



# Pages of the Past

CELEBRATING  
HISTORICAL FICTION

Vol. 1, No. 9, May 31, 2019

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## From the Editor

Today we're talking about finding ideas for historical fiction stories, but the places we find inspiration doesn't apply only to the genre of historical fiction. Writers are always on the lookout for new ideas, no matter what genre we write in. And, alas, sometimes we don't even need to go looking for ideas – they can often drop in uninvited and soon we have more ideas to write about than we have time to write.

But selecting the ideas, narrowing them down, and choosing to ignore the ones we don't have enough hours to write about is a whole other topic. Any writers out there – if you have any ideas on how you handle that problem, send me an email and we'll do a roundup article on that dilemma in a future issue.

For the readers out there, we're highlighting three books today from the 1800s: *Seven Springs*, *Paladin*, and *Murder at Gatewood*. They're all three wonderful books that I have in my own personal library.

Our author spotlight this week is on Charity Bishop, the editor of a Colorado monthly publication that I'm particularly fond of – *Prairie Times*. She has some fun things to say about her journey writing historical fiction.

*Trisha*

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## Ideas for Historical Fiction

The elusive story ideas – where do they lay in wait, ready to spring forth and germinate? They surround us. Ideas for historical stories, too. For what is historical fiction but a story that's set in the past instead of current or future times.

Many writers I talk to have an abundance of story ideas. They complain instead of not having enough time to write the stories they want to. I commiserate with them. I, too, have more ideas in mind than I'll probably ever finish. About three years ago I finally put them together in a document and named it 'Backburner Books'. A lady I spoke with last week keeps her ideas on index cards. And the massive pile of cards is threatening to collapse.

But yet, there are times when despite the wealth of ideas that swirl in an eddy around our existence, we have trouble coming up with an idea. Here are a few places where I find ideas for plots, characters, or settings.

**Cemeteries:** I love visiting cemeteries. The older the better. Often as I'm wandering through the graves, I'll spot an intriguing name that leads down the path to a story. I met Mittie Ann at Medlin Cemetery in Trophy Club, Texas. I've wanted to write her story since, and I have a notebook full of Medlin research. I've written some short stories and articles about her, yet the book remains on my 'Backburner' list. Through my research, I also discovered other fascinating women that I'd love to write about. Someday.

**Vintage Items:** A trip to an antique store, museum, or merely perusing all the collectibles and antiques that fill my shelves hands me more story ideas than I can write in a year. I finger the embroidered dishtowels made from feed sacks and wonder about the woman that made them so many years ago. 'Don't Call my Handiwork Frivolous' won first place and got me a \$50 Barnes & Noble gift card at our local writer's conference last year. A name on a flyleaf in a vintage book leads to another story. A depression-era milk glass candy dish started off another tale. Old cookbooks – I've written more than one story using a vintage cookbook as the jumping off point to start a new tale.

**Photographs and Postcards:** That's all I need is a handful of old photographs and postcards and I'm off and running. An added plus is that they're in my budget. But with the internet now, you don't even need to actually purchase them. All you need is for the photos or postcards to spark an idea.

**Research:** Ah, the rabbit hole of research – so much fun. When I surface sometimes days later, I not only have the research I was after for my current idea (sometimes, often I'm still lacking and need more!), but I come out with another handful of ideas for *other* stories or books.

**Chance or overheard conversations:** Sometimes all you need is a chance conversation, or an overheard snippet, and \*whammo\* you're off and running. What if....? If he or she said....

**Old Publications:** Old newspapers or magazines provide awesome story ideas. I had a copy of some 1904 issues of Horticulture magazine. When I was browsing through them, I found a fascinating report of a Mr. Lawson that feigned grief over his wife's demise to get a floral pillow delivered. Imagine the florist's surprise when a very much alive Mrs. Lawson opened the door. Mr. Lawson was sentenced to a month in the House of Correction over the charge of the larceny of one bunch of Lawson pinks. I couldn't get this idea out of my mind and a short story, William's Blunder, was born.

**Television Shows or Movies:** Sometimes one scene or one line will prompt a whole scenario in your brain. Not a replica of the show or movie that you're watching, but an idea can germinate from your entertainment. One of my favorites is Josh Gates in Expedition Unknown. Oh my! The fascinating snippets of information that he unearths and the unique places he visits, and the amazing people that he finds. After watching one of his hour-long shows I have another few leads to either write about or work into one of my current works in some way. I often joke that I want his job. Until we reach an

episode where he's eating bugs or drinking some unimaginable concoction – or diving in frigid water that will kill you in less than a number of minutes if you didn't have the proper gear. Then, I'm perfectly fine sitting at home behind my computer writing stories about people, places, and items from the past.

Here's a link with some wonderful writing prompts and ideas for historical fiction writers. I haven't used any of these yet, but there are easily a half dozen photographs that I'm dying to use in some way.

<https://thejohnfox.com/2016/06/historical-fiction-writing-prompts-and-ideas/>

Ana Howard wrote a nice article – 5 Tips: Gathering Ideas for Historical Fiction

<https://www.editing-writing.com/5-tips-historical-fiction-writing/>

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Charity Bishop has a lot of writing projects on her plate. Besides being the editor of *Prairie Times*, a monthly publication based in Colorado, she also has a passion for historical fiction. Join us today as we chat with Charity about her journey as a historical fiction author.

And go check out [Prairie Times](#) too. You can read it free online and I like you'll be amazed at the array of interesting articles they have each month!

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**Charity, you've written in a wide range of historical eras – Tudor, Victorian, Edwardian, Regency and even one in Pontius Pilot's time. Which was the first historical fiction book you wrote, and what drew you to write that first story?**

I wrote my first historical novel at age sixteen. I had developed a fascination with India's silk trade, so I wrote a book about a boy gifted with healing abilities in the late 1700s. His misadventures took him to a boarding school in England, caused him to befriend young King George (before he "went mad"), entangled him in the American Revolution, and led him to a crisis that

forced him to self-evaluate and find redemption. It was a way for me to incorporate everything I loved (writing and melodrama and history) into a single medium. Often, my novels reflect whatever historical time period I am studying at the time; I don't choose a period and then write a story, I start reading history and the story comes to me.

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

Each time period has different belief systems, social expectations, and "trends" (such as the Victorian obsession with the afterlife, leading to the popular creation of many "monster" stories like Dracula, Frankenstein, etc), which makes writing and researching in all of them fun, but I think my favorite time periods is Victorian. I blame Sherlock Holmes. There's something romantic about flickering gaslight, hansom cabs, and cobbled London streets.

**Do you have any favorite methods you use in researching your books?**

In writing historical fiction about real people, you must look outside biographies about them to learn the context of the world that "made" them. Just reading Tudor biographies did not help me to understand Henry VII's motives; I had to read about European politics to get the big picture. Then, I understand the political decisions he made. Until you get "why" a society believes what it believes, and what social systems were in place, you will not understand the mindset of someone who lived in the past. I do not want my characters to have too modern attitudes. It's inconsistent with the past.

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

I met Sir Thomas Lovell in a moment of crisis. A test reader had informed me my first draft was "dull." Then, Lovell rode onto the scene, dripping wet in a downpour, halted his horse beneath a distant monastery, and waited for his informant. He changed the entire structure of the novel. And he has gone on to shift events in every book since, in my Tudor series. I like him because he's emotionally complex. A man who would execute someone for treason without a second thought, but shows uncommon kindness to an innocent child. Lovell doesn't know it yet, but he won't be the same man who started out when we reach the end of his story.

**What challenges have you found with writing historical fiction?**

The old saying, "History is written by the victors" holds true. It's difficult to find unbiased sources. Biographical writers have opinions that flavor their conclusions about the past, and contemporaries who wrote about historical figures also either disliked or liked them. There are very few neutral sources, so I must compromise by staying somewhere in the middle, between the saint and the sinner. It's also difficult for me to leave out things. I love history so much, I would love to tell everyone's story... but I can't. My books need to move forward. I think the most difficult thing I've faced is to leave someone or something I care about out of a novel because it doesn't fit or further the plot.

**You write in other genres also. One is your short story *Witchy and The Beast*. Finding unique characters names can often be a daunting task. How on earth did you come up with such a great name in *Witchy and The Beast* – Madame Piddlesquat?**

I wrote that short story as a loving tribute to my favorite author, Terry Pratchett, whose hilarious books have left me laughing late into the night. That name just "came to me" when I asked myself, what would make you laugh if you read it? I try to seek out names that go with the character's overall tone -- more

serious people get serious names, my heroines get pretty names, my villains get sinister names. Names have power. They make an unseen impression.

**Is there anything you'd like to share with us that I didn't ask you about?**

History comes alive through stories. Stories are, after all, what history is all about. Most of my impressions of historical figures have come from historical fiction, either in novels or on-screen. It's hard to shake those impressions later if they do not match the actual person. That's why I urge historical authors to stay as close as possible to the actual personality of the person they want to represent. Their words have far more power than a history book to shape someone's view of the past, and they should use them wisely.



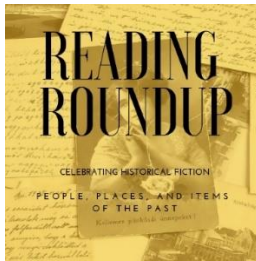
**You can find Charity's books here:**

[www.charityspace.com](http://www.charityspace.com)

<https://www.amazon.com/Charity-Bishop/e/B00E31QB7S/>

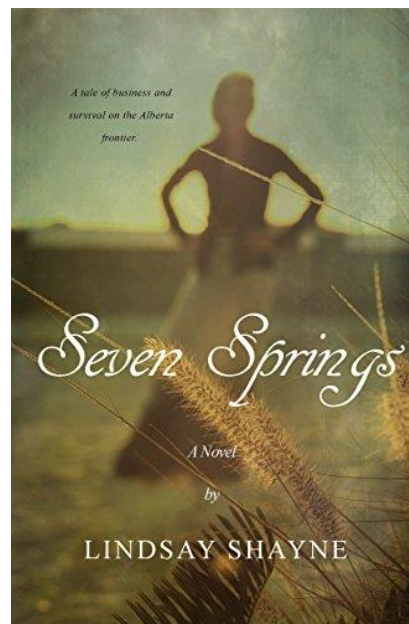
<https://www.goodreads.com/charityspace>

**BIO:** Charity Bishop started writing at eleven years old when she realized *people* write books. Since then, she has moved countless cats off endless manuscripts, gotten red ink all over her hands from her own line-editing, and repeatedly pounded her fists on her desk while lamenting writer's block. Oh, and she also edits a magazine for a living.



## The 1800s

### Seven Springs Lindsay Shayne



Nothing in the Prescotts' eastern, merchant-class lives could prepare them for the sacrifice and hardship of the Alberta frontier.

Charles Prescott is general manager of the prestigious Danbury Hotel and fully expects to become its owner upon old Mr. Danbury's death. But an unforeseen disinheritance forces him to consider alternate means by which to maintain his livelihood and the social comforts expected by his wife, Abigail, and their daughter.

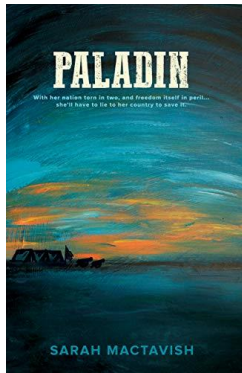
Blinded by impending poverty, he is lured by the promise of prosperity touted for the new towns along the western rail lines, and ensnared by the desire for his own success. But when business does not proceed as intended, he has no option but to consider a surprising source of revenue.

Abigail is drawn to the romantic ideal of nature but is unprepared for the harsh realities of settler life. As her family struggles to improve their station, her chance encounter with an influential investor may switch the track of their lives forever.



# Paladin

## Sarah Thompson



When Lincoln calls for volunteers to put down the rebellion, four friends become soldiers for different reasons. Freedom. Justice. Love. Revenge. But they're united by a secret... one of them is a girl in disguise.

*"This is my country, and I aim to fight for it. You can help me, or get out of my way. Your choice."*

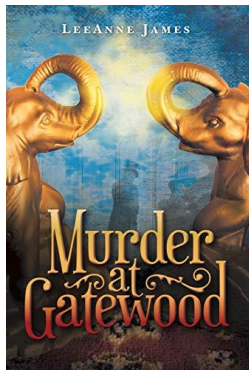
*Hidden under an over-sized uniform and a false name, Saoirse Callahan strives to prove herself as strong and brave as any other soldier. But when an old enemy appears in camp, she knows it's only a matter of time before her identity is exposed. And what will happen to her friends if she's discovered?*

*"I'm quite certain what I am willing to die for. But taking a life is another matter entirely."*

*Westleigh Kavanagh is a scholar, not a soldier. Still, he enlists because he believes their cause is holy-freedom for all, at any cost. When the bullets start flying, he realizes he's made a terrible mistake. Too late to turn back, Westleigh prays that they'll all make it home safely. But can his soul survive the journey?*

# Murder at Gatewood

## Leanne James



In the late 1800s, the English countryside is rife with secret scandals, and nobody knows that better than Amelia. She had only recently made her debut into society when she met Sir Herbert Woodford, Duke of Brazelton. She thought she'd found the love of her life, but the duke turns out to have a hidden, abusive, dark side.

Herbert is well-known throughout the land as being a mean, miserable man with a hair-trigger temper fueled by excessive alcohol consumption. When he is found murdered in his own home, hit over the head by a brass bookend, the list of suspects is endless. It turns out Amelia was not the only person Herbert was pushing around.

The duke is not mourned. Because he often lashed out at those around him, he'd managed to alienate almost everyone he knew, both friends and family alike. Still, a killer must be caught, but the investigation appears to have gone cold--until Senior Inspector Patrick Duffy realizes they overlooked one detail that could lead right to the murderer.

*Authors: Do you have a historical fiction book or short story that you'd like featured in Pages of the Past? Email me at [texasrishafaye@yahoo.com](mailto:texasrishafaye@yahoo.com) to see about scheduling your book or short story in a future issue.*

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