

"Librarian's Shelf" by Melodee Pedersen

Library Friends Host Community Book Discussion

April 25th at 2:00 will be the next event in the "pre-Chautauqua" series. The book "All the King's Men" by Robert Penn Warren will be discussed in the library auditorium. Moderating the discussion will be Fred Krebs, who will impersonate Huey Long during the Chautauqua in June.

The novel "All the King's Men" is said by many to be loosely based on the life of Huey Long, a former flamboyant governor of Louisiana. Certainly the author, Robert Penn Warren, was in a good position to observe Long in action. Mr. Warren was the Assistant Professor of English at Louisiana State University during the height of Huey Long's power. Subsequently he was a professor at the University of Minnesota and finally at Yale University. His impressive body of work includes fiction, poetry, textbooks, essays and history. Among his many awards, he has the distinction of being the only writer to win the Pulitzer Prize for both poetry and fiction. He was also awarded the Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian award given in America.

Huey Long was governor of Louisiana from 1928-1932 and a U. S. Senator from 1932 until his assassination in 1935. His politics have been called radically populist. He was responsible for major infrastructure improvements, creating much needed jobs during the Depression. He was a strong advocate for the public school system and adversary to large corporations, such as Standard Oil. However, his tactics were less than admirable, in fact, he often resulted to blackmail or bullying. "I used to try to get things done by saying 'please'," said Long. "Now...I dynamite 'em out of my path."

Huey Long and Willie Stark share some significant parallels. Like Huey Long, Willie Stark is an uneducated farm boy who passed the state bar exam; like Huey Long, he rises to political power in his state by instituting liberal reform designed to help the state's poor farmers. And like Huey Long, Willie is assassinated at the peak of his power by a doctor.

However, Willie Stark's right-hand man, Jack Burden, is completely a figure from Robert Penn Warren's imagination. Jack comes from a genteel background, in contrast to Willie's dirt farmer roots. Some may say Jack is the actual "hero" of the piece, as he is the narrator and ultimately the novel's main journey traces Jack's shift in attitude from rejection of personal responsibility to acceptance that all history is interwoven, just as his story is interwoven with Willie's.

Please join us on April 25th to discuss this thought-provoking, many-layered novel. This discussion is sponsored by the Friends of the Columbus Public Library and the Nebraska Humanities Council.

The Friends of the Columbus Public Library are also co-sponsoring a travelogue on Denmark on May 2nd at 2:00 p.m. at the Platte County Historical Society Museum. Jean Jaspersen-Naegele, who fascinated us a year ago with a travelogue on portions of Central Asia, has returned to share her pictures and recollections from 6 different trips to Denmark. Mrs. Jaspersen-Naegele has also spent time tracing her Danish roots, and will share tips for fellow genealogists.