

Book Club Kit

Time Stitchers

By Pat Scheckel

Genre: Fiction, Time Travel, Mystery

Themes: justice, friendship, commitment



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Content Consideration: discussion of war and death of family members, death of friends, mild sexuality, mild cursing, violence

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Book summary:

In the summer of 1989 in Hiawatha, Wisconsin, college student Jimmy Foley can't move forward with his life until he finds who is behind his sister Bridget's hit-and-run death. Sketchy evidence points to the local cranberry kingpin, but no one in town has the power to take him down. When Jimmy brushes against a gravestone, he finds himself in Washington DC in 1862, where he comes across other time-traveling "stitchers" working to solve the murder of the British ambassador. The stitchers try to recruit Jimmy to help solve the murder, in an effort to prevent the reversal of the outcome of the Civil War. Jimmy agrees, and between helping the stitchers and investigating his sister's death he uncovers an even more diabolical human trafficking plot. In a wild time-jumping chase, Jimmy and the stitchers risk everything to stop the cranberry king from realizing his dystopian vision.

Read an excerpt

I stirred on the ground, feeling dazed and disoriented. It was still nighttime, but the cloud cover was gone, and I could see the Big Dipper. There were no tombstones, but I could see the outline of a clapboard barn next to me. What was going on? Had I blacked out and been taken somewhere else? Where was Heather?

I picked up a faint whiff of smoke, like from the campfire at the Dugout. Voices floated from the other side of the barn, but it was strange chatter. It was English, but with an unfamiliar cadence and accent.

I peeked around the corner to see four men sitting around a fire. All four wore long pants, which struck me as odd given the August heat. These weren't jeans either but looked like baggy gray sweatpants. Two wore dirty white dress shirts, and the other two wore undershirts. A couple had on short-billed caps.

They could have been Amish. I didn't see any cars, and the barn had no lights. Those were the telltale signs of the Amish who farmed in the hills south of Hiawatha. And Amish men never wore shorts, no matter the heat. And it would explain the peculiar English, since the Amish typically spoke Pennsylvania Dutch at home. What else could it be? Having solved that mystery, I decided to ask them if they could help me get my bearings. I walked out from the corner of the barn and approached them.

I offered a wave and a slight smile to show I meant them no harm. "Hey guys, what's up?"

Two of them jumped up and grabbed long guns that had been leaning against their log seats. The biggest one leveled an antique rifle at my chest. "Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

"Uh, I'm Jimmy Foley. I got lost in the cemetery, and then I woke up on the other side of that barn. Have you guys seen Heather?"

The little fella spat and squinted. "Listen to him, George, he sounds like a Yank if I ever heard one. And he's wearing some kinda strange undergarments."

I took stock of my jean shorts, Van Halen tank top, and flip-flops. At least I wasn't the weirdo wearing long pants in the summer heat.

"Yep, Zeke, he's probably a spy, and I reckon not a very good one since he sidled right out into the open!" George snorted, and all four of them had a good laugh. "Tie him up." The two unarmed guys jumped up and grabbed my arms.

I protested. "Wait, guys, I'm not a spy. I'm Jimmy Foley, from Hiawatha."

"High-a-what?" asked George.

"Hiawatha," I annunciated.

"Where'n earth is that?" asked one of the guys.

How could they not know about Hiawatha when they lived in the hills south of town? "It's about a hundred miles northwest of Madison."

"Madison, Virginia?"

I laughed. "Madison, *Wisconsin*."

"Ha! Wisconsin! See, I told you he was a Yank spy! And a dumb one, too! Tie his ass up good!" George howled.

The other two bound my hands with rough rope.

Definitely not Amish, but what were they? Civil war reenactors? Must be, and Confederate ones at that. They had the haversacks, the dusty old leather boots, and what looked like Enfield muskets. They even spoke with a thick Southern drawl. But what would a bunch of reenactors want with me?

Things had gotten weird in a hurry. Heather had to be upset, being left alone in the dark. She probably had to walk out of the cemetery because I never did give her the keys. And I'd been gone way too long, and I had no way to tell her where I was.

* * *

About the Author

Pat Scheckel was raised in Tomah, Wisconsin, the gateway to cranberry country. He delivered the La Crosse Tribune on his bike and mowed lawns in the summer, giving him a deep appreciation for the people and places on the edges of the Driftless region.

He graduated from the University of Wisconsin – Madison and later earned a master's from the University of Minnesota. He's lived most of his life along the I-94 corridor from Minneapolis to Chicago. He and his wife split time between Madison and Minneapolis, where their two grown children live.

Slipstreamy Midwestern noir ideas shadow him while walking his two pug mixes, Taco and Lulu. *Time Stitches* is his debut novel. His short story collection, *Frozen Chuck*, will be published by Cornerstone Press in 2027. His work has appeared in *Creative Wisconsin*, *The MacGuffin*, and *Macabre Magazine*. You can find him on Instagram @pat_scheckel and at scheckel.com.

An Interview with Author Pat Scheckel

What was your motivation for writing this story?

I wanted to tell a story that took place in the 80s and I've always been interested in time travel. The production values of *Stranger Things* really stoked that 80s nostalgia. I like reading time travel stories and I wanted to write the kind of book that I enjoy reading.

Tell us about choosing the particular time period you did, the Civil War era, and the research you did.

The Civil War has always fascinated me, particularly how its echoes are still felt today in everything from civil rights to popular culture to the battles over statues. In previous travels, I'd visited Gettysburg and Vicksburg and was struck by the scale of the slaughter. The issues of class and race intrigued me, including how Southern soldiers fought and died to protect the "property" rights of a relatively small number of wealthy landowners. In researching this book, I revisited Washington D.C. and toured the battlefields from Richmond north, places like Cedar Mountain and Fredericksburg. I rewatched the Ken Burns documentary and read dispatches from Nathaniel Hawthorne, and books like Michael Shaara's *Civil War Trilogy* and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. I also found an out-of-print book on the history of The Willard hotel.

You chose to assassinate a popular and important figure of the time (who didn't die at the time) to create a time-travel murder mystery. Why him, and did you see wish to see history changing as a result?

I've always been interested in the involvement of the great European powers like Britain, France, and Russia in shaping the history of the United States. The story needed someone that was important enough to trigger a domino effect of British involvement and the potential for changing the course of history, and Lyons fit that bill. Jimmy and his fellow Stitchers did not want to see Britain come the aid of the Confederacy and it was their job to repair the rip in the fabric of history that was caused by the assassination.

You had so many great references to pop culture, ala 1989. How did you decide which examples and experiences to include?

The adage "write what you know" comes into play here, because a lot of those are drawn from personal experience. At times, I tried to channel 80s vibes by listening to an 80s soundtrack while writing.

You set the story in fictional Hiawatha, suspiciously like Tomah. How did the setting play a role in the story?

Suspiciously like Tomah? A mere coincidence! I like stories where the setting is its own character and Hiawatha has that, from the mysteries of the Driftless region hills south of town to the wealth created in the cranberry marshes of the north. There is an interesting mix of people from which to form characters, from dairy farmers to professionals to the Amish.

What's your interest in time travel, do you believe it could happen?

So much of history hinges on small events with big outcomes, like Turing's cracking of the Enigma machine. It's fascinating to think about the what-if scenarios if even a few events were to change through time travel.

Not only do I believe it could happen, it *is* happening. I am from the future, sent back to this time to atone for a minor offense that may be revealed in a short story somewhere down the road.

Which is worse: déjà vu or the butterfly effect?

The butterfly effect. Déjà vu is a feeling, and while feelings can be powerful, the butterfly effect is a series of massive cascading events.

If you could travel back any time, where would you go, why, and what would you do?

I'd go to Ireland in 1919. To find out what I'd do, you'll have to read the sequel to *Time Stitchers*. That's no joke. I've been to Ireland four times and I find the place fascinating. The memoirs written by revolutionaries like Tom Barry and Dan Breen are riveting. They had the audacity to take on the British empire. You can't keep people down who are determined to be free.

You based the story on your own growing up years. What are your favorite memories of that time in your life?

There was a sense of possibility, of wonder, of low-key mischief that made every day an adventure. We'd pile in a car, crank up the tunes, and head to a party in the woods, or go swimming at Mill Bluff or Robinson Creek, or play a game of cards in a friend's basement or garage. And in those late teen years, there was the tantalizing and mystifying prospect of girls.

Mrs. Biggs, Jimmy's high school history teacher, has a big role in the story. Do you have fond memories of some of your teachers? Which ones and why?

I was fortunate to have many outstanding teachers. Naming the great ones is dangerous because I will forget someone, but here are a few: Marianne Risch, Bill Divyak, Greg Bever, Karen Riggs, Sandy Murray, Diane Graewin, Dave Stutzman, and Archie Ecker. And, of course, my own parents. They all have a passion for learning and a well-developed sense of humor. They engaged with us as people and challenged our thinking.

You mention a couple of made-up titles of books *Einstein and Time Travel*, and *Wormholes of the Occult: Accessing Other Dimensions*, along with other authors, Isaac Asimov and Carl Sagan, who have an interest in time travel. What books influenced you?

- *Sea of Tranquility* by Emily St. John Mandel
- *The Ministry of Time* by Kaliane Bradley
- *A Rip Through Time* by Kelley Armstrong
- *What the Wind Knows* by Amy Harmon
- *The Other Valley* by Scott Alexander Howard
- *Kindred* by Octavia Butler

What do you hope readers will appreciate the most about your story?

I hope they enjoy the vibes and humor of riding along with Jimmy and his friends in 1980s Hiawatha.

Quotes from the book

The past is in peril, which means the present and future are as well. You see, for small events, time has a way of healing itself. It's like a pebble landing in a pond, sending out tiny ripples. A short time later, the surface is calm. —Mrs. Biggs

What would I tell them? I didn't know enough to give them a plausible story, and there was no way they would believe the truth. They say there are no atheists in foxholes, and there might not be any in prisoner transport wagons either.

My head spun. The cumulative weight of the recent events overwhelmed me: escaping, running, shooting, the bullet wound and blood loss, the trek through the woods, the surreal sensation of stumbling through a time that was 127 years removed from my own.

I looked myself over and was disappointed to see board shorts and a Beastie Boys Licensed to Ill concert T-shirt. ... It was the middle of the night, and I needed to avoid any patrols until I could find some different clothes, and then I'd be on my way to saving the Union. Bravery and naïveté were two sides of the same coin.

The soldiers fired down the hallway ahead of Eugene. We hadn't seen any bad guys since we left our cell. Then came the response—a hail of bullets and the crunch of splintering wood around the door where Eugene and the others were hunkered down. ... It looked like we had a choice: get shot, or roast to death. We were hotter than convenience store roller dogs that had been left on the rack all night. What kind of plan was this?

“What kind of Satan wagon was that? It moved twice as fast as any horse I've ever seen! It had great, glowing eyes on its face. It's not from this world. Are we in Hades, Jimmy? Tell me the truth!”

What was my mom going to do? Ground me? Of course she was upset, but we were on a mission: to solve the Lyons murder and prevent the course of history from being altered, to escape being murdered ourselves by whatever dark forces were at work back there and maybe in Hiawatha too.

While my efforts to help solve the Lyons case were never half-hearted, I'd be lying if I said I'd been one hundred percent committed before that realization in Mrs. Biggs's kitchen. Prior to then, there was a part of me that had always compartmentalized things, negotiated away my ownership of any difficult situation, told myself that someone else would clean things up, just I'd like done with so many other things in my life...

The odor of his garments matched the stench of his worldview.

It had clouded over. The night was blacker than Charles Manson's soul.

Sociopaths liked to present a clean-shaven face to the world, all the better to fool people into thinking they're upstanding citizens.

“In all seriousness, the Club could always use your services, but you have to be in the right frame of mind. And don't be in a rush. Remember, patience is the mother of all virtues.” --Mrs. Biggs

For Further Reading

11/22/63, Stephen King

Time and Time Again, Ben Elton

The Ministry of Time, Kaliane Bradley

Back to the Future, George Gipe (novelization of the movie)

Making History, Steven Fry

Kindred, Octavia Butler

The Restaurant at the End of the Universe, Douglas Adams

Wrong Place, Wrong Time, Gillian McAllister

Extras

About The Willard Hotel

<https://washington.intercontinental.com/>

<https://www.nps.gov/places/willard-hotel-washington-dc.htm>

Between 1847 and 1858, the Willard Brothers purchased row houses and a former hotel building, eventually a hall, and restructured the group into a single conglomerate.

Between 1900 and 1904, the hotel complex was restructured into Washington DC's first skyscraper. Many presidents and other famous people have stayed there. The Willard family owned the hotel until 1946. In 1968 the property underwent another renovation and has been open again since 1986. Address: 1401-09 Pennsylvania Ave. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974.



Cranberry Farming in Wisconsin

Watch a short video from Discover Wisconsin:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7Sj-AMXQxY>

and here, from the Wisconsin State Cranberries Growers Association:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wuknfl3jEIc&t=1s>

Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association -

<https://www.wiscran.org/>

Facts: Cranberries are native to North America, the first cranberry marshes were farmed in Wisconsin in the 1830s, which now produce 60% of the world's crop, more than half of which comes from the US. Currently there are about 250 cranberry farms on 180,000 acres (support and crop land) in 20 counties. The berries grow in sandy pit beds, which are flooded for ease of harvest in the fall.

Brief Overview of the Civil War in 1862

A great timeline is here: <https://www.nps.gov/gett/learn/historyculture/civil-war-timeline.htm>

For a little historical perspective

Major Events of 1862

- “Battle Hymn of the Republic” by Julia Ward Howe was published in the Atlantic Monthly
- In Italy, rebel leader Guiseppe Garibaldi was taken prisoner
- Otto Von Bismark becomes minister-president of Prussia
- Anna Leonowens goes in Bangkok to teach English (model for The King and I)
- Victor Hugo publishes *Les Miserables*
- US Dept of Treasury begins printing \$1 bill with a picture of Salmon Chase, secretary of the Treasury
- Emancipation Proclamation issued to go into effect in 1863
- Alexander Parkes invents man-made plastic
- US-Dakota war in Minnesota



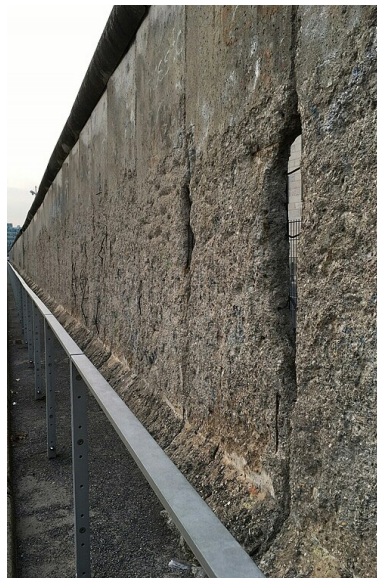
By National Museum of American History - Image by Godot13, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=33422091>

Major Events of 1989

- Japan's Emperor Hirohito dies
- George HW Bush elected president
- Ayatollah Khomeini declares a *fatwa* on novelist Salman Rushdie for *Satanic Verses*
- Hungary and Austria put a symbolic end to the "iron curtain"
- Tiananmen Square, China, protests, demonstrators and soldiers killed
- Berlin Wall torn down
- Nintendo Gameboy released
- Loma Prieta Earthquake shook central California during the World Series
- Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska



By Thomas Nast - Derivative of File:Emancipation- the past and the future (20186657008).jpg, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=135348972>



Remnant of Berlin Wall
By DatGuy - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=47003748>



Book Discussion Guide for *Time Stitchers*, by Pat Scheckel

What are the underlying themes of this story? What did the characters of the past and present have to overcome? Is there anything left undone?

Jimmy's motivation for solving the crime in the past is a result of the crime that affected him and his family – the death of his sister, Bridget. How did Jimmy learn about the ties between the past and the present?

Jimmy had a great group of friends. Who did you like the most and why? What was special about each of them? Do you have a group of people in your circle you can count on?

Why was Jimmy “chosen” for this mission?

Jimmy had a close relationship with a special high school teacher, Mrs. Biggs, whom he trusted. What was her role in the course of events?

What were some of the clues that led to the truth of Bridget's death?

What did you know, learn, or want to know more about the events of the Civil War in Washington DC the summer of 1862 that created the backdrop for this story?

How did those events parallel or contrast with the events of Hiawatha, Wisconsin, the summer of 1862?

What did Bertha represent? How was it instrumental in saving the day?

In what ways did Jimmy grow during his adventures? What skills did he call on, and what decisions made him realize he needed his friends? What choices do you think he regretted?

How do you think Eugene the Michigan farmer turned Union soldier's life was changed by his experience?

This story is set in 1989 in Wisconsin, and 1862 Washington DC, and makes many pop culture references to 1989. See the list below. Which ones do you recall and can name the source, or which do you want to know more about? Do you have others to share? What are still relevant today?

If you could time travel, where would you go and why?

Pop culture References from 1989 in the book

Cars

1977 AMC Gremlin
Camaro
a tricked-out 1970 El Camino SS
GTO
Buick LeSabre
orange & brown 1976 Ford Econoline conversion van

Fast Food & Convenience store restaurants, snacks

A&W, Root Bear
Kwik Trip
Open Pantry
Dairy Queen, full meal deal
Chips Ahoy, Twizzlers, Slim Jims, Fritos
Convenience store roller dogs
Mr. Coffee

General clothing and accessories, iconic items or sayings

Aqua Net
Mullet
Old Spice, Brut 33
pastel polo shirts
backward baseball cap
Formica countertop
Yellow smiley face
Ginsu knives
muscle shirt that said "Sun's Out, Guns Out"
Oscar for that acting job
Gerald opening Al Capone's vault
Velvet Elvis
Valley Girl
Yeti
Charles Manson
Pope John Paul II

Sports figures

Don Bracken, Bart Starr Lynn Dickey, Packers
Gorman Thomas, Brewers
Paul Mokeski, Bucks
Mary Lou Retton
Kirk Gibson
Randy "Macho Man" Savage
Georgia All-Star Wrestling: Tommy "Wildfire" Rich,
Harley Race

Gaming

Berzerk
Donkey Kong
Tank Battle, Atari 2600
Library, candlestick, Colonel Mustard from *Clue*
Mr. Monopoly
Euchre

Reading material

Harper's Weekly
Wisconsin State Journal
Lord of the Flies

Film, TV

Bluto, *Animal House*
Star Wars: Jedi mind trick, Death Star, Obi Wan
Monty Python's Holy Grail
Ponyboy
John Wayne
Bruce Banner, *the Hulk*
Barney Fife
Columbo
Perry Mason
Daisy Duke
The A-Team: BA Barracus, Mister T, Hannibal
Yosemite Sam
Little House on the Prairie
Addams Family
Bill & Ted's adventure
Dirty Harry
Magnum P.I.
Crockett and Tubbs
Mookie, Radio Raheem, Spike Lee
Carl the greenskeeper
Lynda Carter
Sam Kinison
Sixteen Candles
Hoosiers
Red Dawn
Cool Hand Luke

Music, Musical Groups, Songs

AC/DC, Bon Scott
Kiss
Bangles
Whitesnake, David Coverdale, "Here I Go Again"
U2, "Desire"
Madonna
Def Leppard, "Pour Some Sugar on Me"
Great White
Motley Crue
Van Halen, Alex, Eddie
Siouxsie and the Banshees
New Order
Bow Wow Wow
Beastie Boys "Licensed to Ill"
Violent Femmes
Kenny Loggins, "I'm Alright"
Night Ranger concert T-shirt
Tom Petty, "Free Fallin'"
Golden Earring, "Twilight Zone"
Ozzy, Randy Rhoads, *Diary of a Madman*
Elvis, "Suspicious Minds"

For a Themed Book club party

Snacks: Jimmy and his friends mention many food and drink items popular in the late 1980s.

As an addition or alternate, here are some items from The Willard's menu.

You can view the Tea Room menu pdf here: <https://tinyurl.com/5xmandsk>

While serving La Grande Dame Veuve Clicquot might be a fun challenge, certainly any sparkling beverage would be welcome. Try jasmine tea, spiced chai, Casablanca Mint, or Lady Earl Grey.

For sandwiches, consider an array of small sized cucumber, ham, roast beef, or seafood, any variety of choice. (Note: recipes are not from The Willard)

Cucumber sandwiches with pink peppercorn, citrus cream cheese, lemon zest, crustless white bread

To make: soften 4 oz (half a brick) of cream cheese, mix in 1 T lemon juice and ¼ tsp lemon zest, 2 tsp fresh chopped *or* ½ tsp dry dill. Grind a little fresh pepper into the cream cheese, lemon, and dill mixture if desired. The Willard kitchen uses pink peppercorns, but any will do. Use as a spread across the bread. Peel or partially peel in long stripes a cucumber and slice thinly. Remove crusts from bread, spread cream cheese mixture on one side of 6 slices of bread, arrange cucumber slices, make 3 sandwiches and cut into triangles. Makes 24.

Ham with tomato chutney & fresh basil

To make a small batch of quick tomato chutney, (chunky ketchup), peel and chop 2 roma tomatoes, add 1 T chopped onion, 1 T cider vinegar, 2 tsp brown sugar, and a dash each of black pepper, cinnamon, and allspice. Cook in a small pot over medium heat, stirring frequently, up to ten minutes until thickened. Cool.

The Willard serves mini roast beef sandwiches with bib lettuce and horseradish sauce. Use small croissants for an elegant touch.

Desserts could include lemon curd or traditional English scones you can serve with cream or butter and various jams. The Spruce Eats has easy and quick recipes.

Lemon curd: <https://www.thespruceeats.com/classic-lemon-curd-recipe-101356>

Scones: <https://www.thespruceeats.com/perfect-scone-recipe-435045>

The Round Robin Bar inside The Willard opened in 1847. According to history: "It was at this great classic bar that Kentucky senator, Henry Clay, introduced Washington to the Mint Julep, which would become the Round Robin's signature cocktail (Woodinville "Willard InterContinental" Bourbon, Mint, Turbinado Sugar). In 1862 Walt Whitman immortalized The Willard's bar in his poetic appeal to Union Troops: 'There you are, shoulder straps, but where are your companies? Where are our men? Speak, blow, put on airs in Willard's sumptuous bar, or anywhere! No explanation will save you. Bull Run is your work.'" (from <https://washington.intercontinental.com/>). Today's appetizers include olives, fried octopus, potato wedges, pork belly and swiss sandwiches, and mini *crocque monsieur* (ham and cheese sandwiches), cheese plates, as well as a full menu.

"Reading is the sole means by which we slip, involuntarily, often helplessly, into another's skin, another's voice, another's soul." – Joyce Carol Oates

If you're interested in starting or refreshing a book club, Carol of ReadingLadies.com has a great article: [How to start a book club.](#)

Find Wisconsin Writers Association/Wisconsin Writers Association on social media:

Web: <https://wiwrite.org/> **Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/WIWrite/>