

**John Irving/*A Prayer for Owen Meany* Trail**  
**Exeter, New Hampshire 2024**  
**(ExeterLitFest.com)**

One of the most famous authors alive today, John Irving, was born and raised in Exeter, NH. Woven into his books are many locations and happenings from 1960's Exeter, when John came of age. John is currently a Canadian citizen, having moved away from the US during the volatile 1970's. He graduated in 1960/61 from the local prep school, Phillips Exeter Academy, where his stepfather was a history teacher. Mr. Irving married Miss Winslow, whose grandfather had owned a prosperous shoe mill in Exeter at the turn of the century.

John's books often deal with bizarre and tragic sexual situations. Many times, his writing features vignettes from his youth in the puritanical and quintessential New England town of Exeter. In *A Prayer for Owen Meany*, Exeter is called "Gravesend."

Let's begin our tour at his boyhood home:

80 Front St. – A brick home built in 1828, and owned by John Wheelwright's grandmother. This was also John Irving's actual boyhood home. Within walking distance to the academy (and the old family mill).

61 Front St. – Phillips Church – A stone church called "Hurd Church" in the book. The missing ball was in a desk drawer here.

49 Linden St – Exeter Cemetery, the site of John Wheelwright's mother's funeral, with the ball fields out behind the school across the street.

60 Court St./Gilman St. – The new PEA field house includes the new wrestling room on the second floor.

55 Court St. Wentworth Hall – Typical of the academy dorms featured in *Owen Meany*.

21 Front St. - The Congregational Church, original seat of Pastor Merrill. Christmas pageant held here. The old Episcopal church was torn down long ago.

Swasey Parkway – Scene of Winter Olympics in *Owen Meany*. Also, fireworks with Hester the Molester.

Train Bridge near DPW/ Newfields Rd - The hill on the way to the fictitious quarry. Site of crash.

---

Several other of his books include local sites: *Hotel New Hampshire* was set at the Robinson Female Seminary, *Cider House Rules* was set at Applecrest Farms, *Imaginary Girlfriend* also at Phillips Exeter.

His full list of books is as follow, several have been made into films:

- *Setting Free the Bears* (1968)
- *The Water-Method Man* (1972)
- *The 158-Pound Marriage* (1974)
- *The World According to Garp* (1978)
- *The Hotel New Hampshire* (1981)
- *The Cider House Rules* (1985)
- *A Prayer for Owen Meany* (1989)
- *A Son of the Circus* (1994)
- *Imaginary Girlfriend* (1996)
- *A Widow for One Year* (1998)
- *My Movie Business* (1999)
- *The Fourth Hand* (2001)
- *Until I Find You* (2005)
- *Last Night in Twisted River* (2009)
- *In One Person* (2012)
- *Avenue of Mysteries* (2015)
- *The Last Chairlift* (2022)