

## **Resolution 2009-1. On Recognizing the Accomplishments of George Moses Horton**

The Faculty Council resolves

Let it be known that George Moses Horton, having been prevented by the institution of slavery from pursuing formal education during his lifetime, but nevertheless having demonstrated accomplishments worthy of admission to the degree of Bachelor of Arts, we, the chancellor and faculty of the University, have deemed him worthy of enrollment among those upon whom that degree has been hitherto conferred.

Comment:

The Committee on Honorary Degrees and Special Awards has been asked to seek a waiver of the Trustee rule against awarding posthumous honorary degrees in the case of George Moses Horton. The Committee recommends instead that Horton's accomplishments be formally recognized by the Faculty Council in manner that does not establish a precedent for posthumous honorary degrees. It is anticipated that this resolution, if adopted, would be printed, framed, and placed on display in Horton Hall.

Here is the entry on George Moses Horton in the Dictionary of North Carolina Biography.

**"Horton, George Moses** (ca. 1797-ca.1883), poet, was born in Northampton County, 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, taught himself to read, and began composing in his head a series of stanzas based on the rhythms in Wesley hymns. 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 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 the wages collected as a campus laborer. Caroline Lee Hentz, 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*, 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, presidents Joseph Caldwell and David L. Swain of The University of North Carolina, and newspapermen William Lloyd Garrison and Horace Greeley.

In 1845 Dennis Heartt 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*. 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. 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.”

The University of North Carolina Press recently published *The Black Bard of North Carolina: George Moses Horton and His Poetry*, edited by Joan R. Sherman.

Horton was inducted into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame in May of 1996.