

Rosenberg Library Celebrates the History of Domestic Life this Spring

Rosenberg Library is pleased to announce that the Spring 2014 selection for the Museum Book Club Series is *At Home: A Short History of Private Life* by Bill Bryson.

ABOUT THE BOOK

According to Bryson, “Houses aren’t refuges from history. They are where history ends up.” This assertion is something many Galvestonians can appreciate, especially those who own historic properties. Weaving humor and wit into this engaging narrative, Bill Bryson gives readers a room-by-room tour of his historic English home highlighting seemingly mundane domestic objects we often don’t think twice about. The bathroom provides a platform for the history of personal hygiene and plumbing, while the kitchen is the venue to explore the evolution of the human diet and the ancient spice trade. In total, 17 domestic spaces in Bryson’s house are examined as he offers some surprisingly captivating stories behind the multitude of items found inside—from toilets and light fixtures to furniture and food.

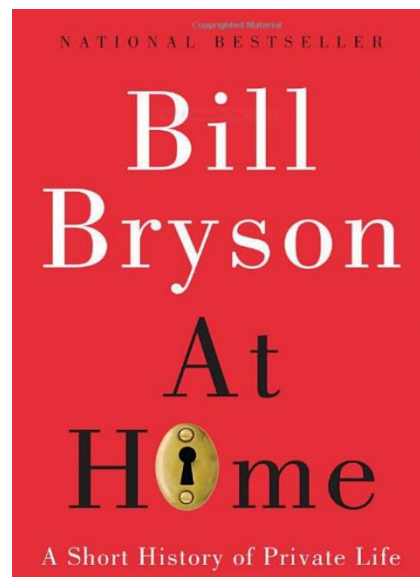
Bryson’s engaging style makes *At Home* a truly enjoyable (and educational) book. From the attic to the floorboards, readers will never look at the contents of their homes the same way again.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bill Bryson was born in Des Moines, Iowa in 1951. At age 22, Bryson travelled abroad to England where he eventually settled. He worked as a writer for English newspapers and penned travel articles. In the mid-1990s, Bryson moved back to the United States and wrote his first full-length travel book, *The Lost Continent*, which chronicles his journey through small-town America. Since then, he has authored a number of bestsellers including *A Walk in the Woods*, *I’m A Stranger Here Myself*, and *In a Sunburned Country*.



*The predecessor to cotton Q-tips, ear spoons were used to remove ear wax. This particular example is made of gold and had a toothpick on the opposite end which is now missing.
(Gift of Helen Ebert)*



Cover image of Bill Bryson's *At Home: A Short History of Private Life*

Other books by Bryson are *Bill Bryson's Dictionary of Troublesome Words*, *Neither Here nor There: Travels in Europe*, *Made in America*, *The Mother Tongue*, *Bill Bryson's African Diary*, and *A Short History of Nearly Everything*.

FROM THE PERMANENT COLLECTION

Bryson provides readers with the history behind certain modern conveniences in our home that we now take for granted such as electricity. Book club participants will view ca. 1830s whale oil lamps and candle molds from the library’s museum collection.

Other weird and wonderful domestic devices such as a gold ear wax remover from the 1880s and a 17th century bed-warming pan will be on display. (According to legend, the bed warmer originally belonged to a man named John Proctor who was accused of witchcraft and was hung during the Salem Witch Trials). Vintage kitchen tools and dining gadgets are also included in the program.

The elaborate—and often excessive—mourning rituals of the Victorian Age are described in detail in Bryson’s book, and associated relics can be found in the library’s museum collection. The black crepe mourning veil worn by Henry Rosenberg’s widow, Mollie, after his death will be on display along with mourning jewelry and black-bordered calling cards from the period.

ABOUT THE BOOK CLUB

Museum Book Club offers participants the chance to experience art and literature in a more interactive way. Members will have the opportunity to view art and historical artifacts from the Rosenberg Library Museum collection as they discuss related books.

The book club focuses on a single book and related museum objects on a quarterly basis. The first meeting of the Spring 2014 Rosenberg Library Museum Book Club will be a brown bag lunch session, Wednesday, March



In Galveston's earliest days, residents had to rely on candles to light their homes at night. Candles were handmade in tin molds like this one. (Library purchase)



Ca. 1893 photograph of Mollie Ragan MacGill Rosenberg, widow of Henry Rosenberg, wearing her mourning costume including a black widow's veil.

12th, from 12:00 noon – 1:00 pm. A second brown bag lunch club will be held on Thursday, April 17th, from 12:00 noon – 1:00 pm. On Saturday May 17th, the book discussion and art presentation will take place from 11:00 am – 12:30 pm.

Registration is required for all Museum Book Club meetings. Established book clubs are encouraged to participate. Groups of over 10 people are asked to call the Reference Desk so that we may arrange to accommodate your entire group.

At Home: A Short History of Private Life is available for [check out at the Rosenberg Library](#).