

**THE POETS OF  
ESSEX COUNTY,  
MASSACHUSETTS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649184965

The poets of Essex county, Massachusetts by Sidney Perley

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By SIDNEY PERLEY,  
Author of "History of Boxford, Mass.;" "Goodridge Memorial;" etc.

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Poetry! the gem that gilds  
The world of letters, and gives  
Expression to soul beauty.

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SALLEN, MASS.:  
SIDNEY PERLEY.  
1889.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1888, by  
SIDNEY PERLEY,  
In the Office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington.

PRINTED AT THE SALEM PRESS.

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## PREFACE.



“OF the dignity of Poetry,” says Camden, in his *Remains*, “much hath bene said by the worthy Sir *Philip Sidney*, & by the Gentleman which proued that Poets were the first *Politicians*, the first *Philosophers*, the first *Historiographers*. I will onely adde out of *Philo*, that they were Gods owne creatures, who in his Booke *de Plantatione Noe*, reporteth, that when he had made the whole worlds maffe; he created Poets to celebrate & set out the Creator himselfe, and all the Creatures: you Poets read the place and you will like it.”

Although we may not fully agree with the ancient writers, it is indeed true that poets occupy no insignificant position. If we believe the words of Fletcher of Saltoun, when he says, “Let who will make the laws of a nation if I may write its songs,” there must be some power in poetry stronger than the judiciary itself in the control of that nation. The poet Whittier made

“ . . . his rustic reed of song  
A weapon in the war with wrong.”

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And the poet Massey strings his lyre

“For the cause that lacks assistance,  
For the wrong that needs resistance,  
For the future in the distance,  
And the good that he can do.”

They deserve an equal honor with our statesmen and historians, and our clergymen, too, if we believe, with Longfellow, that

“God sent his singers upon earth  
With songs of sadness and of mirth,  
That they might touch the hearts of men,  
And bring them back to heaven again.”

Much has been published in Essex county relating to its prose writers, and its statesmen and theologians, but very little concerning its poets. This seemed a gap in our literature that ought to be filled, and it has been our endeavor to supply that want by this little volume of short biographical sketches of our verse writers and selections from their productions.

Most of our spare time during the last nine years has been given to this work ; and an almost incredible amount of labor has been performed in the reading and criticism of probably ten thousand poems, and in extensive correspondence and research for the discovery of writers and for biographical material before the preparation of the volume could be begun.


SIDNEY PERLEY.

*Salem, Mass., Dec. 31, 1888.*



## THE POETS OF ESSEX COUNTY.

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A new country produces very little ornamental literature,—the rough life of frontiersmen tending from such pursuits. New England was no exception to this rule. Engaged in clearing the forest and tilling the barren soil with their few and rude implements, securing for themselves food, clothing and shelter, and ever on the alert lest the Indians should surprise and massacre the household, the time and abilities of the early settlers were consumed. Isolated from each other they lacked the mental growth and strength and culture that mind in contact with mind obtains; and with little or no means of education, the growth of a literary life was necessarily very slow. And yet from its earliest settlement, Essex county had its literary people who published more or less. Anne Bradstreet wrote here early in the seventeenth century, as also did the famous Nathaniel Ward, author of "The Simple Cobbler of Agawam." As the country grew older war after war disturbed its life, reducing its strength and culture, and hindering that natural literary growth which was the legitimate result of our later school system. The orna-

mental had appeared in our literature to a limited extent only. After the close of the Revolution, education began a new era. Schools and colleges multiplied in number and improved in quality. At this juncture poetry in our literature becomes prominent. Since that time the number of writers has constantly and greatly increased ; and in Essex county alone there have been several hundred writers of poetry, most of whom have published their efforts in contemporary periodical literature. The names of many early versifiers are lost on account of their poems having been published anonymously, or under assumed names ; and still earlier we cannot doubt there were many writers of poetry of whom we have never learned,—who wrote but never published their productions. The local newspapers have been to a great extent the occasion of the large number of modern writers. Their columns are open to any local effort that is of passable quality ; and the interest and ambition thus engendered and fostered have caused new and special endeavors to be taken in this direction. In such ways began to write Whittier, Emerson, and other poets of our day.

Among the numerous prose writers of Essex county it was but natural that there should be those who could write in measure and with rhythm. From Nathaniel Hawthorne, the greatest American novelist, down through the line of lesser writers of fiction ; from Hubbard and Prescott, the historians, and other contributors to our historical literature ; from Ward and Story, the authors of treatises on the law ; and from other

writers of many books on art, science and theology, poets have come to complete the canon of our literature.

Nearly all of the great American poets have some connection with Essex county. At Newbury, in an old mansion lately standing, the great-grandfather of Longfellow was born; and at the Jonathan Johnson house at Nahant his "Song of Hiawatha" was written. James Russell Lowell also traces his family back to old Newbury, where his lineal ancestors lived for several generations; and Ralph Waldo Emerson is a direct descendant of the Ipswich family of that name.

There were several distinguished writers, who resided here for so short a time as hardly to have become residents, and are therefore not properly admissible to this volume. Among them was President John Q. Adams, who studied law in Newburyport, and while there wrote some good hymns. He afterwards contributed poetry to *The Token*, and other publications. The celebrated Robert Treat Paine, son of the signer of the Declaration of Independence of that name, also studied law in Newburyport, in the office of Theophilus Parsons. He made his name immortal by writing, in 1798, at the age of twenty-five, his celebrated national song, entitled "Adams and Liberty," beginning,

"Ye sons of Columbia who so bravely have fought  
For those rights which unstained from your sires had descended,  
May you long taste the blessings your valor has bought,  
And your sons reap the soil which your fathers defended!  
Mid the reign of mild peace  
May your nation increase