

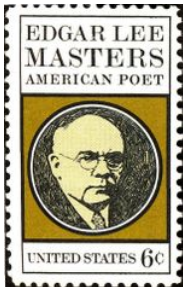
# Edgar Lee Masters

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## Edgar Lee Masters

(August 23, 1868 - March 5, 1950) was an American poet, biographer and dramatist. He is the author of *Spoon River Anthology*, *The New Star Chamber* and *Other Essays*, *Songs and Satires*, *The Great Valley*, *The Serpent in the Wilderness* An

*Obscure Tale*, *The Spleen*, *Mark Twain: A Portrait*, *Lincoln: The Man*, and *Illinois Poems*. In all, Masters published twelve plays, twenty-one books of poetry, six novels and six biographies, including those of Abraham Lincoln, Mark Twain, Vachel Lindsay, and Walt Whitman.



## Contents

- 1 Biography
- 2 Poetry
- 3 Notable Works
  - 3.1 Poetry
  - 3.2 Plays
  - 3.3 Biographies
  - 3.4 Books
- 4 Quotes
- 5 External links

## Biography

Edgar Lee Masters was born on August 23, 1868 to Emma J. Dexter and Hardin Wallace Masters in Garnett, Kansas, where his father had briefly moved to set up a law practice. The family soon moved back to his paternal grandparents' farm near Petersburg in Menard County, Illinois. In 1880 they moved to Lewistown, Illinois, where he attended high school and had his first publication in the *Chicago Daily News*. The culture around Lewistown, in addition to the town's cemetery at Oak Hill, and the nearby Spoon River were the inspirations for many of his works, most notably *Spoon River Anthology*, his most famous and acclaimed work.

Masters attended The Knox Academy from 1889-1890, a defunct preparatory program run by Knox College, but was forced to leave due to his family's inability to finance his education. [1]

After working in his father's law office, he was admitted to the Illinois bar and moved to Chicago, where he established a law partnership with Kickham Scanlan in 1893. In 1898, he married Helen M. Jenkins, the daughter of a lawyer in Chicago, and had three children. During his law partnership with Clarence Darrow, from 1903 to 1908, Masters defended the poor. In 1911, he started his own law firm, despite the three years of unrest (1908-1911) due to extramarital affairs and an argument with Darrow.

Masters died March 5, 1950 and is buried in Oakland cemetery in Petersburg, Illinois. His epitaph includes his poem, "To-morrow is My Birthday" from *Toward the Gulf* (1918):

*Good friends, let's to the fields...  
After a little walk and by your pardon,  
I think I'll sleep, there is no sweeter thing.  
Nor fate more blessed than to sleep.*

*I am a dream out of a blessed sleep-  
Let's walk, and hear the lark.*

## Poetry

Masters first published his early poems and essays under the pseudonym Dexter Wallace (after his mother's maiden name and his father's middle name) until the year 1903, when he joined the lawfirm of Clarence Darrow.

It was in 1914 when Masters truly began developing as a notable American poet, when he began submitting a series of poems (this time under the pseudonym Webster Ford) about his childhood experiences in Western Illinois, which was published in *Reedy's Mirror*, a St. Louis publication. In 1915, the series was bound into a volume and re-titled *Spoon River Anthology*.

Though he never matched the success of his *Spoon River Anthology*, Masters was a prolific writer of diverse works. He published several other volumes of poems including *Book of Verses* in 1898, *Songs and Sonnets* in 1910, *The Great Valley* in 1916, *Song and Satires* in 1916, *The Open Sea* in 1921,

*The New Spoon River* in 1924, *Lee* in 1926, *Jack Kelso* in 1928, *Lichee Nuts* in 1930, *Gettysburg, Manila, Acoma* in 1930, *Godbey*, sequel to *Jack Kelso* in 1931, *The Serpent in the Wilderness* in 1933, *Richmond* in 1934, *Invisible Landscapes* in 1935, *The Golden Fleece of California* in 1936, *Poems of People* in 1936, *The New World* in 1937, *More People* in 1939, *Illinois Poems* in 1941, and *Along the Illinois* in 1942.

Masters was awarded the Mark Twain Silver Medal in 1936, the Poetry Society of America medal in 1941, the Academy of American Poets Fellowship in 1942, and the Shelly Memorial Award in 1944.

## **Notable Works**

### **Poetry**

- A Book of Verses (1898)
- Songs and Sonnets (1910)
- Spoon River Anthology (1915)
- Songs and Satires (1916)
- Fiddler Jones (1916)
- The Great Valley (1916)
- The Open Sea (1921)
- The New Spoon River (1924)

- Selected Poems (1925)
- Lee: A Dramatic Poem (1926)
- Jack Kelso: A Dramatic Poem (1928)
- Lichee Nuts (1930)
- Gettysburg, Manila, Acoma: A Dramatic Poem (1930)
- Godbey: A Dramatic Poem, sequel to Jack Kelso (1931)
- The Serpent in the Wilderness (1933)
- Richmond: A Dramatic Poem (1934)
- Invisible Landscapes (1935)
- Poems of People (1936)
- The Golden Fleece of California (1936)
- The New World (1937)
- More People (1939)
- Illinois Poems (1941)
- Along the Illinois (1942)

## **Plays**

- Maximilian: A Play (1902, drama)
- Althea: A Play (1907, drama)
- The Trifler: A Play (1908, drama)
- Eileen: A Play (1910, drama)
- The Bread of Idleness: A Play (1910, drama)
- Dramatic Dialogues: Four Short Plays (1934, drama)

## **Biographies**

- Lincoln: The Man (1931)
- Vachel Lindsay: A Poet in America (1935)
- Across Spoon River: An Autobiography (1936, memoir)
- Whitman (1937)
- Mark Twain: A Portrait (1938)

## **Books**

- The New Star Chamber and Other Essays (1904, essays)
- The Blood of the Prophets (1905)
- The Great Valley (1916)
- Toward the Gulf (1918)
- Starved Rock (1919)
- Mitch Miller (1920, novel)
- Domesday Book (1920)
- The Open Sea (1921)
- Children of the Market Place (1922)
- Skeeters Kirby (1923, novel)
- The Nuptial Flight (1923, novel)
- Kit O'Brien (1927, novel)
- Levy Mayer and the New Industrial Era (1927)
- The Fate of the Jury: An Epilogue to Domesday Book (1929)
- Gettysburg, Manila, Acoma (1930)
- Godbey: A Dramatic Poem (1931)
- The Tale of Chicago (1933, history)

- The Golden Fleece of California (1936)
- The Tide of Time (1937, novel)
- The Sangamon (1942, nonfiction)

## Quotes

- “To put meaning in one's life may end in madness,

But life without meaning is the torture  
Of restlessness and vague desire--  
It is a boat longing for the sea and yet afraid.”

## External links

- Edgar Lee Masters at the Modern American Poetry Site of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
- Works by Edgar Lee Masters at Project Gutenberg
- A large collection of Edgar Lee Masters' papers is held at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at The University of Texas at Austin

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"[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edgar\\_Lee\\_Masters](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edgar_Lee_Masters)"



Categories: 1868 births | 1950 deaths | American poets | Fulton County, Illinois | Welsh-Americans

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