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A worker sits at the checkout in Paul's Bookstore on December 3, 2024 in Madison, Wis. Photo by [Jake Piper](#) | The Daily Cardinal

OPINION

Last call at Paul's: Buy a book before Madison loses a literary landmark

Madison's beloved Paul's Bookstore is closing its doors after 70 years. In its final days, take the chance to experience the magic of browsing its overstuffed shelves – before it's too late.

By [Owen Puckett](#)

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Madison is losing something special. Paul's Book Store — the quiet, unassuming gem on State Street that has served readers, students and curious wanderers for over 70 years — is closing its doors. If you've walked past its faded red awning a hundred times on your way to campus but never stopped to duck inside, you have one last chance.

And you should take it.

Paul's is closing because the economic pressures that have been squeezing independent bookstores for decades have only intensified. The rent is high. The foot traffic on State Street isn't what it used to be. Fewer students buy physical books for their courses, and fewer still browse used bookstores for fun. There's a broader trend at play here, one that favors convenience over

experience, speed over serendipity. And while there's no easy way to reverse that trend, there is one thing you can do before Paul's is gone for good: go buy a book.

The loss of Paul's is the end of a particular kind of bookstore experience that is vanishing across the country: one that isn't about aesthetics or Instagrammable displays, but about discovery. Unlike the sleek, curated chains or algorithm-driven online retailers, Paul's is messy in the best way — stacks of well-loved books teetering in every direction, shelves packed tight with titles from decades past, the occasional rare find tucked in the corner waiting for the right person to come along. It's a bookstore that rewards patience, curiosity and the willingness to spend an hour running your fingers along old spines just to see what you might find.

This kind of place doesn't get replaced. It disappears. And with it goes something intangible — an atmosphere, a character, a presence that simply can't be replicated by a Barnes & Noble or a one-click purchase on Amazon.

You might find an old edition of a novel you love, one with a note scrawled in the margins by a stranger from decades past. You might stumble across a book on a subject you never knew you were interested in, just because it happened to be sitting at eye level on an overstuffed shelf. You might, for an afternoon, remember what it's like to browse without an algorithm telling you what you should want without a search bar narrowing your possibilities before you've even started looking.

Paul's was never about maximizing efficiency. It was never about being the trendiest shop on State Street. It was about books, in the purest, most chaotic, most wonderful sense. Books that lived, books that carried history, books that waited for the right person to pick them up and take them home.

Soon, those books will be gone. The shelves will empty, the doors will shut, and Madison will be a little less interesting for it. So before that happens, before it's too late — go. Step inside. Wander a little. Pick up something you didn't expect to. Take home a piece of Madison's literary history while you still can.

Not just for the sake of nostalgia, though that's part of it. Not just to support a local business in its final days, though that's important, too. But because, in doing so, you might give yourself the kind of experience that bookstores like Paul's were always meant to offer — a moment of genuine, unexpected discovery.

Once places like Paul's are gone, they don't come back.

Owen Puckett is an Opinion Editor and a member of the Editorial Board. He is a senior studying political science. Do you agree students should stop into Paul's before it closes? Send all comments to opinion@dailycardinal.com

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