

BREAKING: All Salem National Park Service Sites Reopened

The legacy of Salem women

By Sarah Thomas
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Salem — *EDITOR'S NOTE: Since press time, the government shutdown has been lifted and the Salem Visitor's Center has reopened.*

Let's face it: Many people bemoaning the closure of the Salem Visitor Center might miss the restrooms with running water. But the center in Armory Park had far more than sinks and fountains; it was also home to a gift shop, informational videos on Salem history, and an invaluable resource on learning about the legacy of the city's women.

The Salem Women's Heritage Trail, brainchild of local historian Bonnie Hurd Smith, has been accessible as a book for sale at the Visitor's Center for nearly 10 years. In the wake of the shutdown, Smith said she would lead another walk along the trail this fall, and that she wanted to raise awareness of women's history through online sales of the trail book and the website [salemwomenshistory.org](#).

Smith also published "We Believe In You!," a series of motivational anecdotes of famous Massachusetts women, earlier this year.

"My desire to promote Massachusetts women's history began when I was a student at Simmons College," Smith said. "When I got there, I'd never even thought about seriously pursuing women's history; I was taking retail management courses. But a number of professors encouraged me, and I ended up doing a senior thesis on Judith Sargent Murray."

Murray, an essayist and early proponent of equality between the sexes, was married at the First Universalist Church in Salem and had an early leadership role in the development of Universalism. Smith has published a number of books on Murray and is considered one of the preeminent historians

to study her work.

"I have a shelf full of the books I've published in my house, and it introduced me to the wide and vibrant world of women's history in Massachusetts," Smith said. "I eventually became the director of the Boston Women's Heritage Trail and founded the Ipswich and Salem trails as well."

Smith said her work on Murray's legacy led her to the Salem Athenaeum, which led her in turn to the legacies of local women like Caroline Plummer and Caroline Emmerton, who established a settlement house at the House of the Seven Gables.

"You can't go anywhere in this city, in terms of the old charitable organizations, and not trip over the Emmerton family," Smith said. "Emmerton was in a position to help new immigrants, workers in the mills, all kinds of people, and that's what she did. She was brilliant, wonderful and kind."

Of all of her historical work, Smith said that the intersection of narrative and architecture has a richness in Salem that it lacks anywhere else.

"In Salem, if I'm leading a tour and standing behind the Phillips Museum, you can point to the Ward House, the Crowninshield House, all these structures, and see the legacy of four centuries of beautiful world-class buildings at once. You can't say that anywhere else," Smith said. "It's wonderful to lead these tours and let people know the legacy of the women of their city."

The Salem Women's Heritage Trail covers the time of the Native American settlement at Naumkeag to current Salem mayor Kim Driscoll. For more information or to contact Smith for more information about upcoming tours, visit [historysmiths.org](#).

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