



## President's Overview

by John Anderson



A lot has happened at MHSM since the last newsletter! First, I can report success in finding grants to further MHSM's mission.

Our applications to the City of Medford for Community Preservation grants have been approved. In February of this year, we applied for two grants:

1. \$83,000 for a museum quality upgrade to our heating and air conditioning (HVAC), and
2. \$9,100 to clean and conserve parts of our historic textile collection.

The application process for these grants was very time (and paper) consuming. The HVAC grant totaled 40 pages and the textile grant was 16 pages. We were required to submit an electronic copy and 11 paper copies. That's over a ream of paper, not counting trashed paper from drafts and errors!

Once the applications were completed for the March 1 deadline, the process moved along smoothly. In April, we appeared before the Community Preservation Board. The Board reviews proposed projects and makes recommendations to the City Council. The Board was very supportive and recommended both projects to the City Council. We appeared before them in

*continued page 2*

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## Susanna Rowson in Medford

by Kyna Hamill

Steven Epley, Professor of English at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama, will be MHSM's first scholar-in-residence from September 5-25, 2018. His book, *Susanna Rowson: Sentimental Prophet of Early American Literature*, was published in 2016 by Northwestern University Press. Susanna Rowson (1762-1824) was an early American best-selling author and ran a girls' school in Medford in 1799-1800. We would like to thank Mass Humanities Foundation for their support of this initiative.

Kyna Hamill, faculty member at Boston University and MHSM's reference volunteer, interviewed Epley to learn more about his research.

**KH: How long have you been researching Susanna Rowson?**

**SE:** I first did research on Rowson's novel *Reuben and Rachel*, published in 1798, while writing my dissertation at Columbia University more than twenty-five years ago. I set Rowson aside until I started serious work on my book project about fifteen years ago.

**KH: What did you learn about her as you were writing your book?**

**SE:** I learned that her fictional and pedagogical writings were suffused with direct and indirect references to the Bible. In particular, the frequency and intensity of her references to the Old Testament surprised me.

**KH: What could you tell us about Medford in 1799 that we might not know?**

**SE:** Medford was apparently rocked by a teacher sex scandal in 1799. Respected pedagogue Joseph Wyman resigned as director of a private boarding school and was replaced by Rowson who also leased the building from him. Usher's history notes only that Wyman taught just a few years in Medford, but records and court documents show that he abandoned his wife and family and kept company with "divers lewd women," according to his wife's divorce petition.

**KH: What do you hope to find in MHSM's collections?**

**SE:** I hope to learn more about the scandal from materials at the

*continued page 5*

## President's Overview *continued*

May and received our official award letters in early June. Funds are expected in early September.

I met with the HVAC project engineer on July 31 to kick off the project. Although the grant will cover most or all of the cash outlays, there will still be an incredible amount of work for volunteers as the collection will have to be protected during this very invasive project which impacts every room in the building, except perhaps the kitchen. Anyone who has lived in a house under renovation knows what I'm talking about. At the same time, textiles are being prepared for professional cleaning. I want to thank Heather Champigny and Beth Hayes for their hands-on work with the textiles and for their major role in completing the grant applications and appearing with me before the Community Preservation Board and the City Council.

We are also completing a Collection Preservation Assessment, funded by \$6,000 from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). This process has not moved as swiftly as the

Community Preservation grants. In 2016, we first applied for this grant but were turned down. Fortunately, the NEH provides feedback. We took the feedback to heart and re-applied in 2017. This time we were successful and were awarded \$6,000 in December, 2017. This grant funds an assessment by museum professionals of our collection and our conservation practices. Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) in Andover is doing the assessment. The project kicked off with a site visit on Friday, August 3. Two consultants spent a day with us, looking at our collections and interviewing six of us who are most involved with the collections. They will provide a report with specific recommendations that will become the basis for follow-up grants for specific preservation activities. Experience has shown that it's difficult to get large grants until you have successfully executed smaller grants. And recommendations from independent museum professionals will carry a lot of weight as we go forward. David Fedo and Allison Andrews started the grant application back in 2016. Also, our grants guru, Jen Gilbert, points us to grants for which we are a good match and assists us with applications when we need help.

As written about in length in the last newsletter, we are also executing a grant from the Mass Humanities Foundation to bring a "Scholar-in-Residence" to MHSM in order to study Susanna Rowson and provide two public lectures. This is a first for MHSM. Thank you, Kyna Hamill.

We've also made some fairly dramatic improvements in the building. If you haven't been in since we removed the musty old carpet in the entry area, you're in for a treat. The somewhat irregular surface of our concrete made it impossible to install conventional floor materials at a reasonable price. The glue residue from the carpet installation made simply painting the floor impractical. We found a provider who ground the glue off the floor and then applied a two-coat epoxy system that leaves the floor a rich texture and semi-sparkling surface.

Additionally, we took advantage of the emptied entry area, kitchen, and bathroom to apply a fresh coat of paint to them. A volunteer team (John, Heather, Sue Gerould, Will Tenney, and Kyna Hamill) spent a Saturday painting the walls as well as the staircase to the second floor.

On Tuesday, all the furniture was moved back from temporary storage to the main hall, and on Thursday, we had the opening reception for the Lydia Maria Child exhibit! This was a huge amount of work in a short amount of time, but it was worth it.

Meanwhile, at 350 Riverside Avenue, the Peter Tufts House now has a driveway.

It wasn't quite complete when the picture below was taken, but it is complete now. Special thanks to Beth Hayes who has been managing the property for the last several years.,



top left: *The Peter Tufts House, as it appeared before its 1890s renovation by Samuel Crocker Lawrence, clearly shows the old driveway.* bottom left: *The driveway of the Peter Tufts House has been restored to its historical location on the property. This change will provide convenient parking from busy Riverside Avenue.*



## Oscar Greene at 100

by David Fedo

"Longtime West Medford resident Oscar Greene turns 100," trumpeted *The Medford Transcript* on May 22, 2018. Mr. Greene's 100th birthday was celebrated three days earlier at the Grace Episcopal Church where, for decades, he has been an active parishioner. Bill Hager, Executive Director of the West Medford Community Center, says that Mr. Greene "is a remarkable man." "He has lived an incredible and diverse life," Maria Salamanca, another admirer, writes. "We are blessed to know him." Mr. Greene has even been presented a plaque in his honor by the aldermen of Somerville's Lowell Street community, a place he now calls home after living for some 72 years in West Medford. When asked about the secret to his longevity, Oscar smiled and said, "I don't really know—but I was always interested in things."

Everyone who knows Oscar Greene agrees that he is indeed one amazing man, and not only because he's passed the milestone of a century's worth of years. For many of those years, he was one of the pillars of the African-American community in West Medford, a neighborhood that contains one of the earliest African-American suburban enclaves in the United States. A writer for the *Tufts Journal*, Helene Ragovin, asserts that "West Medford remains a jewel of African-American history." Rosalind Shaw of Tufts University writes that West Medford is truly "an extraordinary community."

The composition of the residents, of course, has changed over the years. When Mr. Greene first arrived in West Medford, African-Americans comprised over 90 percent of the population; now Oscar speculates that white residents constitute over 50 percent. In his detailed essay "Memories of West Medford", Oscar reminisced that he "hungered to live in a small, nurturing, African-American community so I could benefit from the neighborhood strength and where I could make forays into the white community." Mr. Greene credits Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the passing of the Civil Rights Act in the 1960s for improving the lives of many African-Americans. "I'm optimistic about the future," he remarks. Thus Oscar Greene—reader and teacher, writer and storyteller, husband and father, and seemingly friend to everyone he meets—is a vital part of the history and legacy of West Medford.

Oscar's links to West Medford, however, came well after his birth in New York City on May 28, 1918, and his subsequent childhood and years growing up in Williamstown, MA. These were hard and uncertain times for him, but Oscar eventually joined the Army during World War II and served as an infantryman in the Luzon campaign in the Philippines. Back in the United States, Oscar found the love of his life, Ruby, while both were working in Illinois; they married in 1942. They had one child, Oscar Greene, Jr., who became a pharmacist and then a dentist. Ruby, who

for many years worked as a tax examiner for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, became the subject of the last of Oscar's four books entitled *Ruby: A Love Story*. They were married for 69 years before Ruby passed away several years ago at the age of 90.

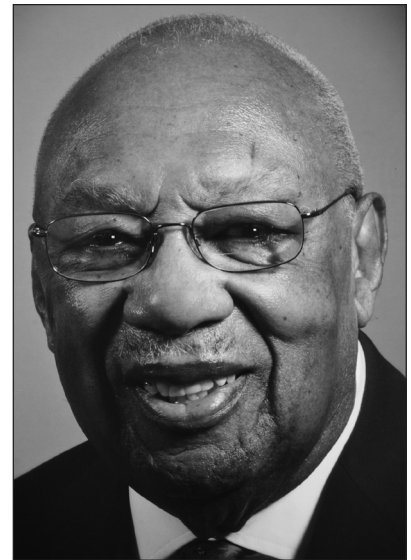
Once again settling into West Medford, Oscar was hired by General Electric in 1946 as a machine operator in the Everett facility and remembered that he was "the lone, skilled, African-American machine operator in a work force of 1,800." Mr. Greene was eventually promoted in 1957 to the GE Engineering Division, where he spent time working on the American Gemini space project. He also served some years as a senior technical writer before his retirement from GE in 1967.

"You know how I have liked books," Oscar tells some listeners recently at an Italian restaurant in South Medford. "And I always dreamed of being a writer."

Mr. Greene's byline on a wide range of essays and articles has appeared in at least 16 national publications, including many in *Guideposts* magazine. He also wrote book reviews over a decade for the *Boston Globe*. And then there were the books: *House of Strangers*, *Hampton and the War Years*, *From Homecoming to Twilight*, *Ruby: A Love Story*.

But Oscar, as prolific as he was, believed good writing required hard work and patience. He claims in "Memories of West Medford" that "Famed writers like E.B. White, Theodore Dreiser and Ernest Hemingway say the learning period is fourteen years. For me it has been 60 years and I am still learning!"

Now having passed the 100-year mark, Mr. Greene's expanse of memories —of his West Medford neighbors and friends, his family and co-workers, his Sunday School teaching at the Grace Episcopal Church, his time as Trustee at the Medford Public Library, the books he has read and the ones he has written, his favored New England Patriots football team—remains sharp and clear. Unlike most aging mortals, no small or large date from his life is slow to reach his lips. And amazingly, Oscar Greene, at age 100, also looks to the bounty of the future. A favorite Biblical verse from Ecclesiastes 3:13, quoted by Oscar during his birthday celebration at the Grace Episcopal Church, seems to sum up such prospects: "Every man should eat, drink and enjoy the good of all his labor; it is a gift from God."



## Part 2: John Ciardi: Medford's Own Poet (1916-1986)

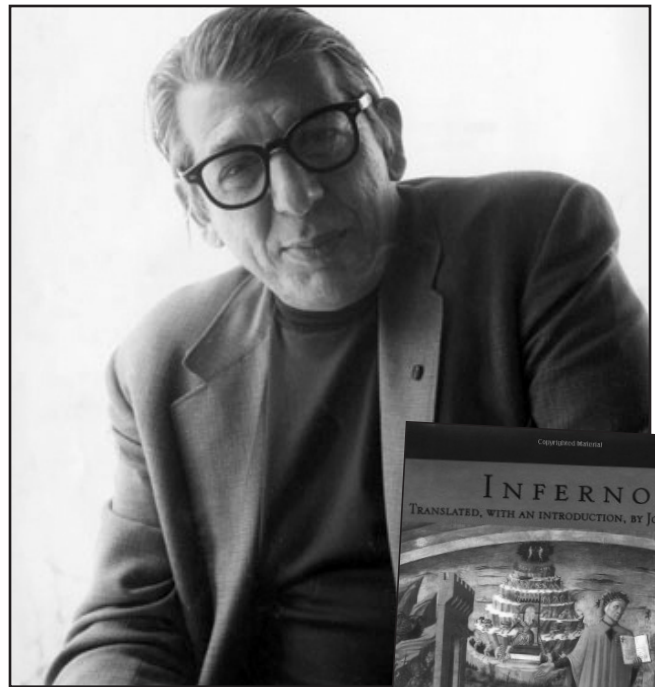
by David Fedo

John Holmes (1904-1962) was a great teacher and mentor to aspiring writers, and Ciardi found Holmes, who had himself graduated from Tufts in 1929, and who would publish seven collections of his own poetry as well as books about the making of poetry. Holmes nurtured Ciardi's talents, which were beginning to bloom, and after Ciardi's Tufts graduation in 1938, steered him to the University of Michigan's graduate school, where Ciardi promptly won the prestigious and competitive Hopwood Prize for his first collection of verse entitled *Homeward to America*. Along with the prize, Ciardi received twelve hundred dollars, which, according to Edward M. Cifelli, Ciardi's biographer, was said to be the "largest in poetry that had ever been awarded at that time." In some ways, according to Cifelli, he downplayed the prize for the collection, calling the work my "Juvenalia," but adding that it was "promising Juvenalia." Ciardi's voice is clearly his own in the 34 poems that constitute *Homeward to America*. Cifelli rightly points out that his "Letter to Mother" is one of the strongest poems in the book.

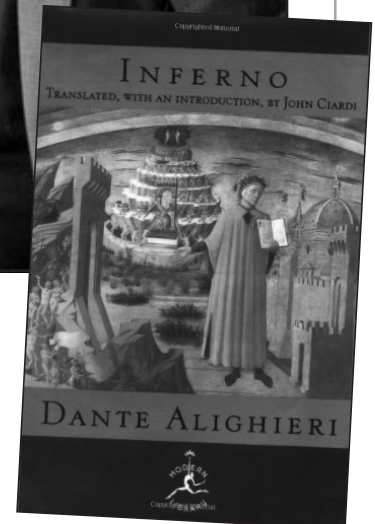
So a still young John Ciardi, 24 years old and schooled in Medford and Michigan, was on his way. Over his lifetime, he would turn out to be among the most productive of American poets, an artist who would write well over two dozen books, not including many others for children. After his successful Michigan years he would teach for a short time at the University of Kansas City. In 1942 he entered the U.S. military and participated as a gunner in B-29s, involving 20 missions over Japan. Two of Ciardi's books, *Other Skies* and *Saipan* (the latter, a kind of diary, published following his death), chronicled his war experiences. Beside his poetry and books and articles about how readers might better deconstruct modern poetry, Ciardi's translation of Dante's formidable *Divine Comedy* would win him mostly enthusiastic praise.

After the war, in 1946, Ciardi went back to the University of Kansas City. There he met an English instructor named Myra Judith Hostetter, who was originally from Hannibal, Missouri. They married quickly that July and moved back to Medford, where Ciardi was to take up a teaching position at Harvard University (he stayed at Harvard until 1953). The new Ciardi couple actually moved to the old South Street home, and with eight people, including the mother and sisters crowded into the rooms, they somehow managed their domestic life. Importantly, Ciardi said of his new wife, "Mother fell in love with her instantly."

In his poem, "Most Like an Arch This Marriage," which many readers and critics feel is among his best, Ciardi muses on the subject of his marriage in four difficult but beautiful stanzas:



*Ciardi's translation of Dante's formidable Divine Comedy would win him mostly enthusiastic praise.*



*Most like an arch—an entrance which upholds  
and shores the stone-crush up the air like lace.  
Mass made idea, and idea held in place.  
A lock in time. Inside half-heaven unfolds*

*Most like an arch—two weaknesses that lean  
into a strength. Two failings become firm.  
Two joined abeyances become a term  
naming the fact that teaches fact to mean.*

*Not quite that? Not much less. World as it is,  
what's strong and separate falters. All I do  
at piling stone on stone apart from you  
is roofless around nothing. Till we kiss*

*I am no more than upright and unset.  
It is by falling in and in we make  
the all-bearing point, for one another's sake,  
in fruitless failing, raised by our own weight.*

Meanwhile at Harvard, Ciardi was writing constantly, hitting all of the prestigious poetry markets like *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic*. His prose book, *How Does a Poem Mean?*, was a text carried around by English majors and faculty on university campuses for years. Back in Minnesota, I was one of the carriers. His poetry collection, *Mid-Century American Poets* (1950), included works by many of the acknowledged best poets of the time—Elizabeth Bishop, Richard Wilbur, Robert Lowell, and others. He somehow found

*continued page 5*

**Ciardi** *continued from page 4*

time to write children's books (I love the title of one of these volumes: *You read to me/I'll read to you*. And it was while he was teaching at Harvard that he began what would become a valued presence at and then leadership of the highly acclaimed Bread Loaf Writers Conference in Vermont. Perhaps restless despite the achievements, he departed from Harvard in 1953 to take up a position as head of a writing program at Rutgers University in New Jersey.

Like Robert Pinsky, a recent poet laureate, John Ciardi publicly championed poetry and its creators whenever and wherever he could—in forums as diverse as National Public Radio and even on Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show*. He wrote hundreds of poems; his *Collected Poems* (the University of Arkansas Press) fill over 600 pages. They are vivid recollections of things he had seen, and more importantly of things that he felt. The subjects are endless. The poems are hardly all engaging—in the 1960s and 1970s, according to one critic, his fresh and brash verse “had become entrenched and his voice became bitter, sometimes bumptious.” But to read his verse (and prose) today is to see the largeness of his hu-

manity and to be touched by a compelling voice, the seeds of which were planted in a child growing up in Medford, Massachusetts.

John Ciardi died at the age of 69 on Easter Sunday in Metuchen, New Jersey, where he had lived for many years. Years earlier, he had written his own cryptic elegy:

*Here, time concurring (and it does),  
Lies Ciardi.  
If no kingdom come,  
A kingdom was.  
Such as it was,  
This one, beside it, is a slum.*

In an obituary in the *New York Times* (April 2, 1986), Robert Boorstin praised Ciardi for “his sharp and witty images”; he noted that readers had often lauded his fierce honesty. At his death, John Ciardi left behind his wife, Myra Judith Hostetter, his daughter Myra Judith, and his sons John and Benn. He is still missed by people who believe that poetry matters, and he is honored by a permanent exhibit (with other Medford writers) in the Medford Historical Society and Museum.

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**Susanna Rowson** *continued from page 1*

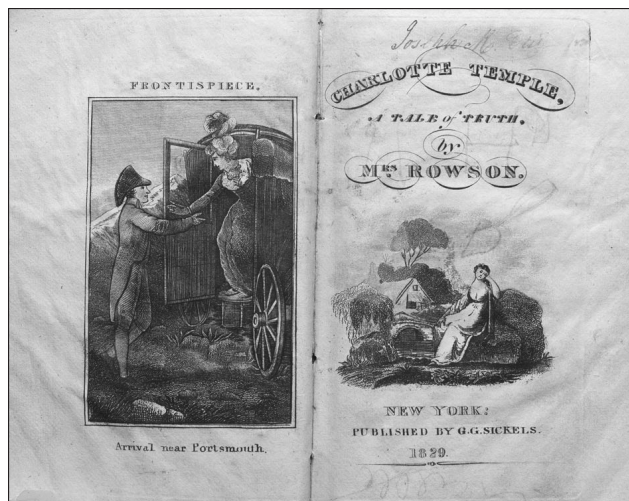
historical society, including letters written by people close to the affair that mention “Susan,” who I am hoping is Wyman's daughter. He put her up for adoption by the Swan family at the end of 1799, and she became one of Rowson's inner circle of students, then teacher and preceptor of her own school, and ultimately, I hope to show, part of the inspiration for Rowson's last fictional heroine, Lucy Temple. Like Susan Wyman, Lucy was abandoned by the father who had seduced her mother, Charlotte Temple, and she grew under the guiding hands of adoptive parents and her teacher, modeled upon Rowson herself, to enjoy a successful and happy adulthood.

**KH: What is your next project?**

**SE:** My next project is related to my archival research in Medford. Scholars have long noted the pervasiveness of seduction, disguise, and hypocrisy in the early American public imagination. With the scandal in Medford as my point of reference, I hope to show how Rowson uses her last novel both to describe and reform social relations at a time of high cultural anxiety.

Learn more about Professor Epley's research during two public programs in September:

1. Sunday, September 9 at 2 PM (10 Governors Avenue) “Researching Susanna Rowson – a roundtable format on researching Medford in the 18th century led by Professor Epley. Free. Co-sponsored by MHSM and Mass Humanities.
2. Monday, September 17 at 6 PM in the Austin Conference room at Tisch Library at Tufts. “Susanna



**Above is the frontispiece for Susanna Rowson's acclaimed novel, "Charlotte Temple", published in 1829.**

Rowson in Medford: Novels, Schools, and Scandals in 1799.” Learn about the curious case of Joseph and Mary Wyman and their daughter, Susan Wyman, of Medford who may have been the subject of Rowson's last novel, *Lucy Temple* (published posthumously in 1828). Free. Co-sponsored by Tufts Departments of History and English, MHSM and Mass Humanities.

Steven Epley is a professor of English at Samford University. He has a bachelor's degree from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and a Ph.D. from Columbia University. He was a reporter and editor for the Chattanooga News-Free Press for seven years.



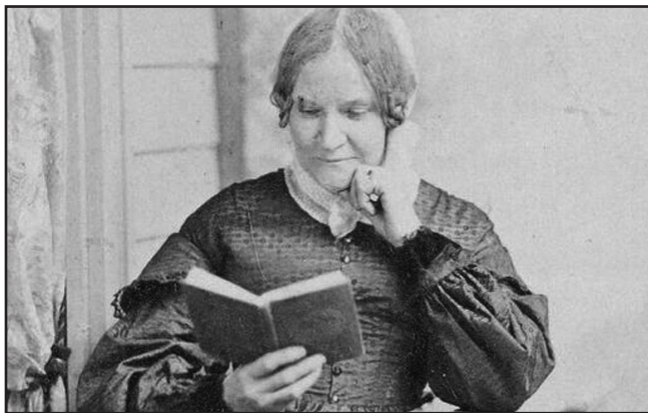
## MHSM Events Calendar

### SEPTEMBER

#### Lydia Maria Child: Author and Abolitionist Series Exhibit and Walking Tours

**Sundays: continuing through March 31, 2019, at MHSM, 12:00 – 4:00 PM.**

**EXHIBIT:** *Gathering Up the Fragments*



Learn how Lydia Maria Child, a Medford-born daughter of a baker, became one of the most important writers and activists in nineteenth-century America. Special focus is given to her portraits and personal items.

**Saturdays: September 8, October 6, and November 3, 10:00 AM. Meet at Riverside Avenue Plaza, between River Street and City Hall Plaza.**

#### **WALKING TOURS: Lydia Maria Child's Medford**

The tour, led by MHSM Program Committee Member, Nancy White, covers Medford during the period of Lydia's birth (1802), the people who were influential in her education, religious and social development, and the institutions that were present in Medford Square during the early nineteenth century.

**September 5 – 25.**

#### **SCHOLAR-IN-RESIDENCE**

With thanks to a grant from Mass Humanities, MHSM will host Scholar-in-Residence Professor Steven Epley from Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama.

Professor Epley is the author of *Susanna Rowson: Sentimental Prophet of Early American Literature* (2016). Susanna Rowson (1762-1824), an early American best-selling author, ran a girls' school in Medford in 1799 and had many connections in Medford. Join us for two presentations during Professor Epley's residency:

**Lydia Maria Child: Author and Abolitionist events are funded in part by a grant from the Medford Arts Council, a local commission that is supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council and the City of Medford. It is also funded by the Tufts Neighborhood Service Fund.**



**Sunday, September 9, 2:00 PM, at MHSM at 10 Governors Avenue.**

Researching Susanna Rowson – a roundtable format on researching Medford in the early 19th century led by Professor Epley. Co-sponsored by MHSM and Mass Humanities.

**Monday, September 17, 6:00 PM in the Austin Conference Room at Tisch Library at Tufts University, 35 Professors Row.**

"Susanna Rowson in Medford: Novels, Schools and Scandals in 1799." Learn about the curious case of Joseph and Mary Wyman and their daughter, Susan Wyman of Medford, who may have been the subject of Rowson's last novel, *Lucy Temple* (published posthumously in 1828). This event is co-sponsored by Tufts Departments of History and English, MHSM, and Mass Humanities.



### OCTOBER

**Friday, October 19, 2018, 1:00 PM at the Medford Senior Center, 101 Riverside Ave., Medford.**

#### **AUTHOR/LECTURE: The Boston Italians**

Stephen Puleo's highly-praised book, *The Boston Italians*, has widespread appeal. Mr. Puleo tells the important story of the Boston Italians from their earliest years, when a largely illiterate and impoverished community in a strange land recreated the bonds of villages and regions in the cramped quarters of the North End and rose to become prosperous and productive citizens of Boston and cities beyond, including Medford.

Co-sponsored by MHSM with the Medford Public Library. Both the Library and MHSM are happy to offer this program as part of Medford CACHE's October Arts Across Medford series.

Limited tickets available: Please call the Senior Center at 781-396-6010 to reserve your ticket(s).

### NOVEMBER

**Sunday, November 4, 2018, at 2:00 PM at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Medford, 147 High Street.**

#### **LECTURE: History of the Unitarian Church of Medford: Lucy, George and the Judge**

The Reverend Hank Pierce will present a talk on the importance of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Medford in the life and history of the community by focusing on three members of its community. These three often overlooked individuals made a lasting impact on the church congregations, our city and our



*Author Stephen Puleo described the experience of Boston's Italian immigrants as they battled poverty, illiteracy, and prejudice. This scene is from Boston's North End.*

nation. His talk will be on the lives and legacies of Lucy Osgood, George Luther Sterns, and Judge Lawrence Brooks. Reverend Hank Pierce is the minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Reading and previously served the Medford church for 12 years. Refreshments follow. **All attending are encouraged to bring non-perishable food items for the Food Pantry which is sponsored by this historic church.**

## DECEMBER

**Friday, December 7, 2018, at 7:00 PM at MHSM at 10 Governors Avenue**  
**MHSM Annual Holiday Party**  
**with Featured Speaker**

### LECTURE: Jumbo the Elephant

Our guest speaker is Professor Andrew McClellan, Professor of Art History at Tufts University. Professor McClellan will share the fascinating story from his book, *Jumbo: Marvel, Myth, & Mascot* (2014), on how the carcass of Jumbo the Elephant was a gift to Tufts College in 1889 from founding trustee and benefactor P.T. Barnum and became the most famous college mascot in the United States. Followed by holiday refreshments, and a chance to meet new and greet old friends.



## Jordan Marsh's Blueberry Muffins

*from Anthony Sammarco*

On February 27, historian Anthony M. Sammarco, whose dozens of books on almost every enterprise, neighborhood and corner of Greater Boston, spoke to a large gathering at an MHSM event held in Medford's Carroll's Restaurant. The topic focused on Mr. Sammarco's recent book, "Jordan Marsh: The World's Largest Department Store," and it was a fascinating tale about a Boston icon that, since 1851, had been the favored destination of shoppers from Boston and all of New England.

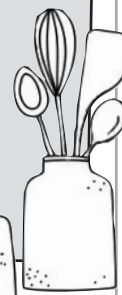
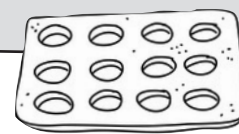
In his delightful book, Mr. Sammarco provides the recipe and instructions for Jordan's famous Blueberry Muffins. For all you bakers, here it is:

### Jordan Marsh Blueberry Muffins

- ½ cup of butter, softened
- 1 ¼ cups of sugar
- 2 eggs; 2 cups of flour
- ½ teaspoon of salt
- 2 teaspoons of baking powder
- ½ cup milk
- 2 cups of blueberries
- crystallized sugar.

The oven should be preheated to 350 degrees. Cream the butter and cups of sugar until light and smooth. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Sift together the flour, salt and baking powder and add to the creamed mixture alternately with the milk. Crush ½ cup of the blueberries with a fork and mix into the batter. Gently fold in the remaining whole blueberries.

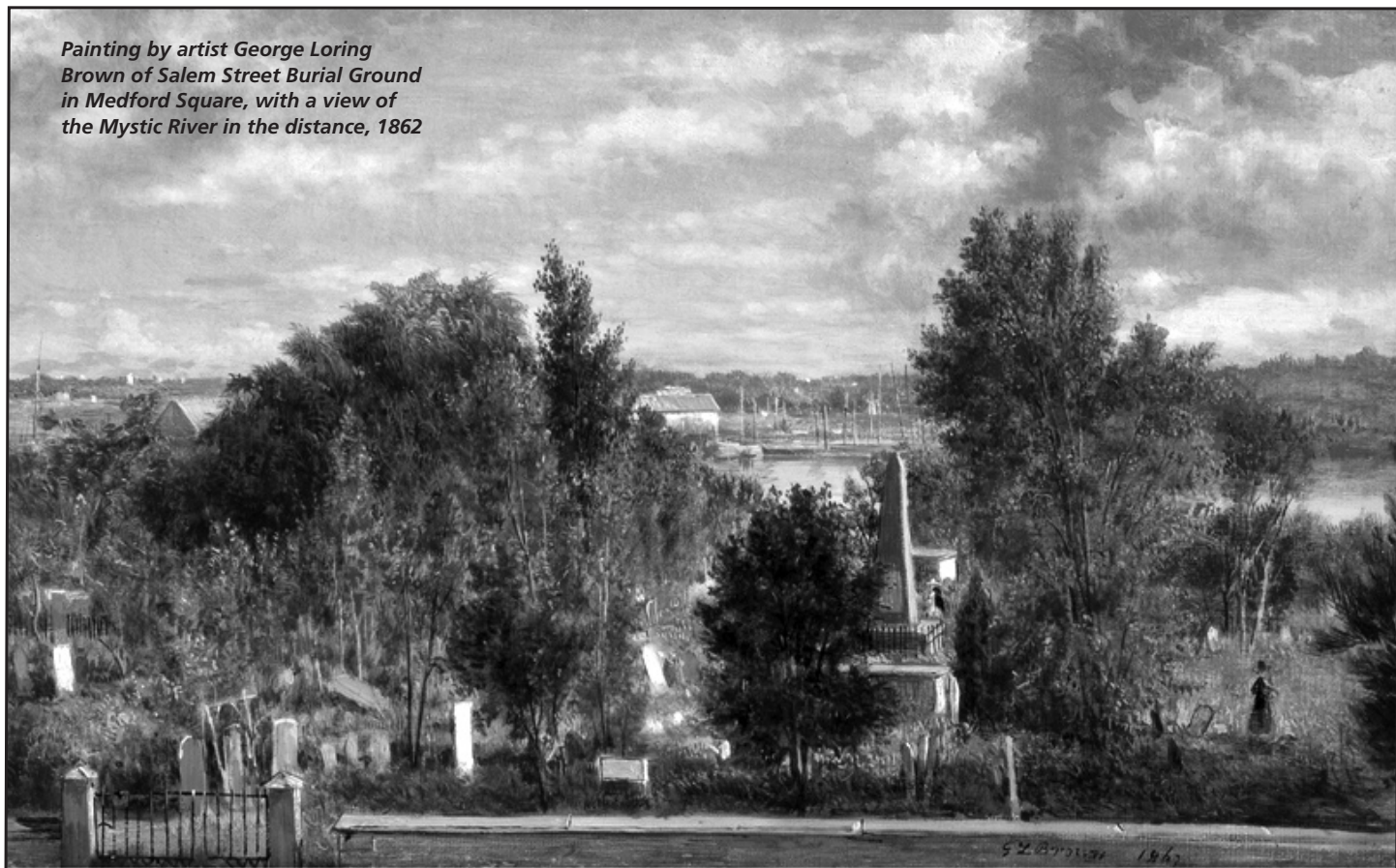
Grease 12 large muffin cups including the surface of the tin (alternatively grease the surface of tin and line tin with paper liners). Fill generously with batter. Sprinkle crystallized sugar over the tops of the muffins, and bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes, or until a toothpick comes out clean. Cool 30 minutes before removing. Store uncovered, because the muffins are so moist.



Enjoy this treat which, for some of you, will bring back happy memories of earlier tastes and times. Thanks, Anthony!



*Painting by artist George Loring  
Brown of Salem Street Burial Ground  
in Medford Square, with a view of  
the Mystic River in the distance, 1862*



***Your Medford Historical Society Newsletter***

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