July 2014

A year of Oregon books

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Brian Booth, Portland lawyer and founder of Literary Arts and the Oregon Book Awards, compiled this list of his favorite “Oregon books” by Oregon writers. He is the editor of Wildmen, Wobblies & Whistlepunks: Stewart Holbrook’s Lowbrow Northwest (1992), chosen as one of 20 books on the “Essential Northwest Reading List” by Pacific Northwest Magazine.

**January**

*Honey in the Horn* (1935) by H. L. Davis

Set in rural Oregon in 1906 to 1908, this Northwest version of Huckleberry Finn was called the “best first novel written by an American,” by H. L. Mencken. It helped change the course of Northwest literature and won Davis the Pulitzer Prize for fiction.

**February**


A distinctive and powerful narrative of the Applegate family, from 1843 to the present, written by a fifth-generation descendant.

**March**

*Track* (1960) by Don Berry

The clash of two cultures when a former mountain man and two Clatsop Indians journey to the land of the Killamooks in 1848; written when he was 27, this is the first of Berry’s three acclaimed Oregon novels.

**April**

*Stepping Westward: The Long Search for Home in the Pacific Northwest* (1901) by Sallie Tisdale

A personal, opinionated and very readable view of the region’s history, people, geography and natural resources.

**May**


The Lopez stories describe the physical and spiritual relationship of a river with humans, herons, fish, animals and wilderness. Duncan’s epic of Oregon fly fishing was the first novel published by the Sierra Club. Moore’s essays originated on the rivers she hiked and floated. Cody’s book describes his solo canoe trip down the length of the Columbia River.

**June**


A collection by Oregon’s poet laureate and National Book Award winner whose work “in the American grain” used everyday language to probe relationships among the individual, the family and nature.

**July**


**August**

*Somedays a Great Nation* (1964) by Ken Kesey

This massive tale of the Stamper family and conflict in an Oregon coastal town is considered by many the greatest Northwest novel.

**September**

*Hole in the Sky* (1992) by William Kittredge

A memorable “New West” memoir of a ranching family and their land in Southeast Oregon.

**October**


Written when he was 81, this exuberant and colorful autobiography of a working man on the fringes of society between 1918 and 1934 won the Western States Book Award for creative nonfiction. For the ultimate contrast with Clyde Rice, read *A New Life* (1961) by Bernard Malamud, who drew upon his 12 years at Oregon State College for this delightful and humorous tale of transplanted New Yorker Seymour Levin’s “new life” in academia in a fictional Corvallis.

**November**

*Seaboard, Chronicles of Klatanand* (1991) or *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971) by Ursula Le Guin

Two very different books written by perhaps the most versatile living Oregon author. *Seaboard* examines the lives of residents in a beach community from the 1890s to the present; *Lathe* is the story of a Portlander whose dreams come true.

**December**

*Winds of Morning* (1952) by H. L. Davis

Not as well known as *Honey in the Horn*, this novel of the journey of an old horse herder and a young deputy sheriff in the mid-Columbia River country in 1926-1927 may be Davis’s best work.

**Bonus**

*Hickethroat 3* (1969) by David Sheitzman

This impressive 1960s novel involves loggers, a great forest fire and what happens when a bull elk is killed out of season; praised as “extraordinary and always deeply moving” by Thomas Pynchon.