



Literary
MOUNT VERNON
 Authors, Poets, & Editors who Sojourned
 In Baltimore's Cultural Hub

Howard St.
 W. Biddle St.
 Maryland Ave.
 N. Charles St.
 E. Biddle St.
 Jones Falls Expwy.
 Cathedral St.
 E. Chase St.
 E. Eager St.
 W. Read St.
 Edna St Vincent Millay
 Tupac Shakur
 W. Madison
 H.L. Mencken
 F. Scott Fitzgerald
 W. Monument St.
 Md Historical Society
 Walters Gallery
 John Dos Passos
 W. Centre St.
 John Murphy
 W. Franklin St.
 Karl Shapiro
 Upton Sinclair
 W. Mulberry St.
 E.A. Poe
 N. Charles St.
 W. Saratoga St.
 Carl Sandburg
 St. Paul Place
 E. Monument St.
 E. Centre St.
 The Sun
 Orleans St. Viaduct
 St. Paul St.
 Calvert St.
 Pleasant St.
 Guilford Ave.

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 H.L. MENCKEN

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 F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

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 JOHN DOS PASSOS

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LITERARY MOUNT VERNON WALKING TOUR

Begin your tour at Old St. Paul's Rectory, 25 W. Saratoga Street. A tour of the rectory may be arranged by calling in advance 410-685-2886.

Introduction

Mount Vernon is quintessentially 19th century Baltimore. Its soaring monument, elegant brick and brownstone mansions, and majestic cultural institutions were built by Baltimore's successful merchants and industrialists from that era. From the early 19th century, with Edgar Allen Poe's bold experiments with literary forms, through the late 20th century when the poetry of hip-hop superstar Tupac Shakur was spoken, artists have drawn inspiration from Mount Vernon. As the home of scholars, students, struggling artists, newspapermen and women, and social reformers as well as wealthy industrialists and society leaders, the neighborhood offered rich opportunities to individuals to discuss and debate ideas and open new literary avenues.

1. Carl Sandburg: 1878-1967

Old St. Paul's Rectory, 25 W. Saratoga Street

Sandburg was a frequent guest here when the Rectory was the home of Sally Bruce Kinsolving, a founder of the Maryland Poetry Society

An everyman from the Midwest, Sandburg quit school at 13, worked odd jobs to support his family, rode the rails to Kansas as a hobo, served in the Spanish-American War, and attended Lombard College in Galesburg, Illinois. He was an enthusiastic socialist, always with an eye to the position of the little guy. In Chicago, he produced the poems for which he is best remembered, *Chicago Poems* (1916). These praised the energy and muscularity of the developing city and its ambitions, and found beauty in its industry.

A poet, historian, folklorist, and biographer, Sandburg enjoyed immense popularity among his readers, receiving the Pulitzer Prize for *The Complete Poems* in 1950. He continued until his death to search for the authentic voice of America, not only in his own poetry but also in the country's folksongs. He traveled the U.S., recording, performing, and printing over 255 tunes as he heard them. *The American Songbag* and *The New American Songbag* contain these favorites.

Walk north on Charles Street to the intersection of Mulberry Street. Look across Charles Street for the American Heart Association Building.

2. Upton Sinclair: 1878-1968

417 N. Charles Street

Now part of the American Heart Association building, this way the location of the boardinghouse when Sinclair was born.

"Muckraker" was the approving title President Theodore Roosevelt bestowed on Baltimore native and avowed socialist Upton Sinclair upon publication of *The Jungle*. A popular success, the book sold 150,000 copies immediately after its publication and has been translated into 17 languages.

“[The book] reeked of the stink of the Chicago stockyards. [Sinclair] told how dead rats were shoveled into sausage-grinding machines, how bribed inspectors looked the other way when diseased cows were slaughtered for beef, and how filth and guts were swept off the floor and packaged as ‘potted ham.’”

Horrified at the unsanitary conditions common in the meat packing houses vividly described by Sinclair in *The Jungle*, President Roosevelt immediately created the Food and Drug Administration and the Meat Inspection Act in 1906, the same year of the novel’s publication.

There would be many other books, essays, plays, and short stories from this most prolific and long-lived writer. Sinclair took on religion, education, coal and oil, for example, but none of these would have the impact of *The Jungle*.

Turn left and walk west on Mulberry Street to #11 Mulberry.

3. Edgar Allan Poe: 1809-1849

11 W. Mulberry

Here Poe visited J.H.B. Latrobe who selected Poe’s “Ms in a Bottle” as the winning entry in the Baltimore Saturday Visiter.

Born in Boston, Poe had family roots in Baltimore, lived here in the 1830s, died in a Baltimore hospital, and is buried on the corner of Greene and West Fayette Street in Westminster Burying Ground. And so Baltimore fully claims him for its own. Every January 19th, the anniversary of his birth, a dashing figure visits his grave under the cloak of darkness, deposits three roses and a half-full bottle of cognac, and disappears as stealthily as he came. Poe has insinuated himself into 20th century national pop culture—appearing on a U.S. stamp, a Beatles album cover, in television episodes of *The Simpsons*, and on coffee mugs, refrigerator magnets, and mouse pads. His poetry and short stories have been adapted for film, music, and theatre. The name of the Baltimore Ravens football team recalls his enigmatic poem, as does the USS Raven, a Navy minesweeper.

Poe—poet, short story writer, and critic—is credited with fathering both science fiction and detective fiction. In fact, the Mystery Writers of America annually award the Oscar-like Edgar to honor an outstanding work of mystery writing. Read Poe’s masterful *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Cask of Amontillado*, or *The Tell-Tale Heart* and experience the thrill of a chilling tale. His poems beg to be remembered—and are. Many a reader can quote whole stanzas, whether it be “The Bells,” “The Raven,” “Annabel Lee,” or “Ulalume.”

Cross Cathedral Street to the Enoch Pratt Free Library. The nation’s first library system, it was founded by philanthropist and namesake Enoch Pratt.

4. Karl Shapiro: 1913-2000

Enoch Pratt Free Library, 400 Cathedral Street

Shapiro attended Enoch Pratt Free Library School before WWII

If there were a prize for the most productive poet in active military service, Shapiro would be a serious contender. While serving in the U.S. Army in the South Pacific from 1941 to 1945, Shapiro was awarded the Sewell Poetry Magazine Prize, the Levinson Prize for Poetry, and the Contemporary Poetry Prize, had his work anthologized in *Five Younger Poets' Series: Second Edition*, and received a grant from the American Society of Arts and Sciences. In 1945, he won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry at the age of 32.

This Baltimore native had the good fortune to spend his many years making a living doing what he loved most: writing, editing, and teaching poetry. The recipient of many honors for his poetry, Shapiro was named Poetry Consultant to the Library of Congress, known today as the nation's Poet Laureate. Without a college degree—"half an education," as he called it—he taught at the University of Nebraska, the University of Illinois, and the University of California, Davis, and was named Poet-in-Residence at Bucknell University. His works include *The Bourgeois Poet*, *V-Letter and Other Poems*, and *Poems of a Jew*.

Walk north on Cathedral Street to the intersection with Centre Street. Here you are three blocks from the former location of the Afro American newspaper on Druid Hill Avenue and Eutaw Street, the current location of the Baltimore Sun on Centre and Calvert Streets, and the current location of City Paper at 812 Park Avenue.

5. John Murphy: 1840-1922

In 1897 former slave John H. Murphy purchased the *Afro American* and began its crusade for racial equality and economic advancement for African Americans. At his death in 1922, the *Afro American* was the most widely circulated paper for African Americans along the Atlantic coast. Under the leadership of his son Carl Murphy, the newspaper, then located on Eutaw and Centre Streets, rose to national prominence. Poet Langston Hughes, artist Romare Beardon (who began his career as a political cartoonist here), and legendary sportswriter Sam Lacy (credited with helping integrate professional sports) all appeared in the pages of the *Afro American*. During the Civil Rights era the *Afro American* collaborated with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People on numerous civil rights cases and successfully championed reforms that ended *de facto* segregation as well as legally-sanctioned racial discrimination.

Newspapers Today

Today the *Baltimore Sun* and *City Paper* are located in Mount Vernon. *The Baltimore Sun*, founded in 1837, has spawned numerous literary stars besides H.L. Mencken (see # 8,) including essayist Russell Baker, novelists Laura Lippman and David Simon, and poet Sidney Lanier. The weekly *City Paper*, founded in 1977 as *City Squeeze* by Johns Hopkins University undergrads, features contemporary coverage of current affairs, politics, and the cultural arts and entertainment. The annual "Best of Baltimore" edition is a much-anticipated publication, raising or dashing the hopes of aspiring artists, entrepreneurs, restaurants and businesses.

Walk east on Centre Street, past the Walters Art Museum (where you can visit its extensive manuscript gallery), cross Washington Place and turn left to walk up the hill to the Peabody Institute. The entrance is on Mount Vernon Place. Please visit the Peabody Institute and the George Peabody Library.

6. John Dos Passos: 1896-1970

George Peabody Library, 17 E. Mount Vernon Place

Dos Passos wrote many of his works at a carrel in this library's reading room.

John Dos Passos spent time in Baltimore from the 1950s until he died, writing in the Johns Hopkins, Peabody, and Pratt libraries. Here, he developed a deep love for the city, for its color, tempo, and variety. His essay, "The Streets of Baltimore," is an homage to the city, of which he says,

Neighborhoods had a special flavor. Somehow the houses and people of Hampden didn't look the same as the houses and people around Union Square The modest calm of Govans was entirely different from the faded nineteenth century elegance of Mount Washington with its enormous grove of trees.

Playwright, essayist, and novelist, Dos Passos is best remembered for his three-novel trilogy *U.S.A.*, a sweeping American epic that reflects the complexity of American life between the world wars, an America where industrialism shaped our private lives and public policy, where war lapped at our shores, where our sense of duty to the international community would be defined and re-defined. *U.S.A.* doesn't look or read like a traditional early 20th century American novel. Experimenting with the technological techniques of the camera and the newsreel in its storytelling, Dos Passos interrupted its narrative with songs, oratory, and biographies of newsworthy people. Its characters, drawn both from life and the imagination, freely intermingle. A sprawling work, *U.S.A.* has been called a "history of public moods and changes" in a period of American history still undergoing scrutiny today.

Cross Mount Vernon Place, walking past the nation's first Washington Monument and the gothic Mount Vernon Place United Methodist Church, cross Washington Place, to the 11-story Stafford Hotel.

7. F. Scott Fitzgerald: 1896-1940

The Stafford Hotel, 718 Washington Place

F. Scott Fitzgerald lived here for a time while his wife Zelda was undergoing treatment at Sheppard Pratt Hospital.

Fitzgerald named the decade of the 1920s the "Jazz Age," and he embodied all of the flamboyance and notoriety that the name suggested in his life with Zelda Sayre. "It was an age of miracles, it was an age of art, it was an age of excess, it was an age of satire," said Fitzgerald in *Echoes of the Jazz Age*. With several early successes, among them novels *This Side of Paradise* and *The Beautiful and the Damned*, F. Scott lived the life he described. "Like gilded butterflies with excellent credentials," he and Zelda came to Baltimore from Europe, after the publication of *The Great Gatsby* in the 1930s.

In Baltimore, the couple produced literature exploring the underside of their glittery jazz age: their depression, alcoholism, debt, and the schizophrenia that institutionalized Zelda for most of their marriage. F. Scott wrote *Tender is the Night* and also “The Crack-Up” in this period. Zelda’s literary successes were marked with increasingly extended periods of time in psychiatric hospitals. F. Scott, his drinking increasing and his money dwindling, remained in Baltimore, where their daughter was in school, until his luck finally turned with a Hollywood screenwriting job. F. Scott and Zelda are buried together in Rockville, Maryland, with the plaintive last line from *The Great Gatsby* on their tombstone: “So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.”

Walk west on Madison Street to the corner of Madison and Cathedral Streets, where the Baltimore School for the Arts is located. Please visit its Alcazar Gallery.

8. H.L. Mencken: 1880-1956

704 Cathedral Street, now part of Baltimore School for the Arts

Mencken lived in an apartment here during his brief marriage to Sara Haardt.

He ranks right up there with other Baltimore icons—waitresses who call you “Hon,” spaghetti in Little Italy, and tasty, sweet Maryland blue crabs. Mencken, the classic cigar-smoking newspaper man wrote 30 books, including a linguistic study of the American language, and about 3,000 newspaper columns for the *American Mercury* and *Baltimore Sun*. He has left us with much to quote, and quoting Mencken is a popular Baltimore pastime. Some samples of his wit and wisdom include:

The truth that survives is simply the lie that is pleasantest to believe.

It is a sin to believe evil of others, but it is seldom a mistake.

Men have a much better time of it than women. For one thing, they marry late; for another thing, they die earlier.

As the editor and chief book critic for two magazines, *The Smart Set* and *American Mercury*, Mencken promoted such writers as Theodore Dreiser, Willa Cather, Sinclair Lewis, and others he felt brought a welcome realism to American writing. His *American Mercury* was the first magazine edited by whites to publish the work of African-Americans, such as James Weldon Johnson and Langston Hughes, bringing these writer’s voices to a broader America and shining light on these distinctive contributions to our literature.

9. Tupac Shakur: 1971-1996

Baltimore School for the Arts, corner of Madison and Cathedral Streets

Shakur attend the school for a short time.

At age 25, this prolific Brooklyn-born hip-hop music legend died in a blaze of bullets on the Las Vegas strip. He had had extraordinary early success, a larger-than-life public presence in a world of drugs and alcohol, a police record, an aggressive message of

pain and retribution, and an alternative music that boldly, often crassly and obscenely, spoke to the inequities of race in American life.

His lyrics and interviews suggest that Shakur, from the time he was a small child, struggled to develop a clear sense of self. The family moved frequently and he had few close personal relationships. Raised by his mother and with no knowledge of his father, he sorely missed a male presence in his life. Early interests included writing and performing in plays for his family. At age 12, he played Travis in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* for the 127th Street Ensemble in Harlem. At the Baltimore School for the Arts, he began to find a place for himself. At home in this institution, he said, "I loved going to school . . . I started to feel like I really wanted to be an artist." But the family's stay in Baltimore was short and it was in Oakland, California, where most feel he came into his own as a hip-hop artist.

He leaves a poignant eulogy for himself in his lyrics: "No matter what you think about me, I'm still your child you can't shut me off."

Turn right to walk one block north on Cathedral Street to the Emmanuel Episcopal Church. A tour of the church may be arranged by calling in advance 410-685-1130.

10. Edna St. Vincent Millay: 1892-1950 Emmanuel Episcopal Church, 811 Cathedral Street

Millay frequently read her poetry here at meetings of the Maryland Poetry Society.

A poet, dramatist, and actress, Millay was also a force of nature when she arrived on the literary scene fresh out of college, "the embodiment of the liberated woman of the 1920s." Her poems, often written in first person, reflect her dynamism, *joie de vivre*, intensity, and sly humor. We see all of these in the following quatrain:

My candle burns at both ends;
It will not last the night;
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends
It gives a lovely light!"
From A Few Figs from Thistles

After attending Vassar College, Millay settled for a bohemian life in New York's Greenwich Village, where she acted and socialized with members of both Eugene O'Neill's Provincetown Players and the Theatre Guild. Winning the Pulitzer Prize for *The Harp Weaver and Other Poems*, she married and moved to a farmhouse in rural New York. Although out of the limelight in her later years, she continued to speak out on the contentious issues of the day, including both the Sacco-Vanzetti trial in 1927 and the totalitarianism beginning to spread across Europe.

Turn right to walk east on Read Street to Charles Street, then turn left on Charles to walk to the Belvedere Hotel, at the corner of Charles and Chase Streets. While this Beaux Arts building is now condominiums, the public still gathers at the owl Bar, a favorite Mencken hangout, and enjoys the best night view of Baltimore from the 13th Floor Lounge.

11. Henry James: 1843-1916 Belvedere hotel, 1 E. Chase Street

James stayed here in 1905.

James, novelist, playwright, literary theorist, and diarist, was born into a prominent New York City family with whom he traveled widely as a child. Ultimately he settled in England for most of his adult life. He returned to the U.S. in 1904 to explore changes in his native country, arriving in Baltimore in June of 1905. From the Belvedere, he started out on his own walk of early 20th century Baltimore. He observed, "A certain vividness of high decency seemed...to possess [the houses] and...this suggestion of the real southern glow expressed in repeated vistas of little brick-faced and protrusively door-stepped houses ...suggested rows of quiet old ladies seated, with their toes tucked up on uniform footstools." These and other observations of Baltimore were included in his *The American Scene*, published in 1907.

A major contributor to the development of the novel form, James experimented with narrative technique, while exploring the psychological, moral, and social landscapes of his upper-class characters in such novels as *The Portrait of a Lady*, *Daisy Miller*, *The Turn of the Screw*, and *The Bostonians*.

Cross Chase Street.

12. Emily Post: 1873-1960 14 E. Chase Street

Post was born here in the house designed by her father, architect Bruce Price.

Born in Baltimore into a family of wealth and privilege, Emily Post became a household name that continues to be invoked when questions of etiquette arise. Since the publication of *Etiquette: The Blue Book of Social Usage* in 1922, her name remains today, almost 50 years after her death, synonymous with civil behavior. *Etiquette* is in its 17th edition and has been printed almost 100 times, an unqualified success.

Post was a shrewd and successful business woman at a time when a woman of her class was expected to remain in the home and attend to her social obligations, children, and other domestic duties not assigned to servants. Changed circumstances, however, forced Post into a different lifestyle. After divorcing her husband she received no alimony and, with two young children to care for, she began to write. She contributed stories to popular fiction magazines and wrote the first of several novels, *The Flight of a Moth*. Writing an etiquette book was the idea of an editor at Funk and Wagnalls. Post parlayed this almost immediate best seller into newspaper columns, radio programs, and similar books on homemaking and cooking. She created a lively industry that flourishes to this day.

Walk east to St. Paul Street, turn left to walk one block north on St. Paul Street to Biddle Street, and then turn right and walk two blocks east on Biddle.

13. Gertrude Stein: 1874-1946

215 E. Biddle Street

Gertrude Stein lived here while attending nearby Johns Hopkins Medical School.

Stein was a magnet for the rising literary and artistic stars she entertained in her Paris home in the early 20th century. By the early 21st century she was also becoming a touchstone for lesbian and feminist writers. Novelist, playwright, and essayist, she is best remembered in Baltimore for an early failure as an unenthusiastic medical student. Stein who did *not* graduate from Johns Hopkins Medical School, leaving at the end of three and a half years for Europe, where she would live for over 30 years. She was a literary innovator who fearlessly experimented with language, a librettist, and regular host to those who would profoundly change the art and literature of the new century: Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Thornton Wilder, Ezra Pound, and Henri Matisse.

Stein's notable works include *Three Lives*, *Four Saints in Three Acts*, a collaboration with composer Virgil Thompson, and *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Toklas was Stein's companion through her most artistically productive years.

Maryland Humanities is pleased to help you discover the literary heritage of Mount Vernon. For more information about Maryland Humanities programs, visit www.mdhumanities.org.