

Planners Work in Mysterious Ways...

Manitoba Legislative Building,
Winnipeg, Manitoba.
Source:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Parliamentwinnipeg_manitoba.jpg

LITERARY TOURISM AND THE IMAGINATION

by Rae Bridgman

Living in a city, one finds oneself unconsciously slipping into magical habits of mind.¹

There is a fascination about places associated with writers that has often prompted readers to become pilgrims: to visit a birthplace and contemplate the surroundings of an author's childhood, to see with fresh eyes places that inspired poems or books, to pay homage at a grave side or public memorial.²

Literary tours abound in many cities made famous through fiction. Look for the blockbuster *Da Vinci Code* tours of Paris. In Germany, take one of the historic *Brothers Grimm* fairy tale tours. Enjoy *The Sound of Music* tours in Austria and *Harry Potter* tours in London. Most recently, the small town of Forks, Washington—the site of Stephenie Meyers' best-selling *Twilight* vampire series—has undergone a renaissance and is offering tours of heroine Bella's "home turf."³

Closer to home, L. M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* in Prince Edward Island has become a major economic engine for the province. Library and Archives Canada's online *Canada: A Literary Tour* is a wonderful virtual treasure trove for those who want to learn more about Canada's literary cities, landscapes and maps.⁴

Literary tours take many forms (virtual online visits, walking tours, coach tours, self-guided driving tours). They can be inspired by a particular book or books by a single author, locations featured in a book or series of books, authors' favourite haunts (e.g., cafés, bookstores, libraries). Visitors retrace historic footsteps and breathe the *air of inspiration*. Literary places are not the only cultural arts attractors; places with an artistic history or sites known from movies also have a role to play in place-making. Movie tourism, in particular, arises with the "[transformation of] fictional places into real places that can be accessed, visited, and experienced."^{5,6}

Literary tours are, of course, part of cultural tourism in general, and involve multiple layers of planning, analogous to writing a novel – from plotting (the tour's or trail's storyline); developing characters (exploring the lives of real

Summary

"Planners work in mysterious ways..." highlights the value of literary tourism for image and place-making, for the marketing of international destinations, as well as for helping children appreciate just how "magical" cities can be. Featured are some interesting literary tourism initiatives happening across Canada (plus inspiring examples from other countries). Highlighted also is Rae Bridgman's *MiddleGate Books*, a popular series of Canadian fantasy books for children. Find out how her books helped to save a derelict heritage building in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Résumé

Le présent article souligne la valeur du tourisme littéraire pour créer une image et un endroit, pour la commercialisation de destinations internationales, et pour aider les enfants à réaliser à quel point la ville peut être « magique ». Quelques projets intéressants de tourisme littéraire au Canada sont décrits (en plus d'exemples édifiants d'autres pays). Sont également soulignés les livres *MiddleGate* de l'auteure Rae Bridgman, la série populaire de livres fantastiques canadiens pour enfants. Découvrez comment ses livres ont contribué à sauver une maison historique abandonnée de Winnipeg (Manitoba).

authors and fictional characters); exploring partnerships involving “dramatis personae” or stakeholders (including local literary societies and book clubs, educators, managers of heritage sites and landscapes, tourist bureaus, cultural events organizers); helping your readers (or tourists) enjoy their journeys, both real and fictive; promoting and marketing the “worlds” invented by authors and illustrators; and on through to planning events that celebrate *the literary* (festivals, readings, workshops, discussions, re-enactments).

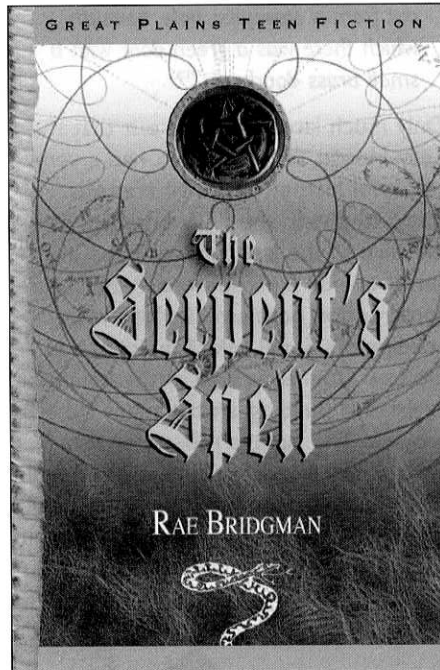
Planning issues are rampant when tourists come looking for the sights and sounds of their favourite books, particularly when there is a rush of visitors, such as Forks, Washington has seen from *Twilight* “pilgrims.” Catering to the “ample needs” (as Dieter Müller refers to them)⁵ of visitors, falls squarely with the camp of planners, as does balancing the dictates of business with the protection of the very (historic) resources (literary shrines) that visitors come to see and take delight in. Balancing the needs of local residents and those “from away” as well, specialized tourist services, safe, scenic and “authentic” settings, public facilities and accommodations represent just some of the pressing issues.

My own experience with literary tourism highlights some of these themes.

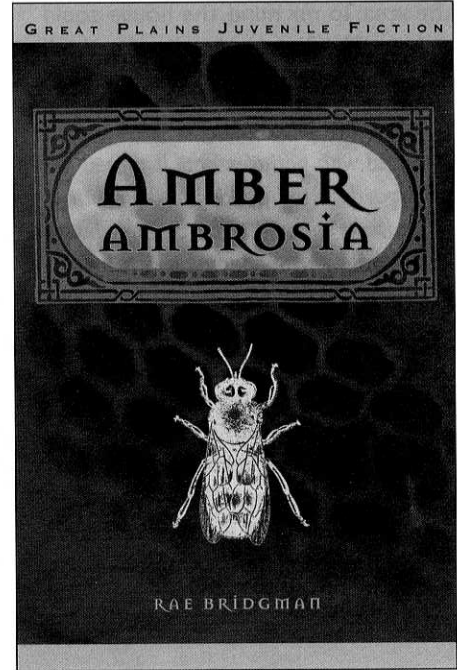
Inspiration originally came in the form of the plight of an old house. A house with a history. A house that led to the writing and illustrating of my fantasy books for children, set in a secret city within Winnipeg’s Exchange District. Through my writing and advocating for the preservation of this house, I learned first-hand the value of literary tourism for place-making and image, for the marketing of international destinations to tourists and “literary pilgrims,” as well as for helping children appreciate just how “magical” cities can be.

The MiddleGate Books

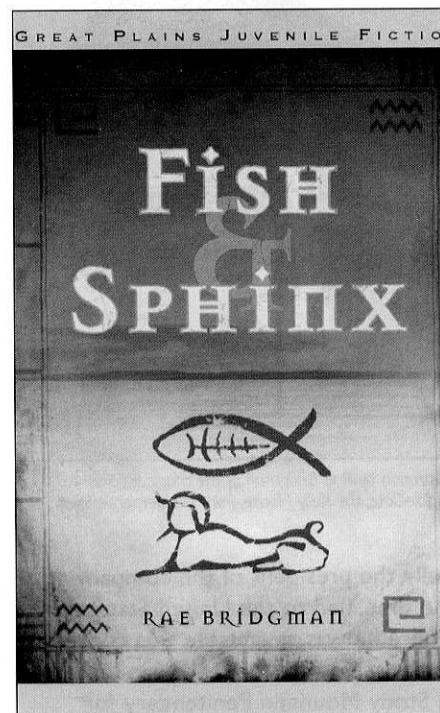
In *The Serpents’ Spell*, the first of my MiddleGate books, the secret city of MiddleGate has been rocked by the slaughter of hundreds of snakes in nearby Narcisse.⁶ In their quest to solve the mystery, young cousins Sophie and



Cover of *The Serpent's Spell*



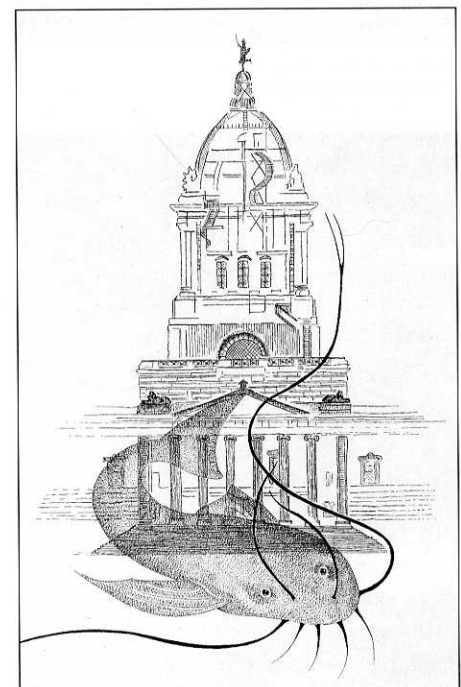
Cover of *Amber Ambrosia*



Cover of *Fish & Sphinx*

Wil discover that Wil’s medallion once belonged to the Serpent’s Chain, an ancient, formidable secret society. The second book in the series, *Amber Ambrosia*, finds the cousins fighting to save MiddleGate’s magical honeybees, and in the third, *Fish & Sphinx*, they uncover a dastardly plot by the Serpent’s Chain to seize Manitoba’s famous Legislative Building (or the *Palace of the Blazing Star*, as it is known in MiddleGate).

What’s the story behind the MiddleGate books? My family moved to Winnipeg in 1998 after I was offered an academic post in the Department of City Planning at the University of Manitoba. During our first winter in Winnipeg, we happened upon a sorry, dilapidated, little brick house in the Exchange District. The house captured my imagination, for it was the only remaining historic house in



The Manitoba Legislative Building, Illustration by Rae Bridgman, from *Fish & Sphinx*.

the area. To my mind, the house could only be *The Portal to Another World*, à la Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*.⁹

"...the bus jolted along a side street pitted with potholes until it turned into a large, deserted parking lot by a brick house. It seemed to be the only house in the area, surrounded as it was by a sea of parking lots dotted with warehouses. A rising sunburst decorated the peak of the house, and a five-pointed star graced each corner.... The bus inched past a rusty dumpster filled with garbage bags.... [and] turned to face a brick wall at the back of the house. ... The wall had gaping cracks and was missing chunks of mortar. Faded pink insulation poked

*out from a stovepipe hole, beneath which there was a green door with a small brass doorknob."*¹⁰

Only much later did I find out that the Kelly House, as it is known, had a very colourful history, linked to scandals associated with the Kelly brothers at the turn of the last century. The Kelly family owned a prosperous Winnipeg construction business involved with building the Shoal Lake Aqueduct and the Law Courts, as well as the Manitoba Legislative Building, among many other projects. The family's reputation was tarnished by scandal in 1915, unfortunately, when it was learned that the Kelly family was being overpaid on the construction costs of the Legislative Building. Thomas

Kelly House, proclaims: "Find the REAL places in Manitoba inspiring the MAGICAL places of MiddleGate! Discover architectural wonders and city sights. Scandal and mystery. See Winnipeg as never before..."¹²

Over the last decade, regrettably, the Kelly House was threatened with demolition, to make way for a parking lot. On 24 October 2008, I wrote the following dispirited "News" entry on my web site:

DEMOLITION OF OUR MAGICAL PORTAL?

The [Kelly House] has been vacant for many years and is in sad need of repair. The owner appears to have lost interest in maintaining the house and it is slowly crumbling. As the building is privately owned, it's difficult to force the owner to take action, even though there is a Vacant and Derelict Buildings Bylaw on the books. The state of this property shows the ongoing frustration that exists when owners, despite bylaws, are still able to Slowly Demolish Properties by Neglect—even properties of known social, historical, cultural (and, in this case, also literary) value—so eventually there is no alternative but to create a surface parking lot.

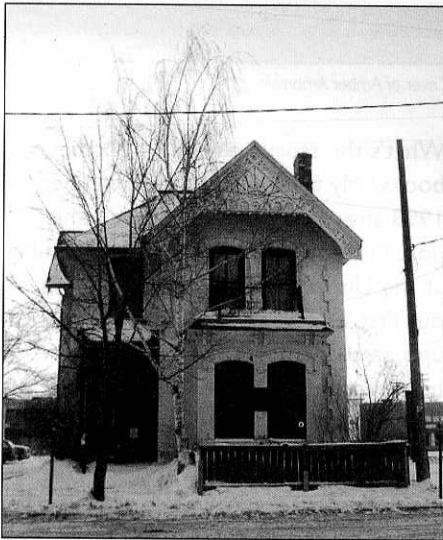
*According to a recent Winnipeg Free Press article, "David Rich, the owner of the last intact house from the city's Exchange District building boom of 1882, had asked the city to remove its Grade III status as a heritage building in order to pave the way for demolition."*¹³

Pave the way, indeed...for yet another sorry parking lot?

At a Public Hearing on 25 November 2008, Winnipeg's Historic Buildings Committee will apparently be recommending to the Planning and Property Development Committee that 88 Adelaide Street NOT BE DE-LISTED as a heritage building.

Will future generations of children be able to visit 88 Adelaide, the magical portal to MiddleGate—just as they now make the pilgrimage to J. K. Rowling's Platform 9¾ at King's Cross Station in London?

I, for one, would like to be able to say, "Yes!"



Front facade of the Kelly House.
Photo credit: Rae Bridgman

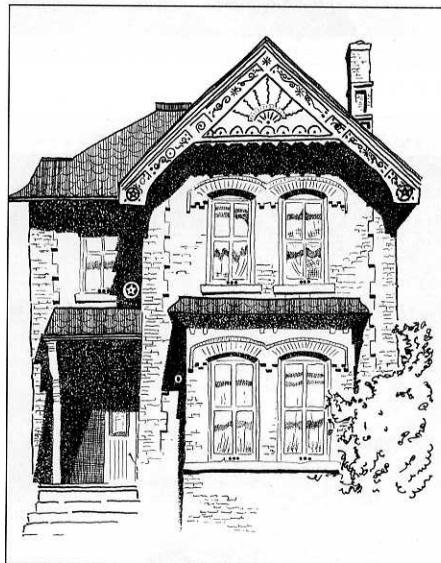
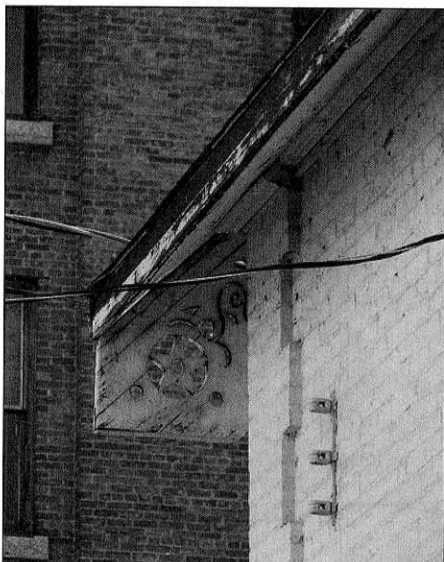


Illustration by Rae Bridgman of the magical portal to MiddleGate, the Kelly House, from *The Serpent's Spell*.



Five-pointed star, architectural detail, Kelly House.
Photo credit: Rae Bridgman

Kelly, the president of the company at the time, fled to the United States where he was caught. He was convicted to serve a two-and-a-half year sentence in Stony Mountain Penitentiary for perjury and embezzlement, to the tune of \$1,400,000 – an astronomical sum in those days!¹¹

Today, the Kelly House perches on the edge of Winnipeg's Exchange District, a 30-block district that showcases some of North America's most extensive turn-of-the-twentieth-century architecture. The district is also home to the city's lively arts community.

The MiddleGate *Hidden Secrets* virtual literary tour, including a "stop" at the

Members of the general public may attend the hearing and make a presentation...you can bet November 25th is in my datebook.

This story has a happy ending... On 25 November 2008, I "penned" excitedly:

Hurray! The Kelly House—the portal to the secret, magical city of MiddleGate within Winnipeg's own Exchange District—was saved (for now) at this morning's public hearing at City Hall. The decision was NOT to de-list the building as a heritage building (and thus offer a smooth path to demolition and eventual parking lot). Many supporters attended and spoke passionately about the house and its important place in the history of Winnipeg. A stirring letter from members of the Kelly family was read—a letter with 45 signatures on it. And I spoke about how important the house is for its magical place in The MiddleGate Books. Notice of the public hearing featured on the front page of the Winnipeg Free Press this morning, with a wonderful photo and a great article. Read all about it... "Literary landmark faces threat"....¹⁴

The Kelly House has recently been renovated, and as of spring 2010, is home to CancerCare Manitoba. My part in helping to save the Kelly House was small. Many, many others rallied to the cause. Nevertheless, I was struck by the "power of the pen" to help turn the tide. There are many ways to save a building, many ways to shift public sentiment and political will. My children's books added to the "arsenal" in this case. An old house offered a way into a fictional world, and then later, its notoriety became a way to help save the old house.

So, what are the lessons for planners and others in all this?

- Remember there may be "unorthodox" ways of saving heritage buildings in your town or city.
- Think about missed opportunities for promoting destinations. Authors and their books can help to "sell" a place.
- Support your local authors and illustrators, learn who they are, read their books. At the same time, build local pride and your tourism base.

LITERARY TOURS AND VIRTUAL VISITS IN CANADA (SELECTED)

Canada: A Literary Tour (Library and Archives Canada)

<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/literary-tour/index-e.html>

A virtual exhibition and literary tour across Canada of literary landscapes, literary cities, literary maps through the eyes of well-known Canadian authors. An excellent site, well worth a "visit"!

Alice Munro Tour in Huron County, Ontario

http://www.literarytraveler.com/tours/alice_munro_literary_tour.aspx

Anne of Green Gables (by L.M. Montgomery) in Prince Edward Island

<http://www.gov.pe.ca/greengables/>

Carol Shields Tour

<http://www.routesonthered.ca/pdf/CarolShields.pdf>

Halifax Literary Walking Tour

<http://www.halifaxpubliclibraries.ca/research/topics/local-history-genealogy/literary-walking-tour.html>

Imagining Toronto Project (by Amy Lavender Harris)

<http://imaginingtoronto.com/about/about-imagining-toronto/>

Montreal Literary Tour

http://www.literarytraveler.com/tours/montreal_literary_tour.aspx?page=itinerary

Ontario: Read It Here — New Project Puts Ontario Literature on the Map

http://www.openbooktoronto.com/news/ontario_read_it_here

LITERARY TOURS AROUND THE WORLD (SELECTED)

Brothers Grimm Fairy Tales in Germany

http://www.roadtogermaany.com/private_tours/travel_fairytale_road_germany_self_drive_1.htm

The Da Vinci Code (by Dan Brown) in Paris

<http://www.da-vinci-code-paris.com/> OR

<http://www.parismuse.com/about/news/da-vinci-code.shtml>

Edinburgh Literary Pub Tour in Scotland

http://www.edinburghliterarypubtour.co.uk/pub_route.php

Harry Potter Tours in the UK

http://www.britishtours.com/harry_potter.html

In the footsteps of C.S. Lewis, Oxford

<http://www.sacred-destinations.com/england/oxford-c-s-lewis.htm>

Jane Austen Tours in the UK

http://www.specialgrouptours.com/html/7_day_england_lit_tour.html

Lord of the Rings (by J.R.R. Tolkien) in New Zealand

http://www.lordoftheringstours.co.nz/trails_of_middle_earth.htm

Sound of Music in Austria

<http://www.sound-of-music.com/>

San Francisco Literary Tours in California

<http://sfliterarytours.com/>

Twilight (by Stephenie Meyers) in Forks, Washington

http://www.stepheniemeyer.com/twilight_forks.html OR

<http://www.quileutenation.org/businesses/resort>

- Explore links and partnerships with other purveyors of cultural tourism to build momentum, while recognizing that there may be (as is often the case) competing interests.
- Excite children and their families about the stories that may be *hidden in plain sight*. Tell stories from days past, stories of mistakes made, stories about the famous and not-so-famous who walked this very sidewalk. Tell stories that never happened, but could have happened...

Ask yourself, *Where are the literary haunts in your town or city?* Guaranteed... a walk down Main Street will never be the same. ■

Dr. Rae Bridgman, PhD, MCIP, is a Professor of City Planning at the University of Manitoba, and the author and illustrator of *The MiddleGate Books*, a series of fantasy-adventure books for kids—including *The Serpent's Spell* (Great Plains, 2006), *Amber Ambrosia* (Great Plains, 2007), *Fish & Sphinx* (Great Plains, 2008) and *Kingdom of Trolls* (In press). The first three *MiddleGate Books* are being published in translation by the People's Literature Publishing House in Beijing, China, autumn 2010. (See: <http://www.raebridgman.ca>). Rae Bridgman is also the author of *StreetCities: Rehousing the Homeless* (University of Toronto Press, 2006) and *Safe Haven: The Story of a Shelter for Homeless Women* (Broadview Press, 2003), and co-director with Wins Bridgman (MAA, MRAIC) and Marcella Poirier (MCP) of the Winnipeg architectural and planning firm *BridgmanCollaborative Architecture*. (See: <http://www.bridgmancollaborative.ca>). She can be reached at: bridgman@cc.umanitoba.ca

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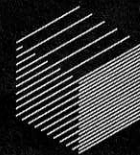
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