Of these the book covers just over 100 of the most prominent, all of which can be viewed on the several miles of walking trails on the museum property. These walking trails cover a vibrant salt marsh, a wooded upland, Wing’s Island, and the Outer Beach. You have to be aware of the tide and where it is likely to be during your hike, but there are hours of delight and discovery for anyone who cares to make the journey. “Beyond the pleasure that plants give us”, Nancy Wigley writes, they are largely “responsible for the air we breathe and the food we consume. Without the plant kingdom, we, as well as all other animals would vanish from the face of the earth!”

Mudflat Mania, Exploring the Ocean when the Tide pulls out! was published in 2009 . Irene Ledwith, an expert on what goes on between the wrack line and the ocean was responsible for the excellent text and Bud Ferris, with his wife Betsy, contributed the gorgeous photographs of what you can turn up on the Bay beach, between Quivett Creek and Paine’s Creek in the Town of Brewster, and out across a mile of sandbars and tidal pools across the Brewster Flats, during extreme low tide.

On almost every summer’s day scores of residents, visitors, tourists—amateur naturalists all—descend on the Brewster Flats, equipped with pails, shovels, rakes, specimen containers and liberal doses of sun screen to search for some of God’s most amazing creatures. Have you ever seen a Razor Clam disappear under the sand in the wink of an eye when it feels threatened? Or been squirted in the eye by a buried Quahog, the principal ingredient of the fabulous Cape Cod Clam Chowder? Or been warned not to touch the Lion’s Mane, which only reaches 12 inches wide on the Cape but sometimes reaches 8 feet wide in the Gulf of Maine and whose nasty sting can ruin a good afternoon on the Brewster Flats?

Then there is the Horseshoe Crab, whose blood contains a unique ingredient that has never been duplicated but which is saving human lives every year (used as a screening test for bacterial contamination in pharmaceutical substances, for instance). There are usually dozens of them visible during any low tide on the Brewster Flats. These are just a few of the many hundreds of marine invertebrate animals available for inspection by even a novice Mudflat Maniac who takes a summer’s afternoon stroll on the Brewster Flats with *Mudflat Mania! Exploring the Ocean when the Tide pulls out!* as a handy reference and guide. It’s a joy no resident or visitor to Brewster should ever miss. Do it once and you’ll be back again Do it twice, possibly with one of the museum’s volunteer guides at your side, and you’ll be hooked.



The Poisoner's Handbook: Murder and the Birth of Forensic Medicine in Jazz Age New York

by Deborah Blum

reviewed by Jim Mills

In the 1941 film, *Suspicion*, Alfred Hitchcock fans may remember the relentless curiosity expressed by the Cary Grant character about the availability of non-detectable poisons leading to an understandable fear and suspicion on the part of his wife, Joan Fontaine. The *Poisoner's Handbook* deals with the race between amateur and professional poisoners and the forensic detection capabilities of various medical examiners' offices. Covering the period 1915 – 35, this book concentrates on the pioneering efforts of the New York City Chief Medical Examiner, Charles Norris and his chief toxicologist, Alexander Gettler. During this period coroners had to deal with death caused by agents such as arsenic, cyanide, mercury, radium, carbon monoxide, methyl (wood) alcohol, chloroform and that old standby ethyl alcohol.

Throughout history poisoners had always had a major advantage over the detection capabilities of legal authorities. The use of various poisons was a favored way to dispose of unwanted individuals with little fear of apprehension. With the dawn of the 20th century, chemical analytic capabilities began to close the gap and make the poisoner's task a much riskier one. The advent of Prohibition in 1920 greatly increased alcohol related deaths. The government added many denaturing (poisonous) agents to industrial alcohol in an effort to make them unusable for recreational drinking. This denatured alcohol became a prime raw material for bootleggers in their lucrative task of providing drinks for a thirsty nation. The efforts at removing the poisonous agents was half-hearted, at best, leading to the sharp increase in deaths, particularly in drinking establishments that catered to low income customers. Throughout this period, Norris continually pointed out to federal authorities that their efforts in making alcohol non-potable had led to a major public health crisis in New York City and in the nation as a whole. The situation was not to be resolved until 1933 and the repeal of prohibition.

Another source of non-intentional poisonings came from the widespread use of illuminating gas that contained carbon monoxide for heating and illumination in New York City. The accidental quenching of a flame could rapidly lead to death in a closed room. This was an era when many dangers lurked for the unsuspecting or unwary public. Carbon Monoxide poisoning was, however, one that was easy to diagnose. A tougher challenge was provided by the plight of employees of a company operating in nearby northern New Jersey. U. S. Radium Corporation used the recently discovered radioactive element Radium to create luminous watch dials. The women in the plant who painted these dials began to come down with an invariably fatal disease that involved the rapid physical destruction of their bones. For a while the Radium Corporation tried to deny any responsibility for the misfortunes of their employees. Harrison Martland, the Chief Medical Officer for Essex County, NJ, was able to show that the cause of the employees' bone deterioration was the replacement of the Calcium in the bone with chemically similar Radium. At this time various health elixirs containing radium were also on the market. The analysis provided by Chief Medical Examiners' offices alerted the government and the public to this new man-made health hazard.

The Poisoner's Handbook is a fascinating book. The author supplies a detailed history of the various poisonous agents and why and how these agents are harmful to humans. Blum provides interesting detail on the painstaking efforts involved in developing analytical techniques to deal with ever-changing medical challenges. These efforts resulted in bringing many culpable individuals to justice and the exoneration of many innocent individuals. Our modern age with government involvement in ensuring product safety owes much to the hard work and dedication of these pioneers.

Omnibus

from: Archives of American Television Presents

reviewed by Don Boink

Leonard Bernstein in an interesting video - DVD on four discs in which he presents an inclusive array of talks/demonstrations of various types of music such as Jazz, Conducting, Musical Comedy, 20th Century Composition and Bach, plus What makes Opera Grand.

The video was made in the 1950s with the NBC orchestra in a very interesting format. Bernstein discusses the various forms of music in an informal manner. His complete mastery of, and familiarity with, his subject is extraordinary. He illustrates on the piano what he is referring to and also has at his disposal the NBC orchestra in part or in its entirety. The information is non-technical and easy to follow and covers pretty much the full range of musical presentation. Beginning with the structure of musical scales, through the various types of instruments, the tempos and rhythms, as well as What Makes a Good Conductor. The evolution of musicals to the modern musical comedy is one of the parts I enjoyed the most. Each disc is over an hour in length so plan to spend a few evenings to hear it all. Omnibus is available in the DVD section of the library.

The Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves, and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History

by Robert M. Edsel with Brett Witter

reviewed by Don Boink

World War II was the epic era that defined the “greatest generation.” It lasted as long as the current Iraq-Afghanistan war but it was called the “good war.” It affected everyone and represented a cause for which everyone sacrificed,

Within the Allied armed forces there was a small group of men whose sole interest was not death and destruction but the protection and/or recovery of art treasures, be they paintings, architecture, tapestries, or literature. This book is a compelling story of the trials, sacrifices, brilliant skill and perseverance of this group, called the Monuments Men. They came from thirteen nations. Most had volunteered early for service in the newly created MFAA, (Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives). They were museum directors, curators, art scholars and educators, artists, architects and archivists. The job description was simple: to save as much of the culture of Europe as they could during combat.

George Stout originated the idea of the Monuments Men in December 1941, long before the invasion at Normandy. He was the go-to guy for all the men and was an excellent organizer. After the war he resumed his job as head of New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art. It was the first time an army fought a war while attempting, as much as possible, to mitigate cultural damage—a remarkable experiment. Since no formal provisions were made for this unit, they had no transportation, supplies, personnel or historical precedent. They were the most unlikely of heroes. Of the initial 60 or so that served through May 1945 most were middle-aged, the average age was 40. Most had families and accomplished careers. To a man they were willing to die and fight for what they believed.

One of the customary accompaniments of the war is looting: “To the victor belong the spoils,” as the saying goes. In the European theater of World War II the Nazis took that dictum to its highest level. Hitler fancied himself an artist and had studied architecture. He affected an appreciation of fine art and was an avid collector. As the German army moved through Europe the famous art collections of French Jews were confiscated—stolen. The upper echelon of Nazi officials likewise affected an interest in the artworks, probably to ingratiate themselves with Der Fuhrer. Hitler got first pick, the Reichmarshall Hermann Goering got seconds and so on down the line. The result was aptly termed “the Rape of Europa.” Thousands of stolen paintings and art objects were systematically shipped to the fatherland.

The members of the Monuments Men unit were assigned to the various armies that moved from the beaches of Normandy east and north to the final battles in Austria. The experiences of several of these men as the fighting progressed are recounted. Often they began their searches before the battles were over. Frequently the monuments on their lists no longer existed and in many instances the stolen treasures had to be tracked down. A favorite place to store paintings and other treasure was in mines, thousands of feet deep. One such was an iron mine, another was a salt mine.

Rose Valland, a courageous French woman, served in a Paris museum during the German four-year occupation. Through her contacts with the Resistance she was able to stall the movement of a trainload of paintings, stolen from the Louvre, to the interior of Germany, until the city was liberated. In the late 1940s and early fifties the U.S. was transformed from a cultural backwater to a center stage of culture and the arts. World War II had exposed millions of American men and women to the art and architecture of Europe and Asia and almost overnight created an interest and appreciation for the arts that would normally require generations to nurture. The “new” nation of America, for the first time, suddenly had a broad audience that wanted to learn to simply enjoy painting, music, and sculpture. This book is one of the most impressive I have read to date.



Hitler – Goering Viewing Art Treasures

The Big Burn, Teddy Roosevelt and the Fire that Saved America

by Timothy Egan

reviewed by James N. McCutcheon

On August 20, 1910 a wildfire “blowup” occurred which is still regarded as the worst natural disaster ever to have ravaged the United States. All summer the national forests of Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana had been without significant rain. Now they were bone dry. The several thousand small fires touched off over the previous weeks by lightning strikes, and sparks from the lumber, coal, and copper ore trains that had lately been driven through the national forests -- all were only waiting for a strong wind to touch off a nightmare that had been many months in the making.

On the late afternoon of August 20th, a hurricane force wind called a “palouser”, sweeping through the Bitterroot Mountains of Idaho, built into a single, towering, thirty mile wide blast furnace that almost immediately overwhelmed the undermanned, under prepared, under equipped 10,000 man collection of out of work miners, just off the boat immigrants, human refuse from the local jails, drunks dragged out of local saloons and bordellos, and the recently deputized I Company of the U.S. Army’s 25th Infantry Division, whom a handful of U.S. Forest Rangers had been able to enlist as firefighters.

Wallace, Idaho was the first town to be hit. Airborne sparks and other debris ignited a wall of fire. Hurricane force winds burned to the ground the town and incinerated dozens of its inhabitants in less than an hour. But that was just the beginning. Before “the ‘blowup’ of 1910” finally ran out of steam, major parts of the national forests of three states and billions of dollars worth of trees, mineral resources, and at least 35 villages and towns had been destroyed, as well as 85 U.S. Forest Rangers and countless other irreplaceable human, animal, and property assets.

That’s the way Timothy Egan, a Pulitzer winning author of five other books introduces us to *The Big Burn, Teddy Roosevelt and the Fire that Saved America*. However the real story of *The Big Burn* begins sometime earlier, in the closing days of the 19th century with John Muir the founder of the Sierra Club and the father of American Conservation, Gifford Pinchot and the bankrolling of the Yale University School of Forestry, and President Teddy Roosevelt the champion and great friend of America’s national park system. Pinchot and Roosevelt were favored sons in millionaire families, whose common love of the rugged outdoor life and dedication to American Progressivism brought them together and soon developed into a lifelong political collaboration and friendship.

These were the great years of western expansion, the Gilded Era, and of the “Robber Barons”, whose strip mining operations, clear cut removal of majestic forests, and continent spanning railroad systems had produced at least a half dozen American plutocrats as rich as Bill Gates and, in the case of John D. Rockefeller at least one who was four times as rich. Gifford Pinchot’s obsession was to recruit and train a national organization of forest rangers to manage the great national forests that President Teddy Roosevelt had authorized and he and Gifford Pinchot were now creating under the banner of a “Grand Crusade”, and the theme of saving the national forests, for the perpetual enjoyment of the American People.

The “Robber Barons” were not long in realizing that their vast mining and lumbering empires were mortally threatened by these new initiatives by the Federal government, and so they attacked. Their preferred instrument was bribery, millions and millions of dollars of it, paid to U.S. Senators and Congressmen, to pass legislation that would end the “Great Crusade” of conservation and put the U. S. Forest Service permanently out of business. “Uncle Joe” Cannon of Illinois led the fight in the U. S. House of Representatives, Seldon Weldon of Idaho and William Clark of Montana in the U. S. Senate. This trio steered laws through the House and Senate that set a U. S. Forest Ranger’s salary at only \$1,000 a year, from which each ranger was required to buy, along with his food and housing, his own horse, his uniforms, and his revolver. The size of the force was limited to a point where each forest ranger was responsible for maintaining some 300,000 acres of our national parkland. Then the “Robber Barons” sent thugs into the forests to threaten the rangers and, through our nation’s newspapers, they incited riots against the forest rangers themselves.

These tactics had almost squeezed the life out of the U.S. Forest Service when an act of God and a brilliant political move by President Teddy Roosevelt saved our national forests and Gifford Pinchot’s forest rangers. It had long been recognized by professional foresters and taught in Yale’s School of Forestry that forest fires were not only inevitable but also an essential part of the life cycle of all healthy forests. But there had lately been several major uncontrolled forest fires and the “Robber Barons” had been forced to watch some of their finest timber, miles of almost new railroad track, and even mining machinery go up in flames for lack of an adequate U.S. Forest Service. Conservation suddenly appeared to them in quite a different light.

Roosevelt and Pinchot saw their opportunity also. Although they knew better, both soon began to broadcast far and wide a new gospel of “conservation”, namely that “forest fires were bad but nevertheless could and would be eradicated, if only the U.S. National Forest Service was given enough financial support and manpower to do the job.” That is how and why on August 20, 1910, a handful of professional rangers of the U.S. Forest Service, came to be trying to organize, teach and direct some 10,000 completely untrained and poorly equipped recent conscripts, spread across the immense national park systems of three states, to fight the worst forest fire in U.S. history. Timothy Egan tells the story of *The Big Burn* through the lives of these people – heroes, cowards, deserters, ordinary men and the women who shared life in the Gilded Age on the western frontier with them. (continued)

It's a story only an award winning newspaper reporter, a stickler for facts, a fly fisherman, an American historian and a serious naturalist could properly tell. Timothy Egan is all of these and a great deal more. *The Big Burn, Teddy Roosevelt and the Fire that saved America* is the most exciting and consequential piece of anecdotal history I've read in a long time. I couldn't put it down. As Egan tells it, *The Big Burn* cemented the reputation of President Teddy Roosevelt as the savior of our National Park System, made national heroes out of our U.S. Forest Rangers, and guaranteed that our national parks would belong not to "Robber Barons" but to all of us Americans, at least so long as you and I and the politicians we send to Washington properly manage, protect, and support what many Americans, my self included, believe to be one of our greatest national treasure.

Masters of the Air: America's Bomber Boys Who Fought the Air War Against Nazi Germany

by Donald L. Miller

reviewed by Jim Mills

Masters of the Air is a brilliantly detailed account of America's WW 2 bombing campaign against Germany. That campaign got off to a very poor start in 1942 and early 1943 with horrific casualties among the fliers and with little effect on reducing the Nazi war-making capability. Early US raids on the German U-boat pens on France's Atlantic coast were completely ineffective. Only during the last year of the war would strategic bombing have a major impact on the German war-making capability by drastically cutting the oil supply available. Initially only one-quarter of aircrews survived the standard 25-flight tour that would have allowed them to go home. Throughout the war the human loss rate for the Air Corp was exceeded only by the submarine service.

Before the war air planners had had an overly optimistic view of the effectiveness of strategic bombing, with the hope that bombing alone would win wars without the need for costly ground combat. It was felt that bombers would be able to penetrate deep into enemy airspace with impunity without the need for fighter aircraft protection. Combat experience quickly dispelled these views. Early on, the American Air Commanders decided on a sharply different bombing strategy from that employed by Britain's Royal Air Force (RAF). The British flew at night to reduce vulnerability to German Air Defenses. Since night flying sharply degraded bombing accuracy, the British employed large scale area bombing of German cities with no attempt at precisely hitting war critical industries. The results were massive civilian casualties that dwarfed the losses that the British experienced during the Blitz. The US adopted daylight bombing and used the super-secret Norden Bombsight in an attempt to selectively hit targets of military value. The prevalence of inclement weather over northern Europe and the very high flight altitudes flown tended to sharply reduce the ability to destroy pinpoint targets. For the first year and a half daytime flying well beyond the range of protective fighter escorts had a devastating effect on both aircraft and aircrew survivability. Only the ability of America to turn out an increasing number of bombers and the crews to fly them allowed the US to follow such a high loss strategy. Only later in the war were a significant number of pilots and crews able to survive a (25 to 35 flight) tour over Germany. This was brought about when fighter escorts, such as the P-51 Mustang, were able to accompany the bombers until they reached their targets and the number of German defensive fighters encountered had been sharply reduced.

Miller describes, by relating many individual experiences, the effects of this extremely stressful environment on the outlook of fliers. There was no hiding the facts of their perilous situation from the aircrews with flyer's bunks being vacated on a daily basis. Many of both American and British fliers would end up as German prisoners which was frequently the only survivable alternative available in the highly dangerous skies over Nazi Europe. The author describes the prison experience of many captured fliers including the much-publicized Great Escape. Much lesser known is the experience of the more than one thousand allied fliers who were forced to land in neutral Switzerland. These fliers were held in detention by the Swiss until the end of the war. Those who attempted to escape were subjected to much more severe incarceration that included physical and mental punishment. For most of the war, the Swiss were encircled by Axis occupied nations and as a result were very sensitive to any criticism coming from Germany. Swiss neutrality was a biased one.

Masters Of the Air runs for 521 pages but manages to hold your interest throughout. This is accomplished by providing informative descriptions on all aspects of the Air War. Included are the contacts of the US airmen with the host British population, the changing strategy of the war planners, the German tactical responses, and the day-to-day erosion of the spirit and sanity of the flight crews. In the author's opinion the best motion picture portrayal of the US Air Campaign is the Gregory Peck film, *Twelve O'clock High*. This reviewer found *Masters of the Air* to be one of the best descriptions of the terror and madness of warfare. There is no other aspect of human activity that places a greater demand on the basic fiber and sanity of those involved. No participant can survive the experience without being changed in a very fundamental way. Considering the overbearing stresses involved, the wonder is that so many were able to rise to the challenge.

The Worst Hard Time

by Timothy Egan

reviewed by James N. McCutcheon

Meteorologists rate the Dust Bowl that descended without warning on the High Plains country of the American Southwest, where Kansas, Texas, and Oklahoma intersect, as the worst ecological disaster to devastate America in the 20th century. Timothy Egan's *The Worst Hard Time*, published in 2006 and just reissued by Houghton Mifflin and Mariner Books, is thought by many to be the finest and most accurate account so far written of the true cost to our nation, in money, territory, people and other irreplaceable assets. It was a tragedy that could have and should have been avoided; and since the causes of that tragedy continue among us, Timothy Egan's *The Worst Hard Time* is a story that Americans cannot afford to miss.

At its peak, the Dust Bowl ruined one hundred million acres of some of the finest grassland on earth. One quarter million people fled the area during the 1930s when the "dusters" were at their worse. The Comanche Indians, the fierce "Lords of the Plains" whom the earliest pioneers encountered, traded with, and occasionally fought, roamed the territory in search of buffalo for many hundreds of years before white immigrants arrived. Those were very good times for the grasslands, the buffalo and the Indians, who never took more buffalo than they required and treated the land as well as the buffalo as gifts from their God.

Then barbed wire, small windmill driven water pumps, cowboys, and the railroad arrived. With the price of beef on the east coast soaring, much of the High Plains country began to be fenced off; wells were sunk into the Ogallala Aquifer, the buffalo were slaughtered, the Comanche who weren't killed were confined to miserable reservations, and with free grass and abundant water always available and railroads to ship their cattle, the cattle barons and the syndicates moved in. But a day came when there was more money to be made in selling farmland for raising wheat than in raising cattle, so the large ranches began to be broken up and land agents as well as the federal government began to recruit immigrants from overseas and out of luck Americans to fill what had been until then a vast and vacant land.

The sodbuster steel plow and the tractor completed the rape of the High Plains. Thousands of large and small wheat farmers, during the First World War and the "Roaring 20s" that followed, made more money in a short time than they ever had believed possible.

Then it all ended just as suddenly as it had begun. On October 29, 1929, the Stock Market crashed, touching off a Depression that would wipe out banks and businesses and millions of Americans' jobs and life savings and that would only begin to end with the onset of the Second World War. Then the great droughts came, and there was no rain in the High Plains country for years and years. Its soil, no longer protected by sod that had been thousands of years in compacting and the once abundant trees that the ranchers and early settlers had turned into fence posts and "Desert Dugouts," quickly calcified. Strong winds, now with nothing to impede them, whipped the dust into great clouds that filled the heavens and the "Dust Blizzards," beginning in 1929 and lasting until 1938, quickly turned much of the High Plains country into a Dust Bowl from which it is unlikely ever to completely recover,

Jeanne Clark, one of those who was there when it happened, left this account of Black Sunday, April 14, 1935, the date of the worst "Black Blizzard" of them all:

The day dawned quiet, windless, and bright. In the afternoon, the sky went purple—as if it were sick—and the temperature plunged. People looked northwest and saw a ragged topped formation on the move, covering the horizon. The air crackled with electricity. Snap.Snap.Snap. Birds screeched and dashed for cover. As the black wall approached, car radios clicked off, overwhelmed by the static electricity. Ignitions shorted out. Waves of sand like ocean water rising over a ship's prow, swept over roads. Cars went into ditches. A train derailed. It was like a whirlpool. All of a sudden it got completely dark. I couldn't see a thing . . . That single storm carried twice as much dirt as was dug out of the earth to create the Panama Canal. More than 300,000 tons of the High Plains topsoil went airborne that day . . . The Panama Canal took seven years to dig. Black Sunday lasted a single afternoon!

Walter Cronkite called Timothy Egan's *The Worst Hard Time* "can't- put it-down history." Indeed it is: beautifully written, filled with heroes, painstakingly authentic, incredibly sad. John Steinbeck in his masterpiece *The Grapes of Wrath* gave voice to those whom the "Dust Blizzards" drove out of the High Plains country; Thomas Egan in *The Worst Hard Time* has given voice to the thousands who like Jeanne Clark remained.

The Ogallala Aquifer, a marvelous underground lake of purified water as large as Lake Huron, is being emptied today at an unsustainable rate by the corporate farmers who now farm the High Plains Country; and the trees planted by the New Deal have been ripped out to make even more High Plains land available for cultivation. The only light at the end of the tunnel are the "restored areas," the biggest of which is "The Comanche National Grasslands", a part of our marvelous National Parks System and named after the "Lords of the Plains" but without the Comanches. The park is now teeming with buffalos. It is slated eventually to cover 600,000 acres. If it ever actually does so, the old bison hunting grounds between the Arkansas River and the Rio Grande, which Ten Bears, one of the last great Comanche chiefs once described as "where the wind blew free, and there was nothing to break the light of the sun," may after all see the Comanche homeland restored. And if it is, the rest of America and its people, as Timothy Egan surely must hope, will recover a part of its soul as well.

The Imperial Cruise

by James Bradley

reviewed by Don Boink

To coin a not-so-quaint phrase: This book is a real “eye opener.” We have all formed an impression of Theodore Roosevelt as a pugnacious president with his use of the “bully pulpit.” Also famous is his ride up San Juan Hill in Cuba where the roughriders freed Cuba from Spain during the Spanish American war. He was also portrayed as the great white hunter going after big game and never bringing them back alive, usually just bringing the heads for mounting at his home, Sagamore Hill, out on Long Island.

He also was a fervent expansionist and a staunch advocate of “Manifest Destiny,” which decreed the “natural order” of things to include the expansion of the U.S. from coast to coast. In the same way that Columbus initiated the eradication of the Arawak Indians and the U.S. government eliminated the Native Americans and the subjugation of the Philippine natives, Roosevelt envisioned the expansion of American influence across the Pacific. During his presidency in 1905 Roosevelt sent his Secretary of War, William Howard Taft, along with a group of legislators, on a cruise across the Pacific to Hawaii, the Philippines, Japan, Korea and China. The ostensible purpose was simply a diplomatic visitation but the real purpose was for Taft’s visit was to propose an unwritten agreement with the Japanese. The secret portion of the venture was strictly unconstitutional since Congress was kept totally in the dark. The objective was to establish the “open door policy” in Asia especially with Japan and China.

From our western shore, America (at least Roosevelt) was looking to “follow the sun “in a very expansive quest for more territory to control.” The basic concept of the Imperial Design stemmed from the myth of Aryan superiority. According to myth, a superior race of Whites emerged from the dark Teutonic forests of present-day Germany. This “pure” race was self-anointed as the true ruling class. It moved westward across Europe, then to England where the Anglo-Saxons carried the mantle “ following the sun (a phrase Bradley uses). Apparently there is a remnant of this conceit in America that is racist in the extreme, and considers white supremacy paramount. Fortunately in the last hundred years this notion has been blunted considerably. It is interesting to speculate how Teddy would view the advent of Barack Obama.

Imperial Cruise explains how the clandestine arrangements with the Japanese encouraged them to “civilize” the country of Korea and open up China to trade. Japan was encouraged to invade Manchuria and tackle the Russian navy, which it trounced very decisively. Things changed after Roosevelt left office. The Japanese and Russians resolved their differences. Japan became disillusioned and dissatisfied with playing second fiddle to the U.S. and embarked on its own Monroe Doctrine in the Pacific. The “open door” to China led to the colonial powers of Europe, together with the U.S., attempting to slice it up like a melon. China at first insisted that payments for tea be made in silver, and not merchandise. When this nearly bankrupted England she retaliated by flooding China with opium from India. The result was the opium wars and the Boxer Rebellion. Many American fortunes were made during the opium era. It is interesting how many well-known American names are connected to it.

As Japan’s ambition for dominance in the Pacific grew it led to the attack at Pearl Harbor. Hundreds of thousands of lives were destroyed in the ensuing conflicts that can arguably be traced to the misguided foreign policies of our country. This book emphasizes the aggressive nature of our expansion not only in this country, where the native Americans were annihilated but in the Philippines which we acquired as a result of the Spanish American war. There too, the natives were looked upon as uncivilized and incapable of self-government. When they attempted to oust the Americans they were slaughtered. Torture was a routine American practice often taken to the point of death.

Roosevelt sent his daughter by his first wife along on the cruise. Alice was, to say the least, a free spirit. The press adored her because she was pretty, young, and not one to follow protocols. She smoked in public, an unladylike act at the time. She behaved in a very carefree way and was not intimidated by any one or anything. Her father knew she would keep the name of Roosevelt in the news coverage of the day.

The author definitely intends to deflate Roosevelt’s image. If all he writes is true, Teddy was a megalomaniac of sorts and created very serious troubles for our country. He is portrayed as representative of a kind of mindset that is common to many world leaders. It is a disturbing book that probably should be taken with a grain of salt, or at least with skepticism. The book is heavily annotated and has been diligently researched.

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A Reliable Wife

by Robert Goolrick

reviewed by Suzanne McInerney

What are the elements of a Gothic novel? Horror and violence; a gloomy castle; a deep and dark mystery; insatiable lust; the sense that what we see on the outside of human beings conceals almost everything about them and the recognition that when we find out the truth it will be shocking. *A Reliable Wife* possesses all of these elements and more, yet nothing is forced. Everything, including the eroticism, seems to come to pass naturally from the circumstances the author has set up.

In the first scene in Wisconsin, 1907, we meet the protagonist, the man who owns almost everything in town, like his father before him. He accepts respect and the tipping of hats, but he suspects that beneath the surface of polite gestures they all revile him for one enormous failure in his life. His mood is as cold as the weather:

Nothing says hell has to be fire, thought Ralph Truitt, standing in his sober clothes on the platform of the tiny train station in the frozen middle of frozen nowhere. Hell could be like this. It could be darker every minute. It could be cold enough to sear the skin from your bones.

And a few paragraphs later, as he contemplates the townspeople for whom he is responsible, his mood is even more alarming:

These people, their children got sick. Their wives or husbands didn't love them or they did, while Ralph himself was haunted by the sexual act, the sexual lives, which lay hidden and vast beneath their clothes. Other people's lust. They touched each other. Their children died, sometimes all at once, whole families, in a single month of diphtheria or typhoid . . . their husbands or their wives went crazy in a night, in the cold, and burned their houses down for no good reason, or shot their own relatives, their own children dead . . . they fed poison to each other. . . . Such things happened.

The train carrying his bride-to-be, the “reliable wife” he found through the personal ads column of the big city, arrives. We meet Catherine Land on the train as she changes her beautiful clothes for modest ones. She sews money into the hem of her dress and checks a vial of liquid that may or may not be poison. On the platform, meeting Ralph, her disguise is transparent: she is not the woman she pretended to be when she answered the ad, and Ralph lets her know that she is (what he calls) “a liar.”

How their story and their relationship develop, with haunting twists and surprises, gives us insight into the battered childhood of three people: Truitt, Catherine, and Truitt’s son, the young child who lost his innocence in an act so gruesome that we can barely believe in its truth.

The three people have each had unbearable childhoods that have made them become monstrous in some of their actions as adults. But in some ways each of the three experiences dramatically what Aristotle talked about and Shakespeare employed: a “recognition scene,” which makes them see something to which they have been blind.

This book is dedicated to something larger than the horrors that can be life’s experiences. It leads, naturally and without hesitation, to an unusual and beautifully rendered message of peace and tenderness through what seems like an impossible love—the promise that these may be always in our reach.