

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 Chipotle 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-

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-poet 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

ar

