



Vol. 2, No. 13, March 27, 2020

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From the Editor

Hello all!

Our world is different than it was a month ago – even a week ago. If we would have been writing about these current days last year, it would have been Sci-Fi, a far cry from our beloved historical fiction. But now, the days we’re experiencing seem to match some of the historical tales we enjoyed merely reading about - World War 1 and the flu epidemic of 1918-1919, days when a nation was devastated by tuberculosis or polio...The Plague.



Yes, the days are different. Most of us are under Stay at Home orders. Limited outside excursions, for necessities only. No social interactions. But yet, there is so much to still be thankful for. (Excepting those who are involved with the catastrophic effects of the virus and to those I send my heartfelt wishes. The story is different for you, I know. I can't begin to imagine what you're going through.)

For those who are home, with unexpected time available, we're continuing the newsletter. We will still be learning, reading, and growing – and continuing to enjoy the world of historical fiction.

Sending you all thoughts of wellness and strength during these tumultuous times.

Trisha

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Getting the Details Right

One of the difficulties in writing historical fiction is getting the details right. Not simply ‘right’ as in accurate, but right as in the amount of detail that you include in your manuscript also.

This is always the challenge. It’s like walking a balance beam between two points. We need to include enough details to bring a sense of the setting and the time into the story. We need enough to make the reader feel that they’re seeing the story unfold before their eyes. We need to make the story authentic and believable.

But we also don’t need to include so much detail that it’s as if we’re writing a non-fictional narrative about the time, including every piece of information that we’ve learned in our marvelous foray into the researching rabbit hole.

Juggling between these two is where the art of historical fiction lies.

I can’t claim to be an expert on this. I’m learning more. Day by day. Week by week. Year by year. But I am far from the ultimate source of knowledge. Probably twenty years from now I’ll still be in a learning curve.

To explain better, here are some words from Elizabeth Crook that sums up the predicament perfectly. They’re from her article, [Seven Rules for Writing Historical Fiction](#).

Rule #2: Dump the Ballast.

In order to write authentic historical fiction you must know a period of time well enough to disappear daily through a wormhole to the past and arrive at the location of your story. There you must understand the customs and use the manners perfectly enough to be accepted by people walking the streets (if there are streets) and to dress yourself, and make a living. This said, the major trick of writing good historical fiction is not in compiling research or knowing the details, but in knowing the details to leave out. Try to avoid overwriting. Keep perspective on what will interest the reader. Historical fiction writers tend to be overly conscientious and excited by minutia: if you succumb to excess, and put in too much detail, then go back later and take some of it out. Think of your novel as a boat that is about to sink from having too much weight on board: some of the loved items will have to go. Toss them over with impunity! Throw them out! If a rare, surprising statistic, or a moving anecdote, or an obscure reference you saw to an interesting thing that happened in the county adjacent to the one where your story takes place, does not advance your plot or provide your reader with important information about your characters, then it is irrelevant to your story and must go overboard.

Keep in mind that the care, and time, it took to assemble all that you have just thrown out has not been wasted. It was necessary to gather these facts and assess their worth in order to know which ones to save.

One step at a time. One rule at a time. One lesson at a time. Coupled with practice, practice, practice – write, write, write. And we get better with each paragraph, with each page. Our stories become more polished. The details we include become so seamlessly interwoven into our tales and our readers beg us for more. Then...we’ll know we’ve gotten the details right.

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Author Spotlight – Anne Louise Bannon

Today Anne Louise Bannon joins us to talk about her books, *Death of the Zanjero* and *Death of the City Marshal*. When I saw that she'd written these books, set in the early days of Los Angeles, I was excited. I was born and grew up about thirty miles inland from LA. So, while I'm not that familiar with the city directly, it seems like it was just a stone's throw away from home. I was excited when she agreed to come chat with us.

For this interview, we chatted with her about her books set in old-time Los Angeles. She also has another series out, set in the 1920s. Her Freddie & Kathy series has four books: *Fascinating Rhythm*, *Bring into Bondage*, *The Last Witnesses*, and *Blood Red*. You can find all of her books [here on Amazon](#).



Welcome Anne Louise! We're excited to have you as our guest today and to hear about your historical fiction books. You have two books that are set in 1870 Old Los Angeles - *Death of the Zanjero* and *Death of the City Marshal*. What drew you to set this series in this time period of Los Angeles' early days?

It was my husband's fault. My husband, Michael Holland, is the archivist for the City of Los Angeles. He was giving a lecture on the Zanja system, which was how the town was irrigated from shortly after 1781 until around 1911. Zanja is Spanish for ditch, and the residents dug ditches off what is now known as the Los Angeles River, mostly from the Zanja Madre, or Mother Ditch. So, Michael was explaining how you'd pay for your water subscription, then the Zanjero (or water overseer) would come out and open the sluice gate to your personal zanja, and the water would rush in—Um. I write murder mysteries, so no surprise, I'm thinking what a great time for a body to pop up. Then Maddie Wilcox, my main character started talking to me. I did consciously choose 1870 as my starting point, mostly because I don't have the background to write about the Mexican era effectively and also because I wanted to avoid the Civil War.

What were some of the research methods you utilized to find the background you needed for these books?

I'm a big fan of primary sources. I looked at newspapers from the era. Michael pulled all sorts of city council minutes out for me to look at. The history librarians at the L.A. Public Library were enormously helpful. I also read a lot of Louisa May Alcott. Maddie has a similar background and that really helped me hear Maddie's voice.

Do you have a favorite era to write in? What do you enjoy most about that era?

I guess I'd have to say whatever era I'm writing about. I never really thought I'd enjoy writing about the 19th Century. As eras go, it didn't particularly appeal to me. But I've really come to love it. I did something not too long ago set when Athens was at its height, and really enjoyed looking at that time. I figure whatever comes along will always be of some interest.

Tell us about one of your favorite characters from one of your books.

Because both *Death of the Zanjero* and the sequel, *Death of the City Marshal*, are told in Maddie's voice, I'd have to call her my fave. She's writing her memoirs as an old woman in the 1920s. She comes from Boston society stock, although her mother was a Transcendentalist and quite possibly a Quaker. She was forced into marriage after graduating from medical school because her father was ashamed of her and dragged out to Los Angeles by her husband, who bought their vineyards then died. So, on one hand, she really hates being out in this desolate place, and on the other, she realizes that she is able to be who she really is in a way that she wouldn't be able to in her native Boston.

What challenges have you found with writing historical fiction?

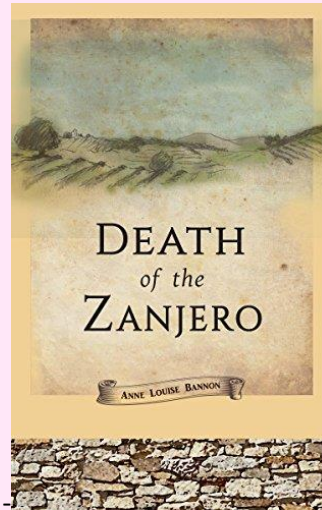
Avoiding anachronisms in dialog. That one is tough, especially for me since I tend to "hear" the characters speak rather than simply look at the text. It can also be tough to find out weird little details about daily life because people didn't really write about them. We had a horrible time figuring out how wine was made in California in the 19th Century. Even worse was trying to find out what the sluice gates were made of (wood? metal?) and how they operated. There were several entries in the city council minutes for payments to the Zanjero for materials, but no mention of what the materials were. We did finally find mention of those details in tourist literature, but it took considerable digging by multiple librarians to pull those up.

Do you have a current historical fiction work in progress? Can you give us a little teaser about it and let us know when we can look for it?

I've finished the first draft of the third book in the Old Los Angeles series, *Death of the Chinese Field Hands*. It takes place in the aftermath of one of the darkest moments in L.A. history, the lynching of 18 Chinese men during a riot. Two of Maddie's Chinese field hands are brutally murdered and Maddie ends up with a lot of suspects, thanks to the terrible prejudice of the time. I'm hoping to have it ready for release around the end of this year, but certainly no later than May 2021. The best way to stay on top of it is to get my newsletter, which folks can sign up for here: <http://eepurl.com/zHOAb>

You also have some contemporary books that also have murder, mystery, and mayhem. How do you compare writing in the more contemporary periods versus historical fiction?

The flippant answer is less research. But that's not quite true. I still have to do research. I'm working on a contemporary story right now that involves a lot of white hat hacking. I know a fair amount about that world, but probably not enough and I need to get it right.



You can find *Death of the Zanjero* here:

<https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/death-of-the-zanjero-anne-louise-bannon/1128015290?ean=9781948616003>

<https://www.kobo.com/us/en/ebook/death-of-the-zanjero>

<https://www.amazon.com/Death-Zanjero-Old-Angeles-Book-ebook/dp/B07BF5YST6/>

You can find Anne Louise Bannon here:

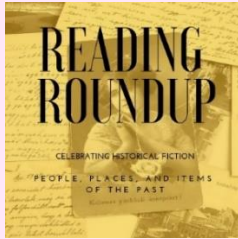
<https://twitter.com/albannon>

<https://www.facebook.com/RobinGoodfellowEnt/>

Anne Louise Bannon has been writing novels since she was 15. She currently writes mostly mysteries and is the author of the Freddie and Kathy 1920s series, the Operation Quickline series, set in the 1980s, and the Old Los Angeles series, set in 1870. You can find out more about her on her website, <https://annelouisebannon.com>

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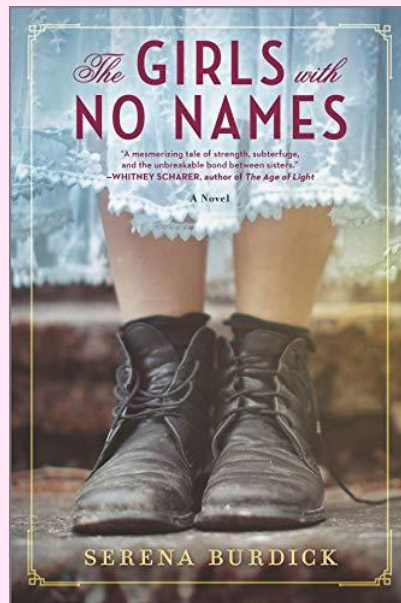
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The 1900s/1910s

The Girls with No Names

Serena Burdick



A beautiful tale of hope, courage, and sisterhood—inspired by the real House of Mercy and the girls confined there for daring to break the rules.

Growing up in New York City in the 1910s, Luella and Effie Tildon realize that even as wealthy young women, their freedoms come with limits. But when the sisters discover a shocking secret about their father, Luella, the brazen elder sister, becomes emboldened to do as she pleases. Her rebellion comes with consequences, and one morning Luella is mysteriously gone.

Effie suspects her father has sent Luella to the House of Mercy and hatches a plan to get herself committed to save her sister. But she made a miscalculation, and with no one to believe her story, Effie's own escape seems impossible—unless she can trust an enigmatic girl named Mable. As their fates entwine, Mable and Effie must rely on their tenuous friendship to survive.

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