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President's Message

IN October FAW honors its Past Presidents for their dedication to FAW and appreciation of talented writers. I thank Angie Higginson, Corrine Morrissey, Minnie Orfanos, Vivian Mortensen, Betty O'Toole and Corene Anderson for their service to FAW. Your strong leadership has strengthened our mission of encouraging high standards and promoting literary ideals among American writers. Also in October, we honor and invite our Sustaining Book Clubs: Flossmoor Book Club, Ogden Dunes Book Club, Renaissance Art Club and Women's Reading Club of Riverside. Through our sustaining book clubs will are able to expand our reach and the scope of our membership.

While we all must wait until January 5 for season four of *Downton Abbey* to begin, we can whet our appetite for those bygone days of a more genteel way of life at our October meeting. As soon as the programs were announced in August, we started to receive reservation requests for October – from guests of FAW members! Roberta Gates and the Program Committee certainly know how to pack a room. Please be sure to get your reservations in early for Barbara Geiger's presentation of *Downton Abbey*.

Finally, Shirley Baugher's newly designed newsletter has been met with loud applause. Bravo Shirley on a job well done. You are a visionary and have left your mark on FAW.

All the best, Christine Bern, *President*

The Making of *Downton Abbey*: Setting the Scene

Roberta Gates, Program Chair



▲ Highclere Castle, aka *Downton Abbey*
◀ Barbara Geiger

Barbara Geiger from the Illinois Institute of Technology will join us on October 9 for a slide lecture on the Highclere Castle estate, which, as *Downton Abbey* fans know, is the real-life home of the Crawley family, whose ups and downs we've been following for last three seasons on PBS.

But Geiger, who will trace the beginnings of Highclere in her presentation, says that the aristocratic way of life it represents was already dwindling by 1912, which is the starting point for the series. Geiger will explain what she means by this and clarify some of the other things you may have wondered about. For instance, how did a handful of English families come to own so much property? And why did Robert's family need him to marry an heiress like Cora?

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Also, why aren't any of the three Crawley daughters able to inherit? In addition, Geiger will tell us about Capability Brown and the sumptuous landscaping he created for Highclere/Downton.

Geiger, a landscape historian who teaches in the College of Architecture at IIT, has given her *Downton Abbey* presentation to 60+ libraries and is also a popular tour leader in and around Chicago. In addition, she's written a book on the landscape-

gardener O.C. Simonds, who—believe it or not!—is connected to the history of *The Fortnightly*. Geiger explains: “Simonds is probably best known (when he is known at all!) for developing the east side of Graceland Cemetery. His mentor at Graceland was Bryan Lathrop, who of course had 120 East Bellevue [home of *The Fortnightly*] built in 1892. Simonds designed the original postage stamp-sized back yard in the 1890s.”

ANNOUNCEMENTS



Reservations for the October luncheon, October 9, 2013, are due no later than 6:00 p.m. on Sunday, October 6. To reserve please call only Pat Adelberg, 847-588-0911 or Lorraine Campione, 773-275-5118. The cost is \$40, payable by check to FAW in the front lobby. If you wish to sit with friends, please inform Pat or Lorraine. If you are reserving for a group, we ask that only one person make the group request to avoid confusion. If you make a reservation and find you cannot attend, you must cancel no later than 6:00 p.m. on the Sunday preceding the scheduled meeting. Reservations not cancelled must be paid for by the member. Guests coming especially for the *Downton Abbey* presentation on October 9 must also reserve in advance.

Juvenile Awards Committee Meeting

The Juvenile Awards Committee will meet on October 22. Members will be notified of the time and place by the Chair, Tanya Klasser.

Literary Awards Committee Meeting

Co-chair April Nauman has an-

October Luncheon

nounced that the Literary Awards Committee will meet on **October 16th**, from 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m., at the Fortnightly Club (120 East Bellevue Place, Chicago). This will be mostly an organizational meeting for members to get to know each other and discuss how to accomplish goals.

Attention All Sustaining Club Members

October's luncheon meeting celebrates the loyal support of FAW's Sustaining Clubs. Please join us as we pay tribute to all that you bring to us.

Honoring Our Past Presidents

In October, FAW also honors its past presidents for their dedication to the organization and for their appreciation of talented writers. Their leadership has strengthened the mission and continued success of the Friends of American Writers.

Patron's Fund Needs Your Support

As many of you know, the Patron's Fund is used to support our annual literary juvenile and adult awards. Last year, we were able to make two awards to winners in the Juvenile category; and three awards to winners in the adult category to promising new authors

with strong Midwest ties. Donors may designate which category they wish to support.



A REMARKABLE WOMAN

Lady Almina Carnarvon and the Real Downton Abbey

Shirley Baugher, *Editor*

MOST OF US are familiar with the story of the aristocratic Crawley family, residents of the fictional Downton Abbey, but many may not know the story behind the popular television series, the story of Lady Almina Carnarvon and her husband, the Fifth Earl of Carnarvon.

Lady Almina Carnarvon was born Almina Wombwell in 1876. Her mother, Marie Boyer, was French; her father, on paper, was Freddie Wombwell, a heavy drinker and reckless gambler, whom Marie married and left after he was caught stealing from her parents. Marie then entered into a relationship with Alfred de Rothschild, scion of a wealthy banking family. It is widely believed that Almina is Rothschild's illegitimate daughter. Rothschild, who called himself the child's "godfather", doted on Almina, lavished her with expensive gifts, and left her his fortune; but he never openly acknowledged her as his daughter.

Almina grew up to be a beautiful, vivacious, and very spoiled young woman. In 1894, when she was 19, Rothschild married her off to George Edward Stanhope Molyneux, the Fifth Earl of Carnarvon. The Earl, who owned thousands of acres and houses in London, Hampshire, Somerset, Nottinghamshire, and Derbyshire, was strapped for cash, having squandered his money on thoroughbred racehorses, fast cars (driving at speeds from 12 to 25 mph), and archeological expeditions. Rothschild let it be known that whoever married his "goddaughter" would receive a very generous dowry. Carnarvon jumped at the chance. He signed a legal agreement in which Rothschild agreed to pay 12,000 pounds annually (the equivalent of 6.5 million pounds in today's money) to Lady Carnarvon (or Lord Carnarvon if she died before him). It was a marriage of convenience. Carnarvon got Almina's considerable dowry, which enabled him to preserve the ancestral home and finance his hobbies. She got respectability and the opportunity to become chatelaine of Highclere Castle and the Earl's other properties. And Rothschild married his daughter into an old and reputable family.

◀ Almina Wombwell at age 19

The young bride quickly won over English high society with her wit, spirit, and fabulous wardrobe

(on one occasion, she wore a dress made entirely of white orchids with a priceless pearl and diamond necklace.) She entertained as extravagantly as she dressed. When the Prince of Wales visited Highclere, she commissioned a large bed to accommodate his girth, imported new furniture from France, hung red silk draperies in his rooms, bought Persian carpets and Chinese lamps, and hired extra carriages to transport the Prince's entourage. Nor did she spare any expense on the food. She brought in chefs and waiters from the Savoy in London to serve sumptuous dinners, one of which included consommé, a fish course of grilled turbot, pates and chicken dishes, roasts, game birds stuffed with foie gras, numerous vegetable dishes, and an orange soufflé dessert with several ices. Later, Almina served a light supper of cold meats and salads. The Prince retired well fed and in an excellent mood.

▼ Prince of Wales visits Highclere



Lady Carnarvon was a prominent figure at England's most prestigious events: the races, society balls, dinner parties, and court affairs. She attended at funeral of Queen Victoria and was invited to the coronation of Edward VII. The Carnarvons traveled frequently and fashionably—sometimes together, often separately.



◀ Lady Almina and the Fifth Earl of Carnarvon at Ascot

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Upstairs, Downstairs

Although Lady Almina presided over a staff of more than 90 people at Highclere, the staff really ran the house. Streatfield, the steward, did the household accounts, ordered provisions, was in charge of the wine cellars, and looked after the valuables kept in the great safe. Mr. Roberts, the footman, supervised the grooms and coachmen and presided at house parties. Mrs. Bridgland, the housekeeper, was in charge of the maids. Numerous servants swept carpets, plumped cushions, emptied ashtrays, carried hot water for baths, cooked, cleaned, did the laundry, polished the copper and silver, and wound the clocks. Gardeners cared for the lawns and gardens, groomsmen tended to the horses, dairy workers brought in milk and made cheeses, carpenters ran the sawmill, and a gamekeeper raised pheasants both for the table and for the shooting pleasure of the Lord and his friends. A separate staff attended to the children.

Poor Little Rich Children

The Carnarvons were not doting parents. Their two children, Evelyn and “Porchy”, were raised in a separate section of the house and cared for by others. That was not unusual in an age when children were supposed to be seen and not heard. The parents

visited their children at tea-time on Sundays. Almina’s son, the Sixth Earl of Carnarvon, recalled that these visits were awkward occasions. Neither parents nor children knew what to say to each other and both were relieved when the adults left.



▲ Lady Almina at her son’s crib

In 1910, Almina became a champion for the Tory Party when the Liberals attempted to reform the House of Lords. She spoke at village fetes and political meetings, saying that the Upper House did not need reforming. While not exactly an advocate for women’s rights in the sense of her Chicago counterparts, Bertha Palmer and Jane Addams, she did believe that women’s opinions mattered. “We never were, and we never shall be the weaker sex,” she said.

“We are neither inferior nor superior, only different. We shall do most good to our country if, instead of imitating men, we endeavor to widen and perhaps enrich the spirit of public life by being simply ourselves.”

The First World War changed life at Highclere forever. Men whose families had worked there for generations went off to fight for England. Many did not return. Lady Almina turned Highclere into a hospital for wounded officers. Using Rothschild’s money, she brought in the most expert medical staff and provided the best of everything a soldier could possibly need during his recovery: state-of-the-art equipment and surgical care, abundant fresh food, clean linens, and a library where the men could play cards or read. For her work, she was recognized as one of the most remarkable women in England.

In 1918, Alfred de Rothschild died, leaving Almina his huge fortune, including a house in Mayfair, and a priceless collection of art and furniture. She set about spending all of it. She invested over 50,000 pounds (10 million in today’s money) to

satisfy her husband’s passion for Egyptology. Her money financed the work of famed archaeologist Howard Carter. The investment paid off on November 6, 1922. Carter telegraphed Lord Carnarvon that they had discovered the magnificent tomb of Tutankhamun with seals intact in the Valley of Kings. Lord Carnarvon rushed to Egypt. On February 17, 1923, Carter entered the burial chamber to view its contents. “Did you find anything,” Carnarvon asked? “Wonderful things”, answered Carter.



◀ Top to bottom

Howard Carter & Lord Carnarvon at King Tut’s tomb

Howard Carter opens the coffin of Tutankhamun

The mask of Tutankhamun

On March 25, 1923, Lord Carnarvon was bitten by a mosquito. The bite became infected and resulted in blood poisoning. He died on April 5 in the Continental-Savoy Hotel in Cairo. Some attributed his death to “the Curse of Tutankhamun”, punishment for having disturbed the tomb.

The End of It All

Life was very good to Almina Carnarvon, and then, it wasn't. Eight months after the Earl's death, Almina made a disastrous marriage to Lieutenant Colonel Ian Onslow Dennistoun, whom she had met in Paris. When Dennistoun's ex-wife heard he had married the Rothschild heiress, she sued her husband for alimony that he couldn't pay at the time of their divorce, but promised to provide in the future when he had the money. Now she wanted her share. Almina considered this blackmail, and refused to pay. A long and scandalous court case followed, filled with accusations, counter-accusations, and revelations so sordid that King George V expressed his disgust that the case had been allowed to come to court. One journalist likened it to the conduct of dogs in the gutter. When it was over, Denistoun was dismissed from the Army reserve and Almina had lost 400,000 pounds, as well as her reputation.

Using the last of the Rothschild money, Almina opened a high-society nursing home, which she called Alfred House. She spared no expense in making the home the best of its kind. Unfortunately, she was not a businesswoman. She considered it bad taste to present her patients with a bill for their treatment.

Author Evelyn Waugh, the Carnarvon's nephew by marriage, wrote that the establishment became a place where society women could discreetly obtain illegal abortions. Eventually, it went bankrupt. Almina's fortune once amounting to over 50 million pounds was gone. Her last years were spent in obscurity and poverty. Unwelcome at Highclere, she moved to a terrace house in Bristol with no hot water, getting by on occasional handouts from her son. She died at the age of 93 after choking on a piece of chicken.

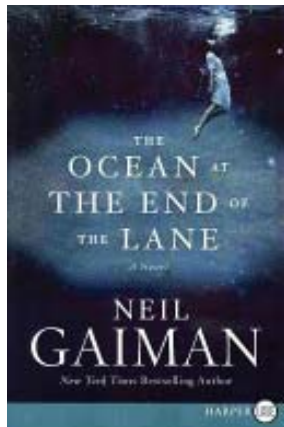
But we will sing no sad songs for Lady Almina Carnarvon. Her life had been the stuff that dreams are made on. She had wealth, glamour, fame, and privilege, and she loved every minute of it. If, as the song says, she had the chance to do it all again, she probably wouldn't have changed a thing.

For further reading: *Lady Almina and the Real Downton Abbey*, *The Countess of Carnarvon*; *The Life and Secrets of Almina Carnarvon*, William Cross

The Reading Corner

The Ocean at the End of the Lane, Neil Gaiman

A major new work from the creator of *Coraline*, the little girl who walked through walls and into another dimension. “*Ocean*” concerns a middle aged man who returns to his home in Sussex, England to attend a funeral; but ends up at the end of the road on the

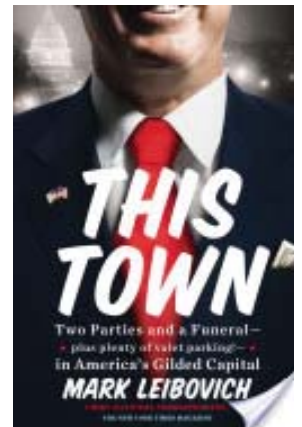


farm where he grew up. He is drawn back to a past that is strange, frightening, and dangerous. A man who had committed suicide in a stolen car on the road, unleashed an incomprehensible darkness. Into the darkness came Lettie, a magical girl who comforts the boy and promises to protect him—no matter what. Forty years later, she

must make good on that promise. One reader wrote, “...soaked in myth, memory, and saltwater, this book is so, so lovely it feels as if it was always there, somewhere in the story-stuff of the universe.”

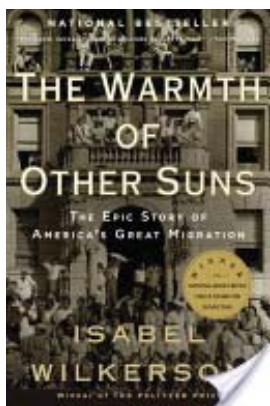
This Town, Mark Leibovich

A blistering, stunning, and often hilarious examination of our “ruling class’s incestuous media industrial complex.” Mark Leibovich, chief national correspondent of the *New York Times*, gives us a picture of Washington, “*This Town*” as the center of big politics, big money, big media, and big vanity in which are no



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Democrats and Republicans just millionaires. He shows how an administration bent on changing Washington can be sucked into its ways with the same ease as Tea Party insurgents who have settled in for the long haul. A good insight into the dynamics of Washington's movers and shakers.



***The Warmth of Other Suns,*
Isabel Wilkerson.**

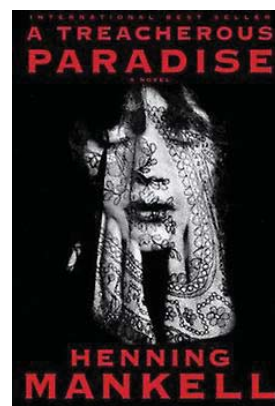
In this epic, beautifully written masterwork, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Isabel Wilkerson chronicles one of the great untold

stories of American history: the decades-long migration of black citizens who fled the South for northern and western cities, in search of a better life. From 1915 to 1970, this exodus of almost six million people changed the face of America. FAW member Tanya Klasser calls it one of the best books she has ever read.

***A Treacherous Paradise,*
Henning Mankell**

From the acclaimed international author of the Kurt Wallander crime novels comes the story of Hanna Renstrom, a young girl who leaves her poverty ridden home in northern Sweden, secures a position as a cook on a ship bound for Aus-

tralia, marries and is twice widowed, and improbably finds herself the owner of a black bordello in Portuguese East Africa. In this treacherous paradise, surrounded by colorful characters, including an ape named Oscar who thinks he is human and a piano tuner who comes daily to tune a piano



he never plays, Hanna struggles to deal with loneliness and racism. Her final action will surprise society, herself, and her readers.