

# Robert Frost

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**Robert Frost**



Robert Frost (1941)

**Born:** March 26, 1874



San Francisco, California USA

**Died:** January 29, 1963



Boston, Massachusetts USA

**Occupation:** Poet

**Robert Lee Frost** (March 26, 1874 – January 29,

1963) was an American poet. His work frequently used themes from rural life in New England, using the setting to examine complex social and philosophical themes. A popular and often-quoted poet, Frost was honored frequently during his lifetime, receiving four Pulitzer Prizes.

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## Biography

Although he is commonly associated with New

England, Frost was born in San Francisco to Isabelle Moodie, of Scottish ancestry, and William Prescott Frost, Jr., a descendant of Nicholas Frost from Tiverton, Devonshire who had sailed to New Hampshire in 1634[1] on the Wolfrana. His father was a former teacher turned newspaperman, a frequent drinker of alcohol, a gambler, a harsh disciplinarian; he had a passion for politics, and dabbled in them, for as long as his health allowed. Frost lived in California until he was eleven years old. After the death of his father in 1885, he moved with his mother and sister to eastern Massachusetts, near his paternal grandparents. His mother joined the Swedenborgian church and had him baptized in it, but he left it as an adult. He grew up as a city boy and published his first poem in Lawrence, Massachusetts. He attended Dartmouth College in 1892, for just over a semester, and while there joined the fraternity Theta Delta Chi. He went back home to teach and work at various jobs including factory work and newspaper delivery.

In 1894 he sold his first poem, "My Butterfly", to *The New York Independent* for fifteen dollars. Proud of this accomplishment, he asked Elinor Miriam White to marry him. She refused, wanting to finish school before they married. They had

graduated co-valedictorians from their high-school and had remained in contact with one another. Frost then went on an excursion to the Great Dismal Swamp in Virginia. He came back later that year and asked Elinor again; she agreed, and they were married in December 1895.

They taught school together until 1897. Frost then entered Harvard University for two years. He did well, but felt he had to return home because of his health and because his wife, Elinor Miriam White, was expecting a second child. His grandfather purchased a farm in Derry, New Hampshire, for the young couple. Soon afterwards his grandfather died. He stayed there for nine years and wrote many of the poems that would make up his first works. His attempt at poultry farming was not successful, and he was forced to take another job at Pinkerton Academy, a secondary school, from 1906 to 1911 as an English teacher. From 1911 to 1912, Robert Frost lived in Plymouth, New Hampshire, and taught at the New Hampshire Normal School (now Plymouth State University).

In 1912, Frost sailed with his family to Glasgow, and later settled in Beaconsfield, outside London.

His first book of poetry, *A Boy's Will*, was published the next year. In England he made some crucial acquaintances including Edward Thomas (a member of the group known as the Dymock poets), T. E. Hulme, and Ezra Pound, who was the first American



Portrait of Frost c.1910-1920

to write a (favorable) review of Frost's work. Frost wrote some of his best pieces of work while living in England.

Frost returned to America in 1915, bought a farm in Franconia, New Hampshire, and launched a career of writing, teaching and lecturing. The family homestead in Franconia, which the Frosts owned from 1915 to 1920 and visited during the summers through 1938, is maintained as a museum

and poetry conference site [2]. From 1916 to 1938, he was an English professor at Amherst College. He encouraged his writing students to account for the sound of the human voice in their craft. Beginning in 1921, and for the next 42 years (with three exceptions), Frost spent his summers teaching at the Bread Loaf School of English of Middlebury College in Ripton, Vermont. Middlebury College still owns and maintains Robert Frost's Farm as a National Historic Site near the Bread Loaf campus.

Upon his death in Boston on January 29, 1963, Robert Frost was buried in the Old Bennington Cemetery, in Bennington, Vermont. Harvard's 1965 alumni directory indicates his having received an honorary degree there; Frost also received honorary degrees from Bates College and Oxford and Cambridge universities, and he was the first to receive two honorary degrees from Dartmouth College. During his lifetime, the Robert Frost Middle School in Fairfax, Virginia, as well as the main library of Amherst College were named after him.

## **Kennedy inauguration poems**

Though not notably associated with any political party, Frost is widely remembered for reciting a poem, "The Gift Outright", on January 20, 1961 at the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy. Nominally a tribute to the country's early colonial spirit ("This land was ours before we were the land's"), the poem ends on an optimistic, but characteristically ambivalent, note:

*Such as we were we gave ourselves outright  
(The deed of gift was many deeds of war)  
To the land vaguely realizing westward,  
But still unstoried, artless, unenhanced,  
Such as she was, such as she would become.*

Frost had intended to read another poem, "Dedication", which he had written specifically for Kennedy and for the occasion. But with feeble eyesight, unfamiliarity with the new poem, and difficulty reading his typescript in the bright January light, Frost chose only to deliver the poem he knew from memory (which he did in strong voice, despite his 86 years).

In April 2006, a handwritten copy of "Dedication" was donated to the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston, Massachusetts; it had come from the estate

of one of Kennedy's special assistants (who had died the year before). On the manuscript, Frost had added "To John F. Kennedy, At his inauguration to be president of this country. January 20, 1961. With the Heart of the World," followed by, "Amended copy, now let's mend our ways." After removing the paper backing from the frame, a Kennedy archivist discovered a faintly-legible handwritten note from Jacqueline Kennedy: "For Jack, January 23, 1961. First thing I had framed to put in your office. First thing to be hung there."<sup>[1]</sup>

*... The glory of a next Augustan age  
Of a power leading from its strength and  
pride,  
Of young ambition eager to be tried,  
Firm in our free beliefs without dismay,  
In any game the nations want to play.  
A golden age of poetry and power  
Of which this noonday's the beginning hour.*  
[3]

Frost represented the United States on several official missions, including a meeting with Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev. After the latter meeting, he told a press conference in New York on September 9, 1962 that "Krushchev said American liberals were too liberal to fight."<sup>[2]</sup> The remark so



angered Kennedy<sup>[3]</sup> that he severed the hitherto cordial relations between himself and Frost, and refused so determinatively to speak to him again that he refused both Stewart Udall's request in January 1963 that he send the dying Frost a final message,<sup>[4]</sup> and ignored (according to Kennedy biographer Richard Reeves) "pleas from the eighty-eight year old poet's deathbed."<sup>[5]</sup> Frost's statement at the press conference may not have actually been accurate; in a letter he wrote to Norman Thomas, Frost said "I can't see how Khrushchev's talk got turned into what you quote that we weren't man enough to fight. I came nearer than he to threatening; with my native gentility I assured him that we were no more afraid of him than he was of us."<sup>[2]</sup>

## Works

Over the course of his career, Frost also became known for poems involving dramas or an interplay of voices, such as "Death of the Hired Man". His work was highly popular in his lifetime and remains so. Among his best-known shorter poems are "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening", "Mending Wall", "Nothing Gold Can Stay", "Birches", "Acquainted With the Night", "After

Apple-Picking", "The Pasture", "Out Out", "Fire and Ice", "The Road Not Taken", and "Directive". Frost won the Pulitzer Prize four times, an achievement unequalled by any other American poet. Many of Frost's published works were illustrated with woodcut prints made by Frost's life-long friend and woodcut artist J. J. Lankes.

Frost was prolific, and poems are occasionally unearthed and published. The most recent instance is "War Thoughts at Home", written around 1918 on the inside cover of a book and published in Virginia Quarterly Review in 2006.[4] Nearly 700 pages of new poems, epigraphs, drafts and fragments appeared in *The Notebooks of Robert Frost*, published January 2007.[5][6]

## Popular culture

- Several of Frost's poems form the basis of Randall Thompson's suite for chorus, *Frostiana*.
- Robert Frost's poem *Nothing Gold Can Stay* is mentioned several times in the book *The Outsiders*. The most famous quote, "Stay gold Ponyboy," is based on his poem.
- In the film *Down by Law*, Roberto Benigni's character names "Bob Frost" his favorite

poet.

- In the film *Grindhouse*, Kurt Russell's character recites part of "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening."
- In the computer game *Grim Fandango*, the player can ask a clown to make a balloon in the shape of Robert Frost.
- In one episode of the television series "The Simpsons", Krusty the Clown shows an episode of his old "Krusty the Clown Show", where he had invited Robert Frost on to read poetry, but instead dumped snow on his head.
- In one episode of the *West Wing*, Josh Leiman discusses Frost's poem, "Mending Wall," and how it portrays people isolating themselves.
- In the movie *Telefon* deep-cover sleeper agents all over the United States could only be activated by a line from the poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening".

## Selected works

### Poetry

- *A Boy's Will* (David Nutt, 1913; Holt, 1915).
- *North of Boston* (David Nutt, 1914; Holt, 1914).



Grave of Robert Frost,  
Bennington, Vermont

### 'Mending Wall'

- *Mountain Interval* (Holt, 1916).
  - 'The Road Not Taken'
- *Selected Poems* (Holt, 1923)
- *New Hampshire* (Holt, 1923; Grant Richards, 1924).
- *Several Short Poems* (Holt, 1924).
- *Selected Poems* (Holt, 1928).
- *West-Running Brook* (Holt, 1929).
- *The Lovely Shall Be Choosers* (Random

House, 1929).

- *Collected Poems of Robert Frost* (Holt, 1930; Longmans, Green, 1930).
- *The Lone Striker* (Knopf, 1933).
- *Selected Poems: Third Edition* (Holt, 1934).
- *Three Poems* (Baker Library, Dartmouth College, 1935).
- *The Gold Hesperidee* (Bibliophile Press, 1935).
- *From Snow to Snow* (Holt, 1936).
- *A Further Range* (Holt, 1936; Cape, 1937).
- *Collected Poems of Robert Frost* (Holt, 1939; Longmans, Green, 1939).
- *A Witness Tree* (Holt, 1942; Cape, 1943).
- *Steeple Bush* (Holt, 1947).
- *Complete Poems of Robert Frost*, 1949 (Holt, 1949; Cape, 1951).
- *Hard Not To Be King* (House of Books, 1951).
- *Aforesaid* (Holt, 1954).
- *A Remembrance Collection of New Poems* (Holt, 1959).
- *You Come Too* (Holt, 1959; Bodley Head, 1964).
- *In the Clearing* (Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1962).
- *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, (New York, 1969).
- 'Fire and Ice' (1964)

- 'Out Out' (Vermont 1964)
- *A Girl's Garden*
- *A Hundred Garden*
- *A Servant to Servants*
- *After Apple-Picking*
- *Birches*
- *Blueberries*
- *Dust of Snow*
- *For Once, Then Something*
- *Good Hours*
- *Good-bye, and Keep Cold*
- *Home Burial*
- *Mending Wall*
- *Neither Out Far Nor in Deep*
- *Nothing Gold Can Stay*
- *Once By The Pacific*
- *Putting in the Seed*
- *Range-Finding*
- *Spring Pools*
- *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*
- *The Black Cottage*
- *The Code*
- *The Death of the Hired Man*
- *The Fear*
- *The Generations of Men*
- *The Housekeeper*
- *The Mountain*
- *The Oven Bird*
- *The Pasture*

- *The Rose Family*
- *The Self-seeker*
- *The Sound Of The Trees*
- *The Star-Splitter*
- *The Tuft of Flowers*
- *The Wood-Pile*
- *To E.T.*
- *Desert Places*

## Poetry books

- *A Boy's Will* (David Nutt, 1913; Holt, 1915).

## Plays

- *A Way Out: A One Act Play* (Harbor Press, 1929).
- *The Cow's in the Corn: A One Act Irish Play in Rhyme* (Slide Mountain Press, 1929).
- *A Masque of Reason* (Holt, 1945).
- *A Masque of Mercy* (Holt, 1947).

## Prose

- *The Letters of Robert Frost to Louis Untermeyer* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1963; Cape, 1964).
- *Robert Frost and John Bartlett: The Record of a Friendship*, by Margaret Bartlett

- Anderson (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1963).
- *Selected Letters of Robert Frost* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964).
- *Interviews with Robert Frost* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966; Cape, 1967).
- *Family Letters of Robert and Elinor Frost* (State University of New York Press, 1972).
- *Robert Frost and Sidney Cox: Forty Years of Friendship* (University Press of New England, 1981).
- *The Notebooks of Robert Frost*, edited by Robert Faggen (Harvard University Press, forthcoming January 2007).[7]

## Published as

- *Collected Poems, Prose and Plays* (Richard Poirier , ed.) (Library of America, 1995)  
ISBN 978-1-88301106-2.

## Pulitzer Prizes

- 1924 for *New Hampshire: A Poem With Notes and Grace Notes*
- 1931 for *Collected Poems*
- 1937 for *A Further Range*
- 1943 for *A Witness Tree* <sup>[6]</sup>



## Sources

- Pritchard, William H. (2000). Frost's Life and Career ([http](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/04/21/AR200604210nav=rss_artsandliving/entertainmentnews)). Retrieved on March 18, 2001.
- Taylor, Welford Dunaway (1996). *Robert Frost and J.J. Lankes: Riders on Pegasus*. Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Library.

## Notes

1. ^ [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/04/21/AR200604210nav=rss\\_artsandliving/entertainmentnews](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/04/21/AR200604210nav=rss_artsandliving/entertainmentnews)
2. ^ *a b* Boller, Jr., Paul F.; George, John (1989). *They Never Said It: A Book of Fake Quotes, Misquotes, and Misleading Attributions*. New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN 0-19-505541-1.
3. ^ Dalleck, Robert, John F. *Kennedy: An Unfinished Life 1917-1963* (2003; London: Penguin, 2004), 540.
4. ^ Reeves, Richard, *President Kennedy: Profile of Power* (1993; London: Papermac, 1994), 455.
5. ^ Reeves, Richard, *op. cit.*, plate 23.

6. ^ <http://www.pulitzer.org/cgi-bin/catquery.cgi?type=w&category=Poetry&FormsButton5=R>

## External links

- Frost's lost poem "War Thoughts at Home" in The Virginia Quarterly Review
- The Frost Place, a museum and poetry conference center in Franconia, N.H.
- Poems by Robert Frost at PoetryFoundation.org
- Frost at Modern American Poetry
- Frost's interview in The Paris Review
- Robert Frost at Bread Loaf (Middlebury College)
- The Frost Foundation
  
- Student finds Frost poem lost for 88 years
- Robert Frost Farm in Derry, NH
- Robert Frost Out Loud: audio recordings and commentary on many Frost poems
- Robert Frost page on Ketzle.com - poems, links

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