

The American Civil War in Fiction: a Guide to Novels at Madison County Public Library

A good story can bring history to life. A novelist can flesh out the bare bones of facts, names, dates, and battles, infusing these with drama, suspense, pathos. An historical novel reminds us that history is made up of the stories of individuals in a particular time and place, who are dealing with specific circumstances, and it can transport its reader to that time and place, allowing him to experience events alongside the book's characters. Although historical fiction operates under less stringent academic safeguards as to accuracy, it can help a reader explore the events in a more holistic way. Good historical fiction can draw a reader in, create a passionate interest in a place and era where none existed before, and can be the beginning of a life-long hobby or even a career! The following are novels that have been cited as core Civil War fiction for public libraries.

The Black Flower: A Novel of the Civil War; The Year of Jubilo: A Novel; The Judas Field: A Novel of the Civil War by Howard Bahr. Bahr's award-winning novel ***The Black Flower*** (F/Bah in Richmond and Berea) deals with a romance that develops in the aftermath of the Battle of Franklin, Tennessee, the bloodiest battle of the war, between a wounded Confederate Rifleman and a compassionate nurse. Bahr creates a strong sense of place with his authentic dialogue and depictions of the devastation and uneasiness prevalent in the impoverished post-Civil War South.—(Sarah Johnson, Novelist.com) In ***The Year of Jubilo*** (F/Bah in Berea and Richmond,) a sweeping, lyrical tale set in the aftermath of the Civil War, Bahr depicts vanquished Southerners coming to terms with the ravages of war, while their Northern counterparts go about the grueling and often thankless task of making the country whole again.—(*Publishers Weekly* May, 2000) And in ***The Judas Field*** (F/Bah in Berea,) a dying widow travels with Cass, a veteran of Franklin, back to the battlefield to recover the bodies of her father and brother. As they travel, Cass's memories return, culminating as he walks over the scene of his army's disastrous defeat. ***The Judas Field*** won the 2007 Michael Shaara Award for Civil War fiction.—(*Publishers Weekly* May 8, 2006)

March (F/Bro in Berea and Richmond) by Geraldine Brooks. “Blending one great fictional tale into another, this 2006 Pulitzer Prize winner imagines the wartime experiences of Mr. March, the father of the four girls in Louisa May Alcott's classic "Little Women." In a review for the Monitor, book critic Ron Charles wrote that, "The great philosophical and military clashes of 19th-century America come excitingly alive in this carefully researched novel." (--*Christian Science Monitor*)

White Doves at Morning by James Lee Burke (LT/F/Bur in Berea, F/Bur in Berea and Richmond, Aud/F/Bur in Richmond) “Despite their misgivings about "the Cause," Willie Burke and his best friends, three young men from New Iberia, Louisiana, enlist in the Confederate Army and head off to war, in a novel drawn from the author's own family history.”—(Novelist.com)

Rebel by Bernard Cornwell (F/Cor in Berea and Richmond) “follows the adventures of Nathaniel Starbuck, the rebellious and discredited son of a famous Boston abolitionist preacher. Nate flees the North after helping a femme fatale steal money she claimed was hers, winding up in Richmond as Fort Sumter falls and the Civil War begins. Unable to return home, distrusted by Southerners because of his parentage, Nate is taken under the wing of the mercurial and megalomaniacal Washington Faulconer, obsessed with building an independent army, answerable only to him, to fight for the Confederacy. Spanning the period from Sumter's capitulation in April 1861 to the First Battle of Bull Run in July, the book is well paced and filled with historical details...” (--*Publishers Weekly*)

The Red Badge of Courage: An Episode of the American Civil War by Stephen Crane (F/Cra in Berea and Richmond; DVD/Red in Bookmobile). “Henry Fleming, a young Union soldier, struggles with his conflicting emotions about violence, death, and the nature of bravery in this ironic, skeptical account of the Civil War.”—(Novelist.com)

The March by E. L. Doctorow (F/Doc in Berea and Richmond) Winner of the 2006 PEN/Faulkner Award, the 2006 Michael Shaara Prize for Excellence in Civil War Fiction, and the 2005 National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction. Tells the story of Union General William Tecumseh Sherman's devastating march through Georgia and the Carolinas during the final years of the Civil War and its profound impact on the outcome of the war. --(Novelist.com)

The Unvanquished by William Faulkner (F/Fau in Berea) Set in Mississippi during the Civil War and Reconstruction, **The Unvanquished** focuses on the Sartoris family, who, with their code of personal responsibility and courage, stand for the best of the Old South's traditions.

The Draw: A Kentucky Civil War Story (K/F/For in Berea and Richmond) by Ed Ford. This story covers six critical days leading to and including the Battle of Richmond. It is written by a member and president of the Battle of Richmond (Kentucky) Association.

Cold Mountain by Charles Frazier (F/Fra in Berea and Richmond) “The Civil War's last months are the setting for this novel... Inman, a wounded Confederate soldier, leaves the hospital before his gashed neck heals enough to get him sent back to war. Still weak, he heads for the mountains, where a minister's daughter named Ada is his objective. Inman's return could hardly be timelier for the Charleston-raised Ada: her father has died, and she finds she knows little about operating a farm. Frazier blends the story of Inman's journey with that of Ada's efforts, with the help of a drifter named Ruby, to wring a subsistence living from the neglected land; in the background are the yelping dogs of war (most dramatically, gangs chasing Confederate deserters like Inman), as well as hints of changes the end of war will bring. ***Cold Mountain*** is based on a Frazier family story...
(-- Mary Carroll, *Booklist*)

On the Occasion of My Last Afternoon by Kaye Gibbons (F/Gib in Berea and Richmond) “Now 70 and near death, Emma Garnet Tate begins her account by recalling her youth living on a Virginia plantation in a highly dysfunctional family...At 17, Emma marries one of the Boston Lowells, a surgeon, and spends the war years laboring beside him in a Raleigh hospital. Through graphic scenes of the maimed and dying, Gibbons conveys the horror and futility of battle, expressing her heroine's abolitionist sympathies as Emma tends mangled bodies and damaged souls.” (--*Publishers Weekly*)

Gettysburg: A Novel by Newt Gingrich (F/Gin in Berea) “Historian and former speaker of the House of Representatives Gingrich and cowriter William Forstchen, a veteran author of historical fiction, present an alternative version of this famous and consequential battle; in their intriguing scenario, General Lee finds success in routing the Union army. The authors' thorough understanding of what *did* actually happen at that fateful confrontation obviously stands behind their imaginative revision; what went right for the Union army and wrong for the Confederate forces is believably switched here. How the real turn of events could have turned out otherwise is carefully offered in vivid battle descriptions and well-considered alternative strategies.” (--*Booklist*)

The Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All by Allan Gurganus (F/Gur in Berea,) “narrated by 95-year-old Lucy Marsden...tells of marriage at 15 to 50-year-old Civil War veteran "Captain" Marsden, who, permanently traumatized by events he witnessed when he and his best friend enlisted as teenagers, makes a lifetime career of reminiscing about the conflict and collecting weapons to memorialize it. Feisty, irreverent and with a caustic tongue,...Lucy distills the essence of the war, evokes the atmosphere of the small town of Falls, N.C.--interspersing social commentary about the South, its women and the institution of slavery--and draws the portrait of a singular marriage.”
(--*Publishers Weekly*)

Escape from Andersonville : A Novel of the Civil War by Gene Hackman (F/Hac in Richmond) “Southwest Georgia’s Andersonville, aka Fort Sumter, was as bad a Confederate POW stockade as the gut-wrenching descriptions here...attest. Union Capt. Nathan Parker, commanding the Michigan 5th (aka Parker’s Rangers, famed as a mounted infantry unit), is captured along with 23 of his men outside Washington, D.C., during Jubal Early’s July 1864 Confederate raid. Two months later, Nathan breaks out, vowing to return and save his soldiers. Between the violent clashes undertaken with his hired guns, Nathan copes by reciting Thoreau and fondly recalling his lover, Darien Crosby. He presses his noble if not reckless mission despite his raiders’ slippery loyalties, and the result is a rousing take on familiar territory.” (--*Publishers Weekly*)

Homeland by Barbara Hambly (F/Ham in Berea) Two women, one a Northerner with a husband fighting for the Confederacy, and one a Southerner yearning to attend art school in Philadelphia, exchange letters and find in their unlikely friendship the strength to survive the Civil War.

A Separate Country by Robert Hicks (F/Hic in Berea) and ***The Widow of the South*** by Robert Hicks (F/Hic in Berea and Richmond,) based on the true story of a Confederate woman who devoted herself to giving Southern soldiers a proper burial – in her own backyard.

All Other Nights by Dara Horn (F/Hor in Berea) “A Civil War spy page-turner meets an exploration of race and religion in 19th-century America in Horn’s novel, based on real historical figures. Jacob Rappaport, the 19-year-old scion of a wealthy Jewish import-export family, flees home and enlists in the Union army to avoid an arranged marriage. When his superiors discover his unique connections, he is sent on espionage missions that reveal an American Jewish population divided by the Mason-Dixon line, but united by business, religious and family ties. After being sent to assassinate his uncle in New Orleans on Passover, Jacob’s next assignment proves even more daunting: marry the feisty Confederate spy Eugenia Levy. What starts out as a dangerous game for both Jacob and Eugenia ends up being a genuine romance, fraught with the potential for peril, betrayal, tragedy and redemption.” (--*Publishers Weekly*)

Nowhere Else on Earth by Josephine Humphreys (F/Hum in Berea and Richmond) “Although not a single cannon is fired in Humphreys’s novel, the lives of the inhabitants of Scuffletown, a poor Indian settlement on the Lumbee River in North Carolina, are in every way affected by the Civil War. The demand for turpentine, their principal industry, has dwindled to nothing. When they are not fending off or involuntarily “supplying” Union soldiers and marauding gangs, they are hiding their sons from... hostile Confederates who are rounding up Scuffletown boys for forced labor in forts and salt works.” Told by heroine Rhoda Strong as a memoir, this novel focuses on her love of a marked man who tries to save the kidnapped boys of Scuffletown. (--Regina Marler)

Charleston by John Jakes (F/Jak in Berea) This novel is set during the American Revolution and continues through the Civil War. “Never one to gloss over details, the author manages to show the bleak horrors of slavery, war, and greed while also confirming the essential goodness of American ideals.” (--*Booklist*) Jakes has also written a number of historical novels concerning the War, including his Civil War trilogy: **North and South** (F/Jak in Richmond), **Love and War** (F/Jak in Berea), and **Heaven and Hell** (F/Jak in Berea). In **On Secret Service** (F/Jak in Berea and Richmond) Jakes writes about spies and conspirators living and working in Washington D.C. from 1861-1865. And Jakes’ **Savannah; Or, A Gift for Mr. Lincoln** (F/Jak in Berea and Richmond) “recounts the taking of Savannah by Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman’s Union Army during Christmas 1864. Fundamentally, it is the story of Sara Lester and her precocious 12-year-old daughter, Hattie, who has an aversion to General Sherman until she finds herself in need of his help.” (--*Library Journal*)

Enemy Women by Paulette Jiles (F/Jil in Berea and Richmond) “Set in the Missouri Ozarks during the Civil War, Jiles's story focuses on the trying times of 18-year-old heroine Adair Colley. When a group of renegade Union militiamen attacks the Colley home, stealing family possessions, burning everything down, and taking away her father...Adair gathers the remnants of her clothes and mounts a rescue effort. Unfortunately, she is falsely accused of being a Confederate spy, a charge that lands her in a squalid women's prison run by a decent commandant. After he helps her escape, the two agree to seek out one another after the war; their separate, harrowing journeys and the evolution of each character throughout make for breathtaking action and powerful writing. Each chapter of *Enemy Women* begins with excerpts from historical testimony about this terrible period in the Civil War, when marauding soldiers pillaged and murdered whole families and communities at will.” (--*Tom Keogh*)

Andersonville by MacKinlay Kantor (F/Kan in Berea) This 1956 Pulitzer Prize winning novel remains the gold-standard novel of Civil War prison atrocities. Man's inhumanity to Man -- and the redeeming flashes of mercy -- this is the theme at the heart of this grim record in fictional form of one of the blots on the nation's history.—(*Kirkus Reviews*)

Jacob's Ladder: A Story of Virginia During the War by Donald McCaig (F/McC in Berea). When a Works Project Administration writer interviews an old woman in 1934, he learns the secrets of a prominent Virginia family before and during the Civil War. Winner of the 1999 W. Y. Boyd Literary Award and the 1998 Michael Shaara Prize for Excellence in Civil War Fiction.

Landsman by Peter Charles Melman (F/Mel in Berea and Audio/F/Mel in Richmond) “A barely literate hard-bitten gambler and petty criminal, Elias Abrams, flees hometown New Orleans (and a bogus murder charge), joins the Confederate Army and realizes “every circumstance of his life now conspires to kill him.” He survives the infantry as he had the city—using his wiles, card skills and fists—until his colonel hands over an envelope containing a charming missive from Nora Bloom, a young New Orleans maiden

who wrote a support-the-troops letter at the urging of her rabbi. Unexpectedly stirred, Elias begins a correspondence and finds himself obsessively fantasizing about her. A battlefield injury leads to a furlough during which he returns to the city to meet both Nora (he falls in love) and cronies from his seedy past, who use his new flame as leverage to draw him into a sinister plot... There is certainly no shortage of Civil War fiction; this is one of the better offerings.” (--*Publishers Weekly*)

Gone With the Wind by Margaret Mitchell (BER/F/Mit in Berea and F/Mit in Richmond) This, and the movie based upon it, are the main source of information about the Civil War for many Americans, as well as for readers and viewers around the world. Told from a decidedly Southern point of view, it follows Scarlett O’Hara, a beautiful and willful southern belle, from the day before war is declared through the Reconstruction.

Walking to Gatlinburg by Howard Frank Mosher (F/Mos in Richmond) “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.” (--*Publishers Weekly*)

Stonewall's Gold by Robert J. Mrazek (Aud/F/Mra in Berea) Winner of the 1999 Michael Shaara Prize for Excellence in Civil War Fiction. “In the last winter of the Civil War, 15-year-old Jamie Lockhart kills a man who attempted to rape his mother, and finds in the dead man's tobacco pouch a small piece of cloth that looks like a crude map. Searching for clues about it, Jamie hears the words "Stonewall Jackson's gold" and is off on a far-fetched adventure-to seek the treasure buried behind enemy lines and take it to Richmond, VA, where his father is fighting with Robert E. Lee. Jamie is captured by a desperate band of men who, knowing he has knowledge of the gold's whereabouts, take him with them to search for it. The renegades take shelter at a large estate, killing its owner. The owner's daughter is determined to avenge her father's death and becomes Jamie's ally and friend, and together they plot to escape and find the gold on their own. Aided by a mysterious one-armed major, they ultimately find the gold. Only when they are on their way to Richmond with it does Jamie find that the major has another destination in mind. This is more than a fast-paced adventure story; it is also a tale of the horrors of war, and of the last days of the Confederacy.” (--*School Library Journal*)

My Name is Mary Sutter by Robin Oliveira (F/Oli in Berea) Winner of the 2011 Michael Shaara Prize for Excellence in Civil War Fiction. “Mary Sutter’s expert midwifery skills are renowned throughout Albany, New York, in 1861, yet she yearns for more. After local

physicians refuse to formally train her in medicine, and her hoped-for husband chooses her twin sister instead, she heads south to Washington, D.C., bringing only a valise and her single-minded ambition. Mary runs into prejudicial roadblocks even there but gains acceptance as a charwoman-turned-nurse at the Union Hotel hospital. While caring for wounded, disease-ridden soldiers under appalling conditions, she persistently ignores family pressures to return home. The viewpoint shifts between Mary, her family members, two doctors who come to love her, and real-life figures like Lincoln and Dorothea Dix, ensuring an intimate yet wide-ranging portrait of the chaos, ineptitude, and heartbreak of wartime.” (--*Booklist*)

Coal Black Horse by Robert Olmstead (F/Olm in Berea and Richmond) “At 14, Robey Childs is on the cusp of manhood when he sets off from the family farm at his mother's behest to find his soldier father and bring him home. A sympathetic farmer loans Robey an uncommonly beautiful and sturdy black horse. On the road, Robey passes carts carrying the maimed and dead, and bands of Native Americans and runaway slaves. A chain of horrific trials begins for Robey when a man dressed as a woman shoots him and steals the horse. He's taken prisoner as a suspected spy, witnesses a girl's rape and is caught up in a carnage-drenched raid. However, he survives the attack, is reunited with the stolen horse and sets out again, days later finding his father on the battlefield, mortally wounded. Robey can't save his father, but he can try to save the raped girl, Rachel, from further violence. His return home and his testimony to what he saw forms a powerful, redemptive narrative.” (--*Publishers Weekly*)

Antietam by James Reasoner (F/Rea in Berea) focuses on a Virginia family as Civil War hostilities advance, causing each family member to grapple with heart or conscience. “Frought with passion, tension, and tenderness, this enthralling family saga will appeal to fans of epic, well-researched historical fiction.” (--*Booklist*) One of Reasoner's several *Civil War Battles* series, of which the library also owns ***Manassas*** (Berea and Richmond), ***Shiloh***, ***Chancellorsville***, ***Vicksburg***, ***Gettysburg***, ***Chickamauga***, ***Shenandoah***, ***Savannah***, and ***Appomattox*** (all F/Rea in Berea).

A Small Still Voice (F/Ree in Berea) by John Reed “A passionate love story and a sweeping historical saga set against a vivid backdrop of the Civil War....The year is 1859 as seven-year-old Alma Flynt arrives in the Kentucky town of Cotterpin Creek to begin a new life. There, Alma meets the magnificent Cleveland family... From the beginning, one Cleveland draws all of Alma's attention: the youngest son, John Warren...But everything changes as war descends on Cotterpin Creek, taking John Warren to battle and sweeping his family into the chaos. Against this turbulent backdrop, Alma will come of age. And when the fighting is over, the story of a brave young man riding off to battle becomes a haunting journey of vengeance and redemption.” (--from the publisher)

Freedom by William Safire (F/Saf in Richmond) “The 20 months between Lincoln's suspension of habeas corpus and his signing of the Emancipation Proclamation were perhaps the most crucial period in American history, a time when a lasting definition of

American democracy was being forged by civil war. This enormous book is both an outstanding history of that critical time and a model historical novel. Over a hundred pages of notes testify to Safire's thorough research and present the carefully reasoned speculation justifying his imagining certain scenes. As a Civil War historian he is worthy of mention beside Bruce Catton or Shelby Foote. As a Civil War novelist, as the creator of a vividly compelling book, Safire is easily the equal of MacKinley Kantor, John Jakes, or Gore Vidal, and perhaps their superior. An impressive achievement, one of the very few truly significant Civil War novels." (--*Library Journal*)

Gods & Generals by Jeff Shaara (F/Sha in Berea) focuses on the lives of Stonewall Jackson, Winfield Scott Hancock, Joshua Chamberlain, and Robert E. Lee from 1858-1863, and explores how each was drawn into military command. His ***Last Full Measure*** by (F/Sha in Berea) follows the course of the war in Virginia from Lee's retreat from Gettysburg to his surrender.

The Killer Angels by Michael Shaara (BER/F/Sha in Berea and F/Sha in Richmond). This Pulitzer Prize-winning novel concerns the battle of Gettysburg and was the basis for the 1993 film ***Gettysburg*** (DVD/Get in Berea and Richmond). The events immediately before and during the battle are seen through the eyes of Confederate Generals Lee, Longstreet, and Armistead and Federal General Buford, Colonel Joshua L. Chamberlain, and a host of others. The author's ability to convey the thoughts of men in war as well as their confusion-the so-called "fog of battle"-is outstanding.—(*Library Journal*, Feb. 1, 1992)

The Annotated Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe, edited and with an introduction and notes by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Hollis Robbins ; photos selected by Karen C. C. Dalton and Noam Biale (F/Sto in Berea) "According to legend, Abraham Lincoln greeted Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1862 by saying "So you're the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war." Whether the story is true or not, the sentiment underscores the public connection between *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Civil War. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* contributed to the outbreak of war by personalizing the political and economic arguments about slavery. Stowe's informal, conversational writing style inspired people in a way that political speeches, tracts and newspapers accounts could not."—from the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center website:
<http://www.harrietbeecherstowecenter.org/utc/impact.shtml>

Canaan's Tongue by John Wray (F/Wra in Berea) "Genuine and imagined quotes from Mark Twain, narrative passages by assorted quixotic characters (including the occasional declaration from God), diary entries, letters, criminal inquisitions, etc., are brilliantly used by Wray to describe, and partially veil, the real-life atrocities of the infamous mid-19th-century preacher, horse thief and murderous schemer John Murrell, called the "Redeemer" by Twain in *Life on the Mississippi*. Set in 1863 and narrated chiefly by Virgil Ball, the right-hand man and eventual assassin of Thaddeus Morelle (Wray's fictional "Redeemer"), the novel details the final days of a curious handful of holdout cutthroats from Morelle's once much-larger band... As the novel opens, one of the group has been

found murdered, and the resulting inquiry unfolds by fits and starts amid an untidy sequence of flashbacks. The dark side of American history has always been best treated by the novel, and Wray does justice to some incredibly rich and challenging material”
(--*Publishers Weekly*)

The Amalgamation Polka by Stephen Wright (F/Wri in Berea) “Liberty Fish is born in 1844, and his liberal education is enhanced by his parents, and the oddball metaphysicians and charlatans with whom they surround themselves. When war breaks out, Liberty joins up, participates in a series of horrific battles, deserts and travels South to his mother's ancestral home, Redemption Hall. There, he finds his grandfather, Asa, practicing ghastly homicidal experiments with his slaves. As Union forces approach, Asa abandons his invalid wife and more or less kidnaps Liberty, and the two ship aboard a blockade runner, bound for Nassau... This book, rich in an appropriately fatuous, overblown period style, is the morbidly comic counterpoint to Doctorow's ***The March***.”
(--*Publishers Weekly*)

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