

Love of history comes alive in 'Devil's Elbow'

LONDERGAN'S FIRST NOVEL SET IN 17TH-CENTURY WEST BROOKFIELD

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LEICESTER — It's not the fact that he published his first book that thrills Ed Londergan. It's not that most of the book reviews are five-star, or that it's really selling.

It's that people enjoy reading it.

"What feels best is when people tell me they liked it," he said. "Having people say, 'It was wonderful, it was like I was there,' that's what makes me feel great."

The book, "The Devil's Elbow," weaves the fictitious story around a fact-based depiction of King Philip's War between the Native Americans and New England pioneer settlers. It takes place in West Brookfield, which was then part of Brookfield, in the 1660s and 1670s.

"It's a story about a boy's passage into manhood, really, and the adventures he experiences and encounters along the way," Londergan said.

"The Devil's Elbow" combines Londergan's love of history and English. While he published some short stories in college and various articles throughout his career as a financial advisor and energy-efficiency analyst, this was his first real attempt at becoming an author.

"I just sat down one day and started writing," he said. "The story had been rolling around inside of me. After three and a half years it was done."

The writing part was preceded by about four years of intriguing research about West Brookfield during King Philip's War, Londergan said.

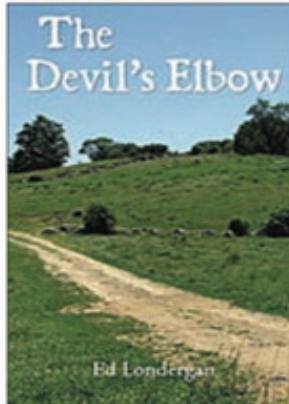
It focuses on Wheeler's Surprise and the Siege of Brookfield, which was a battle between Nipmuc Indians and the English settlers in August 1675.

"I loved doing the research," Londergan said. "I learned a tremendous amount. I probably read 100 books."

One of Londergan's goals for writing the book was to let people know how historically rich West Brookfield is.

"I hope people get an appreciation of this area," he said. "If you look for it, you'll be amazed. People don't know it is here. I've walked around the town with people and said, 'This is where the house was.' 'Here is where Indians were.' 'Let's go to the place the ambush happened,' and people start getting interested."

Londergan grew up in Worcester, lived in West



The cover of "The Devil's Elbow," the first book by Ed Londergan, a longtime West Brookfield resident who now lives in Leicester.

Brookfield for years, and then moved to Leicester. He and his wife are planning to move back to West Brookfield next year for several reasons, including the connection he feels to the town, especially since he wrote "The Devil's Elbow."

Another of Londergan's goals in writing the book was to relay a sense of daily life in West Brookfield in the 1660s and 1670s. He wanted to do more than just tell what it was like — he wanted to let readers live it.

"I want people to see it, feel it, smell it," he said. "From what people said I guess I succeeded."

Londergan said he worked hard to bring alive the sights, smells and sounds of the Foster Hill siege, when 99 people were trapped in a four-room house for days during a hot and humid August.

"In those days, gunpowder was not good, and it would've caused smoke in the house," he said. "And two women gave birth, you have to think about that. One guy got killed — what did they do with the body?"

Londergan works details like those into the story.

"I had one I scene where the main character is talking about a sound they couldn't identify," he said. "It was all the flies, millions of flies, because the Indians had killed all the horses and cows and just left them there, and there were millions of flies. I tried to get into stuff like that, so they would be able to feel it."

Since "The Devil's Elbow" first came out in August, Londergan has sold well over 3,000 copies through local book



Ed Londergan

signings and sales, as well as electronic and hard copy Barnes & Noble and Amazon.com sales, he said.

While the number of sales hasn't seemed to make much of a difference to him, people's reactions to the book did, Londergan said.

"Those things didn't matter at first, but I started getting reviews, and when people gave it five stars, that made me feel good that they liked it," he said.

One of the things Londergan thinks adds to the popularity of "The Devil's Elbow" is its broad interest.

"When I first started, I thought it would be for people who like history," he said. "But it appeals to a lot of different people. There's some romance, some adventure, some danger. I've had people who don't like history say it's a great story."

While there is some violence that is part of the main storyline, there is nothing else that would make it inappropriate for any audience, he said.

"There is very little swearing, no sex, it's not upsetting to kids — anyone can read it," said

Londergan, who is 55. "We have grandkids, and our 9-year-old grandson read it, and he thought it was fine."

Throughout his conversation, Londergan kept going back to how satisfying it is to hear that people enjoyed reading his book.

"My wife and I were at Salem Cross Inn and a woman came over to me and said, 'I understand you are the guy who wrote this book. I think it is one of the best books that I've read in a long time,'" Londergan recounted. "That was just amazing."

Londergan is well into writing the sequel, which he said he'd like to get into bookstores later this year.

"It's a continuation of the story and the main characters are heading out toward the Springfield area," he said.

"The Devil's Elbow" is available at the West Brookfield and Leicester public libraries, at the Salem Cross Inn, Barnes & Noble in Millbury and online at Barnes & Noble and Amazon.com.

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