



DELPHI
CLASSICS

George Moses Horton
Complete Works

DELPHI POETS SERIES

D E L P H I P O E T S S E R I E S

George Moses Horton

(c. 1798-c. 1883)



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A handwritten signature of George M. Horton in cursive script. The signature is written in dark ink and is centered on the page.

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Version 1

DELPHI POETS SERIES

George Moses Horton



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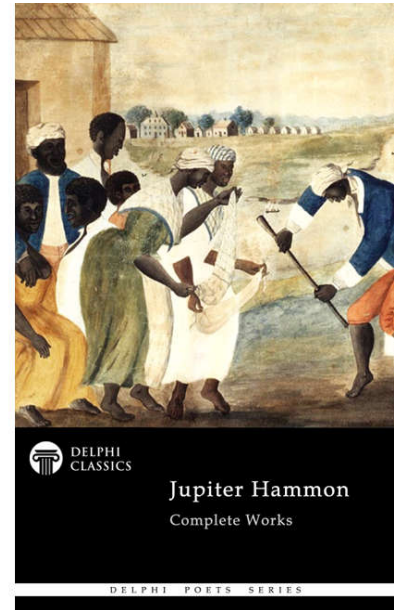
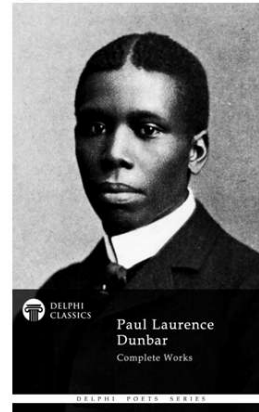
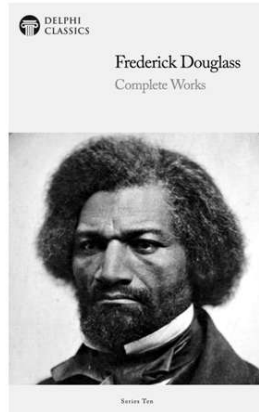
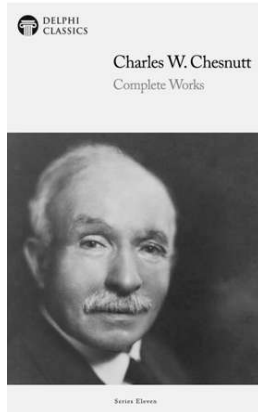
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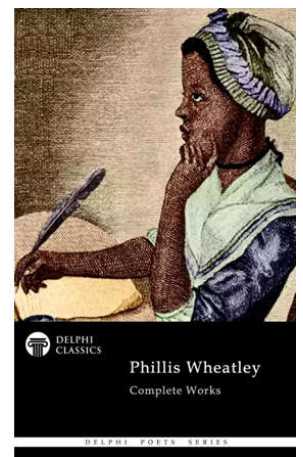
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NOTE



When reading poetry on an eReader, it is advisable to use a small font size and landscape mode, which will allow the lines of poetry to display correctly.

The Life and Poetry of George Moses Horton



Jackson, Northampton County, North Carolina — George Moses Horton was born into slavery on a plantation in Northampton County, North Carolina.



In 1999, North Carolina placed a historic marker, the first in the state for an African American, near the farm where Horton lived.

Brief Introduction: George Moses Horton



The first African-American author to be published in the United States, George Moses Horton, the “Slave Poet”, was born into slavery on William Horton’s tobacco plantation in c. 1798 in Northampton County, North Carolina. He was the sixth of ten children and the names of his parents are unknown. When he was six years old, his slave owner relocated his family and the people he held in slavery to a farm in Chatham County, North Carolina, where Horton lived until the end of the Civil War. In 1814 William Horton gave the younger enslaved people as property to his relative James Horton.

The young George reportedly developed an interest in learning to read and write by listening to the Bible read aloud and the hymns he heard. He learned to read and write based on what he was hearing during revival meetings, which he referred to as his “reading lessons.” He was soon compiling pieces based on the verses that he remembered from the King James Version of the Bible. In c. 1817, he began making a ten-mile trip north to Chapel Hill in order to sell fruits and farm products for his master. While there, Horton employed his gift for composing elegant love poems for the University of North Carolina students, selling them for 25 cents or more. These students took an interest in Horton, impressed by his ability to compose verses and his desire for greater knowledge. They provided him several books, including *Murray’s English Grammar and Its Accordant Branches*, Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary* in miniature, Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Thompson’s *Seasons*, as well as parts of Homer’s *Iliad* and Virgil’s *Aeneid*.

Caroline Lee Hentz (1800-1856), a celebrated author and playwright, also took an interest in Horton, helping him to improve his verses. Teaching slaves to read and write was legal in North Carolina until 1836, when restrictions were imposed due to fears of slave revolts. Hentz was highly influential in having Horton’s poems “Liberty and Slavery” and “Slavery” published in the *Lancaster Gazette* in April of 1828, for which she provided an introductory note. In June of the same year, she sent a third Horton poem, “On Poetry and Musick” to be also published by the *Gazette*. The three poems were renamed and included in Horton’s first collection, *The Hope of Liberty*, which appeared in 1829. Now that he was somewhat established as a poet, Horton attempted to earn enough money from his poetry to purchase his freedom. Alas, he was not successful.

Horton was the first Southern Black to publish literature. By 1828 a number of newspapers in North Carolina and beyond were discussing his verse. Though he knew how to read, he published the book before he had learned how to write. As he recalled, “I fell to work in my head, and composed several undigested pieces.” After Horton’s first poem was published in the *Lancaster, Massachusetts, Gazette*, his works were published in other newspapers, such as the *Register* in Raleigh, North Carolina, and *Freedom’s Journal* in New York City. His poetic style was typical of contemporary European poetry and was similar to the poems written by his white contemporaries, which is a reflection of his reading and his work for commission. He composed both sonnets and ballads. His earlier works focused on his life in slavery. Such topics, however, were more generalised and not wholly based on his personal experience. He referred to his life on the “vile accursed earth” and the “drudg’ry, pain, and toil” of life, as well as his oppression “because my skin is black”.

Sometime in the 1830's, he informally married (legal marriages were not permitted) Martha Snipes, an enslaved woman owned by Franklin Snipes in Chatham County. The couple went on to have two children, Free and Rhody. Little else is known about the family. On two occasions, Horton sought the help of others to secure his freedom. In 1844 he wrote a letter to the well-known abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison and in 1852 he wrote another letter to Horace Greeley, the editor of the *New York Daily Tribune*, including a poem titled "A Poet's Feeble Petition", expressing his longing for freedom. Neither letter reached their recipient due to the messenger entrusted by Horton not passing them along and discarding them.

In c. 1858, at the age of sixty, Horton described himself as "Belonging to Hal Horton living now in Chatham County". In 1865, when Union troops arrived in his area, following the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, they liberated all the slaves in the states that had seceded. Horton befriended a young Union officer with that group, William H. S. Banks, who was greatly impressed with his literary achievements. Horton left Chapel Hill with Banks, traveling to Philadelphia in the free state of Pennsylvania.

With the end of the Civil War, Horton had finally become a free man. He continued to write poetry for local newspapers. His poem "Forbidden to Ride on the Street Cars" expressed his disappointment in the unjust treatment of Blacks after emancipation. Arriving in Philadelphia before the summer of 1866, he wrote Sunday school stories on behalf of friends that lived in the city. Still disappointed by the racial discrimination he encountered in Philadelphia, Horton emigrated to Bexley, Liberia, arriving on 7 January 1867. This is the last known reference to the poet. While later death dates are found in some recent publications, his death location, date and burial are unknown. Some historians claim he later returned to Philadelphia.

He was said to be an admirer of Byron, whose poetry he used as a model. His first collection, *The Hope of Liberty* (1829), was focused on the issues of slavery and bondage. He did not gain enough in sales from that book to purchase his freedom. In 1845, Horton published another book of poetry, *The Poetical Works of George M. Horton, The Colored Bard of North-Carolina, To Which Is Prefixed The Life of the Author, Written by Himself*. Newspapers took notice again in December to January 1849-1850, and advertisements for the book were printed in a Hillsborough newspaper from 1852 into 1853. Horton was given direct credit for some poems published in newspapers in 1857 and 1858. A short review of his last book, *Naked Genius*, appeared in the *Raleigh Daily Progress* on 31 August 1865. His later works, especially those written after his emancipation, expressed rural and pastoral themes. Like other early Black American writers, such as Jupiter Hammon and Phillis Wheatley, Horton was deeply influenced by the Bible and African-American religion.

His three volumes of poetry cover a wide range of subjects in a variety of styles and tones. Horton's poetry displays a keen ear for rhythm and rhyme and a thorough understanding of human nature. His poems explore politics, faith and love, while celebrating the rural beauty of Chatham County, the home of the plantation on which he spent much of his life. Nonetheless, the strongest and most compelling voice found in his verses must be that of the slave, who for sixty-eight years toiled in a white world, whose culture he longed to share. Throughout his life, Horton had struggled for his freedom, composing his poetry for a single purpose, never wavering in this pursuit. Although his poetry failed to bring him freedom or profit, his enduring struggle and the beauty of his art have secured his place in the history of American

literature, elevating the status of a black poet in a manner that was unprecedented for his time.



Caroline Lee Hentz, c. 1852, an American novelist, most noted for her defences of slavery and opposition to the abolitionist movement. She supported Horton in his early writing.



Portrait of Phillis Wheatley in 'Revue des colonies', 1837

By the President of the United States of America:
A Proclamation.

Whereas, on the twenty-second day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-two, a proclamation was issued by the President of the United States, containing, among other things, the following, to wit:

"That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward and forever free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do such acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom.

"That the Executive will, on the first day

Abraham Lincoln issued the 'Emancipation Proclamation' on 1 January 1863, as the nation approached its third year of civil war.



A Philadelphia Street Car, which inspired one of Horton's most celebrated verses, c. 1880



Grand Bassa County, in the west-central area of Liberia, c. 1900. In later years Horton emigrated to Liberia.

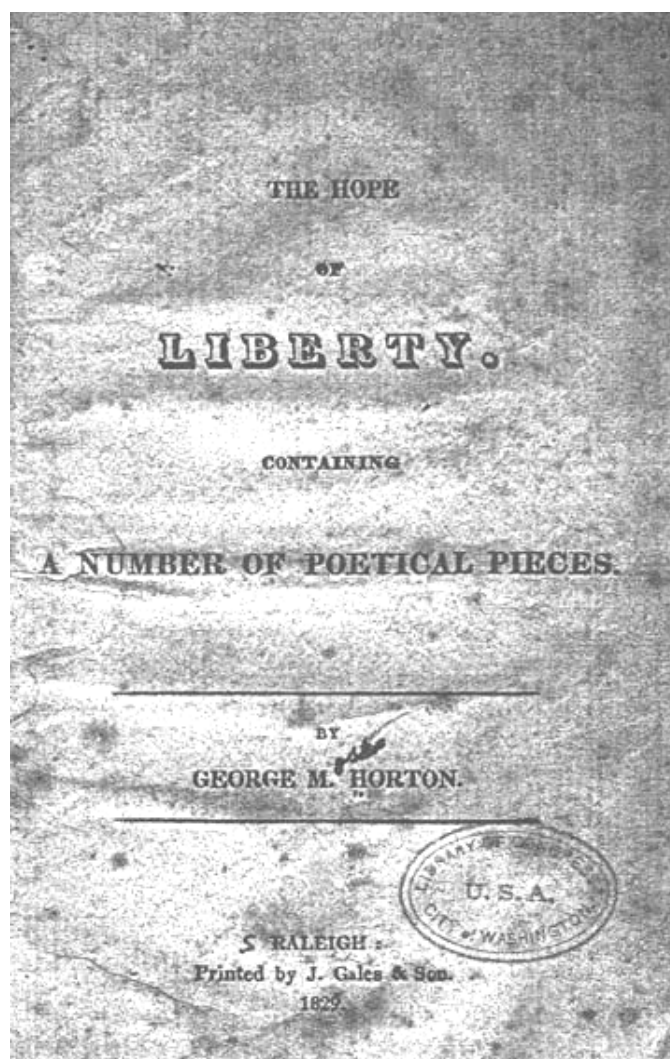
The Hope of Liberty (1829)



OR, POEMS BY A SLAVE

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The first edition's title page

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