

## Horton, George Moses <sup>[1]</sup>

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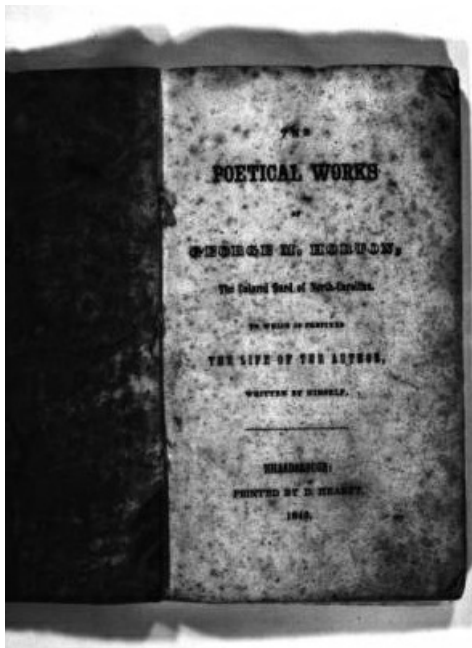


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## Horton, George Moses

by Richard Walser, 1988

a. 1797–ca. 1883

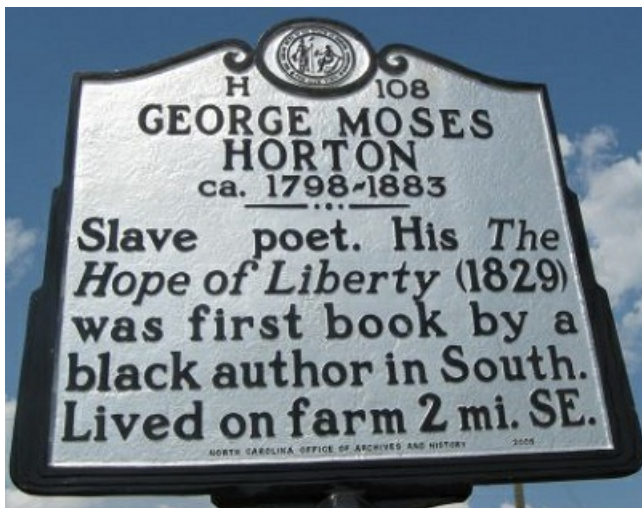


Work by George Moses Horton. Image courtesy of Digital North Carolina Collection Photographic Archives, UNC Libraries.

<sup>[2]</sup>George Moses Horton, poet, was born in [Northampton County](#) <sup>[3]</sup>, the property of William Horton who also owned his mother, his five older half sisters, and his younger brother and three sisters. As a child, he moved with his master to [Chatham County](#) <sup>[4]</sup>, taught himself to read, and began composing in his head a series of stanzas based on the rhythms in [Wesley hymns](#) <sup>[5]</sup>. In 1814 he was given to William's son James, at whose death in 1843 he passed to James's son Hall.

By the time he was twenty, George Moses Horton had begun visiting the campus of [The University of North Carolina](#) <sup>[6]</sup> eight miles away. There he sold students acrostics on the names of their sweethearts at twenty-five, fifty, and seventy-five cents. For several decades he "bought his time" from his masters through the sale of his poems and through wages collected as a campus laborer. [Caroline Lee Hentz](#) <sup>[7]</sup>, novelist and professor's wife, encouraged him; his first printed poem, "Liberty and Slavery," appeared in Mrs. Hentz's hometown Massachusetts newspaper, the *Lancaster Gazette*, on 8 Apr. 1829. Soon plans were made to purchase his freedom and transport him to Liberia. To raise funds, Horton's *The Hope of Liberty* <sup>[8]</sup>, the first book published in the South by a black man, came later that year from the press of Raleigh's liberal journalist Joseph Gales, but profits were inconsiderable and the plans were dropped. From time to time, Horton won the admiration and support of such men as Governor [John Owen](#) <sup>[9]</sup>, presidents [Joseph Caldwell](#) <sup>[10]</sup> and [David L. Swain](#) <sup>[11]</sup> of The University of North Carolina, and newspapermen William Lloyd Garrison and Horace Greeley.

In 1845 [Dennis Heartt](#) <sup>[12]</sup> of the *Hillsborough Recorder* brought out *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* <sup>[13]</sup>. Seldom was Horton without a manuscript for which he was gathering subscriptions from admiring students and friends. In April 1865 he attached himself to Captain Will H. S. Banks, and thereafter followed Banks's Michigan cavalry unit to Lexington and Concord.



North Carolina Highway Historical Marker for George Moses Horton

[14]Banks sponsored Horton's third book, *Naked Genius*, published several months later from the press of William B. Smith in Raleigh.

Horton's last years were spent in Philadelphia writing Sunday school stories and working for old North Carolina friends who lived in the city. Details of his death are unrecorded. Through Horton's unhappy marriage to a slave of Franklin Snipes, he was the father of a son Free and a daughter Rhody, both of whom bore their mother's name. Horton's poems are traditional in vocabulary and style. His academic imitations and the love poems he wrote for student sale are less appealing than the rural pieces and those on slavery. His poetic protests of his status are the first ever written by a slave in America.

#### Educator Resources:

Grade 8: George Moses Horton. North Carolina Civic Education Consortium. <http://civics.sites.unc.edu/files/2012/05/GeorgeMosesHorton.pdf> [15]

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#### References:

W. Edward Farrison, "George Moses Horton: Poet for Freedom," *CLA Journal* (March 1971)

Richard Walser, *The Black Poet* (1966).

#### Additional Resources:

The George Moses Horton Project. <http://chathamarts.org/horton/> [16]

Resources on George Moses Horton at LEARN NC. <http://www.learnnc.org/search?area=&phrase=George+Moses+Horton> [17]

"Who was George Moses Horton?" State Archives of North Carolina. <http://exhibits.archives.ncdcr.gov/educationalresources/georgehorton.html> [18] (accessed November 1, 2013).

Slavery and the Making of the University. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/exhibits/slavery/horton.html> [19]

"George Moses Horton" at the North Carolina Highway Historical Markers Project. <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?sp=Markers&k=Markers&sv=H-108> [14]

Poems by George Moses Horton at Poets.org. <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/16645> [14]

Harris, Trudier. "African American Protest Poetry." Freedom's Story, TeacherServe. National Humanities Center. <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1917beyond/essays/aaprotestpoetry.htm> [20] (accessed March 15, 2012).

Horton, George Moses. 1837. *Poems by a slave* [21]. 2nd ed. Philadelphia : [s.n.].

1999. George Moses Horton: Documentary Resources Available at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/exhibits/horton/index.html> [22]

Sherman, Joan R., ed. 1997. *The black bard of North Carolina: George Moses Horton and his poetry* [23]. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

"George Horton, The Slave Poet." *The University Magazine* (University of North Carolina) 20/7, no. 4 (May 1888). 229-232. <https://archive.org/stream/northcarolinauni18871888#page/228/mode/2up> [24] (accessed March 14, 2014).

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North Carolina Highway Historical Marker Program. "Marker H-108." Photograph. Raleigh, 1999. <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?sp=Markers&k=Markers&sv=H-108> [14]. (accessed March 15, 2012).

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