

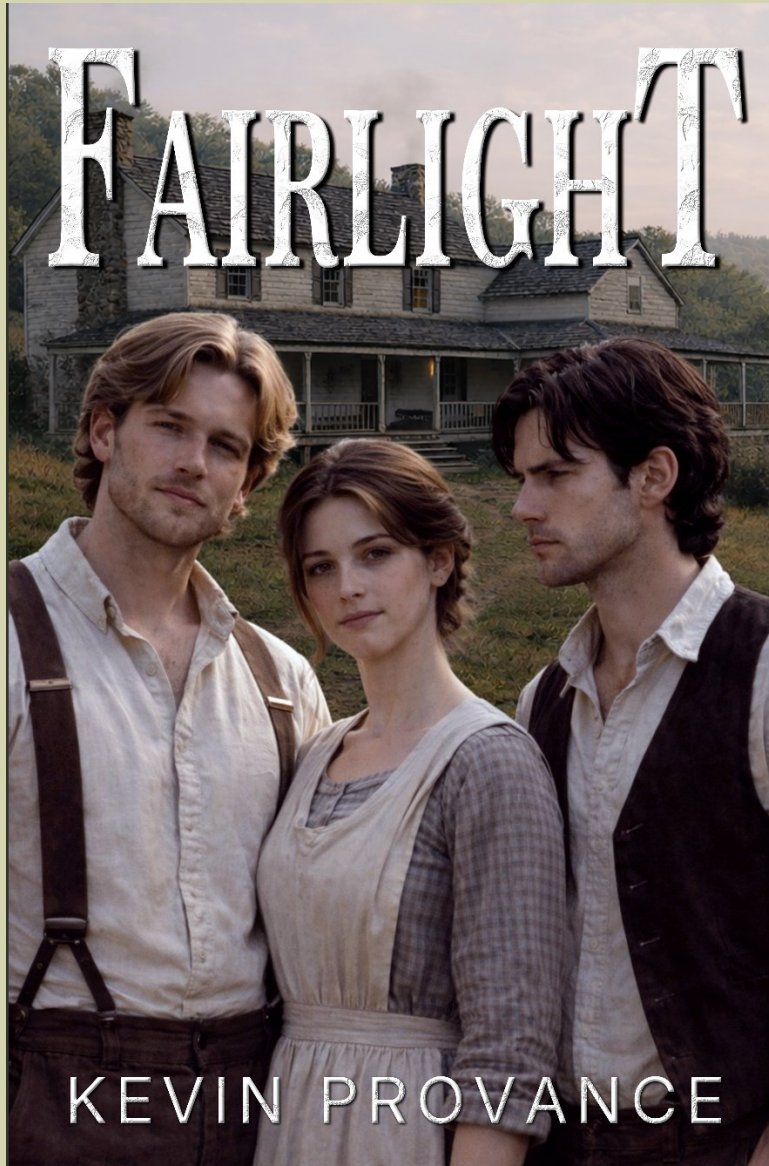
THE FAIRLIGHT BOOK CLUB GUIDE

Discussion Questions, Recipes, Maps, and Playlist

A companion guide for book clubs exploring the world of *Fairlight*.

KEVIN PROVANCE

This guide may be freely shared with book clubs and reading groups.



Book Club Kit Contents:

- Letter from Kevin Provance
- Playlist of classical and 1990s favorites
- Shoofly Cake Recipe
- Apple Cider Shrub Recipe
- Featured Locations
- Fairlight Timeline
- Discussion Questions
- A Note for Book Clubs
- About the Author

A Letter from Kevin Provance

Dear Book Club Readers,

First, thank you for choosing *Fairlight* for your book club. Stories are often written in solitude, but they truly come to life in conversation. Knowing that readers are gathering to discuss the characters, their choices, and the world they inhabit is one of the greatest rewards an author can hope for.

The seed for *Fairlight* began not with a character, but with a place.

Years ago, while driving through the hills of Carroll County, Maryland, I wondered about the quiet pieces of land one passes every day without noticing. A stand of trees, a rise in a field, the faint suggestion of an old road. If you look closely, you sometimes realize that something once stood there — a house, a farm, perhaps even a community that has long since vanished.

That thought stayed with me.

It led to a simple question that eventually became the foundation of this story:
What does a place remember?

If you've ever stood somewhere and wondered about the lives that unfolded there before you arrived, you already understand the beginning of this story.

It's from that question that the world of *Fairlight* and the people who shaped it grew. Josephus Marlowe believes deeply in building something lasting — a home, a livelihood, a sense of order in a complicated world. Hannah carries a quieter strength, rooted in loyalty, patience, and love. And Jacob learns a very different lesson about control, resentment, and the cost of ambition.

None of them can see the full consequences of their choices. Like most people, they are simply trying to live within the moment they've been given. Yet their decisions echo across decades, shaping the lives of people who come long after them.

Setting the story on the eve of the Civil War allowed these personal choices to unfold against a nation already standing on unstable ground. The characters live inside that uncertainty without the benefit of hindsight, navigating a world where moral clarity is rarely simple, and the future is anything but predictable.

At its heart, *Fairlight* is a story about legacy — about what we build, what we leave behind, and how the past lingers in ways we don't always expect. Sometimes it lingers in family stories. Sometimes in memory. And sometimes, perhaps, in the land itself.

I hope the novel gives your group plenty to talk about: the characters' choices, the meaning of the place they inhabit, and the question of how history continues to shape the present.

Thank you again for spending time with this story and for sharing it with one another. I'm grateful that *Fairlight* found its way to your table.

Warm regards,

Kevin Provance

P.S. - Share all the fun you're having by using the hashtag **#fairlight** on either Instagram or Facebook. And I'll be forever grateful if you leave a review on [Amazon](#) or [Goodreads](#). Thanks again!

Fairlight Playlist

Here's the perfect background music to set the mood. If the land had a voice, this might be it. As the story switches between 1997 and the nineteenth century, so does the music.

Bonus: [Play it on Spotify!](#)

Prologue

1. Red Rain – Peter Gabriel

The Land

1. Symphony #6 “Pastoral”, 2nd Movement – Ludwig van Beethoven
2. Cornflake Girl – Tori Amos
3. Impromptu #3 – Franz Schubert
4. Kiss Me – Sixpence None the Richer
5. Songs Without Words, “Venetian Boat Song” – Felix Mendelssohn
6. Missing – Everything But The Girl

Josephus (Order, Restraint, Stewardship)

1. Piano Concerto #1, 2nd Movement – Johannes Brahms
2. Hallelujah – Jeff Buckley
3. Piano Sonata #8, “Pathetique”, 2nd Movement – Beethoven
4. Name – The Goo Goo Dolls
5. Symphony #3, “Rhenish”, 3rd Movement – Robert Schumann
6. If You Could Only See – Tonic

Jacob (Curdled resentment, Divergence)

1. Piano Sonata in B minor, 3rd Movement – Franz Liszt
2. One Headlight – The Wildflowers
3. Symphony #7, 2nd Movement – Beethoven
4. How's It Going To Be – Third Eye Blind
5. Requiem, 2nd Movement, “Dies Irae” – Giuseppe Verdi
6. My Own Prison – Creed

Hannah (Moral clarity, Quiet strength)

1. Jewel Song from Faust, Act III – Charles Gounod
2. Summertime – The Sundays
3. Nocturne #2 – Frédéric Chopin
4. Fade Into You – Mazzy Star
5. 3 Romances, #1 – Clara Schumann
6. Dreams – The Cranberries

The Coming War (1859-1861)

1. Un Ballo in Maschera: Overture – Verdi
2. Lakini's Juice – Live
3. Symphonie fantastique, 4th Movement – Hector Berlioz
4. Precious Declaration – Collective Soul
5. Nearer My God to Thee – Arranged by Andrew Rieu
6. Angel – Sarah McLachlan

Fairlight – Aftermath and Memory

1. Vltava – Bedrich Smetana
2. Bitter Sweet Symphony – The Verve

Epilogue

1. Symphony #5, 4th Movement – Gustav Mahler
2. Good Riddance (Time of Your Life) – Green Day

A Taste of the Fairlight Era

Food in the mid-nineteenth century was practical, seasonal, and meant to be shared. The recipes below reflect simple dishes and drinks that would have been familiar on farms in Maryland and Pennsylvania during the time in which Fairlight is set.

Shoofly Cake (Pennsylvania Dutch Molasses Cake)

Tell your book club members (and your family members) to come hungry! Shoofly cake (often called shoofly pie in later forms) comes directly from **Pennsylvania Dutch and German Brethren food traditions**, which align with the cultural background of Hannah's community. Molasses was widely used in the mid-19th century because it stored well and was cheaper than refined sugar.

It was a **common church or visiting cake** — something that could easily appear during an afternoon visit or small gathering.

Shoofly Cake

Cake

1 cup molasses
1 cup boiling water
1 tsp baking soda
2 cups flour
½ cup brown sugar
½ cup butter
1 tsp cinnamon
½ tsp nutmeg
Pinch of salt

Crumb Topping

¾ cup flour
½ cup brown sugar
¼ cup butter
½ tsp cinnamon

Begin by stirring the baking soda into the boiling water. Once it dissolves, mix the liquid with the molasses and set it aside.

In a separate bowl, combine the flour, brown sugar, butter, cinnamon, nutmeg, and salt. Work the mixture together with your fingers or a pastry cutter until it forms a coarse, crumbly texture.

Set aside about 1 cup of this crumb mixture for later use as the topping.

Gradually stir the molasses mixture into the remaining crumbs, mixing until a thick batter forms.

Pour the batter into a greased baking pan, then sprinkle the reserved crumbs evenly across the top.

Bake at **350°F for about 35 minutes**, or until the cake is set and the crumb topping has lightly browned.

Serve warm with coffee or cider — the way it might have been enjoyed in a nineteenth-century farmhouse kitchen.



Apple Cider Shrub (19th-Century Farmhouse Drink)

Before refrigeration, families preserved fruit by turning it into **shrubs** — fruit drinks made with sugar and vinegar. The vinegar stabilized the mixture, allowing it to keep for long periods. Shrubs were widely consumed throughout the 18th and 19th centuries and could be served either as a refreshing non-alcoholic drink or mixed with spirits.

In farming communities across the Mid-Atlantic, apple-based drinks were especially common.

Apple Cider Shrub

1 cup apple cider
2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
2 tablespoons honey or brown sugar
Pinch of cinnamon or grated nutmeg
Sparkling water (optional)

Optional Historic Variation

1-2 oz rye whiskey or brandy

Begin by gently warming the apple cider in a small saucepan. Stir in the honey or brown sugar until it dissolves completely, and the cider becomes fragrant.

Remove the cider from the heat and stir in the apple cider vinegar along with a pinch of cinnamon or freshly grated nutmeg.

Allow the mixture to cool, then refrigerate until well chilled.

To serve, pour the shrub over ice in a glass and, if you like, top it with a splash of sparkling water for a lighter, refreshing finish.

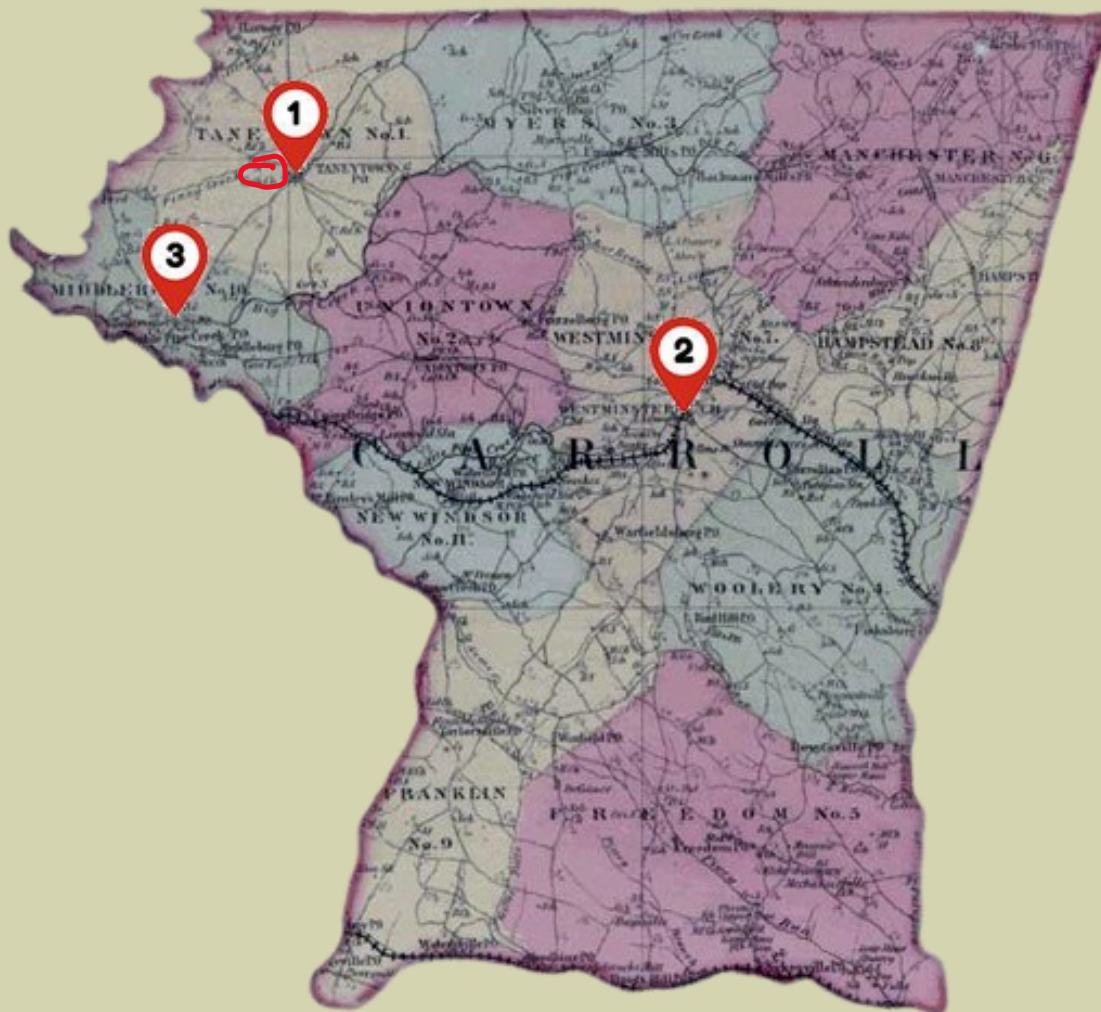
Apple shrubs were often kept in the kitchen as refreshing drinks during the warmer months. A splash of rye whiskey or brandy could be added for an evening variation.

Featured Locations

Many of the places mentioned in *Fairlight* are drawn from actual locations in Carroll County, Maryland. The maps below highlight towns, landmarks, and roads that helped shape the novel's world.

Carroll County, Maryland:

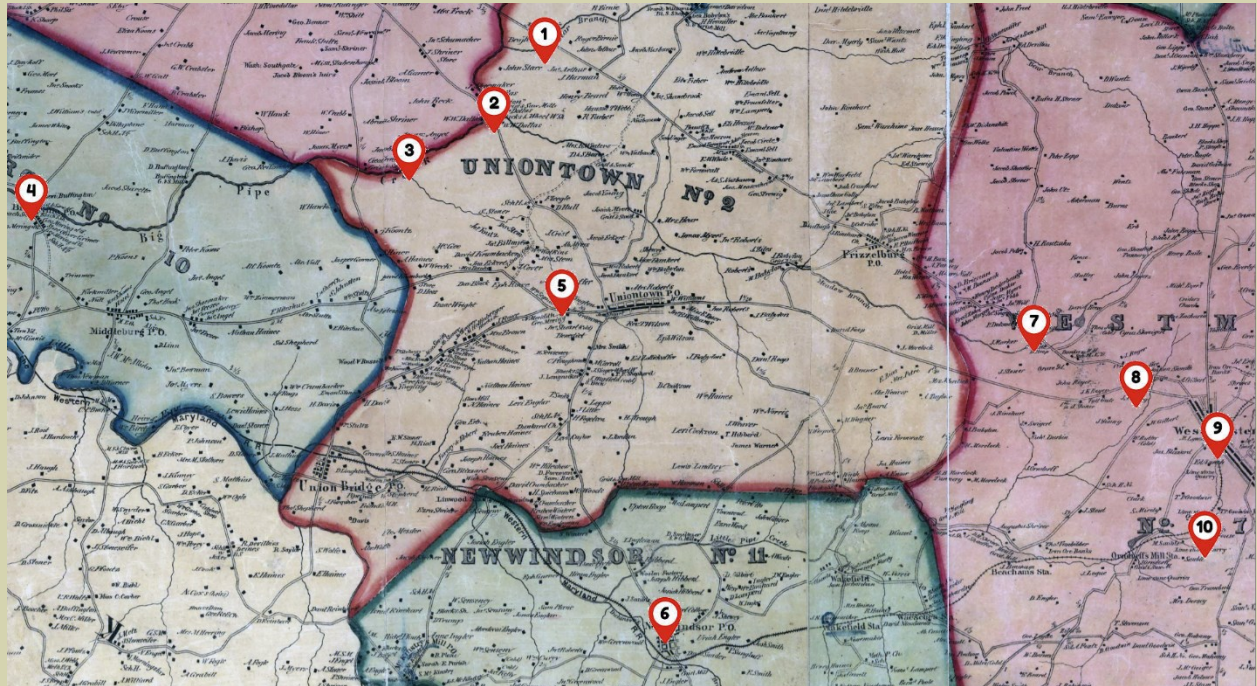
The events of *Fairlight* take place in and around Carroll County, Maryland, a rural region of rolling hills and farmland just north of Baltimore. In the mid-nineteenth century, the county was home to a mixture of small farms, mills, and tightly knit communities shaped by German and Pennsylvania Dutch traditions.



1. Taneytown
2. Westminister
3. Bruceville

Northern Carroll County, Maryland:

Landmarks in *Fairlight* are shown on this 1862 Martenet map.



1. The fictional Marlowe Farm along the Taneytown/Westminster Turnpike.
2. Trevanion, which still stands today, was originally Brick Mills. Owned by William W. Dallas, a Southern sympathizer, in the 1850s.
3. The fictional Fairlight property.
4. Myrtle Hill in Bruceville. Originally the home of Normand Bruce, it was purchased by George Mehring in the 1840s. It still stands today.
5. William Segafoose's Inn on the outskirts of Uniontown.
6. Joanna Kleefisch's Academy for Girls in New Window, where Hannah Mehring was educated. The building stands today as a private home.
7. Meadow Branch Church of the Brethren, where the Mehring family worshipped. The original meeting house was rebuilt in 1914 and, in 1954, expanded into what stands today.
8. The Jacob Mehring house along the Uniontown Turnpike. Jim Myers restored it in 1999, turning it into the modern home it is today.
9. The town of Westminister.
10. The Carroll County Almshouse, which closed in 1965 and became the Farm Museum in 1966.

Westminster, Maryland:

Westminster landmarks in *Fairlight* are shown on this 1862 Martenet map.



1. The Meadow Branch Church of the Brethren Meeting House.
2. The Jacob Mehring House.
3. The Anchor Hotel beside “the forks” where W. Main Street and Pennsylvania Avenue fork apart. Also known as the “West End” of Westminster.
4. The office of The American Sentinel newspaper at 132 and 132 ½ E. Main Street. William H. Grammer, editor.
5. The office of The Carroll County Democrat newspaper at 183 E. Main Street (originally 3 Carroll Hall). Joseph Shaw, editor.
6. The Carroll County Almshouse.

Fairlight Timeline

The events of Fairlight stretch across decades, but they are bound together by one place and the lives that passed through it. The timeline below highlights the moments that shaped the story.

October 1857

Josephus Marlowe and Hannah begin their courtship.

April 6, 1858

Josephus and Hannah become engaged.

May 5, 1859

Josephus and Hannah are married.

September 2, 1860

The fire at Fairlight destroys the house and claims Josephus's life.

April 20, 1861

In the uncertain days following the outbreak of the Civil War, Hannah prepares for the future ahead.

August 12, 1870

A broken Jacob returns to the ruins of Fairlight.

May 24, 1997

Ernest Marlowe retells the story of Fairlight at the site where the house once stood.

Present Day

A single pine tree still stands near the place where Fairlight once stood.

Discussion Questions for Book Clubs

1. **Josephus Marlowe believes deeply in order, stewardship, and building something lasting.** Do you think his vision for Fairlight was realistic, or was he naïve about the surrounding forces?
2. **Hannah's strength often appears quiet rather than dramatic.** In what ways does she shape the course of events in the story?
3. Early in the novel, Fairlight is presented almost as an ideal. **What does Fairlight represent to each of the main characters?**
4. **Josephus and Jacob approach the world in unique ways.** At what point do you think their paths truly diverged?
5. **Jacob often frames his actions as practical or necessary.** Do you believe he sees himself as justified?
6. The events of *Fairlight* unfold on the eve of the Civil War. **How does the larger historical tension influence the characters' choices, even when the war itself is not always directly present?**
7. **Hannah and Josephus's relationship develops quickly.** What do you think draws them together?
8. Several moments in the novel suggest people interpret the same events differently. **How does perspective shape the way characters understand what happens at Fairlight?**
9. **The fire at Fairlight becomes the defining event of the story.** Do you see it as a tragedy, inevitability, or something else?
10. Some characters try to impose control over the world around them, while others rely on patience and care. **How do these different approaches shape the outcome of the story?**

- 11. Place plays an important role in the novel.** In what ways does the land itself seem to hold memory?
- 12.** The story spans generations. **How did the later timeline change your understanding of the earlier events?**
- 13. Ernest recounts the story decades later.** How reliable do you think memory and storytelling are in shaping history?
- 14.** Many of the characters make choices that seem small in the moment but prove significant later. **Which decision in the novel struck you as the most consequential?**
- 15.** The appearance of the lone pine tree near the ruins is one of the novel's most symbolic images. **What do you think it represents?**
- 16. Near the end of the story, Jacob expresses regret, but the object of that regret is not entirely clear.** Who — or what — do you think he is truly sorry for?
- 17. If Josephus had survived the fire, do you think Fairlight could have been rebuilt—or was the dream already doomed?**
- 18. Is Jacob a villain, or is he the product of the world he lived in?** At what point, if any, could his path have changed?
- 19. Hannah ultimately returns to Fairlight near the end of her life.** Do you see her final journey as an act of closure, devotion, or something else?
- 20. If you had lived in the same time and circumstances as the characters, whose choices do you think you would have understood the most, and whose would you have struggled to accept?**

Bonus Question:

1. If Fairlight becomes a movie, who would you cast for the roles of Josephus, Hannah, and Jacob? Who would you cast for the other characters?

A Note for Book Clubs

Thank you for choosing *Fairlight* for your discussion.

If your group would enjoy it, Kevin is happy to occasionally join book clubs for a brief virtual visit to talk about the story, the historical setting, and the inspiration behind the novel. These informal conversations typically last about 15–20 minutes and give readers the opportunity to ask questions about the characters, the research, and the writing process.

If you would like to arrange a visit for your group, please feel free to reach out through the author's website:

www.kevinprovance.com

P.S. - Book clubs are one of my favorite ways to talk about stories, and I'm always grateful for the chance to hear readers' perspectives.

About the Author

Kevin Provance was born in Carroll County, Maryland, and grew up surrounded by back roads, ghost stories, and quiet fields that would later become the settings of his fiction. His work often explores the long shadow of the past and the ways individual choices echo across generations.

Fairlight marks a step back into the literary universe of his earlier novels, telling the origin story of the Marlowe family, whose legacy appears in later works such as [Prisoner of the Game](#) and the Ryan Thomas novel [Scorpion](#).

Kevin's stories are known for their cinematic pacing, emotional depth, and a touch of darkness that lingers long after the final page.

Provance lives in Summerville, South Carolina, and continues to write stories that blend history, mystery, and human drama.

When he's not writing, he's behind a camera, producing or photographing life under the banners of *Furious Conundrum Productions* and *SVL Studios*.

To learn more about Kevin's books or upcoming projects, visit:

www.kevinprovance.com