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THE LAST DAYS OF DOGTOWN LECTURE FINDING AID & TRANSCRIPT

Speaker:	Anita Diamant
Date:	7/28/2012
Runtime:	0:57:20
Camera Operator:	Bob Quinn
Identification:	VL44 ; Video Lecture #44
Citation:	Diamant, Anita. "The Last Days of Dogtown". CAM Video Lecture Series, 7/28/2012. VL44, Cape Ann Museum Library & Archives, Gloucester, MA.
Copyright:	Requests for permission to publish material from this collection should be addressed to the Librarian/Archivist.
Language:	English
Finding Aid:	Subject List: Anne Siegel, 5/5/2020. Description: 2012 Press Release. Transcript: Paul Romary, 6/2/2020.

Video Description

From 2012 Press Release: We are thrilled to host author Anita Diamant at the Museum this summer, in conjunction with the special exhibition Marsden Hartley: Soliloquy in Dogtown. The discussion of her novel, *The Last Days of Dogtown*, beautifully complements the Hartley exhibition and offers another perspective on

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how Dogtown has inspired artists and writers throughout history” said Ronda Faloon, museum director.

Anita Diamant’s writing career began in Boston in 1975. As a freelance journalist, she contributed to local magazines and newspapers. Her features and columns covered a wide variety of topics, from profiles of prominent people and stories about medical ethics, to first-person essays ranging from politics, to popular culture, to pet ownership. In 1997, she began her fiction writing career with her novel, *The Red Tent*, which soon became a best seller.

One of her next novels was *The Last Days of Dogtown*, set on Cape Ann in the early 1800s. This novel describes life in a poor, rural community of Dogtown inhabited by widows, spinsters and other marginal women, freed Africans, and orphan children. The novel was inspired by a pamphlet she found in a Gloucester bookstore many years ago. To hear the rest of her story, and the reasons she was drawn to Dogtown, come to the Museum on July 28.

Subject list

Ralph Waldo Emerson	Nathaniel Hawthorne
Henry David Thoreau	Bronson Alcott
Margaret Fuller	Transcendentalism
Anti-slavery Movement	Elizabeth Peabody
Rev. Hartshorn	Jonathan Edward
Charles E. Mann	Thomas Dresser

Transcript

Courtney Richardson

Can everybody hear me okay? Welcome to the Museum. My name is Courtney Richardson. I'm Director of Education and Public Programs. I always bring reminders up with me, please turn off your cell phones. Thank you. This is an exciting summer for us as most of you know, we have two special exhibitions. They cover the outer Cape and the inner Cape. On the third floor, oh, and they also cover 20th century art and 21st century art.

On the third floor, we have *Marsden Hartley, Soliloquy in Dogtown* and we've had a sort of flurry of programming around Dogtown, as some of you know. A few of you were on a walk with me this morning. We were in Dogtown Square, imagining all the characters in *The Last Days of Dogtown*. It was really wonderful.

We also have *Water, Water*, which is the multimedia installation by Sara Hollis Perry and Rachel Perry Welty. On Wednesday morning, for those of you who don't know, we will be joined by the artists Rachel Perry Welty and her mother Sarah Hollis Perry. They'll be talking about their collaboration and about the exhibit. It was a truly amazing thing to have the opportunity to be in a gallery with the artist. I would love to have a conversation with Fitz Henry Lane. Or to have a conversation with Marsden Hartley. At least we have Hartley's letters and you know, other essays but Lane is a little trickier. But anyway, the talk with Perry and Welty is on Wednesday. So please join us.

Anyway, Hartley was completely captivated by the place, Dogtown. And I don't think he was the first, though he claims he was, but as we know, he certainly hasn't been the last person. Anita Diamant's writing career began in Boston in 1975. As a freelance journalist, she contributed to local magazines and newspapers, including the Boston Phoenix, the Boston Globe, the Boston magazine, branching out into regional and national media, with articles in *New England Monthly*, *Yankee*, *Self*, *Parenting* and others. Her features and columns covered a wide variety of topics, from profiles of prominent people and stories about medical ethics to first person essays ranging from politics to popular culture to pet ownership. She also wrote about Jewish practice, a Jewish community. A collection of her essays appears in the book, *Pitching My Tent: On Marriage, Motherhood, Friendship and Other Leaps of Faith*.

Her first book was *The New Jewish Wedding*, written in the year following her own wedding. She followed the wedding book with five more guidebooks to Jewish life and life cycle events. In 1997, she wrote her first book of fiction, the bestseller, *The Red Tent*. After that, *Good Harbor*, and then, *The Last Days of Dogtown*, both available for purchase at the front desk and the author will be signing afterwards if you'd like. A wonderful gift. *The Last Days of Dogtown* is set in the early 1800s in rural Massachusetts, basically in our backyard. In it, we imagine the lives of people who have been left out of history. Though fiction, the story brings to life colorful characters of Cape Ann folklore.

"Marsden Hartley: Soliloquy in Dogtown", the reason behind all of this sort of Dogtown frenzy, closes on October 14. Still to come is Peter Anastas's talk next month discussing Hartley as a poet. And later in the month. Elyssa East will be here to share with us how Marsden Hartley inspired her writing. Gail Levin will be here in September to discuss Hartley the artist, and we also have a Dogtown walking tour each month until the exhibit closes. The museum would like to thank the Cape Ann Savings Bank for sponsoring our lecture series. And I would like to thank you all for coming today. Please join me in welcoming Anita Diamant.

4:54 Anita Diamant

Wow, thank you. Love you today. Terrific. You never know who's showing up. Is it sunny outside? It's wonderful to be here. It's a real pleasure to be speaking at the Museum, this Museum in particular. And I'll talk about the role this Museum has played in, in *The Last Days of Dogtown*, which is really very central. The Marsden Hartley show upstairs I think is breathtaking. And I've seen it three times. And I will come back again and again. If you haven't been up there, then, you have a treat in store.

So, today I'm going to talk a little bit about historical fiction, and in particular, writing *The Last Days of Dogtown*. I'm not going to talk for too long and then take as many questions as possible from all of you. So, a few months ago, I was invited to be on a panel of the Newburyport Literary Festival, on a panel about writing historical fiction focused on women. And I was the third person on the panel to talk. And the first one talked about Cleopatra. The second one talked about Anne Boleyn. And then I realized that my historical characters, for the most part, nobody knows who they are. It's a really very different approach to, to writing into history. My historical characters, both female and male, are virtually unknown, at least as three-dimensional characters. So, what draws me to writing historical fiction is silence, is the untold stories, or the under-told stories, of which there are many. I'm drawn to tell the stories of marginal or powerless people, people whose lives were lived outside the purview of history, the capital "H", outside of memory itself, which explains why I tend to focus on the lives of women.

When I was an undergraduate in college, I read Virginia Woolf's essay "A Room of One's Own", and when I re-read it, oh, it must be 10 years ago now, I felt like I'd uncovered the cornerstone of my intellectual life and certainly the inspiration for pretty much all of the fiction that I've written, and a great deal of the nonfiction as well. In one passage, which is pretty well known, Virginia Woolf muses about women of the Elizabethan period, a time, of course in which Shakespeare created a pantheon of powerful and funny and wise women. But as Woolf wrote in 1928, quote, "One knows nothing detailed, nothing perfectly true and substantial about the Elizabethan woman. History scarcely mentions her. She never writes her own life and scarcely keeps a diary. There are only a handful of her letters in existence. She left no plays or poems by which we can judge her. What one wants", wrote Woolf, "is a mass of information. At what age did she marry? How many children had she as a rule? What was her house like? Had she a room to herself? Did she do the cooking? All these facts lie somewhere, presumably, in parish registers and account books. The life of the average Elizabethan woman must be scattered about somewhere. Would one collect and make a book of it." So, I see my novels as part of an ongoing attempt by lots of writers and artists and historians to answer Virginia Woolf's challenge to us and also to 'complicate history', which is one of her terms, to write into the silence of women.

My first novel, *The Red Tent*, I saw a couple of you carrying copies of that, dove deep into the great mother lode of that silence within the Bible. In the Hebrew Bible, there are 2500 personal names, names of people, fewer than ten percent of them belong to women. And of them, a lot of them never say anything, you know, those long lists of begets. So-and-so begets. Those are

lists of begetters. Those were census lists that were used for military conscription. So that's why they didn't, but every now and then in these lists is a woman's name. She's identified by name, the daughter of so and so, the sister, or the wife of so and so. And, I have to think those were remarkable women, their names to even have cropped up into these lists of men's names.

The character Dinah, who is the subject of *The Red Tent*, has a lot more than just a mention of her name. A whole story's told about her, but it's told about her, it's not told in her own voice. And so, in the *Red Tent*, I gave her a voice. It's told in the first person, so she talks for about 280 pages or so. So, Virginia Woolf wrote, actually that women's voices were missing until the 18th century, which is not exactly true. There were poems by Ann Bradstreet, for example, an African who was the dramatist and one of the earliest British novelists and there were letters and diaries as well. But she was right that ordinary women were voiceless, for the most part, and invisible. And Woolf wanted to know about the woman in the street. She wrote, "One often catches a glimpse of her in the lives of the great, whisking away to the background, concealing, I think, sometimes a wink, a laugh, perhaps a tear." And that is certainly what I was trying to do with Dinah who is glimpsed and told the story about and she disappears. So that was that attempt.

10:30

In *The Last Days of Dogtown*, I was drawn to tell the untold stories of people again, rarely lives in history, the rural poor, women and men in the 1820s and 1830s, who were really marginal, who lived in the backwoods in Massachusetts, as there were other groups of people living in the backwoods in Maine and other states all over the United States. It's of course, just up the road from here, where they lived outside the bounds of convention. It's so great to be in a place where I don't have to say, you know, Dogtown is a real place and Good Harbor is a real beach. So, all of that is a given here, which is nice. So, I was writing this book about these characters in the 1820s and the 1830s. And every now and then I had to kick myself in remember what was going on in the rest of the world because there was such a narrow life that was being lived up there in the rocks. So, Beethoven and Schubert were composing and were popular. Lord Byron and Pushkin were publishing. In the United States, Edgar Allan Poe and James Fenimore Cooper were making names for themselves. And barely 50 miles from here, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Margaret Fuller, Thoreau, Louisa May Alcott were all coming of age, they were all talking to each other. And transcendentalism was taking place, taking shape, and the anti-slavery movement was gathering steam.

And there were a bunch of wonderful women's stories in that period, too, but a little less known, but still, one of my favorites, Elizabeth Peabody in Boston was pioneering the notion of early childhood education and introduced the idea of kindergarten to the United States. So, all of that's going on while I'm telling the story -- those of you who have read the book -- know what it was a totally different world that was. And I lost sight of that when I was working on the book. The distance from Boston to Dogtown was more than 50 miles when you measure it by differences in class, and education and opportunity, and literacy. In a way, Dogtown is still in the 18th century. And even a trip into Gloucester with newspapers and bananas and fashions

and shoes that were different shape was a step into the 19th century. Going to Boston, or New York was literally a different world.

The Last Days of Dogtown focuses on women on the very edges of society, who were foraging for wild food, who were cleaning homes of the wealthy, who were making “symbols” to use to cure things, mostly constipation as far as I can tell. It's a big problem. Some of them were called witches and some of them practiced the world's oldest profession, but without any of the fake glamour that's often attached to prostitution. In Dogtown I imagined those women as surviving in some measure, because they could depend on each other's kindness, and on each other's support for survival. They depended on friendship, which remains as far as I'm concerned, the secret healing balm that keeps the world from breaking into a million pieces. And friendship, women's friendships in particular, is the consistent theme in all of my novels. I also think resilience is a, is a theme in them all as well. And the men in *The Last Days of Dogtown* were equally voiceless and invisible in history by virtue of poverty and status. The main male characters are two orphan boys and one free African man. Again, people who are not well known in history.

13:57

Virginia Woolf mentioned that there are parish records and account books and that that's where we would find this history as sources. And you would think that. that's where I started. But that's not that's not where I started *The Last Days of Dogtown*. The idea for this novel came, I was actually finishing *The Red Tent* in Gloucester, we'd rented a house and I was, I was finishing the book. So, I was walking up and down Main Street in Gloucester, to try not to finish the book, I couldn't sit still. And I walked into the bookstore, the wonderful independent bookstore, which we should all support. And found this, this is *Dogtown: A Village Lost in Time* by Thomas Dresser. I had just, my family had just sort of discovered Cape Ann and I was buying everything that I could read back then. So, so I opened this up, and I was just struck mostly by the part called 'Dogtown People', which has this listing, these little thumbnail sketches of characters who are just spectacular characters with great names. Finding names for characters is really hard. This was like being offered them on a platter. Abraham Wharf, who was, let's see, a relative of the Massachusetts Supreme Court Justice and Easter Carter, what a great name, Granny Rich, Annie Carter, Judy Rhines, Molly Jacobs and, and Sarah Phipps, this is Stanley, Stanley, Stanley, these names these characters, those of you who read the book, these names came right out of here, and so did Ruth. And so did the Finsons, the two African characters in the book. So, they came from here. I put this in a file, I had to finish *The Red Tent*. When I finished *The Red Tent*, I didn't want to write anything historical so I wrote *Good Harbor*, which is a contemporary novel, with a very small, takes place over the course of the summer, sort of the opposite of *The Red Tent*. But this was still in my file, I knew where it was and I went back to it, and it was just those names and those stories still appealed to me. And so, I decided I would write a novel about this.

So that was, that was the inspiration. I went to talk to Thomas Dresser who lives on Cape Cod now. So, I started to do research. I found all the books that I could about Gloucester and Cape

Ann, and in particular I looked at the chapters on Dogtown. And they were repetitive. They repeated the same kinds of things that everything referred to one source, the source, the *Rosetta Stone*, which is the oldest piece of evidence that I could find. And that's this. It was published in Gloucester in 1896. It's called *In The Heart of Cape Ann: The Story of Dogtown* by Charles E. Mann. This was the prime source of material for everything written about Dogtown ever since, all these characters that Thomas Dresser talks about in his pamphlet and all the all the other writings and all those other books, this is the primary source material. I found this book in the library here, down the hall. This was one of the first places I came to do research. And the librarians were incredibly generous and kind. And it was a very important place. But I had to have a copy of this. So, I went on the Internet, and I, and I found one. And it's one of my prized possessions. And it's a beautiful little book, by the way. It's also in the exhibit, in Marsden Hartley exhibit upstairs, it's in the case. I don't know if it's, it's probably the one from your library. So, it's very, very fragile. It was published and I read it, let's see.

So, this book, so this is the resource. This is the Rosetta Stone. This is the source. This book is the most unreliable source you could possibly find. It's, it's funny, actually, it had two different dates for the death of Neil Finson. And so, after a description of all the wrong that Tammy Younger did in the world, especially to her nephew, he writes "She wasn't as bad as she'd been painted. As Mr. Benjamin P. Kidder says, and this testimony is confirmed by an agent Betsy Elwell of Malden, who remembers her well, as well as by Mrs. Elmyra Riggs, but recently deceased." So that's who he's, that's who he's quoting. So, I did try to find parish records and primary sources. I am, I searched in the Sawyer Library, in this library, in City Hall, and the Sandy Bay Historical Society, in the Boston Public Library. And I didn't find much, and certainly not much that was helpful to me. And to be honest, that was perfectly fine with me. Because the fewer the specifics, the more freedom I had to embroider and imagine and event the lives of these people. And my goal was not really to set the record straight or to have a straight record, but to give you a good story. And in fact, the author's notes to *The Last Days of Dogtown* really sums up my relationship to the past when I'm writing fiction about these unknown and silent denizens of history, so I'm just going to read this to you. It's just a couple of pages. It really is my, it's, this is true. Everything in the author's notes is actually factual. And after this, it's fiction, I made it up.

19:22

"This is a work of fiction that rests lightly upon the historical record, which is spotty at best when it comes to the village of Dogtown. There was once such a hamlet set on the high ground of part of Cape Ann. You can find signs directing you to its ruins on that rocky fist of coastland, the northernmost boundary of Massachusetts Bay. A local pamphlet, *Dogtown: A Village Lost in Time* by Tom Dresser may still be available for purchase in the bookshops of Gloucester and Rockport, which was known as Sandy Bay until 1840. This little publication contains a not wholly accurate walking map of the area, and some tales about the more vivid characters sent to live there long ago. Most accounts of Dogtown's last citizens rely heavily upon a volume of thirty-one pages published in 1906, that was actually I think that was right, called *In The Heart of Cape*

Ann: or the Story of Dogtown Illustrated. The illustrations are great by Katherine M. Follansbee, who has a fondness for drawing witches astride their brooms. It was written by Charles E Mann. In his prefatory note, Mr. Mann revealed that nearly all of his material was believed, quote, ‘...in the memories of Cape Ann’s aged people... sweet-faced old ladies, often with sweeter voices, or men with whitened locks and time-furrowed cheeks recalling the stories told them by the fireside by other dear old women and noble men of a past century.’ In other words, ancient gossip and hearsay. I tell you this so that you will not make the mistake of confusing my fancies for facts, and yet the death of the village, even one as poor and small as Dogtown, is not an altogether trivial thing. Surely there was value in the quiet lives lived among those imposing boulders under that bright sky. Why not imagine their stories as real, not true; for the space of this entertainment, where's the harm?”

So that that's my attitude when I'm writing historical fiction. My goal in imagining the past is to create a world that feels real to the reader, that sounds and tastes and smells real, that you feel like you've had an experience of what life, real life lived was like, in that time. A world within the realm of the historically possible, which means my research is basic, basically defensive, so there are no anachronisms in anything I write, so there were no wrist watches in Egypt, when I wrote about The Red Tent, or tomatoes or chickens, by the way. And in the backwoods of Massachusetts, I was very careful to do research about what people would have eaten and how they would have foraged for, for firewood and things like that. I was really very careful. Even so, as I mentioned in the book a mockingbird, and I got an email from a reader saying, ‘Do you have evidence that there was a mockingbird on Cape Anne in the period in which you write because according to my research, there was not.’ I was actually in the library saying this, and ha, ha, ha, she was there.

But definitely very careful. I really tried very hard. So, I think actually, I got that right. But in any case, the details of the past for me are only props, sometimes. Sometimes writers of historical fiction, even relatively recent historical fiction, can fall in love with their research, and they tell you everything there is to know about for example, doing laundry over boiling cauldrons. There's a scene in *The Last Days of Dogtown* where that happens. And then if you're lucky as I was lucky to have an editor who said, ‘Your research is showing’, like ‘Your slip is showing’. Cut it down. There were like pages about how many times you had to go to the river and get water and change the water and it was enough. You didn't need all of that. But then again, I'm one of those people who does not read, did not read, the whaling chapters in *Moby Dick*. I would skim that. Some people would live for that.

And there was great joy in doing the research. I remember, this was actually the first book where the Internet was of use to me. For *The Red Tent*, there was nothing, absolutely nothing, but by now, I could look up the history of making butter in in the 19th century. And that found its way to Google and it was great fun to find out how butter was made and how it was stored and how it went to market. And I and it's, it's in there, but it's in a small, small form. You don't know everything that I read about it. But the most fascinating part, I think of the research that I

did, was reading about the history of Africans in New England. And in this regard, I think *The Last Days of Dogtown* helps complicate the mythology of New England. I think we like to think of ourselves as Yankees, as moral and hardworking and our forefathers as high achieving and dedicated to the idea of freedom and abolition. But the story of manumission, of freeing slaves, was not so neat. It was in fact, it was in fact a state-by-state thing. Some states were more lenient in terms of how they freed slaves, others didn't. Massachusetts was not one of the best, by the way, it was one of the slower ones.

Audience Member 24:41

But I was just going to read a paragraph here about emancipation. This is set in Rhode Island.

“Word of emancipation had finally reached the Africans of the South County plantations. Ruth heard it in church where the slaves were crowded into the narrow balcony called Nigger Heaven. Newport is full of free Africans, someone behind her whispered. The man to Ruth’s left leaned over her and said he heard that all the Rhode Island born slaves could claim their freedom if they were 21. But a woman on the right warned that the masters were fighting it one by one, arguing how this man was going someplace else and that girl was too young to count. First of all, you needed a paper to prove it, and what master was going to put it on paper. The talk upstairs got so loud, the parson slapped his hand on the lectern to quiet the noise. Three times he counted, but it did no good. Ruth saw proof that the news was true from the looks on the upturned white faces. Some of them seemed scared, some sad, all of them plainly unsettled.”

That's taken from the historical record and so is the name for the loft where the Africans were sitting. And they were called Africans. And they were also called the N word. That's an old, it's an old epithet in the United States.

The stories of Cornelius and Ruth, the two African characters in the book, are historically accurate, although not true. He does, there were many, many Africans who were in New England who grew up with a family as described in *The Last Days of Dogtown* who ate at the same table, who in fact learned to read with the children of the household, and who were given their freedom at some point in their lives. Ruth’s story is also historically accurate. She's a child of rape, she's given away. She's sold by a black woman to a black man who then sells her to a plantation in Rhode Island, which was where the largest slaveholding was in these large dairy plantations on the south coast of Rhode Island. And for, for until, until the Civil War, Africans were in danger of being snatched and sold back into slavery, abetted by greedy New Englanders. The whole history of Africans in New England is just fascinating. There were many, many fewer women than men here in New England. There were men like Neil’s description, who couldn't hack it in the cities and went into the country, and in some cases, up in Maine, and married into Native American tribes to get away from white civilization where they were not allowed to succeed.

27:16

There's a great piece that I found that in Salem in the late 1700s, early 1800s, every year there was a big parade that was allowed, and the Africans were allowed, the slaves were allowed to

dress up and muster on the, on the common and they even had weapons. And people quickly decided that wasn't such a good idea. It was like a day when they were free, and they came for picnics and parties and they dressed up and everything they owned. But it's gone, it's gone That was just a little tiny piece of history that doesn't find its way anywhere into this book. But that's the joy of writing historical fiction, and, and the sadness is all the stuff that ends up on the cutting room floor. Again, I set my goal in writing a novel, whether it's set in the present or in the past, is that readers, that you care about the characters, everything I write is very character-driven. And I really want you to miss them when you reach the last page and it's time to say goodbye.

This is the first time I have ever re-read any of the fiction that I've written ever. So, I reread 90%, I have to finish it, *The Last Days of Dogtown*. And once, once I got over the idea of why I used that word twice in a paragraph. I remembered how much -- you can always see the flaws -- I do remember how much I loved these characters, and how I thought they were so interesting, so good, so worthwhile to get to know, even in the saddest cases. I did hear from readers who found this too sad. They found it depressing. But I actually, I think of these people as survivors, of people with remarkable resilience. The two boys in particular I think are an example of one child, two children raised in horrific circumstances, one of whom manages to come out of it whole, and one of whom manages to come out of it in a way, who never makes a connection to other people. And we have no explanation why one person who was raised by wolves does fine when another person raised by bears doesn't do fine. And so, so the idea, the notion of resilience is at the heart and soul of this and to me, that is a very uplifting story, and it's not a straight..., although there's sadness in this, there's also love, and there's also hope. So, I think that's all I'm gonna say about *The Last Days of Dogtown* and then we're going to have some questions and answers. It's up to you. This is the fun part with questions and answers. I will repeat the question, so don't worry.

30:00 Audience Member

So, it sounds like the sources are pretty spotty. But do you have a sense of when and why Dogtown became a village in the first place? I mean, no river, lousy farmland, not much of your road, no church. What was it that drew people there? And when did that happen.

Anita Diamant

The question is about why on earth was that the settlement on Cape Ann because it was hard to get to, it was rocky, there was no church up there. The way I understand it is that it was very British. There was a commons out there. There was lots of empty land and people divided the commons up and it was called the commons settlement. That was one of the earliest things as well. And I think there was a notion of safety up there. It didn't last long as a thriving community. People figured out pretty fast that you couldn't grow much out there. And there was, there was a better livelihood to be made along the way. Either by trade or by or fishing, and then and then later, much later, in fact, quarrying. So, it was, it seemed to me that sort of a British mistake that they were recreating some notion of what they had come from in the old country. And it didn't work. And I, it's been a long time since I did that research, but it was

really only a thriving community for maybe two generations. And then it started slowly leaking people down and, and it was, it was in decline longer way longer than that it thrived. So that's, that's my understanding of why. It's not a great answer, but that's what I could come up with because it makes no sense.

Audience Member

And the two generations were sort of right before the establishment of the village in 1738.

Anita Diamant

I think so again, it's in a file someplace. It's not in here anymore. Yeah, this was a very early settlement and they started having to go to church, they had walked quite a distance to go to church. So that was another reason to stop it. I think there was a there was an attempt to open a parish up there, which didn't never, never got very far. Second parish opened someplace else. So, it struggled from the very beginning. It was doomed.

Audience Member

And there was one of the questions that we have a couple students with us, and they were very interested in writing historical fiction. And so, one of the questions they had was, what advice would you give a student or a young writer who has sort of entered this exciting field, if you will, but you know, where do you draw the line? Where does the nonfiction become fiction? Does that make sense?

Anita Diamant

Good questions from students about when you're writing your historical fiction, where's the line between fiction and nonfiction? I don't know if that's a question about research or not about research. I think you have to be historically accurate, or it sort of loses its validity. People who know anything about the history are going to go, doesn't know what she's talking about, why would I believe any of this. By the same token, if you, if you keep it in, you just, it's all about the history and the characters and stories are given short shrift, that's not going to work as a, as a novel. If you're writing fiction, that I think, that has to be front and center. And people are very successful writing novels like that. And you know, they'll have an entire chapter on glove making and it's, you know, people, it's okay, they just couldn't let go of it. So, you're going to learn all about glove making and then we'll get back to the character. So, there are lots of different ways to write historical fiction. I tend to write but relatively short books and there are really, the women on the panel with me in Newburyport, they write really thick books, and they do an enormous amount of research on just about the clothing people wore. And then they describe it in great detail. So, I don't think there's a, an answer to that one in particular, I think there's room for lots of different ways to tell, to tell stories about the past.

Audience Member

Do you consider doing footnotes?

Anita Diamant

I would never put footnotes in a novel. First of all, it's asking for trouble. "Where is that, I'm going to go find that source." But that's, I mean, that's not why you read novels. I've had, the questions I've had have been, like, where's the source for this and where you can the source for that? And if you read it 10 years ago, I remember nothing. I'm gonna get a necklace that says 'I remember nothing'. But, but if you had footnotes, what novel has footnotes? Someone, someone's published a novel with footnotes but I don't want footnotes when I read a novel, I want to read a story and I want to keep going. I don't want to stay up to check it out. There are acknowledgments and some people, some novelists have very long list of acknowledgments and talk and then sort of figure out what they got, who they interviewed and what resources they use, what books they use, and I have in the acknowledgments in some of my books, acknowledged people who helped me and also really important pieces of evidence. And in this book, I acknowledged, one of the things I acknowledged in the paperback edition, which I hadn't. This is the last page of the paperback acknowledgments. "Finally, although Reverend Hartshorn does not in the pages of this book, acknowledge his great debt to the words and opinions of Jonathan Edwards, the renowned 18th century Calvinist revival preacher, I would like to do so here." So, so my fictional character Reverend Hartshorn ripped off from Jonathan Edwards fire, it was very famous, fire and brimstone speech. Which was done. That's what people did. I mean, they got the sermons and they went, I'm saying that. I didn't want to acknowledge it, and he doesn't, the Reverend doesn't and nor did preachers. And I didn't acknowledge it. And somebody wrote to me and said, 'You stole that,' so I thought I'd better acknowledge it.

Audience Member 36:26

What part of Dogtown, what's next on Cape Ann.

Anita Diamant

Rockport Lodge. That's the name of the novel I'm working on now. It starts in, starts in. I'm sorry. It starts in 1915. And it's set in Boston a lot to, it's about immigrants, immigrant girls who spend some time in Rockport and it becomes, a lot it becomes a place where major changes happen to them. So, it moves back and forth.

Audience Member 36:55

Did you ever establish a population at the height of occupation up there?

Anita Diamant

Did I ever establish the population at the height of occupation? No, I didn't. I didn't, because I wasn't writing about that period of time so I didn't need to know that. I was really writing about the last days. I was writing about the last I think it was 15 years altogether. And it ended with the death of Cornelius Finson, which again, Mr. Mann gave two different times. So, I picked one of them, and I made him the last one out, and so I was writing about deaths more than successes. These people were, they were not succeeding in Dogtown, they were eking out a living. And the children, the few children up there, left, had to leave.

Audience Member 37:45

I'm interested in the historical fiction that you're writing, how do you determine the period of time that you're going to write particular books about. It's bottomless, it's endless...

Anita Diamant

So, the question is how do I choose the period? I don't choose the period first, at all. It's the story, it's something this was, as I told you how I found this period, I didn't say, Oh, I want to write about the early 1800s in rural Massachusetts, I found this pamphlet. And I did it. It was like, how interesting how intriguing. I have a little house in Rockport. And the Rockport Lodge is very close to where I live. I have friends that in fact, stayed in that place in the late 70s. I have a friend who cooked in that place. And so it was always intriguing to me. I watched it crumble, for those of you remember what it looked like as it deteriorated. So, it was kind of an interesting place. So that's, and in 1915, it would have been, it was in its heyday. So, and I'm interested in the immigrant experience, so that's how I picked that. *Day After Night*, which is the other historical novel I've written, is set in 1945 in Palestine, and I picked that only because I heard this amazing story. And that's the finale, it tells the story of an escape in 1945. And so, I didn't pick it. The story is what, is what determined entirely. And I'm not particularly interested in revisiting those, any particular period of history, which means I have to reinvent it. Really having to start from scratch all over again. Although since I remember nothing I have to start all the research again. I'm not kidding.

Anita Diamant 39:40

The question is, how long does it take to write a novel? And how do I know when I've done enough research to start? It takes me about three years or that's what I give myself. I give myself a deadline and publisher takes the deadline. So, this one's due December 1. And you can keep doing research forever. So, I will read broadly and then start. And then the specifics. as I go along, I'll go I need to know, how to make butter, for example, I didn't look up butter, before then. I really didn't know how they make butter until later into the novel. And that's been true all the way through. With all of these books, there were a few texts that were really important. Sometimes I would interview people. And that was really important. But then the research accompanies me along the way. And the Internet makes that very, very easy. Although, still, libraries are great, because libraries take you places, down radicals, like I would have never found X, Y, or Z if I hadn't been walking past a bookshelf, and I picked up a different book and Oh, look at that. And then that will, that could send you off in a whole different direction. And there's something just great about doing that in a library

Audience Member 40:56

As your characters begin to come alive for you, do they ever surprise you?

Anita Diamant

Do characters ever surprise me when I'm writing? Um, yeah, I guess so. It's not in the writing, but it's in the rewriting more than anything because they're pretty sketchy when they come in. They're really kind of cartoonish in some ways. So, it's in the rewriting and understanding what

motivation might be. And then and then oh, that that's where she might, this kind of person would go that way. So, sort of. Actually, plot turns surprise me a little bit more. So, somebody will say something and, Oh, we're going that way. But by the by the middle of the book, I kind of know who they are and what kind of people they are. But it's about getting to know you. I really, really, I don't really know them when I start.

Audience Member

I haven't read the novel yet, but I'm going to. I'm just curious as to how the town got its name.

Anita Diamant

Actually, I just noticed upstairs that it was referred to as Dogtown in 1785, which is remarkable. I really didn't know that. There are many Dogtowns all over the United States. It's not the only Dogtown. It's generally a term of, it's not a nice thing to call a place, a Dogtown. It's going to the dogs, it's gone to the dogs. It's kind of a slum. There's a neighborhood in St. Louis called Dogtown, which was a slum for a long time. Dogtown in the Gold Rush, in places called Dogtown, which were not towns even. So, it's, it's an epithet. It's something that in the book actually, they're, they're constantly some of the men are constantly defending against having it called Dogtown because that's an insult to them, that they live in a Dogtown. So, I think that's where there have been very romantic ideas because there was so many dogs out there, and it was named after the dogs; I don't think so. And there's this wonderful book called *The Secret Life of Dogs*, by Elizabeth, I don't remember the last name. It was a wonderful book about packs and dogs don't live in gigantic packs, it wouldn't have worked. So, it couldn't have happened that there were tons of dogs out there, according to canine anthropology. But actually, I think, there's that song by Harry Chapin? (Yes.) It's the widows and the dogs and it's very romantic, but I don't think it was about dogs, so much, I think it was about a theme or place. But again, I was really surprised to see that early reference. I hadn't seen that before, so I could be completely wrong. I thought it was I thought it was a name that was applied later as it was starting to deteriorate. So, I have to stop telling that story now that I have evidence. See, you don't want to learn too much, you want to start with truth.

Audience Member 44:01

I know a lot of this is from your imagination. I'm just curious details of the characters like the relationship between Judy Rhines and Cornelius and Molly and Sally and how much of that is

Anita Diamant

The relationships between the characters are very much from my imagination. I think there may have been some reference that Cornelius and Judy Rhines lived in the same building, somehow, but and the girls know, I made that up entirely. Their relationships are my invention and the people falling in love and the people falling out of love and Judy's relationship with the woman who lived in in town, that's all invented. So, and that's where there's a lot of freedom, obviously, to imagine what it would have been like. One of the things that I find really interesting in writing historical fiction, including 1945, is that people didn't talk to each other about their feelings, so much. We live in such a professional age that we have this sense that

everybody must have been telling everybody everything forever. No. You weren't supposed to, you weren't allowed to, it was considered bad taste, it was unhealthy, actually, to wallow in the past. So, so having had, describing people's feelings for one another when they never talk about it, it's a little, it's challenging. It's very interesting to think about how different things are now that even good friends in, in *The Last Days of Dogtown*, Easter and Judy are sitting down, and Judy says to her, "why didn't you tell me that, you didn't need to know that, it wasn't necessarily appropriate, you can't tell me that." And they actually have a momentary falling out over what wasn't said. But then they come back together again. And so that's a really interesting shift to look, to understand about now versus until at least 1960, I think. I'm not kidding.

In the forward to my book 1945, so that's recent history and people did not talk about Holocaust experiences until the Eichmann trials. And it sort of blew the lid off of everything. People, there were memoirs. It's not to say that nobody had done it, but this notion that everybody should share that it's important, that people share their personal stories, it was nuts, you were supposed to be quiet about it, you had to live in the future, that was wildly in the past. And I'm sure there are some psychiatrists who wouldn't have agreed with that at the time, but that was sort of the cultural attitude towards that, leaving the past and going with the future. We don't live that way so much anymore.

Audience Member 46:32

To the extent that you read historical fiction, yourself, are there some authors that you particularly admire and would recommend to others who admire your work?

Anita Diamant

I don't read that much historical fiction. I tend to read contemporary fiction when I read, because I'm curious about what people are doing right now. And when I do read something that's set in the past, it's not because it's historical fiction, it's because someone said, you really have to read this. And it's quite, people ask me what I read, I always freeze. I can never remember what's in my mind, I.... Actually, I can tell you something, I'm reading about yoga by William Broad. I'm reading non-fiction. When I'm writing fiction, actually, I tend to read nonfiction, when I'm writing non-fiction, I tend to read fiction. But I also read poetry, which is cleansing. So, I'm not, I'm not now reading. I was trying to read fiction but I was having a hard time.

Audience Member 47:31

What's your writing habits?

Anita Diamant

My writing habit? Very sloppy. I haven't written by hand in a very long time. I tend to write better in the morning. I'm really actually on a tear right now so I'm working every single day in the morning and when you have momentum going, from nine until two is a really good day. And I give myself deadlines. I was journalist for a very long time, so that drives deadlines into

your head, which is a very good thing. So, I meet my deadlines. So, then I have one long term deadline I have by the end of the summer, I need to be here, and by December I need to be there. In between I give myself deadlines so I work to the deadline. And I actually am pretty good, I don't cram, don't stay up late the night before. Because I was, I wrote for newspapers and magazine for so long that I, you can't do that. So, I work on a computer. I don't know how anyone ever wrote a book without a computer. I'm in awe when I see manuscripts. I do an enormous amount of revising. And I find writing real hard. I don't enjoy it. I've heard writers say they love writing and I hate it. I like having written. I like the finished product. Across the writing. I also have an, I'm in a writing group. I have two tremendous friends who are wonderful editors and wonderful human beings and they are cheerleaders as well as editors. So, we, we hold each other's hands in the process of getting finished with books. I count on them a lot.

Audience Member 49:23

Since you brought that up and it's been swirling around in my head. How are you so lucky to have these wonderful writing partners? I'm actually a published author of non-fiction and I'm finishing up a novel. And to find writers who are, you know, published or who are professional writers to share with, share with questions like how do you find the writing partners, right?

Anita Diamant

The question is how to you find writing partners. It's luck. Actually, Amy Hoffman, who's still in this, she and I started, was when I started writing *The Red Tent*, my first novel, that I thought I don't know how to do this anymore, so she and I started a group knows a lot. It's pretty big like six people for a while and then it dwindled. And then we added Steven McCauley, and we are such different writers and I can't even begin to tell you that. It's helpful, it's fine, but they're also just, they're smart, they're helpful. They're thoughtful, they both teach writing. And they're fine. So, it's, I think it's trial and error. We have people that Amy and I will be attending the group that are not so great, fell away and three is fine for us. Doesn't have to be a big group. I've heard of two or three writers who read for each other and go back and forth and that works for them. It's trial and error. It's not easy. There's no, you can put an ad on Craigslist, but I.... Another question?

Audience Member 50:56

How did you choose to transition from journalist to fiction?

Anita Diamant

How did I choose to make the transition from, it's really nonfiction to fiction? So, I've written three nonfiction books before that. I had written nonfiction for like 20 years and I thought I knew how to do this. And I did know that. And so, I wanted the challenge. So, I actually thought about getting a real job. But I realized I couldn't do that. I've freelanced my entire life. So, I wrote, I wrote this as a, *The Red Tent*, kind of a, it was a project. I didn't know if it would be published, but I did give myself deadlines, and it was my knitting project. I was writing, I was writing for magazines, and I was writing, *Choosing Jewish Life*. That was the book that I had an advance for while I was working on *The Red Tent*. And so, it was, you know, an experiment, and

I got very lucky. It was the right moment in history and it found its audience, which is not a given and allowed me to write this book. That's why, no great, you know, it was not an inspiration that came. I did not always want to write a novel. It was, I was 40 and I needed something different

Audience Member 52:18

When can we expect to see Rockport Lodge at the bookstore?

Anita Diamant

When will you see Rockport Lodge on the bookshelves? It gets turned in in December and if my editors like it, if it's accepted, it is usually out in the following fall, so in the fall of 2013, that will probably be when it's coming out. And I will of course, Paul and I will of course be at the bookstore. I always say yes to him, an independent bookstore. One more.

Audience Member

I just want to make the comment that I did not find the book at all depressing and it was very warm and hopeful. What you really characterized Ruth and Cornelius very nicely. Did you have experience or how did you decide to portray them?

Anita Diamant

How did I portray Ruth and Neil. You know, they were kind of my favorite characters in some ways. I just thought it was so lonely. I did find them very isolated, very lonely and very sad for that reason, but they had great dignity at the same time. I made up the whole thing about the murder and that's actually an earlier story that did happen on Cape Ann, there was a murder of a young slave girl. So, I conflated that in here. The business about Rhode Island is completely invented. I just wanted I wanted to include that because I thought Oh, look, I didn't know there were slave plantations in Rhode Island. So, I went to Rhode Island, walked around. And with Neil also when I read about what it was like for an African man in New England in that period of time and how hard it was to get work in the city and that in fact that Africans did go off into the woods where they could find a safe haven. So, all of that just suggested these, these isolated, sad characters. And they were close to being, I mean, their mothers were slaves, they were, they had, they came over on the boat. One of them was actually one was from (?) and the other from Barbados I think, or, but they were close enough to that experience that there was still this lingering feeling of deracination and so, so I just, I was just taken by them. Falling in love with your research is not so bad always.

Audience Member 54:45

I have one more. Your characters are living in Dogtown and some of them seem really, they're okay being there. There, no one's bossing them around. It's a, it's a really nice place for them to be. And then we have Hartley writing, you know, with his letters upstairs, that he's so captivated by Dogtown and that's where nature can go and you know where she lives for herself alone. And so just do you have a relationship with Dogtown? Do you have, after writing,

you do visit there? Like was it spiritual for you at all? Was there any sort of draw other than those books?

Anita Diamant

I walked around several times. I went with some friends of mine, we hiked around, we got lost. We found our way out but it wasn't that, but haven't been here before. I find it an odd place. And I think again, a lot of people have written that there's something, something with the light, there's something about the history, there's just sort of this haunted thing, those rocks, the rocks with the name with the words on them. It's an odd place. But the Dogtown that I'm writing about, the Dogtown in Hartley's paintings is not the Dogtown that exists today. It's so different. It's so overgrown. It's so, it's a mess and it has so little of what it must have been like when it was settled even in the days when I'm writing about. The trees weren't there so you could actually see the water. And it's, it's, it's wilder in some ways than it was in this time. And certainly, it's not what you see when you see any of those paintings, not just Hartley's but the other paintings outside of there, show you a place that I'm kind of nostalgic for. I kind of I was wondering what it would be like to actually have a landscape architect take over and what would they do with it? What time would you restore it to sort of, you can't sort of pre-settlement because they'd have to plant all the trees or would you have rolling fields, but it feels like, it feels lost to me. There. I do. I do walk around up there to silence and walk around the quarries and head in and out but it's um I find it's actually kind of a sad place. I want to rescue it. Thank you