

# TRAVEL THE



One of Ohio's many proud nicknames is "Mother of Presidents" as eight of the nation's chief executives called the Buckeye State home and sites associated with them draw hundreds of thousands of visitors each year.

But Ohio could just as easily be called "Mother of Literature." Some of America's, and the world's, great literary figures were either born or lived in Ohio. And now, just like our presidents, you can visit places associated with them, thanks to the Ohioana Library Association and its new Ohio Literary Trail, a program that will shine the spotlight on Ohio's unique role in shaping culture and literature worldwide.

By David Weaver



Jennifer Fisher/Nancy Drew Collection at the Toledo Lucas County Public Library

Photo below courtesy of the Toledo Lucas County Public Library

Ohioana compiled the trail map with more than 70 sites across the Buckeye State, paying tribute to the authors, poets, illustrators, libraries and creative influencers of the written word who have called Ohio home.

Hosted online by the Ohioana Library Association, the Ohio Literary Trail is organized by the state's five geographic regions. The downloadable map provides links to every destination, with details, directions and background information. Among the highlights by region:

### Northwest Ohio

The new Jennifer Fisher/Nancy Drew Collection is housed at the Toledo Lucas County Public Library. This year marks the 90th anniversary of the celebrated teen sleuth, created by Toledo writer Mildred Wirt Benson, the original "Carolyn Keene."

Benson was a great adventurer, making numerous trips to Central America, traversing the jungle in a Jeep, canoeing down rivers, visiting Mayan sites, flying airplanes and witnessing archaeological excavations. Benson wrote under the Stratemeyer Syndicate pen name, Carolyn Keene, from 1929 to 1947 and contributed to 23 of the first 30 Nancy Drew mysteries, which were bestsellers.

### Northeast Ohio

Malabar Farm State Park in Lucas was the home of Pulitzer Prize-winning writer and conservationist Louis Bromfield. Bromfield's famed "Big House," a 32-room country mansion, was the site in 1945 of the wedding of Hollywood icons Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall.

In 1924, Bromfield published his first novel, "The Green Bay Tree," which featured a headstrong, independent female protagonist — a feature that would recur in many of his later books. His third novel, "Early Autumn," a harsh portrait of his wife's Puritan New England background, won the 1927 Pulitzer Prize.

### Central Ohio

Among the many notable sites in central Ohio is Thurber House, the Columbus home of writer and cartoonist James Thurber, America's most celebrated humorist of the 20th century. Thurber's home, and the adjacent center, host several literary programs year-round.

Thurber was an American cartoonist, author, humorist, journalist and playwright. He was best known for his cartoons and short stories, published mainly in "The New Yorker" and collected in his numerous books.

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Big House, Malabar Farm State Park in Lucas

Photo courtesy of Lindsey Burnett

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### Southwest Ohio

Paul Laurence Dunbar House and Museum in Dayton was the home of the poet and author who became one of the most influential Black writers in American history. The house looks much the same as it did when Dunbar lived here from 1904 until his death in 1906 at the age of 33.

Dunbar was one of the first Black writers to establish an international reputation. He wrote the lyrics for the musical comedy, “In Dahomey,” the first all-Black musical produced on Broadway in New York. The musical later toured in the United States and the United Kingdom. He published a dozen books of poetry, four books of short stories and four novels.

### Southeast Ohio

The National Road and Zane Grey Museum in Norwich honors the dentist-turned-author who wrote more than 80 western novels, including the hugely popular *Riders of the Purple Sage*. The museum includes a re-creation of Grey’s study and many of his manuscripts and other memorabilia.

Grey was an American author and dentist best known for his popular adventure novels and stories associated with the Western genre in literature and

the arts, where he idealized the American frontier. “*Riders of the Purple Sage*,” published in 1912, was his best-selling book.

That’s just five of the more than 70 sites on the trail. Another key part of the trail: a listing of a major annual literary event in each region.

While many places on the trail are currently closed or open only on a limited basis because of COVID-19, we also know it’s not going to be permanent. We also know that people who love to read are people who love to travel. Now, tourists planning a literary-themed outing, as well as Ohioans who want to discover literary treasures they never knew existed in their own backyard, will find it on the Ohio Literary Trail.

The Ohio Literary Trail was made possible thanks to the Ohio History Connection, TourismOhio and Betty Weibel, Ohioana board member.

The Ohio Literary Trail can be accessed at [www.ohioana.org/resources/the-ohio-literary-trail](http://www.ohioana.org/resources/the-ohio-literary-trail).

David Weaver is the executive director of the Ohioana Library Association.





Photo courtesy of the Ohio History Connection



Photo courtesy of Thurber House

Also part of the Literary Trail, check out these fun annual events, where readers can connect with Ohio writers and illustrators:

Northwest Ohio:

**Claire's Day, Maumee** (May)

Northeast Ohio:

**Buckeye Book Fair, Wooster** (November)

Central Ohio:

**Ohioana Book Festival, Columbus** (April)

Southwest Ohio:

**Books by the Banks, Cincinnati** (October)

Southeast Ohio:

**Spring Literary Festival, Athens** (April)

Each event has a website where you can find more information. Or contact Ohioana, by email at [ohioana@ohioana.org](mailto:ohioana@ohioana.org) or by phone at **614-466-3831**.

Photo courtesy of the Ohio History Connection



Top left: Paul Laurence Dunbar House and Museum in Dayton  
 Top right: Thurber House in Columbus  
 Above: The National Road and Zane Grey Museum in Norwich