

THE GOOD, THE GREAT, AND THE DELICIOUSLY AWFUL

WHY BOSTON NEEDS A LITERARY TRAIL | BY PAUL LEWIS

AT THE HEIGHT of Boston's tourist season, more than 50 walking tours a week guide visitors along the Freedom Trail. Other tours focus on architecture, neighborhoods, pubs, African-American history, and women. Yet only one tour a week deals with the city's greatest contribution to American culture: the writing, editing, and publishing that made Boston the preeminent center of literary creativity up to the outbreak of the Civil War.

New York may be the nation's literary capital today, but during the early decades of our national life, American letters took root and thrived here in Boston. The city's editors and publishers helped usher the first great generation of American writers into print: figures like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry David Thoreau. Its publishing houses, libraries, and magazines helped drive American intellectual life.

Today, many Bostonians are barely aware of this legacy. In the rush of traffic and noise, they pass the intersection of Franklin and Federal streets and find no indication that this was where our first long-running professional theater opened amid controversy in 1794. At what is arguably the single most important literary site in America—the Old Corner Bookstore, where masterpieces of the American Renaissance, including “The Scarlet Letter” and “Walden,” were published—they find not a museum but a small plaque on the brick wall of a Chiotle Mexican Grill.

Beneath this legacy lies one even more hidden. Boston's famous authors didn't work in a vacuum—they were part of a rich ecosystem of publishing, journalism, theater, and lectures that made the city the Athens of America.

For an exhibition on the city's forgotten literary history that opened last week at the Boston Public Library and Massachusetts Historical Society, our research team identified about 20 specific locations associated with writers, editors, publishers, and magazines that have faded from popular memory. Many of these are places where periodicals like the *Massachusetts Magazine* or the *United States Review and Literary Gazette* were published, their pages filled with poems and essays that can transport us back in time.

For over 20 years starting in 1794, Judith Sargent Murray—essayist, novelist, poet, playwright, and feminist—lived on Franklin Street in what was then called the Tontine Crescent. In the late 1820s, two Boston magazines—Lydia Maria Child's *Juvenile Miscellany* and Nathan-

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JOHN S. DYKES FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

{ LOCATIONS ARE APPROXIMATE. }

iel Willis's *Youth's Companion*—located only blocks apart on Court and Washington streets, competed for readers in the nascent world of children's literature. In the Central Burying Ground, on Boston Common near Boylston Street, Charles Sprague, once known as the “banker-pot of Boston,” awaits rediscovery.

To honor and recover this legacy, Boston needs a new, more diverse literary trail—a street-by-street map of the city's history in letters. Some of its stops would be for the famous, like Edgar Allan Poe, born near the Common; others for the obscure. And some would be just plain fun: What may well be the worst play in English ever produced, *Orlando: or Parental Persecution*, was written by Bostonian William Charles White and performed at the Federal Street Theatre

in 1797. In 1831, Lydia Huntley Sigourney published a poem in which the cows that had just been barred from grazing on Boston Common argue hilariously against their banishment.

With tales like these, and supported by new signs, a literary trail would attract the kind of enthusiastic visitors who now flock to Walden Pond in Concord and the House of the Seven Gables in Salem. It would tell a fuller story, boost civic pride, and give schoolchildren—and all of us—a way to understand this part of our cultural heritage.

62 Charles St.

Edgar Allan Poe was born here on Jan. 19, 1809, in the city his mother urged him to love. Eighteen years later, after dropping out of the University of Virgin-

ia, he moved back, published his first collection of poems here, and then enlisted in the Army. Later, as a critic and book reviewer, he quarreled with the Boston literati, whom he derided as “Frogpondians.”

53 Hancock St.

Nathaniel Hawthorne lived here in 1836, while editing the *American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge*, and later on nearby Pinckney Street. He married Sophia Peabody on West Street, across the Common, and would later occasionally attend meetings of the Saturday Club at the Parker House.

81 Court St.

Almost exactly on the spot where the Government Center MBTA station

now stands, the *Juvenile Miscellany*, edited by Lydia Maria Child, was published from 1826 to 1834. In competition with the Calvinist editor of the stern, biblical *Youth's Companion*, Child created a delightful magazine that would set the course for future children's writing in the United States.

283 Washington St.

Arguably the most important literary site in the United States, the Old Corner Bookstore is the place where William D. Ticknor, John Reed Jr., and James T. Fields published many of the enduring works of the American Renaissance, including Emerson's essays, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Walden*, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

453 Washington St.

The *Massachusetts Magazine* was published here by Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews from 1789 to 1796. Like most of Boston's early magazines, its issues include poems good enough to bridge the centuries, and bad enough to be unintentionally amusing.

One Devonshire Place

In 1835, four months after the Ursuline Convent in Charlestown was destroyed by an anti-Catholic mob, Bishop Benedict Joseph Fenwick, S.J., turned the archdiocesan newspaper, published here, over to a new editor, George Pepper. To emphasize that the Irish were cultured and intelligent, Pepper changed its name to the *Literary and Catholic Sentinel* and started to include poetry in every issue.

77 Franklin St.

Judith Sargent Murray moved here from Gloucester in 1794. Though little remembered today in Boston, she was a wide-ranging writer and thinker who produced essays for the *Massachusetts Magazine* and the first play by an American performed at the Federal Street Theatre. Her belief in “the equality of female abilities” led her to champion improved education for girls and to create unusual female characters.

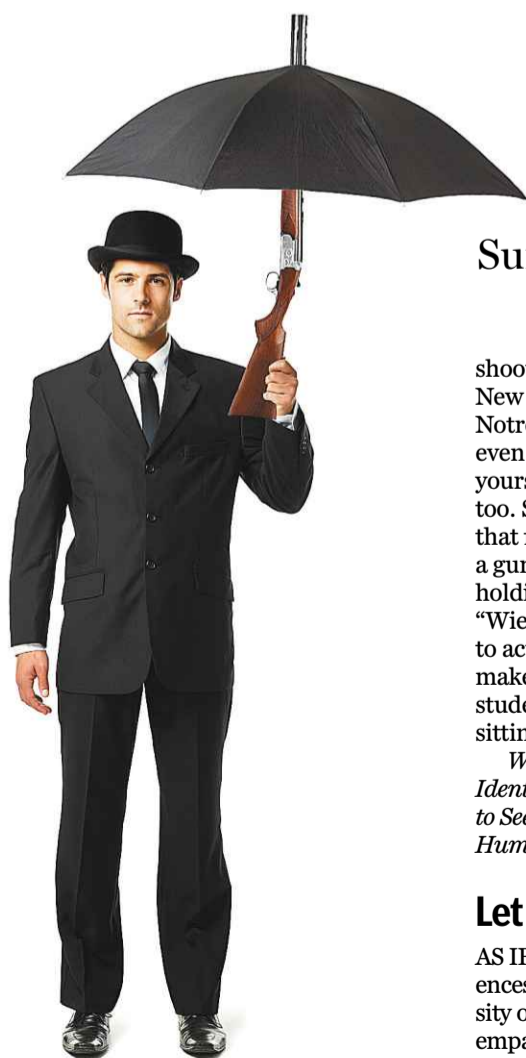
201 Washington St.

Home of *The Pioneer*, edited by James Russell Lowell, in 1843. Although the magazine survived for only three issues, they included two of the most famous American short stories ever published: Hawthorne's “The Birth-Mark” and Poe's “The Tell-Tale Heart.” Fourteen years later and four blocks away on Winter Street, Lowell would serve as the first editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*—which is still publishing today, nearly 2,000 issues later.

A more detailed map with a longer list of sites is available at www.bostonliterary-history.com.

Uncommon Knowledge

Surprising insights from the social sciences BY KEVIN LEWIS



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He looked like he had a gun

THE RECENT KILLING of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed teenager in Florida, highlights a large gray area in firearm self-defense cases: Did the

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shooter really perceive his life to be in danger? New research from psychologists at Purdue and Notre Dame universities may make this gray area even bigger. They found that simply holding a gun yourself can make you think others have a gun, too. Students were positioned in front of a screen that flashed a picture of someone holding either a gun or another object while the student was holding either a gun or another object. The result: “Wielding the gun made participants more biased to act as if they had seen a gun and quicker to make this judgment.” The bias disappeared when students weren't holding the gun, even if it was sitting next to them.

Witt, J. & Brockmole, J., “Action Alters Object Identification: Wielding a Gun Increases the Bias to See Guns,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance* (forthcoming).

Let the liberal freeze!

AS IF WE NEEDED more evidence that our differences are intractable, researchers at the University of Michigan found that people have trouble empathizing with political opposites who are in situations of physical need. In one experiment, researchers asked students who were either inside or outside during the winter to read a story with either a liberal Democrat or conservative Republican protagonist who gets lost in the woods without food, water, or extra clothes. Students who were outside and shared the protagonist's politics were significantly more sensitized to the protagonist's coldness. However, there was no extra sensitivity for coldness among students who were outside but didn't share

the protagonist's politics. In a similar experiment, students who had eaten salty snacks without water were also extra sensitive to the protagonist's level of thirst, but, again, not if the protagonist had different political views.

O'Brien, E. & Ellsworth, P., “More Than Skin Deep: Visceral States Are Not Projected onto Dissimilar Others,” *Psychological Science* (forthcoming).

How drinking shapes your politics

NOTE TO THE Republican Party: You might want to serve alcohol and give prizes for fast voting at the polls. Psychologists at the universities of Arkansas, Kansas, and Wisconsin found that people instructed to multitask, go fast, or go with their gut adopted more conservative attitudes. Moreover, people leaving a bar were more conservative the higher their blood-alcohol level, over and above the effect of their political identity, sex, and education.

Eidelman, S. et al., “Low-Effort Thought Promotes Political Conservatism,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* (forthcoming).

The bright side of predatory interest rates

ONE OF THE objections to the financial overhaul legislation passed by Congress in 2010 is that many regulations, while well-intentioned, nevertheless end up restricting access to credit. And while credit can be overextended, it also extends opportunity. According to a new study, this is exactly what happened several decades ago when many states lifted

caps on credit card interest rates. Even though people in these states ended up with more debt and higher interest rates, access to credit cards made it easier for blacks to become entrepreneurs, bypassing discrimination in traditional financial channels. Indeed, the authors of the study find that states with a worse history of discrimination saw a bigger boost in black entrepreneurship as a result of credit card deregulation.

Chatterji, A. & Seamans, R., “Entrepreneurial Finance, Credit Cards and Race,” *Journal of Financial Economics* (forthcoming).

Atheism in the foxhole

AS THE OLD saying about war goes, there are no atheists in foxholes. A new study seems to back that up, finding that atheists think less atheistically when confronted with death, even though they won't admit it. When people were asked explicitly about their supernatural beliefs, those who were religious reported that they felt stronger supernatural beliefs after thinking about death, while those who were not religious reported weaker supernatural beliefs after thinking about death. However, when tested on their implicit associations of supernatural and real entities—a technique designed to get around self-censorship—those who were not religious demonstrated beliefs that were closer to those who were religious after thinking about death.

Jong, J. et al., “Foxhole Atheism, Revisited: The Effects of Mortality Salience on Explicit and Implicit Religious Belief,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* (forthcoming).