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Elijah Parish Lovejoy: Poet

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Plaque in Lorimer Chapel, Colby College

Lovejoy Building, Colby College

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Elijah Parish Lovejoy
1802 - 1837
ALL of the Francis Lovejoy clan about Lovejoy Pond in Albion, Maine, wrote poetry: Elijah Parish, the buoyant liberal; Owen, the stern moralist; Joseph, the scholarly conservative; Daniel, the escapist; and John, the laughing-eyed prankster. This family of writers and poets would often compose fifty or a hundred lines of verse and enclose it in a letter. Such lines might be occasioned by a revival in the church, a desire to thank the Creator or to invoke His blessing, a nostalgic recollection of bygone days, a long journey far from home, or the mere sight of a beautiful star.

Betsey Lovejoy introduced them to good verse very early in their lives. She set them to reading and learning the Psalms before they had passed ten winters. In their teens, she encouraged them to read Burns, Pope, and Cowper. All the eager youngsters played memory games with lines they had learned, quoting verses with similar themes, each in turn trying to outdo the other.

Without a doubt, Betsey Lovejoy's love for poetry was inculcated into the heart and mind of her eldest son. When one loves poetry, mastering it is easy. Parish found the art of learning poetry so absorbing that he once mastered the long 119th Psalm and one hundred and fifty hymns from Watts and then quoted them to his Sunday School teacher at a single recitation. Yet he never ceased to be amazed at his mother's awe-inspiring command of the field. She was the source of his growth and he would refer to her authority again and again. In 1833 he wrote Sarah a letter of consolation on the death

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of her child and suggested that she read "The Gardiner and the Rose Tree" which could be found in the Memoirs of Rev. Samuel Pearce. But if Sarah could not find it, she could turn to Betsey, Parish wrote, for Betsey knew it well and "could write it down for you."

There were other experiences shaping the mind of young Lovejoy. He grew up in an axman's country. Before he was twelve, he knew what it was to make his ax flash and bite into pine, sugar maple, and silver birch. Except in summer, he was working with an ax most of the time. He cleared openings in the pines, cut logs, trimmed them for the rafting season, split firewood. Sometimes he worked all alone in the woods with little to hear but his own voice reciting verses he loved, or the cries of partridge, hawks, and an occasional wolf. The vast loneliness of the lake and the woods among the maze of hills and ravines of Albion Town gave him the pause which poets must have to breathe and grow. He knew the eloquent silence of the great green groves.

There were powerful voices coming to him from the American past. Of these, none was wiser than that of the old greybeard Francis Lovejoy with whom he ran trappines. They hunted together, old man and young boy, going on snowshoes in winter, in and out of the mysterious mazes about Lovejoy Pond. They knew spring and autumn together and Parish learned about time from his grandfather—about immortality, life and death, and the courage of patriots. He grew wiser with each season. In all his poetry there are the lessons he gained in his youth, the slowly distilled thoughts he had after long conversations with the Revolutionary veteran.

He grew to young manhood in a land devoted to poetry, poetry that had a bite in it as keen as the ax he wielded in the pine clearings. His schoolmates in Albion and China kept little daybooks in which their friends often wrote pointed reflections or witty tributes in verse. Farmers scribbled quatrains on smith and mill walls; each little crossroads had its local bard. Feuds in the Kennebec churches were noted for the quantity of satirical poetry engendered in the heat of controversy. Ministers and good deacons were not immune to such poetic frenzies; nor were

\[Ibid., 57.\]
judges. Parish often stayed at Squire Lemuel Paine's in Winslow. The Squire, whose wit was proverbial, expressed in rhymes his censure of judicial acts, and on one occasion rendered his judge's decision in verse, giving the argument of counsel, a statement of the case and his final decision in clear Anglo-Saxon lines.\(^3\) Parish loved this sort of thing and could never get enough of satire in verse, or, in fact, of any good verse. Long before he went to Waterville College, the poetry of the people among whom he moved had become a living part of him.

He entered Waterville (now Colby) College in the autumn of 1823, along with Daniel and Joseph, all three of them being familiar by this time with Homer, Horace, Cowper, Milton, Campbell, Pope, and Shakespeare. Their study room at old South College rang to the rhythmical chant of the works of these masters. Parish began to dream of seeing his own verse in print and kept carefully hidden certain lines tucked away in his books.

In the summer of 1825, there appeared in the small country weekly known as the Waterville Intelligencer poems signed "Lambda."\(^4\) These were very crude attempts at forming poetry, but as Parish was persistent his craftsmanship grew. In 1826 and 1827, he wrote poems signed "Mainensis" which were printed in the Hallowell Gazette.\(^5\) By 1828 the pen of "Mainensis" was attracting praise from the readers of the Gazette, his relatives, and especially his mother. "Parish," Betsey implored, "do write me if the lucid interval in the Gazette is not your composition. I read it as coming from your hand."\(^6\)

For Parish there was more than mere pride in the authorship of "The Farewell," "The Wanderer," "There Is an Isle,"

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\(^3\) Albert W. Paine, The Paine Genealogy (Bangor, 1881), iii.


\(^5\) In the Wickett Collection at Texas Technological College there is a copy of the Missouri Republican, March 25, 1828, with a note E.P.L. penned in the margin of its front page: "The article on this page signed 'Mainensis' I wrote . . . E.P. Lovejoy." In the Republican, March 18, 1828, is found his poem "There Is an Isle" signed "Mainensis" and this poem is found also in the Memoir, 293-295.

\(^6\) Betsey Lovejoy to Elijah Parish Lovejoy, October 2, 1824. Wickett Collection.
"The Evening Star Was Shining Bright" or "Star of the West." It was satisfying to hear friends comment about a poem they had read signed "Mainensis." The compliments or ridicule heard were under these circumstances innocent and sincere, if the secret of the author's identity was well kept. It was laugh-provoking to listen to the arguments of scholars as to the identity of the poet. If he were asked, Parish, with his sense for such humor, could add his own guess.

Much of his poetry was born out of the dreams of his youth when he had explored far and wide over the Kennebec forest and glen, climbed the distant hills and remained for hours in the spell of their grandeur. The lines of "Mainensis" came from the heart of one who had carved his name high up on lofty trees, had ventured to swim unknown lakes and dived to their uttermost depths.

He knew what it was to see the wondering look of a young child searching the woods and the sky. The forest about Lovejoy Pond had its secrets and he showed these to Owen, his younger brother. They explored "a wide extended meadow, a soft meandering brook where flowers in wild exuberance grew, and a cold and rippling spring." By this spring they sat while Parish let his imagination roam, telling strange stories which caused the young boy to gasp in amazement.

The imagination of the young poet had no limits. One starry night he told little Owen he must count all the stars in the heavens; if he did not, something terrible would happen to him. Owen began to number the stars but stopped, realizing that he could not. He trembled and grasped his brother's hand in great anxiety. Then Parish laughed and Owen laughed too. Such friendly nonsense brought them closer together. When Parish left home to live in the far West, his absence was deeply felt by Owen, who composed a poem of abiding love for the wanderer.⁷

All the turning points of Parish's life in Maine and his westward journey, he marked with poetry. His valedictory at China Academy in 1823 was in verse and his Waterville College valedictory was entitled "The Inspirations of the Muse." In May

⁷ Owen Lovejoy to Sarah Lovejoy Moody, August 20, 1830. Colby College Collection.
1827, as his ship left the shores of Maine behind, he wrote "The Farewell." In the autumn of that year he became seriously ill while he was in Cleveland, Ohio, and he believed that his life was saved by one he called "an angel of mercy." This kind soul inspired the charming verse which he entitled "M.-H.-R.-." When his hazardous westward journey was finished, he wrote a prophetic poem, "Star of the West."  

There is a restless force in all the lines he wrote. The poetry of Elijah Parish Lovejoy derives from the main wellspring of young America of the early eighteen hundreds — a time of great yearnings and wonderful hopes. The force driving the mind of Lovejoy was nourished by such dreams. He dreamed that young America would meet and subdue tyrannies which limited her great aspirations; he conceived of the mind of the young nation as strong, flexible, and ever scornful of restraints on freedom of thought. In "The Wanderer" he speaks scornfully of such:

Oh! how preposterous 'tis for man to claim In his own strength to chain the human soul; Go first and learn the elements to tame Ere you would exercise your vain control O'er that which pants and strives for an immortal goal.

Take heed, ye guardians of the youthful mind That facile grows beneath your kindly care, 'Tis of elastic mould, and if confined With too much stress shoots madly from its sphere Unswayed by love and unrestrained by fear.  

Something of the inheritance which became the impelling motive in his life is seen in these lines found in "The Farewell," a stirring tribute to his native land:

Yes, I do love thee, though thy hills are bleak And piercing cold thy winds, though winter blasts Howl long and dreary o'er thee; and thy skies Frown oftener than they smile; though thine is not The rich profusion that adorns the year in sunnier climes, Though spicy gales blow not in incense from thy groves For thou hast that far more than worth them all —

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9 Memoir, 30-31.
Thy sons are noble, in whose veins there runs
A richer tide than Europe's kings can boast,
The blood of freeman; blood which oft has flowed
In freedom's holiest cause; and ready yet to flow
If need should be; ere it would curdle down
To the slow sluggish stream of slavery.\(^\text{10}\)

Through the lines of his verse there run a deep consciousness
of the frailty of men, the transitoriness of life, and an urgent
appeal that all man's waking moments be consecrated to the
Lord. This earnest, sober, approach to life did not come to
him without an inner struggle of great proportions.

In 1825, Parish passed through the foggy sea of doubt that
young men all face sooner or later. He doubted his own ability
to believe in anything strongly. Restlessly he searched the stars
at night, and by day looked for a route of escape from a world
he had grown to distrust. Faith in God he retained, but he
could not see what mission God could have for him on an
earth so faithless and so barren of justice. He dreamed of
islands in far off lakes that he had known as a boy. In poetry
he found escape from reality, and when his pen traced out the
lines of "The Little Star" and "There Is an Isle" he found for
one blissful hour a retreat upon an island or a star where he
could live like a recluse, viewing the world with a lofty detach­
ment:

I would I were on yonder little star,
That looks so modest in the silver sky,
Removed in boundless space so very far,
That scarce its rays can meet the gazer's eye,
Yet there it hangs all lonely, bright and high.

And if to souls released from earth 'tis given
To choose their home thro' bright infinity,
Then yonder star shall be my happy heaven,
And I will live unknown, for I would be
The lonely hermit of eternity.\(^\text{11}\)

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\(^{10}\) Ibid., 27-28. The first version of this poem is found in the Hallowell
Gazette, June 13, 1827.

\(^{11}\) Waterville Intelligencer, July 28, 1825. "The Little Star" is signed
"Lambda" and is reprinted in the Missouri Republican, April 8, 1829, and in
Memoir, 22-23.
In May 1827, he bade goodbye to his loved ones and departed on a long journey that did not end until he was in the far West — in St. Louis, the limit of the frontier. The leave-taking was a tearful occasion, for the family of Daniel Lovejoy were very close to one another. Betsey Lovejoy was so overcome that “she could not speak.” Parish held her hand a last time, kissed her goodbye, and slowly rode away. The correspondence Betsey and Parish maintained in the following years was one of pure love. Betsey grieved often at his absence and was worried that she might never see him in this world again. She knew his heart would come roaming back often, that he would think of her as she was in the old manse by Lovejoy Pond. She dreamed fearful dreams about him and wrote asking if anything had happened to him on any of certain days on which she had been aroused from her slumbers by such dreams. To reassure her and to show his love, he wrote a moving tribute which he entitled “My Mother”:

There is a fire that burns on earth,
A pure and holy flame;
It came to men from heavenly birth
And still it is the same

No passion in the choirs above,
Is purer than a mother's love!

My Mother! how that name endears,
Through Memory's griefs and Sorrow's tears!

Oh! life was then a joyous thing,
And time bore pleasure in its wing,
How buoyant did the minutes move,
For I was hope and thou wert love.

And often as there would betide
Some little griefs my heart to gall,
I bore them to my mother's side,
And one kind kiss dispelled them all.
Then he recalled how he had lain critically ill in a lonely cabin on the shores of Lake Erie:

Weary and worn my bed I've shared
With sickness and with pain,
Nor one of all that saw me cared
If e'er I rose again.

In the trying days which followed in that dingy cabin amid strange surroundings, the remembrance of his mother's abiding love was as sweet balm to Parish—the recollection of her gentle voice and constant loving kindness tiding him over the painful hours of sickness he had known in his youth:

How she would sit beside my bed,
And pillow up my aching head,
And then in accents true as mild
"Would I were suffering for thee, child!"

And watch through weary nights and long
Nor deem fatigue could be her own,
And if, perchance, I slept, the last
I saw, her eyes were on me cast;
And when I woke 'twould be to meet
The same kind anxious glance so sweet.

My Mother! I am far away
From home, and love, and thee
And stranger hands may heap the clay
That soon may cover me.

And if there's aught assures me more,
Ere yet my spirit fly,
That heaven has mercy still in store
For such a wretch as I,
'Tis that a heart so good as thine
Must bleed—must burst along with mine.12

These lines he wrote at the end of his first strange and uncertain winter in St. Louis. "My Mother," first printed in the Missouri Republican, caught at the hearts of editors from New Orleans to Hallowell, Maine, and was widely reprinted. Parish had expressed so well the yearning for a mother's love felt

so keenly by all the thousands of young men who had left their mothers to seek their bread in the West. All the lonely men of the frontier — the solitary peddler, the numberless young men dwelling in bachelor towns along the Mississippi, the itinerant teacher of backwoods settlements, the strolling player, the circuit rider, all those who had left their families and their parents in the East — were deeply touched by the poem. It is the heartfelt thankful voice of a grateful son living in a strange town a thousand miles from home, in an age when travel was slow and hazardous, and life uncertain.

A newspaper came to Betsey Lovejoy in Albion in the month of June, a copy of the *Missouri Republican* which Parish had mailed, containing the poem "My Mother." Betsey answered promptly in a letter such as only a loving mother could write:

You can better conceive than I can describe the different emotions that agitated my bosom while reading your poetry. Parish, my dear, my darling child, do return to your native home. What shall I say to you? I can hardly see tears obscure my sight. . . . When you first left us I thought it would entirely unfit me for business but I found God a very present help.\(^\text{13}\)

When Parish moved to the western frontier at St. Louis, he left behind another loved one. She was Clarissa Read, the granddaughter of his great aunt Mary Lovejoy. Aunt Mary had married Nathan Heywood, who kept an inn on the Augusta-Bangor stage road and whose farm lay on the east slope of Lovejoy Pond, just a neighborly distance from Daniel Lovejoy's. Mary, their eldest daughter, married John Read of Orono, Maine.\(^\text{14}\) The Reads, with thirteen children, managed a general store and a tavern on the main street in Orono and were highly regarded as builders of grist mills and inns. They ran a mill on the Stillwater and played a part indispensable to the growth of the village.

Parish was often in the company of his thirteen cousins, visiting back and forth with them and cousin Howard Read, especially. His interest in Clarissa grew. When he departed for Illinois he was deeply in love with her and she with him.

\(^\text{13}\) Betsey Lovejoy to Elijah Parish Lovejoy, June 27, 1828. Colby Collection.
\(^\text{14}\) This was probably the John Read who had a farm on the south slope of Lovejoy Pond in the early years of the nineteenth century. See map in possession of Mary Washburn, China, Maine.
Clarissa Read was a delicate, fragile girl with big blue questioning eyes, "sunny hair," and a voice so pleasing that Parish could never forget it. She attended China Academy in 1827, but since her health was not good she did not attend any school in 1828. Meanwhile, Parish in far away St. Louis courted her tenderly in letter and verse.

He had listed her name carefully in his little day book along with the names of eighteen other people whom he said he "must write when on my way to Illinois." For a year and more Clarissa and Parish kept a fond correspondence. Long months after Parish had departed westward, Daniel Junior, the curious, wrote his father asking, "Is Parish as partial as ever to Clarissa?" And later, "Does Parish continue his addresses to C . . . . sa?"15

After a year, Parish was as much in love with Clarissa as ever. It may well be that he had gone a long way from home to make his fortune and so to prove his love. Certainly, he intended to return to her.

The columns of the American Advocate of Hallowell, Maine, and of the Maine Patriot of Augusta, Maine, contain clear lines of poetry, in which Parish waged a losing fight to hold Clarissa Read against the wiles of other suitors. There was nothing secret about his love for Clarissa, and he saw nothing wrong in using the press as a medium in which to show it. He was always transparent; it was impossible for him to hide his loyalties or his loves.

On February 10, 1829, the following verse appeared in the Maine Patriot.

The Maid of the Prairie
St. Louis, Jan. 13, 1829

Fair maid of the prairie! I go far away
From the scene thou wilt still look upon.
Will thy thoughts in their purity sometime stray,
With a sigh to the wanderer gone?

When to the soft vows thy admirers will pay,
Thou turnest the half pleased ear;
Though they promise thee more than he that's away,
Believe them not half so sincere.

15 Daniel Lovejoy, Jr. to Daniel Lovejoy, Nov. 29, 1827. Wickett Collection.
Again on April 1, the Patriot carried lines entitled “To . . .” and signed “Mainensis” in which he pledged to love her forever. He exclaimed “O, slight not the vows I have given,” and called her a “sweet rose bud of innocence, beauty, and grace.”

Eight days after “The Maid of the Prairie” came out in the Patriot, Clarissa wrote Parish. Her letter is steeped with serious doubt about the future of their romance:

Dear Parish:

There is not a day nor an hour passes but I think of you and the uncertainty of our meeting again in this world. You said in your last, you hoped we should yet meet and so do I, yet when I think of the distance that separates us my heart reviles at the thought . . .

The letter continued. William and Margaret were away at China Academy but Clarissa would not attend school there; perhaps she would go to a private school in Stillwater Village in April if her health should continue good. There was nothing about which she was certain. She signed — “Yours Affectionately,” Clarissa Read.

By the autumn of that same year another had won the heart of Clarissa. Parish, having loved and lost, could not easily dismiss her from his mind. He wrote more verses and made futile gestures. Nor could he refrain from telling Clarissa how he felt — at the same instant paying her one graceful compliment after another.

In the American Advocate of September 5, 1829, these verses appeared:

To . . . . . . .

My cup has been a bitter one; yet time can never raise
From out the tablet of my heart the image of thy face;
Last night upon my sleep it came; itself as soft as sleep,
And rose upon my visions like a star upon the deep.

That voice—methought I heard that voice, although the lips were mute;
Its music like the dying wind upon a silver lute;
I caught the gleam of sunny hair, and listened to the fall
Of footsteps like the antelope’s so light and musical.

16 Mary W. and Clarissa Read to Elijah Parish Lovejoy, February 18, 1829. Colby Collection.
Thou art a pleasant memory enshrined 'mid worldly wrong,
And thou shalt be the feeling and the voice of every song;
Yea, even as the pilgrim greets the fount in palmy shade,
My thirsting heart still stoops to thee, and worships,
though betrayed

The marriage records of Orono, Maine, show that Clarissa Read married Edwin F. Hovey of Thomaston, Maine, on September 30, 1829. For a time Parish was disconsolate, certainly hurt. He sought escape. He rode into the consoling stillness of the great virginal forest around St. Louis, exploring the backcountry and along the crest of the Mississippi bluffs to the Point of the Missouri River. He continued writing for the Republican and taught school; with others he founded an orphans' or waifs' school and so gradually lost himself in work.

Another year went by and he became editor of the St. Louis Times. In this weekly newspaper his poets' corner was exactly what he wanted it to be, a space that was forever New England. The pen of "Mainensis" had established a solid reputation in the West, and he made the Times into a finer newspaper than the Mississippi frontier had yet seen. Parish called himself "a son of New England," declaring that his mission was to defend that fair land from the attacks of sectional politicians and to keep the virtues of the land of the Pilgrims alive in the West.

The poets' corner in the Times (upper left, front page) was redolent of old New England. In the autumn of 1830 it featured from John Greenleaf Whittier's "The Destiny" the clear Puritan lines:

Look to thy heart — and ask of none
To read the stars for thee.

It carried the verse of other poets of New England: "The Ballad of the Oysterman," "Hymn to the Stars," Reverend Pierpont's "Original Hymn," "The Dying Alchemist," "The Monks of Old" (a satire), "Night," a poem of immortality. The great themes of death, of faith, of immortality, by poets he had long revered are found here. The following summer and autumn Lovejoy's clientele was reading "A Reflection," "The Resignation," reprinted from the Boston Courier, "The Last Supper;"
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"Why Is My Spirit Sad?" "Ode for the Landing of the Fathers," and William Cullen Bryant's "Autumn." There is a sadness in all these poems, for Parish had in him an earnest, sober, even somber strain. This was natural in a young man reared to believe that one day spent with God exceeded in value a thousand spent in frivolous pursuits. 18

Parish carried deep in his heart a great sympathy for all those who had in them the wilderness loneliness. He knew the yawning dangers to be met in westward crossings — he had so well expressed his own narrow escapes in "The Wanderer" and "The Evening Star Was Shining Bright." Sad yearnings of other pioneers found their way into his poets' corner. "The Love Watcher" carries a refrain about a faithful girl who waits in vain for her lover to come back from the West. Western poets imbued with this spirit contributed "He Comes No More," "The Harp of the West," and many another verse born out of the tragedies which beset the settlers in raw clearings, isolated and far from civilization. 19

His New Year's poem for 1832, entitled "The Address of the Carrier of the Times to Its Patrons," is a long, fresh breath of New England wisdom, giving life to the western prairie. When New England people moved in colonies onto the Illinois prairies, he exulted and could not sing their praises too much. In this movement of brave pioneers he saw a destiny running back to 1620 and marching ever toward the West, a destiny of which he was a living part. New England men would free the frontier from forces which stifled it, and he would be their voice. In his "Address of the Carrier of the Times" he speaks of this new democracy:

O, Mine own land, with joy to thee I turn
Here, Freedom, here thy altars brightly burn
Here long prescription fetters not the mind,
The laws ourselves have made alone can bind.

Thrice happy land! long as the years roll on,
Long as thy rivers to the ocean run,
Long as the sun shall shine, while nature lives,
Be thine the bliss that virtuous freedom gives. 20

19 Ibid., April 23, May 21, Oct. 1, 1831.
20 Ibid., Jan. 7, 1832.
After 1833 he wrote no more poetry. The remaining four years of his life were given to the crusade against slavery and against the gag of the press. He used his pen exclusively to fight these twin tyrannies, and his opposition became, in time, universally noted. Yet to the last he printed the lines of famous poets where such would aid his cause; and he went to the place of his martyrdom quoting the Psalms.

MARGARET FULLER AND THE TWO SAGES

By Ray Cecil Carter

In the days when New England was flowering, Margaret Fuller was probably the most fascinating, the most famous, and certainly the most astonishing of American women — and this in spite of the fact that she was morbidly self-critical because of her lack of beauty. But plainness was no barrier to her becoming the leading feminist of her day, for she early became the leader of the famous “Conversations” for the women of Boston and the author of the first feminist tract in the New World. She was, however, destined for broader and more positive influence upon her time. Gamaliel Bradford said of her: “Margaret has so many selves that you can peel her like an onion.”

Thus this brilliant bluestocking, brought up by an eccentric father to be a boy and learned far beyond her years, in due time became one of the most powerful leaders of the Transcendentalists and editor of their immensely influential journal, the Dial. She was the intimate of the great personalities of her day and the special confidante of Emerson. She was the Zenobia of Hawthorne’s novel of Brook Farm, The Blithedale Romance. A competent writer, she became Greeley’s first columnist for the New York Tribune; steeped in literature, she was an authority on Goethe; and, according to one eminent contemporary, she was, “save Poe, the foremost literary critic of America.”