

INDEPENDENT *Perspectives*

Editorials

North Adams Planners Unite!

By Alex Brooks

Many things seem to be coming together for a major transformation of the North Adams downtown. In March, MassMoCA, already the largest museum of contemporary art in the world, announced the start of its third and final phase of renovating the old Sprague campus, a \$55 million expansion that will double the size of its exhibition space. A \$6 million public/private partnership plan to reinvent the Western Gateway Heritage Park and re-connect it to MassMoCA and Main Street seems nearly ready to move forward, under the new name of Greylock Market. Plans to have a scenic excursion train running into a terminus near the Greylock Market, and to connect the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail to a terminus in the same area, as well as the possibility of rebuilding the flood control chutes in that area to reconnect to the South Branch of the Hoosic River as envisioned in plans drawn up by the Hoosic River Revival, all enhance the possibilities of the area and draw more visitors.

If planners for MassMoCA, Greylock Market, the Berkshire Scenic Railway, The Ashuwillticook Trail, the Hoosic River Revival and the City can all work together well on this, the area has the makings of a world-class small city.

3 Books on American Presidents for July 4th

By Susan Dunn

"In confidence, I can assure you," wrote George Washington to a friend on the eve of his inauguration in 1789 as the first president of the new republic, "that my movements to the chair of government will be accompanied by feelings not unlike those of a culprit who is going to the place of his execution." Washington knew well that he was about to enter, as he wrote, an "ocean of difficulties." Still, in his inaugural address he expressed his optimistic belief that the new government, the product of reflection, deliberation, and choice, would further the freedom and happiness of the American people. I recommend three outstanding and lively books that explore key periods in the evolution of the American presidency.

1. Joseph Ellis's Pulitzer Prize-winning and deeply perceptive **Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation** takes us back to the critical first decade of the American constitutional experiment. Ellis focuses not on wise, serene, and boring founding fathers, but rather on brilliant, passionate, unruly, and sometimes violent brothers -- Washington, Hamilton, Adams, Madison, Jefferson. On the one hand, they collaborated in shaping the principles, values, and

path of the new nation, the most successful experiment in republican government that history has ever known. But they also collided in unexpected ways. The book begins dramatically with a chapter about the 49-year-old Alexander Hamilton's death in the famous duel with Aaron Burr -- and on the psychology behind that self-destructive, hopeless act. Another fascinating chapter examines the wrenching problem of slavery -- and is significantly entitled "The Silence." A master of the English language, Ellis describes Madison's ambivalence about abolition as "enlightened obfuscation." In this book, the brothers' personalities, ideas, and debates all come alive.

2. During his transformational presidency, Franklin D. Roosevelt led the United States through the mortal crises of the Great Depression and World War II. Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award-winning historian James MacGregor Burns's luminous book, **Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox** (available as an e-book), explores FDR's early life, his devastating bout with polio, his skillful race for the White House against the dazed Herbert Hoover, the excitement of the experimental programs of his "First Hundred Days,"

and the thorny problems that overshadowed his second term -- from his confrontation with a conservative Supreme Court to his failed attempt to purge conservatives from his own party. The president whose New Deal reinvented American government for the modern age was a talented and wily politician who, Burns argues, had learned from Machiavelli that a leader must act at times with great valor and at times with great prudence -- that leaders must be something of a lion and something of a fox.

3. David Gergen has the unusual distinction of having worked in the White House under four presidents -- Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton. Gergen was still a kid, fresh out of college, law school, and the Navy, when he joined Nixon's staff in early 1971. His book **Eyewitness to Power** gives us startling access into the private domain of the Oval Office. He shares with us his keen insights into Nixon's rogue administration, Ford's efforts to restore honor to the White House, Reagan's immensely appealing "aw shucks" temperament, Clinton's impressive intellect offset by his ethical lapses. As a student and teacher of leadership, Gergen memorably analyzes for us the character, goals, skills, enduring accomplishments, and dismal failures of several of the best known presidents of the second half of the twentieth century.

Who will our national leaders be in the decades ahead? Let us hope for men and women who have the brilliance of mind and the generosity of heart of a George Washington and a Franklin Roosevelt -- people who will be able to articulate and respond confidently and effectively to the needs and hopes of all Americans, making our democracy ever more inclusive, safe, and prosperous.

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Susan Dunn teaches at Williams College and is the author of *1940: FDR, Willkie, Lindbergh, Hitler -- the Election amid the Storm*. She is also the editor of *Something That Will Surprise the World: The Essential Writings of the Founding Fathers*.

The Contours of the Land



Illustration by Karen Zasloff

By Tela Zasloff

There is a certain view in our town that stops traffic at all seasons. Driving south on Route 7, as you cross a ridge and start to descend toward Five Corners, the trees edging the road on your left suddenly open on a short downward sweep to a valley, across the river winding along the bottom, to wide pasture that climbs to a line of wooded mountain peaks slanting eastward, near to far, to the highest in Massachusetts, Mount Greylock. One local historian didn't restrain himself about this particular cluster of mountains and valleys: "Nowhere east of the Rockies or north of the Great Smokies is there a gorge so awful in its geometric majesty and so feminine in its mists and shades, colors and moods." But what exactly is there about this view that is so captivating?

Ever since the first landscape architects attempted to redesign nature to human scale, they worked with a concept of the beautiful that probably has as many varieties as there are aesthetic eras in human history. Jane Austen, for example, participated in a landscape design issue debated in early nineteenth century England--the classical side promoting the highly formal and symmetrical and the romantics trying to reproduce the rough nonsymmetry of wildness. Austen finds both styles too artificial and so praises the Pemberley view for the ease with which the estate both sits within and enhances its natural setting.

It is probably this same particular combination of natural beauty enhanced by its human scale that appeals to those who stop their cars on Route 7 south. We look down over the domesticated--over orchards and cultivated fields--across pastures of grazing cattle and horses, to mountains that all look climbable and promise further sweeping views. Wooden buildings on the near side of the river remind us that this is a working farm, but the sweep is still clean to the distance. And the approach is dramatic: it opens suddenly from behind trees, with an arrangement of wooded hills, pastures, cultivated fields, river and mountains that, in one large image, expresses the whole of New England.

But its pleasing design does not fully explain why I like to look at this view. I also see huge, hulking animals in those hills. They are all watching down over the valley, some reclining, some standing, not unlike the cattle dwarfed below them. These giants absorb the moods of the seasons: benevolent and drowsy in the summer, intense then brooding in the fall, reclusive in the flat gray-whiteness of winter, and then coming back in the spring, showing again their rounded, anatomical shapes.

There is a popular story that when Herman Melville was sitting at his desk in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, he would gaze out the window on Mount Greylock, and that its size and shape inspired him to write a long book about a great white whale. Perhaps only children can believe this story, but I understand how it might have happened.

Heroin Comes To The Northern Berkshires

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Cozzaglio recognizes that, while his police force is doing its best to stop heroin use and distribution on the street, this is only part of the solution. Heroin use and addiction has become a huge public health problem, damaging not only the physical health of users but the well-being of the whole community. "We need to work with treatment centers, social service agencies, substance abuse counselors, clinics, and family support groups. The majority of the people we're dealing with are struggling -- unemployed, living off government resources, on disability. I would say 98% of our population is good and honest, but the other 2%, maybe 300 people, have been drawn by heroin addiction into behavior that threatens families and the workforce. Their addiction destroys their overall moral values and leads them to a life of crime."

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