



Emily Elizabeth Dickinson

December 10, 1830 - May 15, 1886

Amherst, Massachusetts

Emily Elizabeth Dickinson died in the Homestead on Main Street in Amherst, Massachusetts, on May 15, 1886. She was fifty-five. Bright's disease had narrowed the last years; she had already narrowed the life, by choice, to a garden, a few correspondents, and a locked chest of poems. Born in that house on December 10, 1830, she lived almost her whole life within a walk of the village burying ground where she now lies.

Only a handful of poems appeared in print while she lived, and those were tidied by editors who disliked her dashes. After her death the manuscripts - fascicles sewn by hand, alternate words stacked like choices - became the American poem later scholars had to learn to leave alone. She baked the family's bread, kept the bulbs, and wrote at a small table as if the work were another household task that would not announce itself.

She wore white in the late years and spoke to visitors from the stairs. The solitude was not emptiness; it was a method. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who never quite knew what to do with her, at least kept the letters. Sister Lavinia found the packets and refused to let them stay private.

Amherst is the only city that belongs on this page. The house and the grave in West Cemetery are a short walk apart. The poems still arrive as if they had been slipped under a door.

Higginson called her his partially cracked poet and still could not stop reading. The later variorum editions restored the dashes the first editors had treated as a lady's mistake. She remains easier to quote than to domesticate. Main Street in Amherst is still a short walk between the kitchen and the stone.

Services

Died in Amherst on May 15, 1886. Interment at West Cemetery, Amherst.

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