Conjuring Up the Past

Creating Characters in Historical Fiction

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My Heart Lies Here: A Novel of the Ludlow Massacre  
Clean Cut: A Romance of the Western Heart

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(Main Character (MC))\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(adj.)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_year-old \_\_\_\_\_\_\_(noun)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Historical Event/Situation/Era in which MC Lives:

1. DESIRES: What does your main character (MC) want? Consciously? Unconsciously?
2. INTERNAL CONFLICT: What is the conflict between the MC’s conscious and unconscious desires?
3. EXTERNAL CONFLICT: How does the historical/social/political situation surrounding the MC influence/affect/weigh/keep the MC from getting what they want?
4. POLITICS: How does the MC break/buck/oppose stereotypes/expectations of the time? What political leanings does the MC have that are specific to the historical era? Would the MC be called a rebel or a follower during their lives? What about today?
5. SOCIAL STATUS: How is their social status reflected in their political leanings? Does their political stance change as a result of the historical event(s) that they witness?
6. OBSTACLES: What historical/timely event/situation unbalances the MC’s world and prevents them from achieving their conscious or unconscious desires? How is the MC swept up in/drawn into/forced into the historical events of their time in ways that are uncomfortable or painful for them?
7. BELIEFS: What is the dominant belief structure of the historical era? Does the MC adhere to it? If not, why? Do they belong to an organized religion? Do they have religious icons or books in their homes? Do they pray? Are they tolerant to others with different beliefs?
8. THE FUTURE: How does the MC see their future? Is it rosy? Is it dystopian or nihilistic? Does the MC redeem themselves? If so, how? If not, why not?
9. LOVE: Who does the MC love? Is this love sanctioned by the social conventions of the time? Is their love risqué? Taboo? Forbidden by law?
10. RELATIONSHIPS: What other relationships does the MC have? Has the historical milieu put a strain on some or all of these relationships? Are some of the relationships thwarted, broken, etc., by differences of opinion?
11. DEMEANOR & GESTURES: How would your MC describe themselves? Friendly? Shy? How would others describe the MC? Standoffish? Abrasive? What is the MC’s most used facial expression? Smirk? Frown? Wince? Do they use their hands when they speak? Shrug their shoulders? Are they jittery? Do they make eye contact when they have a conversation?
12. MOST PRIZED POSSESSION: What would the MC say is their most prized possession? A mansion? A book? What would they rescue from a fire, flood, tornado, etc.? Where and how did the MC get the object/possession?
13. NEEDS: What can’t the MC live without? What keeps them going? What do they need to believe about their own personality, the other characters in the story, their most significant relationships, and so on in order to survive?
14. PATHOLOGICAL MANUEVER: What do they do when they don’t get what they need? What do they do when they are under stress? Do they have a pattern of behavior when they realize they are not the person they want to be?
15. FEARS: What does the character worry about at night when they cannot sleep? What do they imagine is the worst way to die? Are there places, people, situations they avoid? What are their phobias? Do they suffer from anxiety attacks? Depression? What triggers their fears?
16. SECRETS: What have they kept, even from lovers or friends and family? Why? How do their secrets reflect/align with the historical era in which they live?