



History 101

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The first time you probably came upon the name was when you had to read “Paul Revere’s Ride” in school...or how about the “The Song of Hiawatha” [I may have seen that as a cartoon first, actually!]

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (February 27, 1807 – March 24, 1882) was an American poet and educator whose works include "Paul Revere's Ride", “The Song of Hiawatha”, and “Evangeline”. He was also the first American to translate Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* and was one of the five Fireside Poets.

Longfellow was born in Portland, Maine, then part of Massachusetts, and studied at Bowdoin College. After spending time in Europe, he became a professor at Bowdoin and, later, at Harvard College. His first major poetry collections were *Voices of the Night* (1839) and *Ballads and Other Poems* (1841).

Longfellow retired from teaching in 1854 to focus on his writing, living the remainder of his life in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in a former headquarters of George Washington. His first wife, Mary Potter, died in 1835 after a miscarriage. His second wife, Frances Appleton, died in 1861 after sustaining burns from her dress catching fire. Longfellow's youngest daughter Annie explained the story differently, claiming that there was no candle or wax but that the fire started from a self-lighting match (!) that had fallen on the floor. After her death, Longfellow had difficulty writing poetry for a time and focused on his translation.

During the 1860s, Longfellow supported abolitionism and especially hoped for reconciliation between the northern and southern states after the American Civil War.

On August 22, 1879, a female admirer traveled to Longfellow's house in Cambridge and, unaware to whom she was speaking, asked Longfellow: "Is this the house where Longfellow was born?" Longfellow told her it was not. The visitor then asked if he had died here. "Not yet", he replied. He died in 1882.

Longfellow predominantly wrote lyric poems which are known for their musicality and which often presented stories of mythology and legend. He became the most popular American poet of his day and also had success overseas. He has been criticized, however, for imitating European styles and writing specifically for the masses. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Wadsworth_Longfellow]

