

Payne, Anne Blackwell ^[1]

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By Pauline Worthy, 1994

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Anne Blackwell Payne, poet, was the daughter of Charles M. and Margaret Justice Sparrow Payne. Anne, called "Annie" until she grew up, was born in Concord, where her father was a Presbyterian minister. When his daughter was six months old, Dr. Payne accepted a call to the First Presbyterian Church of Washington, N.C., where both he and his wife had relatives. Anne Payne's roots were so deep in Washington that she was never reconciled to the fact that her actual birth had occurred in Concord.

After attending local schools Anne was sent to [Flora MacDonald College](#) ^[2], a Presbyterian institution in Red Springs. Two years later she returned to Washington to teach in the new graded schools and to be a companion to her mother, now a widow. Following her mother's death Anne went to New York, where she lived for years with a friend from [Wilmington](#) ^[3], [Kathryn Worth](#) ^[4]. (Kathryn eventually became a successful writer of teenage novels, including [The Middle Button](#) ^[5], [They Loved to Laugh](#) ^[6], and others.)

Anne Payne had been writing verse all her life. At [Columbia University](#) ^[7] she undertook the serious study of poetry—its history, structure, and style. She enjoyed her work and her contacts with John Erskine, Carl Van Doren, and Horace Gregory. Particularly she profited from her study in craftsmanship with [Joseph Auslander](#) ^[8], [Pulitzer Prize](#) ^[9]–winning poet in the twenties. Under his tutelage she became adept in the art of song and sonnet.

She joined the Writer's Club at Columbia as well as the [Poetry Society of America](#) ^[10], through which she won several awards. Many periodicals bought her poetry, including *Century Magazine*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *The Youths' Companion*, *Commonweal*, *Living Church*, and *Contemporary Verse* ^[11], *The Boston Herald* ^[12], *New York Herald*, and *New York Times* ^[13] provided steady markets, and for more than a quarter of a century her poems were seen frequently on the editorial page of the *New York Times*.

In 1930 [The University of North Carolina Press](#) ^[14] published *Released* ^[15], by Anne Blackwell Payne. This was the first book of poetry brought out by that press, and it was widely and favorably reviewed. Miss Payne's gentle, gracious, and delightful personality now became better known in her native state. Although she wrote prolifically for thirty-odd years after *Released* appeared, no second volume was ever published since books of poetry are notoriously poor money-makers.

Anne Blackwell Payne was widely anthologized, however, particularly in collections of poetry for children, as she had a gift for communicating with young people. She wrote much of this verse for her niece and nephew, Mary and Tim, the children of her brother, Thomas Sparrow Payne of Washington. For many years she spent her summers at Thomas's home on the Pamlico River. During World War II Anne left New York and went to live in Wilmington, where she ran a library for the [Federal Housing Administration](#) ^[16].

When she was invited to make her home with her double first cousin, Dr. Thomas Sparrow, she moved to [Charlotte](#) ^[17], where Sparrow was a prominent surgeon. As his hostess-housekeeper she lived in Charlotte for some years before her death there. She was buried in [Oakdale Cemetery](#) ^[18], [Washington](#) ^[19].

References:

Greensboro Daily News, 18 May 1930

North Carolina Authors: A Selective Handbook (1952)

Raleigh News and Observer, 29 May 1927, 17 Nov. 1929, 18 May 1930

Additional Resources:

Anne Blackwell Payne Papers: http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/p/Payne,Anne_Blackwell.html ^[20]

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