

Davis Genealogy Book Club
Recommended reading
June 2025

April 24 @ 12:30 pm

DGC Book Club - **The Widow Spy** By Megan Campisi. 2024 Fiction

This is the 12th selected book for the DGC Book Club.

Suggested books from our DGC members

*new suggestions

*Cummins, Jeanine. *The Crooked Branch*. **Fiction**. 2013. After the birth of her daughter Emma, the usually resilient Majella finds herself feeling isolated and exhausted. Then, at her childhood home in Queens, Majella discovers the diary of her maternal ancestor Ginny—and is shocked to read a story of murder in her family history.

With the famine upon her, Ginny Doyle fled from Ireland to America, but not all of her family made it. What happened during those harrowing years, and why does Ginny call herself a killer? Is Majella genetically fated to be a bad mother, despite the fierce tenderness she feels for her baby? Determined to uncover the truth of her heritage and her own identity, Majella sets out to explore Ginny's past—and discovers surprising truths about her family and ultimately, herself.

Recommended by Mary Dobosz

*Franklin, Tom. *Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter*. **Fiction**. 2010. In the 1970s, Larry Ott and Silas 32 Jones were boyhood pals in a small town in rural Mississippi. Their worlds were as different as night and day: Larry was the child of lower-middle-class white parents, and Silas, the son of a poor, black single mother. But then Larry took a girl to a drive-in movie and she was never seen or heard from again. He never confessed . . . and was never charged. More than twenty years have passed. Larry lives a solitary, shunned existence, never able to rise above the whispers of suspicion. Silas has become the town constable. And now another girl has disappeared, forcing two men who once called each other friend to confront a past they've buried for decades. "A ripping good mystery, this novel also has depth and a subtle literary side, as the local area comes to life through the writer's cinematic descriptive phrases and a large and colorful cast of supporting characters. Highly recommended." — *Library Journal* (starred review)

Recommended by Mary Dobosz

Goodwin, Nathan Dylan. *The Forensic Genealogist Series. The Orange Lilies, The American Ground, The Spyglass File, The Missing Man, The Suffragette's Secret, The Wicked Trade, The Asylum, The Sterling Affair, The Foundlings, The Deserter's Tale*. **Fiction**

Recommended by Michael Bowling and Nancy Asmundson

Hill, Richard. *Finding Family: My search for roots and the secrets in my DNA*. **Nonfiction**. 2012 *Finding Family: My Search for Roots and the Secrets in My DNA* is the suspenseful account of an adoptee trying to reclaim the biological family denied him by sealed birth records. This fascinating quest, including the author's landmark use of DNA testing, takes readers on an exhilarating roller-coaster ride and concludes with a twist that rivals anything Hollywood has to offer.

Recommended by Mary Dobosz

Humes, Edward. *The Forever Witness: How DNA and Genealogy Solved a Cold Case Double Murder*. **Nonfiction**. 2022. “Thought-provoking true-crime thriller...the book raises urgent questions of balancing public and private good that we’ll likely be dealing with as long as the title implies.”—*Wall Street Journal* A relentless detective and a civilian genealogist solve a haunting cold case—and launch a crime-fighting revolution that tests the fragile line between justice and privacy.

Recommended by Lisa Henderson

Jerkis, Morgan. *Wandering in Strange Lands, A Daughter of the Great Migration Reclaims her Roots*. **Nonfiction**. 2022 Between 1916 and 1970, six million black Americans left their rural homes in the South for jobs in cities in the North, West, and Midwest in a movement known as The Great Migration. But while this event transformed the complexion of America and provided black people with new economic opportunities, it also disconnected them from their roots, their land, and their sense of identity, argues Morgan Jerkins. In this fascinating and deeply personal exploration, she recreates her ancestors' journeys across America, following the migratory routes they took from Georgia to Louisiana, Oklahoma and California.

Recommended by Suzanne Peterson

Jones, M.K. *Maze Investigation Series* (6 titles) *The Curiosity Club of St. Foy* series. (2 titles so far). **Fiction** M. K. Jones is a family history researcher, genealogist and author of the “Maze Investigations” series and “The Curiosity Club of St. Foy”

Recommended by Michael Bowling

Mason, Daniel. *North Woods: A Novel* **Fiction**. 2023. It begins with a pair of young lovers in colonial New England escaping wrathful judgment in their Puritan village. They flee to a house in the wilds of western Massachusetts. The rest of this impossible-to-summarize novel introduces us to inhabitants of that house over the ensuing three-plus centuries. North Woods is a hodgepodge narrative, brazenly disjointed in time, perspective and form. Letters, poems and song lyrics, diary entries, medical case notes, real-estate listings, vintage botanical illustrations, pages of an almanac, modern-day nature photographs, a true-crime detective story, and an address to a historical society.

Recommended by Suzanne Peterson

*Miles, Tiya. *All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack, a Black Family Keepsake*. **Nonfiction**. 2021. National Book Award winner - A renowned historian traces the life of a single object handed down through three generations of Black women to craft a “deeply layered and insightful” (The Washington Post) testament to people who are left out of the archives.

Recommended by Mary Dobosz

Parthasarathy, Raghuveer. *So Simple a Beginning: How Four Physical Principles Shape Our Living World*. **Nonfiction**. 2022

A biophysicist reveals the hidden unity behind nature’s breathtaking complexity - The form and function of a sprinting cheetah are quite unlike those of a rooted tree. A human being is very different from a bacterium or a zebra. The living world is a realm of dazzling variety, yet a shared set of physical principles shapes the forms and behaviors of every creature in it. So Simple a Beginning shows how the emerging new science of biophysics is transforming our understanding of life on Earth and enabling potentially lifesaving but controversial technologies such as gene editing, artificial organ growth, and ecosystem engineering.

Recommended by Cyndi Young

Raymond, Barbara Bisantz. *The Baby Thief: The Untold Story of Georgia Tann, the Baby Seller Who Corrupted Adoption*. **Nonfiction**. 2007

For almost three decades, renowned baby-seller Georgia Tann ran a children's home in Memphis, Tennessee selling her charges to wealthy clients nationwide, Joan Crawford among them. Part social history, part detective story, part expose, *The Baby Thief* is a riveting investigative narrative that explores themes that continue to reverberate today.

Recommended by Sue Torguson

Ross, Andrea. *Unnatural Selection: A Memoir of Adoption and Wilderness*. **Nonfiction**. 2021 (Andrea Ross is a local Davis author)

Adopted at birth, Andrea Ross grew up inhabiting two ecosystems: one was her tangible, adoptive family, the other her birth family, whose mysterious landscape was hidden from her. In this coming-of-age memoir, Ross narrates how in her early twenties, while working as a ranger in Grand Canyon National Park, she embarked on a journey to discover where she came from and, ultimately, who she was. After many missteps and dead ends, Ross uncovered her heartbreaking and inspiring origin story and began navigating the complicated turns of reuniting with her birth parents and their new families. Through backcountry travel in the American West, she also came to understand her place in the world, realizing that her true identity lay not in a choice between adopted or biological parents, but in an expansion of the concept of family.

Shorto, Russell *The Island at the Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan and the Forgotten Colony That Shaped America* **Nonfiction**. 2005.

Russell Shorto presents astonishing information on the founding of our nation and reveals in detail the crucial role of the Dutch in making America what it is today. In the late 1960s, an archivist in the New York State Library made an astounding discovery: 12,000 pages of centuries-old correspondence, court cases, legal contracts, and reports from a forgotten society: the Dutch colony centered on Manhattan, which predated the thirteen "original" American colonies. This is a different perspective of our nation's beginnings.

Recommended by Suzanne Peterson

Shorto, Russell. *Smalltime: a story of my family and the mob*. **Nonfiction**. 2021

Smalltime is an American immigrant story that travels back to Risorgimento Sicily, home of Antonino Sciutto, the author's great-grandfather, who leaves his wife and children in grinding poverty for a new life—and wife—in a Pennsylvania mining town. *Smalltime* draws an intimate portrait of a mobster and his wife, sudden riches, and the toll a lawless life takes on one family.

Recommended by Suzanne Peterson

The best genealogical mystery novels (shepherd.com). Mystery Book Series with Genealogy Theme cozy-mystery.com

Recommended by Nancy Asmundson

Books read by the Davis Genealogy Book Club

Hiding the Past, The Lost Ancestor by Nathan Dylan Goodwin-Fiction

The Pirate's Wife: The Remarkable True Story of Sarah Kidd by Daphne Palmer- Nonfiction

Inheritance: A memoir of genealogy, paternity, and love by Dani Shapiro-Nonfiction

Genealogy: a novel by Mae Wood-Fiction

The Lost Family: How DNA Testing is Upending Who We Are by Libby Copeland-Nonfiction

The Rosie Project: a novel by Samson, Graeme. Fiction

Secret Harvests: A Hidden Story of Separation and the Resilience of a Family Farm-Nonfiction

Three Times Removed by M.K. Jones Fiction

The Stranger in my Genes: A Memoir by Bill Griffeth -Nonfiction

The Orange Lilies by Nathan Dylan Goodwin-Fiction

The Foundling: The True Story of a Kidnapping, a Family Secret, and My Search for the Real Me by Paul Joseph
Fronczak and Alex Tresniowski-Nonfiction