



HCC&M Readers 2025

Feb 25 – The Demon of Unrest by Eric Larson

On November 6, 1860, when Abraham Lincoln became the victor in a tight race for president, the country was bitterly at odds. Southern extremists were moving ever closer to destroying the Union and Lincoln was powerless to stop them. Drawing on diaries, secret communiques, slave ledgers and plantation records, best-selling author Erik Larson offers a gripping account of five chaotic months between the election and the Confederacy's shelling of Fort Sumter, as Lincoln tries desperately to avert a war that appears inevitable.

May 13 – Thomas Jefferson and the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom by Michael Aubrecht

Prior to his death, Thomas Jefferson left behind specific instructions for the obelisk monument that was to mark his grave. With all his contributions to the nation, he chose particularly to note his authorship of a state law. Jefferson crafted his statute for religious freedom neither in Philadelphia nor any other of the busy cities of the day, but rather while staying in the small town of Fredericksburg on the Rappahannock. Local historian Michael Aubrecht tells the tale of this remarkable document and the influence it continues to have.

July 15 – The Last Founding Father: James Monroe and a Nation's Call to Greatness by Harlow Giles Unger

In this compelling biography, Unger reveals the epic story of James Monroe (1758-1831) – the last of America's Founding Fathers – who transformed a small and fragile nation beset by enemies into a powerful empire stretching 'from sea to shining sea.' This is both a superb read and stellar scholarship that rescues Monroe from undeserved obscurity and gives us a host of new insights into the first 50 years of our nation's tumultuous history.

Sept 9 – Courting India: Seventeenth-Century England, Mughal India, and the Origins of Empire by Nandini Das

Traditional interpretations of the British Empire's emerging success and expansion have long overshadowed the deep uncertainty that marked its initial entanglement with India. In 1616, when Thomas Roe, James I's first ambassador to the Mughal Empire arrived in India, the English barely had a toehold in the subcontinent. This story of Roe's four years in India is a tale of palace intrigue, scandal, lotteries and wagers that unfold as global trade begins to stretch from Russia to Virginia, from West Africa to the Spice Islands of Indonesia. Acclaimed historian, Nandini Das has written a groundbreaking account of one of the most important encounters in the history of colonialism.

Nov 20 – Founding Spirits: George Washington and the Beginnings of the American Whiskey Industry by Dennis J. Pogue

George Washington: first in war, first in peace ... and first in whiskey? Washington's largely unknown and unexamined role as the entrepreneurial owner of one of the largest whiskey distilleries in 18th century America forms the core of this detailed study of the origins of the American whiskey industry. Using a rich body of personal papers and documentary evidence from Mount Vernon plantation, Pogue highlights the development of American whiskey production and the economic and social role consuming alcoholic beverages played in colonial society. *We'll toast to that!*