



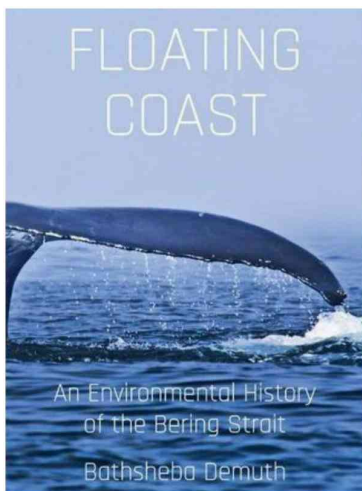
Boston Authors Club

December 2020 Newsletter

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Featured Interview: Bathsheba Demuth



The Julia Ward Howe Winner for Nonfiction and recipient of many other book awards, Bathsheba Demuth talks about the joys and challenges of researching Floating Coast, reader responses to this groundbreaking environmental history, and her next project; the Yukon River watershed.

The story you tell in *Floating Coast* transcends geographic, cultural, temporal, and many other boundaries. Was there one particular strand of this interwoven story that you most enjoyed writing?

The parts that were both the most challenging and most gripping for me, as I was writing this, were the parts of the book that blend the sorts of sources historians always use -- dairies, bureaucratic documents, oral accounts, letters-- with personal observations and sources from the sciences. The sections that bring whales into the narrative, for example. I wanted to make the lives and choices of whales immediate and interesting to readers, really alive as part of the history, and that required submersion in a variety of sometimes pretty technical literatures and then rendering them in ways that are both accurate and (hopefully!) compelling for readers.

Beyond an academic and environmental history audience, what types of readers were you hoping to reach with *Floating Coast*?

Floating Coast is in many ways a pre-history of climate change in the Arctic and sub-Arctic, or a history of the ideas that have produced the kinds of climate change the north --and the rest of us-- are now experiencing. For that reason, I felt a real responsibility to reach readers outside the usual academic realms, and particularly folks for whom the polar parts of the world feel distant and disconnected. I wanted to show that due to the ways consumption and production have been organized over the past 200 years,

nothing is distant. I also wanted to reach readers who are used to thinking of humans as the only actors in history, the only kind of protagonists we can write. To see animals or ecosystems as important is not strange for environmental historians and Indigenous historians, but I think it's less integrated into histories for general readers. I want to change that, because doing so helps reorient how we understand what is important, and valuable, and worthy of our stories.

Have you heard from that broader readership, and if so, what feedback have you received?

I have been so surprised and honored --I think that's the right word-- with the notes and discussions I've had with readers from all over. I've heard from undergraduate and graduate students who find the narrative style and questions inspiring for their own work, which makes me so happy as it means this book will be useful for making other works that contribute to how we understand the past. I've heard from readers outside academic spaces inspired to think differently about what history is and includes, and how they think about economies and their place in them. I think some of the most meaningful notes have come from readers in the Bering Strait, readers who have ancestors and relatives in the pages, and who find use and beauty in this telling of a history that has so many tellings.

What topics will you be working on next? Do you have more Bering Strait publications in mind, or are you focusing on something different?

I'm in the very early days of a project about the Yukon River watershed. I lived on the Porcupine, a tributary of the Yukon, for years, so my interests there go very far back. And like the Bering Strait it's a place full of political contrasts and contradictions. The Yukon flows through multiple Indigenous homelands, including those of the Yup'ik, Tagish, Tlingit, Koyukon, and Gwitch'in. These nations defined the region's politics, systems of value, and resource use prior to the 1700s, and, along much of the river and its tributaries, are today the watershed's primary residents. By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Indigenous ways of governance met with imperial ideas, as the British Empire expanded westward the Russian Empire moved east from Siberia. Then in 1867, after Russia sold Alaska to the United States and Canada was granted self-governance, the Yukon watershed was divided between nation-state legal regimes. What I'm interested in is how these different and layered and contesting societies thought of rights - rights to land, animal rights, rights of people. As in my first book I was looking at socialism and capitalism, in this one I want to think through what it means to give rights to the other-than-human world? Where does the idea that people "give" rights come from, and what are the alternatives? Are rights a useful way to imagine an ethical relationship between humans and nature? But it's really really early days, so those questions might change!

Interview by Mary Cronin

A Book Lover's Banquet - Holiday Contest

From THE BOOK COLLECTOR: CALL FOR ENTRIES

Fantasy Banquet for Bibliophiles
Get your literary juices flowing over Christmas!

Win £500! Get yourself Published!

You are asked to describe, in 1,000 words, an imaginary banquet for book-lovers. Your characters can be alive, dead or fictional, from any period, of any age, color or creed
OPEN TO ALL AUTHORS OVER 16 - DUE DATE IS JANUARY 22, 2021.

Entrance is free.

Full contest details and how to submit at:

<https://www.thebookcollector.co.uk/banquet>



authors!
AUTHORS!

**SPECIAL JANUARY NEWSLETTER
FEATURING BAC MEMBER NEWS,
COMING EVENTS, AND 2021
RESOLUTIONS**

**SEND YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS BY
DECEMBER 29 TO BE INCLUDED
bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com
THANKS!**

President's Note

Though it's unusually balmy as I'm writing today, it *is* actually December. And December evokes so many things for so many of us: the start of the holiday season, the end of the year, the change of season.

Each December I look forward to the close of my semester and to the end of the paper grading orgy when I can take some time to disappear into a few good books. Like many of you, I expect, I have many books stacked up on the nightstand beside my bed, just waiting for me to dive into them. I can hardly wait for Elena Ferrante's *The Lying Life of Adults* and the new book of short stories by Emma Cline, but I'm also eager to plow into my Tufts colleague Kerri Greenidge's *Black Radical: The Life and Times of William Monroe Trotter* and a forthcoming biography of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings for which I've been asked to write a book blurb.



My December literary musings also inevitably bring me back to the woman who only made an appearance in my last book after she'd died – Emily Dickinson – because on December 10 we will celebrate her 190th birthday. Books were an important commodity in the Dickinson household, and Emily was a voracious reader. Like me, her literary tastes varied. In addition to her frequent perusal of the King James Bible, Emily read the newspapers and magazines her family subscribed to. She loved the novels of the Bronte sisters and George Eliot, as well as Charles Dickens. She read the sermons and essays of Emerson, the poetry of Tennyson and Wordsworth, the plays of Sir Walter Scott. Elizabeth Barrett Browning seems to have been a particular favorite. And, fun fact, as a young woman Emily was also a part of a group of young people in Amherst who had a reading group that read Shakespeare aloud.

There are Emily Dickinson quotes for so much in life, and the joy of books is no exception. She once wrote that books are “the dearest ones of time, the strongest friends of the soul.” So true!

So, BAC friends, I wish you all health and safety, happy holidays, and the joy of some of these strongest friends of the soul to take you through the season.

Julie Dobrow
BAC President

Yesteryear at the BAC by Scott Guthery *BAC At the Movies - Minus the Film*

The entry for Philip Dana Orcutt in volume 2 of Notable Boston Authors ends with “The Colonel plans to give to the Club the 16-millimeter motion pictures of his father for its film library.” Boston Authors Club film library? What other films do you suppose were in club’s library?

There is no mention of films in the finding guide for the papers of the Boston Authors Club at the BPL: <http://archon.bpl.org/?p=collections/findingaid&id=104&q=&rootcontentid=53033>

The only connection between the BAC and film I was able to turn up after a little more research was through BAC member Beulah Marie Dix: *“After graduation [Beulah Marie Dix Flebbe] joined the Boston Author’s Club, where she met Mrs. Evelyn Greenleaf Sutherland and collaborated with her in playwriting ... Mrs. Flebbe worked for Cecil B. DeMille and Jesse L. Lasky, writing original screen plays and adaptations. Some of her own stories were made into motion pictures including Their Own Desire and the Life of Jimmy Dolan.”* This blurb is from the finding guide to Dix’s papers at the University of Oregon. <http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv78460/> Dix, Sutherland and both of the films have their own pages on Wikipedia. *The Life of Jimmy Dolan* starred Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., Loretta Young, and John Wayne. But I digress.



In addition to Wikipedia, Dix and Sutherland have entries in *More Authors* too. Sutherland’s entry notes: “She was the author of *Po’ White Trash* and many other one-act dramas produced in collaboration with Beulah Marie Dix.” (The two are the subject of a chapter in Sherry Engle’s book *New Women Dramatists in America, 1890-1920*.) Neither entries mention Jimmy Dolan but the entry for Dix includes: “In 1915, Mrs. Flebbe wrote a play entitled *Across the Border*, in which she did almost the impossible: she took the contemporary theme of war ... and threw it into an artistic mold of compelling challenge greater

than any number of harangues on peace.” You have to wonder just what particular aspect of this bibliophilic feat of legerdemain rendered it almost impossible.

But, back to the missing film donation.....why, you are undoubtedly asking yourself would the Boston Authors Club want to have a film about Philip Dana Orcutt’s father in its film library? Well, besides also being a member of the Boston Authors Club (see volume 1 of *Notable Boston Authors*), William Dana Orcutt was the designer of the *Humanistic* typeface which went on to become Blake’s *Bologna* and then the American Type Founders’ *Verona*. Orcutt senior is also the author of *In quest of the perfect book: reminiscences & reflections of a bookman*.

So, OK, Philip’s father was an author of books about books and designed typefaces as well as being a revered member of the BAC. That’s the direct connection to the BAC. But wouldn’t the value of a 16-millimeter film of him to the BAC turn on what Orcutt senior was doing in the film? Writing? Designing the next type face? Tossing a ball around with Philip? And what other films were in the BAC film library? Any written by Dix? And finally, what happened to the library?

Become a member for 2021!

Membership dues are \$50 annually for the calendar year. 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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