

The Dickens Fellowship of Pittsburgh
Founded in 1925
April, 2020



Life imitates Art. Our novel for the 2019/2020 year, "The Mystery of Edwin Drood" was Dickens' final work and was left unfinished. And now our year, while certainly not our final one, is left unfinished. As you probably have deduced **the Fellowship's meeting and program scheduled for April 18 are canceled.** Our presenters for March and April, Mark Sachleben and Bob Thompson, respectively, have graciously agreed to present their programs in our 2020/2021 year. The Fellowship also hopes to meet June 20 for the annual Ramble. Details will be sent in May.



The "Who Am I?" in March, "**A deferential widow with a weak back, a chronic sigh and a suppressed voice who looks after the young ladies' wardrobes and leads them to infer that she has seen better days. (Hint: And whose departed husband had probably been a hairdresser.)**" was Mrs Tisher.



The Fellowship is still in need of candidates for President, Board member, Newsletter Editor and of course program presenters. Please do your part.



If you have a chance, please view the 1961 film "Cash on Demand." It is an excellent, suspenseful twist on "A Christmas Carol" as told in the context of a bank robbery. It was made by Hammer Films of England and stars Peter Cushing and Andre Morrell.



Messages from Mark Sachleben:

During the Broad Street Cholera Epidemic of 1854, [part of the worldwide cholera pandemic 1846-1860] Dickens wrote a short piece in *Household Words* strongly criticizing the response of the authorities who did nothing to prevent the epidemic. Dickens said, "they are guilty, before GOD, of wholesale murder." He urged laborers to work together, to use their collective strength, to remove from office the politicians and policymakers "who misled and mistreated them."^[1]

^[1] The outbreak killed 616. Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), page 708-09.

One more thing that members might find interesting. I was going to an exhibition at the University of London called Childhood in Dickensian London, attending looks increasingly less likely. The website is good and people might want to have a look while they are at home: <https://london.ac.uk/senate-house-library/exhibitions-and-events/exhibitions/childhood-dickensian-london>.



Message from member, Nancy Neal: From the New Yorker article (March 20, 2020) by Amy Davison Sorken, “From the Fever Room: Epidemics and Social Distancing in *Bleak House* and *Jane Eyre*.”

"In some ways, with *COVID-19*, we are as vulnerable as the Victorians were— given the novelty of the virus, our lack of immunity, the inequalities that make its depredations worse. We are all like a child in a dark hallway. But in many other respects, of course, we are lucky: *COVID-19* has not proved as deadly as smallpox (which has been eradicated) or typhus. We know how diseases spread.

Doctors around the world are working on vaccines and treatments, and there is every faith that they’ll find them. Until then, we can do what we have long known how to do. Keep on different sides of the door—the Adas and Esthers among us can FaceTime or Zoom—and do everything humanly possible to lighten the load on hospitals and medical professionals. Remember that most of us can walk past the fever room. They have to go inside."

<https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/the-fever-room-epidemics-and-social-distancing-in-bleak-house-and-jane-eyre>



Message from Marge Lubawy: I hope everyone is weathering this unusual state of affairs we are in now. Not being able to go out to our regular activities and events or be with our friends and families because of a pandemic is certainly not something I believe most of us ever expected to experience. However, we are fortunate to live in a time where we can stay connected via internet and phone. And, aren't we lucky we like to read? Having to be isolated in our homes is hard, but it can be much easier if you enjoy the company of a good book. **Even though I am at home alone, I am not bored because I have quite a store of books waiting to be read, one of which is our book for next year, *Sketches by Boz*.** So, enjoy catching up on all of those books you always wished you had more time to read. With perseverance we will overcome this challenge and be able to see each other soon.



Message from member and newsletter editor, Marsha Maietta:

Here's a great quote from Yale scholar, David Scott Kastan. I think we should keep it in mind whenever we are tempted to judge (and thereby limit) Dickens or any artist by the mores of our own time: “We want our great writers to guarantee our best selves, but they never quite do that. They never can fully escape the limitations of their own moment or tell us what we should think. They do, however, tell us what we should think about--and the contradictions of their thinking alert us, if we read well, to the genuine difficulties of the issues, and perhaps provoke us, as Beckett says, to ‘fail better.’”



Our Fellowship year has ended. Happy Passover and Happy Easter! We look forward to seeing you at the Ramble and then in October when we begin our study of “*Sketches by Boz*.” Stay well.

