



## MASSBOOKS OF THE YEAR/NONFICTION

*Recommended Reading from the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Massachusetts Book Awards*

*(Books Published in 2008)*

### **Must-Reads from the 9<sup>th</sup> MassBooks** *(alphabetical, by title)*

*The Exchange Artist: A Tale of High-Flying Speculation and America's First Banking Collapse* by Jane Kamensky.

(Viking/Penguin) The story of Andrew Dexter, Jr. and his attempt to build Boston's Exchange Coffee House; a fascinating and cautionary study of the birth of "speculative capitalism," complete with a pyramid scheme, questionable real estate investments, and the first bank failure.

*Furious Improvisation: How the WPA and a Cast of Thousands Made High Art Out of Desperate Times* by Susan Quinn.

(Bloomsbury USA) A look at the ways in which WPA, even during the depths of the Great Depression, embarked not only on (re)building the infrastructure of the US but also on significant creative programs, such as innovative projects involving the Federal Theatre Project.

*Maria Mitchell and the Sexing of Science: An Astronomer Among the American Romantics* by Renee Bergland. (Beacon) The fascinating but little-known life of Nantucket-born astronomer Maria Mitchell, who thrived within the intellectual, free-thinking New England culture of the early 19th century. A powerful reminder of the need to nurture science education and opportunities for all.

*The Paradise of All These Parts: A Natural History of Boston* by John Hanson Mitchell. (Beacon) An insightful look at the city of Boston, from its formation millions of years ago to modern-day urban ecology, engaging us with the geology, botany, biology, and geography that give Boston its unique sense of place, the 'paradise of all these parts' described by John Smith in 1614.

*Patriot Pirates: The Privateer War for Freedom and Fortune in the American Revolution* by Robert H. Patton (Pantheon Books) Makes the case that American independence was won at sea, where citizen sailors, or "patriot pirates," seriously undermined the Royal Navy and ensured American victory. Reads as a thriller and changes the way readers think of the American Revolutionary era.

*Snow Falling in Spring: Coming of Age in China During the Cultural Revolution* by Moying Li. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux) A moving memoir that begins with the Great Leap Forward when the author is four years old and ends at the end of the Cultural Revolution when she is permitted to travel to the US to study; a book about the values of family & education, particularly the refuge that reading offers.

*This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* by Drew Gilpin Faust. (Knopf) An account of America's deadliest conflict, showing, through contemporary letters, diaries and journals, that the carnage of the Civil War led to the creation of national cemeteries, days of remembrance, and new methods for accounting for the dead and caring for the wounded.

*Through An Uncommon Lens: The Life and Photography of F. Holland Day* by Patricia Fanning. (U Mass Press) An important biography, based on newly discovered archival sources, of often-overlooked Norwood, Massachusetts, native F. Holland Day, considered one of the world's most influential photographers at the turn of the twentieth century

*A Voyage Long and Strange: Rediscovering the New World* by Tony Horwitz. (Holt) An account of a journey along the same routes as the early explorers who roamed the New World in quest of gold, glory, converts, and eternal youth, telling the story of these brave and often crazed explorers while accomplishing at the same time a modern-day trek of discovery.

*White Heat: The Friendship of Emily Dickinson and Thomas Wentworth Higginson* by Brenda Wineapple. (Knopf) New insights into the personality and character of one of Massachusetts' most reclusive poets, revealing yet another side of Emily Dickinson through her friendship and correspondence with Thomas Wentworth Higginson.

Director's Note: Don't miss *The Suicide Index* by Joan Wickerham & *The Summer of Hummingbirds* by Christopher Benfey.

Judges for the 9<sup>th</sup> MassBooks in Nonfiction: Betsy Clarke, Boston Public Library; Mary Rose Quinn, North Andover Public Library/Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners; John D. Warner, Massachusetts Archives.

The Massachusetts Book Awards are a program of the Massachusetts Center for the Book, on the web at [www.massbook.org](http://www.massbook.org).