



Welcome to our March book, Historians!

Our next meeting is Tuesday, March 6 to discuss *Twilight of the Belle Époque: The Paris of Picasso, Stravinsky, Proust, Renault, Marie Curie, Gertrude Stein and their Friends through the Great War* by Mary McAuliffe published in 2014. This is the sequel to her book *Dawn of the Belle Époque* and this book is followed by *When Paris Sizzled*, the story of Paris in the 1920s. Taken together, these three books trace the move from the 19th century to modernity. As the center book, *Twilight of the Belle Époque* shows this change most clearly, and

that is our interest in our discussion of this book.

McAuliffe travels through this time period by moving year by year from 1900 to 1918. As each year passes, you will meet a dizzying array of characters from the arts to automobiles and everything in between. It is easy to get lost in the details, so keep in mind that McAuliffe is giving you a feel for the richness of the era. The same people will appear and reappear throughout the book, so don't worry about remembering them. Many of the names are familiar, so that helps. This is a small society with the same wealthy patrons and artistic figures interacting with one another whether it is in the arts, in fashion, or at dinner parties. It is in these interactions that the personalities of these people are developed; it is in the fascinating details that the personality of the time period is developed.

Using personal diaries and letters, McAuliffe creates the rich textures of pre-WWI Paris, which makes the outbreak of war that much more bitter. We follow these same people now through the war years. Some fought in the war. Some joined the war effort on the home front. All prayed for sons sent off to fight, something we do not think about with these cultural leaders. And some will endure the heartbreak of losing loved ones to the Spanish Influenza once the war is over.

As you read about this marvelous time of history with its Art Nouveau architectural masterpieces and its early triumphs in technology, watch for the fissures below the surface in this glittering society. Parts of Paris are still villages, but urbanism is rapidly changing this. WWI is not the only thing that moves us into modernity. Pay attention to what lasting contributions are made in the Belle Époque and what signs you see of a society in decline, or perhaps in denial. As you read, think about which historical figures make an impression on you and why. How do these people adapt to change, or not?

There will be much to discuss when we meet on Tuesday March 6 at 6:30. We will recreate the salons of Paris as we discuss *Twilight of the Belle Époque: The Paris of Picasso, Stravinsky, Proust, Renault, Marie Curie, Gertrude Stein and their Friends through the Great War*. See you there!

Donna McBride