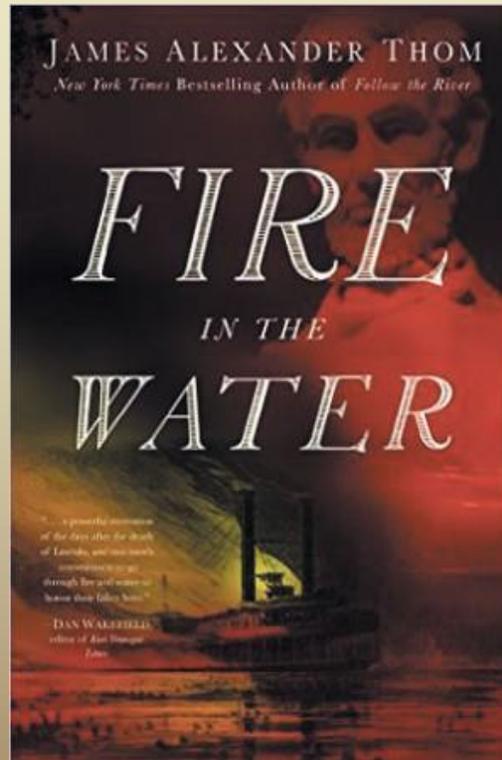
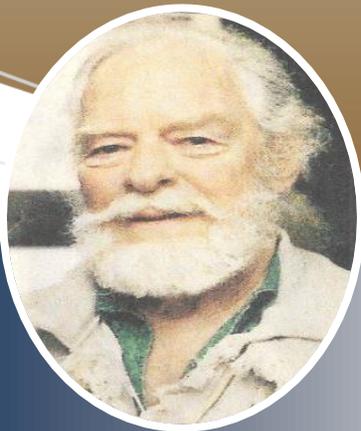


# Fire in the Water

For famous one-armed war correspondent Paddy Quinn, this will be his final Civil War assignment: the funeral of the assassinated President Lincoln. Quinn and his new bride, Felice, are aboard the steamboat Sultana going up the Mississippi River toward Illinois to meet the Funeral Train. When their honeymoon vessel stops at Vicksburg, it takes on a cargo of 2,000 sick and ragged survivors of the Andersonville prisoner-of-war camp, kept alive only by their desire to get home. While he is interviewing them about life in the notorious prison, the Sultana, carrying five times its lawful number of passengers, explodes after midnight. Quinn is blown overboard with the emaciated veteran Robb Macombie, and in the worst night of his life proves himself a better man than he had ever imagined.



**James Alexander Thom** was born in Owen County and still resides there, in a log house he built himself. Thom studied English and journalism at Butler University, after which he became a reporter and columnist for *The Indianapolis Star*, as well as a freelance magazine writer. His writing focuses on frontier and Indian Wars history, and his carefully researched novels have sold more than 2 million copies. Two of these novels were made into television films by Ted Turner and Hallmark. *Follow the River*, a 1981 novel about a pioneer woman captured by Shawnee Indians became a New York Times bestseller and is now in its 50<sup>th</sup> printing. *Panther in the Sky*, his biographical novel about Shawnee chieftain Tecumseh, won the Western Writers of America – Spur Award for best novel in 1989. His years of research among Shawnee Indians for *Panther in the Sky* led to his marriage to Dark Rain, a Shawnee Indian with whom he co-authored the 2003 novel *Warrior Woman*. He is currently working on another American Indian novel and is illustrating one of his children's books.



James Alexander  
Thom

The Eugene  
& Marilyn Glick  
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## Useful Links:

Interview with James Alexander Thom:

<http://deborahkalbbooks.blogspot.com/2017/02/q-with-james-alexander-thom.html>

NPR article on the Sultana sinking:

<https://www.npr.org/2015/04/27/402515205/the-shipwreck-that-led-confederate-veterans-to-risk-all-for-union-lives>

Eugene & Marilyn Glick Indiana Authors Award:

[www.indianaauthorsaward.org](http://www.indianaauthorsaward.org)

# The Indiana Authors Award

The Eugene and Marilyn Glick Indiana Authors Award was established when **The Indianapolis Public Library Foundation** received a generous grant from **the Glick Fund, a fund of Central Indiana Community Foundation**. This program seeks to recognize the contributions of Indiana authors to the literary landscape in Indiana and across the nation. The Award is divided into three categories: Emerging, for new writers of one or two books that show great promise; Regional, for writers well known and respected especially in Indiana and the Midwest; and National, for writers of widespread acclaim. Each winning author receives a cash prize and a \$2,500 grant for the Indiana public library of his or her choice.

## Discussion Questions



1. What did you know about the Sultana sinking prior to reading *Fire in the Water*?
2. The events of the novel begin with the assassination of President Lincoln. How does Lincoln's assassination set the tone for the book? In what ways is Lincoln a main character in the narrative?
3. As Paddy interviews the prisoners, he hears some colorful, painful stories about their lives in a prisoner-of-war camp. Which story stuck out to you most and why?
4. *Fire in the Water* primarily uses third-person narrative. However, there are also first-person diary entries. Why do you think Thom chose that approach?
5. Thom's background as a journalist is evident in the thorough research and rich historical details seen throughout the novel. Do you think the book handled the balance between history and fiction well? Did any of the characters' words, actions or decisions seem out of place with your understanding of that time and place?
6. What, if any, parallels do you see between the events and discourse in this book and America today?