

The Daily Cardinal

Est. 1892



Framed photo of Paul's Books on State Street. Photo by [Jake Piper](#) | The Daily Cardinal

LIFE & STYLE

Remembering Paul's Books

A look back on the final days of Paul's Books, and a look into those most affected by its closure.

By [Jake Piper](#)

March 6, 2025 | 3:00am CST

Upon stepping into Paul's Book Store on State Street, the first thing customers always notice is the musty, warm scent reminiscent of used books filling the air. But on Feb. 22, an atmosphere of somber reflection seemed to fill the store instead.

After over 70 years of business, Paul's Books opened its doors for the last time, inviting newcomers and old patrons alike to share their memories in the bookstore's final hours.

"For me, I think nostalgia is a big emotion, and there's some sadness there, saying goodbye to a Madison institution," said David, a University of Wisconsin-Madison alum who, upon hearing of Paul's closure, came to say one last goodbye to the store.

Martha Askins, the daughter of owner Caryl Askins, said that as her mother gets older, it's become "harder and harder" for her to come down to the store. This caused the family to come together and decide to sell the iconic location last November.

"It really is the end of an era," Martha said.

For decades, Paul's Book Store has been a staple of State Street, its cluttered shelves holding over 200 years of history within its rows, enticing any passersby with the soft glow of yellowed paper.

But during its closing sale on Feb. 22, the shelves slowly emptied one by one, some even getting a price tag placed on them once their books are sold. The records, once neatly tucked behind the front desk, laid in crates below the music section of books for \$5 a piece. And patrons, boxes in hand, piled books inside by the dozen on a "book saving mission," as one Paul's clerk put it.

Even the decorations weren't spared from the sale — a wooden duck overlooking the crowds was marked with a \$25 price tag.



[Jake Piper](#)

Two people examine a wooden duck for sale at Paul's Books on Feb. 22, 2025.

As patrons lined up in front of the wooden checkout desk, some paused and left their well-wishes in a guest book.

"Thank you for all the years of books, a warm place on a snowy day, a portal to different worlds, and a part of what makes this city home," read one message in the journal.

Another thanked Paul's for giving them "a daily reminder that there are good people in the world."



[Jake Piper](#)

Man signs the guest book at Paul's Books on Feb. 22, 2025.

But out of all the people Paul's Books has touched over the decades, it most greatly impacted Caryl's four children.

"When you grow up in a bookstore, books become something different, something more," Martha said.

Martha spent her younger years coming to Paul's to help her dad run the store with her siblings. She fondly remembers going out to eat on State Street with her family after the day's work.

"It was that atmosphere, not so much a single memory, but something you sort of pick up by osmosis," Martha said, reflecting on her memories of growing up at Paul's.

Martha's two other siblings who helped with the move out, David and Libby, were also deeply affected by the closure, she said.

Even though she thinks the closure of Paul's has left a hole in the heart of State Street, Martha is happy about the positive impact her mom's business has had on the Madison area and knows its impact will be felt for years to come.

"My mom has a good philosophical take on it," Martha said. "For anybody who's ever been in here, you carry this atmosphere forward with you."



[Jake Piper](#)

Paul's Books photographed three days after its closure on Feb. 25. Three pictures taped to the door commemorate its closing.

Support your local paper

 [DONATE TODAY](#)

The Daily Cardinal has been covering the University and Madison community since 1892. Please consider giving today.

The Daily Cardinal

608-262-8000 · 2142 Vilas Communication Hall
821 University Avenue · Madison, Wis. 53706-1497

Powered by  **WORKS** Solutions by The State News

All Content © 2026 The Daily Cardinal