

by Donald Tongue
Directed by Matthew Cahoon

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A Timeline of Robert Frost's Life



Robert and Elinor Frost at Plymouth, New Hampshire, 1911, < <http://www.frostfriends.org/chronology.html>>



J.J. Lanke's frontispiece to *West-Running Brook*. http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/a_f/frost/exhibit.htm

- 1874 Born March 26, San Francisco, CA
- 1885 Father Will Frost dies; family returns to Lawrence, MA
- 1890 Writes his first poem "La Noche Triste"
- 1892 Graduates from Lawrence High School
- 1892 Enters Dartmouth, leaves before end of first term
- 1894 First poem published: "My Butterfly: An Elegy"
- 1895 Marries Elinor White in Lawrence
- 1896 First child, son Elliott born
- 1897 Enters Harvard University
- 1899 Leaves Harvard, returns to Lawrence
- 1899 Second child, daughter Lesley born
- 1900 Son Elliott dies at age 4
Family moves to farm in Derry, NH
Frost's mother, Isabelle, dies of cancer
- 1902 Third child, son Carol born
- 1903 Fourth child, daughter Irma born
- 1905 Fifth child, daughter Marjorie born
- 1906 Accepts a teaching position at Pinkerton Academy
- 1907 Sixth child, Elinor Bettina born, dies within days
- 1911 Sells Derry Farm, moves to Plymouth, NH
- 1912 Moves to England
- 1913 First book of poetry, *A Boy's Will*, published
- 1914 Second book, *North of Boston*, published
- 1915 Returns to the US, buys farm in Franconia, NH
- 1920 Moves to Shaftsbury, Vermont
- 1923 *Selected Poems* and *New Hampshire* are published
- 1924 Awarded Pulitzer Prize for *New Hampshire*
- 1931 Awarded second Pulitzer Prize for *Collected Poems*
- 1934 Daughter Marjorie dies following childbirth
- 1937 Awarded third Pulitzer Prize for *A Further Range*
- 1938 Wife Elinor dies of a heart attack
- 1940 Son Carol dies of suicide
- 1941 Buys home in Cambridge, MA
- 1943 Awarded fourth Pulitzer Prize for *A Witness Tree*
- 1963 Dies January 29 in Boston, MA

Biography of ROBERT FROST

Robert Lee Frost was born in San Francisco on March 26, 1874 to Isabelle Moodie, a Scottish schoolteacher, and William Prescott Frost, Jr. Frost's family lived in California until his father died when he was just eleven. He moved with his mother and sister to Lawrence, Massachusetts to live with his paternal grandfather.

In 1892, Frost graduated from high school and attended Dartmouth College and was a member of the Theta Delta Chi fraternity. While attending college, Frost's first poem, "My Butterfly: An Elegy", was published in the New York Independent, which earned him \$15. He had five poems published privately in 1894.

In 1895, Frost married former schoolmate Elinor White; they had six children. Frost became a teacher and continued publishing his poems in magazines to support his family. From 1897 to 1899, Frost attended Harvard University, but failed to receive a degree. In 1900, the couple moved to Derry, New Hampshire, where Frost worked as a cobbler, farmer and teacher at Pinkerton Academy and a state



Frost and his family at the farm. <http://hrsbstaff.ednet.ns.ca/engramja/projects&evals/sem2_mag1/chantellemag/ryannemag/ryannemag/PWK_ryanne/index.htm>

normal school in Plymouth.

The couple grew tired of their farm life. Robert wanted to move to Vancouver and Elinor to England. In 1912 the couple sold their farm and moved to the Gloucestershire village of Dymock, in England, where Robert became a full-time poet. The next year, *A Boy's Will* was published. The book received international fame and contains many of Frost's best-known poems: "Mending Wall," "The Death of the Hired Man," "Home Burial," "After Apple-Picking," and "The Wood-Pile." While in England, Frost made notable contacts with fellow poets Ezra Pound (who gave Frost his first favorable review by an American), T.E. Hulme and Edward Thomas.

Frost returned to America in 1915 and bought a farm in Franconia, New Hampshire. From 1916 to 1938, Frost worked as an English professor at Amherst College, furthering his career in writing, teaching and lecturing. He encouraged his students to bring the sound of man to their writings. Also in 1916, Frost was made a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters and published his third collection of verse, *Mountain Interval*.

In 1920, Frost purchased a farm in



Robert Frost writing, circa 1915. <<http://www.thehistorybluff.com/?p=2011>>

South Shaftsbury, Vermont. Over the course of fourteen years (1934-1948), Frost experienced a string of family tragedies that included the death of his daughter Marjorie, the suicide of his son Carol, the death of his wife Elinor, and the commitment of his daughter Irma to a mental institution where she would spend the last twenty years of her life. He suffered from long bouts of depression and continual self-doubt. After the death of his wife, he employed Kay Morrison, to whom he became strongly attracted. One of his finest love poems, *A Witness Tree*, was composed for her.

During the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy in 1961, Frost recited one of his poems, "The Gift Outright." He also represented the United States on several other official missions.

Robert Lee Frost died on January 29, 1963 and is buried in the Old Bennington Cemetery in Bennington, Vermont.

A Note from the **PLAYWRIGHT**

Writing Historical Fiction.

To many, the phrase, historical fiction, may seem like a contradiction in terms. When creating a work of fiction, the story, characters, and scenes are only limited by the author's imagination. So how does a writer create a work of fiction based on the lives of historic figures? The first step is research.

Before I started writing, *My Neighbor, the Poet* I sought out a number of resources to learn as much I could about Robert Frost. I read biographies, family letters and journals. I visited the Robert Frost Farm museum and took the tour. I met with a local historian and attended a lecture that focused on the time the Frost family lived in Derry, NH. And I discovered the poet's poems provide wonderful insights and images of the family's experiences on the farm.

When the time came to start writing the play, I had fully familiarized myself with the characters and the moments I wanted to dramatize. The research materials provided the puzzle pieces I needed to construct my play with informed imagination.

Ultimately, a theatrical production needs to tell a story that an audience finds interesting. If I have done my job, as a playwright, you will become interested in the characters and want to know what happens to them. There will be conflicts between the characters and you will wonder how it will be resolved. You will observe a change in some characters, brought on by the experiences they encounter in the story. In the end, you will have learned something about Robert Frost and his poetry, and, I hope, you will have enjoyed watching the play as much as I have enjoyed writing it.

- Donald Tongue



The Robert Frost Farm, Derry, NH. www.robertfrostfarm.com

“No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader. No surprise for the writer, no surprise for the reader. For me the initial delight is in the surprise of remembering something I didn’t know I knew. I am in a place, in a situation, as if I had materialized from cloud or risen out of the ground. There is a glad recognition of the long lost and the rest follows.”

- Robert Frost, The Figure a Poem Makes

My Neighbor, the Poet Robert Frost in Derry, NH

by Donald Tongue
Directed by Matthew Cahoon

Cast of Characters

Hank Lee.....Joel Breen
Lesley Frost.....Donna Goldfarb
Robert Frost.....Justin Fredenburg
Elinor Frost.....Carey Cahoon

Time: 1900 – 1905 and 1964

Place: The Robert Frost Farm, Derry, New Hampshire

Scene 1	1964, Morning
Scene 2	November 1900
Scene 3	1964, Later the same morning
Scene 4	May 1904
Scene 5	1964, The same afternoon
Scene 6	December 24, 1905
Scene 7	1964, Later the same afternoon

My Neighbor, the Poet features the full text of the following Robert Frost poems:

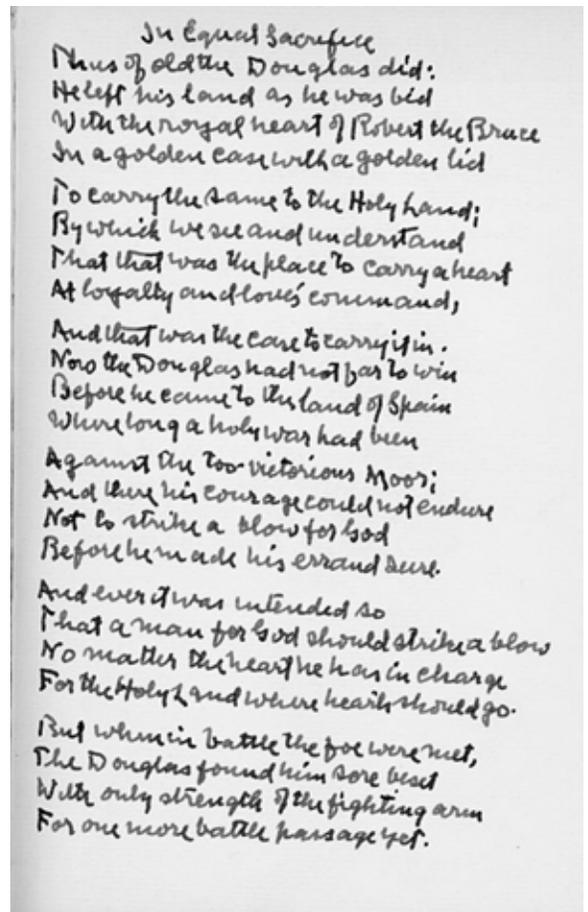
- "Desert Places" (1936)
- "Flower-Gathering" (1915)
- "To the Thawing Wind" (1913)
- "A Tuft of Flowers" (1915)

In addition, the following poems are alluded to in the play.

- "My Butterfly" (1913)
- "Home Burial" (1915)
- "Mending Wall" (1915)
- "Mowing" (1913)
- "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" (1922)
- "Reluctance" (1913)

Support for this production is provided by
The Parker Nelson Foundation.

For more information about theatre KAPOW,
please visit www.tKAPOW.com.



Frost's manuscript of a poem from A Boy's Will (1915)
<http://www2.lib.virginia.edu/exhibits/frost/english/images/willms1.jpg>

Study QUESTIONS

General Discussion:

- 1) What would it be like to live on an isolated farm in 1900? What do you think Derry, NH was like in 1900?
- 2) Why do you think Frost chooses the subjects and settings that he does? What does the rural setting provide for Frost that a more urban one would not? In what way is this setting appropriate for the plea or emotions Frost is attempting to express in his poetry?
- 3) Did learning more about Frost's personal life change the way you view his poetry?
- 4) How does the familiarity of Frost's poems affect an analysis of their meaning? Is it better or worse that they are well-known?

The Poetry Used in the Play:

- 1) The full text of four poems is used in the play while a number of other poems are alluded to. What is allusion? In what ways did the playwright use allusion to tell the story of the play? How did this enhance or detract from your enjoyment of the play and the poetry?
- 2) The four poems used in the play are written in different forms? How are they different? How are they similar? In what ways does Frost use poetic form in unusual ways?
- 3) The first scene between Robert and Einor in the play is based in part on Frost's poem "Home Burial." The theme of loss recurs in a number of

Frost's poems. Compare the ways in which loss is portrayed in these poems. How do Frost's characters deal with their situations? How do you think Frost's personal life influenced his poetry?

4) One of Frost's most famous poems, "Mending Wall" is also alluded to in the play. What is ironic about the speaker's statements concerning his neighbor's opinion of wall building in the poem? What is the effect of simple language in the poem? Based on this poem and what you learned in the play, how would you characterize Frost's relationships with his neighbors?

5) Frost was very meticulous when it came to rhyme and meter. What is the rhyme scheme of "The Tuft of Flowers?" What is the meter used in this poem? How do rhyme and meter affect your enjoyment of the poem? Do you think they affect the poem's meaning?

The Play:

- 1) What did you like or dislike about the form of the play? Did Lesley's stories help you to understand anything about Frost as a poet?
- 2) How did hearing Frost's poems recited by the actors differ from reading the poems in a book? How does reading the poems aloud affect their rhythm? How does hearing them read aloud affect your understanding of their meaning?
- 3) What do you think the key conflicts of the play are? Are these conflicts resolved? If so, how?

Additional RESOURCES

The Robert Frost Farm in Derry, NH. www.robertfrostfarm.com.

Modern American Poetry: Robert Frost (1874-1963) http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/a_f/frost/frost.htm

A Frost Bouquet: Robert Frost, His Family, and the Clifton Waller Barrett Library of American Literature, at the University of Virginia. <http://www.lib.virginia.edu/small/exhibits/frost/home.html>

Gerber, Philip. Robert Frost. 2nd ed. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982.

Gould, Jean. Robert Frost: The Aim was Song. New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1964.

Harris, Kathryn, ed. Robert Frost: Studies of the Poetry. Boston: G.K. Hall and Company, 1979.

Lynen, John. The Pastoral Art of Robert Frost. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960.

Meyers, Jeffrey. Robert Frost: A Biography. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996.

Parini, Jay. Robert Frost: A Life. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999.