



## Historic Christ Church & Museum Readers

### 2020 Book Selections & Schedule

**May 12, 2020**     **Thomas Jefferson's Education by Alan Taylor** – (2019), 448 pp., 23 illustrations

From Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Alan Taylor comes a brilliant, absorbing study of Thomas Jefferson's campaign to save Virginia through education. By turns entertaining and tragic, this beautifully written history reveals the origins of a great university in the dilemmas of Virginia slavery. It offers an incisive portrait of Jefferson set against a social fabric of planters in decline, enslaved black families torn apart by sales, and a hair-trigger code of male honor. Jefferson's intention was a university to educate the sons of Virginia's wealthy planters, lawyers, and merchants, who might then democratize the state and in time rid it of slavery. But the university's students, having absorbed the traditional vices of the Virginia gentry, preferred to practice and defend them. Opening in 1825, the university nearly collapsed as unruly students abused one another, the enslaved servants, and the faculty.

**July 14, 2020**     **Powhatan Lords of Life and Death by Margaret Williamson Huber** – (2008), 344 pp.

A richly textured portrait of the famous Native leader Powhatan and his realm emerges in this revisionist study. For decades the English colonists at and around Jamestown lived in the shadow of a powerful confederation of Native American communities led by Powhatan. That realm encompassed the Tidewater area of Virginia from the James to the Potomac rivers. An incisive perspective and an impressive reinterpretation of available records by anthropologist Huber provides a more complex and culturally appropriate view of the realm of Powhatan during the crucial early decades of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Alternative conceptions of power and cosmology are set forth that force reconsideration of important components of Powhatan society including the basis of leadership, the relationship between political leaders and religious specialists, the role of ritual, and the resonance of Powhatan beliefs with those of other southeastern Native peoples.

**Sept. 22, 2020 \***     **The Water Dancer by Ta-Nehisi Coates** – (2019), 416 pp.

Coates is best known as a writer of nonfiction, including *Between the World and Me* and *We Were Eight Years in Power*, but with a new novel and his work on the Black Panther comic series, he is straying into speculative fiction. Coates' protagonist, Hiram Walker, can remember everything — faces, stories, facts — with photographic recall. But there is one exception: his mother, who was sold south when Hiram was 9 years old by his father, the owner of a fading Virginia plantation called Lockless. One day, when Hiram is driving across a bridge, he has a sudden vision of his mother dancing. Before he understands what is happening, the carriage is in the water. His brother drowns, but he is transported to safety. Hiram learns that he has a power called conduction, and on contact with water, Hiram can use it to transport himself and other people across great distances, but to do it, he needs to access a powerful source of feeling and to remember his mother.

The most moving part of *The Water Dancer* is the possibility it offers of an alternate history. In epigraphs between chapters, Coates quotes poems and writings about people who were captured and drowned in the middle passage. The book's most poignant and painful gift is the temporary fantasy that all the people who leaped off slave ships and into the Atlantic were not drowning themselves in terror and anguish, but going home.

**Nov. 17, 2020**     **Damned Souls in a Tobacco Colony: Religion in Seventeenth-Century Virginia by Edward L. Bond** – (2001), 344 pp.

In this well-written study, historian Edward L. Bond provides an inside view of religion in America's first colony. He clarifies our understandings of Virginia's established Anglican Church, discusses the theology and devotional practices of the colonists, and explains the role of religion in colonial polity. Such an approach allows the reader to see clearly both the conservative and progressive elements in the way the earliest colonists in Virginia defined their individual and corporate relationship with God. Throughout Bond's fascinating analysis, he shows that by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Virginians, though viewing themselves as Anglicans, nonetheless gradually discovered that they were defending an ecclesiastical institution much different from the one they left behind in England.

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**Meetings: Research Library in the Carter Center at 9:30 a.m.\***

**Free & Open to the Public**

**\* Note - September 22 meeting is in the Bayne Event Center**

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