A Man called Ove
By Fredrik Backman

Adult Fiction
Reviewed by Connie Bennett, Vinton Public Library Clerk

        First of all, don't try to tell me that you've "never heard of it", because that is almost impossible!  This book was first published in Great Britain in 2014, and then in paperback form in 2015 by First Washington Square Press, NY.   Since then, it has become so popular that it was named a New York Times best seller!  (Now, it has been made into a movie starring Tom Hanks, and renamed A Man Called Otto.)
        We first meet Ove as he attempts to buy his first iPad.  We briefly sympathize, first with Ove, since he is so obviously clueless about it all, then with the clerk, who is trying so hard to explain.  Alas, it appears to be like explaining Algebra to a preschooler.
         One morning, just after his cup of coffee Ove begins his morning inspection of the street.  This self-assigned job involves checking the neighborhood for vandalism or rule-breaking among the tenants of the development.  Just as the reader is getting comfortable with this bossy and unfriendly older man, the narrative shifts, and we realize that what we have been reading is very close to the end of the story! The story started sixty years before, and the entire story is told from the beginning, in a series of flashbacks, interspersed with present-day events.
         Along the way, we learn how the past has influenced the man that he has become; in attempting to become as unlike his father as possible, Ove has done the opposite. As we read, each vignette gives more insight into the polite and ordered young man who now just wants to be left alone to die. As a young man, Ove has a best friend named Rune, with whom he spends many happy years.  As events unfolds, the friendship crumbles and very nearly ends.  Living in a small, quiet housing development with just one house in between them, the two men work together (most of the time) to build a neighborhood.  The years pass, and Ove reluctantly meets and interacts with a chubby young man from next door; a pregnant Iranian woman, her accident-prone husband and two small daughters; a cafe owner and his gay son; a love-struck young bicycle thief; many businessmen known as “suits”, and a few others. Oh! And a mangy, homeless cat!
        This book is quite the mix of nostalgia, love, comedy, and heartbreak.  If you missed the movie which was showing at The Palace the last two weekends, you can still read the original story, translated from Swedish, and available in book form at The Vinton Public Library.  You'll love Ove- and (spoiler alert) you’ll probably cry.

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Great Britain