

George Moses Horton

Born a slave on William Horton's tobacco plantation, George Moses Horton taught himself to read. Around 1815 he began composing poems in his head, saying them aloud and "selling" them to buyers at the weekly Chapel Hill farmers market. As his fame spread, he gained the attention of Caroline Lee Whiting Hentz, a novelist and professor's wife who transcribed his poetry and helped publish it in the newspaper. With her assistance, Horton published his first collection of poetry, *The Hope of Liberty* (1829), becoming the first African American to publish a book in the South—and the only one to publish it while still in slavery. After 68 years as a slave, he settled in Philadelphia for 17 years of freedom before his death. His poetry explores faith, love, and slavery while celebrating the rural beauty of Chatham County, home of the plantation on which Horton spent much of his life.