CAXTONIAN

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Collecting Early Frost

R. Eden Martin

If you were to ask most Americans where Robert Frost was born and raised, they would tell you New England—perhaps a farm in New Hampshire or rural Massachusetts. In his poetry and his craggy features, Frost seemed to exude the air of rural New England, somewhere north of Boston. Yet he was born and spent his early years in California. He is regarded today as the archetypical American poet. But he wrote or polished—and also published for the first time—his most important poetry in London.

Robert Frost was born on March 26, 1874, in San Francisco, the son of William Frost and Isabelle Moodie Frost, known as Belle. William Frost was a New Hampshire man and a Harvard graduate. Belle was the daughter of a Scottish sea captain who drowned at sea shortly after she was born. She was raised by her grandparents until she was 11, and then was sent to live with relatives in America. After she met and married Will Frost, they moved to San Francisco, where Robert, their first child, was born.[1]

This portrait of Frost was to publicize North of Boston.

Will Frost was about as un-New Englandish as it gets. He rejected the puritan religious heritage of his father. At Harvard, in contrast to college students today, he "behaved wildly, whored, gambled and drank."[2] Moreover, during the Civil War, unlike virtually all New Englanders, he was a Confederate sympathizer.

The move to California was emblematic of Frost's estrangement from his New England background. In San Francisco he went into the newspaper business—working first as a reporter for a local newspaper, then as city editor, and later as business manager. He supported the single-tax ideas of Henry George, and became active in local Democratic Party politics—partly to promote George's theories, partly to try to get a government job. Will's Southern sympathies led him to name his first-born Robert Lee Frost. Belle went along with "Robert" because of her love for the poetry of Burns.

Not long after Robert's birth in 1874, his father's health began to deteriorate, and his drinking increased, as did the harshness of his behavior toward his wife and son. Robert received severe whippings from his father for minor infractions. At one point, Belle left her husband—taking young Robert back East. She returned after six months, but family life remained strained.

Robert's schooling in his early years was negligible. He skipped the first three grades, assertedly because of stomach problems. He owed his early education primarily to his mother, who read to him from the Bible, Cooper's novels, and many of the Scottish writers, including Walter Scott and Robert Burns. Burns' poetry seems to have made a particularly strong impression on young Robert. He later named his oldest daughter after the heroine of Burns' "Bonnie Lesley."

Frost's introduction to literature was thus as a listener rather than a reader—perhaps a good thing for a poet. He later claimed that he did not read a book until he was in his teens.

By 1882, when Robert was 8, his father had developed tuberculosis. He died three years later, leaving destitute the small family—which now included a sister, Joanna. They were forced to return East in the hope of obtaining help from Robert's paternal grandparents, who lived in the industrial town of Lawrence, Massachusetts.

Unfortunately, the grandparents offered little sympathy and less help. Robert's mother got a job teaching grade school in nearby Salem. Over the next several years, she scratched out a meager living by teach-

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ing in a series of low-paying schools, moving from town to town.

Yet somehow the family's poverty did not stifle Robert's intellectual development. In 1888, at the age of 14, he entered Lawrence High School, where he studied the classics—Latin and Greek—as well as history and math. At the end of the first year, he was at the top of his class.

During his second year, 1889-90, Robert became more interested in poetry—the taste for which had been planted by his mother's early readings. He absorbed Shelly, Keats, Poe, and Arnold. William Collins' poem about the soldiers who died at Culloden made a particular impression on him.[3]

In that same year, Robert wrote his first poem—"La Noche Triste"—inspired by Prescott's narrative of the retreat of Cortes and his soldiers from the Aztec capital. Frost later remembered, "I had never written a poem before, and as I walked, it appeared like a revelation, and I was so taken by it that I was late at my grandmother's."[4] This first poem was published on the first page of the high school bulletin in April 1890. (I wish I had a copy.) Robert was then 16 years old.

During his senior year at Lawrence, 1891-92, Robert fell in love with his classmate and co-valedictorian, Elinor White.

Robert's grandparents, although not helpful earlier, now offered to cover his expenses to attend Dartmouth. He also won a scholarship that paid most of his tuition. In the fall of 1892, Robert commenced his studies, taking Greek, Latin, and math. But he evidently took more pleasure from rough-housing with other students than from his studies.

The rough conduct sometimes became excessive. The class history reported that Robert and another freshman were hazed and bullied by older students. On one occasion at least, Robert got even. Through some sort of deception, he gave a fellow student a close and unsightly hair-cut, shaving his head in the back. Robert and one other student were expelled by the college. He later told friends that he had done nothing wrong and had not been expelled, but instead had chosen to leave school because of boredom and disillusionment with his classmates.

Poe had earlier been thrown out of West Point, and Wallace Stevens would later be sent packing by Harvard. These were arguably our three greatest American poets!

In early 1893 Robert Frost—now almost 19—found himself out of school with unhappy grandparents, no job and no prospects. For the next several years, he made do with a series of low-paying positions—first teaching grade school, then laboring on farms or in the mills of Lawrence, and on one occasion working for a local newspaper.

Frost still aspired to become a poet. In early 1894, he sent one of his poems—"My Butterfly"—to a New York publication, the *Independent*, edited by William Hayes Ward and his sister, Susan. It appeared in the *Independent* in November 1894.

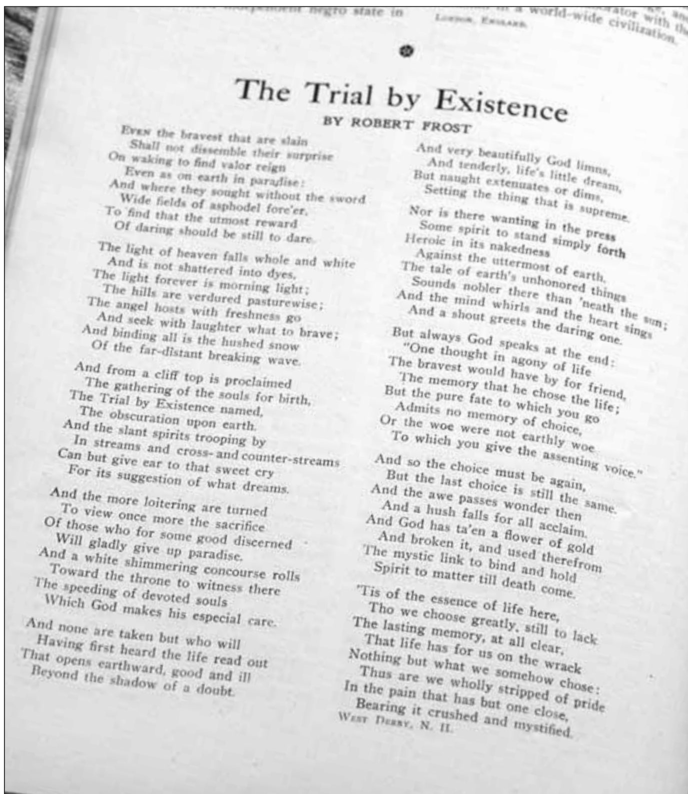
In the fall of 1894, Robert resumed his courtship of Elinor White, who was then attending St. Lawrence University in Canton, New York, near the Canadian border. But how was he to convince Elinor of his seriousness? Book lovers must be delighted by his choice. He arranged for "My Butterfly" and four other poems to be printed and bound in leather. The title of this small booklet, *Twilight*, was stamped on the leather cover in gold. Only two copies were prepared, as Robert intended to present one to Elinor and to keep the other for himself.

Robert caught the train to Canton armed with his determination and his two leather-bound books. Wasting no time upon arriving in the University town, he went directly to Elinor's boarding house and presented himself and the nicely-bound *Twilight*.

Elinor was surprised, irritated and unappreciative. After accepting the book casually, evidently without understanding its significance, she told him to leave town on the next train. Robert was deeply wounded. As he was leaving town, in anger and frustration he destroyed his own copy of *Twilight*.

Frost's biographer Meyers believed that Robert never fully recovered from this experience. Even though he and Elinor would eventually marry, her harsh rejection and apparent preference at that time for another suitor left Robert with a sharp sense of betrayal. Meyers says it "destroyed forever the essential foundation of his love," and that he "never recovered from this scarifying wound."[5]

But Elinor did not destroy her copy of *Twilight*. She kept it; and after she and Robert were married, the little volume came back into Frost's



The Trial by Existence

BY ROBERT FROST

Even the bravest that are slain
Shall not dissemble their surprise
On waking to find valor reign
Even as on earth in paradise;
And where they sought without the sword
Wide fields of asphodel fore'er,
To find that the utmost reward
Of daring should be still to dare.

The light of heaven falls whole and white
And is not shattered into dyes,
The light forever is morning light;
The hills are verdured pasturewise;
The angel hosts with freshness go
And seek with laughter what to brave;
And binding all is the hushed snow
Of the far-distant breaking wave.

And from a cliff top is proclaimed
The gathering of the souls for birth,
The Trial by Existence named,
The obscuration upon earth.
And the slant spirits trooping by
In streams and cross- and counter-streams
Can but give ear to that sweet cry
For its suggestion of what dreams.

And the more loitering are turned
To view once more the sacrifice
Of those who for some good discerned
Will gladly give up paradise.
And a white shimmering concourse rolls
Toward the throne to witness there
The speeding of devoted souls
Which God makes his especial care.

And none are taken but who will
Having first heard the life read out
That opens earthward, good and ill
Beyond the shadow of a doubt.

And very beautifully God limns,
And tenderly, life's little dream,
But naught extenuates or dims,
Setting the thing that is supreme.

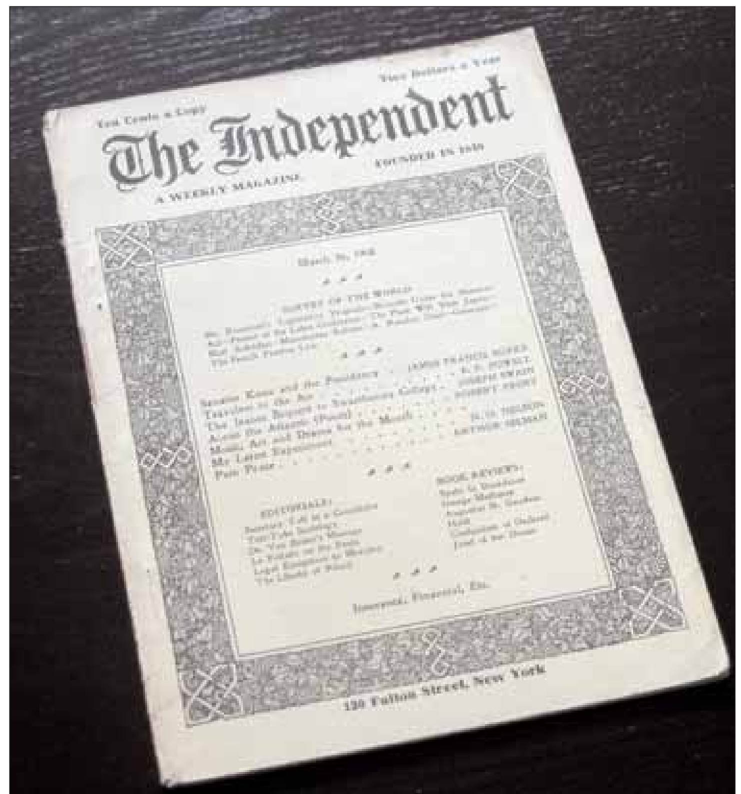
Nor is there wanting in the press
Some spirit to stand simply forth
Heroic in its nakedness
Against the uttermost of earth.
The tale of earth's unhonored things
Sounds nobler there than 'neath the sun;
And the mind whirls and the heart sings
And a shout greets the daring one.

But always God speaks at the end:
"One thought in agony of life
The bravest would have by for friend,
The memory that he chose the life;
But the pure fate to which you go
Admits no memory of choice,
Or the woe were not earthly woe
To which you give the assenting voice."

And so the choice must be again,
But the last choice is still the same.
And the awe passes wonder then
And a hush falls for all acclaim.
And God has ta'en a flower of gold
And broken it, and used therefrom
The mystic link to bind and hold
Spirit to matter till death come.

'Tis of the essence of life here,
Tho we choose greatly, still to lack
The lasting memory, at all clear,
That life has for us on the wrack
Nothing but what we somehow chose:
Thus are we wholly stripped of pride
In the pain that has but one close,
Bearing it crushed and mystified.

West Derry, N. H.



Early Frost poems appeared in The Independent. *"The Trial by Existence" appeared in 1906; the copy on the right is from 1908.*

possession. In 1940 he sold it to Earle Bernheimer with the following explanation:

> I had two copies of *Twilight* printed and bound by a job printer in Lawrence Mass in 1894 probably out of pride in what Bliss Carmen and Maurice Thompson had said about the poem in it called My Butterfly. One copy I kept for myself and afterward destroyed. The other I gave away to a girl [Elinor—later Mrs. Robert Frost] in St. Lawrence University to show to her friends. It had no success and deserved none. But it unaccountably survived and has lately leaped into prominence as my first first. A few scattered lines in it are as much mine as any I was ever to write. I deliver it into your care…with the last request that you be not too fondly selfish with it, but consent to lend it once in a long long time to some important exhibition of my works as at the Jones Library in Amherst or the Baker at Dartmouth. Boston February 1, 1940. Robert Frost.

House of Books, Ltd., purchased the book at the sale of Bernheimer's books in 1950, and subsequently sold it to Roy Thornton. With help from Frost (who "acted as liaison"), the book was eventually purchased by C. Waller Barrett in 1960.[6] Barrett says in his introduction to the catalogue that the pursuit of this book "occupied ten years from 1950 to 1960."[7]

If Robert never got over the "scarifying wound" caused by Elinor's rejection, he at least got past it. In November 1894 Robert traveled into the "Dismal Swamp" in North Carolina—possibly trying to kill himself, but more likely trying to prove to Elinor how badly she had hurt him. Not long after this strange episode, they were reunited. Elinor finished college the next spring, and the two were married in December 1895. He was 21 years old.

Meyers describes Elinor as "self-effacing" and as a "dull and rather conventional woman," quiet and meek. She was also, he writes, "an incompetent and chaotic housekeeper."[8] Given Frost's own idiosyncrasies, this marriage had its predictable difficulties. Yet they stayed together, producing six children between 1896 and 1907.

In the meantime, Frost had to make a living. Back in Lawrence, Massachusetts, he tried teaching again, but found it unsatisfying. He soon realized that working in the mills would lead nowhere.

His grandfather Frost generously agreed to pay his tuition if he went back to college—this time to Harvard. He enrolled in September 1897 as a special student, but lasted only a year and a half. During this period he continued his study of Latin and Greek, and also took classes in English composition, German, and philosophy. But he felt "intellectually and emotionally isolated." To make matters worse, he became ill during his sophomore year. "I got very sick," he later told a friend—"Trouble in the solar plexus. So I resigned from the sophomore class at the end of March [1899], to the Dean's regret. The doctor thought I would die."[9]

Although Robert had earned no degree, his study of the classics was surely one of the influences that led him to develop his clean, simple style of writing poetry in accordance with traditional standards of rhyme and meter.

Now what? Within a few months of leaving Cambridge, Robert had rented a farm near Lawrence and had begun to raise chickens. A year later (October 1900) found the young family in Derry, New

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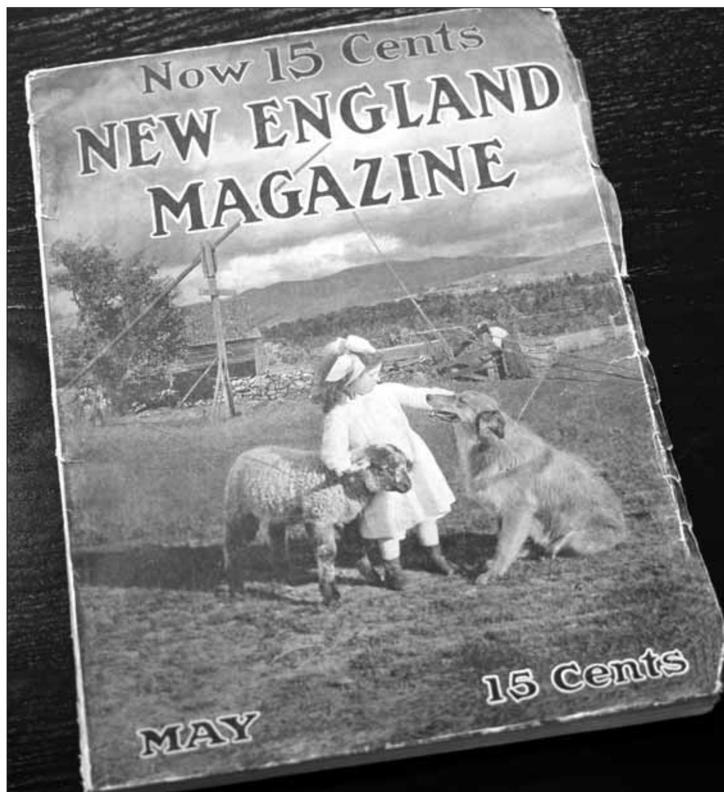
Hampshire, working a 30-acre farm. The Frosts remained there nine crucial years, during which Robert deepened his knowledge of the life and speech patterns of Yankee farmers.

Meyers writes that he was a better observer than farmer:

> His awkwardness around livestock, his distaste for regular chores, his frail constitution, his fears of darkness, storms, and tramps, his difficulty in rising early in the morning, and his general inexperience with the basic elements of rustic husbandry all contributed to his unsuitability for farm life.[10]

He fed the chickens and milked the cows whenever he felt like it—on no fixed schedule. Once by accident he nearly burned down his house.



This copy of New England Magazine *from 1909 contained Frost's poem "Into Mine Own."*

Not surprisingly, Robert found time to read, making up in part for his lack of a complete college education. His favorites included Wordsworth, Emerson, Longfellow, and Palgrave's *The Golden Treasury*. As his children grew up, they were treated to readings from the *Bible*, the *Odyssey*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Walden*, and works by Shakespeare, Longfellow, Tennyson, and others.

Robert also continued to write. A few stories appeared in local poultry trade magazines. And he arranged for publication of a handful of poems in obscure journals. Meyer reports that he sold only five poems between 1894 and 1906.[11] Yet during these years on the Derry farm, Robert drafted several of the poems that were later to appear in his first three books.

By early 1906, Robert had to face economic reality. He had four children, all under six; and he was barely able to support his young family on income received from his grandfather's estate and from his poultry farming. In March 1906, without giving up the farm, Frost began teaching part-time at the Pinkerton Academy in Derry village. In September 1906, in need of more money, he began teaching full time—English, Latin, history, geometry. He continued to try to farm and teach until the burden became too great. Or perhaps he quit farming because the older children had reached an age where they needed to be in school. Whatever the reason, in the spring of 1909, Robert rented a house in Derry, gave up farming, and put the children in the local school.

During the Derry farming period—1900 to 1909—a few of Frost's poems were published in obscure magazines. One was the New York *Independent*, which had published his "My Butterfly" back in 1894.[12] In 1906 the *Independent* published Frost's "The Trial by Existence," and in 1908 it ran "Across the Atlantic." Another magazine in which his work occasionally appeared was the *New England Magazine*, published in Boston. In it appeared Frost's "A Line-Storm Song," (1907) and "Into Mine Own" (1909).

The burdens of teaching cut into Robert's time for writing. From early 1908 to mid-1910, he apparently wrote no poetry at all.[13] In 1911 he took a better job—with the same pay but more free time to write—in Plymouth, New Hampshire. He continued to submit poems to magazines, but virtually all were rejected.

Yet this period of the first decade of the Twentieth Century was important for Frost. It was during this period—commencing in mid-decade—that he began experimenting with poems using the idiom and speech patterns of his New England neighbors. By 1910 according to Walsh, "the urge to write poetry had returned on Frost in full force."[14] At Christmas 1911, he sent his friend Susan Ward a handwritten booklet of poems, one of which—"To a Moth Seen in Winter"—"represents Frost's first surviving attempt to work with a pastoral or rural subject in blank verse."[15]

By late summer 1912, Robert had decided to move again. He believed he needed to live where he could associate with other writers—and where he would have a chance to publish his work. The death of his grandfather had left him a little income. Frost's daughter Lesley later wrote that Robert had leaned toward Vancouver, but that Elinor preferred England:

> And so it came about that on one day of destiny the question was settled by the turn of a coin. We were standing around my mother who was ironing in the kitchen when my father said, 'Well, let's toss for it,' and he took a nickel from his pocket. 'Heads England, tails Vancouver.' Heads it was! All that had been contemplated was fresh scenery, peace to write, the excitement of change.[16]

So Frost sold the farm, put his belongings in storage, and set sail for England with his little family in August 1912.

England opened for Frost the doors to a career in poetry. Knowing no one, in early September 1912, he rented a small place—"the Bungalow"—in the village of Beaconsfield, 20 miles north of London. He remained there a year and a half, during

which he wrote or polished to conclusion many of the poems that made him famous—including "Birches" and "Mending Wall." It was also while living here that he prepared for publication the two books that made his reputation.

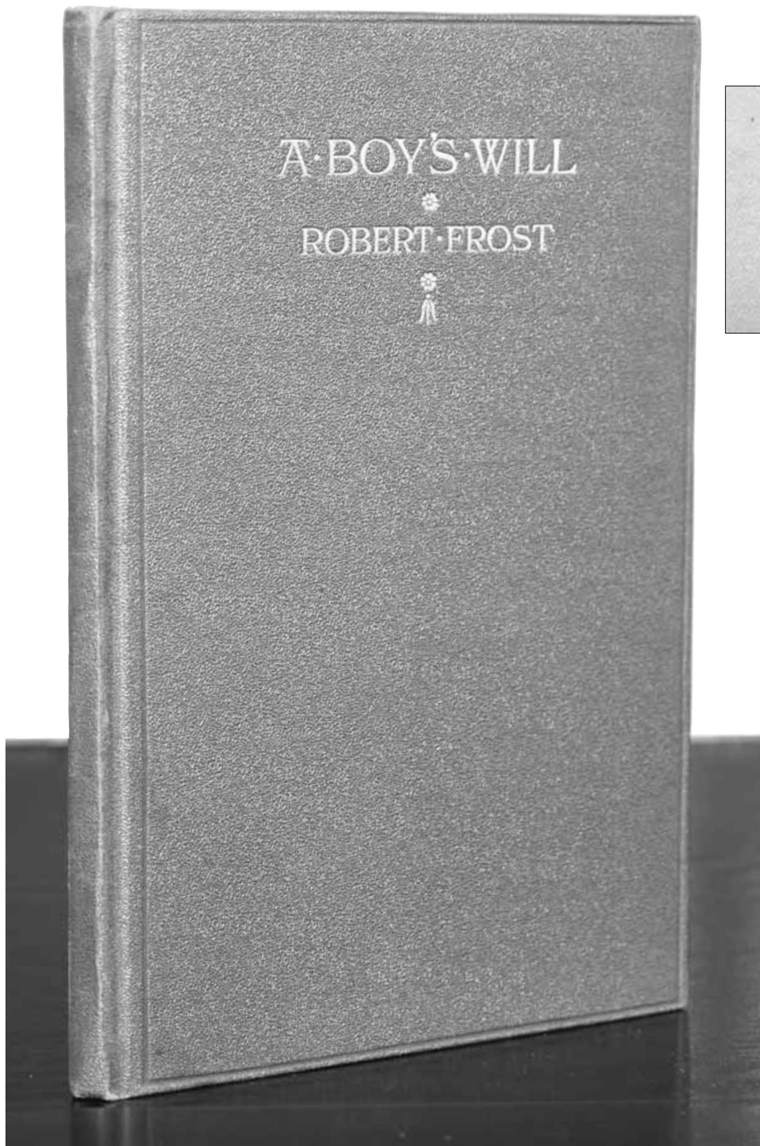
Soon after the family was settled, Frost began to visit London—relaxing in the Reading Room of the British Museum, stopping by the second-hand book shops, attending poetry readings, and meeting other writers.

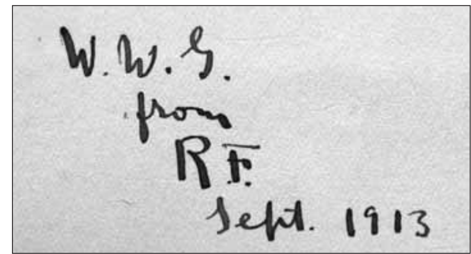
Frost had been thinking about publishing a volume of poems for months, if not years. In late 1912 he referred to a manuscript of poems brought over from New England: "I brought it to England in the bottom of my trunk, more afraid of it, probably…" He later explained that "the little pile of lyrics which went into my first book had stayed all the time around thirty, what with burning one and writing another."[17] He later told a correspondent that these poems "come pretty near being the story of five years of my life"—referring to life "on the farm in Derry."

One evening, in the living room of the Beaconsfield Bungalow, Frost laid out his manuscript sheets on the floor—picking out about 30 that he thought might be included in a book. According to his biographer, Thompson, Frost gradually came to see that he could "shape a selected group into a spiral of moods, upward through disappointment and withdrawal to aspiration and affirmation…a motion out of self-love and into his love for others."[18] More simply, he organized his autobiographic poems around a theme—"the emotional education of a growing boy." Yet the poems themselves were mostly the mature products of a poet in his early-to-mid-30s. Frost had lived on the farm in Derry from the age of 26 to 35.

After selecting the poems that fit his theme, he added a brief gloss or note of explanation to each poem. His daughter Lesley typed the manuscript, including the glosses as part of the index.

Sometime in mid-October 1912, after having been in England only about a month and a half, on the recommendation of an acquaintance at a weekly magazine, Robert





The first edition of A Boy's Will *(London, 1913) with the presentation inscription in the author's copy.*

approached the firm of David Nutt—a well-known publisher of books of poetry. The business at that time was run by the French widow of the recently-deceased proprietor of the firm.

The widow was a tough nut. She started by telling Frost there was no market for poetry, nobody would read it—but she might publish his work if Robert "would pay part of the costs." This was a common practice with respect to books by previously-unpublished poets. Frost firmly rejected that idea, and started to leave. Mrs. Nutt softened, asked him to leave the manuscript, saying "If they're good I'll take a chance."[19] Robert left his manuscript with her.

About 10 days later, Frost received a note from Mrs. Nutt. She agreed to publish his poems, though she was not yet in a position to offer definite terms. She was probably softening him up for a "poor offer."

A second note arrived about two weeks later extending an invitation to visit Mrs. Nutt in her office. There, she gave Frost her terms—which turned out to be worse than if Frost had agreed to cover the costs of publication. Frost would receive a 12% royalty only *after* sale of the first 250 copies—an exception that deprived Frost of about 24 £.[20] Mrs. Nutt also demanded the rights to publish Frost's next four books—whether in verse or prose. Worse yet, the terms for the next four books were to be "the same" as for this first book.

The first edition of *A Boy's Will* was to be 1,000 copies, and the price was to be one shilling sixpence per copy.

Frost no doubt realized that the contract was one-sided but thought he had little choice. He signed on December 16, 1912.

Several months were spent polishing the manuscript, and printing and binding the sheets. Finally, *A Boy's Will* appeared on April 1, 1913. It contained 32 poems, nine

*See **FROST**, page 6*

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of which had previously appeared in obscure American periodicals. Of the 1,000 sets of pages that were printed, about 280 were bound in bronzed-pebble cloth. The copy shown is the "first issue," Binding A. A few copies were bound in cream vellum paper boards, stamped in red, with a single rule border on the cover ("first issue," Binding B).[21]

The Nutt firm advertised *A Boy's Will* and sold it directly rather than through the bookstores, which avoided having to allow the bookseller receive a 40% discount off the retail price. Despite the contract, Frost never received any money from Mrs. Nutt—probably because the book did not sell more than 250 copies.

Frost took the title from a line of one of Longfellow's poems, "My Lost Youth":

> A boy's will is the wind's will,
> And the thoughts of youth are long,
> long thoughts.

He dedicated the volume to Elinor. The book included Frost's editorial "glosses" on each poem—glosses that were later dropped.

Virtually all of the poems in *A Boy's Will* were written *before* Frost had developed his theory of "the sound of sense"—the use of the word patterns of everyday speech in poetry. Thus, some of the works in this first volume now appear to critics to reflect archaic or artificial expression. But a few poems in this first book—including "The Trial by Existence," and "Mowing"—are among his finest.

Despite the restrictive manner in which his book was sold, as well as the limited number of copies in the first issue, Frost's biographer reports that it was "well and widely received."[22] Perhaps he refers to the reception by the readers. The critics did not review Frost's first book enthusiastically. *A Boy's Will* received only brief mention in the *Athenaeum* and *Times Literary Supplement*. The *Athenaeum* was lukewarm at best—saying the author is "only half successful" and that "many of his verses do not rise above the ordinary...." The *TLS* referred to "an agreeable individuality about these pieces," and to the "vein of reflection... though the thought may be feebly or obscurely expressed." The *Bookman* reviewer wrote that Frost's achievement "is no great matter; but he has a way of keeping one expectant, as though something good were sure to come."[23]

F.S. Flint, writing in the June 1913 issue of *Poetry and Drama*, was more positive.[24] He wrote of Frost's poems that, "Their intrinsic merits are great" despite occasional faults; it is the "simplicity which is the great charm of his book; and it is a simplicity that proceeds from a candid heart." He observed that Frost's "heart is pure and the life not lived in vain." Flint reprinted Frost's poem "My November Guest" as part of his review, described it as "perfect," and referred to several others "almost or quite as perfect."

Ezra Pound, then living in London, was one of Frost's biggest early fans, though his support was far from an unmixed blessing. An odder pairing of poets is hard to imagine. Pound had heard about Frost and sent him an invitation to visit. Frost did so, shortly before publication of *A Boy's Will*. The two hit it off—wandering through London, talking about poetry and about Frost's early experiences. They walked to the David Nutt office, where Pound snatched up the only available copy of *A Boy's Will*. Frost himself had not yet had a chance to examine the published book.

Pound gave Frost his first American review—in the May 1913 issue of Harriet Monroe's *Poetry*, published in Chicago. After noting that Frost's work had previously been "scorned" by American editors ("the old story"), he gave *A Boy's Will* a positive but rambling review, short of enthusiasm:

> Mr. Frost's book is a little raw, and has in it a number of infelicities; underneath them it has the tang of the New Hampshire woods, and it has just this utter sincerity.... This man has the good sense to speak naturally and to paint the thing, the thing as he sees it. And to do this is a very different matter from gunning about for the circumplectious polysyllable.... He has now and then such a swift and bold expression as
>
> "The whimper of hawks beside the sun."
>
> He has now and then a beautiful simile, well used, but he is for the most part as simple as the lines I have quoted in opening or as in the poem of mowing. He is without sham and without affectation.

It was not long before Frost and Pound parted company. For one thing, Frost thought of himself as much more than a poet of simple rural themes. For another, Pound's crack at American editors worried Frost, who feared a bad reaction from American publishers and reviewers, particularly in light of the fact that Frost had chosen to have his book published in England. More than that, Frost resented Pound's patronizing attitude, and his attempt to "improve" Frost's drafts (as he would later improve Yeats' and Eliot's). And he was irritated that Pound, without permission, had sent one of Frost's best poems—"The Death of The Hired Man"—to a New York magazine, *The Smart Set*. When Frost demanded his manuscript back, Pound refused to help retrieve it. The problem was solved only when the editor of the journal turned it down.[25] More fundamentally, Frost strongly disliked most of Pound's own poetry. Years later, however, when Pound himself needed help after World War II, Frost would remember Pound's generous first reaction to his work.

In the spring of 1913 when *A Boy's Will* first appeared in London, Frost's "best friend" was the English poet, Wilfrid Gibson. Gibson was four years younger than Frost, and was considered one of the "Georgians" (George V had been crowned in 1911)—a group whose lyrics generally took nature and the countryside for their themes, as distinguished from the more experimental Imagists like Pound, or the Futurists or Modernists. Gibsen had published his first book of poems in 1902 and wrote on northern rural themes. Frost liked his work and liked him personally: "He's just one of the plain folks with none of the masks of the literary poseur about him."[26] Eliot later wrote slightingly that what nearly all of the Georgians had in common was "the quality of pleasantness."

Gibson was a close friend of Rupert Brooke, and he would soon publish his own books of war poetry, including *Battle* (1915) and *Friends* (1916), which he dedicated to the memory of Brooke. Gibson

had a cottage in Gloucestershire, 100 miles or so northwest of London, and he urged Frost to move out of London and come to Gloucestershire.

My copy of *A Boy's Will* is one of the first issue, binding A, and is the copy Frost presented to his friend Gibson in the fall of 1913 with this inscription:

"W.W.G.
from R.F.
Sept. 1913."

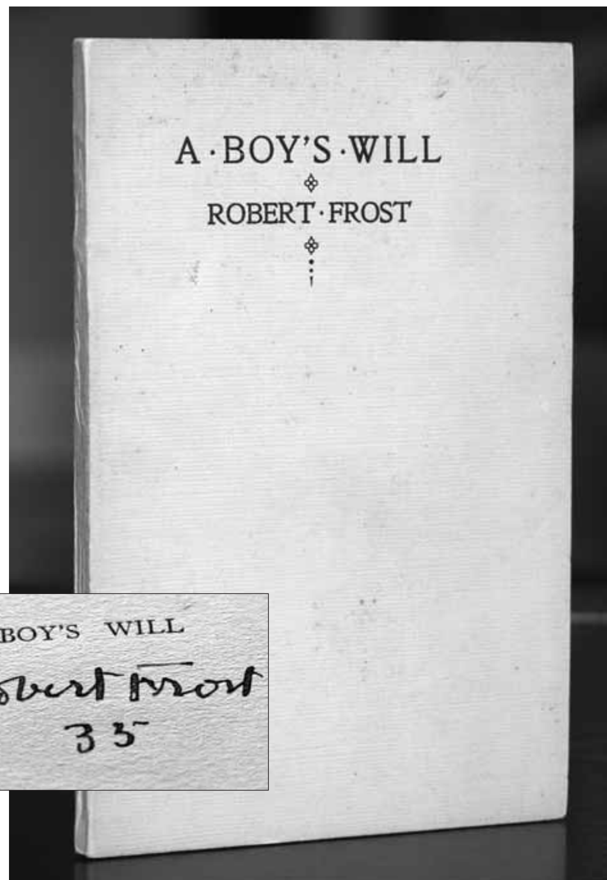
Frost later had a falling-out with Gibson, but their close friendship at the time this first collection was published gives this inscribed copy a special poignancy.

The remaining copies of unbound sheets of the first edition of *A Boy's Will* have a fascinating story, but first (because it is more chronological), let's pause over the first American edition of the same book, which was published two years later by Henry Holt and Co., in April 1915, in a blue cloth binding. (By the time this American edition appeared in America, another book by Frost had already made it into print—but more on that below.) The American edition of *A Boy's Will* (1915) was printed and bound in 750 copies, and was a separate "edition"—with a separate setting of type and printing of pages.

Now—back to the remaining unsold copies of the true first (i.e. English) edition. In 1917 the Nutt firm in London still had lots of copies of the unbound sheets of *A Boy's Will*. It put 100 sets of these sheets into the hands of a different firm—Simpkins Marshall—which bound these pages in a wrapper printed in blue with an ornamented letter "A." These sheets are referred to by bibliographers and book collectors as the "second issue" of the first edition. It is in Binding C.

After the War the Nutt firm went into bankruptcy, and the remaining copies—(a) 70 of the 100 bound for Simpkins Marshall, and (b) the 616 remaining copies not yet bound—were bought at Frost's suggestion by the Dunster House Bookshop in Cambridge, Mass. The bookshop bound up the 616 copies in cream linen-paper wrappers with a normal, or unornamented, letter "A." These are referred to as the "second issue" in Binding D. Some of these were sold between 1923 and 1943.

Later copies of the first printing of A Boy's Will *received a paper wrapper and were signed and numbered by Frost.*



In 1943, the last 135 copies not yet sold were acquired by another bookseller—The House of Books in New York—which paid Frost 50 cents to sign and number them. This is sometimes erroneously referred to as a separate "issue" of the first edition (1913). In fact it is indistinguishable from the second issue (Binding D)—except for the difference created not by the publisher but by the bookseller. And, bibliographically speaking, differences created by booksellers don't count.[27]

My copy of this 1943 so-called separate "issue" (actually, the first edition, second issue) is signed and numbered ("35") by Frost.

After completing the polishing of the manuscript that became *A Boy's Will*, Frost went back to writing—but this time in his new style and voice. *A Boy's Will* had contained only one poem ("Mowing") written in this new style, and it was apparently added at the last minute. This next batch of poems marked what Walsh calls "a radical departure":[28]

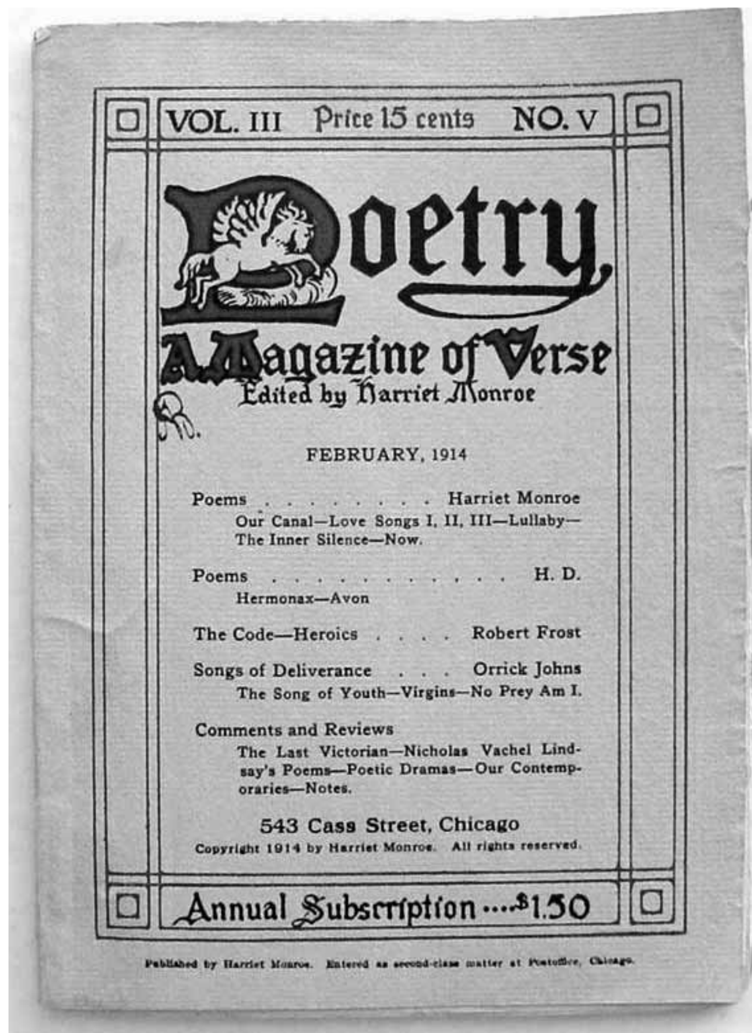
> In the fall of 1912, in a magnificent burst of creative power, Robert Frost embarked on a period of sustained writing for which there can be few parallels in English or American literature. Composing steadily day after day, by late spring he had produced at least a dozen finished poems, perhaps as many as fifteen. All were quite lengthy, all were written in a markedly original strain, and nearly all have long since taken an honored place in American and world literature.
>
> Powerfully evoking the life of the New England countryside, an area into which he had not previously strayed in search of subjects, they explore the interior lives of ordinary individuals and bring to his work for the first time what one critic has well described as a 'humane realism.' Couched in a style arrestingly new to the language, these poems give off the authentic tones of the everyday Yankee voice, all blended intimately with the traditional air and vigor of formal blank verse.

Walsh shows that this burst of creativity, though begun before Frost brought his family to England, reached its creative peak in the Bungalow, north of London, in the fall of 1912 and spring of 1913.[29] Frost would soon begin to refer to his new approach, based on the cadences and patterns of the spoken voice, as "the sound of sense." He wrote to a friend, "I alone of English writers have consciously set myself to make music out of what I may call the

*See **FROST** page 8*

FROST, *from page 7*
sound of sense."[30]

Another distinctive feature of Frost's new approach—beyond both voice and tone—was his identification of "the fact" as "the inspiring basis of all imaginative construction." As Frost himself said, "A poet must lean hard on facts, so hard, sometimes, that they hurt."[31] (Implementing this fact-based approach, Frost created his greatest poems in 1912-1913 at virtually the same moment that one of the greatest of all Russian poets—perhaps one of the greatest in any language—was taking Russian poetry in a new and similar direction. Osip Mandelstam, the most talented of the so-called Acmeists, published his first collection in Petersburg in 1913. Fittingly, he entitled it *Kamen*—or "stone.")


VOL. III Price 15 cents NO. V

Poetry

A Magazine of Verse
Edited by Harriet Monroe

FEBRUARY, 1914

Poems . . . . Harriet Monroe
Our Canal—Love Songs I, II, III—Lullaby—The Inner Silence—Now.

Poems . . . . H. D.
Hermonax—Avon

The Code—Heroics . . . . Robert Frost

Songs of Deliverance . . . Orrick Johns
The Song of Youth—Virgins—No Prey Am I.

Comments and Reviews
The Last Victorian—Nicholas Vachel Lindsay's Poems—Poetic Dramas—Our Contemporaries—Notes.

543 Cass Street, Chicago
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Annual Subscription $1.50

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Frost's appearance in this 1914 Poetry Magazine *was his first in a major literary magazine.*

During the spring and summer of 1913, Frost continued to work on the poems he was writing in his new style and voice. He wrote "Birches" in late July. "Mending Wall" was apparently written after a visit to Scotland in August and a walk in the Scottish countryside, during which he and a friend came upon what he later described as "stone walls (dry stone dykes)…"[32] Thus, one of Frost's best-known poems—and one most associated with his New England themes—was suggested by a Scottish stone wall.

By the fall of 1913, Frost believed he had produced enough new poetry to make a second volume. He hoped this second book would reach out beyond the "critical few who are supposed to know" and appeal to "the general reader who buys books in their thousands."[33] Part of this motivation was economic. Frost had to make a living to support his family.

Mrs. Nutt had exercised her option, and was preparing to publish Frost's new book—tentatively titled "Farm Servants and Other People."[34] But publication was delayed till the spring of 1914. In the meantime, the title was changed to *North of Boston*.

Frost had become acquainted with Gibson in August 1913. (He gave Gibson the presentation copy of *A Boy's Will* a month later, in September.) In the spring of 1914, in order to be near Gibson, Frost decided to move his family from the Beaconsfield "Bungalow" north of London to the Gloucestershire countryside—to the little town of Dymock. Frost told an acquaintance that he was moving to Dymock "to be with Wilfrid Gibson"—and later wrote that, "The important thing to us is that we are near Gibson."[35]

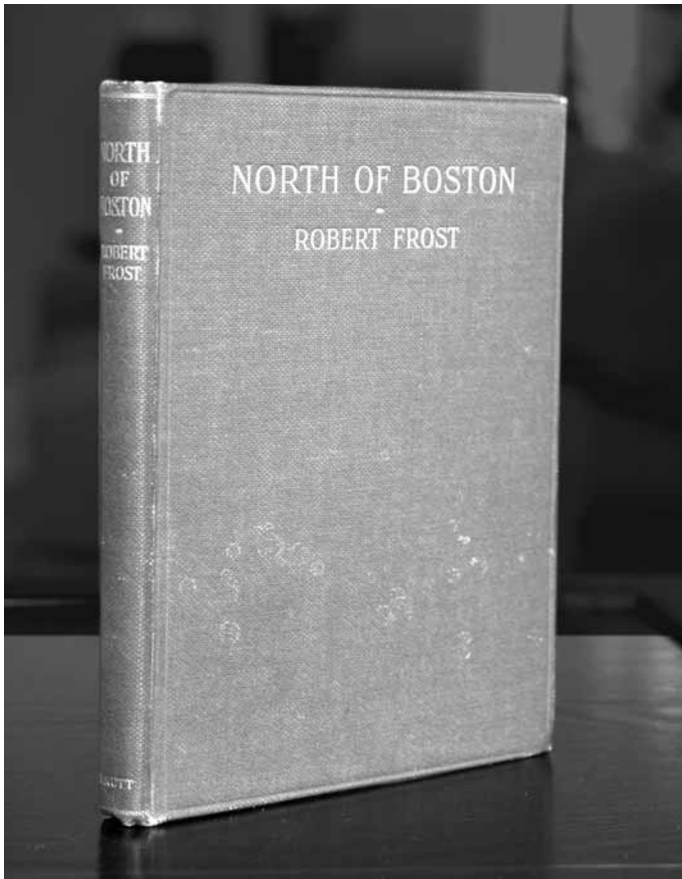
The first to settle in Dymock had been Lascelles Abercrombie, who today is regarded as a second-tier poet. He in turn had attracted Gibson and John Drinkwater. Together with a few friends, they were sometimes referred to as the "Dymock Poets." They saw each other frequently—walking in the country, meeting for meals, and always talking about poetry. These three, soon joined by Brooke, decided to publish a quarterly poetry magazine to be called *New Directions*. The first number, in grey-blue paper covers, appeared in February 1914. There were 200 subscribers. Abercrombie's wife addressed the envelopes, and Gibson licked the stamps.[36]

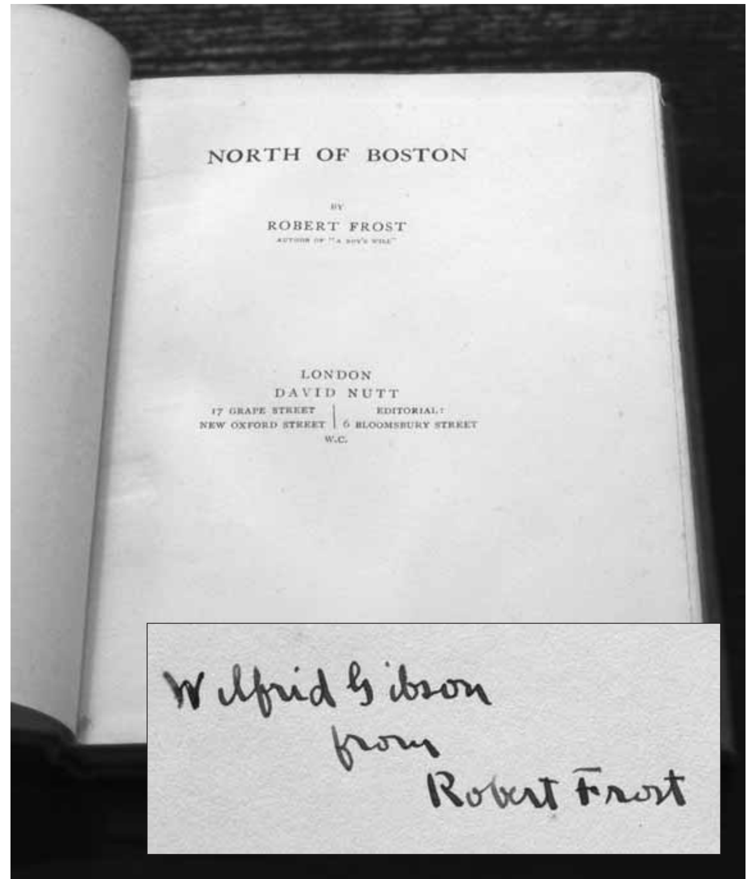
At almost the same time, Frost's "The Code—Heroics" appeared in *Poetry Magazine* in Chicago (February 1914). It was his first appearance in a major American literary magazine.

Three months later, on May 15, 1914, Frost's second book, *North of Boston* appeared. It contained 16 poems—fewer than the first volume. Bound in green buckram, it was priced by Mrs. Nutt at three shillings and sixpence—more than twice the price of the first book.

As with the earlier volume, the first edition of *North of Boston* consisted of 1000 copies. The first-issue copies appeared in five binding variants over a period of eight years. "Binding A" was an olive-green coarse linen cloth, with gilt stamping on the front cover and spine. About 350 copies were bound for distribution in this "Binding A."

Early in 1915, Mrs. Nutt sold 150 sets of sheets to Henry Holt in New York. These were given a Holt title-leaf and bound in cloth-backed tan boards ("Binding B", no jacket) for sale in the United States. This batch of 150 copies from England consti-





The first edition of North of Boston *(London, 1914), with title page and inscription in the author's copy.*

tutes, correctly speaking, the "first edition, *second* issue, for American publication."

Holt soon ran out of the 150 copies from England, and wrote Mrs. Nutt saying that "our first supply was immediately exhausted." Holt then printed an additional 1,300 copies, in March 1915. This separate Holt printing became the "first American edition."[37] Unhappily, it had not been authorized by Mrs. Nutt. Knowing this, Holt explained that he had asked for authorization but received no reply and that he had reprinted the books in order to protect Mrs. Nutt's interests:

> Now we find ourselves without any supply for a month, and piracy threatened. So to protect your interests and those of the author, we are forced to reset both of Mr. Frost's books here in order not only to forestall piracy but also to take advantage of the present interest in Mr. Frost's work.

The 1300 copies of this new "first American edition" appeared in gray-blue linen cloth, with a heavy gray-brown dust jacket.[38]

The remaining copies of the first edition, *first* issue (i.e., the pages printed by Nutt which were *not* sent to Holt) were given different bindings and sold at different times over the next few years by the Nutt firm ("Binding C"), Simpkins Marshall ("Binding D"), and Dunster House ("Binding E" and "Binding F").

Frost dedicated *North of Boston* to his wife, and wrote below the dedication, "This Book of People." The poems in this second collection reflect Frost's new "sound of sense" approach; and the volume contains several of Frost's most memorable poems—"The Pasture," ("I'm going out to clean the pasture spring; …"), "Mending Wall" ("Something there is that doesn't love a wall, …"), "The Death of the Hired Man" ("Mary sat musing on the lamp-flame at the table / Waiting for Warren. …"), and "After Apple-Picking" ("My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree / Toward heaven still. …").

In *North of Boston*, unlike his first book, Frost omitted the editorial "glosses"—except in one case. On the page before "Mending Wall," he prints the statement: "*Mending Wall* takes up the theme where *A Tuft of Flowers* in *A Boy's Will* laid it down."[39] This statement does not appear in subsequent editions of the book or Frost's collections, or in the anthologies. And it is one of those elements that can give first editions their special character. Without Frost's explicit link, one might not know the connection to the first poem—which, incidentally, appears in *A Boy's Will* as "*The* Tuft of Flowers," not "*A* Tuft …"

"The Tuft of Flowers" contains these lines:

> I went to turn the grass once after one
> Who mowed it in the dew before the sun.
>
> The dew was gone that made his blade so keen
> Before I came to view the leveled scene.

Frost looks for the mower, but he is gone. Instead, Frost spots a "bewildered butterfly" seeking some remembered spot or flower. The butterfly finds it—"A leaping tongue of bloom the scythe had spared. …" The mower had loved the flowers and let them

See ***FROST****, page 8*

FROST, *from page 9*

stand uncut. Why? Not for Frost or the butterfly, "But from sheer morning gladness at the brim."

> The butterfly and I had lit upon,
> Nevertheless, a message from the dawn,
>
> That made me hear the wakening birds around,
> And hear his long scythe whispering to the ground,
>
> And feel a spirit kindred to my own;
> So that henceforth I worked no more alone.

Frost felt he had touched the hem of the unseen mower:

> "Men work together," I told him from the heart,
>
> "Whether they work together or apart."

Does this poem not cast new light on "Mending Wall"?

> Something there is that doesn't love a wall
> That wants it down.

My copy of *North of Boston* was also a gift from Frost to his friend Gibson. Undated, it bears a simple presentation:

"Wilfrid Gibson
from
Robert Frost."

The reviews of *North of Boston* were more numerous and far more favorable than those of Frost's first book. The *London Academy* proclaimed, "We have read every line with that amazement and delight which are too seldom evoked by books of modern verse." Not surprisingly, Frost's Dymock neighbor, Abercrombie, wrote a positive review in the *Nation*. Ford Maddox Ford was enthusiastic: "Mr. Frost's achievement is much finer, much more near the ground and much more national, in the true sense, than anything that Whitman gave to the world." Richard Aldington wrote, "[Frost] has put between his two green covers more of a certain kind of American life than any other American poet I have read." Yeats called it, "The best poetry written in America for a long time...."[40]

Pound added his acerbic note: "Mr. Frost is an honest writer, writing from himself, from his own knowledge and emotion.... Frost's people are distinctly real. Their speech is real; he has known them. I don't want much to meet them, but I know that they exist."[41]

The big surprise was Frost's "best friend" Gibson, who wrote a lukewarm review in *The Bookman*, August 1914. Part of the problem was that his review, which covered several new works, gave little space to Frost's volume. Worse, when he got to *North of Boston*, the praise was at best tepid. As Street notes, this review marked the turning point in Frost's relationship with his former "best friend" Gibson.[42]

Despite the generally excellent reviews, sales were still slow—which no doubt accounts for the fact that Mrs. Nutt never paid Frost a shilling on this second book either.[43]

One of the English critics who gave *North of Boston* highly favorable reviews was Edward Thomas, who called it "one of the most revolutionary books of modern times."[44]

Of Welsh descent, Thomas was a nature writer and literary critic living in London. Frost had been introduced to Thomas in October 1913, and liked him instantly. Thomas had graduated from Lincoln College, Oxford, where he drank heavily, took laudanum, and became infected with gonorrhea. He married his wife Helen after she became pregnant. Quite a contrast to the tightly wound Frost.

Thomas wrote some thirty books of prose between 1897 and 1917—none commercially successful. A list can be found in H. Coombes' *Edward Thomas*, London, 1956, at 248-249. Yet Thomas was regarded as an influential critic of modern verse. He was a strong critical supporter of Rupert Brooke.

Frost found that he and Thomas had similar ideas about poetry even though Thomas had not yet written any himself. Both were interested in rural themes and in common language and speech patterns. Frost would later write that "Edward Thomas was the only brother I ever had."[45]

Their surviving letters have recently been published, and are well worth reading. Matthew Spencer (ed.), *Elected Friends, Robert Frost & Edward Thomas to One Another*, New York, 2004. This volume contains Thomas' three exceptionally favorable reviews of *North of Boston*[46].

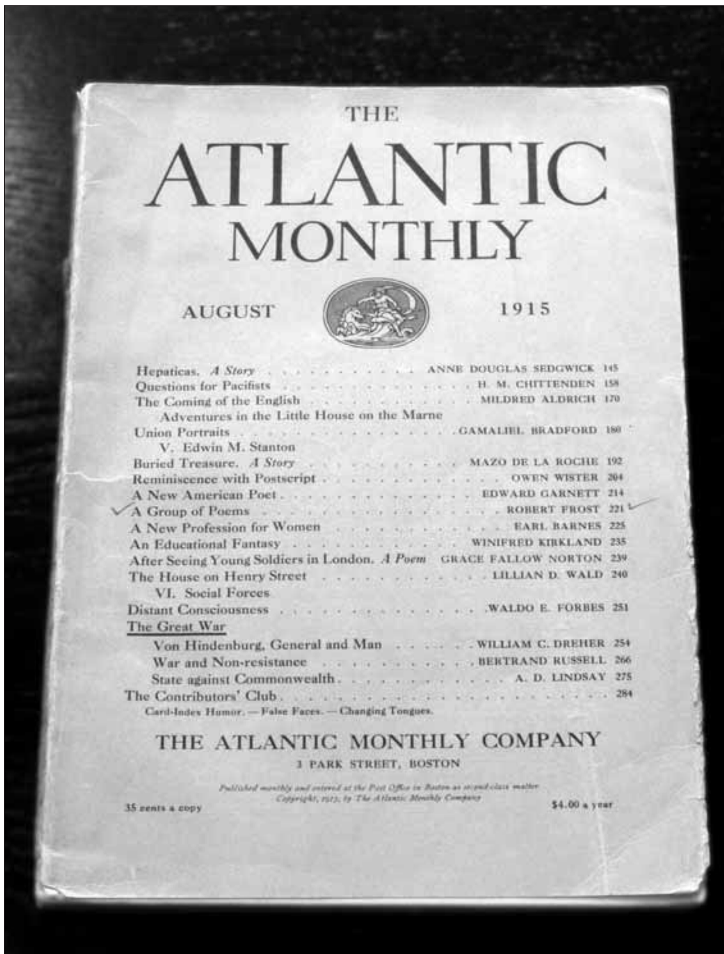
Shortly after Frost moved to Dymock in April 1914, Thomas came for a visit. The two men walked through the meadows of Gloustershire, talking about poets and Frost's "sound of sense" theory of poetry. Frost later immortalized one of their walks in his poem, "Iris by Night," during which the two men saw in the evening mist a moon-made rainbow, in circular form, with its ends closed:

> ...It lifted from its dewy pediment
> Its two mote-swimming many-colored ends
> And gathered them together in a ring.
> And we stood in it softly circled round
> From all division time or foe can bring
> In a relation of elected friends.

Frost and Thomas continued to meet through the summer and fall of 1914—the legendary "last summer" as Brooke called it. One of Gibson's poems written years later memorialized one evening in Dymock—June 24, 1914. This was before Gibson's break with Frost. The poets and their families had gathered in Gibson's cottage. Frost was the focus of the evening:

> In the lamplight
> We talked and laughed; but for the most part listened
> While Robert Frost kept on and on and on,
> In his slow New England fashion, for our delight,
> Holding us with shrewd turns and racy quips.
> And the rare twinkle of his grave blue eyes.
>
> * * *
>
> Now, a quick flash from Abercrombie; now
> A murmured dry half-heard aside from Thomas;
> Now, a clear laughing word from Brooke; and then
> Again Frost's rich and ripe philosophy,
> That had the body and tang of good draught cider,
> And poured as clear as a stream....

Street writes, "If there is a central moment, a central day, that most embodies and commemorates the Georgian poets and



THE

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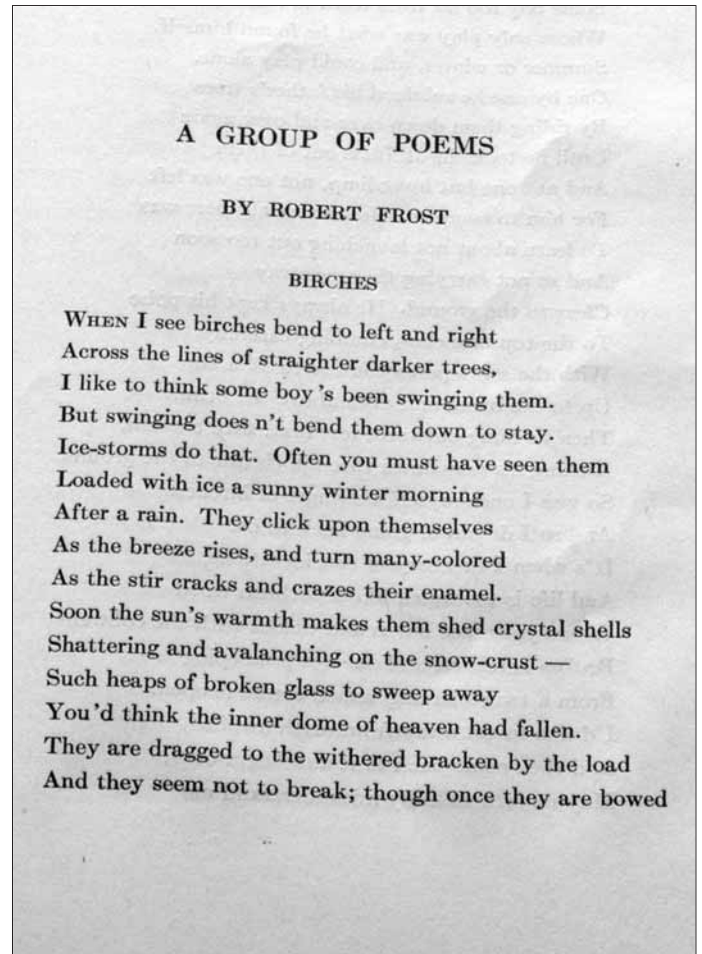


A GROUP OF POEMS

BY ROBERT FROST

BIRCHES

WHEN I see birches bend to left and right
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
I like to think some boy 's been swinging them.
But swinging does n't bend them down to stay.
Ice-storms do that. Often you must have seen them
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
After a rain. They click upon themselves
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust —
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.
They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load
And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed

"Birches" and "The Road Not Taken" appeared in the Atlantic Monthly *in August 1915.*

their capture of the idyllic English pastoral dream (real or imagined) that we look back to even now, most of a century later, this must be it."[47]

Four days later, Archduke Franz Ferdinand was shot at Sarajevo. A month later, German troops invaded Serbia, and the Russians mobilized.

Yet as the world collapsed around them, Frost and Thomas continued to enjoy their walks through the English countryside and their talks about poetry and life. Thomas wrote about one of their visits in August 1914:

> How easy it was to spend a morning or afternoon in walking over to his house, stopping to talk to whoever was about for a few minutes, and then strolling with my friend, nearly regardless of footpaths, in a long loop, so as to end either at his house or at my lodging.... If talk dwindled in the traversing of a big field, the pause at the gate or stile braced it again. Often we prolonged the pause, whether we actually sat or not, and we talked—of flowers, childhood, Shakespeare, women, England, the war—or we looked at the far horizon, which some dip or gap occasionally disclosed.[48]

Without question Thomas' affection was reciprocated by Frost. He told Amy Lowell that, "the closest I ever came in friendship to anyone in England or anywhere else in the world I think was with Edward Thomas.... We were together to the exclusion of every other person and interest all through 1914—1914 was our year. I never had, I never shall have another such year of friendship."[49]

Thomas was inching toward writing poetry. In May 1914, even before they spent the summer together, Thomas had written to Frost, "I wonder whether you can imagine me taking to verse. If you can I might get over the feeling that it is impossible..."[50] And on several of their summer visits, Frost encouraged Thomas to give it a try. As Frost would later put it, "I bantered, teased and bullied all the summer we were together.... All he had to do was put his poetry in a form that declared itself.... He saw it and was tempted. It was plain that he had wanted to be a poet all the years he had been writing about poets not worth his little finger."[51] Frost persuaded Thomas by reading aloud a passage from one of his prose works—showing him he had been writing poetry all along.

In his study of Thomas, Coombs confirms that Thomas did not begin seriously to write poetry until after he was urged to do so in 1914 by Frost.[52] But Thomas had surely considered the possibility earlier. Another friend of Thomas, Eleanor Farjeen, had suggested a year earlier that he try his hand at poetry.[53] Thomas later wrote a friend, "I had done no verses before, and did not expect to, and merely became nervous when I thought of

See ***FROST****, page 12*

FROST, *from page 11*

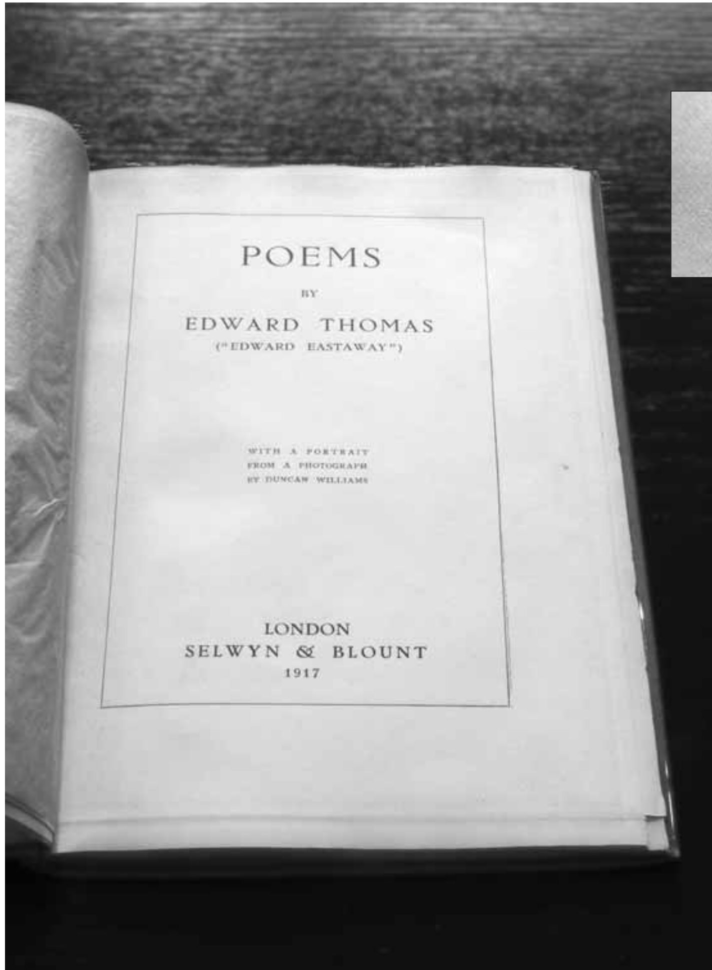
beginning. But when it came to beginning I slipped into it naturally, whatever the results."[54]

After the War started, Thomas did not immediately enter military service. He visited Frost several times during the fall of 1914, and during their walks, he agonized over whether to enlist. One of Frost's great poems—"The Road Not Taken"—grew out of these walks with Thomas. ("Two roads diverged in a yellow wood. . . .") Frost sent a draft of it, entitled "Two Roads," to Thomas in late April or May 1915,[55] and later described this poem as a satire on Thomas' indecision: "No matter which way he went he was always sorry he didn't go the other way."[56] As Street observes, time and familiarity have given "The Road Not Taken" new resonances. When one knows how it came to be written, "we are very close to the two men, their walking, and their characters."[57]

Several months passed before "The Road Not Taken" found its way into print. In August 1915, the *Atlantic Monthly* carried a review of *North of Boston* by David Garnett, who wrote that Frost "was destined to take a permanent place in American literature." Following the review, *Atlantic Monthly* published "A Group of Poems" by Frost—their first appearance anywhere. The group consisted of three poems: "Birches," "The Road Not Taken," and "The Sound of Trees." The first two of these rank among Frost's most popular.

"Birches," "The Road Not Taken," and "The Death of a Hired Man" soon after made their first book appearance in the *Anthology of Magazine Verse*, New York, 1915. (This anthology is also noteworthy for the appearance of Wallace Stevens' "Peter Quince at the Clavier.")

In the meantime,Thomas had taken Frost's suggestion. He wrote at least one poem, "November Sky," in November 1914.[58] Another, "Up in the Wind," was written in early December 1914. Others quickly followed. Thomas submitted several to London editors under the name "Edward Eastaway," but virtually all were rejected. Two appeared anonymously in an anthology edited by Thomas.



By this time, Frost and his family had decided to return to America. Frost wanted to publish his next volume of poetry in America, and needed to find a way to make a living. Also one may assume that he did not want his family to live in England under the shadow of the War. They set sail on February 13, 1915—a few days before the German naval blockade virtually cut off passenger travel across the Atlantic. One of the ships traveling in the same convoy was the Lusitania, sunk three months later by the Germans.

In April 1915 Rupert Brooke died of blood poisoning while serving in the Dardanelles campaign. Two months later, his posthumous volume, *1914 and Other Poems*, was published. Brooke was the first of the major English "War poets" to die in service. A week later, Julian Grenfell died of wounds. Charles Sorley was killed at Loos the following September.

Thomas continued to agonize over which road to take. He considered for a while the possibility of moving to America and working on a farm with Frost. He was 37 years old and under no obligation to serve in England's army. His doubts about what to do were magnified by fear that his courage might fail him under fire. But on July 14, 1915, he enlisted. While undergoing training in London, he continued to write. By the end of 1915, he had written 93 poems—having commenced only a year earlier.

TO
ROBERT FROST

Edward Thomas dedicated his Poems *to Frost.*

In 1916 a handful of Thomas' poems was privately printed by James Guthrie at the Pearl Street Press in a small booklet entitled *Six Poems* by Edward Eastaway. (Between 50 and 100 copies were distributed. It is now a very rare book.) A few of Thomas' poems began to appear in periodicals. In September 1916, Frost sent a handful to Harriet Monroe, for publication in *Poetry*. She published three of them in the February 1917 issue, using the name "Edward Eastaway."

The first publication to include a large gathering of Thomas' work was Gordon Bottomley's 1917 anthology, *An Annual of New Poetry*. It included 18 poems by "Edward Eastaway"—i.e. Thomas. One, entitled "Aspens," was Frost's favorite. Bottomley's annual also included six poems by Frost and another batch by Gibson. My

copy of the anthology is the one Bottomley presented to Eddie Marsh on March 27, 1917.

In late November 1916, Thomas had sent Frost a manuscript of the poems which he hoped to publish in his first book. He wrote that he had arranged it "in the nick of time" because his unit would soon be called up.[59] Again on January 12, 1917, Thomas wrote that he had just seen his publisher, who "thinks he can publish the verses whole as I sent them to you & he will wait a while in case he hears from you, which I don't expect."[60]

Thomas' unit was shipped to France in late January 1917. His rank was now second lieutenant in the artillery. One of the few books he took with him was Frost's newly-published *Mountain Interval*.

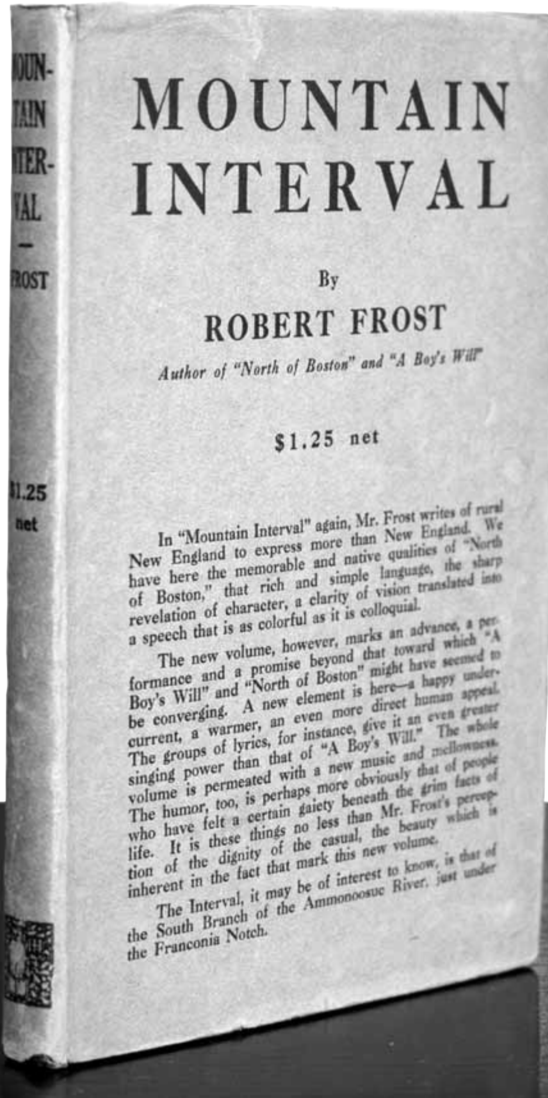
Frost wrote to Thomas on February 6, 1917, saying he had found a publisher for Thomas' poems in America, and wondering if Thomas had given his English publisher rights to world-wide publication. He also urged his friend to "throw off the pen-name and use his real name." Frost's letter caught up to Thomas in France. He replied in March saying it was too late to change publishers or pen-names; he "must stick to Edward Eastaway."[61] But, in fact he did make the change—identifying himself with both his real and pen names.

On April 9, 1917, Thomas was killed by a German shell at Arras. His collection (64 poems), entitled simply *Poems*, "by Edward Thomas ('Edward Eastaway')," appeared a few months later. Thomas had dedicated the book to Frost. A further volume, *Last Poems*, containing 71 poems, came out the next year, 1918.

In his *History of Modern Poetry*, David Perkins concluded that Thomas was the best of the Georgians and wrote that, "Of the poets who died in the War, he was, with Owen and Rosenberg, one of the great losses to literature."[62]

Frost later wrote an elegy to Thomas—"To E.T."—the only elegy he ever wrote:

> I meant, you meant, that nothing should remain
> Unsaid between us, brother, and this remained–
>
> And one thing more that was not then to say:
> The Victory for what it lost and gained.
> You went to meet the shell's embrace of fire
> On Vimy Ridge; and when you fell that day
> The war seemed over more for you than me,
> But now for me than you—the other way.



Frost's Mountain Interval *was one of the few books Edward Thomas took with him when his unit shipped to France.*

Frost also dedicated his own *Selected Poems* (1923) "To Helen Thomas, In Memory of Edward Thomas." He told Helen Thomas that "Edward was the bravest, best and dearest man he had known, and called him the only brother he had."[63]

Frost returned to America in February 1915 in a much different literary position than when he had left it 4 1/2 years earlier. His two collections—particularly the second—had established his reputation. "The Death of the Hired Man" had appeared in the *New Republic* two weeks before his arrival in New York. And *North of Boston* was about to be printed in its New York edition, and would soon reach the best seller list, eventually selling 20,000 copies.[64]

This latter event stirred up a row with Mrs. Nutt back in London, who held contract rights to *A Boy's Will* and the next four books. Frost, on the other hand, was irritated with her for failing to send him royalty payments, or even to render an accounting. In October 1915 he expressed the hope to his American publisher that one of the German bombs raining down on London might land on Mrs. Nutt's office. Finally, in April 1916, Frost sent her notice that he regarded her breach as having voided the contract. She threatened suit, and Frost at one time considered putting his farm in his wife's name "for protection."[65] But she never carried out the threat. Nutt's firm then went bankrupt in 1921. But even after that, the receivers claimed royalties from Frost's publications.

Having rejected the Nutt contract, Frost then brought out his third collection, *Mountain Interval*, in the United States. The book, published by Henry Holt, appeared in November 1916. Holt, it may be remembered, had published the American edition of *North of Boston* in 1915.

The first edition of *Mountain Interval* appeared in blue cloth, with a gray wrapper, and consisted of 4,000 copies. There were 33 poems, the first of which was Frost's rec-

*See **FROST**, page 14*

FROST, *from page 13*
ollection of Thomas, "The Road Not Taken." *Mountain Interval* also included the other two poems from the earlier *Atlantic Monthly* issue—"Birches," and "The Sound of the Trees" and also "The Cow in Apple Time," "Putting in the Seed," and "Out, Out __." This new collection was well received by the reviewers.

In January 1917 Frost began his teaching career as Professor of English at Amhurst. He was two months shy of 43 years old. With this step, he put his career as a poet temporarily on the back burner. During the remainder of the War he published only a few poems. We do not think of Frost as a "War Poet," but one of his poems—"Not to Keep"—was included in an anthology of *War Poems*, published by Yale in 1918.

Frost wrote about the places and people of New England—and they became the lens through which he saw and portrayed a larger world. His portrayals used the rhythms and language of common speech, rather than the more ornate, literary style of the Victorians or the Edwardians. Yet he wrote within a literary tradition, and this led to his dislike of the work of the Modernist poets. Frost thought they "played tennis without a net."

When his friend Sandburg challenged him once, saying "you can play a better game with the net down," Frost responded: "Sure, you can play a better game with the net down—and without the racket and balls—but it ain't tennis."[66]

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NOTES

[1] For the basic facts of Frost's life, I rely on Jeffrey Meyers' *Robert Frost*, Boston, 1996. For the three years during which Frost lived in England and published his first two books, I have depended most on a wonderfully-readable book by John Evangelist Walsh—*Into My Own, The English Years of Robert Frost*, New York, 1988. Also helpful is the recently-published volume of correspondence between Frost and his English friend, Edward Thomas—entitled *Elected Friends*, edited by Matthew Spencer, New York, 2004. The reader who wants more details and doesn't mind bias should consult Lawrance Thompson's three-volume biography, published from 1966 to 1976. *Robert Frost: The Early Years, 1874-1915*, N.Y., 1966; *Robert Frost: The Years of Triumph, 1915-1938*, N.Y., 1970; and *Robert Frost: The Later Years, 1938-1963*, N.Y., 1976. The second volume of this work won Thompson the Pulitzer Prize.

For bibliographical details, I found most helpful the catalogue compiled by Joan St. C. Crane, *Robert Frost - A Descriptive Catalogue of Books and Manuscripts in the Clifton Waller Barrett Library University of Virginia*, Charlottesville, 1974. Reading Barrett's introduction, in which he describes his "comprehensive assemblage of American literature from the beginnings of the Republic to the present day"—including "some 1,000 single-author collections"—produces mixed sensations of awe and envy.

[2] Meyers, *Robert Frost*, Boston, 1996, p. 1.

[3] I find it in the Great War poet Edmund Blunden's edited collection, *The Poems of William Collins*, London, 1929, p. 86, entitled "Ode, Written in the beginning of the Year 1746": "How sleep the Brave, we sink to Rest, By all their Country's wishes blest!"

[4] Meyers, p. 19.

[5] Meyers, p. 30.

[6] Crane, p. 4-5.

[7] *Id.* at ix.

[8] Meyers, p. 35.

[9] Meyers, p. 45-46.

[10] quoted in Meyers, p. 52.

[11] Meyers, p. 61.

[12] Crane, p. 191.

[13] Walsh, p. 63.

[14] Walsh, p. 71.

[15] Walsh, p. 72.

[16] Walsh, p. 30.

[17] Walsh, p. 34.

[18] Walsh, p. 34, quoting Thompson.

[19] Walsh, p. 40.

[20] Walsh, p. 81.

[21] Crane, p. 8-9.

[22] Meyer, p. 91.

[23] Walsh, 99-100.

[24] at p. 240.

[25] Walsh, 111-113.

[26] Meyer, 98.

[27] Crane, p. 5-14.

[28] Walsh, p. 41.

[29] Walsh, p. 48-49.

[30] Quoted in Walsh, p. 120.

[31] Walsh, p. 41.

[32] Walsh, p. 138.

[33] Quoted in Walsh, p. 149.

[34] Walsh, p. 125.

[35] Walsh, p. 158.

[36] Sean Street, *The Dymock Poets*, Bridgend, 1994, p. 19-21, 52-53, 76. The December 1914 issue of *New Directions* was notable for the appearance of five of Brooke's sonnets, the fifth of which was titled "The Soldier" ("If I should die, think only this of me….")

[37] Crane, p. 16-18.

[38] Crane, p. 18-19.

[39] *North of Boston*, p. 10.

[40] Street, p. 50.

[41] Meyers, p. 117.

[42] Street, p. 98.

[43] Meyer, p. 91.

[44] Meyers, p. 121.

[45] *Selected Letters of Robert Frost*, p. 217.

[46] Spencer, p. 16-25

[47] Street, p. 91-92.

[48] Spencer, p. 32-33.

[49] *Selected Letters of Robert Frost*, p. 220.

[50] Spencer, p. 10.

[51] Spencer, p. xx.

[52] Coombs, p. 11-12, 181.

[53] Street, p. 51.

[54] Coombs, p. 181.

[55] Spencer, p. 49.

[56] Meyers, p. 126.

[57] Street, p. 116.

[58] Spencer, p. 38, fn.

[59] Spencer, p. 161.

[60] Spencer, p. 169.

[61] Spencer, p. 172, 180.

[62] Perkins, p. 217, 220.

[63] Meyers, p. 126.

[64] Meyers, p. 133.

[65] Spencer, p. 139.

[66] Meyers, p. 81.

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Frost portrait from Amherst College Archives and Special Collections. All photos of books in the author's collection. Photo of Poetry Magazine *by the author. Other photos by Robert McCamant.*

Greer Allen Memorial

There will be a memorial service for former Caxtonian Greer Allen at Bond Chapel on the University of Chicago campus on Tuesday, November 8, 2005, at 2:30 PM. A reception follows.

Caxtonians Collect: Susan Jackson Keig

Twelfth in a series of interviews with members.

Interviewed by Robert McCamant

Susan Jackson Keig joined the Caxton Club in 1998, at a point when many of the organizations to which she had traditionally belonged (the Society of Typographic Arts, Artists Guild of Chicago, etc.) had fallen on hard times. She was sponsored by Bruce Beck, and seconded by Hayward Blake, both longtime associates in the book-design world. "The Caxton Club appealed to me because it has maintained its continuity over the years," she says.

Keig has been in publishing since 1945. She began as an art director for Science Research Associates. Since then, she has had clients from around the world: she did a set of books for the king of Saudi Arabia [he wanted a limited edition to explain the plans for his modernization of the city of Riyadh], for Buckminster Fuller [she produced an LP of one of his talks], for the Kennedy family [a keepsake of JFK's inaugural address].

She has won quite a few awards: in 2002, she was selected as a Fellow of the American Institute of Graphic Arts; this year, she was nominated for a lifetime achievement award by the Communal Studies Association; she has lectured at Yale, the Ringling School of Art, and the Art Institute of Chicago (not to mention the Caxton Club luncheons). Interestingly, she has also *created* many awards, such as the Clare Booth Luce medallion and certificate presented to Margaret Thatcher by the Heritage Foundation.

She has built a variety of collections over the years. "In my work, I'm an interpreter. Any time I have a project, I end up collecting materials which will help me to illustrate and explain my subject. Sometimes it ends up being books, sometimes photographs, sometimes objects—and sometimes all of those."

One subject has consumed her interest since the early 60s: the Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill, Kentucky. Her collection of Shaker items now exceeds 3,000 items, mainly of Pleasant Hill. It was one of 18 villages which had been established in the Eastern U.S., and one of the longest lasting: its last member died in 1923. She had grown up with it in a nearby county, and with furniture from the Village which her father had purchased in 1922. But in the 60s, a movement arose to try to preserve the Village and open it for the public. She immediately found a calling in working on interpretive material about the Village: sometimes printed materials, sometimes exhibits. She has collaborated on two books about the Village: *Pleasant Hill and Its Shakers*, with Thomas D. Clark, and *The Gift of Pleasant Hill* with photographer James Archambeault. She has consulted on exhibits in Munich, Bath, and Japan. An exhibit of her photographs just closed at the University of Kentucky Library, and will run November 15-February 5 at the gallery of Scott Foresman in Glenview. Keig will give a gallery talk on November 16 at noon.

In a *Caxtonian* article in December, 2001, Keig explained why the Shakers so resonated with her design background. "By coincidence, Ray Pearson [of the Institute of Design]…and I both became interested in collecting Shaker, especially photographs…. We found a parallel in the functional design of the Shakers and the mantra 'form follows function' of the German school of design, founded over 80 years ago, known as the Bauhaus."

"Of all the experiments in communal living in the settling of America," Keig continued, "the Shakers were the most successful, productive, and longest-lived. For those who belong to this religious sect one of the major tenets is that its members live, literally, in heaven on earth. This means creating a world that is orderly, clean, and free of distration. Every building they erect, every object they make—down to its shape, color, and function—is designed to be heavenly. As the Trappist monk and scholar Thomas Merton said, 'The peculiar grace of a Shaker chair is due to the fact that it was built by someone capable of believing that an angel might come down and sit on it.' In Shaker villages, perhaps more than in any other place, God was in the details, and the details had to be perfect."

Keig cannot think of any object she wanted to collect which escaped her. "I usually get in at the beginning on things, when the selection is best," she admits. When asked what book she would take to a desert island, she says a blank one: "I'd like to take time to record the people I've known and the places I've seen."

Among the many things Club members have to thank this proud Kentuckian for is the fact that bourbon is now one of the libations available at our dinner meetings.

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Bookmarks…

Luncheon Program—*Note Date Change!*
November 4, 2005
Jerry Meyer
"From Ruskinian Medievalism to Beardsley Decadence: The Influence of William Morris' Arts and Crafts Movement on English Book Design and Illustration"

Caxtonian Jerry Meyer, a retired Art History Professor and administrator at Northern Illinois University, will present a slide lecture including Kelmscott press productions (Chaucer, the *Glittering Plain*, etc., with designs by Morris and Burne-Jones), Owen Jones' 1846 homage to Medieval book illumination, *Gray's Elegy*, C.R. Ashbee's Essex House production of Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress* (1899), Herbert Granville Fell's designs for *The Book of Job* (1896), Willy Pogany's designs for Wagner's *Tannhauser* (1911), Charles Ricketts' *Cupid and Psyche* (1901), Walter Crane's *Queen Summer* (1880s), Bernard Sleigh's designs for Amy Mark's *Sea King's Daughter* (1895), Aubrey Beardsley's profusely illustrated Le *Morte d'Arthur* (1893 & 1927).

Jerry is near publication on a book on the uses of religious images in 20th Century Art and will bring along a tantalizing selection of books from his personal collection. An important meeting.

Dinner Program
November 16, 2005
Samuel B. Ellenport
"The Economics of Desire: A History of the Club Bindery"

The Club Bindery—including European binders of great reputation and skill—was formed at the turn of the nineeteenth century by members of the Grolier Club to produce book bindings to meet the high standards achieved elsewhere in the world, but not yet in America. The Club binders did so for members of the Grolier Club as well as for outside clients. The story of this bindery will be traced through numerous slides of bindings, exquisite in their design and execution. Yet despite the incredible workmanship and supportive clientele, the bindery failed in New York and failed again in its reincarnation as the Rowfant Club Bindery in Cleveland. As a model of a hand-bindery, the failure of The Club Bindery is worth looking into as a way to explore and understand the enormous changes in the way books were bound by hand in the 20th century. Sam Ellenport, proprietor of Boston's Harcourt Bindery, will bring his combined skills as historian and binder to an exciting evening.

Beyond November…

DECEMBER LUNCHEON: "This Book Changed My Life" is the topic for the December 9th Luncheon. Panelists include: Tom Joyce, Bill Mulliken, Paul Ruxin, Junie Sinson and Karen Skubish.

DECEMBER DINNER: Wednesday, December 21, our annual Holiday Revels: libations, food, music, magic, and a chance to bid on treasures donated by fellow members. Contact Dorothy Sinson at 630-832-7438 for donation information or with questions.

JANUARY LUNCHEON: January 13, Caxtonian Vincent Golden, curator of newspapers and periodicals at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts speaks. His talk: "The Sorry State of Newspaper Survival / The Attack of the 50 Foot Dumpster."

JANUARY DINNER: On January 18, Caxtonian Tony Batko, former Co-Chair of the Chicago Public Library Group, a coalition that stopped the City from putting the main library in an abandoned department store, will tell the inside story of library intrigue in the 1980s.

Collectors and Their Collections: Sunday, December 11, Caxtonian Helen Sclair will share her remarkable collection of death-industry and cemetary-related books and ephemera. Two very small groups will be arranged for noon and 2 pm on that day. As always, advance reservations are requested. Please call the Club at 312-255-3710 to hold your spot. An attendance fee of $25 will be charged.

All luncheon and dinner meetings, unless otherwise noted, are held in the Mid-Day Club, 56th floor of BankOne, Madison and Clark, Chicago. Luncheon: buffet opens at 11:30; program 12:30-1:30. Dinner meetings: spirits at 5 pm, dinner at 6 pm, lecture at 7:30 pm. For reservations call 312-255-3710 or email caxtonclub@newberry.org. Members and guests: Lunch $25, Dinner $45. Discount parking available for evening meetings, with a stamped ticket, at Standard Self-Park, 172 W. Madison. Call Steve Masello at 847-905-2247 if you need a ride or can offer one.