



*Boston Authors Club*

## February 2019 Newsletter

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### Featured Author: Cynthia Levinson

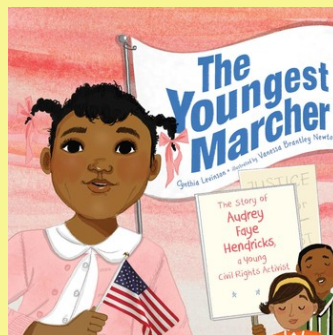


**Winner of the Julia Ward Howe Award for Young Readers, *The Youngest Marcher* by Cynthia Levinson chronicles the story of Audrey Faye Hendricks, who was jailed for her participation in the Birmingham Children's March at the age of nine.**

*In this interview, Levinson talks about meeting Audrey Faye Hendricks and her family during her research, working with a picture book illustrator for the first time, and her plans for more books, including verse based on the civil rights era in America.*

**Q: Congratulations on being the Young Readers Winner in this year's Julia Ward Howe Awards cycle. As part of your research for *The Youngest Marcher*, you had an opportunity to meet Audrey Faye Hendricks in person. How did that meeting impact your ideas about presenting Audrey's story for very young readers?**

**A:** Her calm fearlessness, personal reserve, and relentless determination most affected me. She was quiet-spoken, yet unswerving in her devotion to the civil rights movement, not only as a young child but also later, when she helped desegregate her high school, and as an adult, when she wrote her graduate thesis on women in the movement. I wanted to convey that inner drive.



For young readers, it was also important to show that her family and teachers supported and watched out for her. And, like many people I interviewed, she talked about [the importance of music](#) and the church. Talking with her sister, Jan, I also learned how impish Audrey was as a child!

**Q: In 2012, you published *We've Got a Job*, a book that chronicles the Birmingham Children's**

**March for readers over 10. In retrospect, what are the most important differences and the biggest challenges in crafting your content and storytelling for these two different age groups?**

**A:** After 18 months of rejections for **We've Got a Job**, I received offers for both the middle grade version and a picture book. I chose to write the latter first because I wanted to investigate and tell the larger story. The [four real-life "main characters"](#) allowed me to show various attitudes toward the movement within the black community as well among white people.

Nevertheless, writing **The Youngest Marcher** was challenging because I needed to convey the context from only a nine-year-old's perspective. Fortunately, Audrey was a very savvy youngster. I also really appreciated Jan's sharing their mother's recipe for Hot Rolls Baptized in Butter, which is both yummy and very appealing to kids.

**Q: How have younger children (and their parents) responded to hearing about the jail experience and the courage that Audrey demonstrated at such a young age?**

**A:** Candidly, I've been surprised that teachers and parents have read **The Youngest Marcher** to kindergarteners. It's a tough story not only because Audrey was jailed and threatened with solitary but also because, fortunately, most children in today's diverse classrooms have trouble imagining the strict segregation under which she lived. Yet, her story has clearly made deep impressions. Recently, a woman in Japan wrote to tell me that her four-year-old daughter loves singing "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round" and insisted that her mother buy another copy when they left theirs behind on a trip. The mother even refers to women who are demanding their rights as Audreys. That the book won the Julia Ward Howe Award from the BAC and SCBWI's Crystal Kite, which is chosen by children, among other [awards](#), also indicates how much she speaks to readers.

**Q: The illustrations by [Vanessa Brantley-Newton](#) have been praised as an important component of the power of *The Youngest Marcher*. Did the illustrations match your vision of the story? Could you talk about your interactions with Vanessa and with your editor in preparing *The Youngest Marcher* for publication?**

**A:** Initially, I didn't imagine **The Youngest Marcher** at all the way Vanessa did. Fortunately, I'm not an art director! Her illustrations are stunning—powerful, full of personality (I love her mother eyeing Audrey at the dinner table with Dr. King!), and yet hopeful. My favorite image is the one of Audrey on her jail cell cot with her back turned to the reader—literally, arresting.

Vanessa and I had no direct contact during the process; we communicated entirely through our editors. I sent a lot of factual information—descriptions of scenes, photos, videos—and also moods I hoped to have conveyed, such as Dr. King's deep faith. Since this was my first picture book, I learned a lot about the process. BAC Newsletter readers who want to see Vanessa's process can look [here](#).

**Q: Are you already working on a new book project? If so, can you tell us about it?**

**A:** Like all of us, I'm always working on a new project, though I hesitate to call something a "book" until it's under contract. Two nonfiction picture books (yes, they will be books!) are coming up, though I need to be circumspect since they're not yet announced. One is written in verse about the early civil rights period—the 1950s. The other is a biography of a social justice artist. I'm also pursuing one or two other bios, a possible historical fiction picture book, maybe another middle grade...

*Interview by Mary Cronin*

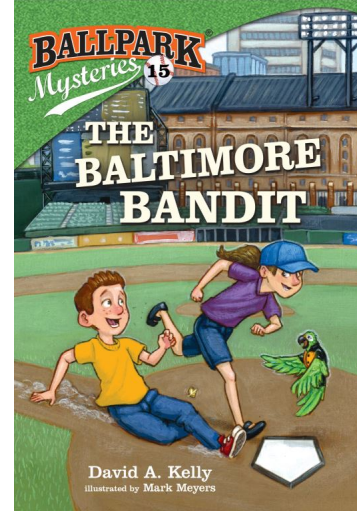
**authors!**  
**AUTHORS!**

## News About BAC Authors

### David Kelly's Ballpark Mystery #18 Visits the Orioles In Baltimore

David A. Kelly's latest Ballpark Mysteries book will be published by Random House on February 5<sup>th</sup>. It's the 18<sup>th</sup> book in the Ballpark Mysteries series, in which Kelly's main characters, Mike and Kate, visit different Major League baseball

stadiums to investigate mysteries. In **THE BALTIMORE BANDIT**, Mike and Kate visit the Baltimore Orioles Camden Yards baseball stadium, only to discover that Babe Ruth's baseball glove has been stolen!



## John Ronan's *The Early Bird Special* Will Be Staged on February 23 and 24 in Gloucester



John Ronan's one act play, *The Early Bird Special*, will be presented by the Rogers Street Theatre, February 23 and 24, in Gloucester.

*The Early Bird Special* has been selected as a finalist in the Tennessee Williams competition in New Orleans and the Strawberry Festival in NYC, as well as a winner in the Fire House new works festival.

John reports that his prize-winning play is about age - and senior moments! A tragic-comedy, sort of, as far as age can be made funny.

*The BAC newsletter is published the first week of every month.. Please send news about your activities, speaking, and new books (along with related pictures) to [bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com](mailto:bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com) by February 25 for publication in the March 2019 newsletter.*

## Yesteryear at the BAC by Scott Guthery What's Inside the BPL's BAC Archives Box?

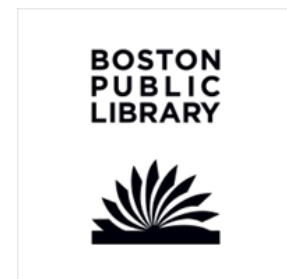
The finding guide is, as I noted in last month's column, a highly specialized form of literature; it is unlikely that finding guides will ever become category for the Julia Ward Howe Prize. Finding guides might be considered a kind of Sparknotes, or perhaps the classic comic books for primary source research.

*So what, you may ask, might one find in the BPL's finding guide for the archive of the Boston Authors Club?*

The guide is titled "Boston Authors Club Records, 1796-1872" and it can be accessed here:

<http://archon.bpl.org/?p=collections/controlcard&id=104>

The guide was last updated in November of 2014 by Kimberly Reynolds. The overall description of the archive tells us that the BAC archive occupies "1.0 Cubic Feet." Judging by the amount of material listed in the guide a library version of the shoehorn must have been used to get it all in there.



The archive itself consists of two boxes containing roughly 200 folders together with seven oversize items containing club records, correspondence, and newspaper clippings. Here are

some items that caught my eye as I read down the finding guide.

***Oversize item f130 contains the documentary comings and goings of a circular sent out in the first half of 1887 testing the waters for the formation of the club. There are lists of names to which the circular might be sent, proposals for offers of membership, as well as expressions of general support and helpful suggestions.***

Not everyone thought establishing the Boston Authors Club was a good idea, however. Item 15, for example is a communication from Percival Lowell to Col. Higginson on April 16, 1887, "Regarding the uselessness of continuing Authors Club project." Strangely, the previous day Mr. Lowell had requested that membership in the club be extended to "Hezekiah Butterworth and others." One has to wonder whether some animus must have existed between Lowell and Butterworth. On April 30, none other than Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote "giving his objections to formation of Club."

The archive holds a surprising number of poems. There is, for example, a poem titled "The Boston Authors Club Room" by Nixon Waterman as well as a poem titled "Miriam" by John Greenleaf Whittier. Folder 114 in Box 1 holds nineteen poems in tribute to Alice Brown including "I plucked the weeds of Candlemas" and "Listening in on Alice Brown's birthday."

Folder 114 is, however, eclipsed by Folder 115 which holds birthday tributes to Julia Ward Howe on her eighty-sixth birthday. Sixty club members gave free rein to their poetic impulses to contribute works such as "Prithee, tell me Julia Ward," "Birds on their nests now meditate" and "The Madonna of the glory." Thomas Wentworth Higginson put "Eistedfodd" in the hat. Wikipedia says that "The date of the first eisteddfod is a matter of much debate among scholars." but that's with two d's in the middle and only one at the end so maybe that's not what Higginson had in mind.

Folders 131 and 132 contain responses to an invitation to attend a founding meeting and to join the Club which, judging from the dates of the responses, was sent out shortly after the market test. There are roughly 80 acceptances, 70 declinations, and 20 requests for further information. It's all very polite until we get to Item 6 in Folder 132 where we find that Andrew Preston Peabody doesn't simply decline the invitation but assures everyone that he refuses to join the club.

***The details of Peabody's objections as well as the nature of the accusations against the Corresponding Secretary (which were vigorously protested) will, I fear, have to wait until the BPL's Special Collections division reopens next year.***

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## One More 2019 Membership Reminder!

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***Full membership dues are \$50 annually and Associate memberships are \$25 annually for the calendar year. If you renew or join any time during 2019, you will be a paid up member through December 2019. You can join and renew online by [clicking here](#). If you would rather pay by check, please make your check out to Boston Authors Club and mail it to the following address:***

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