BIBLIOPHILES Meeting #26

A hearty band of book lovers met on September 10th at SPEZIA, an elegant restaurant alternative, after the Venice Inn closed its doors for the last time. It looks like there will be greater competition for space at this locale, however. I was unable to reserve the same private room for the first Wednesday of November as planned. So I had to change the next meeting date to Wednesday, November 12 at 11:30 a.m. I apologize for this surprise change of timing.

RIVER CITY EMPIRE: Tom Dennison’s Omaha, by Orville D. Menard. Our discussion of this book was enhanced by the presence of Mrs. Darlene Menard. She soldiered along with her husband for the ten years it took conduct the extensive interviews and research required to write this graphic history of Omaha boss leadership in the first half of the twentieth century. She revealed that Orv had begun his project focused on Mayor Jim Dahlman, but his discovery of the central importance of the unelected Boss Tom Dennison, caused him to switch the main protagonist of his study. Records of all the many interviews conducted by Prof. Menard are available for examination in UNO’s Criss Library.

The nature of Omaha government during the first thirty years of the twentieth century was dominated by machine politics led by Boss Dennison. His powerful underworld network, had alliances with politicians and businessmen to achieve secret deals, payoffs, fraudulent schemes, political control and contract kickbacks. The machine was cobbled together over a period of time and became difficult to expose or dislodge, because so many stakeholders reaped material and psychological benefits from its operations. People and public authorities “looked the other way”, because the machine was efficient, got things done and kept the excesses quiet. In Omaha and other boss-controlled cities, things seemed to run smoothly. It’s interesting to speculate
what might have happened to Omaha and other cities without the political control that the bosses effectively provided. Dennison was finally brought down by publicity surrounding a gangland style shooting in which he was implicated.

Our second book, I AM MALALA, impressed many of our readers. It was considered an impressive and reliable testimony to the disruption of life in a “peaceful valley” in Afghanistan when the Taliban usurped power from the constituted authorities. Malala’s father demonstrated extraordinary courage in keeping his school for young girls operational despite harassment and intimidation by the intruders. Terry Haney had done some research on The Malala fund (http://www.malala.org/), which contributes financial support to the education of young women, both in Afghanistan, Pakistan and African countries. He found that only 9% of the money collected is used for administration and fund raising and the rest goes to educate young women. Both he and Bob advocated donations to the fund through the intermediary of the Omaha Community Foundation. The ODF conducts due diligence examinations and handles various processes necessary for verification and funds transfer.

Our next “great read” chosen after some discussion of alternatives was THE ALCHEMIST by Paulo Coelho. Discounted paperback copies are available at The Book Worm in Countryside Village.

I look forward to seeing you all once again at SPEZIA (3125 South 72nd St.) on Wednesday, November 12 at 11:30 a.m.

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