



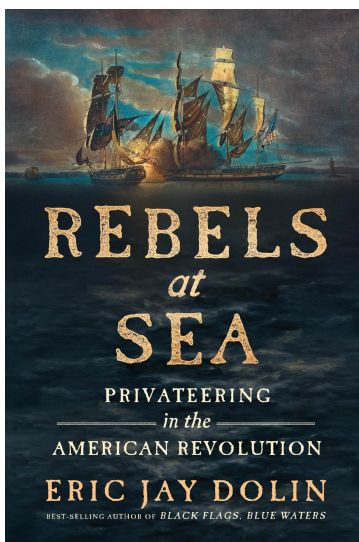
Boston Authors Club

May 2022 Newsletter

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Featured Interview: Eric Jay Dolin



Eric Jay Dolin's latest book, ***Rebels at Sea: Privateering in the American Revolution***, will be published at the end of May. Dolin's earlier historical account of American pirates, ***Black Flags, Blue Waters*** was a Julia Ward Howe nonfiction finalist in 2019.

In this interview, Dolin talks about what brought him back to writing about adventures on the high seas, his research process, plans for in-person and online book promotion, and why he switched gears on his next book project.

Q: Do any of the Black Flags pirates make an appearance in Rebels at Sea, or does Rebels feature a different cast of characters?

A: There is no overlap, for two reasons. First, ***Black Flags*** covers the period from 1630 to 1726, while ***Rebels At Sea*** focuses exclusively on the American Revolution. Second, although people often think of privateers as being synonymous with pirates, that is not the case here. Given the origins of privateering, it is easy to understand why so many viewed privateering and piracy as two sides of the same coin. But privateersmen operating during the American Revolution were not pirates, and the vast majority acted honorably, observing international law and the laws and regulations laid down by the Continental Congress during the war. The few exceptions only served to prove the rule.

Q: How much research did you do before and during writing Rebels at Sea? What sources did you use?

My books tend to take close to 24 months to research and write. For ***Rebels at Sea***, the process was faster due to COVID. Since many of the normal activities of life were suspended, and I had more time in my home office, I finished in about 18 months, with about 8 months researching, and the rest writing, with a bit more research during the writing phase to fill in gaps.

I made extensive use of my local public library in Marblehead, the Abbot Public Library, and through it, interlibrary loans, which tapped many libraries near and far. I also want to give a special shoutout to the

Widener Library at Harvard, for a most unusual reason. For all my books, I have used the Widener extensively, especially to obtain rare books and search through the many historical databases the library subscribes to. In early March 2020, just when things were becoming really scary with COVID and just a few days before a national emergency was declared, I decided to spend a few days visiting the Widener, scanning sections from scores of books and downloading hundreds of articles and other documents, most of them primary sources. A week or two later, the lockdown began and the Widener closed (as did all the other libraries I typically use). Had I not made those multiple trips to the Widener and obtained those critical documents before the library shut down, I don't think I would have been able to finish the book during COVID, or at least write the book I wanted to.

Finally, via the Internet, I was able to search databases of many libraries and historical societies, which often had digitized materials I needed to use.

*Q: What are your plans for promoting **Rebels at Sea**? Are in-person events back in full force for the summer?*

COVID is still a wild card, but all of the talks I have scheduled this summer are, as of now, in person. Even if COVID numbers go up again, I hope my talks don't move to Zoom—although I do like hybrid events, I much prefer in-person. My list of talks can be found at my website – <https://www.ericjaydolin.com/events>. My publisher will also be sending me out for a week or two on a tour outside of New England, which is in the process of being set up. I will also be doing a number of podcasts and radio shows, and some TV appearances. If anyone reading this knows of venues that might be interested in hearing me talk about *Rebels At Sea*, just let me know via ericjayd@aol.com (yes, I am really old, and a dinosaur, who still uses AOL).

The only other lever I have for promoting the book is via my professional Facebook page -- @EricJayDolin (make sure you go to my author page, with the blue check, and not my personal page, which uses the same name). I enjoy posting on this page, and the back and forth that comes via THE comments. I typically post about history or nature, and intersperse my general posts with ones about my books. The only problem is that a normal post is seen by only a fraction of one's followers. So, I do invest my own money, and sometimes my publisher's, to boost posts to reach a larger audience. I believe it helps to sell books or draw people to talks. Whether it is cost-effective, I am not sure, but I hope so!

Q: Are you already at work on your next book? If so, can you talk about your inspiration and topic and timeline?

I wrote a proposal months ago, got an offer, but before signing the contract I decided my heart wasn't in it, so I dropped the project, and didn't sign. Since then, I have written another proposal, on a different topic. and we shall see what happens with that! So, for the moment, I can't share what the new proposal is about, but I like it, and hope one day it becomes a book. If not, I will have to find something else.

Picking a topic is always fraught. You need to be passionate about it, but you also need to have confidence that it will find a good audience, and, before that, that a publisher will support it. Over the years, I have considered scores of topics. Many of them ultimately became books I wrote. More than a few others, I passed on, only to find a few years later that another author had taken up the topic, and published a book that sold quite well! I don't regret writing the books I have, at all, but there have been a few what-ifs along the way. On the flipside, I know that at least a few authors have gnashed their teeth, so to speak, when they saw one of my books appear, since they were thinking about writing a similar book, or, worse, were just about to publish a book on a similar topic (the latter of which is not always a problem, and there are times when very similar books publishing around the same time, both sell well). Those are the vagaries of publishing.

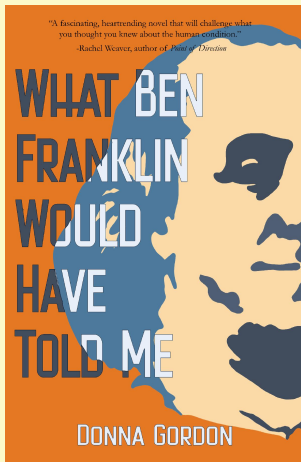
Interview by Mary J Cronin

BAC Author News & Events

Our first in-person BAC event after the long pause for COVID took place on April 25 at the Blue Bunny bookstore. Over 35 people turned out for a stellar panel discussion of Children's Book Writing.

Panelists (l to r): Nancy Tupper Ling, Lisa Verchol Perron, Mia Wenjen, Janet Costa Bates, and our host, Peter H. Reynolds



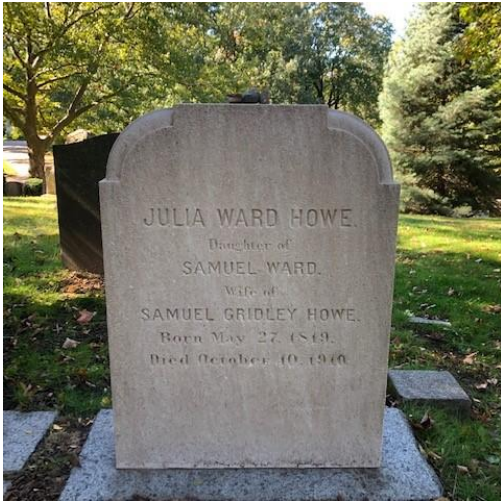


Donna Gordon, fiction writer and visual artist, is excited to announce the publication of her debut novel, *What Ben Franklin Would have Told Me*.

A book launch event is scheduled for the Harvard Book Store on June 8th.

More about Donna and her novel in the June BAC newsletter!

BAC President's Note: Visiting Julia



Mount Auburn Cemetery, founded in 1831, was designed both as a final resting place and as an arboretum that celebrates the natural environment. It's also a great place to "visit" with famous authors, ranging from Margaret Fuller to Harriet Jacobs to Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.

Poets Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Amy Lowell and Robert Creeley are buried there. Pulitzer Prize winning historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. has his final resting place at Mt. Auburn, as does Pulitzer Prize winning author Bernard Malamud. Fannie Farmer of cookbook fame lies in Mt. Auburn. There are also authors whose names you might not know, though surely you know their writing, like Eleanor Porter (author of *Pollyanna*).

But when I walked around Mount Auburn, the one author I most wanted to visit was Julia Ward Howe, one of the founders of the BAC.

Julia Ward Howe is most known as the writer of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," lyrics she crafted after a visit to Washington D.C. and a visit with President Abraham Lincoln in 1861. Published in *The Atlantic Monthly* early in 1862, the song was set to existing music and became well-known as a patriotic song for the Union. But Julia wrote in so many other genres that I'm sure she'd be surprised to know this is the primary way in which she is remembered today.

Because her husband, Samuel Gridley Howe, a physician and reformer who'd founded the Perkins School for the Blind, did not approve of her writing, at all, Julia published her first two books of poetry anonymously. Much of her poetry and many of her plays focused on issues surrounding the limitations of women's roles; she also wrote freely – if obliquely – about problems in her own marriage. No surprise she chose not put her name on these books!

But later in life, Julia would also write essays about the topics she cared about deeply (abolition, pacifism, women's suffrage). She was happy to claim authorship at this point in her life. She served as editor of the literary magazine *Northern Lights* in 1867, and became editor of the *Woman's Journal*, a widely-read suffragist magazine in 1872. Julia also wrote and published travel essays, and a biography of Margaret Fuller.

Julia was honored during her lifetime by becoming the first woman elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1908 when she was 88. Posthumously she's been much awarded, ranging from schools, neighborhoods and awards that bear her name (like our own Julia Ward Howe Award), to having her Boston home named a landmark on the Boston Women's Heritage Trail, to her induction into the Songwriter's Hall of Fame in 1970.

I've told the story of how Julia became involved with three other women writers who suggested forming a Boston Authors Club elsewhere (see, for instance, this article published in the *Boston Globe Magazine* <https://www.bostonglobe.com/magazine/2014/05/03/the-boston-authors-club-defending-books-age-distraction/ZemqUbJVg0wYTD1EFU0rxM/story.html>) so I won't retell it here. The first BAC meetings were held in her home, and she served as the first

president of the BAC, a position she held for many years. Suffice to say that without Julia Ward Howe, there would be no Boston Authors Club.

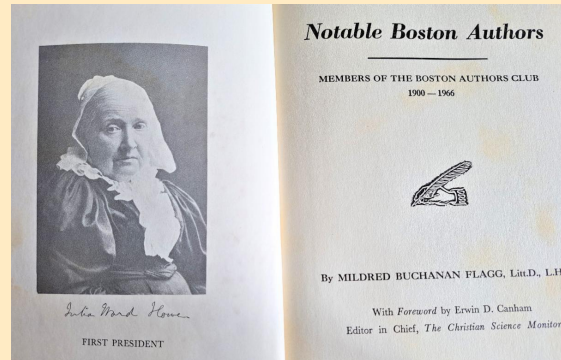
So, fellow BACers, if you want a good springtime outing, go to Mount Auburn. And make sure to stop and pay homage to Julia.

Julie Dobrow
BAC President

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If you are curious about the frequent source of Scott's monthly Yesteryear columns, now's your chance! For a FREE copy of Mildred Flagg's oft-quoted history, just email your request (and your postal address) to bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com

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Yesteryear: Lucy Poate Stebbins Cracks Her Dishpan



Mrs. Lucy Poate Stebbins, Boston author.

*Beginnings, as every author knows, are perilous. The first step picks a direction but how can you pick a direction if you don't know where you're going? Our own Mildred Buchanan Flagg, Litt.D., L.H.D., was fearless in the face of this literary peril, writing about a fellow Boston Authors Club member in *Boston Authors Now and Then*, "Mrs. Lucy Poate Stebbins's lusty vent to her feelings cracked the glaze of writing indecision..."*

See? A little lusty vent and you're on your way.

Lucy Poate Stebbins (pictured here), it seems, was just as fearless. Writing about launching her career as an author she says, "I hung up my dishpan with a bang and said loud and fiercely, 'Now I will write a novel.'" And so she did. Her first book, *Old Adam's Likeness*, was published by Houghton Mifflin in 1928.

Mildred gives Lucy a fulsome hubba-hubba in a feature article about Stebbins in the Sunday, May 17, 1936, edition of the *Boston Herald*: "The outrageous bang which cracked the enamel on her dishpan did seem to break open her shell of writing inhibitions..."

When *Old Adam's Likeness* was finally published, Flagg quotes Stebbins as saying "It was like Cincinnatus leaving his plow in the furrow, only that old boy's plow stayed there until he came home from the wars---I do think his wife should have dragged it under the cover, don't you?" Far be it for me to disagree with Lucy.

Once she had hung up her dishpan, Stebbins went on to write nine more novels herself as well as three with her son, Richard Poate Stebbins, including *The Trollopes: The Chronicle of a Writing Family*." Thirty-five years after Lucy's death, Richard wrote her biography, *So Hard the Stones: Lucy Poate Stebbins and Her Life in Literature*, which was published by P. Lang in 1993.

Lucy's mother's uncle was author Richard Doddridge Blackmore, whose novel, *Lorna Doone*, was published in 1869 and has been in print ever since. So perhaps Lucy Stebbins was always destined to crack some enamel and open some shells, figuratively speaking, of course.

By Scott Guthery

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