

● **WATCH LIVE** HOUSE HOLDS FIRST HEARING ON
JAN. 6 INSURRECTION

WATCH LIVE: HOUSE HOLDS FIRST
HEARING ON JAN. 6 INSURRECTION

NEW ENGLAND LITERARY NEWS

Two new books about plants and the return of a popular bookstore focusing on Italian-American writing

By **Nina MacLaughlin** Globe Correspondent, Updated July 22, 2021, 6:00 p.m.





A new biography of James Vick includes images from the seed catalogue "Vick's Monthly Magazine."

Victorian blooms

James Vick ran a hugely successful seed business in Rochester, New York, in the mid-nineteenth century driven by an abiding love of flowers, and the desire to spread that love. In a new biography, the first on Vick, [“All About Flowers: James Vick’s Nineteenth-Century Seed Company”](#) (Ohio University), Thomas Mickey, a Professor Emeritus at Bridgewater State, tells the story of “a man whose personal and passionate approach to his business and his customers changed the cultural face of his nation.” Vick was a marketing pioneer, suggesting that a colorful bed of flowers completes the home, and sending out yearly seed catalogues, and his impact is still seen on flower gardens today. Flowers popular in the Victorian era — geraniums, dahlias, morning glories, nasturtiums — remain in beds and boxes now. Mickey’s book is warm, informative, and ranging, looking at Vick as writer, as marketer, as good businessman, as a man passionate about flowers. A letter from one of his customers puts it well: “There is much that is hard and productive of sorrow in this sin-plagued world of ours; and, had we no flowers, I believe existence would be hard to be borne.”

Healing plants

Plant matter gets thorough and elegant attention in another book, this one recently out from MIT Press. Catherine Whitlock's "[Botanicum Medicinale: A Modern Herbal of Medicinal Plants](#)" is an A to Z encyclopedia of some of "most significant" herbs, fruits, flowers, and roots used for medicinal purposes, those that have "a long history of medicinal use and/or are the subject of ongoing or new medical research." Each entry includes illustrations of the plant, its key uses, habitat, medical use, and cautionary notes. Lily of the valley, for example, can be used as a treatment for high blood pressure, angina, cardiac arrhythmia, emphysema, and cancer. And the evening primrose can ease symptoms of insomnia, PMS, nerve pain, asthma, among other ailments and discomforts. Many of the plants will be familiar — coffee, cinnamon, marijuana, black pepper, parsley — but their uses and recommendations go beyond how we might typically understand them. The book serves as reminder of the ways natural sources can work in tandem with modern medicine.

ADVERTISING



A bookstore returns

In August of last year, the owners of I AM Books, the Boston independent bookstore that celebrates Italian and Italian-American heritage and literature, announced they'd be

shuttering their brick-and-mortar store as the result of the pandemic. When they announced the closure they promised to work to find a new, larger home for the bookstore when the time was right. They kept their business going online in the meantime, and have now made good on their promise to find a new home for the store. Owners Nicola Orichuia and Jim Pinzino recently announced they'll be re-opening the shop at a new location in the North End this fall. "It is our neighborhood," wrote Orichuia, "and there is no other place in the world where I AM Books can and should belong." The storefront at 124 Salem Street is triple the size of the previous location, with a sweeping bank of windows along the sidewalk of one of the North End's main drags. Orichuia and Pinzino opened I AM Books in 2015, and besides selling books, hosted a number of readings, concerts, film screenings, as well as started an annual two-day cultural festival of books and ideas.

Coming Out

["Breathing Fire: Female Inmate Firefighters on the Front Lines of California's Wildfires"](#) by *Jaime Lowe* (MCD)

["A Farewell to Gabo and Mercedes: A Son's Memoir"](#) by *Rodrigo Garcia* (Harpervia)

["The Second Season"](#) by *Emily Adrian* (Blackstone)

Pick of the Week

Meghan Carmichael at Titcomb's Bookshop in East Sandwich, Massachusetts, recommends "**[Be Holding](#)**" by Ross Gay (Pitt Poetry Series): "This book is one poem. My experience of this poem was through the lens of embodiment. After the experiences of 2020, of isolation and immobilization — the flight, falling, and awe inspiring dynamism of this piece was so liberating. This is also an incredibly personal piece, one that draws the reader into moments of despair and elation, and ultimately of justice."

Nina MacLaughlin is the author of “[Wake, Siren.](#)” She can be reached at nmaclaughlin@gmail.com.

[Show comments](#)

©2021 Boston Globe Media Partners, LLC